

# Bedford Schools Well-Being Strategy

## An Evaluation



PETER PAN  
TEACHING  
SCHOOL ALLIANCE

*'Infinite possibilities, endless curiosity and a passion for learning'*





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## PART ONE

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# INTRODUCTION





# 1

## BACKGROUND TO THE WORK



*"If you don't address well-being you won't get the best results. A child who is secure and happy is one who learns – and thrives as a whole individual".*

**Bedford school leader**

- 1.1.1 In April 2015, some 40 school leaders from across Bedford gathered to consider the meaning and significance of schools paying closer attention to concepts of well-being. The event was a launch-pad for a 15-month development programme to support schools to bring together a contextually-focused strategy to promote well-being in their schools.
- 1.1.2 The programme was initiated and supported by Bedford local authority and coordinated by Peter Pan Teaching School Alliance, with funding coming through the EISG and also some practical support from the Early Help Team.
- 1.1.3 From the LA perspective, this initiative sprang from a concern about the number of children and young people coming through in early help assessments, in particular, where a sense of their own well-being was a significant underlying feature.
- 1.1.4 This in turn had raised questions about whether this represented the full extent of the prevalence of issues such as low mood, anxiety and depression among children and young people, as well as whether there was wide enough understanding of how difficult it was for children and young people to succeed and engage in learning if their own levels of well-being were not high. The hope was to gather evidence of effective whole-school strategies and to begin to build strong through-phase approaches and understanding from early years to secondary.
- 1.1.5 National data and trends support this concern. In 2007, UNICEF data placed Britain consistently near the bottom of all measures across six dimensions of children's wellbeing, except for health and safety.
- 1.1.6 Data from The Children's Society 2015 Household Panel Survey, which provides detailed information about how children and young people in the UK feel about their lives now and about the future, suggests that comparison over several years of research shows levels of satisfaction with life as a whole have declined since 2007 amongst children aged 10 to 15, although seem to have settled in



more recent years at levels of around 7-8% for those who state low levels of general happiness. One worrying finding for educationalists is that only 83% feel happy with the school they attend. Around 20% overall show signs of mental ill-health.

- 1.1.7 The local authority's concerns coincided with an interest within Peter Pan Teaching School Alliance to build on work around children's well-being which had successfully started within some early years provision, in order to develop a joined-up approach across phases that acknowledged a holistic understanding of well-being rather than focusing on specific issues, such as mental health.
- 1.1.8 As a result of all this, schools across the Borough were invited to opt in to develop one of three strands of activity arranged through external partnerships with Early Excellence, Schools of Tomorrow and Young Minds. These three strands each offered a distinctive emphasis and contribution but also shared common principles and understanding about the significance of well-being for learning and achievement.





### **EARLY EXCELLENCE ([HTTP://EARLYEXCELLENCE.COM/](http://earlyexcellence.com/))**

Early Excellence is an established national leader of pedagogy, provision and practice, specialising in young children's education. It champions the development of inspirational learning and teaching, offering expert advice, support and training to schools and settings across the UK.

Its role in Bedford has been to provide training and support around the introduction of the Leuven scales for emotional well-being and involvement based on the work of Dr Ferre Laevers. Although initially devised for early years settings, the interest was to take the use through into older age groups as well.

### **SCHOOLS OF TOMORROW ([WWW.SCHOOLSOFTOMORROW.ORG](http://www.schoolsoftomorrow.org))**

Schools of Tomorrow is a research and development of school leaders launched at the RSA in 2013. Its work is built fostering a broader vision of school quality and purpose which links high levels of achievement with high levels of well-being, highly effective preparation for the future and highly effective family and community engagement. Its role in Bedford has been to support schools in understanding and developing strategies for lasting and purposeful change.

### **YOUNGMINDS ([WWW.YOUNGMINDS.ORG.UK](http://www.youngminds.org.uk))**

YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people. Its role in Bedford has been to provide training and support in the area of academic resilience. This is an approach for schools devised by Lisa Williams and Professor Angie Hart and adopted by YoungMinds. Based on Professor Hart's collaborative resilience work at the University of Brighton. Academic Resilience supports schools to step up the things they do so there is greater impact on the achievements of their most vulnerable or disadvantaged pupils.

## **THE THREE EXTERNAL PARTNERS**

## 2

# RATIONALE FOR THE PROGRAMME



- 2.1.1. The understanding of well-being underpinning this work draws on Seligman's PERMA model of flourishing (Seligman 2011). This defines 'flourishing' in terms of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. These five attributes summarise well the outcomes in terms of well-being which the initiative sought for Bedford pupils.
- 2.1.2 The relationship between well-being and educational achievement is increasingly well understood. Gutman and Vorhaus, in a 2012 DfE Research Report "The Impact of Pupil Behaviour and Well-being on Educational Outcomes", examined the predictive power of four dimensions of well-being - emotional, behavioural, social, and

school well-being - at three average age points: 7.5, 10.5, and 13.8 years. The control variables included whether English was the first language, whether the child was eligible for free school meals, and whether any SEN was identified, along with factors such as highest parental educational level, parents' marital status, child's birth weight in grams, gender, and ethnicity. The outcome measures were academic achievement and school engagement.

- 2.1.3 Their study used data from ALSPAC, an ongoing longitudinal study of families in the former county of Avon in the west of England. More than 14,000 women enrolled in the study during pregnancy in 1991 and 1992. Primary sources of ALSPAC data collection include self-completion questionnaires for mothers and their partners administered during pregnancy and at regular intervals following the birth, assessments of children in a clinic-based setting, and questionnaires for the cohort members themselves.
- 2.1.4 The study uses parent-reported data as the only consistent measures of well-being available from ALSPAC that span the period from childhood to adolescence. Key stage scores were obtained from the National Pupil Database. Several control variables, including English as a first language, SEN status, and eligibility for free school meals, were obtained from the Pupil Level Annual School Census administrative data.
- 2.1.5 The authors conclude their study demonstrates the importance of well-being for children and adolescents throughout their primary and secondary school education. There are critical periods, however, when specific dimensions of well-being are most crucial. For academic progression, better emotional well-being is a key factor in primary school, whereas low levels of troublesome behaviour and more school engagement emerge as significant in adolescence. Good attention skills, on the other hand, are important for academic progression in both primary and secondary school. For school engagement, victimisation appears to have a greater impact in primary school, whereas better emotional and behavioural well-being and positive friendships are supportive in secondary school. School enjoyment plays a significant role in encouraging engagement in both primary and secondary school.



#### 2.1.6 Overall, the study's findings suggested:

- *Children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social, and school well-being, on average, have higher levels of academic achievement and are more engaged in school, both concurrently and in later years.*
- *Children with better emotional well-being make more progress in primary school and are more engaged in secondary school.*
- *Children with better attention skills experience greater progress across the four key stages of schooling in England. Those who are engaged in less troublesome behaviour also make more progress and are more engaged in secondary school.*
- *Children who are bullied are less engaged in primary school, whereas those with positive friendships are more engaged in secondary school.*
- *As children move through the school system, emotional and behavioural well-being become more important in explaining school engagement, while demographic and other characteristics become less important.*
- *Relationships between emotional, behavioural, social, and school well-being and later educational outcomes are generally similar for children and adolescents, regardless of their gender and parents' educational level.*

2.1.7 These findings provide a valuable benchmark against which to consider the work undertaken by Bedford schools. What this statistical analysis suggests is that it is worth spending time focusing on the well-being of pupils in schools, but by its nature it cannot say what that might look like in practice. It is here that the experience of schools and school leaders such as those in Bedford is crucial.







# 3

## SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT



3.1.1 The small-scale evaluation on which this report is based was designed to draw out and understand significant learning from school practice in promoting well-being through the Bedford well-being initiative across 2015-16 in such a way as to:

- *inform future decisions and priorities for the Teaching School Alliance;*
- *share learning across both participant and non-participant schools, locally and more widely;*
- *assist in embedding long-term change.*



3.1.2 *In the light of these purposes, the evaluation tries to address the following questions:*

- *What is the intention behind a school choice to be involved in the Bedford Well-being Strategy and the work chosen as its focus?*
- *What changes occur in schools taking part in the Strategy that might be attributed to their involvement?*
- *What effect do those changes appear to have in terms of both pupil learning and well-being?*
- *Where a possibly significant effect is identified, under what conditions has this occurred?*



## PART TWO

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# THE EVALUATION





# 1

## METHODOLOGY



2.1.1 The context for this evaluation is complex and its nature and purpose posed a number of significant challenges in terms of evaluation design.

### 2.1.2 ***Definition of outcomes***

The concept of well-being in a school context is necessarily wide-ranging, embracing safety and security, spiritual and moral development, physical health and fitness, psychological health, social and cultural development. All these are essentially long-term in their effect. This makes the potential outcomes for the strategy, and pieces of work within it, both difficult to define with precision and complex in their inter-relationship.



### 2.1.3 **Measurement of outcomes**

Both learning and well-being raise issues in terms of their measurability. Whilst learning might seem the most straightforward, in the sense of there being some national standards in terms of academic attainment, these do not capture important subjective characteristics such as motivation to learn, enjoyment of learning, or the ability to learn for oneself. Equally the national measures used to gauge progress have changed significantly whilst at the same time being subject to increasing statistical criticism (e.g. Gorard 2009).

In terms of the health aspect of well-being, Bedford has defined its overall desired outcomes as:

- *Decrease in the numbers of children and young people being referred for tier 3/4 specialist CAMHs services*
- *Children, young people and families are happy in their communities and are ready to fulfil their potential*
- *Children, young people and families are confident and resilient with high aspirations to take advantage of opportunities and make informed choices about their lives*
- *All children, young people and families have healthy lifestyles and emotional well-being and can thrive both now and in the future*
- *Interventions are in place to ensure children and young people have clear pathways of support to prevent issues from escalating*
- *Health inequalities are reduced.*

Several of these (2,3, and 4) link to learning. The first and fifth are measurable but also highly specific in terms of their reach. The last is not specifically focused on schools.

OECD make an important point about the balance of subjective and objective measures, warning against a priori assumptions about people without taking account of their views and wishes. They note:

*“Measures of life satisfaction are a useful complement to more traditional indicators based on objective conditions because they present an overall picture of well-being that is grounded in people’s preferences rather than in a-priori judgments about what are the important drivers of individuals’ well-being ... After having long been relegated to academic research, these measures are today increasingly accepted more widely”.*

#### 2.1.4 **Causality**

Notwithstanding potential difficulties of definition, and even if it is possible to gauge some sense of measured progress against defined outcomes, the central issue of causality remains.

Is there any way it could be possible to talk meaningfully and with any degree of confidence about whether there is some causal linkage between identified outcomes and changes effected by the strategy?

#### 2.1.5 **Time constraint**

The evaluation is necessarily much more time-constrained than a full-scale research programme, although its potential scope is very wide-ranging.

#### 2.1.6 **Importance of context**

Taking all these factors into account, the evaluation approach chosen placed a significant responsibility on each participating school to understand and evaluate its own work and impact. Each school plays a key role in determining its intentions in relation to the overall strategy and the specific means by which it seeks to achieve these. That purpose will be influenced by both school and community context, by careful analysis of priorities using known data, by what is known from other research, and by judgement.

2.1.7 Therefore, the evaluation sought to establish for each school:

- Its initial intentions.
- The reasons for deciding these, including any relevant data.
- The approaches adopted to meet them.
- The preferred measures of progress and achievement in terms of impact for pupils.
- The challenges encountered.
- Changes made in response.
- The extent to which the intentions were achieved.
- The factors that appear to have influenced this.





## 2 EVIDENCE BASE



The evidence base behind the report consists of five main elements:

### 2.2.1 ***An online baseline survey of participating schools***

which was carried out in the latter part of the summer term 2015. Nineteen schools completed part of the questionnaire and thirteen completed it in full.

### 2.2.2 ***Nine of these schools subsequently agreed to take part in a more extended study.***

These schools were drawn from all three programme strands and included schools with nursery, primary and secondary age pupils, although the great majority were primary.

In each case the evaluator made two visits to the schools, in February and July 2016, to interview lead staff and, in most cases, the head.

The purpose of this was to understand the strategy and the progress each school was making against their chosen objectives and to agree evidence that the school was happy to collect and provide in order to help understand the impact of their work.

This evidence was analysed along with the interview transcripts. The results are presented in this report in the form of nine case studies.

It should be noted that all schools in the sample were significantly affected by local school re-organisation in some form which was going on at the same time, although the pace and timing of this varied.

- 2.2.3 ***In addition, six sample schools indicated they would wish to take part in a staff survey*** to gauge staff perceptions of the work that had been undertaken.

60 staff responded in total. Of these, just under half were support staff, and just over 20% were from senior or middle leadership. The remainder categorised themselves as teachers. Staff overall were reasonably evenly spread between between Foundation, KS1 and KS2, with slightly fewer working in KS2 than other areas. There were no secondary phase respondents. Just under 90% of those replying said they had been quite involved or fully involved in their school's well-being strategy.

The results along with the other evidence have been used to suggest to some key findings from the project which may be helpful to other schools who want to take forward such work and the teaching school alliance in terms of assessing how best to support and encourage further development.

- 2.2.4 ***Interviews were also held with representatives of all the lead partners*** in the initiative to seek their perspective on the intentions and progress of the work.

2.2.5 ***Finally, a number of schools did withdraw from the programme at its beginning having previously expressed interest.***

Short interviews were carried out with two headteachers from this group to understand the reasons for their decision. Both headteachers welcomed the opportunity to be interviewed, and talked openly about their decisions. Although their circumstances were each different, there were some key common factors that emerged, particularly:

- *Changes of personnel and staffing pressures.*
- *Not being able to attend a key meeting or activity.*
- *Concern about accountability overload, in part apparently triggered by a number of Borough questionnaires which they associated with the programme.*

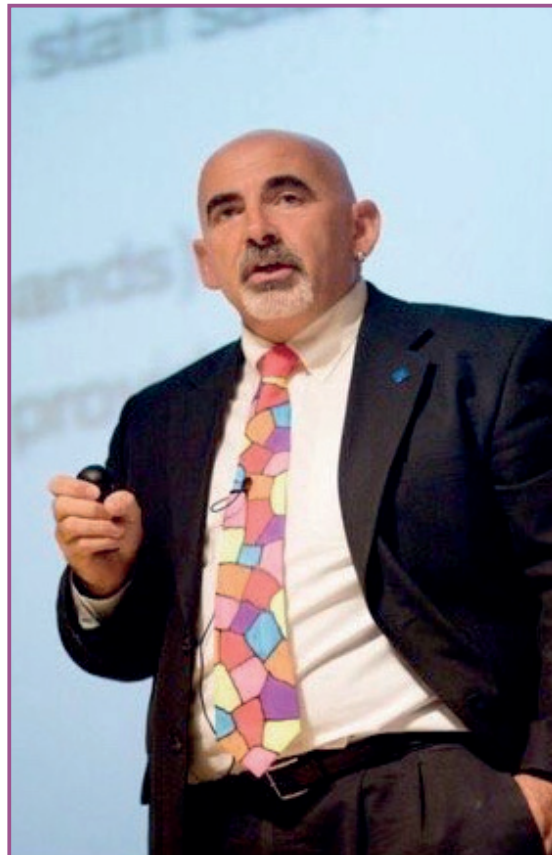
Significantly both indicated they were planning to continue working with the themes they had proposed, but outside the programme.





# 3

## KEY FINDINGS



*In education, "what works?" is not the right question because everything works somewhere and nothing works everywhere.*

*So what's interesting, what's important in education is: "Under what conditions does this work?"*

**Dylan William**

2.3.1 In the great majority of case study schools, leaders reported significant changes to both policy and practice in the way the school responded to pupils experiencing barriers to learning, and attributed these to their involvement in this programme.

2.3.2 Common key features of these changes are:

- *A focus on earlier identification of response to difficulties experienced by children within the school and outside.*
- *The encouragement of more personalised responses which match intervention to the child rather than the other way round.*
- *Taking time to get know pupils as individuals and responding to their interests and concerns.*

2.3.3 Where leaders reported the most significant impact, key contributory factors appeared to be:

- *Direct involvement of the headteacher.*
- *Clear commitment to a whole-school approach.*
- *Significant investment in training for all staff at all levels.*
- *Attention to visible promotion of staff well-being.*
- *Tight-loose leadership balance which combines empowerment and agency with a tight framework of clear values, shared purpose and joint accountability.*
- *The multiplier effect of a range of small, discrete, manageable steps when taken with a common purpose.*
- *Crucial importance of the role of family workers.*



- 2.3.4 For most schools, the engagement of parents in understanding both their children's and their own well-being has provided the greatest challenge. Key to those who report the greatest success has been time spent building trust and confidence, careful choice of language in all communications, and unthreatening venues in which to meet. Those schools who chose to employ family workers reported that they would not be able to do this work without such support in place, and despite its resource implications, saw it as a vital role.
- 2.3.5 The evidence of the impact of the work is difficult to gauge in terms of cause and effect. The sample of schools is also self-selecting, small in size, and varying in their starting points. But schools themselves, consistently and independently, frequently reported:
- *Reduction in crisis intervention leading to more productive use of staff time both teaching and non-teaching.*
  - *Reduction in staff absence and stress.*
  - *Increased confidence and awareness among children.*
- 2.3.6 In addition, one school reports a significant impact on the attainment and progress of pupils attributed to the changes they have made as a result of the initiative. It is important this is tracked in more detail and over a longer period of time.
- 2.3.7 All schools reported plans to continue to build on the work in the subsequent year.
- 2.3.8 From the staff survey, it is clear that just over 90% of respondents thought pupils had benefited from the work undertaken this year. Just one respondent out of sixty felt there had been no benefit. Among a wide range of positive responses, particular benefits highlighted included:
- *Interventions to nurture social interactions and self-well-being for those children with low scores and more challenging interventions for those children with higher scores.*
  - *It has been incorporated alongside their normal classroom learning and has been extremely effective.*



- Pupils have benefitted from a more 'targeted' approach - interventions are having impact.
- Their resilience has improved tremendously and they have more respect for one another. They are also beginning to understand the notion of 'loving yourself'.
- Children are becoming more aware and able to express their emotions.
- Children have understood what they need to look after their own well-being. They have incorporated their understanding of well-being in class discussions which has been enhanced by tasks set during lesson time.
- We have renewed focus and understanding regarding well-being as a whole. Identified a new scheme of work for PSHCE. Children have been given responsibilities and roles within school. Problem solving approach being used cross-curricularly. Other well-being programmes and therapies have been investigated and invested in, although these are still being implemented.
- Positive effect of having time to address situations before they escalate. Having time to reflect and focus on ourselves. Setting high aspirations, children aware they need to challenge themselves, has created thirst for learning. Children aware of others around them and the impact their behaviour has on those around them.
- Vulnerable children have been identified at an earlier stage, less referrals for day to day pastoral issues. Whole school ownership of well-being and classroom practices has raised awareness and allowed opportunities for children to share problems, reflect on emotions and help others. Raised profile with parents and how they can support their child's well-being. Parent workshops have allowed a voice and feedback has been valuable to inform next steps.
- It has been very effective in supporting children with difficulties and emotional needs and now needs to be embedded more fully across the school to support more children. It has raised staff awareness and opened up a range of alternative programmes and types of support that could be used to support staff and children.
- They are more confident in the setting, and with the adults who facilitate their play and learning. Staff have commented that the children have seemed more relaxed and eager to participate or 'have a go' during activities. Staff feel they know the children better.

- This enables all children to have access to support with their well-being. Children who wouldn't have normally been flagged up due to not being 'extreme' are now getting some intervention. Emotional well-being support for children in all areas of school due to whole school training and awareness making support consistent. I have found that the Emotional Literacy sessions greatly benefit children, they look forward to coming each week and a feelings profile at the beginning and end of the course of sessions shows children develop a better understanding of their feelings and how to deal with them.
- Children feel important and needed. It has helped their confidence and self-esteem which in turn helps them to learn.
- Involvement levels in the target children (for the specific well-being project) were raised significantly, and their interest in the small world items was such that parents commented on it based on their observations at home. Well-being was also boosted for those participating children, and has remained at a higher level once their initial confidence was supported.
- There have been big improvements but this is a work in progress.

2.3.9 Just over 80% of staff felt their own practice had been influenced by the work this year. These changes included:

- It has helped me think about my own well-being which I have not before.
- I have thought carefully about how I can improve the well-being of the children in my class. These are sometimes activities which consume learning time but I know they will have an impact on the atmosphere of my classroom and will therefore be beneficial to all and improve the outcomes for the children, including seeing an improvement in the work they produce.
- I have introduced new strategies for behaviour management which have worked. Children are feeling better about themselves and generally are happier, they trust all adults in the school because we are all doing the same thing.
- I make sure I speak to children as they come in, paying particular attention to those I know are vulnerable. I understand that these

*'little chats' are really important to support the learning of the children. As a staff, we discuss the children and support each other in helping the children.*

- As a school I think we have positive relationships with the children. The extra work has enhanced this and we now have a way of monitoring/recording this.*
- Pupils well-being has become a higher profile issue for the whole school, not just for those of us delivering Emotional Literacy. Through sharing details and resources of this course with other staff on a training day, there is greater awareness of what is available. There is more coherence in the whole school approach, more sharing of ideas, resources and concerns about individual children. Pupils are more likely to be referred on to us for the course if more in depth help is needed.*
- We have reviewed how we support the children. Children are now supported within the classes rather than being taken away to work in groups with others who are also in need of support. The children are supported whilst engaged in their chosen activity and others children are welcomed to join. As for resourcing the department we have adopted the 'Less is More' approach - children still have the choice element but it is less daunting and we are finding that resources are being used in a more creative manner. We have also changed how the furniture in the classroom is set, making areas more inviting for the children.*

2.3.10 A smaller proportion of staff responding, just over 60%, felt their own well-being had improved as a result of the work, though 8% felt their own well-being had declined, with just under a third reporting no apparent change. Typical comments include:

- Work life balance and stress has made personal well-being difficult.*
- It has been a challenging year involving a lot of unavoidable changes.*
- It has made me more aware of my own well-being.*
- I have made my well-being more of a priority than it was before and I am more aware of the impact my job has on my well-being.*
- It's not improved at all. But hasn't got worse.*



2.3.11 The great majority of those responding were able to identify further steps they planned to take in the coming year. Actions with regard to children included:

- *Embed this into everyday practice.*
- *Learn more about mindfulness and ways to keep yourself calm and relaxed in EYFS.*
- *I am going to be holding tea parties for small groups of children.*
- *Continuation of theme by encouraging children to share their feelings of well-being.*
- *To have a Kindness Week and not Anti-Bullying Week. In other words re-name Anti-Bullying Week?*
- *WOW days, time during the week to reflect and discuss.*
- *Fully embed in to whole school practice and ethos*
- *Continue to keep it high profile.*
- *Weekly well-being tasks set aside actual timetabled time.*
- *Regular timetable slot.*
- *More praise and positive language.*
- *Broaden use across school to support more children.*
- *Evaluation of initiatives.*
- *Continue the well-being initiative.*
- *Continue the positive impact of nurture group and well-being within the classroom.*
- *For this to follow them into year 1.*
- *Continuation and extension of small social emotional groups.*
- *Not at the moment.*
- *Continued involvement.*
- *Ensuring the input continues as the children progress through the school.*
- *Breakfast for children, a lot of children come to school without breakfast.*
- *Keep it going and watch, listen and move forward as the children develop with the current initiatives.*
- *Continue the work.*
- *Develop peer buddy system more fully.*

2.3.12 There were also actions connected with their own well-being:

- *To embrace well-being and mindfulness myself.*
- *Termly meetings of a support network to share ideas and allow time during the week to focus on own personal well being.*
- *Support in place for those who may be struggling with workload and stress of workload.*
- *Develop my own practice further and continue to support staff.*
- *Occasional staff meeting - meditating/calming.*
- *More positive, encouraging, not naming and shaming in front of whole school. Adequate notice being given for tasks.*
- *Further continue with this initiative and to improve further our practice to support well being.*
- *Develop the variety of resources.*
- *Continue to consider the well-being of staff and how we can support them using the resilience framework.*
- *Continued training and sharing good practice.*
- *More training.*
- *Continued training.*
- *Keep it going.*

2.3.13 Overall summary comments included:

*"A very worthwhile project which provided a valuable, concentrated focus on well-being."*

*"We have benefitted immensely from this training and I feel it helps us in our role."*

*"It has ensured that all children are supported despite not being 'flagged up' as needing complex intervention."*

*"The school has always been a very nurturing environment and the well-being program has made an already welcoming environment even more inclusive by helping children cope with stresses of day to day life while enjoying learning."*

## PART THREE

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# LEADERSHIP OF CHANGE





# 1

## CASE STUDIES IN CHANGE



In this section of the report, the nine schools who completed the initial baseline questionnaire and agreed to ongoing inclusion are the subject of individual school change studies. In each case the lead staff and often the headteacher were interviewed on two occasions during the second and third terms of the project. Each also agreed with the evaluator to collect a range of evidence which they felt was important and useful for them to help gauge impact.

Each change study follows a similar structure:

- *School information*
- *Context of the school*
- *Focus chosen for the work*
- *Strategy adopted*
- *Challenges encountered*
- *Evidence of impact*
- *Next steps*
- *Key learning points*



# CHANGE STUDY 1

*“Never think you’ve got there – recognise it is a journey.”*

**School:** CHERRY TREES NURSERY SCHOOL

**Age range:** Nursery

**Size:** 78 FTE

**Contact:** Suzie Hoefkens, Assistant Head; Isabel Davis, Executive Head

**Working with:** Schools of Tomorrow

## Context of school:

Cherry Trees Nursery School is an average sized nursery and one of three providers in the Bedford Nursery Schools Federation. The three nursery schools share one executive headteacher and deputy headteacher. The nurseries work together on most policies and documentation including shared development and self-evaluation.

Cherry Trees serves a deprived area of Bedford. It has no catchment as such, but most children are from the local area, which is multi-cultural in its population. Around 20 languages are spoken in the nursery, with Polish-speaking children the biggest group, followed by Bengali and Panjabi.

## Focus of work:

Cherry Trees identified two development themes it wanted to pursue through the well-being strategy:

- *Recognising the importance of parents as first educators and the most influential adults in a child’s life.*
- *Acknowledging the importance of the well-being of key adults in a child’s life on the child’s own well-being.*



## Strategy:

Since first joining the Federation in 2014, Cherry Trees had shared with the other two federation schools a strong focus on the promotion of well-being of children, especially through developing the use of the Leuven scales, and as a result had begun to note a range of positive benefits.

Regular observations of children were carried out using the scales. With experience this practice had developed to incorporate observation by two staff. This in turn served to focus staff minds on how children were in their environment and to do this much more objectively.

This information was then actively used by staff. If, for example, a child's well-being was not high, staff considered what could be changed in the environment to bring about improvement. Staff also began to bring in home knowledge and observed that some children who had difficult home lives displayed high levels of well-being and involvement. In this situation clearly the school was getting something right, but equally support may be needed to maintain this at home. This insight started to contribute to a significant shift in approach.

It also became clear to the federation leadership team that this growing awareness of the importance of well-being implied that an equivalent focus was needed on the promoting the well-being of staff. As a result, a conscious focus was placed on staff well-being. A range of strategies was developed, including the regular use of celebrations and thanks. In particular, all staff were asked to include in their appraisal a performance target connected with their own well-being.

The move to become part of the federation had marked a significant shift for the nursery, which had been used to being stand-alone. In Suzie's words; *"We've become more accountable"*, but she adds significantly, *"we're also more in control."*

This is because of a leadership approach which emphasises trust and autonomy within a clear framework of values and expectations. That change of culture has been significant in enabling improvement and development to take place, for it models the way in which staff are expected to treat children. As a result of a less prescriptive approach, staff at all levels have

felt more able to be creative, and adapt quickly to respond to children's need, and as a result have been more willing to take on new ideas.

The final stage, which became the focus of this new work, was to consider the practical implications for the school's work with parents. This included both developing parental understanding of their child's well-being as well as thinking more about their own well-being.

In order to develop the work with parents, the school, in conjunction with its adjoining primary school, worked with Groundwork, a local voluntary organisation, to put in place a 'Parents as Partners in Play' programme. This 8-week programme of 90 minute sessions gives families the chance to have fun together outside and through this for families to skills and knowledge about safe play in the outdoors, creative use of natural resources and where to go for wild play in the local area. Activities include den making, nature trails, eco-art, bird box making and camp fire cooking.

The programme aims to build and strengthen relationships between parents and their children and between the school and families. The pilot programme involved eight families in total, deliberately selected as a mixed group to include some role models. Three school staff who had also been trained by Groundwork were involved.

Meanwhile a range of other small steps were being taken to strengthen the focus on the well-being of significant adults. These included:

- *Stay and Play sessions half-termly so parents can experience what their children are learning in a relaxed, friendly and sociable atmosphere.*
- *Family home visits now include discussion of well-being.*
- *Well-being display in entrance.*
- *Involving some parents in observing children in nursery and at home.*
- *Café in the Cabin – drop-in coffee and chat sessions run by parents. This has proved slow to get off ground but is being persevered with through the enthusiasm of a parent leader.*

## Challenges encountered:

- *Developing the trust of staff in new leadership and making sure everyone was hearing the same message.*
- *Building a shared vision and culture was hard and took time.*
- *Change felt vulnerable and fragile for a long time.*

## Impact:

Lots of small steps and initiatives have contributed to building momentum, but it is only recently beginning to be possible for staff to see them as a whole. There is a feeling that the school now has a more thought-through approach to its dealings with parents, especially those who may be hardest to reach or where there are particularly sensitive issues. At the present stage, though, the most evident impact is in relation to staff and children rather than parents, notably:

- *The well-being of children involved in the work consistently high by end of year (89%) – and showing good or outstanding progress in terms of behaviour*
- *Progress is measured through observations in the nursery environment using the Leuven scales. Children are expected to make one point progress each term. The average termly progress for this particular group of children ranged from 1.4 to 1.8 points.*
- *Staff confidence in dealing with behaviour issues calmly has increased as well as a reduction in the frequency and severity of those issues.*
- *The school has seen an overall reduction in the number and difficulty of parental complaints.*

## Next steps:

The school aims to continue to build on the range of approaches it has developed. It will repeat the Groundwork project with new families, drawing on the staff training that has taken place, whilst also developing more structured approach to evaluation through refining recording systems, especially in relation to work with parents.



## Key Learning Points:

- Leadership is crucial, in particular finding the right loose-tight balance to create individual empowerment within shared values.
- Everyone needs training, and allow plenty of discussion to build a shared language.
- Lots of small improvements can create a multiplier effect, without any one of them making significant extra demands.
- Development has been allowed to be organic but has also had structure and purpose.
- Sometimes things need time. Involvement of parents cannot be rushed – it has to be their choice. So give lots of different opportunities, recognising people are starting at different points.

## CHANGE STUDY 2

*"We thought we knew our children before, but actually we didn't."*

**School:** URSULA TAYLOR CE SCHOOL

**Age range:** 4-9, becoming primary in 2017

**Size:** 286

**Contact:** Heather Lee, Head of Early Years; Vicky Morrall, Head

**Working with:** Early Excellence

## Context of school:

The school is a 2-form entry Church of England lower school in Clapham, Bedfordshire. The local area contains a high proportion of lone parent families and unemployed parents. It has an increasing East European intake. The school prides itself on an open and welcoming environment and was rated by OFSTED as a good school in 2016.

## Focus:

The school wished to develop the use of the Leuven scales to increase the well-being and involvement of all children and impact positively on rates of progress. It decided to focus this initial work within the early years team.

## Strategy:

The school has always undertaken home visits in September for all children starting school, using input from parents to support baseline assessments. However, the head recognised that despite high quality teaching, children were not progressing as far or fast as they should, and therefore decided there was a need to look more closely at emotional well-being.

After the Head of Early Years, along with the Headteacher, attended training with Early Excellence, she used their resources with staff to give training on observing children and what to look for. The decision was made to use the first six weeks of schooling differently, observing and talking to children through play, and to use this time to really get to know each child before the start of formal teaching. This required a complete change in observation practice for staff.



It was quickly clear that children did not know how to play and so changes were made to the environment. The classroom and the outdoor area were laid out differently with smaller areas. By taking away many resources and leaving a minimum out, with the rest boxed up in see-through boxes, the children became more responsible for setting up play, which in turn had an impact on their respect for resources.

The staff also encouraged more confident or more imaginative children to join groups with vulnerable children, using modelling as well as teacher scaffolding to draw these children in and grow their confidence to move elsewhere in the setting.

Baseline assessment waited until a child's well-being had become good. This gave licence to staff to get to know each child through play. So when they came to work more formally, children were much more relaxed, and because of their higher levels of confidence and lack of worry, they moved more readily to the next stage. Staff believe this response was noticeably different from previous cohorts.

Twelve children out of 49 were identified as still in need of support for well-being and involvement by the end of six weeks, although there had been a lot more at beginning. All children were reviewed each week. Where children were identified as in need of support, a teaching assistant is employed to give extra support in play, with language, and on the social and emotional side, every afternoon.

The overall effect of change has been to make staff think more about emotional well-being and to track it more carefully than before. The later start for formal learning required an openness to risk and change on the part of staff, as well as strong leadership support, resisting the pressure to force the pace because of external accountability.

In return, all were struck by how much easier it then was to teach children than in previous years, and how much faster was the progress children then made, in every case except one. In addition, more home learning was taking place, though not expected or required. Across the year the progress of the cohort, although starting from the lowest baseline ever for the school, made more progress than any previous cohort.



## Challenges encountered:

- *Judging the pace and rate of development and dissemination across the school.*

## Impact:

- *Intervention now happens in classroom not through withdrawal.*
- *Children are perceived to be taking more responsibility and becoming more independent earlier.*
- *This year group had the lowest baseline on record but at the end of year achieved the highest standards of any previous cohort in school. Numeracy levels are up 13% on the previous year, a highly significant achievement for the school. Writing at 61% is the highest ever, with every child able to write their name for the first time ever. 61% are achieving GLD in all areas.*

## Next steps:

The school will continue to further develop the approach in early years, refining room organisation and grouping. It hopes to involve parents at an earlier stage as well.

The same principles will now be rolled forward into Y1 and across the school, with all classes using the first two weeks of year to establish relationships and build confidence in new settings.

## Key Learning Points:

- *Well-being needs to be in place before standards.*
- *Importance of headteacher involvement and leadership.*
- *Staff have to be allowed to take risks to change and the school climate must encourage this.*
- *Plant seeds – do things gently – gain trust first – before speaking about things that might cause people concern.*

## CHANGE STUDY 3

*"I used to see resilience as inbuilt, but now I see more that it can be learnt. So I don't think a child just is that way anymore – I can do something about it".*

**School:** SCOTT LOWER SCHOOL

**Age range:** 4-9

**Size:** 170

**Contact:** Anita Barker, Head; Jo Sawford, Assistant Head

**Working with:** Young Minds

### Context of school:

The school was rated good by OFSTED in 2013. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and a higher than average proportion of pupils comes from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few are at the early stages of speaking English.

The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides funding for children in the care of the local authority and for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is well above average.

The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion receiving support at school action plus and who have a statement of special educational needs is average.

### Focus:

To develop a whole-school approach to resilience, including pupils, staff and families.

### Strategy:

The school already had in place teachers who knew families well, nurture

groups for the most vulnerable pupils and their families, and some characteristics of resilient classrooms.

After a delayed start because of building work, the school used training from Young Minds, along with their audit tools, to identify and build capacity for the next steps. It used the academic resilience framework to create a vulnerability register with identified strategies and levels of support at each level, and this register is regularly updated.

This had the effect of recognising what the school was already doing as well as raising the awareness of all staff of children not at the extremes, and in turn making future development more visible.

A key element in this approach has been the emergence of a common language, also shared with children. To help bring this about, the school has used cuddly animal toys as 'learning friends' to capture and represent key school values and the characteristics of resilience and to make these accessible in language understood by children. For example, Bloom the Rabbit is the 'bounce-back bunny', and stands for coming back from disappointment and difficulty.

The school has found children really responded to these figures and show a clear grasp of the underlying meaning. As one result, the head believes the self-confidence of children generally has improved and they are less afraid to make mistakes and more ready to challenge themselves. The staff have also become more confident in recognising children in need of additional support at an earlier stage.

The school had operated a nurture group for vulnerable children for some time before the well-being strategy started. This has played a key role for some children who found school a very difficult place, and meant they could develop a relationship with trusted adults with whom they could talk. The work of the group is very practical and built around the interests of the children.

However, the strategy has helped to differentiate levels of need and to develop more focused interventions, especially more short-term personalised support, and at an earlier stage. Teaching assistants are now more involved in small group emotional work and meet regularly to share strategies between themselves.



To begin with it took time for staff to see this work had as much importance as other school development plan priorities. Teachers were initially reluctant to release teaching assistant time for this. In the end it was regular, visible senior leadership monitoring which proved crucial to gaining acceptance and engagement.

The involvement of parents was also seen as crucial element for success. This built on its earlier work with Achievement for All and the introduction of structured conversations with parents. The school adopted a friendly but tenacious approach in inviting people to regular coffee mornings which included the opportunity to share what the school was doing around resilience and why, the framework and the themes behind the work.

Separate meetings were also held with parents of children involved in the nurture group. The schools took pains to make clear this was a joint approach with parents, it was not in any way judgemental or critical, and took care to frame questions so that parents could come up with their own answers.

The role of the schools' family worker was very important in making this successful. This 0.6 post funded by the school is seen as a crucial link in building trust and communication with parents.

### Challenges encountered:

- *Building staff recognition of the importance of this work and its equivalence to other school development plan priorities.*
- *Meeting training needs in terms of a whole-school approach, especially in terms of cost. The areas of interest for the future are emotional literacy, attachment awareness, and play therapy.*
- *Responding to the demands of parents – some of whom may want more intervention for their child and some none at all.*

### Impact:

A survey of 28 pupils across all year groups who had been involved in the work indicated the following:

- *100% of the children now enjoyed learning and felt they learned well in class.*
- *100% of the children felt safe at school and also knew who to turn to for support if needed.*
- *100% of the children had strategies to cope when they felt unhappy or had a problem.*
- *100% of the children felt they had good relationships both with teachers and with other children in school.*

Although it is of course not possible to establish a causal connection, staff perception is that children are more engaged in learning, in the classroom and in school clubs, and show evidence of improved academic progress in terms of the year group objectives achieved.

The attendance of specific targeted children has improved, on average from 89% to 98.6%.

Leaders believe staff have developed greater awareness of a broader range of children and their needs and become more confident in responding to these.

### **Next steps:**

The school will continue to have well-being and resilience as a development priority for the next year because the leadership team feel their work so far has only scraped the tip of the iceberg. There is a need to embed what has been started and ensure a whole-school approach which supports all children as and when there is a need, rather than targeting just particular groups of children.

### **Key Learning Points:**

- *Resilience can be learnt.*
- *Importance of a whole school approach.*
- *The crucial role played by a family worker.*

- *Liaison with parents involved building trust carefully with a tenacious, friendly, informal, but insistent approach.*
- *The role of a community of practice sharing ideas and experience between different schools has been highly valued.*

## CHANGE STUDY 4

**School:** TURVEY LOWER SCHOOL

**Age range:** 4 -9

**Size:** 60

**Contact:** Sharon Coles, Headteacher

**Working with:** Young Minds

### Context of school:

Turvey is a small rural school. Nearly all pupils are from White British backgrounds. A very small proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well below average.

Along with other local schools it has been affected over the last year by the reorganisation of schools into a two-tier system.

### Focus:

The school's initial focus was about providing better support for children facing personal challenges, but, as the project developed, the school began to see the notion of resilience had a place for all children. And so the scope of the work shifted to encompass all children through the notion of building resilient classrooms and a resilient school. The emphasis moved towards helping to prevent things going wrong by catching potential difficulties earlier, rather than simply trying to fix problems when they arose.





### Strategy:

The whole staff completed training on academic resilience, and this was followed by a school self-audit and action plan. Teachers also reflected on their own classroom, and this highlighted the need to build relationships with each child, including the most hard-to-reach.

The use of the Leuven scales has been adopted across the school. A vulnerability register has been put in place and this has led the school to become more proactive in putting support in place. This has included a drawing and talking therapy group.

A health day was held for the whole school and a PSHE scheme of work, which includes a focus on academic resilience, designed and mapped.

The school has not yet been able to develop the work parents it had hoped because of demands on staff and leadership time.

### Challenges encountered:

- *Limited resource as a small school, especially with conversion to primary happening at the same time.*

### Impact:

- *The programme has changed the way the school deals with pupils with difficulties, leading to a more proactive approach.*
- *Children are perceived to be on task more in lesson observations and more able to talk about their learning and their difficulties.*
- *A perceived reduction in the frequency and number of classroom behaviour incidents.*

### Next steps:

The school intends to continue to embed the work started this year. It will also implement the PSHE scheme of work and hopes to start work to help parents to understand academic resilience.

### Key Learning Points:

- *Ensure all staff understand and value the nature and purpose of academic resilience and the school's approach.*
- *Recognise the importance of taking small steps.*



## CHANGE STUDY 5

*"We have, as a profession, I think got it wrong in our response to children experiencing barriers to learning. The standard response if a child is struggling learning Maths or English, has been to give extra Maths and English, more of the same. But if teaching is high quality, then the barrier lies elsewhere. So look for that barrier, and remove it first. And it's often to do with emotional readiness to learn. That's why we've put such hefty investment into training around emotional well-being, resilience, and inclusion - to get that right."*

**School:** GOLDINGTON GREEN ACADEMY

**Age range:** 4-9, becoming primary

**Size:** 528

**Contact:** Rachel Clay, Deputy Head

**Working with:** Young Minds and Early Excellence

### Context of school:

The school serves a mixed catchment both high levels of deprivation and affluent working professionals. It reports significant numbers of families needing support. The proportion of pupils attracting pupil premium is above the national average at 46%, and 26% of pupils have English as an additional language.

The school has a high focus on diversity and multiculturalism, as well as inclusion. There is an ASC centre on site. It maintains a strong commitment to values-based education. It became an academy in 2013 and was rated by OFSTED in 2016 as a good school.



## Focus:

The aim at the outset was to tighten up the school's identification of need and to upskill staff with a deep understanding of attachment and resilience.

## Strategy:

The school had identified many children with barriers to learning. This included an increase in the number of families experiencing mental health issues and the number of children needing specific support for mental health and well-being. Although there were many strategies in place, a particular concern was what were termed 'quiet children' – those with hidden anxieties or whose families did not necessarily let the school know of significant events that might affect attitudes to learning.

The strategy sought to build on existing practice, but also develop from the perspective of a whole-school approach rather than being seen as a specific project. So, for example, the school married its work on academic resilience with ongoing work around understanding growth mind-set based on the work of Carol Dweck.

The starting point was a significant and ongoing investment in staff training for all staff at all levels, including two full days on attachment and two on academic resilience.

The curriculum then incorporated the development of every child's understanding that intelligence is not fixed with the result that every child now has explicit teaching about resilience in all areas.

The school's use of the Leuven scales, which initially had been in the early years, was developed to become more robust and now used half-termly with every child across the school. All children with low scores have support in place and the school provides its own play therapy and music therapy.

But staff also looked more analytically at this data and particularly where children developed an atypical profile. As a result, changes that might affect a child's learning were picked up earlier than might otherwise have been the case, with appropriate intervention and support then helping to resolve the difficulty sooner and more easily.

The school also changed its thinking about intervention as a result, beginning to look for and source the right intervention for a particular child rather than trying to fit the child to the intervention. It also shifted in its understanding of priorities.

Whereas previously, drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of need, support may have tried to address for example needs of housing or food first, on the assumption that unless these were addressed, children would not have high well-being, the approach, whilst still seeking to help with these needs, recognised that *"if we equip children with the right skills, they can cope, so we don't assume we've got to get the basics right before helping them, we can give them skills to cope"*.

The change of approach means the school is now more proactive in securing earlier intervention. Where this requires the support of other agencies, the school has learnt how to ask for what is needed and who to ask, as well as how to build an evidence base to support their case. This has involved strong networking, getting to know what particular services offer and named people within each, and being proactive and persistent in seeking support.

A reduction in crisis intervention has meant staff begin to approach children differently, whilst resilience strategies mean children are not so reliant on teachers so teachers in turn can work differently and more productively.

Another key part of the strategy is the use of pupil premium funding for a family worker, seen as a vital link in providing a friendly and easily accessible face for parents. As well as doing early help assessment, the worker can provide practical support for parents and act as a signpost for advice.

### Challenges encountered:

- *Getting all staff on board – use of training to create an interested group of staff to take forward specific pieces of work.*
- *Funding the training.*

## Impact:

- *Reduction in crises through earlier support.*
- *The attendance of specific targeted children has increased, and they have shown greater progress and stable scores on the Leuven scales.*
- *Children's use of the language of resilience has increased.*
- *Staff have widened the way they think about need.*

## Next steps:

The school will continue on all these practice developments, but in particular in the next phase look to strengthen and increase the role of pupil voice in the school as well as developing the contribution of parents to school development.

## Key Learning Points:

- *A whole-school strategy is key to embedding work of this sort.*
- *Be clear about what the school has capacity to do, so targets are realistic.*
- *The prime importance of robust training for staff at all levels. Make sure all staff have those skills to some level, not just a few specialists, though they are needed too.*
- *The value of the Leuven scales for all ages in recognising context and enabling early intervention and support.*
- *Develop a proactive and informed approach to developing strong links with outside agencies and building trust through them.*



## CHANGE STUDY 6

*“Without a focus on well-being, as a school you’re never going to achieve as much as you could.”*

**School:** LIVINGSTONE PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Age range:** Primary

**Size:** 360

**Contact:** Ruth Lavender, SENDCO; Linda Crombie, Head

**Working with:** Schools of Tomorrow and Early Excellence

### Context of school:

Livingstone is situated in a recognised area of deprivation. It is an urban school, but is fortunate to have large grounds. This is particularly important as few of the children attending the school have outdoor play space at home. The school has children from a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and currently the children attending have 38 different first languages.

The school has recently become a primary (having been a lower school) and is also in the process of transitioning from single form entry to two-form entry, and so is experiencing major change. The children have a choice of 4 different colours of uniform, as valuing individuality and celebration of diversity are very much part of the school ethos. It is seen as vital the importance of each individual child and staff member to the school as a whole continues to be recognised as the school grows larger.

The school serves a range of communities. Families seeking asylum, families fleeing war zones, parents seeking refuge, economic migrants, linguistic and cultural groups, as well as families working within higher education.

### Focus:

The school had worked with Early Excellence on the project ‘Securing and Demonstrating Real Progress’, which introduced the school to the use of

the Leuven Scales, and this resonated with earlier work that the school had undertaken regarding well-being. Recognising the importance of well-being as having life-long impact on the development and health of the children in the school, and as the school expands and develops to cover the full primary age range, it is seeking to develop a firm foundation of well-being and to facilitate active learning as a preparation for adult life.

### Strategy:

The importance of fostering a sense of well-being for children has always been an important part of the school ethos, and this was understood to embrace pupils, staff and parents. This was especially significant as the school goes through profound change. The understanding of well-being and readiness to learn formed a significant element of staff training days, including attachment theory and mental health. One key discussion centred on developing a shared language for well-being, which led on to considering a shared language for learning.

With pupils, the school began to build further on this with two strands of activity, developing the use of the Leuven scales at KS1 and, with older children, using the NFER Emotional Literacy Screening to establish more precise areas of support. However, the use of NFER crystallised into use with particular Y4 class which contained a number of quite challenging individuals. At the same time staff in other year groups had expressed interest in use of Leuven scales and this came to be the main focus throughout the school, using NFER only as a tool with very specific children when the need arose. Leuven screening will now take place each term and form part of the discussions at parent consultation evenings.

Given the extensive changes the school was going through, the leadership team used change management principles to guide the process. The team recognised that as part of this staff well-being was a critical element. A conscious focus was given to staff well-being, especially given significant numbers of new staff joining the school. This included:

- *A performance management target related to personal well-being.*
- *Ensuring paid planning time for teaching assistants.*

- *Cutting down bureaucracy, for instance removing the need to re-write learning objectives.*
- *Improving the efficiency of marking practice and giving more emphasis to conferencing with children.*
- *Creating a feeling of agency for staff.*
- *Constant need to reinforce and embed, and take time to help new staff understand principles and values.*
- *Daily greeting.*
- *Shared activities together – for instance cooking, music, sport, and gardening.*

Engaging with parents has proved challenging because of their many demands and needs. In general terms, the school has worked in the past on talking about academic outcomes with parents, but saw the need to extend this to encompass well-being. This is now included as part of the expectation for parent consultation evenings, but it is recognized that care may be needed to get the right language. As a first step the school has produced a simple leaflet guide about well-being to give to parents.

### **Challenges encountered:**

- *The scale and pace of externally driven change meant original plans were too large and had to be scaled down.*
- *Creating time and getting the pacing right.*
- *Finding capacity to do enough development work with parents.*

### **Impact:**

- *Pupil attendance has improved from 91% to 96%.*
- *Parent consultations have very high attendance– in part due to establishing flexible times.*
- *More language about well-being evident in school reports.*



## Key Learning Points:

- *Don't accept barriers for children – redeploy and refocus resources to resolve.*
- *Staff well-being matters, so start with staff – they need to live it out before giving out.*
- *Importance of taking time to build a shared language.*
- *Ensure you make time to enable new staff joining to understand principles and processes.*

## Next steps

The school plans to continue to build on its existing strategy, but look to deepen work with parents to give them the tools to talk about well-being.

## CHANGE STUDY 7

*"I've stopped making assumptions about children and their behaviour."*

**School:** ELSTOW PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Age range:** Primary

**Size:** 420

**Contact:** Amanda Maddox, Learning Mentor

**Working with:** Young Minds

## Context of school:

The school catchment is made up of new and old social housing as well as privately owned homes. There is a high percentage of social deprivation and there is a high percentage of children with special needs compared to the national average.

The school has high academic expectations and also aims to educate pupils to enable them to be happy, healthy and socially responsible members of the school and the wider community. A learning mentor and family support advisor are employed by the school. They work with children and parents to provide and deliver short and long-term interventions, with the aim of eliminating any barriers to learning. The school has its own Striving for Success programme which aims to engage hard-to-reach parents. Elstow is fully inclusive and a Centre of Excellence for Inclusion, employing a lead teacher for inclusion.

### Focus:

The school wanted to develop staff understanding of children's mental well-being, develop a vulnerability register and pyramid of need so as to reduce the number of interventions from external agencies, to create more resilient classrooms in which children were happy, engaged in learning and made good progress, and to engage parents more effectively and increase their understanding of their child's mental well-being and how they support and encourage their child to cope.

### Strategy:

All staff took part in two general training sessions to understand overall aims and strategy as well as specific training with Young Minds focused on creating resilient classrooms.

In order to encourage the development of resilient classrooms, a well-being week was held across the school in March 2016. This marked a turning point for change.

Every day during the week class teachers offered a well-being activity of their choice to their class, drawing on a range of resources provided by the Learning Mentor. In the mornings this might have included feeling check-ins, relaxation exercises or reflection time, and in the afternoon resilience activities or mindfulness. On the final day, the learning mentor devised a carousel programme of activities for all classes for the whole day. The programme included healthy eating, the importance of exercise, positive mind-set, and resilience.

The week was well received by staff and pupils and activities have carried on since. Some classes have a journal in place or good deed boxes, others make time for mindfulness or focus on problem-solving. Each class chose their own approach within the range and this empowered staff and has given them increased confidence in dealing with situations, such as a falling-out between pupils. As a result, these incidents are now rarely passed through to the inclusion team to resolve, enabling them to focus their work more productively.

Moreover, classroom practice has begun to change as the profile of the work has been raised and as staff have come to understand more fully the link between well-being and learning.

A vulnerability register and pyramid of need has also been introduced as part of these changes. This is reviewed on a half-termly basis and has helped to raise the profile of vulnerable children across the school, encouraging all staff to take time to notice all children and pay attention to them.

Finally, a programme called Child Whispering ([www.childwhispering.co.uk](http://www.childwhispering.co.uk)) has been introduced, again supported by staff training, and is now being rolled out across school to support school values of inclusion and respect. It is being found particularly helpful in thinking about approaches to transition.

The other part of the strategy has been to introduce the work to parents, with some success. Forty attended one of two 90 minute sessions. These offered a brief introduction to school practice, and then parent-led activities for them to think about risk factors and protective factors for children in terms of resilience, what affects their child's resilience and what could be done about it, and importantly, what they thought the school could do differently. These ideas were then followed through and a response given.

Key factors in attracting such a relatively high attendance were the tone of the invitation letter, which asked for parents' help in developing practice to support their child rather than wanting to tell them things, flexibility of timing, including daytime and evening options, and the use of incentives such as coffee and doughnuts and the award of house points to their child if they attended.

## Challenges encountered:

- *Parental engagement – working out how best to approach parents, having tried everything over the years with limited success.*
- *Embedding across the whole school and ensuring all staff are on board, including support staff.*

## Impact:

- *Classroom practice is beginning to change as staff think more about the relationship between well-being and learning and feel more able to know how to respond to children's needs.*
- *Pupils say they are becoming more able to communicate their own feelings and solve relationship problems.*
- *Reduction in support referrals and behaviour incidents from 23 to 17.*

## Next steps:

The school will continue to embed the practice that is evolving, as well as taking steps to raise the awareness of new staff. It also plans now to develop its lunchtime play practices to provide better support for vulnerable pupils. Finally, it will offer further parent sessions to build on the successful start made.

## Key Learning Points:

- *Significant investment in staff training is crucial – but it is important to minimise any gap between training and implementation.*
- *Engaging with parents through seeking their help has proved more effective than simply asking them to attend sessions.*
- *Empowerment of staff is key to implementation and embedding.*



## CHANGE STUDY 8

*"At the start I felt that taking this on was a big risk at this school, but actually it's the best risk I've ever taken because of the difference it's made to the school and pupils - their attendance, behaviour - and the difference for staff too."*

**School:** LINCROFT SCHOOL

**Age range:** Middle becoming secondary

**Size:** 842

**Contact:** Cat Johnson, SENCO

**Working with:** Young Minds

### Context of school:

Lincroft converted to academy status in February 2011. Most of its students come from White British backgrounds, with others coming from Indian and a wide range of other heritages. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action plus or a statement is broadly average. The academy has specially resourced provision for special educational needs and a 28-place unit for students with autistic spectrum condition (ASC).

The academy was rated as outstanding by OFSTED in 2012. Lincroft is part of the Sharnbrook Academy Federation.

### Focus:

The school's initial focus was to launch a well-being initiative for Y5, to train staff in well-being and resilience, and to develop a vulnerability register.

## Strategy:

The first step involved a training day for all staff delivered by Young Minds in September 2015, and this was built on across the year.

Although the initial intention was to develop a vulnerability register with Y5, this was subsequently extended to all year groups beyond because it proved so useful. The register is discussed in pastoral team meetings and updated each week. The register also proved a key step in enabling wider school change.

The decision was then taken to employ a well-being officer for two days a week, reporting to the SENCO, in order to help implement a tiered approach to support and intervention based on the register. Stage 1 is handled initially by the form tutor and attendance officer, and may then develop to involve the parent and the head of year. All heads of year have been EHA trained. Stage 2 puts in place mentor support. At Stage 3 the well-being officer is involved in 1-1 sessions with the pupil, and it only moves to the safeguarding officer at Stage 4.

In addition, a break-time Snack and Chat Club for vulnerable students, which is sponsored by TESCO, provides a supply of both toast and support. A member of the student council volunteered to continue to go to the club to gather the views of students there about what they wanted from school. As a result a number of small changes have been put in place, including more availability of fruit and changes to non-uniform day arrangements.

The academy obtained a £10,000 Lottery grant to buy into the Zumos website (<https://www.insight4life.co.uk/schools.aspx>). This provides pupils with expert written, peer reviewed, motivational support, vocal recordings, anonymously accessed by pupils, with further support information in the form of web links, helplines, suggested reading, books and videos, all of which have been passed through a due diligence procedure.

Schools are able to see anonymised, statistical information on what pupils are accessing, and all information is fully controlled by the school. Each week Lincroft reviews the trends and decides on follow-up input through

tutor time and assemblies. For example, in one week, 300 hits on the site from pupils showed trending questions relating to 'how do I know if I am gay?', 'why do I get jealous?' 'how can I be less aggressive?'. These topics were then followed up the following week.

In October 2015, well-being was introduced into the Y5 PSHE curriculum, using the Pacesetters programme (<http://www.gogivers.org>). This consisted of 10 sessions, with a pre- and post- questionnaire used to measure impact. 75% of pupils indicated a positive gain in terms of their well-being:

*"It has made me like myself and be more happy" (girl).*

*"I am better at interacting with people now" (boy).*

*"It helped me through tough times" (girl).*

*"It helped me find out my imperfections are OK" (boy).*

*"It helped me in things I've never really thought about" (girl).*

*"It has helped calm me down" (boy).*

A Y5 parent evening introduced parents to the programme and to the appropriate language behind it, and parents showed themselves very enthusiastic about the programme with comments such as:

*"I am so pleased this kind of thing is being addressed".*

*"My daughter loves this lesson and it really helped her".*

*"I would like to do something like this myself".*

The academy also decided to host the Triple P programme for parents run by the local authority. This however runs in daytime and many parents of vulnerable children were unable to attend, so the school Mentor was trained and now personally invites specific parents to a special evening course for them.

The newly appointed Head has been fully supportive of well-being and has been innovative in addressing this in the Y4 intake evening where he specifically spoke about the school's approach to well-being. This was highly

appreciated by parents and helped to open up a much more accessible relationship with the school for many of them.

It was a tangible demonstration of an emerging culture shift from 'an outcome-focused school driven mainly by results to one with more regard for understanding the needs of all children, including the most vulnerable'. The next step in this has been to review and change the school behaviour policy to include a well-being edge. This will be launched in the autumn term 2017.

### Challenges encountered:

- *Changing staff mindset with regard to understanding behaviour and the need for developing suitably personalised responses to young people's needs.*
- *Tackling staff well-being.*

### Impact:

- *Safeguarding team caseload reduced from 78 to 17 in Y5, resulting in more purposeful use of safeguarding staff time.*
- *Disruptive behaviour incidents reduced from 80 to 35, with incidents of verbal abuse from 36 to 6 over the year.*

### Next steps:

The school is planning for a full continuation of all the work started, including continuing the role of the well-being officer. It will also provide a range of further training for all staff, including attachment theory as well as positive mindset training for staff, including language for example of school reports. This will coincide with the launch of the new behaviour policy. With the move to become a full secondary school it has hoped that the well-being support arrangements can also operate five days a week.

Remaining challenges include how best to work on increasing parental engagement, the increasing workload pressures on key staff, because although the number of cases has been reduced the degree of seriousness



of those that remain is increasing, and timely access to appropriate external support for children with mental health problems.

### Key Learning Points:

- *The importance of ongoing staff training and professional development - every training day includes some drip-feed relating to well-being.*
- *Create ripple effects through a range of different approaches, and look for ways to make connections across.*
- *A flexible and responsive approach to response and intervention is key.*
- *The critical role of headteacher leadership in offering both support and trust.*

## CHANGE STUDY 9



**School:** BEDFORD ACADEMY

**Age range:** 11-18

**Size:** 1206

**Contact:** Scott McGregor, Vice Principal; Rachel Hodgkins, Well-being Assistant

**Working with:** Schools of Tomorrow

## Context of school:

The academy was established to replace the former John Bunyan upper school and in 2013 moved into brand new premises. It has been transitioning since into the two-tier system and in September 2014 took in three new groups Y7-9 totalling 650 students. It operates a vertical tutoring system of learning villages, except in Y7. OFSTED inspection in 2015 found the school to be good with outstanding leadership.

The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is significantly greater than the national average. Around 60% of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest of these is Bangladeshi. Just over one third of pupils speak English as an additional language.

The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is lower than the national average.

An Access Centre serves as a holistic area for student support. A team of four staff have roles connected with well-being. Their roles encompass looked after children, child protection, medical and health issues, early help assessment, and liaison with external agencies. The school also has a family support team and a careers and aspiration team.

## Focus:

The academy has a strong focus on safeguarding but wanted to expand its approach by moving from reactive to proactive approaches, with more emphasis on preventing problems and giving student tools they can use to solve problems themselves.

## Strategy:

After lengthy consideration it decided to work with Y7 students as a small focus group to look at how pupils felt about the transition from primary to secondary school and the effect on their well-being. The hope is this group will go on to become ambassadors in their tutor groups with other students to help them focus on resilience and well-being as they move into Y8.

Pastoral leaders identified the students on the basis that they would be capable of taking part and would benefit from discussion about well-being

in a safe environment. They were drawn from a range of feeder primary schools and with different levels of individual need.

A core group of 10 students were identified and met with the Well-being Assistant for seven weeks for twenty minutes during tutor time. She began by using the Leuven scales to assess their well-being and involvement and moved on to discussing the meaning of well-being to help them build a vocabulary. Activities also covered the importance of exercise, relaxation techniques, safe places, and their role in the community and family. Students also provided encouraging feedback on their feelings with regard to primary-secondary transition.

Although an attempt was made to explore issues of staff well-being through an email bulletin, this drew only a limited response. A well-being handbook has been produced for staff. Although this focuses on factual information about academy policies and procedures, information is included to help staff in supporting the well-being of their students, and some of the content has been influenced as a result of the work undertaken.

### Challenges encountered:

- *Aims were drawn very broadly at the outset. The size of the school made finding a manageable focus difficult within existing resources.*
- *Lack of other secondary school involvement to share perspectives on development.*
- *Staff awareness of the initiative was quite limited and its profile low.*

### Impact:

The scale of the project carried out in relation to the size of the school means that it will inevitably be very specific in its immediate impact.

The small group of students who took part indicated a positive response through a survey, with all wanting to continue in the group, and two-thirds feeling it had developed their personal sense of well-being and understanding of well-being.

The project work has also served to act as a stimulus to discussion and development points in team meetings. The academy is also undertaking ongoing work in relation to staff training, especially this year around understanding in creative ways the context of the school and its pupils.

### Next steps:

Well-being will continue to be a strong focus for the academy. The original aspiration to build from its existing strong reactive support to also develop more proactive work on well-being remains. The academy recognises that if the work started this year is to move forward in terms of wider well-being, this needs to be on a more strategic footing. Staff will look at whether and how it could be possible to incorporate some content and approaches into Y7 tutor time and assemblies in the future.

It is also looking at the feasibility of some sort of marketplace activity to help raise staff awareness.

### Key Learning Points:

- *Link work into whole school priorities from the outset.*
- *Get all staff involved early on.*





## 2 LESSONS FOR LEADERSHIP



*"A focus on well-being has to be part of a central vision for the school, and at the heart of what you do, for it to be as effective as it has been for us."*

*Case study headteacher*

For many, but not all, of the schools in these case studies, their involvement in the initiative has led to significant changes in thinking, policy and practice. At the heart of these changes lies a re-focusing on the centrality of each child and understanding their specific needs and barriers to learning, then addressing those directly and personally at the earliest possible opportunity.

Common key features of the resulting changes are:

- *A focus on earlier identification of response to difficulties experienced by children within the school and outside.*

- *The encouragement of more personalised responses which match intervention to the child rather than the other way round.*
- *Taking time to get know pupils as individuals and responding to their interests and concerns.*

The impact of such changes may be seen in:

- *Reduction in crisis intervention leading to more productive use of staff time both teaching and non-teaching.*
- *Reduction in behaviour incidents in terms of frequency and severity.*
- *Increased confidence and awareness among children.*
- *More effective learning by pupils.*
- *Tentative initial evidence of possible impact on achievement in early years.*
- *Improvements in staff levels of well-being with consequent reductions in staff absence and turnover.*
- *Supportive responses from parents.*

It should be stressed it is not possible to assign direct causality here, but it is worth noting that several schools report similar things happening.

There is also no single 'right' approach. Context is important and makes a difference. It is for each school to work what approach is right for them at a particular time, whilst being very clear about their overall direction of travel.

Where school leaders reported the most significant impact, key contributory factors appeared to be:

- ***The direct involvement of the headteacher***

That does not mean undertaking the work directly. It does mean ensuring the calibre of staff leadership for the work and ensuring those people have suitable status, permission, and support within the school and wider community. It also means on occasions providing a visible public face in relation to the importance of well-being for both parents and staff to ensure their awareness and commitment.

- ***A tight-loose leadership balance which combines empowerment and agency with a clear values, shared purpose and joint accountability***

Enabling leadership of this sort encourages empowerment and agency among staff to make the right decisions at the right time, but does so within a clear framework of shared values, common purpose and joint accountability.

Fullan (2016) notes:

*“Top-down change doesn’t work because it fails to garner ownership, commitment, or even clarity about the nature of the reform. Bottom-up change, so-called ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’, does not produce success on any scale. A thousand flowers do not bloom and those that do are not perennial.” (p. 24).*

The implication of this, and the evidence of the case study schools, suggests that a balance between loose and tight provides an optimum leadership style. That does not mean there is a single ‘right’ balance. It may shift according to context and time. Getting that balance and timing right is the role of leadership, and a significant factor in success within case study schools.

- ***A clear commitment to a whole-school approach***

The Bedford well-being initiative was not conceived as a project, a one-off piece with a clear beginning and end. Nor has it been seen as such by the case study schools. Although many began with a focus around a specific piece of work, the intention, and in most cases the effect, was to see this an entry-point for bringing about wider cultural change. Ripples begin to spread which influence the whole school and the way it goes about its work.

School leadership has helped to foster this by establishing clear priorities, and spotting moments and opportunities to make connections and to develop a consistent approach for all pupils and their families.

- ***The multiplier effect of a range of small steps taken with a common purpose***

The notion that big change may happen incrementally through many small steps, each of which seems relatively insignificant and not taking an undue amount of effort, was helpful to several schools. If this approach is adopted,

the implication for leadership lies in having clarity of purpose around those steps and their direction of travel, as well as in sensing the moment to draw them together to raise awareness of the whole picture based on an established record of success.

- ***Significant investment in training for all staff at all levels***

The investment made in training for all staff on an ongoing basis across the period of the initiative so far has been a significant factor in bringing about successful change. This training has most often and usefully been on-site, using over time a mix of external and internal input, and has been continually reinforced and refreshed.

The communities of practice which met periodically under each of the project strands also played a valued part in ensuring the dissemination of learning and experience. There is a strong wish expressed for these to continue in some form, though there may also be value in securing closer integration now across the three strands.

- ***Attention to visible promotion of staff well-being***

Although the focus and often the starting point for schools was the well-being of pupils, it quickly became clear to many of the school leaders that this was inextricably entwined with the well-being of all the adults with whom pupils interacted on a day-to-day basis. Adults who did not feel good about themselves and their work were unlikely to be wholly effective in encouraging a sense of well-being among the children for whom they had a responsibility. These leaders therefore sought to create a virtuous circle whereby happier staff supported happier children leading to better learning which in turn resulted in happier staff.

- ***The crucial role played by family workers***

Several case study schools employed their own family worker. All independently suggested this role was absolutely critical for them in developing their work and gaining trust and confidence across the parent body. They suggest their investment in this work at a time of highly stretched resources is repaid many times over.



# 3

## BUILDING AHEAD

### THE REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS



A number of issues emerge from the experience of these schools which may help to point the way forward for those who find the evidence from this report suggestive of the potential for change which, through a greater concern for well-being, contributes to better learning and to raising achievement for all.

#### For schools

There is much for other school leaders to reflect on in the experience and evidence of the schools involved in the initiative. Impactful change is clearly possible even within the constraints of funding, national policy and the local reorganisation affecting all Bedford schools. Moreover, investment in such work has potential to pay real dividends for both pupils and staff.

Secondary schools played a relatively small part in the initiative, but there is some emergent evidence that there may also be significant benefits for them in applying some of the lessons learned from programme schools within their own context and contributing to building a continuity of approach from age 3 (or earlier) to 19.

A key part of the change occurring lies in the re-shaping of priorities in terms of increased focus on understanding and responding to individual needs.

Grasping the significance and limitations of data is a vital component in this. It is for school leaders and governors, as well as those who advise and support them, to demonstrate confidence that an over-focus on crude testing and test outcomes, almost inevitably leading to teaching to the test, is ultimately counter-productive in raising achievement. Philip Woods writes recently of the shift towards managerialism in schools which in his view has led to:

*' a system which treasures simple measures of productivity, such as examination results ... accompanied by a belief that analysis of this data will lead to clear trajectories for improvement. When inspections occur, it is these same 'numeric landscapes' which are mined for evidence of quality, as if they tell the complete story of the organisation. These managerialist approaches contain fundamental assumptions which are highly reductive in nature. They assume that simplified sets of numeric data reflect accurately the 'complex organisations' to which they relate, and further, that if only we can use this data properly and accurately that we can foster 'best practices'. Thus we have educationalists who describe their organisations as 'complex', whilst leading them as 'reductive' entities.'*

Data has an important part to play - it helps to ask good questions and check the balance of competing objectives. The most effective leadership recognises this and helps others to see and use data in such a way. There may be some emergent evidence from programme schools of a false dichotomy between a concern for securing high standards and a concern for individual well-being, with a number of case study headteachers of good

and outstanding schools arguing that securing high levels of well-being for all is a necessary pre-cursor to their securing highest levels of academic achievement.

### **For Peter Pan Teaching School Alliance**

The investment in training for all staff at all levels made by many of the schools was significant and clearly seen by them as a critical factor in their success. As budgets tighten there is a need to find cost-effective ways to help both existing schools and those who want to start on this work to continue to have access to high quality training opportunities.

An extension of this lies in the role of communities of practice across all the strands of the initiative, and school leaders repeatedly point out the value they have gained from these and their wish for them to continue in some way.

Peter Pan TSA can potentially play a key role in developing a coordinated and cost-effective response to both these needs, as well as in enabling the cross-fertilisation of thinking and ideas between schools.

### **For Bedford Local Authority and its partners**

There is evidence in some programme schools of them making better and more focused use of specialist services through earlier preventative intervention in school. If this is to be fully effective, it will be important for specialist services to take steps to facilitate prompt access when called on, as, once that point is reached, a critical urgency has arisen.

Further steps to increase understanding between health and education professionals may be highly relevant in this context, as well as looking for opportunities to draw on and use the skills and capacity developed within schools through the initiative.

Finally, it will be desirable to find ways to continue to monitor and evaluate the longer-term effects and impact of the changes schools have made as a result of the initiative in terms of a broad range of outcomes.



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# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A number of case study schools have offered to make available examples of resources they developed in the course of their work. These are not offered in any way as exemplars, but in a spirit of collaborative improvement as a stimulus for others to thinking and development. Please contact the schools directly if you want to know more.

1. *Individual Provision Plan - Goldington Green Academy*
2. *Group tracking sheet - Goldington Green Academy*
3. *Parent leaflet explaining well-being – Livingstone Primary School*
4. *Well-being Officer job description – Lincroft School*
5. *Parent workshop letter – Elstow Primary School*
6. *Well-being week programme – Elstow Primary School*











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