# PISA for Schools: Case Studies

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## Contents

# PISA for Schools: Case Studies Project

## Introduction

Educational leaders need meaningful, reliable, and globally comparable information to understand how well their students are prepared for life, work, and citizenship. While many schools evaluate student learning against national standards, the benchmark for educational success increasingly lies in how students compare with peers across the world's best-performing education systems.

For more than two decades, the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has provided this lens, enabling over 80 countries and economies to gauge the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of 15-year-old students. The PISA-based Test for Schools (PBTS) or PISA for Schools (PfS) extends this opportunity to the school level, giving individual schools the chance to benchmark their students' outcomes internationally, to reflect on teaching and learning practices, and to engage in dialogue with peers worldwide.

Data, however, is only the beginning. Its true value lies in how schools interpret and enact the insights it provides. Building on Ball's (2011) policy enactment theory, this project recognises that schools do not simply "implement" policies or respond to assessment reports. Instead, they interpret, negotiate, and adapt findings to their own unique contexts, cultures, and priorities.

To deepen our understanding of this process, researchers from the Department of Education at the University of Oxford collaborated with the OECD PISA for Schools team with the support of an Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN) Fellowship.

The goals of this initiative were to:

A) Explore how schools around the world interpret and act on their PfS results
B) Showcase concrete examples of school-level innovation, collaboration, and reform
C) Identify lessons that can inform both local practice and global education policy

Through an ambitious survey and interview programme, the project gathered insights from schools who have participated in PfS since 2012. These schools' experiences form the core of this report. Each case study illustrates one of four thematic categories that emerged from the research:

- Global benchmarking and comparison
- Data-driven insights for school improvement
- Student wellbeing and equity
- Collaboration and networking

The stories shared within this report show that while participation in PfS can be mandated or encouraged externally, its impact depends on the professionalism, motivation, creativity, hard work and values of educators and communities within schools. In addition, local context and institutional capacities were key factors affecting the enactment process.

Ultimately, this project underscores the PfS mission to provide schools worldwide with the evidence, tools, and networks they need to deliver better policies for better schools and better lives.

## Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN) at the University of Oxford

The Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN) is a university-wide initiative at the University of Oxford designed to strengthen connections between academic research and policymaking. OPEN supports researchers in building the skills, relationships, and opportunities needed to ensure that high-quality research informs decisions of public value. Within this framework, Dr Sara Ratner from the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, was awarded an OPEN Fellowship to work in collaboration with the OECD's PISA for Schools team, led by Tanja Vujičić between December 2024 and June 2025. By embedding researchers within the PfS team, the fellowship enabled co-production of this case study project, ensuring that the research was both academically rigorous and directly relevant to the policy questions and practical challenges faced by schools worldwide. The funding from OPEN supported the project assistance of Ms Olena Rusnak who was invaluable to this process.

Ms Natalia Rubio from the OECD worked tirelessly with us to underwrite the project's success with the oversight of Tanja Vujičić. Together, the Oxford researchers and OECD PISA for Schools team designed and successfully implemented the PISA for Schools Case Studies Project.

## About the PISA-based Test for Schools

The PISA-based Test for Schools (PBTS), more commonly known as *PISA for Schools (PfS)*, is an OECD initiative designed to extend the insights of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to the level of individual schools. While PISA provides comparative evidence across education systems, PfS enables schools to situate themselves within this international landscape, offering a distinctive combination of benchmarking and diagnostic feedback.

At its core, PfS assesses the knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics, and science. Like PISA, it does not merely test whether students can reproduce what they have learned, but evaluates their capacity to apply knowledge, reason, and solve problems in real-world contexts. Alongside these cognitive domains, PfS also gathers information on student attitudes to learning, their sense of belonging, motivation, and perceptions of their school environment. This contextual data allows schools to connect performance outcomes with dimensions of student wellbeing and equity.

Results are reported on the same scale as PISA, with a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100 across OECD countries. This provides schools with an opportunity to benchmark themselves against the OECD average and high-performing systems worldwide. Reports are designed not as static documents but as tools for reflection, dialogue, and improvement. They provide insights that allow schools to confirm strengths, challenge assumptions, and identify areas requiring further development. By linking schools internationally, PfS also encourages peer learning and collaboration, supporting educators in sharing strategies across diverse contexts.

The OECD's vision for PfS is that it should act both as a *mirror*, reflecting a school's position within the global education landscape, and a *compass*, guiding schools towards new directions for improvement. Yet the value of PfS depends not only on what the assessment measures, but on how schools interpret and enact the data in their own settings. Schools do not work with data in a vacuum; they bring to it their histories, cultures, priorities, and professional practices.

## The Benefits of PISA for Schools

Schools that participate in PISA for Schools typically benefit in several ways:

- Global benchmarking: situating their students' performance in reading, mathematics, and science against the OECD average and the world's top-performing systems.
- Diagnostic insights for improvement: gaining detailed feedback not just on performance levels, but also on how students learn, their motivation, and their perceptions of their school environment.
- Equity and inclusion: understanding the extent of performance gaps by gender, socio-economic background, and ability level, and considering how to respond to them.
- Wellbeing and engagement: learning about students' sense of belonging, confidence, and resilience, and recognising how these shape both academic outcomes and life satisfaction.
- Professional dialogue and peer learning: using the school report as a catalyst for discussion among teachers and leaders, and for exchange across networks of schools, both nationally and internationally.

## From intended purpose to lived practice

The OECD has articulated a clear vision for PfS, to provide schools with internationally comparable evidence that can support reflection, guide improvement, and foster dialogue. Yet the value of such evidence ultimately depends on how it is interpreted and used in practice. Schools do not engage with data in a vacuum. They bring to it their own contexts, priorities, and professional cultures.

This Case Studies Project was developed to examine how schools enact this vision in practice. While the OECD articulates the benefits that PISA for Schools can bring, the experiences of participating schools provide much needed insight into how the data is actually used on the ground. We want to know how it confirms or challenges assumptions, sparks action, and shapes school life.

By bringing together survey evidence and in-depth interviews, the case studies that follow show the many ways in which schools interpret, negotiate, and apply their PfS results. They demonstrate that the intended benefits are not abstract ideals but living processes that unfold differently across diverse contexts.

The case studies that follow explore this process in depth. They show how schools across diverse countries and networks have taken the data provided by PfS and made it their own by using it to affirm strengths, confront challenges, and adapt policies and practices. Each case study illustrates a distinctive pathway of enactment, but together they highlight the creativity and professionalism with which educators bring international evidence into their local realities.

# Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods case study design (Yin, 2018) to explore how schools engage with and enact PfS results across four thematic categories: global benchmarking and comparison, data-driven insights for school improvement, student well-being and equity, and networking and collaboration. The research follows a two-phase sequential design, including an initial survey analysis with semi-structured interviews to deepen insights.

## Conceptual framework

The study is grounded in policy enactment theory (Ball et al., 2011), which posits that policies are not simply implemented but are subject to 'interpretation', negotiation, and 'translation' within specific institutional and cultural contexts. This framework allows us to see PfS reports not as static outputs but as dynamic resources that schools engage with, debate, and integrate into their own strategic development.

## Survey

The first phase of the study involved a survey distributed by the OECD via Test Providers (formerly known as National Service Providers) to all schools that had participated in PfS since 2012. Additional channels included direct OECD outreach to schools in countries without Test Provider agreements, as well as a public link posted on the OECD's PfS LinkedIn page. The survey included six background questions on school profile and participation, six case study-related questions on the use of PfS data, and six feedback questions on the school report itself.

A total of 366 responses were received from seven countries and networks. After removing incomplete and duplicate responses, 136 substantive responses remained for analysis. This marked a significant increase in engagement compared with the PISA for Schools teams' previous efforts, which had yielded fewer than ten responses.

## Dataset description

The dataset generated captures the diversity of schools engaging with PfS. It includes small schools (fewer than 500 students), medium schools (501–3,000), and large institutions (more than 3,000). It also spans public, private, and public–private partnership schools, and includes urban, rural, inclusive, multilingual, and specialised institutions. Each response was coded against four thematic categories (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017): global benchmarking and comparison, data-driven insights for school improvement, student wellbeing and equity, collaboration and networking.

- Total responses received: 366
- Substantive responses after cleaning: 136
- Countries/Networks represented: 7

## Case study selection

From the 136 substantive responses, 23 schools were shortlisted for potential case studies through purposive sampling. Three members of the research team independently reviewed and ranked responses according to four criteria:

1) Richness of response
2) Thematic coverage
3) Contextual diversity, and
4) Evidence of impact beyond the classroom

This process ensured that shortlisted schools offered detailed accounts, represented different types and contexts, covered all four thematic categories, and demonstrated influence at the classroom, school, network, or national level.

From these 23 schools, ten were selected for semi-structured interviews. These interviews provided the qualitative depth required to understand how PfS data is enacted in practice.

The figure below shows the four stages the team progressed through to select the schools:

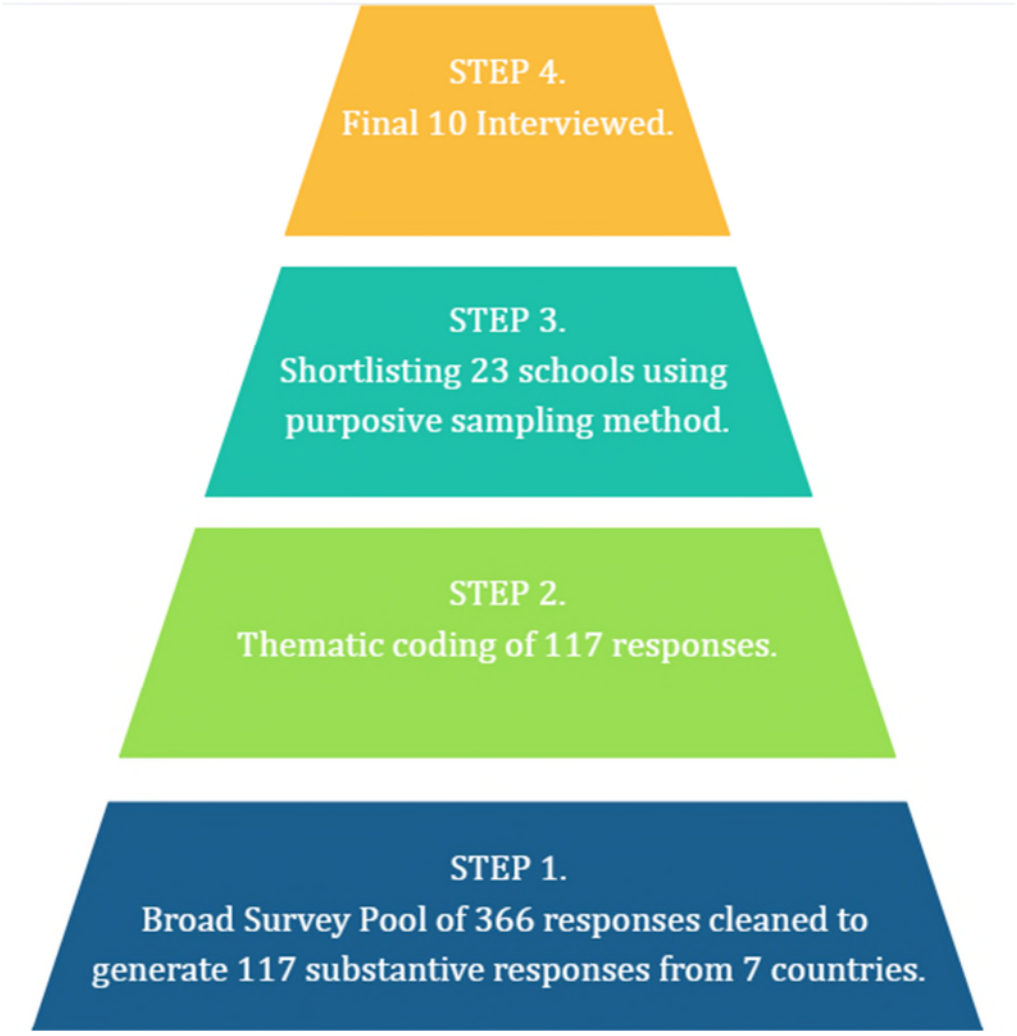


***Figure 1. Four Step Selection Process***

## Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school leaders, teachers, and in some cases, advisory councils. The interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and were designed to explore four areas:

1) Context and motivation;
2) Engagement with the PfS report;
3) Key insights and surprises; and
4) Actions and challenges.

Participants were encouraged to describe not only outcomes but also the processes and conversations that led from data to action. Importantly, interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, or Russian, depending on the preference of the school. This multilingual approach enabled participants to express themselves in their first language wherever possible, ensuring accuracy, inclusion, and cultural nuance (van Nes et al., 2010).

The interview phase allowed the research team to move beyond survey summaries, providing vivid accounts of how PfS findings were interpreted, contested, and embedded in practice. This approach follows Yin's (2018) Case Study methodology for understanding the 'hows' and 'whys' of key events, while aligning with Ball et al.'s (2011) enactment theory by providing the situated depth necessary to understand how policy enactment unfolds differently within each school context.

## Data Integrity and Ethics

The project was conducted with close attention to issues of data integrity, confidentiality, and ethical responsibility. Survey responses were de-identified by the OECD before being shared with the research team, ensuring that no school or participant could be identified. Schools are referred to only by coded identifiers indicating country/network, size, and type, thereby protecting anonymity while preserving contextual richness.

A rigorous process of data cleaning eliminated duplicates and suspicious entries, retaining only those responses that provided substantive engagement. Findings were triangulated across survey and interview phases to strengthen validity and avoid over-reliance on any single data source.

Ethical principles guided every stage of the research. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained. Interviews were conducted in four languages to maximise accessibility, and findings are reported in a way that respects the voices of schools while safeguarding anonymity.

There are nonetheless limitations. Survey and interview data are self-reported and therefore reflect perceptions and experiences, which may not always align with measurable outcomes. Furthermore, contextual differences across schools limit direct comparability. Despite these limitations, the combination of broad survey evidence and in-depth interviews provides a robust foundation for understanding how PfS data is enacted in practice.

## Ethical assurance

This project adhered to the University of Oxford’s standards for responsible social research. Data were handled securely and reported respectfully, ensuring confidentiality while amplifying the perspectives of participating schools.

## Thematic Analysis of Survey Responses

The analysis of the 136 substantive survey responses reveals how schools around the world interpret and act upon their PfS data. Each response was coded across the four categories.

The findings demonstrate that benchmarking and school improvement dominate the ways in which schools use PfS. Almost all schools referenced international comparison and described at least one improvement action taken in response to their report. Wellbeing and equity appeared in around two in five responses, often framed as a paradox between strong performance and lower motivation or belonging. Collaboration was evident in roughly the same proportion, although its depth and scope varied greatly between networks and contexts. Finally, a sizeable minority of responses described wider influences, including alignment with national reforms, new leadership roles, and engagement with technology.

- **Global Benchmarking and Comparison**

More than 90 percent of participants referred to benchmarking as a key benefit of PfS. Schools valued the opportunity to compare their performance with OECD averages and top-performing countries. For some, these comparisons validated their existing strategies, offering reassurance that they were "on the right track." For others, the results served as motivation to close performance gaps.

At the same time, in the interviews several leaders cautioned against simplistic league-table thinking. Instead, they emphasised the importance of comparing with similar-profile schools, such as rural or inclusive institutions, and using results as a basis for reflection rather than competition.

Illustrative examples include a rural school that used benchmarking to track performance in science literacy and align results with the Sustainable Development Goals, and a large network school that used international comparisons to highlight equity gaps, prompting targeted reforms.

In summary, schools consistently valued PfS, citing its objective perspective as a key benefit. For some, benchmarking served as validation of existing strategies; for others, it revealed unexpected gaps, such as strong comprehension but weaker problem-solving. In practice, schools used benchmarking data to set priorities, communicate with parents and councils, and motivate staff and students.

- **Data-driven Insights for School Improvement**

Almost 85 percent of schools described PfS as a catalyst for concrete improvement initiatives. Schools reported curriculum reforms such as the introduction of project-based learning, strengthening of science provision, and updating of literacy programmes. Pedagogical changes included the adoption of analytical reading strategies, the embedding of problem-solving tasks, and the use of PfS-style exercises to support functional literacy.

Professional development was another common response: teachers engaged in training on interactive methods, differentiated instruction, and collaborative use of PfS materials.

Illustrative examples include a school that introduced analytical reading strategies across all subjects, leading to measurable improvements in grades, and another that implemented stress-management programmes alongside real-world mathematics problem-solving, linking academic progress with wellbeing.

In summary, schools frequently described PfS as a catalyst for concrete changes in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and professional development. Examples include the integration of analytical reading strategies across subjects, the embedding of project-based learning and problem-solving tasks, and the introduction of differentiated instruction for underperforming groups. PfS reports provided a common evidence base for decision-making and for dialogue with stakeholders.

- **Student Wellbeing and Equity**

Approximately 40 percent of schools highlighted issues of wellbeing and equity. Many reported a performance–wellbeing paradox, where strong academic results coincided with low intrinsic motivation or weaker feelings of belonging.

Schools responded with wellbeing programmes including stress-management and motivation plans, emotional intelligence training for teachers, and extracurricular activities to build community. Equity-focused interventions included targeted tutoring, mentoring, and differentiated support for underperforming groups.

Illustrative examples include a school that established a psychological support system and extracurricular activities to reduce anxiety, and another that used PfS findings to justify equity-focused teacher training after identifying gender and socio-economic disparities in reading and mathematics.

In summary, a significant proportion of schools reported a paradox: high academic performance accompanied by lower levels of student happiness, confidence, or sense of belonging. PfS data revealed equity gaps by gender, socio-economic status, or language, prompting targeted interventions such as psychological support, mentoring, study skills programmes, and motivation plans. These findings underscored the importance of attending to the wider conditions that shape learning.

- **Collaboration and Networking**

Around 30 percent of responses emphasised collaboration as a key outcome of PfS. Teachers collaborated within schools to share PfS tasks, create literacy databases, and run peer seminars. At the network level, some schools worked together to co-design assignments and exchange strategies. Cross-border collaboration was less common but notable, with a few schools reporting partnerships with universities and international learning organisations.

Illustrative examples include teachers in one school working across departments to align lessons with PfS frameworks, and a school that launched the Positive Humanity Programme in collaboration with universities and international partners.

In summary, for many schools, PfS reports provided the impetus for new forms of collaboration. Teachers worked together across departments to align tasks with PfS frameworks, schools within networks co-designed assignments, and in some cases, international partnerships were forged. Such collaboration not only allowed for the sharing of effective practices but also helped to reduce the risks of competitive comparison.

## Cross-cutting insights

Four cross-cutting insights emerge from the analysis:

1. **From mirror to mechanism**: Most schools began with benchmarking but quickly moved towards using PfS data as a mechanism for diagnosing challenges, designing interventions, and structuring professional learning.
2. **Equity through practice**: Schools that took equity seriously translated findings into practical supports, subgroup monitoring, and targeted resource allocation.
3. **Infrastructure for learning**: Collaboration flourished where schools maintained structured opportunities for exchange, such as repositories, seminars, and leadership attention to PfS as a continuous cycle of reflection.
4. **Sustained engagement matters**: Schools participating across multiple cycles described clearer trajectories of impact, including institutionalised practices and the use of re-testing to evaluate progress.

## Implications

The strongest cases demonstrate coherence as schools moved from benchmarking to diagnosis, from diagnosis to targeted action, and from action to review, integrating wellbeing and equity into improvement rather than treating them as separate. Where schools engaged in formal or informal networks, the impact of PfS was amplified. Policy-level uptake occurred where school leaders explicitly positioned PfS within existing reform timelines and professional development frameworks.

The survey analysis shows that schools overwhelmingly view PfS as a tool for benchmarking and improvement, but many extend its use to include wellbeing, collaboration, and systemic reform. Benchmarking provides the entry point, but the true value lies in the ways schools enact PfS data in practice as we see them interpreting it within their own contexts, negotiating tensions, and using it to guide tangible change.

# The Case Studies

The ten schools selected for in-depth study represent six contexts and range from small institutions of fewer than 500 students to very large campuses of more than 3,000. Public, private, and partnership schools are included, and profiles span urban, rural, inclusive, multilingual, and specialised institutions.

While all ten schools engaged with PfS in terms of benchmarking and school improvement, each offered distinctive perspectives. Some used PfS to drive literacy reforms and collaborative professional practices. Other schools highlighted equity and alignment with national reforms. Others again emphasised collaboration, including through networks. One case focused on wellbeing and technology, while another used PfS to promote science-focused innovation. Finally, one case stood out for engaging with all five themes, including systemic responses to AI.

The cases varied in their level of impact from classroom interventions such as task redesign to school-wide initiatives including wellbeing programmes and new coordinator roles. We heard about network-level collaborations and alignment with national reforms. Taken together, these schools demonstrate the multiple pathways through which PfS data can be enacted, confirming its role as both a mirror and a compass.

## Case Study 1: Benchmarking as Reflection, Not Competition

In this unique school system, where children from across a continent study together in a multilingual environment, assessment plays a distinctive role. Students move through the curriculum without major external checkpoints until they reach the Baccalaureate at the end of their schooling. For teachers and leaders, this means that the years leading up to the final qualification rely heavily on internal assessments and professional judgement. It was in this context that PISA for Schools (PfS) arrived and for many staff it was both unfamiliar and intriguing.

Participation was not optional. As one senior leader explained with some candour, *"It was an order but it was an order we learned a great deal from."* The mandate came from the system as a whole, but the way schools interpreted the data was left to them. For this large, multicultural school, PfS became the first time they had been able to see their students' outcomes in comparison to international peers before the end of their schooling. *"It was the only way for us to see, in a systematic and international way, how our students were doing before the very end of their schooling,"* noted one teacher.

At first, there was some hesitation. Would the data be used to rank schools against one another? Would parents, often highly educated and ambitious for their children, turn PfS into another source of pressure? Leaders were clear from the outset that they would not allow that to happen. *"We never wanted this to become a ranking,"* explained one director. *"Our schools are too different. What matters is whether we are improving compared to ourselves."* This framing became crucial. PfS was not a competition, but a mirror for self-reflection.

The report itself was shared widely. Subject coordinators and leadership teams engaged with the data in detail. Teachers were encouraged to analyse results in relation to their classrooms, and discussions were built into professional development sessions. Parents and students were not left out. The school council, which includes representatives of both, reviewed the findings and considered their implications. At the network level, directors from across the group convened in workshops to discuss results collectively, to share emerging practices, and to highlight common challenges such as gender gaps in mathematics or lower levels of motivation in science.

Some findings confirmed existing strengths. As expected, reading and literacy were strong, a reflection of the multilingual character of the school community. Students showed resilience in navigating multiple languages, and this was borne out in their PfS performance. But other results came as a surprise, and it was here that PfS began to reshape school priorities.

Mathematics was one such area. Results compared favourably with international peers, yet within the school they were considered less satisfactory. Teachers felt the outcomes did not fully reflect their aspirations. Science provided a deeper paradox. While students scored highly, their reported motivation told another story. *"Our students succeed,"* observed one teacher, *"but they are not motivated intrinsically. They are pushed by parents, by society but they don't love the subject."* This finding resonated widely. Leaders realised that achievement alone was masking issues of student engagement and wellbeing.

The PfS data also revealed lower levels of reported life satisfaction and higher perceptions of classroom disruption compared with international averages. In other words, the picture was one of strong attainment alongside weaker wellbeing, a performance/wellbeing paradox.

In response, the school introduced a series of initiatives. At the curriculum level, a new science coordinator role was created. The leader interviewed was tasked with supporting projects, encouraging experimentation, and ensuring bureaucratic barriers did not prevent teachers from innovating. *"It was about giving science more visibility,"* they explained. *"We wanted to make it easier for teachers to create new opportunities."*

Trips and extracurricular opportunities were redesigned to strengthen science engagement, especially at the age when students' interest in physics and chemistry often declines. Students were encouraged to take part in Olympiads and competitions, with the school covering entry fees to ensure equity of access. This commitment was more than symbolic: students went on to achieve significant success, raising the profile of science across the community. Student-led initiatives were also encouraged. In one example, a group of girls produced a series of videos to inspire younger peers in science, using digital media to reach and motivate others.

The emphasis on science was complemented by cross-disciplinary projects. Teachers collaborated across subjects, developing integrated fieldwork initiatives that linked science, history, and geography. Multilingual resources and booklets were produced, shared, and celebrated.

At the same time, wellbeing became a central priority. The school developed a large-scale motivation plan aimed at both students and families. Hundreds of students took part in resilience workshops and study skills training, while parents were supported with multimedia resources to help them guide their children. *"It's about balance,"* the teacher reflected. *"We want students not just to succeed, but to be confident and happy in their learning."*

These actions were not without challenges. Staff workload increased, and some initiatives required cultural change and additional budget. Ensuring equity of access to extracurricular programmes meant finding funds to cover costs, which placed pressure on resources. Parents, many of whom are highly educated and ambitious, sometimes reinforced the external pressures that students described, making the challenge of building intrinsic motivation even harder. Emerging issues, such as the impact of artificial intelligence on learning and assessment, added a further layer of complexity. *"We cannot ignore AI,"* one leader observed. *"It changes how students learn, how they do homework, even how we assess them."*

Despite these challenges, the school's reflections on PfS are overwhelmingly positive. As one director explained: *"The data does not tell us what to do, but it opens a mirror. It makes us ask questions we might not otherwise have asked."* By reframing PfS as a tool for reflection rather than competition, the school has been able to build new structures, introduce targeted initiatives, and sustain system-wide conversations about teaching, learning, and wellbeing.

Today, PfS is seen less as a one-off assessment and more as part of a continuous improvement cycle. Leaders and teachers regard it as a means of holding themselves accountable not to rankings, but to their own aspirations for students. For other schools internationally, this case shows how data can be used both to confirm strengths and to illuminate hidden challenges. It also shows that the most significant impact of PfS often lies not in the scores themselves, but in the conversations they spark.

## Case Study 2: Student Voice and Wellbeing Innovation

Sitting in the leafy outskirts of the city, this independent school had long prided itself on academic excellence. Its students consistently ranked in the top one per cent of results nationally, and families often chose it for its rigorous reputation. Internal and national data abounded: national tests, tertiary entrance scores, commercial benchmarking tools. Yet for the principal, something was missing. *"We do a lot of testing,"* they reflected, *"but I've always been interested in international benchmarks for the school."*

When the opportunity came to participate in PfS, the school embraced it. For staff, the attraction was simple, PfS would provide a way to measure their students not just against national peers, but against schools across the world. For parents, many of whom made great sacrifices to send their children there, the international lens carried prestige and reassurance. And for leaders, it promised fresh insight. *"It was good to have some international benchmarking data,"* the principal explained. *"PfS is particularly interesting because you've not only got the maths, science and reading, you've also got those social-emotional skills."*

The report was received with interest across the school. The principal and data lead first presented it to the executive team, then to department heads, and eventually to all staff. Parents were invited to a council meeting, where discussion flowed late into the evening. Even students were brought into the conversation, particularly those enrolled in the school's flagship Certificate of Global Responsibility, a programme where older students lead cross-age projects designed to have impact across the school.

At first, the findings seemed reassuring. Results in reading, mathematics and science were strong, confirming the school's place as a high achiever. Gender differences were noted (girls stronger in science, boys ahead in maths) but these mirrored wider patterns already known.

What made the most impact, however, was the wellbeing data. Despite their academic success, students reported lower levels of optimism, higher levels of anxiety, and concerns about classroom climate. Teachers and parents, who had long focused on test scores, were startled. *"I think what struck me most,"* said one leader, *"was that we had kids achieving really highly, but at the same time saying they were stressed, less happy, less confident."*

For the principal, this was a turning point. PfS had not only validated the school's strengths, but it had also revealed the hidden side of achievement, the wellbeing paradox. *"That result really resonated,"* they reflected. *"It showed us we had to pay attention to more than grades."*

The school did not leave the findings on the shelf. Instead, it channelled them into a wave of initiatives, many of them designed and led by students themselves.

The Certificate of Global Responsibility became a vehicle for action. Students were shown the PfS wellbeing data and asked to respond. Their answer was bold: a whole school wellbeing day. Activities ranged from yoga and meditation to peer mentoring and games; all aimed at reducing stress. When surveyed afterwards, 90% of students said they often felt overwhelmed by schoolwork, but the wellbeing day itself received glowing feedback, with students calling for it to become an annual event. *"Because it came from the students,"* the principal observed, *"it had credibility. The same message from teachers would not have worked."*

This commitment to student voice grew. The school's biennial Safety Survey, previously focused on bullying, was redesigned with input from students to include questions on racism, gender respect, and optimism. Wellbeing programmes were restructured under new banners: *Empower* for girls and *Growing Good Men* for boys, together forming part of the school's Positive Humanity Project. These changes reflected an emerging philosophy: wellbeing was not an add-on, but a core part of education, and students themselves needed to be agents in shaping it.

Assemblies, too, became spaces for dialogue. Spurred by PfS data and the Safety Survey, students organised sessions on global issues. *"The kids were lining up at my door,"* the principal recalled, *"asking what we were going to do about issues in the world. We channelled that energy into constructive, explanatory sessions."*

PfS also strengthened the school's long-standing belief in partnering with researchers. Leaders invited academics from local universities to study the school's initiatives, particularly those on wellbeing and social cohesion. They also joined the Global Wisdom Lab, an international collaboration exploring how to cultivate wisdom in young people. These partnerships gave the school external feedback and evidence to refine its approaches.

*"We don't see data as marketing,"* the principal explained. *"This is a suite of data we use for diagnostic purposes. The value is in the questions it prompts us to ask."*

The journey was not without obstacles. Some staff worried about workload and the sustainability of new programmes. Parents, many of whom worked multiple jobs to afford school fees, sometimes brought heightened expectations that added pressure to students already reporting stress. Interpreting the more abstract aspects of wellbeing data such as optimism was also difficult. *"I put a certain spin on it,"* the principal admitted, *"and I hope I interpreted it correctly."*

Looking back, the school regards PfS as a catalyst for a cultural shift. It validated excellence but, more importantly, it broadened the definition of success. Academic performance remained essential, but student voice and wellbeing began to occupy equal space. The most powerful lesson was that initiatives led by students carried a weight and authenticity that teacher-led efforts often lacked.

For this school, PfS became a means to live out its vision: *"to be the best we can be for all humanity and the planet."* By highlighting wellbeing alongside performance, and equity alongside excellence, PfS provided the evidence and the confidence to act on that mission.

## Case Study 3: Building Excellence through Community and Innovation

In the southernmost state of a vast country, this public school has built its reputation on striving for quality against the odds. In a country where average PISA scores are consistently below the OECD mean, this school has managed to rise above the national average. For its teachers and leaders, PISA for Schools (PfS) has become more than an external assessment: it is a catalyst for building community partnerships, strengthening teacher capacity, and giving students a sense of connection to the wider world.

*"We always seek quality,"* explained the principal. *"Our goal is to be a reference among public schools in our country, and especially our region."*

Participation in PfS was not mandated by government. Instead, the decision came from the school itself. Leaders saw PfS as an opportunity to hold themselves to a higher standard, beyond national measures. *"The decision was primarily the school's,"* the principal recalled. *"We wanted to know how our students were progressing, not only in relation to the country, but compared to the world."*

For a leader who came from a humble background, the symbolism of this international connection mattered. *"I never imagined competing on equal footing with other countries,"* they reflected. *"But that's what we say, knowledge opens doors. Regardless of economic or social status, education allows us to get there."*

The school first participated in PfS in 2022. The results were sobering. While their performance was above the national average, it lagged behind many other countries. Problem-solving, logical reasoning in mathematics, reading, and scientific literacy emerged as areas of weakness.

*"We brought this topic into our pedagogical training meetings, and we analysed the report with great responsibility, looking at the numbers,"* explained the principal. *"It helped us identify our weaknesses and the strategies we needed to use."*

Crucially, the report was not confined to leadership. The school council which is composed of teachers, parents, and community members was engaged in interpreting the findings. Parents were not bystanders; they became partners. *"The parents are active and help us in this work of recovery, of promoting challenges, and encouraging our students to participate in these tests,"* said the principal.

One finding stood out above all others, mathematics. *"Our students are below in comparison to other countries,"* the principal admitted. *"This is our challenge."*

While proud of being above the national average, the school set its sights higher. *"We want to reach excellence,"* the principal declared. *"Not just to be the best in our country, but to reach a level similar to other countries."*

This ambition drove the school to implement a strong programme of reinforcement in mathematics and problem-solving. The upcoming PfS cycle became a focus for preparation, with teachers and students alike engaged in tutoring, workshops, and practice exercises.

One of the school's most distinctive responses was its use of partnerships. Alumni who had gone on to university returned as volunteers, offering tutoring in mathematics, reading, and science. *"A student who leaves here returns as a teacher, as a volunteer, as a member,"* the principal explained. *"They help us continue the pursuit of quality."*

Universities and institutes also became allies. Partnerships with these institutions provided online and in-person courses. These offered both students and teachers opportunities in digital immersion, computational science, and real-world problem-solving. Through these collaborations, students not only reinforced academic content but also connected learning to the world of work. Many left school with scholarships or internships already secured.

The school also looked to the future. 2024 marked its first year as a full-day school, and with it came new opportunities. Supported by partners, students and teachers began training in artificial intelligence. AI was introduced into the curriculum as an elective subject, accompanied by teacher professional development. *"Our training is connected to the digital area,"* the principal noted. *"We also did training in math, language, and science. We created study groups so teachers could dedicate themselves exclusively to students."*

Through these initiatives, the school not only addressed weaknesses but positioned itself at the cutting edge of educational innovation within the country's public sector.

Reflecting on their first experiences with PfS, the principal acknowledged that teachers initially struggled to make sense of the results. *"At the beginning it was all new to us. We weren't yet literate in working with that data,"* she said. *"But from the moment we realized that evidence shows results, or that we build results from the evidence, we started working seriously with it."*

By comparing the 2022 and 2023 results, staff saw not only academic outcomes but also greater student engagement. *"Each step will be better,"* the principal observed. *"Because we can really work toward building those results."*

The school also recognised differences between PfS and the national assessments. While national assessments focus on mathematics and the national language, PfS includes science, giving a broader picture. *"These three PISA areas are more globalized, they cover the whole student,"* the principal explained. *"Of course, language and math are entry cards for jobs, but we also need scientific knowledge."*

The principal believed PfS was influencing national policy. *"I think this change is related to PISA,"* she argued. *"Public policies need to look at other successful experiences. Our national assessments are starting to include sciences because of PISA's influence."*

For this school, the greatest benefit of PfS lies in the sense of global connection it brings. *"It gives our students a connection to the world,"* the principal reflected. *"The experience of taking the same test as students in other countries is powerful. Knowledge opens doors."*

At the same time, the results provide a roadmap for improvement, informing pedagogy, professional development, and partnerships. They also strengthen the school's commitment to equity. *"Through these results, we can make a responsible analysis,"* the principal said. *"What are our strengths, and what do we need to improve as an institution?"*

In the end, PfS has become part of the school's identity: a tool for global benchmarking, a catalyst for local improvement, and a bridge between school, community, and the world.

## Case Study 4: Innovation with Evidence

When leaders of this school network first looked at their teaching practices, they worried that too many decisions were being made according to their intuition or as a result of following trends. *"Sometimes our processes went a bit on trends, and this scared us,"* one leader recalled. *"We needed objective data, so we didn't fall into decisions without evidence."*

That concern was the seed of what would later become their most ambitious reform initiative: *Suma y Sigue* ("Add and Continue"), a long-term plan of "innovation with meaning." PISA for Schools (PfS) arrived at just the right time, offering both evidence and external validation. As one leader put it: *"PfS is like the cotton test. You can have a beautiful framework, but if the results don't hold, then something isn't working."*

This network spans 18 schools across six regions of their country. Their contexts could not be more varied from schools in depopulated rural provinces, to large regional and city centres. Some serve highly vulnerable communities in urban peripheries, while others are located in more affluent city centres.

*"We talk about ecosystems,"* a leader explained. *"We have schools with very high vulnerability and others with a medium-high socio-economic level. We are not elite schools. All our schools are publicly funded but together we reflect the full social map of our country."*

This diversity made PfS particularly valuable. Each school received its own report, but the network also received an aggregated institutional report, which allowed comparisons across schools. *"Sometimes, with the same ESCS (socio-economic index), results differ. That lets us ask: what is this school doing differently?"* one coordinator noted. *"It has been revolutionary."*

For this network, motivation to join PfS was twofold. On one hand, they sought to improve academic results and better understand their students. On the other hand, they wanted to strengthen themselves as a network. *"It's not just about each school individually,"* one leader said, *"but about facing challenges together, creating plans of improvement collectively."*

Initially, PfS was taken up by a single school, which shared results with the rest of the network. The findings sparked interest across directors. Soon after, the whole network committed, running PfS in 2018–19 and again in 2022–23. By the second cycle, a stronger provincial pedagogical team had formed, coordinating analysis and ensuring that each school developed its own plan of improvement, as well as contributing to a shared institutional framework.

Reports were analysed in a layered way. First, each school's pedagogical team, led by its coordinator, discussed the data with leadership. External experts from a research company were also invited to provide feedback sessions to deepen the analysis. Students were engaged through class delegates, who were asked to reflect on results and propose improvements. Parents, too, saw the findings through School Councils. *"We wanted everyone to feel ownership,"* the provincial delegate explained. *"We know humans work better when there is oversight and shared responsibility."*

By the time PfS arrived, the school network was already sketching out a broader vision for innovation. In 2014, they began articulating *Suma y Sigue* as a philosophy: innovation that builds on the past rather than discarding it. *"We don't throw away what came before,"* one leader explained. *"Even when results are poor, there are things that were done well. We salvage those and keep moving forward."*

Over time, *Suma y Sigue* became an umbrella framework. At its heart was a provincial pedagogical framework that defined a "competence profile" for student, not just an "exit profile," but one that encouraged them to stay engaged as volunteers in social projects run by their foundation. Ten *fundamental educational practices* were identified, including cooperative learning, social transformation projects, emotional education, critical thinking, creativity, and community participation.

PfS provided the evidence to test and refine these practices. *"We can have a wonderful framework, but PfS tells us whether it holds or not,"* a leader explained. By cross-referencing PfS data with their own practices, schools could see whether innovations were delivering results.

The reports confirmed strengths, including equality and positive attitudes to diversity. They also highlighted new issues: the importance of classroom climate, trust in teachers, and bullying prevention. *"Sometimes we forget that coexistence influences learning as much as resources or hours of teaching,"* one leader reflected.

Another insight was that innovation itself did not guarantee outcomes. In mathematics, some traditional approaches still outperformed more experimental ones. This pushed the network to dig deeper, looking not only at methods but at the conditions surrounding them.

Each school was required to draft an improvement plan, monitored by the provincial team. Actions included:

- Strengthening literacy and reading programmes where results lagged.
- Enhancing anti-bullying strategies and promoting a culture of coexistence.
- Sharing best practices between schools with similar socio-economic contexts.
- Aligning provincial initiatives (like cooperative learning) with PfS evidence.

This process was supported by regular provincial meetings (some online, some face-to-face) which became easier to coordinate after the pandemic. *"The network makes us stronger,"* one leader observed. *"A PfS report for one school is good but facing challenges as a network is much better."*

Not all schools improved equally. In some, teacher engagement was weaker, and without active buy-in, plans remained on paper. *"Paper can take anything,"* one leader admitted. *"But if there is no motivation, implementation is uneven."*

Resources were also stretched. Early on, a staff member was freed for half-time to support the process, but this proved unsustainable, and external support from the evaluation company became essential. Leaders also acknowledged the slow pace of consensus-building: *"Our process is very assembly-based, with lots of feedback. It is slower, but safer."*

From 2014 to 2025, *Suma y Sigue* has grown from an idea into a culture. PfS has become part of that culture, offering both a mirror and a measure. *"It has become embedded in our way of working,"* a leader reflected. *"Regardless of who is in leadership, it will continue."*

For the schools in this network, PfS has brought two gifts: evidence and connection. Evidence to test whether their innovations are achieving what they intend, and connection to bind diverse schools into a learning network. In a landscape where educational fashion can be tempting, PfS provided a "cotton test" of authenticity. And in a network marked by diversity, it gave schools a common language to share and compare.

## Case Study 5: Innovation, Relevance, and the Challenge of Motivation

For more than a century, a family-run independent school in a populous capital city has sought to hold its ground in a shifting educational market. Founded in 1918, the school now serves around 1,000 students and continues to operate independently, even as many similar schools have been absorbed into larger private groups. Maintaining autonomy in such a competitive environment requires credibility, and for the leadership team, PfS became an important tool. *"For a small, independent school like ours, to have this benchmark, to be part of something worldwide, known as PISA is very important,"* explained the principal.

In this country, national assessment systems have been built since the 1990s, but their limitations are well known. Private schools often do not receive school-level reports, and where results do appear, they are typically reduced to rankings in the press. *"We are always having to deal with some kind of ranking in magazines and newspapers,"* the principal observed. *"It's not healthy for basic education. Families see positions on a list, but that doesn't tell them what their children are really learning."*

By contrast, PfS offered both authority and depth. *"The whole package is impressive,"* the principal explained. *"It is a worldwide assessment, very well known, frequently referred to in our press. The report gives us authority to stand for the work we do and the effect we have on our students."*

The school approached the report methodically. First, the high school leadership team reviewed it. Then subject teachers. Particularly in science, mathematics, and humanities were engaged. Students themselves became part of the discussion, and eventually parents were invited to meetings where selected findings were shared.

This sequence mattered, because PfS assessed students at age 15, the exact moment when they transition from middle school to high school in this country. For the school, this provided valuable time to respond. *"We still have them here with us for three more years,"* said the principal. *"So we can make adjustments, put in place any changes we think are necessary, and still influence their development."*

The report confirmed strengths in academic attainment. Students performed well compared with national averages. But it also delivered a surprise that the principal called *"a narcissistic shock."* When asked about the relevance of their learning, students in this middle- to high-income school said they did not see a clear connection between what they learned in science or mathematics and their future lives. *"We hoped to be very relevant,"* the principal admitted. *"But they told us they don't see correspondence. They don't see the connection."*

For teachers, this was unsettling. They had long prided themselves on strong subject teaching, but PfS revealed a deeper issue: students were not convinced of its purpose. *"Maybe this happens in many high-class schools around the world,"* the principal reflected. *"But it was sad, and it worried us."*

Determined to address the gap between learning and relevance, the school introduced a series of curricular innovations. Teachers sought to connect lessons with contemporary issues and cultural references. In biology, for example, students analysed pandemics through the lens of the video game *The Last of Us*, making links between popular culture and epidemiology. Physics students visited a particle accelerator in the city to see how theory came alive in practice.

A new science fair, the Perspectives Festival, was launched. Modelled on academic research, it required students not only to conduct experiments but also to present posters, write articles, and publish their work in a school-edited magazine. *"It was dedicated to natural sciences: physics, chemistry, biology and students had to write an academic article,"* the principal noted. *"We published our first issue last year."*

Project-based learning also expanded. In their first year of high school, students researched the lives of prominent scientists. In the second year, they tackled problems related to time, producing creative and scientific solutions. One group staged an immersive performance that paralleled the life cycle of a star with the human life course, a poetic fusion of science and the humanities.

Technology became central to the school's response. Even before ChatGPT, teachers had begun exploring hybrid education models during the pandemic. By 2023, AI had entered staff training. Teachers experimented with prompts structured by Bloom's taxonomy, created slide decks with automated scripts, and drafted an AI policy to ensure ethical use .

At the same time, concerns emerged. *"Since ChatGPT, the challenge is authorship,"* the principal explained. *"When a student hands in a paper, we must ask, is this really their work? For adults, using AI is fine. But in basic education, we still believe students must face the empty sheet of paper."*

Despite caution, the school continued to train teachers in AI tools and incorporated adaptive technologies for accessibility, such as text-to-speech for students with special needs.

Beyond science and AI, the school also fostered creativity through its annual short film festival, now a decade old. Born from philosophy and sociology classes, the festival requires students to develop a thesis, write a screenplay, and produce a film using their own devices. Films are screened at a gala event and judged by professional filmmakers. Some have even been selected for a major Film Festival in the city. *"These are unforgettable experiences,"* the principal explained. *"Students may forget a lot of what we teach, but they will never forget making a film or acting in a play. That lasts forever."*

While PfS helped align the school's curriculum with our country's ongoing high school reform, tensions remained. National assessments were still dominated by multiple-choice items, while PfS highlighted the value of open-ended tasks. Teachers welcomed the shift, but also noted the workload required to design richer assessments.

Parents, meanwhile, valued international benchmarking but were sensitive to the wellbeing concerns revealed by PfS. Balancing academic ambition with student motivation and stress became an ongoing challenge.

Finally, the principal raised a broader caution: evaluating socio-emotional skills across cultures. *"I worry about a planetary standard for engagement,"* he said. *"Latin American students cannot simply be compared with Koreans or Japanese. Cultural contexts matter."*

For this school, PfS provided both authority and insight. Authority, because it offered an internationally recognised benchmark in a market where families are inundated with rankings. Insight, because it revealed a gap between strong academic attainment and students' sense of relevance.

The school's response has been to innovate connecting science with popular culture, expanding project-based learning, embracing technology, and giving students opportunities to create and perform. PfS did not dictate these actions, but it gave them legitimacy. *"It helps us stand for the work we do,"* the principal concluded. *"And it helps us face the future."*

## Case Study 6: Reasoning for the Future – A Regional Journey

When these education officials looked at their students' performance in international studies, they saw reasons for pride and for concern. The country had performed respectably in PISA, and the region itself often placed above the national average. Yet leaders sensed a deeper challenge. *"We realised too much of our teaching was memoristic,"* recalled one official. *"Students could reproduce, but not always reason. That is where we needed to act."*

By 2021, this concern had crystallised into a bold experiment: a six-year programme to strengthen mathematical reasoning across lower secondary education. PISA for Schools (PfS) became a crucial part of this strategy, not only as a measure of progress but as a way to anchor reforms in internationally recognised evidence.

The seeds were planted years earlier. In 2013–14, 13 schools in the region participated in one of the country's first PfS pilots. Funded by the national ministry, it was largely exploratory, but schools found the individual reports useful. A second round followed in 2019–20 with 10 schools, supported this time by the regional Department of Education.

The decisive moment came in 2021. Inspired by the growing emphasis on reasoning in the PISA 2022 framework, and drawing on earlier pilots in primary schools, the region launched its Mathematical Reasoning Development Plan. Fourteen secondary schools were selected to participate. Their mathematics departments committed to three tasks: create their own teaching materials, receive intensive training, and trial innovative approaches that shifted the focus from memorisation to reasoning.

*"We wanted to measure not only performance, but also socio-emotional variables: attitudes, motivation, interest in maths,"* explained one of the programme coordinators. *"That's why we decided to use PISA for Schools as a baseline in 2021 and again in 2026, when the first full cohort completes the cycle."*

Each participating school received its own PfS report, alongside training from an external provider to help staff interpret the findings. The Department itself deliberately stepped back. *"We didn't interfere,"* the coordinator recalled. *"We simply told schools: here is a tool, use it as you see fit. We'll meet again in 2026 to see what has changed."*

This autonomy mattered. Schools analysed the reports within their own teams, typically led by department heads and senior teachers. Many chose to integrate the findings directly into their improvement plans.

The regional Department, meanwhile, kept its eyes on the bigger picture. By comparing PfS data with control groups and with the region's own diagnostic tests in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades, they could track whether the new reasoning programme was truly making a difference.

Because the first PfS assessment came at the very start of the programme, officials were cautious not to over-interpret. *"In 2021, the 10th-grade students had not experienced the new methodology,"* explained the coordinator. *"They were still under the old curriculum. So those results serve mainly as a baseline."*

Nonetheless, some patterns began to emerge. Internal assessments suggested that gains were most noticeable among students from middle socio-economic groups with smaller effects among the lowest group and almost none among the highest. *"The top group may perform well regardless of methodology,"* one official reflected. *"But in the middle and lower groups, we saw a considerable impact."*

These findings encouraged leaders to think about equity. If PfS 2026 confirms the trend, the reasoning methodology could be extended to more schools serving disadvantaged communities.

At the heart of the programme were the teachers. In 2021, mathematics staff across the 14 schools underwent intensive training, then worked in teams to create new materials for 7th grade. Each subsequent year, they added a level: 8th grade, then 9th, and finally 10th. By 2025, the full four-year sequence was in place.

The materials reflected a new pedagogy. Rather than rote exercises, they encouraged students to represent problems concretely, pictorially, and abstractly. Class discussions were emphasised, and students were expected to explain their reasoning, not just their answers. Teachers described the shift as challenging but rewarding. *"At the beginning it was all new to us,"* one admitted. *"But once we saw the evidence, we started working seriously with it."*

Professional collaboration was another outcome. Teachers across different schools began to meet regularly, sometimes online, sometimes in person. They compared lesson plans, shared experiences, and refined their materials together. The Department supported this by hosting training modules and creating a digital platform where resources could be exchanged.

Although the programme was still in its early years, some schools reported shifts in classroom culture. Students were becoming more willing to tackle unfamiliar problems, more confident in justifying their answers, and less afraid of mistakes. Motivation, long a concern, showed signs of improvement. *"Our own data suggests that attitudes are changing,"* said one official. *"Students are beginning to see maths as something to reason through, not just to memorise."*

This was not universal. In some schools, the changes were embraced quickly; in others, resistance lingered. Teachers accustomed to more traditional methods sometimes struggled to adapt. But the direction of travel was clear, and PfS provided the anchor.

Unlike many educational initiatives that seek quick wins, the region deliberately adopted a long horizon. The PfS assessments in 2021 and 2026 bookend the first phase of the programme, allowing for longitudinal analysis. *"Education doesn't change from one year to the next,"* reflected the coordinator. *"That's why we set it up over six years. We need to see not just immediate results, but sustained ones."*

By combining PfS with their own control group studies, the Department hopes to build a robust evidence base. If results confirm progress, the reasoning methodology could be scaled to more schools across the region.

This case shows how PfS can serve not just individual schools, but entire systems. It illustrates how international data can be integrated into local reform, providing both validation and accountability. It also highlights the importance of teacher ownership, professional collaboration, and patience.

As one leader concluded: *"The value of PfS is that it gives us a mirror. But the real work is ours. To look into that mirror honestly, and to act on what we see."*

## Case Study 7: Building Character and Critical Thinking

In a working-class suburb in the south of the capital city, a relatively young school found itself propelled into the headlines. In 2016, newspapers ran a surprising story: *"A local school surpasses Finland in the PISA test."* For a community more often associated with modest means than with international excellence, the news was striking. *"It was a trampoline,"* the principal recalled. *"We were still a very young school, only 11 years old at the time. Suddenly, people were calling us the 'PISA school of the south.'"*

The motivation to take part in PISA for Schools (PfS) was not simply to make headlines. Leaders felt the need for an external benchmark that would provide credibility beyond their own claims. *"Internally it is very difficult to measure impact,"* explained the director. *"We needed an agent from outside, with prestige, to give us an objective evaluation — both academically and socially, in terms of relationships between students, teachers, and families."*

Initially, they thought PfS would provide a snapshot. What surprised them was how it became a driver of change. *"We imagined it as a static analysis,"* the academic secretary explained, *"but we realised that it gave us a base to implement concrete improvements. We moved from projects going in many directions to projects aligned with data, with a clear purpose."*

The school did not keep the findings to itself. Reports were reviewed first within the leadership team, then with teachers, then shared with parents. The results were even posted on the website and discussed in local media. Parents appreciated the transparency, and for many prospective families, PfS became a seal of quality. *"Parents would tell us in interviews, 'We chose this school because of the PISA accreditation,'"* the principal said. *"It has been a very strong tool for promotion and visibility."*

But the school was careful not to treat PfS as marketing alone. Internally, the results became a mirror. Some findings validated strengths; others revealed uncomfortable truths.

Academically, the school performed well, confirming high expectations. Yet the report revealed gaps. Science outcomes were weaker than in other areas, and students showed less confidence in problem-solving and critical thinking. This prompted leaders to strengthen inquiry-based learning across subjects.

The greater shock came in wellbeing. The school had long prided itself on its personal tutoring system, where every student met monthly with a tutor and parents joined for quarterly meetings. Leaders assumed this was a strong point. But PfS told a different story: student perceptions of teacher-student climate were less positive than expected. *"It was a wake-up call,"* the principal admitted. *"We believed we were strong here, but the data showed otherwise."*

Determined to act, the school invested heavily in teacher training. Leaders discovered a character education programme developed in the United States and adapted it for their context. The training encouraged teachers to see themselves not just as transmitters of content, but as role models shaping an environment through example. *"The idea was to bring teachers back to the essence of being an educator,"* explained the academic secretary. *"Daily stress can push this into the background. We wanted to relaunch it."*

Courses in coaching and mentoring followed, equipping teachers with skills to guide students in setting personal and academic goals. Professional isolation was also challenged. Teachers began observing each other's classes, exchanging feedback, and even visiting other schools. *"It was hard at first,"* one teacher admitted. *"We are not used to being observed. But seeing how others interact with students motivates us to improve."*

PfS findings also highlighted mental health needs, exacerbated by the pandemic. In response, the school established a Family Support Centre in partnership with a local psychology and psychiatry clinic, subsidised by a foundation. The centre offered therapy at affordable rates and ran training for teachers, students, and parents on mental health awareness.

Family life itself became a focus. Recognising that many challenges stemmed from fragile home environments, the school organised annual Family Congresses, bringing parents and children together for workshops on wellbeing and education. *"We wanted the school to be a safe meeting place,"* said the principal. *"A space of healthy leisure and community."*

Students, too, were encouraged to find purpose. A new initiative called Projects with a Cause invited them to identify problems in the school and design solutions. From managing events to supporting younger children, students began to see themselves as active contributors. *"Part of the disengagement of young people is a lack of purpose,"* the principal explained. *"We wanted to give them that sense."*

Alongside wellbeing, PfS drove academic changes. Early childhood classrooms were restructured into globalised learning spaces, breaking down traditional walls between classes in favour of collaborative environments. In primary school, a new Future Classroom was designed, with flexible furniture and project-based learning across subjects. Creativity was fostered through a dedicated art atelier, ensuring students had regular opportunities to innovate.

To address disparities between high and low achievers, the school launched the Peer Support Project. High-performing students mentored younger peers two grades below them, helping with reading, homework, and difficult concepts. The programme built community while narrowing the gap. *"It gives older students a sense of responsibility,"* the director noted, *"and younger ones see close role models they can imitate."*

Contact with nature was another response. An urban garden was created so young children could engage with soil and plants. Outdoor reading spaces were added, and philosophy classes sometimes moved into the open air. A donation of fossils inspired the creation of a Science Museum, curated and explained by students themselves. The museum opened to parents and neighbours, strengthening both science confidence and community ties.

Teacher-student relationships were also nurtured through informal spaces: basketball games on Sports Day, shared meals after celebrations, and residential trips early in the school year. *"These experiences help students see teachers as people, not just authority figures,"* one leader explained. *"It builds trust and closeness for the months ahead."*

This school's journey shows how PfS can serve as both a mirror and a driver. It validated strengths, challenged assumptions, and provided legitimacy to reforms in pedagogy and wellbeing. The impact has been visible in subsequent cycles, with improvements noted in student-teacher climate, wellbeing, and sense of purpose.

Perhaps most importantly, PfS gave the school a language of evidence that resonated with families and staff alike. As the principal put it: *"Having our prestige endorsed by an external entity has been invaluable. It's not just us saying we do well, but measurable standards proving it."*

## Case Study 8: Building a Modern Lyceum

When the school opened its doors in its capital city in September 2022, it joined a rapidly expanding network of schools across the country. Created through a public–private partnership between the government and a large construction company, the schools were designed to showcase what high-quality public education could look like: modern buildings, smaller classes, and up-to-date resources. Parents did not pay fees, but expectations were high. As one deputy principal put it, *"In other schools, there are 38–40 students per class. We have 25, maybe 26 at most. This gives children more opportunities to express themselves and be motivated."*

The leadership team wanted more than prestige around their schools, they wanted proof of their efficacy. PISA for Schools (PfS) provided exactly that. An international benchmark that could demonstrate where the school stood and where it needed to go. *"Our management company, is very committed,"* explained the deputy principal. *"They want to see how our students perform in a global context. What knowledge they receive, and how it is evaluated. Everything is measurable."*

The school participated in PfS in December 2022, only four months after opening, and again in December 2023. The second cycle involved 209 students, mostly 15 years old, with a gender balance of 59% girls and 41% boys. Results were mixed. Reading and mathematics scores were comfortably above the national average, though still well below OECD levels.

This was a source of pride, but also of caution. *"We must remember that we are an urban school,"* the deputy principal reflected. *"Our parents all have higher education, both work, and our students don't face major social problems. Of course, that influences the results."*

The surprise came in science. "*We scored slightly below the national average in science literacy. We didn't expect that,"* the deputy principal admitted. *"It told us we need to reflect: where have we grown weaker, where do we need to improve?"*

PfS quickly became part of the school's culture of reflection. Reports were analysed within the administration, then shared with teachers, and finally presented to the parent committee. *"We told them: yes, we see potential, and we know what we need to work on,"* the deputy principal recalled. International comparisons were particularly motivating. *"We learned that even a five-point increase in PISA is meaningful. When we compared ourselves with Estonia, we saw that we lag behind by seven years. We told our students not to compare themselves with our own country, but to look at the top countries and aspire to that level."*

One of the key lessons concerned the way science is taught. In our country, subjects like physics, chemistry, and biology are separated early. Globally, they are often taught in an integrated way. *"Our students don't have a global understanding of science,"* the deputy principal explained. *"They don't see how biology connects to physics or chemistry. They see only separate subjects."*

Teachers began developing their own PfS-style tasks and running seminars to bridge these gaps. Younger staff, in particular, were encouraged to embrace the subject "Natural Science" taught in grades 5–6, which rotates topics by quarter and introduces students to an integrated perspective.

The students themselves recognised the need. At the end of 2023, 98% said that science subjects were essential for their future, even though they knew they were weak in this area. For the leadership, this was a hopeful sign: students wanted to learn.

Another unexpected finding came not from scores, but from the student questionnaire. Fifteen per cent of students reported that classes were noisy or disrupted. For a new school still forming its culture, this was a red flag. *"If students say there's noise, that means we need to improve,"* the deputy principal said. *"Because the next question is: how does that noise affect learning?"*

The data pushed the school to adopt the Upgrade 45 methodology, developed by a trainer in Singapore and funded by the school network. Upgrade 45 is a structured pedagogy built around the "4Cs" of collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. Teachers were trained to run lessons where groups of four students worked with defined roles, ensuring that every child participated. *"Before, group work meant one leader did everything,"* a teacher explained. *"Now, everyone knows they will be asked something. Nobody can just sit quietly."*

By 2024, 85% of teachers across the group of schools had been trained. Open lessons were recorded and shared across the network, with consultants providing feedback. *"This methodology doesn't solve discipline issues 100%, but it solved 70%,"* said the deputy principal. *"It freed us to focus on learning, not just keeping order."*

The PfS results also highlighted a challenge familiar across our country, language. Many students enrolled in our first language tracks struggle with reading literacy, not because of weak teachers but because they do not fully understand our national language. *"They think and communicate in Russian,"* the deputy principal explained. *"At home, parents don't speak the national language. Media and social networks are in Russian. So when they read in the national language, they don't fully understand the text."*

This was not new, but PfS provided statistical confirmation. To address it, the school launched a "My Favourite Book" project, where parents visit classrooms to share life-changing books. They also introduced stricter phone policies to encourage more reading. *"Competing with gadgets is hard,"* the deputy principal admitted. *"But slowly, we see progress."*

Perhaps the most striking story from this school is about inclusion. The school has 42 students with special educational needs, supported by assistants, therapists, and psychologists. This is unusual in their country, where such roles are rarely fully funded. This school ensures that inclusive students join mainstream classes, robotics clubs, and music groups. *"They don't want to stay home,"* said the deputy principal. *"They want to socialise."*

Their presence has shaped the school's culture. In PfS surveys, tolerance scores were higher at this school than at other schools in the network. Parents also played a role — for example, one mother of an autistic child visited classrooms to explain how peers could support her son. *"Our children came to understand,"* the deputy principal said. *"They learned that people can be different in appearance, in emotions, and that's part of society."*

This school shows how PfS can help a new school establish its identity. Benchmarking gave it credibility, science results exposed weaknesses, student surveys revealed hidden issues of noise and tolerance, and international comparisons inspired ambition. The school responded with structured pedagogies, reading initiatives, inclusive practices, and honest engagement with parents.

As the deputy principal concluded: *"Education is a shared goal, but everyone works with their own resources and capacities. Even if results aren't perfect, there is always something to work on, always somewhere to move forward."*

## Case Study 9: Functional Literacy, Empathy, and Mentorship

This city school, is one of the youngest schools in a network across the country. Opened in 2021 under a public–private partnership, it first joined the PISA for Schools (PfS) initiative in 2022. For its leaders, participation was never about prestige alone, but about getting an objective measure of where they stood. *"Our goal was to get an independent, objective assessment of the quality of education, identify the relevance of our methods, and improve teaching practices,"* explained the deputy principal.

When the school received its first PfS report, leaders convened the administration, methodological associations, and teachers to discuss the findings. The message was clear: while reading literacy was a strength, results in mathematics and natural sciences lagged. *"We created a roadmap,"* the deputy principal recalled. *"First we trained our teachers, because PISA is about functional literacy in three areas. We needed them to understand how to teach differently. Then we began to work with the children, especially the ones performing poorly."*

Monthly workshops were introduced for teachers of humanities, maths, and sciences. Once staff were prepared, attention turned to students. Extra lessons were offered to those who struggled, with special focus on narrowing the achievement gap between high and low performers.

PfS results were not seen in isolation. *"Of course, we compare our results,"* the deputy principal acknowledged. *"We compare with other schools in our network, with schools nationally, and we hope to compare internationally in PISA 2025."*

Within the network, schools divided responsibilities for professional development. This school was tasked with leading reading literacy. Each Thursday, schools exchanged assignments and resources, ensuring that functional literacy was embedded across all subjects. *"This way we save time but introduce functional literacy in all subjects,"* they explained.

The focus on functional literacy did not come only from PfS. It was also enshrined in our national priorities. Each year, the Ministry of Education issues guidance letters emphasising practice-oriented tasks. Yet our schools had moved early. *"Our founders are always one step ahead,"* the deputy principal noted. *"They gave us study plans with electives that regular schools don't have. They had already focused on functional literacy before the Ministry did."*

For this school, the alignment of PfS, national reform, and network strategy reinforced their trajectory.

By 2023, teachers were trained in a new methodology, developed with international trainers and rolled out across the schools. The approach emphasises lesson structure, activation of prior knowledge, and collaborative tasks. *"Upgrade helps systematise,"* the deputy principal explained. *"It shows how to start a lesson, how to structure it, how to reflect. It helps teachers organise and motivates children."*

Still, this was only one part of the picture. Teachers combined this approach with their own strategies, especially in reading literacy, which the school saw as foundational. *"If a child understands a text, identifies the main idea, they will also understand mathematical and scientific tasks,"* the deputy principal explained.

Perhaps the most distinctive initiative has been the Map of Empathy. Developed by a teacher and rolled out across classes, it trains educators and parents to observe students, identify those struggling emotionally, and provide support. *"If a child is anxious or unsettled, of course they cannot handle PISA-type tasks. That's why we developed this programme, to reduce anxiety,"* explained the deputy principal.

The Map of Empathy involves class teachers, parents, school psychologists, and even external specialists. Parents are given algorithms for supporting their children, and psychologists run targeted interventions. Results have been encouraging. *"We already see change,"* they reported. *"Children are calmer, more engaged, and better able to learn."*

The PfS report played a vital role in engaging parents. *"It was very visual,"* recalled the deputy principal. *"Parents could see the gaps including socio-economic issues, bullying, achievement gaps. And because it came from PISA, it had authority. They were willing to act."*

Parental involvement is structured through the Conscious Parent project, launched when the school opened. Parents lead class sessions, sharing their professions and interests, ensuring regular presence in school life. Combined with PfS evidence and the Empathy Map, this created a platform for deeper engagement.

*"Sometimes children understand children, and parents understand parents, not always teachers,"* the deputy principal reflected. *"So when active parents spoke to others, it carried weight."*

Another innovation was a mentoring scheme inspired by practices in Estonia. Two tracks were created: young teachers mentoring groups of students, and strong students mentoring weaker peers. *"Students understand students,"* the deputy principal observed. *"It works better than us just telling them. And sometimes the weaker student later becomes a mentor in another subject."*

The programme is carefully monitored through tests, interviews, and teacher meetings. Students can request a change of mentor if the pairing does not work, and both mentors and mentees are rewarded for progress.

This school is located in a socially disadvantaged district of the capital. Many families face hardship, including alcohol misuse and lack of time to support learning. Teachers responded by opening clubs in English and mathematics from the earliest grades, ensuring vulnerable children had extra opportunities. *"If we lay a strong foundation early, then at age 15 they will be better prepared,"* the deputy principal explained.

What surprised staff was that PfS did not show negative results for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. *"We expected to see low indicators, but they were not there,"* they reflected. *"That was encouraging. Maybe it reflects the work we have done."*

For this school, PfS has been a mirror and a motivator. It confirmed strengths in reading literacy, exposed weaknesses in mathematics and science, and highlighted socio-emotional challenges. In response, the school invested in teacher training, introduced new pedagogies, developed the Map of Empathy, engaged parents, and launched mentoring programmes.

The journey also shows the power of networks. Within this network, schools shared tasks and resources, trained one another, and aligned strategies. Beyond the network, this school began sharing insights with neighbouring schools, contributing to the country's wider improvement agenda. As the deputy principal concluded: *"We don't prepare students just for PISA. Our activities come from real needs. But functional literacy, empathy, and mentoring, these make our children stronger. And if that helps them in PISA too, all the better."*

## Case Study 10: From Reflection to Renewal

When leaders of a school grouping in the centre of the country were first invited to take part in PISA for Schools (PfS), they had not expected to be selected. *"It was a surprise for us,"* the principal admitted. *"We weren't expecting to participate, but we were happy to do so and gave our best contribution."*

At that time, in 2019, the motivation was clear. The school already ran its own internal evaluation processes, but leaders wanted an external benchmark. *"We thought it would be valuable to gain an external perspective, something that allows us to compare our results with those of other schools, and, if possible, with schools in other countries,"* explained the principal. For a community in a region shaped by mobility, many families sending children abroad for study or work, international comparisons carried special weight.

When the first PfS report arrived in 2021, after a pandemic delay, it was not easy to read. *"We weren't really used to working with that structure, especially the socio-emotional skills section,"* the principal recalled. Training was needed, and the Intermunicipal Community stepped in to help. Workshops were held for leadership, department coordinators, group leaders, psychologists, and social mediators. Teachers were surprised at how well students had done. *"In fact, there was a pleasant surprise,"* one leader remembered. *"Particularly in the cognitive skills area, we were above both the national and OECD averages — several points above, in fact."*

The report was then presented to the Pedagogical Council, which oversees educational guidance, and to the General Council, where parent representatives and community members sit. This broader engagement helped ensure that PfS was not confined to leadership alone but became part of a wider school conversation.

The results gave cause for celebration but also reflection. On the positive side, bullying was reported at low levels, and differences between genders and socio-economic groups were insignificant. Yet there were also challenges. Some students said they struggled to understand teachers' language, which surprised staff. *"We often think we're doing a good job,"* the principal acknowledged, *"but it became clear that students do feel this difficulty."*

Motivation and self-efficacy in science were also weaker than expected, and students expressed concerns about classroom discipline. Teachers recognised that while violence was rare, focus and concentration were harder to sustain. *"Anything that requires effort becomes challenging for them,"* one leader observed. *"Distractions are many, and classroom management is harder."*

The findings became the foundation of a new Plan for Personal, Social and Community Development, structured around three axes:

1. Wellbeing of the school community – mindfulness strategies, socio-emotional interventions, and study skills training were introduced. The school psychologist expanded support, and mentors were added to help regulate behaviour. Teachers also reminded students of the code of conduct, reinforcing expectations in a constructive way.
2. Parental engagement and appreciation – rather than simply inviting parents to events, the school sought to make them active partners. A social mediator encouraged participation and organised inclusive activities. Leaders wanted families to feel valued as co-educators, not passive observers.

3. Valuing and discovering students' potential – new interdisciplinary projects encouraged curiosity and life-planning. The aim was to help students imagine future pathways, connect learning to citizenship, and recognise talents beyond traditional subjects.

Workshops with 44 groups of staff and specialists helped shape this plan. Summaries of positive aspects, surprising findings, and areas for improvement were drawn up, ensuring that PfS insights were translated into specific action points.

Despite the plan, barriers remained. Teacher burnout was one. *"About 80% of our teachers joined 30 years ago,"* the principal explained. *"They are close to retirement and quite tired."* Fatigue, bureaucracy, and the weight of continuous reforms took their toll. National policy changes, often introduced abruptly, created further instability. *"It feels like we're on a moving train,"* said one leader, *"and suddenly new plans are thrown at us. We barely start evaluating when new diagnostics arrive."*

Classroom indiscipline also grew more complex. Social media, family breakdowns, and rising numbers of students with autism or personality disorders challenged teachers' ability to maintain focus. Staff turnover due to retirements and national hiring competitions added to the difficulty. Promising initiatives, such as a multidisciplinary parent-engagement team, were discontinued when external funding ended.

Perhaps the greatest change between 2019 and 2025 lay in the students themselves. *"The 15-year-olds back then were the same ones who had spent nine years of schooling in the same group,"* the principal reflected. *"Now, that is no longer the case."*

The pandemic disrupted normal schooling, leaving gaps in learning and socialisation. At the same time, our country experienced significant immigration — over 1.5 million arrivals in just a few years, many from Brazil and Africa, and some from Eastern Europe. While Portuguese-speaking students integrated more easily, those from other systems required additional support. *"Moving to another country always causes instability,"* said one leader. *"Curricula are different, families are adjusting, and we must help students adapt."*

New family patterns also played a role, with more children splitting time between parents' households. Teachers found this disrupted homework routines and added another layer of complexity to already diverse classrooms.

For this school, PfS has been a tool for both reflection and renewal. It confirmed areas of strength, exposed blind spots, and provided a framework for structured action. The Plan for Personal, Social and Community Development, now integrated into the school's educational project through to 2026, reflects this evolution.

The experience also underlined the importance of collaboration. Without the support of the Intermunicipal Community, leaders admitted, they might not have managed. PfS became not only a mirror for the school but a catalyst for regional dialogue about education.

Looking ahead to PISA 2025, the school sees both continuity and change. Continuity in the structures it has built for reflection and planning. Change in the new realities of post-pandemic classrooms, teacher fatigue, and the integration of diverse migrant students.

As the principal concluded: *"Reports are valuable for defining action lines. We are open, willing to collaborate, and to do our best so that everyone can learn more and improve our schools."*

## Lessons from Ten Case Studies

The ten case studies presented in this report tell diverse stories from a long-established independent school seeking to strengthen the relevance of its teaching, to a network of schools uniting around evidence. We heard from new public schools experimenting with pedagogical reforms and an institution where students themselves drove wellbeing initiatives. Despite their variety, common themes emerge. Together, these stories show how PfS acts as both mirror and compass, reflecting where schools stand and guiding them towards purposeful action.

### • Benchmarking as an Entry Point

Across all ten schools, benchmarking was the most visible starting point. Leaders valued PfS for its international authority, particularly in contexts where local assessments were absent, fragmented, or perceived as narrow.

- One school leader described PfS as an external check that validated whether their ambitious innovation agenda was truly working.
- Another used international comparisons to motivate students and staff by highlighting the gap with high-performing countries: *"Don't compare yourselves with the local average. Compare with the best."*
- A third saw PfS as a way to validate strengths while confronting blind spots in areas such as wellbeing and classroom climate.

Benchmarking also gave credibility in the eyes of parents and communities. In several cases, PfS results were publicly shared and even covered in the media. In others, leaders emphasised how PfS offered authority against shallow or overly simplistic national rankings.

Yet schools cautioned against simplistic competition. As one director explained: *"We never wanted this to become a league table. What matters is whether we are improving compared to ourselves."* This recognition, benchmarking as reflection rather than rivalry, is one of PISA for Schools' most important contributions.

### • From Benchmarking to Improvement

Almost every school moved quickly from comparison to action. The PfS data was not left on a shelf, it became a stimulus for curriculum change, pedagogical innovation, and development.

- In some cases, weaker results in mathematics led to reinforcement programmes, tutoring, and partnerships with alumni and local universities.
- Elsewhere, reports triggered literacy initiatives, anti-bullying strategies, or new frameworks for innovation.
- One region even used PfS as the anchor for a multi-year programme on mathematical reasoning, giving teachers time to create new materials and monitor impact over time.
- In another school, literacy results spurred the introduction of weekly functional literacy tasks shared across a wider network.

Professional development was pivotal. Some trained teachers in structured methodologies developed internationally; others invested in mentoring. In each case, PfS gave legitimacy to these initiatives and helped align them with clear goals.

## • The Wellbeing Paradox

One of the most consistent insights across cases was the gap between academic performance and student wellbeing.

- In one high-performing setting, students admitted they were motivated more by parental pressure than by love of the subject.
- In another, wellbeing data became the turning point: *"Kids were achieving really highly, but at the same time saying they were stressed, less happy, less confident."*
- Elsewhere, leaders were surprised by less positive student perceptions of teacher-student climate, despite long-standing support systems.
- In another case, teachers discovered students struggled more with language and concentration than they had assumed.

Schools responded with creativity. Some launched student-led wellbeing days, which proved far more effective than staff-led programmes. Others built family support centres, ran large-scale family congresses, or introduced mentoring systems to reduce anxiety. Together, these examples show how PfS data can legitimise wellbeing as a focus alongside academic results.

## • Collaboration and Networks

Many of the strongest stories were not about individual schools but about networks. PfS gave them a common language and evidence base.

- In one case, aggregated reports were used across a network to ask why schools with similar socio-economic profiles produced different outcomes.
- In another, PfS anchored a regional strategy, with teachers across multiple schools collaborating on new mathematics curricula.
- Within one fast-growing network, schools divided responsibilities for professional development, sharing tasks and lesson designs on a weekly basis.
- Even at the individual level, collaboration mattered: alumni were mobilised as tutors, and partnerships with universities helped bring science and research into classrooms.

Collaboration was also cultural. In some schools, teachers observed one another's classes, breaking professional isolation. In others, students produced peer-led projects that inspired their communities. In every case, PfS results became a stimulus for dialogue.

## Key Insights

From these ten case studies, four insights stand out:

1. **PfS is a mirror, not a league table.** Schools value benchmarking but resist reductive rankings. The real work is comparing against one's own trajectory.
2. **Evidence sparks action.** Reports became roadmaps — from literacy interventions to new curricula, from wellbeing programmes to mentoring schemes.
3. **Wellbeing and equity matter.** Academic success often masked challenges in motivation, engagement, and mental health. PfS gave legitimacy to address these openly.
4. **Networks amplify impact.** When schools worked together — through networks, alumni, or parents — PfS had greater leverage.

## Lessons for Policymakers and Practitioners

These ten schools illustrate that PfS is more than an assessment. It is a catalyst for dialogue: between teachers, students, parents, and policymakers. Its value lies not only in the numbers, but in the questions those numbers provoke.

- For school leaders, the lesson is to share results widely — with staff, students, and parents — and to embed them into improvement plans.
- For teachers, the stories show the need for professional collaboration and the willingness to adapt pedagogy.
- For students, PfS can be a tool of empowerment, as seen in Australia's student-led wellbeing days or Spain's peer mentoring projects.
- For policymakers, the cases suggest that when schools have ownership of the data, supported but not dictated by authorities, engagement deepens and reforms endure.

Above all, these stories remind us that data does not speak for itself. It acquires meaning only through the practices of those who interpret it. The teachers adapting lessons, leaders building partnerships, students finding purpose. As one leader reflected: *"We can have a wonderful framework, but PfS tells us whether it holds value or not."*

## Conclusion

The PISA for Schools Case Studies Project demonstrates that while benchmarking and improvement are almost universal entry points, the value of PfS lies in how schools interpret and enact findings in their own contexts. The project reveals that schools use PfS data to confirm strengths, identify blind spots, and motivate change. It shows that attention to wellbeing and equity is increasingly important, that collaboration can amplify the impact of evidence, and that systemic influences such as policy reforms and new technologies shape how PfS is enacted.

By combining the breadth of survey responses with the depth of qualitative interviews, this report provides a robust and inclusive account of how schools worldwide engage with PfS data. The findings underline that data does not speak for itself; it acquires meaning through the practices of educators who interpret and act upon it. This process of enactment (contextual, negotiated, and adaptive) is where the true potential of PISA for Schools is realised.

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