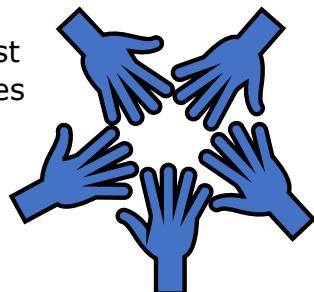




School's Voice

Southwater Junior Academy on the Wellbeing Award for Schools

The [Wellbeing Award for Schools](#), developed in partnership with the National Children's Bureau (NCB), promotes emotional wellbeing and mental health across schools with a particular focus on changing the long-term culture. The award is built on a robust framework of eight objectives which epitomise best practice for pupils, staff and parents/carers. Each of these objectives contain a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), against which schools provide evidence of their achievements. To achieve the award, schools go through a process of self-evaluation, action planning, portfolio building and finally verification to show they have achieved the necessary standards.



Southwater Junior Academy in Horsham has recently completed their Wellbeing Award journey and received their well-deserved certification. In celebration of this achievement, Rebecca Toogood (Headteacher), Amy Rumble (SENCo and Inclusion Manager), Tina Maxey (Family Link Worker) and Lian Toms (Business and Finance Manager) share their personal experience of the award and reflect on wellbeing practices in their setting.

Can you start by telling us about the award process from your own perspective?

Tina: Right from the start, the programme had a proper community feel. We established that the eight objectives were more like domains; you would start to unpick one and discover large work projects which required involvement from a wide range of stakeholders, including our academy ELSA, pupil council and our Kindness Ambassadors.

Rebecca: There were very clear parameters for the award, such as having a wellbeing change team. We operated on an ongoing opt-in system, so staff could get involved whenever they felt the action spoke to their expertise or interests. This enabled everyone (parents/carers, teachers, LSAs, senior leaders) to be represented in some way throughout the two-year process. We saw this opt-in model as an extension of the academy's pre-existing open-door policy.

Amy: When we started our journey two years ago, it was with the intention of celebrating what was already in place for pupils and pushing further into support for staff wellbeing. However, as we began to unpick the eight objectives, it became clear that they all overlapped and were interlinked. We also quickly realised that parent wellbeing played a huge part in both pupil and staff wellbeing, and this needed to be a focus area.

Can you describe how you adapted your practice to support parent wellbeing?

Amy: Tina has been leading on parenting workshops across West Horsham, maximising her local knowledge and contacts. These workshops take place three times a year.

Tina: I am also insured to go into homes as a result of my experience in front-line social care. This gives us a unique opportunity to work with parents, carers, and children in their own environment. For example, I go into homes to discuss parents' mental health



conditions with children in language they can understand, in a space where they can safely receive this information.

In addition, I work with other schools in the network to support transitions. Often CPOMs entries record children not understanding their parents' mental health situations. To combat this, we attempt to equip our children with access to language about mental health and strategies for emotional regulation strategies to help facilitate greater understanding.

Can you outline the theories, principles and strategies that underline your wellbeing practices for pupils?

Tina: We use solution-focussed scaling. For example, we print out big numbers, laminate them, and stick them on the wall. Our children then use these numbers to describe how they are feeling (0 being very bad and 5 being excellent) and what needs to happen to move up the scale. The numbers can then also be used at the end of sessions to gauge whether children have moved up or down based on this discussion. As a result of the award process, we now use solution-focussed scaling more widely across the school, both on a class and individual basis; it is also used in conversations between staff about children.

Amy: We also do a lot of work with books and emotions, relating the content back to our pupils' own lives. This work is then enhanced by our PSHE curriculum which champions discussion without stigma and celebrates difference. Moreover, we run social communication groups, Lego play groups and early morning sensory groups.

Put simply, our focus is on helping individuals self-regulate and choose the tools that work for them. We are really proud of this ethos across the school. I would also like to note that this collective outlook is not the result of the award process; instead it is a part of our culture which the award has helped us celebrate and extend!

How have you developed staff wellbeing at Southwater Junior Academy as part of the award process?

Lian: Despite having an excellent pre-existing culture of staff wellbeing and open-door policy, we acknowledged that sometimes staff don't want to talk. With this in mind, we wanted to develop a support platform for staff to access in their own time. To meet this objective, we developed a staff wellbeing platform hosting a range of resources, including a guide of who staff can go to for support, CPD opportunities, webinars, apps to download, wellbeing reading, mental health and support services through our insurance providers, exercises and a weekly positive affirmation. In addition to the webpage, we allocate wellbeing time throughout the year for staff which can be taken during term time for restorative time and space away from the role.

Rebecca: We also strive to make the staff room a safe haven. We recently added a coffee machine and empty photo frames for staff to add their own photos from social events. It is important that they have a space which they own. Moreover, at our Friday morning staff meetings, we always show our gratitude for our staff by starting with





thank you's to everyone who has contributed positively to how the school is run.

Here at Southwater, I believe that we have a unique culture of support, that pre-dates my headship. The school is permeated by an overriding feeling that everyone cares for each other and an attitude that no question is too silly. The Wellbeing Award for Schools is a true celebration and fantastic extension of this excellent staff culture.

What key pieces of advice would you share with schools wanting to achieve the Wellbeing Award for Schools?

Amy: You have to be confident that you can embed the principles into everything you do; you cannot approach the award as a tick box exercise. It requires whole school buy-in and commitment.

Rebecca: The Wellbeing Award is huge, so approach it one step at a time! If you try and do everything all at once, you will likely do it in a tokenistic and gimmicky way. Especially for staff. Lots of wellbeing initiatives fall into this category, having only momentary impact. To be successful with the award and for your whole school community, you need to really consider lasting ways to improve the experiences of staff, parents, carers and children.