



Proudly part of



Supporting
Education
Group

The Thrive Approach

Evaluation Report



ImpactEd
Evaluation

2026



Contents

Executive Summary	4-7
Key Findings	8
Impact on pupils	8
Impact on staff	9
Impact on the state	9
Introduction	10
Impact on Pupils	12
Wellbeing and emotional development	12-13
Engagement, behaviour and inclusion	14-15
Attendance and readiness to learn	16-17
Impact on Staff	18
Staff wellbeing and morale	18-19
Professional confidence and practice	20
Workforce sustainability	21
Impact on the State	22
Reducing long-term public cost	22
Easing pressure on public services	23
Supporting preventative system approaches	23
Conclusion	24
Appendix	27

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a two-year mixed-methods evaluation of the Thrive Approach, conducted by ImpactEd Evaluation (IEE), and situates these findings within a wider national evidence base drawn from large-scale comparative analysis undertaken by IEE for the Supporting Education Group (SEG) in 2024¹. Together, these complementary strands of evidence examine outcomes associated with Thrive for pupils, staff, and the wider education system.

Across national benchmarking and school-level evaluation evidence, the findings indicate that the **Thrive Approach is associated with positive patterns in wellbeing, inclusion, engagement, and staff experience**. The strongest and most consistent evidence relates to relational and cultural change within schools, alongside sustained reductions in exclusions, and favourable attendance patterns when compared with national trends. **Outcomes appear particularly positive for pupils with additional needs and those at greater risk of disengagement.**



Pupil wellbeing, engagement and inclusion

National benchmarking evidence from the SEG 2024 report indicates **that pupils in schools using the Thrive Approach report wellbeing levels that meet or exceed national averages, with particularly strong outcomes for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).** Within Thrive schools, **average SEND wellbeing scores increased by around 5%** over the 2023/24 academic year, despite wider national declines in pupil wellbeing.

Evidence from the two-year mixed-methods evaluation aligns with this national picture. Qualitatively, **staff consistently described improvements in pupils' emotional regulation, confidence, and ability to articulate feelings and needs.** These changes were again most evident among pupils with additional needs and those who had previously experienced difficulties with behaviour, attendance or engagement.

Across both national benchmarking and school-level evaluation evidence, the **Thrive Approach is also associated with sustained reductions in exclusions.** The analysis indicates that Thrive schools recorded a **27% lower exclusion rate** than the national average during the 2023/24 academic year. Within the evaluation cohort, exclusions showed the clearest quantitative change over time, with:

- **Primary exclusions reducing by 52% and**
- **Secondary exclusions reducing by 35% across the evaluation period.**

Qualitative evidence suggests that **these reductions are linked to earlier identification of need, improved emotional regulation, and more consistent, preventative responses to behaviour** across staff teams.

Average SEND wellbeing scores increased by around

↑ 5%

despite national declines in wellbeing

Thrive schools recorded a

↓ 27%

lower exclusion rate than the national average

Attendance and readiness to learn

up to
↓ 38% reduction in severe absence

Attendance outcomes provide further insight into patterns of engagement. National benchmarking evidence from the SEG 2024 report indicates that **Thrive schools experienced 3% lower overall absenteeism and 15% lower severe absenteeism** than schools nationally², with **reductions of up to 38% in severe absence among schools using the Thrive Approach most consistently.**

Within the evaluation cohort, attendance remained broadly stable across both primary and secondary phases. In primary schools, attendance decreased

by 0.9 percentage points between baseline and endline, a smaller decline than the approximately 1 percentage-point reduction typically observed nationally between autumn and summer terms. Attendance levels remained broadly in line with national averages, with indications of slightly higher attendance for pupils with SEND.

Together, these findings suggest that Thrive may support sustained engagement and readiness to learn, particularly in a context of wider national attendance pressures.

Staff wellbeing, morale, and confidence

The evidence also highlights positive patterns in staff wellbeing, morale, and professional confidence associated with the Thrive Approach. National benchmarking against the Teacher Wellbeing Index (TWIX, 2024³) indicates that **staff wellbeing in Thrive schools sits above national workforce averages.** In Thrive primary schools, average **staff wellbeing scores increased by 4.8%** over one academic year and were **higher than national benchmarks** at both timepoints.

Findings from the two-year evaluation align with this national picture. Role-level analysis shows that **all staff groups experienced increases in average wellbeing scores** between baseline and endline, with the largest improvements observed among **Teaching Assistants (+6.2%)** and **Thrive Licensed Practitioners⁴ (+5.3%)**. These roles typically involve sustained, day-to-day work with pupils experiencing emotional distress or behavioural challenges, therefore these findings suggest that the Thrive Approach could **strengthen staff resilience** to emotionally demanding pupil behaviour, helping to **protect and improve wellbeing** among staff in intensive support roles.

Qualitative evidence suggests that improvements in wellbeing were closely linked to changes in day-to-day experience at work. **Staff described feeling less overwhelmed** by the emotional demands of their roles, supported by clearer shared approaches, more consistent responses to pupils' needs, and stronger collaboration across staff teams. Many **schools reported improved morale and a more positive working culture**, with Thrive becoming embedded into everyday practice rather than delivered as a standalone intervention.

Together, these findings indicate that the **Thrive Approach is associated with stronger staff wellbeing, improved morale, and increased professional confidence**, particularly in roles with high emotional and relational demands.

Staff wellbeing scores increased by
↑ 4.8%

Wider system implications

Beyond individual schools, the findings have implications for wider public systems. National evidence indicates that **Thrive schools experience approximately four fewer exclusions per 1,000 pupils per year** compared with national averages (SEG, 2024). Existing economic research estimates that each permanent exclusion carries an average lifetime cost to the state of £170,000⁵.

Therefore, applied illustratively, if those implementing the Thrive Approach experienced the average reductions seen, **this equates to indicative long-term public value of approximately:**

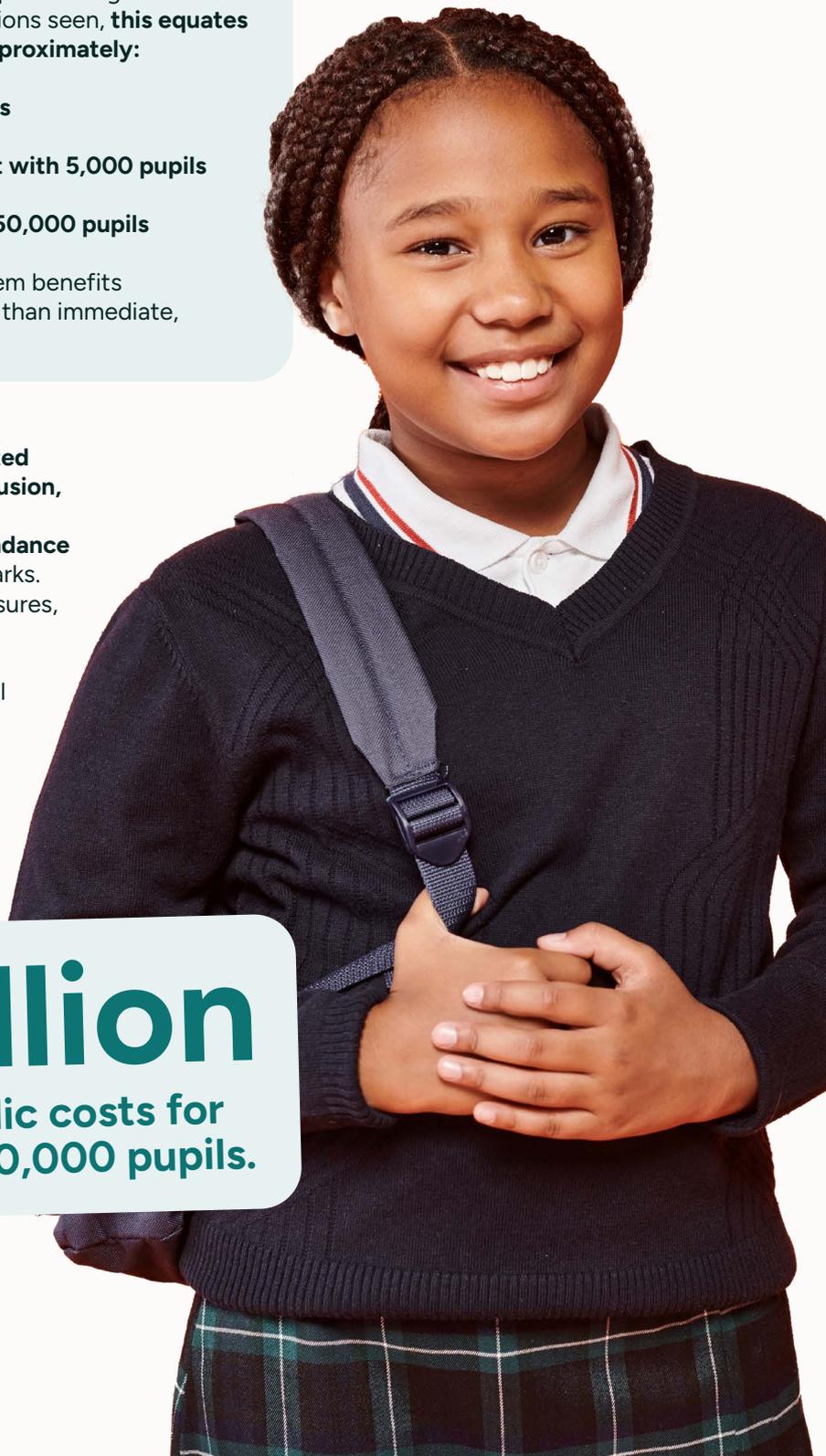
- £340,000 for a school with 500 pupils
- £3.4 million for a multi-academy trust with 5,000 pupils
- £34 million for a local authority with 50,000 pupils

These estimates represent long-term system benefits associated with avoided exclusions, rather than immediate, cashable savings.

Overall, the evidence presented in this report indicates that the **Thrive Approach is associated with positive patterns in pupil wellbeing, inclusion, engagement, and staff experience, alongside reductions in exclusions and favourable attendance trends** when compared with national benchmarks. While outcomes vary across settings and measures, the convergence of national benchmarking, longitudinal school-level data, and qualitative insight suggests that Thrive supports relational and cultural conditions that underpin more inclusive and emotionally supportive school environments. The following section summarises the key findings from across the evaluation and national analysis.

£34 million

saved in long-term public costs for a local authority with 50,000 pupils.



Key Findings

Impact on pupils

Pupils in Thrive schools have higher average wellbeing than the national average⁶, with particularly strong outcomes for pupils with additional needs.

- **Pupil wellbeing in Thrive schools is higher than national averages**, with the strongest outcomes observed for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- **Average SEND wellbeing scores in Thrive schools increased by approximately 5%** over the 2023/24 academic year, despite wider national declines in pupil wellbeing.
- Within the evaluation cohort, **wellbeing outcomes were more stable for pupils with SEND and EAL** than for their peers.
- Qualitative evidence consistently describes pupils **as calmer, more emotionally regulated, and more confident**, with **improved ability to articulate feelings and needs**, particularly among pupils previously at risk of disengagement.

Exclusions were substantially reduced in schools using the Thrive Approach, alongside positive patterns in engagement, attendance, and behaviour.

- National comparative analysis shows that Thrive schools experienced a **27% lower exclusion rate** than the national average, equivalent to approximately **four fewer exclusions per 1,000 pupils per year**.
- Within the evaluation cohort, exclusions showed the **largest and most sustained quantitative change**:
 - **Primary exclusions reduced by 52%.**
 - **Secondary exclusions reduced by 35%.**
- National benchmarking also indicates **lower overall absenteeism (-3%) and severe absenteeism (-15%)** in Thrive schools, with reductions of up to **38% in severe absence** among schools using Thrive most consistently.
- Qualitative evidence links these outcomes to **earlier identification of need, improved emotional regulation, and more consistent, preventative responses to behaviour** across staff teams.

Primary exclusions
reduced by

↓ 52%

Secondary
exclusions
reduced by

↓ 35%

'Pupil wellbeing in Thrive schools is higher than national averages'

↓ Reduced strain

Impact on staff

Staff in schools using the Thrive Approach report higher wellbeing than the national average, alongside improved morale, particularly in roles with high emotional demands.

- National benchmarking against the Teacher Wellbeing Index (TWIX, 2024) shows that **staff wellbeing in Thrive schools sits above national workforce averages**, with average staff wellbeing scores increasing by **4.8%** over one academic year in Thrive primary schools.
- The largest increases in average staff wellbeing scores were among:
 - **Teaching Assistants (+6.2%)**
 - **Licensed Thrive Practitioners (+5.3%)**
- Qualitative evidence highlights **reduced emotional strain, improved morale, and stronger collaboration**, with Thrive widely described as embedded into everyday practice rather than delivered as a standalone intervention.

FOUR
fewer exclusions
per 1,000 pupils
per year

✓ Improved morale



Stronger collaboration

Impact on the state

Sustained reductions in exclusions associated with the Thrive Approach have significant implications for long-term public value.

- National evidence indicates that Thrive schools experience approximately **four fewer exclusions per 1,000 pupils per year** compared with national averages⁷.
- According to the Institute for Public Policy Research⁸ (IPPR), each permanent exclusion carries an estimated lifetime cost to the state of £170,000, reflecting increased demand on alternative provision, health, social care, and justice services⁹. Therefore, this equates to approximately **£680,000 in avoided lifetime public costs per 1,000 pupils** per year associated with reduced exclusions.
- When applied at scale, this has potential to translate into **substantial system-level savings** (e.g., a school of 500 pupils could save £340,000 per year, and a MAT with 5,000 pupils could save £3.4million per year.)
- Combined with favourable attendance patterns, these findings suggest Thrive's potential for **reduced pressure on alternative provision, local authority services, and wider public systems** over time.

Introduction

Schools across England are facing sustained and growing pressures related to pupil wellbeing, behaviour, attendance, and workforce sustainability¹⁰. Rising levels of emotional distress among children and young people, persistent absence, and increased rates of exclusion have placed significant strain on schools, local authorities, and wider public services¹¹. In this context, there is therefore increasing need for preventative, whole-school approaches that prioritise relationships, emotional literacy, and early identification of need, particularly for pupils with additional and complex needs.

The Thrive Approach is one such framework, designed to support pupils' social and emotional development and to strengthen consistent, relational practice across school communities. Through a combination of training, whole-school adoption, and the assessment and action-planning tool (Thrive-Online), Thrive aims to help schools understand and respond to pupils' emotional needs in a developmentally informed and preventative way, promoting inclusion and engagement.

Alongside its growing adoption across the education sector, with over 2,800 schools implementing Thrive; understanding the outcomes associated with the Thrive Approach has become of increasing interest. In response, Thrive partnered with ImpactEd Evaluation (IEE) to undertake independent research and impact evaluation to examine outcomes associated with the Thrive Approach at both a school and wider system level. **This includes:**

- Large-scale national comparative analysis of Thrive customer schools, conducted by IEE for the Supporting Education Group (SEG) in 2024 which draws on data from over 2,600 schools¹¹.
- A two-year mixed-methods evaluation following a cohort of primary and secondary schools as the Thrive Approach became embedded in practice.

The national benchmarking analysis provides system-level context on pupil wellbeing, attendance, exclusions, and staff wellbeing in schools using Thrive, enabling patterns associated with the Thrive Approach to be examined at scale. Alongside this, the mixed-methods evaluation combined behavioural and wellbeing data using validated measures, with

qualitative insight from interviews with teachers and school leaders. The evaluation offers further depth of insight into how outcomes for pupils and staff evolve over time within participating schools, as well as how changes in culture, relationships, and professional practice are experienced by school staff.

This final report brings together evidence from these complementary strands of research to examine the impact of the Thrive Approach across pupils, school staff, and the wider system. Quantitative findings are used to identify patterns and trends over time, and in comparison to national benchmarks, while qualitative evidence from semi-structured interviews with teachers and school leaders provides depth and explanation, illuminating how changes in culture, relationships, and practice are experienced 'on the ground' in schools.

The report aims to support school leaders, trusts, local authorities, and policymakers in understanding how preventative, relational approaches such as the Thrive Approach are associated with improved wellbeing, stronger inclusion, workforce sustainability, and reduced reliance on reactive interventions, in the context of increasing need and constrained public resources.

The Thrive Approach are associated with improved wellbeing, stronger inclusion, workforce sustainability, and reduced reliance on reactive interventions.



ImpactEd
Evaluation

“What stands out in this evaluation is how consistently schools describe the way relational, trauma-sensitive practice like the Thrive Approach supports pupil wellbeing, behaviour, and staff confidence, alongside reductions in exclusions and more stable attendance. Together, the findings indicate that approaches like Thrive can play an important role not only in supporting pupils, staff and schools, but also in easing longer-term pressure on public services.”

— Danielle Jones, Manager, ImpactEd Evaluation

Impact on Pupils

Wellbeing and emotional development

National benchmarking evidence indicates that pupils in schools using the Thrive Approach report wellbeing levels that are at or above national averages, with **particularly strong outcomes for pupils with SEND**. Analysis conducted by IEE shows that average wellbeing scores for SEND pupils in

Thrive schools increased 0.16 points (equivalent to around 5%) over the 2023/24 academic year, exceeding national SEND wellbeing benchmarks, despite wider national declines in pupil wellbeing (figure 1).

Wellbeing levels of SEND pupils in customer schools vs schools nationally

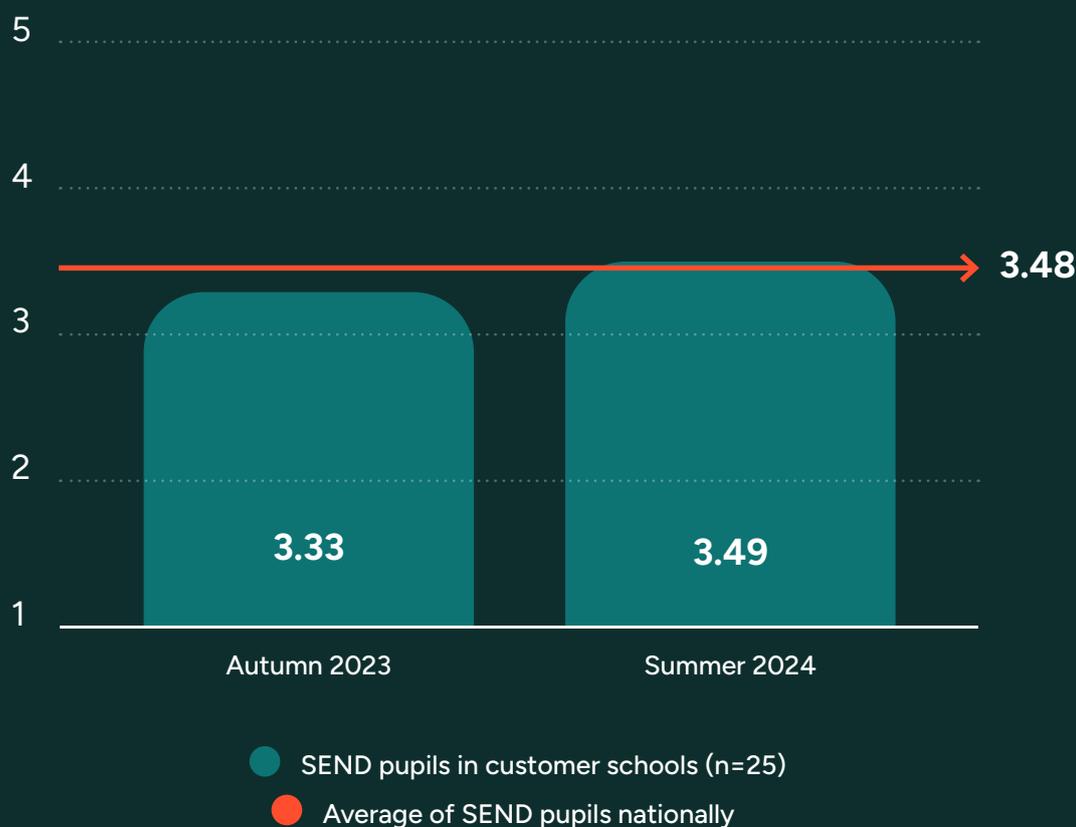


Figure 1: Average wellbeing scores for SEND pupils in Thrive schools compared with national SEND wellbeing averages.

These national patterns are reflected in qualitative evidence with teachers and school leaders. Within participating schools, staff described pupils as becoming more emotionally regulated, confident, and increasingly able to articulate their feelings and needs over time. These reported changes were most evident among pupils with additional needs and those who had previously experienced difficulties with engagement or behaviour.

Staff consistently highlighted improvements in pupils' emotional literacy, resilience, and capacity to manage transitions and everyday challenges. Practitioners emphasised that these changes were supported by Thrive's relational and preventative approach, including shared language across staff teams and more consistent responses to pupils' emotional needs.

Several practitioners also described impacts that extended beyond individual pupils to the wider school environment, including calmer classrooms, improved peer relationships, and a stronger sense of safety and belonging.

Across both the national benchmarking analysis and the school-level evaluation, evidence points to **positive patterns in pupil wellbeing and emotional development in schools using the Thrive Approach, particularly for pupils with additional needs and those at risk of disengagement.**

“There is [now] very little conflict or upset in terms of distressed behaviour.” — Teacher (SEG impact report 2024)

“They feel safe because everyone is responding in the same way. That consistency makes a huge difference for our most vulnerable children.” — Teacher

“The children are significantly happier and calmer in school, and the whole community feels closer and safer than before.” — Teacher



Engagement, behaviour and inclusion

National benchmarking analysis highlights a close relationship between pupil mental health and wellbeing and wider patterns of engagement, behaviour and inclusion. Insights from the SEG 2024 report indicate that schools using Thrive's assessment and action-planning tool (Thrive-Online) experience lower levels of absence and exclusion than schools nationally (figure 2), suggesting that stronger wellbeing outcomes are associated with improved engagement.

During the 2023/24 academic year, Thrive customer schools recorded an exclusion rate of 0.11%, compared with 0.15% nationally, **representing a 27% lower exclusion rate** overall. Among highly engaged schools completing more than 100 Thrive-Online assessments per year, exclusion rates were similarly lower at 0.12%, reinforcing **the association between sustained engagement with the approach and more inclusive outcomes**.

Building on this national context, evidence from the two-year evaluation provides insight into how these patterns play out within participating schools. Within the evaluation cohort, exclusion rates showed a particularly encouraging trend over time. In primary

schools, the number of exclusions reduced by 52% from 31 to 15 over the evaluation period, and in secondary schools, exclusions fell by 35%, from 51 to 33 (figure 3).

These reductions in exclusions align with qualitative accounts from practitioners, who described how Thrive-supported approaches contributed to earlier identification of need, more consistent responses to behaviour, and a shift away from punitive practices. Staff reported greater confidence in understanding the underlying causes of behaviour and responding in ways that prioritise long-term inclusion rather than short-term compliance.

Practitioners also highlighted the impact of these approaches for pupils at risk of disengagement, particularly in supporting continued participation in learning pathways.

This qualitative evidence provides important context for the observed reductions in exclusions, illustrating how relational and preventative approaches may support more inclusive environments and outcomes over time.

“It’s changed the conversation from ‘what’s the consequence?’ to ‘what does this child need?’ That’s made a real difference to behaviour.”

— Senior leader

“I can honestly say that without the programme these pupils would not be heading to KS4.”

— Teacher

Exclusion rate at Thrive customer schools vs pupils nationally

Pupils nationally

0.15%

Thrive customer schools (n=1786)

0.11%

Customer schools with high engagement (n=22)

0.12%

Figure 2: Exclusion rates in Thrive schools compared with national averages (Thrive x SEG analysis, 2023/24).

Exclusions from participating schools

PRIMARY

31

AUTUMN 2023

↓ 52%

15

SUMMER 2025

SECONDARY

51

AUTUMN 2023

↓ 35%

33

SUMMER 2025

Figure 3: Exclusions from participating primary and secondary schools across the evaluation period.

Attendance and readiness to learn

National comparative evidence indicates that schools using the Thrive Approach have lower absence and severe absence rates than schools nationally, suggesting stronger patterns of attendance and engagement. Analysis conducted by ImpactEd Evaluation for the Supporting Education Group shows that, during the 2023/24 academic year, Thrive customer schools experienced approximately **3% lower overall absenteeism** and **15% lower severe absenteeism¹²** compared with national averages (figure 4).

Differences were more pronounced among highly engaged Thrive schools completing more than 100 individual pupil assessments per year. In this group, **overall absenteeism was around 5% lower than the national average, while severe absenteeism was 38% lower** (figure 4), indicating that sustained and consistent use of the approach is associated with more favourable attendance outcomes.

These national patterns suggest that stronger mental health and wellbeing provision is associated with **improved engagement and attendance, particularly in schools where the Thrive Approach is used consistently and at scale.**

Building on this system-level context, evidence from the two-year evaluation provides further insight into attendance patterns within participating primary schools over time. Primary pupil attendance within the evaluation cohort remained consistent across timepoints, showing only a small decrease of 0.9 percentage points between baseline and endline (figure 5). This change is smaller than the around 1 percentage-point decline typically observed nationally between the autumn and summer terms and is therefore positive and consistent with expected seasonal variation.

Absence rates in Thrive customer schools vs schools nationally

Absence rate



Severe absence rate

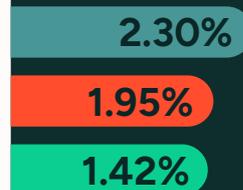


Figure 4: Overall and severe absence rates in Thrive schools compared with national averages (Thrive x SEG analysis, 2023/24).

- Pupils nationally
- Thrive customer schools (n=1786)
- Customer schools with high engagement (n=22)

↓ 3%
lower overall
absenteeism

When considered alongside national benchmarks, attendance levels in participating primary schools remained broadly in line with national averages, with indications of slightly higher attendance for pupils with SEND (figure 5), aligning with wider evidence from the evaluation that Thrive-supported approaches **may help support engagement and sustained attendance for pupils with additional needs**. It is important to note that national attendance figures reflect performance across the full academic year, whereas attendance data within the evaluation cohort relates to specific terms only. Against this context, the slight decrease observed within the cohort suggests that attendance was maintained at levels comparable to, and in some cases slightly above, national patterns, despite wider pressures on attendance.

Qualitatively, teachers and school leaders described how implementing Thrive supported calmer, more predictable school environments that supported pupils to feel settled and ready to engage with learning. Teachers noted that when pupils felt emotionally secure and supported, this was reflected in **greater enthusiasm for school and fewer incidents of distress or disruption**, helping to sustain regular attendance.

“The children are happy, the children are enthusiastic, the children want to learn. There is very little conflict or upset in school in terms of distressed behaviour.”

— Teacher (SEG, 2024)

Attendance for Primary pupils

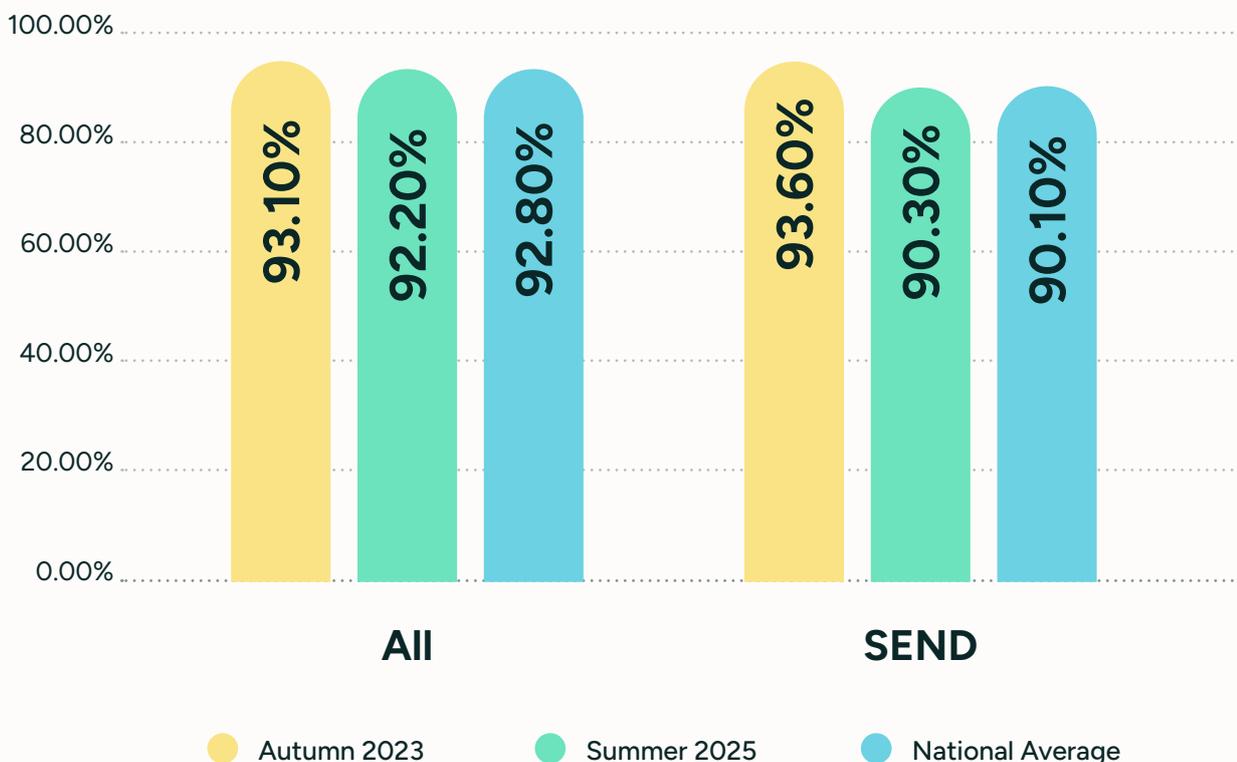


Figure 5: Average primary pupil attendance at baseline (Autumn 2023) and endline (Summer 2025) of the evaluation, all pupils and SEND pupils vs. national average.

Impact on Staff

Evidence from national benchmarking, staff wellbeing surveys, and qualitative interviews provides indications that the Thrive Approach is associated with improved staff wellbeing, morale, and professional confidence. Together, these findings highlight how Thrive-supported approaches may contribute to more supportive and sustainable working environments, particularly in schools serving pupils with complex needs.

Staff wellbeing and morale

Wellbeing survey data indicates that staff wellbeing in Thrive customer schools sits above national workforce benchmarks, as measured against the Teacher Wellbeing Index (TWIX, 2024). Average wellbeing scores for staff in Thrive primary schools

increased by 4.8%, from 45.86 in Autumn 2023 to 48.05 in Summer 2024 and were higher than the national average at both timepoints (figure 8). Drawing on a large cross-sectional dataset across Thrive schools, this evidence suggests that Thrive is associated with more positive staff wellbeing at scale, particularly in contexts where schools are supporting pupils with complex needs.

Role-level analysis from the evaluation data shows that all staff groups experienced increases in average wellbeing scores between baseline and endline. The largest improvements were observed among Teaching Assistants and Thrive Practitioners, with wellbeing scores improving by 6.2% and 5.3% respectively on average (figure 9). These roles typically involve sustained work with pupils experiencing emotional distress or behavioural challenges, and these improvements suggest that Thrive may be particularly supportive to staff wellbeing in roles with high emotional and relational demands, contributing to wellbeing levels that sit above national benchmarks for comparable roles.



Figure 8: Comparison of staff wellbeing scores in Thrive primary schools and national benchmarks, Autumn 2023–Summer 2024.

Qualitative findings align strongly with this picture. Across participating schools, Staff highlighted how Thrive-supported approaches were experienced in relation to wellbeing, morale, and emotional sustainability in relation to their practice. Teachers and school leaders described feeling less overwhelmed by the emotional demands of their roles, particularly when supporting pupils with complex needs. Having shared approaches across the school was seen as reducing isolation and the sense of carrying challenges alone.

Several staff linked improvements in wellbeing to wider changes in school culture, describing calmer environments, improved relationships between colleagues, and a greater sense of collective responsibility. These shifts were associated with reduced stress and a more positive day-to-day experience of working in school.

Staff also emphasised that feeling emotionally supported and working within a consistent, relational culture made schools more sustainable places to work, particularly for those supporting the most vulnerable pupils. This sense of shared understanding and reduced emotional strain was seen as central to maintaining morale over time.

“It (Thrive) had a much wider impact across our whole school than expected. A year later the most recent staff survey was entirely positive with comments such as ‘this is now a happy place to work’ and ‘the children are polite and caring’.”

— Senior Leader

Staff Wellbeing by Role vs National Average

Teaching assistant

43.1

46.8

Teacher

46.2

46.8

Thrive Practitioner

41.3

44.5

Support Staff

44.0

47.0

Senior Leader

44.1

46.2

Figure 9: Average staff wellbeing scores (unmatched) at baseline and endline, broken down by specific role, and in comparison, to National Average figures (TWIX, 2024) where available.

- Baseline Average
- Endline Average
- National average (TWIX 2024)

Professional confidence and practice

Qualitative evidence drawn from in-depth interviews with teachers and school leaders from participating thrive schools suggests that Thrive influenced more positive professional confidence, consistency of practice, and collaborative working within schools.

Across all interviews, practitioners described feeling more equipped to interpret pupil behaviour through an emotional, relational, and developmental lens. This shift was associated with greater confidence in responding to challenging behaviour and more consistent, empathetic approaches across staff teams. Assessing pupils and using shared action plans were described as supporting clearer understanding of pupils' needs and reducing uncertainty about how best to respond.

“For these pupils it was all about the relationship. They saw me as their key person, they knew I had their back, I understood their needs and shared this with other teachers.”

— Thrive Practitioner

Many teachers and leaders described Thrive as becoming embedded into everyday practice rather than delivered as a standalone intervention. This whole-school approach supported a consistent “shared language” around emotional development and more coherent responses to pupils across different staff members and settings. Practitioners reflected that this consistency represented a move away from reactive or punitive approaches towards practice grounded in empathy and understanding.

Staff also described **increased confidence in supporting pupils who might previously have been at risk of exclusion**. Interviewees shared examples of pupils rebuilding trust, engaging more positively with adults, and becoming more settled in school as a result of consistent, relational support.

Thrive was also reported to influence professional thinking beyond the classroom. Some practitioners reflected that the Thrive Approach had shaped how they understood children's emotional needs more broadly, influencing interactions in other contexts, including as parents themselves, and reinforcing confidence in relational approaches.

Improved collaboration with leadership and families was another recurring theme. Staff described how Thrive assessments provided a shared framework for discussing pupils' needs, supporting more constructive conversations, and coordinated responses across home and school. In some cases, this collaborative approach helped schools respond more effectively to pupils with complex needs through agreed and consistently implemented support strategies and activities.

Ongoing professional development, shared reflection, and visible improvements in pupil engagement were described by staff as integral in building professional confidence and securing sustained buy-in. Over time, many schools reported that Thrive resources had become part of their routine professional development practice rather than an additional initiative.

“I have completely changed how I deal with my own children; I realised I needed to ‘Thrive’ them rather than use some traditional parenting techniques.”

— Teacher

We (school and parents) created an action plan, and she has been doing really, really well. The support is in place, and we are all implementing the action plan to get her (pupil) through this."

— Teacher

Workforce sustainability

Evidence from the evaluation suggests that Thrive may contribute to workforce sustainability by supporting staff wellbeing and reducing the emotional strain associated with working in schools serving pupils with complex needs. Staff emphasised that feeling emotionally supported and working within a consistent, relational culture made schools more sustainable places to work, particularly for those supporting the most vulnerable pupils.

Practitioners described how shared understanding across staff teams reduced isolation and helped distribute emotional labour more evenly, contributing to improved morale over time. These factors were seen as especially important in the context of wider

recruitment and retention pressures across the education sector, where sustaining staff wellbeing is critical to maintaining stable and effective school communities.

Overall, the evidence indicates that Thrive may **support schools to sustain their workforce by strengthening staff wellbeing and morale, reducing emotional strain, and supporting consistent, relational ways of working.** These factors are particularly important in contexts where recruitment and retention pressures are high, and staff are supporting pupils with increasingly complex emotional and behavioural needs.



"It's made for happier staff ... it makes the school a much more pleasant place to be." — Teacher (SEG impact report 2024)

Impact on the State

Beyond its impact on pupils and staff, exclusions analysis conducted for the SEG report suggests that the Thrive Approach has the potential to contribute to wider public system outcomes. Reductions in exclusions and improvements in attendance and engagement observed in Thrive customer schools could have implications for long-term public value, given the well-established links between educational exclusion, later life outcomes, and demand on public services.

Reducing long-term public cost

As set out in the 'Engagement, behaviour, and inclusion' section (see figures 2 and 3), evidence from the mixed-methods evaluation and national benchmarking shows that schools using the Thrive Approach experience substantially lower exclusion rates than schools nationally. National benchmarking analysis indicates that Thrive schools recorded a 27% lower exclusion rate than the national average during the 2023/24 academic year, equivalent to approximately four fewer exclusions per 1,000 pupils per year (figure 2). Within the evaluation cohort, exclusions reduced by 52% in primary schools and 35% in secondary schools over the course of the evaluation (figure 3).

While the evaluation does not estimate fiscal impacts directly, existing economic research provides an indication of the potential long-term public value associated with avoided exclusions. Analysis by the Institute for Public Policy Research estimates that each permanent exclusion carries an average lifetime cost to the state of approximately £170,000, reflecting increased demand on alternative provision, health, social care, and justice services.

Applied illustratively to the average reduction of four exclusions per 1,000 pupils, this equates to an estimated £680,000 in avoided lifetime public costs per 1,000 pupils. Scaled across different system levels, this would equate to indicative long-term public value of approximately:

- **£340,000 for a school with 500 pupils**

- **£3.4 million for a multi-academy trust with 5,000 pupils**

- **£34 million for a local authority with 50,000 pupils**

These figures represent indicative long-term system benefits rather than immediate, cashable savings, but illustrate the scale of potential public value associated with sustained reductions in exclusion when achieved at scale.

£3.4 million
saved in long-term public costs for a multi-academy trust with 5,000 pupils.

£34 million

saved in long-term public costs for a local authority with 50,000 pupils.

Easing pressure on public services

Evidence presented earlier in the report also indicates that schools using the Thrive Approach experience lower levels of absence and severe absence than schools nationally (see figures 4 and 5). National benchmarking analysis shows that Thrive schools recorded **3% lower overall absenteeism** and **15% lower severe absenteeism** compared with national averages, with larger reductions of **up to 38% in severe absence observed among highly engaged schools**.

Within the evaluation cohort, primary attendance remained broadly stable over time, with a 0.9 percentage-point decrease between baseline

and endline, smaller than the approximately 1 percentage-point decline typically observed nationally between autumn and summer terms. Attendance levels remained broadly in line with national averages, with indications of slightly higher attendance for pupils with SEND (figure 5).

Sustained attendance and engagement are closely linked to reduced reliance on alternative provision and other high-cost, reactive services. By supporting emotional regulation, early identification of need, and inclusive practice within mainstream settings, Thrive may therefore help ease pressure on local authority services and wider public systems over time.

Supporting preventative system approaches

When considered together, the patterns outlined across exclusions, attendance, and engagement, as well as qualitative evidence indicate that the Thrive Approach is considered a preventative, whole-school approach that **aligns with system priorities around inclusion, early intervention, and value for money**. The outcomes observed suggest that Thrive may **contribute to longer-term system sustainability** by reducing the likelihood that children and young people will require costly, reactive interventions later in life. In this way, Thrive aligns with wider policy ambitions to shift education and related public services towards earlier, preventative support, supporting sustained participation in education, easing pressure on public services, and contributing to more efficient use of public resources over time.



Conclusion

This report brings together evidence from national benchmarking, a two-year mixed-methods evaluation, and qualitative research with school staff to examine the impact of the Thrive Approach across pupils, staff, and the wider system. The findings indicate that the Thrive Approach is a positive, preventative, whole-school approach that is associated with positive outcomes for wellbeing, inclusion, and more sustainable ways of working in schools.

For pupils, the evidence indicates positive patterns in wellbeing, emotional regulation, and engagement, with particularly strong outcomes for pupils with SEND, and those at greater risk of disengagement. National benchmarking indicates that wellbeing outcomes in Thrive schools meet or exceed national averages, while school-level evaluation findings and qualitative evidence highlight calmer learning environments, improved relationships, and more consistent staff responses to pupils' emotional needs. Substantial and sustained reductions in exclusions, alongside broadly stable attendance despite wider national pressures and declines, suggest that implementing Thrive supports earlier identification of need in schools, and more inclusive approaches to behaviour and support.

For staff, the findings suggest that Thrive is associated with higher wellbeing, improved morale, and increased professional confidence, creating 'happier' schools to work in. National benchmarking data shows staff wellbeing sitting above workforce averages, with role-level analysis highlighting particularly strong improvements among staff working most closely with pupils' emotional and

behavioural needs. Qualitative evidence points to clearer shared approaches, reduced emotional strain, and more collaborative school cultures. These outcomes are especially significant in the context of ever-increasing workforce pressures and rising pupil need, highlighting Thrive's potential contribution to workforce sustainability.

Beyond individual schools, the evidence suggests positive implications at system level. Reductions in exclusions and improvements in attendance and engagement are closely linked to longer-term public value, given the established relationship between educational exclusion, disengagement, and later demand on public services. While these benefits represent long-term system gains rather than immediate, cashable savings, the findings illustrate how preventative, relational approaches can support more sustainable use of public resources over time.

Overall, the evidence presented in this report positions the Thrive Approach as a credible, evidence-informed framework for schools and systems seeking to strengthen inclusion, support wellbeing, and reduce reliance on reactive interventions. In a landscape characterised by growing complexity of need and constrained resources, Thrive offers an approach that aligns educational practice with long-term outcomes for children, young people, staff, and the wider system.

Explore what the Thrive Approach could mean for your setting, trust or local authority

Book a call





Appendix

1. The Supporting Education Group Impact Report 2024 can be found here: https://www.supportingeducation.com/wp-content/uploads/SEG25_SEG-Impact-ReportDIGITAL-SPREADS.pdf
2. Department for Education, 2024. Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2023/24. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2023-24>
3. Education Support's 'Teacher Wellbeing Index', 2024. Available at: [twix-2024.pdf](#)
4. Thrive Licensed Practitioners are education professionals who have completed Thrive's training which equips them with the knowledge to effectively support pupils' social and emotional development.
5. IPPR, 2024. Revealed: School exclusions and suspensions rise by a fifth last year, finds new report. Available at <https://www.ippr.org/media-office/revealed-school-exclusions-and-suspensions-rise-by-a-fifth-last-year-finds-new-report>
6. SEG x IEE, 2024., Available at: [supportingeducation.com/wp-content/uploads/SEG25_SEG-Impact-ReportDIGITAL.pdf](#)
7. SEG x IEE, 2024., Available at: [supportingeducation.com/wp-content/uploads/SEG25_SEG-Impact-ReportDIGITAL.pdf](#)
8. IPPR, 2024. Revealed: School exclusions and suspensions rise by a fifth last year, finds new report. Available at <https://www.ippr.org/media-office/revealed-school-exclusions-and-suspensions-rise-by-a-fifth-last-year-finds-new-report>
9. Department for Education, 2024. The impact of school absence on lifetime earnings. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67d2cf8f4702aacd2251cbae/The_impact_of_school_absence_on_lifetime_earnings.pdf
10. The centre for Social Justice, 2022 [Available at: [Lost but not forgotten: the reality of severe absence in schools post-lockdown](#)]; DfE, 2024 [Available at: [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)]; Education Support's 'Teacher Wellbeing Index', 2024. Available at: [twix-2024.pdf](#).
11. SEG x IEE, 2024., Available at: [supportingeducation.com/wp-content/uploads/SEG25_SEG-Impact-ReportDIGITAL.pdf](#)
12. Severe absenteeism is defined as missing 50% or more of school sessions.



Proudly part of



Supporting
Education
Group



ImpactEd
Evaluation

Contact information:
www.impactedbackgroup.uk
hello@impactedbackgroup.uk