

Wiltshire Healthy Schools

Case study focus: Building resilience

Core theme: Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Woodford Valley CE Primary Academy



School context

The school is a smaller than average primary school. Almost half the pupils come from a wide area beyond the three small communities in the Woodford Valley. Almost all the pupils are White British and speak English as their first language. Apart from the pupils in the Valley Centre, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs, there are relatively few pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Why choose this project?

The school has had to deal with the impact of parental bereavement, within the school community, and recognised that a whole school approach to life changing events was essential to support staff, pupils and parents through difficult times. The most recent Health Related Behaviour Survey showed that family problems were a concern for pupils, particularly among Year 6 where 30% said that family problems were a significant concern.

What did the school want to achieve?

- To increase the number of pupils who are able to describe strategies that help them to cope with difficult life changing events
- To increase the number of teachers and teaching assistants that feel prepared and equipped to support pupils who experience difficult and sometimes harrowing circumstances

What did the school do to achieve these aims?

The Healthy Schools work was included in the Whole School Improvement Plan. There was a whole school focus on the development of pupil voice and oral language skills across the curriculum with specifically planned opportunities in Literacy, PSHE Education, RE and Philosophy for Children. This focus included use of partner talk, group work specific roles (e.g. scribe), hot seating, drama, digital cameras, easi-speak microphones, flip share cameras etc.

The following universal activities were already part of school life, although teachers specifically planned to maximise these existing opportunities to further promote emotional literacy skills and resilience:

- Use of the 'Learn 4 Life' Wiltshire PSHE Education scheme of work
- Use of Wiltshire's 'Learn 4 Life' teacher assessment tools and pupil questionnaires
- Getting On and Falling Out conflict resolution

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- Team building activities including: orienteering, trips to outdoor activity centres, house groups, clubs and fund raising
- Opportunities for leadership and responsibility including: school council, class job rotas, school bank, sports captains, prayer team.
- Discussion forums including: Merlin, Circle Time, school council, Life Education Centre, pupil questionnaires, pupil presentations, school newspaper
- Anti-bullying week
- Opportunities to talk to visitors including: the Vicar, community police officer, School Council Network

All teaching staff received P4C Philosophy for Children training.

Bereaved pupils were provided with access to a school counsellor. All staff were made aware of pupils' needs through a staff meeting led by a counsellor. Class teachers regularly reviewed and assessed the emotional needs of pupils and organised access to counselling where appropriate, after consultation with the Headteacher, SENCO and parents. There was close communication between the school and surviving parents. Bereaved children received additional support to help rebuild their emotional resilience.

Measuring success

Following the implementation of the plan most pupils were able to describe strategies to help them manage challenging life changing events; there has been an emphasis on sharing feelings and talking to people that you trust. Staff confidence has grown through work with counsellors and support from agencies including CRUSE. Pupils' communication, dialogue, expression and associated emotional literacy skills have been strengthened. The school community feels better able to cope with and respond to life changing events. The bereaved pupils, who received specialist support, are thriving and have been able to enjoy a class residential trip.

Lessons learned

The Philosophy for Schools programme has been very successful. The impact on the emotional, social and spiritual development of the pupils was evidenced in a recent SIAMS inspection and has enhanced provision for language, literacy and communication skills across the curriculum. The role of the school counsellor was invaluable, not only in supporting recently bereaved pupils, but also in providing emotional support for staff and other children affected by change such as divorce and separation.