



Governor Mental Health and Wellbeing Review

September 2021

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Introduction and purpose of review

Mental health and wellbeing can affect all aspects of a child's life and it is important for all schools to have effective support in place. This is particularly important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic which has had an unprecedented impact on schools and the lives of those who work in and attend as pupils.

In November 2020, the governing board at Red Gates School identified the topic of mental health and wellbeing as a governor development area to enhance strategic oversight and support in this area. As part of this, governors agreed to focus on championing mental health and wellbeing for the whole school, keeping mental health and wellbeing uppermost on its agenda, so that the mental health and wellbeing of children, staff, families, and governors are appropriately supporting. Furthermore, governors committed to undertake a review to assess the systems and processes in place at school for identifying possible mental health problems, and the routes and referral processes.

The review was initiated at the time new guidance in [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) (2020) was issued. A subsequent update was issued in July 2021. Both these updates aimed to raise the profile of mental health and encourage schools to ensure a link between this and safeguarding.

Government guidance and statutory context

The Government [states](#) that “taking a coordinated and evidence-informed approach to mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges leads to improved pupil and student emotional health and wellbeing which can help readiness to learn”.

The **whole school approach**, published by Public Health England (PHE), defines the behaviours that go with good mental health and wellbeing practice. The eight principles are informed by evidence and practitioner feedback about what works, and if applied consistently and comprehensively will contribute towards helping protect and promote student emotional health and wellbeing. The document signposts to Ofsted inspection criteria, practice examples and resources to support implementation.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 places a duty on the governing bodies of maintained schools to promote wellbeing. ‘Wellbeing’ is defined (in the Children Act 2004) as relating to:

- physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing
- protection from harm and neglect
- education, training and recreation
- the contribution children make to society
- social and economic wellbeing



Definition of Mental Health and Wellbeing

The following two definitions are often associated with mental health:

1. *“Mental health influences how we think and feel about ourselves and others and how we interpret events. It affects our capacity to learn, to communicate and to form, sustain and end relationships. It also influences our ability to cope with change, transition and life events.” Dr. Lynn Friedl, 2004.*
2. *“A positive state of mind and body, feeling safe and able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities and the wider environment.” Confident communities, Brighter Futures, Dept of Health, March 2010.*

In addition to the Department for Education’s recognition that that mental health influences wellbeing, The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes mental health as an integral and essential component of health more broadly, defining it as: “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

How schools can influence student mental wellbeing

- Providing a supportive culture, ethos and environment that can serve as a buffer to difficult circumstances
- Teaching and learning that helps students to build important life skills, through PSHE strategies
- Supporting the developing and character traits such as self-management, compassion and teamwork
- Partnership with parents/carers and the wider community

Context of Red Gates School – a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities school (SEND)

Promoting mental health and wellbeing is important for all children, but particularly if a child has special educational needs. Children need to develop the skills to understand and express their emotions, and to develop strategies for coping with the ups and downs of life. Red Gates School is a special community school for boys and girls with severe learning difficulties and autism. There are around 164 pupils at Red Gates School.

Approach

- In November 2020 three governors were appointed to a working group. These governors were Barbara Alcaraz, Gillian McPartlin and Sarah Erridge.
- In May 2021, the working group met virtually with the headteacher and behavioural lead to conduct a **discovery session**. This provided the governors with an opportunity to gather outstanding information around the provision of mental health and wellbeing support at Red Gates School. At the same time, this was an opportunity for the school's leadership team to furnish the working group with the insight required to conduct the report.
- A further aspect of the discovery process was **listening sessions**, which took place in June 2021. All staff members were invited to participate in the session and an opportunity was provided for staff members to submit further feedback by email if they were 1) unable to attend, or 2) did not feel comfortable speaking up in the session.

Overview of Mental Health and Wellbeing provision at Red Gates School

1. Leadership and management that supports and champions efforts to promote emotional health and wellbeing

- The school leadership team are committed to taking a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing and have assigned leadership responsibility to reflect this:
 - **Lorraine Slee** – Headteacher (Mental Health & Wellbeing lead for staff)
 - **Holly Durrant** – Behaviour Lead (Mental Health & Wellbeing lead for pupils)
 - **Karen Williams** – Designated Safeguarding Lead
- In addition, an extended safeguarding team is in place to support wellbeing at Red Gates School. This team spans across the whole school with designated strategic, pathway, operational safeguarding leaders in place. Please see 'safeguarding team roles poster' for details of this team and their areas of responsibility.
- The headteacher champions and encourages staff to look after their mental health and wellbeing, focussing on relevant topics as appropriate (e.g. Covid-19). Training and support resources are shared via regular all-staff emails. Examples of resources that have been shared during the period of this review are:
 - A stress awareness training resource from The National College.
 - A local government poster outlining emotional wellbeing and mental health support available to staff.
- Feedback provided in the listening session with teaching staff highlighted effective communication practices between leadership and teaching staff. The teaching staff group reported strong teamwork amongst peers and with leadership. This is supported by 2021 annual staff survey data which found that 95% of staff members responded yes to the question 'do you get on well with your managers?' and 96.88% 'get on well with their colleagues'. During the session, Melissa Hendry was recognised as an excellent support for the group.
- During the listening session with non-teaching staff, a proportion of the group identified communication as an area for development, citing that a number of non-teaching staff members felt disconnected from leadership on a number of instances of processes. These concerns have been shared with senior management and governing leadership.

2. An ethos and environment that promotes respect and values diversity

- The **school's mission statement** applies across the whole school and promotes positive emotional health and wellbeing at the centre of the school's culture:
 - *"Together we recognise and embrace individuality and nurture learning within a safe and empowering environment so that all can thrive and feel a sense of achievement, belonging and acceptance."*
- This mission statement has been deployed across the school, on signage, materials such as letter templates and within its wellbeing policy to effectively embed the values of the school.
- Within the 2021 annual staff survey, 'diversity', 'inclusivity' and 'teamwork' were highlighted in a number of responses to the question 'what are the school's greatest strengths?'
- The school celebrates diversity and inclusion, with cultural events embedded into the curriculum and school activities.

- The headteacher has begun work to develop a Diversity and Inclusion policy that formalises the school's commitment to equality and valuing diversity, and actively supports practices that promote equality. The headteacher is part of a Local Authority run Diversity Working Group.

3. Curriculum teaching and learning to promote resilience and support social and emotional learning

- The school creates opportunities to develop and monitor pupils' reactions and concerns through targeted learning and development activities such as Chatter Box (formerly known as 'Talking Mats') and 'Wiget Go!' which promotes interaction across all social settings including family environments.
- The school has been proactive and innovative to build activities into the appropriate curriculum areas to further develop social and emotional learning.
- For example, Red Gates began the process of creating a Forest School to help nurture emotional development.
- Additionally, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the school was pro-active in utilising community partnerships to develop a pupil's social development in everyday environments. This is now being resumed: a school Governor has kindly offered his team from a local school to support with building suitable outdoor activity area.
- The school seeks to support pupils at key moments in their time at Red Gates. For example, learning skills for coping with transition periods such as arriving at the school or at the end of their time at Red Gates.

4. Enabling student voice to influence decisions

- Involving students in decisions that impact them can benefit their emotional health and wellbeing by helping them to feel part of the school and wider community and to have some control over their lives.
- The Red Gates School Council aims to give children a voice about things happening in school, to make meaningful choices that affect their daily lives, and allow them to have ownership over their learning and the school environment.
- Red Gates School Council consists of eight pupils selected from across our school. Prior to the pandemic they met at least once each half term to share their ideas about current and relevant events within our school. The school's senior leaders include their views in their planning and then feedback to the council.

5. Staff development to support their own wellbeing and that of students

- The school has trained a number of staff to identify and support mental health and wellbeing issues amongst its staff. This team is known as the 'Listening Team'. During the listening sessions, the Listening Team was noted as particularly valuable.
- This group also remarked on the value of the Inner Armour training sessions, and the group stated they would appreciate further training like this. In response to this, during the 2021/2022 year there are plans to run Adult Lego Therapy Group training sessions that will be available for all staff.
- A notice board in the staff room is dedicated to supporting staff's mental health and wellbeing. Here resources are displayed to signpost staff to contact the designated staff member to assist or

external resources. During the listening session with teaching staff, the group were familiar and aware of the content on the wellbeing notice board in the staff room.

- Staff has access to resources provided by the council to support their mental health.
- The Headteacher is attending government provided mental health training.
- To support staff wellbeing, where possible and applicable to their role. staff are able to work from home. For example, teachers are encouraged to complete (Planning Preparation and Assessment (PPA) work off site (1/2 day a week).

6. Identifying need and monitoring impact of interventions

- The school conducts an annual staff survey providing an opportunity for staff to reflect and feedback on topics relating to their experience at Red Gates School. This including topics that pertaining to mental health and wellbeing.
- For students, the school has established a Student Council and uses Chatter Box (previously known as Talking Mats) to identify any difficulties relating to the child's mental health and wellbeing. Note that during lockdown the Student Council initiative was placed on hold.
- Teaching staff work closely with parents/carers to ensure that the pupil's wellbeing needs are understood and responded to accordingly. This has been particularly important over the pandemic and staff members were focused on connecting with parents and carers regularly whilst the school was closed.
- Feedback during the teaching staff listening session identified an opportunity to talk more about mental health and wellbeing during pathway meetings. This opportunity was identified and vocalised by the teaching staff who made a suggestion to reduce the time of the School Improvement Meetings on occasion to conduct further training for mental health and wellbeing.
- Governors get feedback at governing board meetings about what is working well and not working well. They also visit the school for specific occasions, e.g. Christmas Concert.

7. Working with parents/carers

- The school aims to build a strong partnership with pupils' parent and carers in advance of starting school. Prospective parent/carers are invited to visit the school and meet the teaching staff. Each child is also assessed by the school nurse to build a health and wellbeing profile, and alongside this, school therapists liaise with other therapists currently working with the child to ensure parent/carers are familiar with all professionals involved.
- Teaching staff carry out home visits and parents and carers are invited into classrooms when children start school to make sure information is shared and there is a joined-up approach to helping develop their emotional and social skills.
- The teaching and support staff are regularly in contact with parents and carers throughout their time at the school. Staff can offer advice, support and updates on their children's progress and discuss any concerns. Training is also provided to parents/carers on therapies offered in school so this can also be completed at home.
- When children are unable to attend school, staff make regular check in calls to support and offer advice to parent/carers. Materials are available online to support remote learning and help parent/carers carry out activities with their children at home.
- For pupils leaving Red Gates, there is a transition process, involving their existing teaching staff, therapists, nurses and the new school. This ensures information on their mental health and wellbeing is shared and their individual support plans can continue beyond their time at Red Gates.

- Prior to lockdown governors met with parents/carers at parent/carers evenings and also carry out listening groups with this audience. Governors are regularly updated at Governing Board meetings on how staff are liaising with parent/carers and any concerns. Previously, chill and chat sessions provided another opportunity for governors to come in at meet parent/carers. Led by family liaison officer
- Family works shop prior to COVID-19 and will be picked up 2021/22 year. Additionally, sibling afternoons have previous taken place. Parents/carers come in every term. Are invited to meet occupational therapist and speech therapists etc.

8. Targeted support and appropriate referral

- During both listening sessions, there was consensus across teaching and non-teaching staff the mental health and wellbeing of children is a high priority at Red Gates.
- A significant number of the staff at the listening session felt confident in how to report mental health and wellbeing concerns to leadership. They also had confidence that any such concerns would be addressed promptly and taken seriously.
- Established safeguarding practices are in place with designated safeguarding lead and governing board oversight is provided by the designated safeguarding governor. Together they work to ensure appropriate staffing and resources to monitor assess and act where targeted support and referral is required. This is through the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) system.

Recommendations

- Review and update the school's Wellbeing Policy to integrate mental health into the document. Consider re-naming this policy the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy.
- The headteacher to continue practices that champion mental health and wellbeing across the school and increase visibility across all staff groups.
- Governors should continue to embed mental health and wellbeing as a key strategic theme of governance, particularly in the Curriculum, Standards and Community committee. Additionally, governors should support and monitor the senior leadership teams' efforts to improve communications and staff engagement at Red Gates.
- Governors should look to continue the practice of staff listening sessions and pick up engagement with parents/carers to monitor this aspect, which has not been possible during the pandemic.
- Continue School Council initiative as soon as safe and logistically practical to do so.
- The school should continue to make key materials, information and resources available online. Focussing on supporting parents and carers by updating resources available, regular contacts and signposting to specialist links online.
- Publish this report on the school's website to provide an opportunity for all school stakeholders to review the assessment and recommendations on this important topic.

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