

## Case study: Whole School Approach to Building Resilience

### **Hitchin Girls' School**

Hitchin Girls' School is a specialist science schools and academy trust for girls aged 11-18, in Hitchin, Hertfordshire.

There is a focus in the school on ensuring that everything is joined up and that systems are in place, so that support can be provided quickly if and when it is needed. Students are encouraged to tell someone about your problems at an early stage.

The school has a 'Statement of Rights', which extends to both students and staff.

- The students have a right to learn.
- The teacher has a right to teach.
- All within the school community have a right to be safe both physically and psychologically in the classroom.

### **Re:mindme**

The school is in the process of developing an initiative called **Re:mindme**. It is based on positive psychology and is a whole school approach to promoting emotional wellbeing. They have used positive language and positive messages about early intervention and the fact that students can take control of the situation and overcome their own difficulties. This includes identifying problems when they first arise and if necessary seeking help. There are a number of different routes to support, but when it is needed; systems are quickly put into place.

It acknowledges the importance of mental health and wellbeing for academic attainment and how it is an essential component of being healthy.

Re:mindme was initially set-up by the school's psychology teacher because she saw the need to educate young people (and staff) to be aware of how to keep themselves mentally healthy and avoid crisis points and not be ashamed to ask for help. She drew on her psychology background to get this programme off the ground.

The Re:mindme initiative is not owned by the teachers, but by the school as a whole. They have set-up a working group to take this work forward, which includes a student representative (6<sup>th</sup> form student), teaching staff, and the Student Development Co-Ordinator and Mental Health Lead. The initiative has the full support of the head and the senior staff. They have been working hard to get buy in from both staff and students and help them think about their own mental health and emotional wellbeing; how staff can be a role model for their students; and also understand the stress that their students may be under. Whilst they had buy in from school staff, it was harder for some staff, especially if they had very limited knowledge of mental health, to think about their own mental health and understand how they could be role models.

The aims of the initiative are the:

- Removal of social stigmas relating to attitudes, perceptions and language about mental health issues.

- Promotion of positive language.
- Promotion of positive mental health role-models and practices by all staff, students and parents/guardians.
- To enable the individual to achieve and maintain good mental health by recognising personal stressors, trigger points and unhelpful coping strategies.
- To establish helpful coping mechanisms, increase hardiness and resilience, and be able to put in place appropriate and realistic personal boundaries.
- Achieve a realistic work-life balance.
- To recognise when expert support and guidance, and/or medical intervention is necessary and not be ashamed to ask for help.
- Promoting good mental health and well-being.

One of the first things the working group did was to carry out an audit to establish what they already do to support students' emotional wellbeing. They were surprised at how much they were already doing.

### **Peer Mentors**

The school have set-up a peer mentoring scheme for students, in order to provide support, but also to develop the non-academic aspirations of the young people. The peer mentors are from year 10 and 12 students. They received training from Relate, who are a counselling organisation - <http://www.relate.org.uk/> The students were trained in how to become peer listeners, were given some safeguarding training and given guidance about how to deal with difficult situations. The aim is for the peer supporters to act as listeners and sign post their fellow students onto relevant help and support.

The school have created a post-box for worries, which is placed in the school's reception area. Students can post a note in the post-box if they are having a problem, or if they are concerned about a friend. They are asked who they are or who they are concerned about, and what the concern is. The aim is for the peer mentors to help those students who have posted their worry. The Student Development Co-Ordinator and Mental Health Lead is responsible for the post box, and ensures that posts are regularly collected and actioned. The post-box has been launched in assemblies so that students are aware of how to use it. They can also access peer mentoring or other support via the newly launched Moodle area which has links to external support agencies and email addresses to help them seek out help.

### **Building Resilience**

The school has introduced resilience training called RISE, which is provided by PHASE a local organisation <https://phase-hitchin.org/>. PHASE are a Christian group who work in school to support student needs. This year, RISE ran with a small group of year 11 students; they were looking at personal identity and self-esteem and where they fit in the world. This will be taking place with all year 9 students next year.

The schools learning for Life lessons, (PSHE lessons) include a range of topics, and include lessons on dealing with stress. The students receive 1 hour of these lessons a fortnight. The Learning for Life curriculum is about to be revised and is likely to include more emphasis on emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Mindfulness exercises have been integrated into some lessons. For instance, psychology students were taught mindfulness techniques to help them manage exam stress. They found that these techniques really helped students manage their stress, and be more confident and focused on their exams.

### **Prioritising Support – Self-Harm**

They have prioritised informing and supporting students with regards to self-harming behaviours, and there is a lead for the self-harm work. For instance, they have put in place various things to address this. For instance, holding assemblies which help raise awareness about self-harm in both student and teachers. As part of their child protection policy, they have been working through how to talk to parents when their child self-harms. They brought in some sessions for young people from Alumina – <http://alumina.selfharm.co.uk/> to help give them a better understanding of self-harm. Alumina, runs online courses for young people aged 14-19 years.

### **Working with Parents**

They have a family support worker who works with parents and carers. They are going to run an evening session for parents and carers on how to support your teenager. Their child protection policy is going to look at how to talk to parents when their child self-harms.

In Hertfordshire, the Developing Special Provision Locally (DSPL) help deliver support locally. So, they can ask them to put on a course for staff or parents should the need arise.

### **Promoting Re:mindme**

Re:mindme will be promoted in the school by a combination of traditional methods - posters, and via the Internet, and social media. Posters will be on walls throughout the school but there will also be a *re:mindme* noticeboard in every classroom. It will have a presence on the school's Moodle homepage, which is a virtual learning environment that is used by the school and can be accessed by students, staff, parents and governors. There will be information on the plasma screen, which is in the school's reception area. This will include positive statements that will be posted by both students and staff. The student representative of the working party was instrumental in setting-up a twitter self-help page. This will be run by the peer mentors and will include positive quotes and they will have a relevant #tag to bring all of this content together.

For more information contact: [judith.billson@hgs.herts.sch.uk](mailto:judith.billson@hgs.herts.sch.uk)

<http://www.hgs.herts.sch.uk/>