



Holding the hand of those holding the hand of the child:

The impact of Place2Think reflective practice for headteachers, senior leaders and teaching staff in schools, delivered in 2020-21 as part of the Scottish Government's response to the impact of COVID-19 on schools

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What is this report setting out to do?

This report demonstrates the impact of Place2Think for teachers, headteachers and senior leaders in schools during the pandemic (2020-21).

Place2Think is a reflective supervision space facilitated by qualified Place2Be mental health practitioners, for education professionals to reflect on their reactions to children's behaviour, discuss what children may need from them, and review implementation of any changes in their approach.

It is also space that supports the mental health and wellbeing of education professionals and their pupils in their school through interaction with a Place2Be Practitioner, other teachers, and reflection on their practice from a psychological perspective.

This report will also touch on the impact Place2Think has had on educators more generally. We will explore the evidence for Place2Think as an educational tool to understand our reactions, the behaviour of young people, and to give young people the care they need through this process of reflection and understanding.

"Staff wellbeing is essential for children's wellbeing."ⁱ

The pandemic and CERG Delivery

During the pandemic, teaching professionals continued their work with children and young people whilst adapting to new working conditions during an extremely uncertain period. The Scottish Government, alongside Education Scotland, worked with partnering organisations to provide a package of support for the education workforce. This was developed by the Workforce Support workstream of the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG)ⁱⁱ in response to needs identified. Within this context, Place2Be was funded to provide Place2Think to 425 education professionals in the first year of the pandemic.

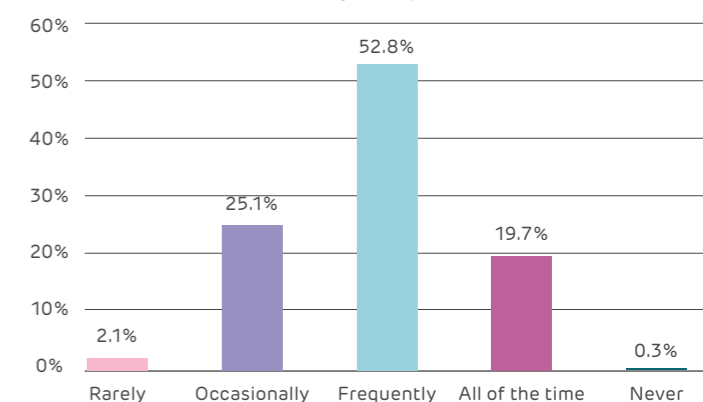
The mental health and wellbeing of teaching staff

The Scottish Government has recognised that all teaching staff need to be skilled in working with the mental health and wellbeing of children to help make Scotland the best place for a child to grow upⁱⁱⁱ. The wellbeing of staff goes hand in hand with the wellbeing of children in schools: there is consistent evidence that the quality of teacher-pupil relationship is related to pupil mental health^{iv}.

High levels of stress impact our health and alters our capacity to be present and caring for others. Prior to the pandemic, teacher attrition rates were increasing, and levels of stress and burnout were on the rise. For instance, in 2019, 75% of teachers reported being stressed in their roles, while 60% stated they would not recommend teaching to others outside of the profession^v. High stress levels in schools are associated with more sick days and members of staff leaving the profession. A study conducted by the Scottish Liberal Democrats, via freedom of information responses, indicates that between 2017 and 2021, 550,000 staff days were lost due to mental health reasons^{vi}. These levels of stress are what may have caused 1 in 3 teachers to leave the profession after 5 years in post^{viii}. Because of this wider context, we will consider Place2Think's potential impact for supporting teaching staff with their mental health and wellbeing outside of the pandemic.

A survey of teachers conducted by the EIS teaching union in 2023, three years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, found that most teachers experienced stress at least occasionally and one in five (20%) experienced it all the time.^{viii}

Figure 16: In a typical week how often do you feel stressed within your job?



Total responses: 14,974

Source: EIS Member Survey, EIS, 2023:

<https://www.eis.org.uk/latest-news/surveyresults>

What are 'Reflective' or 'Clinical Supervision' spaces?

Spaces for professionals to digest the challenging content of their experiences with service users, while supporting their mental wellbeing and improving on the relationships they have at work, have long existed in the worlds of health care, social care, counselling, psychology, and psychotherapy.

Self-reflection for professional standards and learning is commonplace in teaching education in Scotland^{ix}. However, in our experience there is ambiguity around doing this relationally, reflecting on the work with children and young people:

“On the course, we are expected to self-reflect regularly, but are not given any guidance on how to do this. Place2Think can help guide us in this, as a neutral space where we can gain a better understanding of our experiences of the course, placement and anything else which might be affecting these experiences”

(student teacher in ITE at Moray House, 2020)

Several writers have pointed to teacher stress and the 'emotional labour' involved in interacting with children, particularly those with social or emotional problems^x. When 'supervision' is facilitated by a professional that is a trusted expert, there are many benefits for the individual, from reduction in stress and anxiety to improvement in job satisfaction^{xi}. These are outcomes that are much needed given the stress levels and attrition rates in the Scottish teaching workforce.

Professor Jane Hurry (UCL), in a report on supervision for teachers through Place2Think, concluded that teachers found supervision a positive experience providing them "with a sense of relief from stress, an opportunity to talk to colleagues in a more psychologically reflective way than they would otherwise and a place to learn from others". Professor Hurry goes on to say that "the experience of supervision helped teachers to be more reflective about their practice beyond the sessions and to better manage their interactions with pupils"^{xii}.

Although the evidence in this area is new and growing, what is available points towards reflective supervision spaces as an effective mechanism for supporting teachers and contributing to the positive mental health and wellbeing of children and staff in our schools. Our work in this area, detailed in this report, contributes to this research.



What is Place2Think?

Place2Think is a reflective supervision space facilitated by a Place2Be mental health practitioner. Practitioners are accredited through a counselling or psychotherapeutic organisation such as COSCA, UKCP or BACP. Through interactions with the supervisor and other teachers, a reflective process takes place on the practice of working in schools and with young people from a psychological perspective. The space is also for education professionals to reflect on their reactions to children's behaviour, discuss what children may need from them, and review implementation of any changes in their approach. Sessions are carried out in groups that consist of 6-8 teaching professionals, for an hour or an hour and a half.

Place2Think takes from psychodynamic approaches to supervision, drawn from therapeutic and counselling disciplines, focusing on developing the supervisee's skills and knowledge^{xiii}. Place2Think also adopts its approach from person-centred attitudes of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence^{xiv}.

What does Place2Think aim to achieve?

Aims for classroom staff:

- To understand what children's behaviour communicates about their life-experience and could be telling you about their mental health needs
- To develop the capacity to make sense of the experience of working with children with mental health needs in the educational context
- To build effective working relationships with children with their mental health needs in mind
- To reflect on self and one's psychological/emotional needs in response to these demands



Aims for Senior Leaders:

- To clarify the values and drivers that inform the school's approach to mental health
- To identify the priorities and relevant actions central to the development of the school's mental health strategy
- To reflect on relevant stakeholder (staff, children, parents) dynamics that that might help or hinder the development of this strategy
- To build systems across the school to enable and sustain the development of the school's approach to mental health
- To reflect on self and one's own capacity as school leader in this process

Aims for Headteachers:

- To enhance capacity and authority in role as leader of the school community
- To gain insight into the dynamics of stakeholder relationships across the community of the school (including governors, parents and the local authority) and consider how best to manage these for the benefit of children and the school community as a whole
- To develop the capacity to manage systems across the school in response both to the usual developmental transitions as well as environmental and traumatic change
- To reflect on self and one's psychological needs in response to the role as head teacher
- To build resilience in response to external directives

Who was Place2Think delivered to?

Of the 425 school staff who attended Place2Think sessions, 278 responded to the pre-Place2Think survey and 142 responded to the post-Place2Think survey. All respondents were from Scotland and of those that responded to the post survey:



68 respondents
were classroom staff



45 respondents
were senior leaders



29 respondents
were headteachers



Place2Think general impact on all staff

A notable positive impact was seen in the confidence levels of participants to manage their own health and wellbeing, as well as their confidence to support their colleagues:

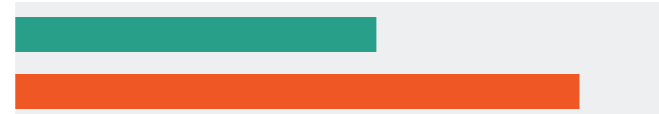
Confident in managing their own health and wellbeing



Pre-Place2Think survey – 64%

Post-Place2Think survey – 88%

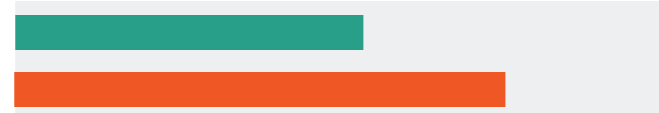
Confident in supporting their colleagues and managing their health and wellbeing



Pre-Place2Think survey – 55%

Post-Place2Think survey – 86%

Confident in managing challenges and opportunities in the context of the pandemic



Pre-Place2Think survey – 53%

Post-Place2Think survey – 85%

Place2Think impact on Classroom Staff

“This course has quite simply been life changing for me. I have had a very challenging class this year with a variety of behaviours and Place2Think has been a real lifeline for me.”

(Class-based staff member)

Classroom staff reported¹ benefits for their own psychological and emotional needs through Place2Think, and the sessions also improved their understanding and engagement with the mental wellbeing of young people:

“I am a calmer person who is much better equipped at managing the challenges of the classroom. I am able to support my children to regulate and cope with their own mental health issues more effectively and I understand so much more about their struggles. This has really provided me with a toolkit to support children’s health and well-being. My own mental health has also benefitted hugely from this. I couldn’t recommend it highly enough. Thank you.”

(Class-based staff member)

Teachers who participated in Place2Think sessions felt more equipped to manage their classroom and their own mental health, increasing their resilience and capacity. A survey of over 16,000 school-based staff in Scotland, conducted by teaching union EIS, indicated that 71.9% of school staff handled stress on their own in 2022-23^{xv}. Research indicates that dealing with stress alone can pose a major risk factor for further health and mental health complications^{xvi}. In comparison, the teachers supported by Place2Think were supported to process the emotional and psychological content of their work, 90% reflected that this it been valuable to reflect on their own psychological and emotional needs.

Place2Think sessions are facilitated by a qualified mental health practitioner, therefore, sessions have the capacity to explore personal, confidential issues around mental health, enabling class-based staff to learn about themselves in relation to their reactions in the classroom. This level of reflection is only possible with a qualified practitioner.



76% felt Place2Think sessions improved their understanding of how children and young people’s behaviour can be communicating their mental health needs



75% felt more able to work with children and young people with mental health needs in an education setting, following the Place2Think sessions



82% have applied their learning about children and young people’s mental health needs in Place2Think to building their working relationships with them



90% highly rated the value (4 and 5 on a 5-point scale) of the opportunity to reflect on their own psychological and emotional needs to supporting their work



93% of classroom staff would recommend Place2Think to a colleague

“I’d just like to say thank you. Given the role that I’m currently in, the Place2Think work has been invaluable.”

Class-based staff member

¹ A total of 68 classroom staff responded to the post-Place2Think survey

Place2Think Impact on Deputy Headteachers

Senior Leaders (Deputy Headteachers) reflected² that the sessions helped them to understand, lead on and change mental health strategy in their schools

Place2Think conversations with senior leaders related to a whole school approach to mental wellbeing. This included changing both universal and targeted mental health provision in their settings and creating further capacity for staff through identifying and allocating resource towards their mental health priorities. Senior Leaders reported that Place2Think sessions helped with their whole school approach to mental health:

- A third of the senior leaders (36%) have made changes or put in place systems for a sustainable approach to mental health in school because of the Place2Think sessions
- 62% felt the sessions helped them to clarify the main factors in school that they need to consider to inform their school's approach to mental health
- 69% of school leaders rated Place2Think as a valuable opportunity to reflect on their own psychological and emotional needs been to supporting their work in school
- 73% felt that engaging with Place2Think increased their capacity for leading mental health in their school
- 60% have applied learning from the Place2Think sessions about dynamics between staff, children and parents to their mental health strategy
- 56% felt that the Place2Think sessions helped them to identify priorities and actions for developing their school's mental health strategy

Place2Think Impact on Headteachers

Headteachers reflected on the benefits to their own mental wellbeing, and an increased capacity to lead the mental health strategy of the whole school:

Place2Think sessions helped headteachers focus on their own psychological and emotional needs, while identifying priorities and actions that they could implement to support their whole school approach to mental health.

- 62% responded on the higher end of 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale when asked if they have applied any learning from the Place2Think sessions about dynamics between members of the school community (children, staff, parents, governors, local authority) to their mental health strategy.
- 86% found Place2Think useful in enhancing their capacity as a leader of the school community (25 of 29 headteachers)
- 83% thought that Place2Think had contributed to their capacity to lead their school through mental health challenges that Covid-19 has placed on their school community
- 83% responded that reflecting on their own psychological and emotional needs have been to supporting their work in school was valuable.
- 100% of headteachers would recommend Place2Think to a colleague

“I cannot recommend this group highly enough. I came to this opportunity as someone who ran at 100 miles an hour, feeling responsible for everyone else's needs. I identified the need to hit pause and actually reflect on my leadership, with a view to shifting from the operational to the strategic. I still find this tricky but it's a work in progress – however I am learning to forgive myself my human shortcomings, which is making me a more productive, healthier leader. In these sessions, I have found a community of virtual strangers who are incredibly supportive and where I can be my authentic self. Everyone needs this in their lives.”

(a headteacher participant)

2 A total of 45 senior leaders (deputy headteachers) responded to the post-Place2Think survey.

3 A total of 29 headteachers responded to the post-Place2Think survey.

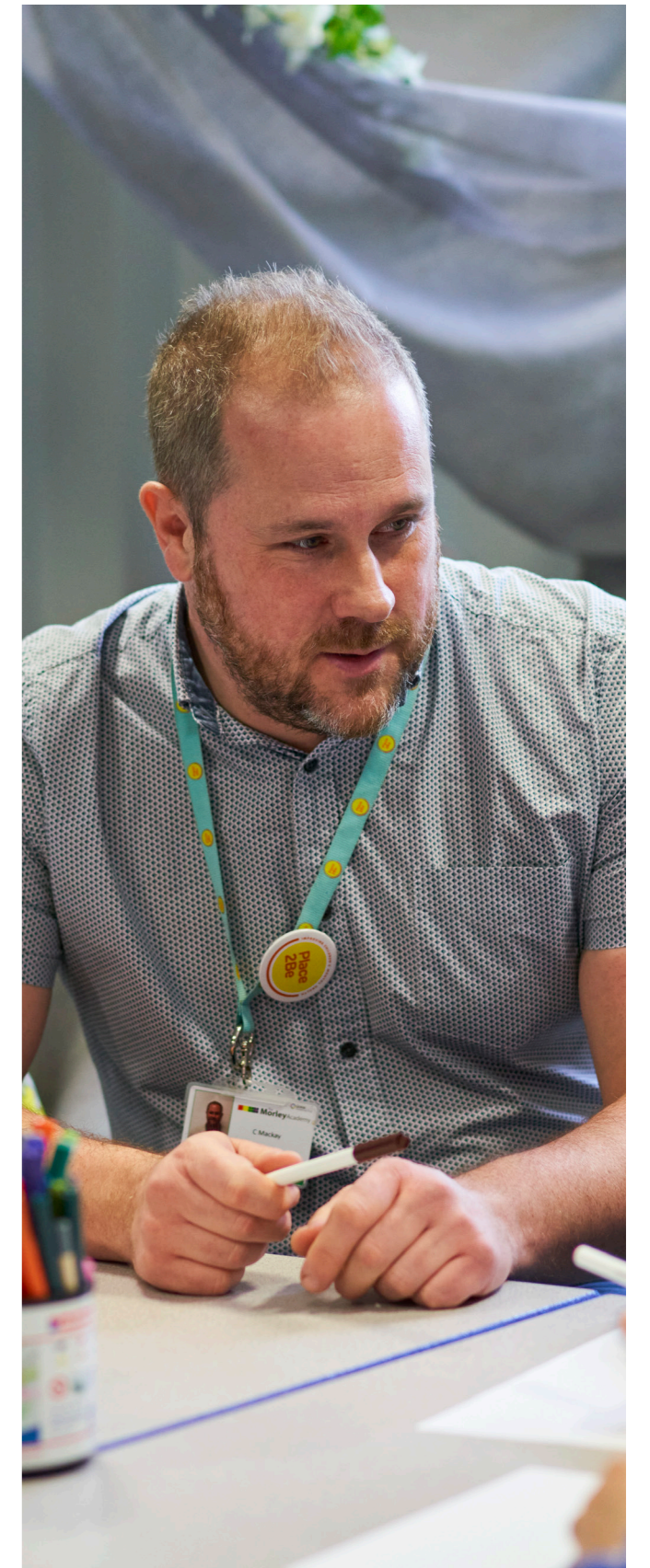


Conclusion

Our evidence shows that the Place2Think sessions were well received by those who participated throughout delivery of the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group. Many school staff, senior leaders and headteachers reported that they had benefitted from attending in terms of their understanding and work with both children and young people and their own mental health.

Senior leaders and headteachers were able to plan a strategic approach to mental health and wellbeing in their school and improved their capacity as a school leader to lead mental health strategy in their school.

In time, and with consistent meetings, we might expect to see the results of these sessions translate into improved wellbeing of pupils and staff, improved staff wellbeing, resilience, and job satisfaction. We believe that this has the potential to help reduce attrition rates and burnout, improve staff wellbeing, whilst increasing resilience and job satisfaction.



About Place2Be

Place2Be creates a safe place in schools where children can open up and talk about their emotions and any difficulties they are facing, so that mental health problems don't grow with them.

The need we are meeting

- 4 in 10 (41.8%) school pupils in P5 to S1 agree that there are lots of things they worry about in their life.^{xvii}
- Half of all mental health problems are present in children by age 14.^{xviii}
- For the quarter ending March 2023, 7,701 children and young people were waiting to start CAMHS treatment in Scotland. For the same period, 74.2% of children and young people were seen within the Scottish Government's target of 18 weeks – well short of the 90% target.^{xix}

Our work

In Scotland, we work in up to 14 local authorities, providing our in-school mental health support services, including 1-1 counselling, in around 60 primary and high schools and outreach services to an additional 128 schools. Overall, we support a school community of almost 56,000 children and young people.

We support the whole school community: providing a place for all school staff and parents to get the mental health support, knowledge, and skills they need to support children. This work includes:

- **Place2Think** supports teachers to reflect on how they work so they can keep learning and improving
- **We deliver training for headteachers** so they can transform their school's approach to mental health. Our Senior Mental Health Leads programme has been completed by 63 school leaders in Scotland
- **We provide foundation-level mental health training** for all those in the school community who need it - 8,485 teachers and school staff have undertaken the course in Scotland

- **We have developed a whole family approach:** helping parents and carers support the mental health of their children and improve their own parenting skills through advice, guidance, and training
- **We are building the capacity of the next generation of teachers** through our Initial Teacher Education partnerships at Edinburgh and Glasgow universities – reaching around 25% of new student teachers in Scotland
- **We work beyond the school gates,** equipping youth workers with mental health skills and supporting the wider children's workforce through Place2Think reflective practice sessions.



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**For further information on
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