

WHAT MAKES A „GOOD SCHOOL“ ?

We all want our children to study in a good school – and we do our best to make this happen. But how do we choose a school that we believe is really good? And do we know for sure what actually makes it good?



It is often the case that many of us think that everything comes down to high grades.

We know that **schools' main task is to have children prepared for a full life as adults.** But are high grades the only thing that guarantees this? Of course not!

A number of international studies prove that **nowadays the wellbeing of children is a crucial condition of their wellbeing as adults.**

In order to know whether a school is really good, we should **consider also child wellbeing, not just grades.**

The wellbeing of adolescents at school is made up of several factors, the key ones being: emotions and satisfaction, mental and social wellbeing.

Good school
=
high grades ?

?

Emotions and satisfaction

The extent to which children are satisfied with school, whether their emotions in school tend to be more positive or more negative

Mental

Whether they have good relationships, cope with their tasks, accept themselves and show development at school

Social

The extent to which they feel they belong to their classroom and school, whether they believe they can have contribution, whether they trust in their peers' positive qualities

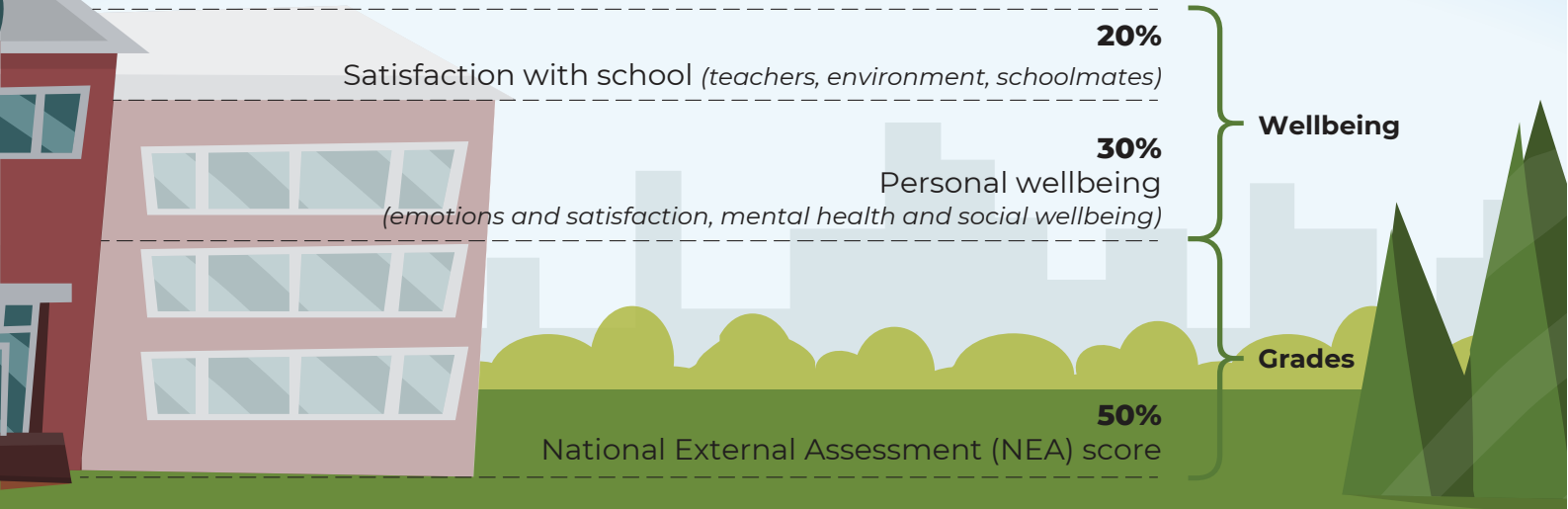


While pursuing the concept of a good school, we carried out a nationally representative survey of seven graders' **wellbeing in 100 schools all over Bulgaria**, in partnership with G Consulting sociological agency and a collaborator from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and we compared the findings with students' grades of the 2017 and 2018 National External Assessments.

...and what we found out is that the most successful schools are the ones that are equally focused on academic success and on student wellbeing, while at the same time they have created networks of extracurricular formats and conditions for individual achievements and community development. **This is how we came up with our:**

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL INDEX*

**The maximum score of this Index is 100 points*



Of the surveyed 100 schools, only

10%

have an Index score of over 60%.

These are schools where ...



there is a feeling of belonging to a community, to a single team



the level of aggressive occurrences and harassment is low



children feel they make a contribution and they matter



there are numerous extracurricular activities in school (outings, camps, out-of-school lessons, sports events)



teachers are impartial, well-meaning and supportive

The survey clearly shows that at individual level there is strong correlation between the extent of wellbeing and academic success. Regretfully, in the case of many schools this correlation of wellbeing and success is broken. Where the focus is entirely on academic achievements, wellbeing is often low. In other schools the opposite is true – children feel well but this is at the expense of academic functions.

% of low wellbeing

12.5%

19.2%

25%

NEA 2017/2018

less than 30 points

50-30 points

more than 50 points

Also, it often happens that child wellbeing in “elite” schools is at the lowest levels because:



students have no feeling of belonging to a community



the environment is very competitive



students feel that teachers have favorite students, disregarding the rest



social discrepancies are not left outside schools



students do not feel that they matter to their school

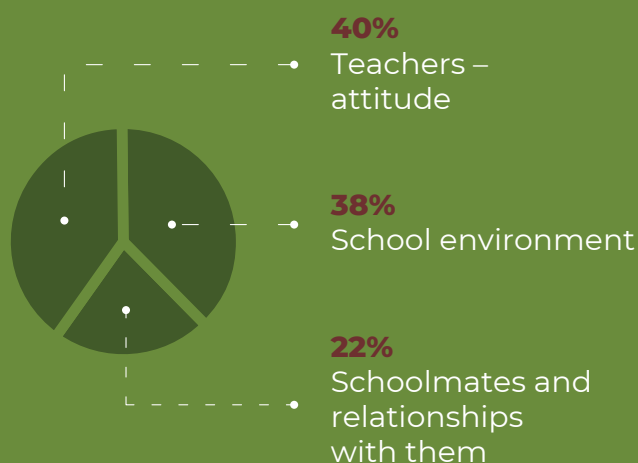


students notice that the public (external) image of the school diverges from the image perceived from inside



in the universe of such schools, there is only one hierarchy of achievements, that of grades

Key factors that determine whether children are satisfied with school, according to the survey:



The wellbeing index shows that

38.4%

of Bulgarian seven-graders are at very low to moderate level of school wellbeing; the main reasons they refer to are the following:

- Unfair teachers
- Bullying by schoolmates
- Absence of opportunities of individual expression
- Division lines in the classroom (by grades, by ethnic belonging)

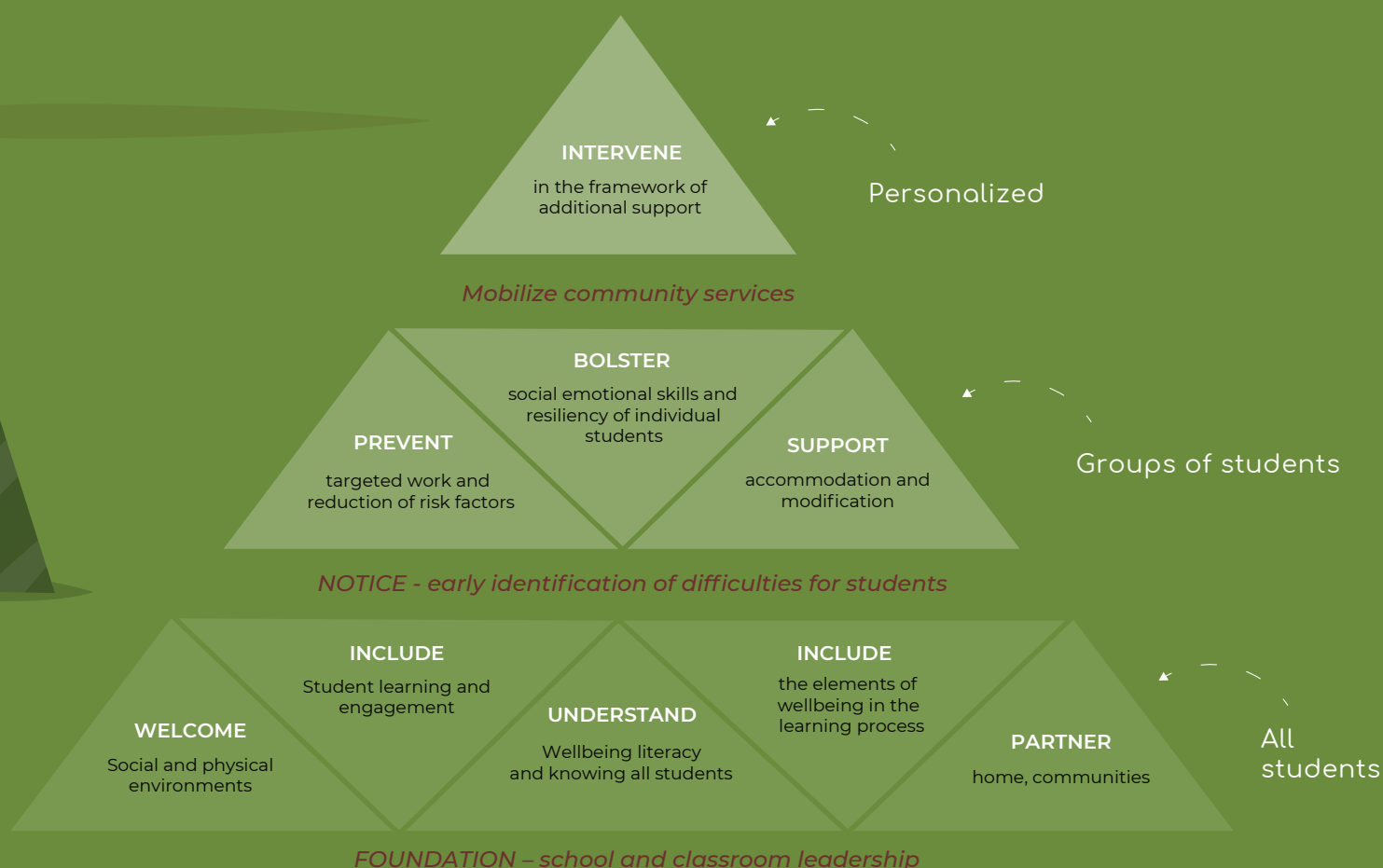
WHY WELLBEING MATTERS?

When the levels of wellbeing are high:

- There is lower risk of school dropout, playing truant, ungrounded absence
- Students are less inclined to show aggression
- Children are more inclined to continue their education at the next level
- Stress and anxiety among students and teachers is reduced
- Children's social skills are developed successfully

HOW IS WELLBEING PROMOTED?

There are several key things that **every school can do to improve student wellbeing:**



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