



School Example:

# Hele's School, Plymouth

## Focus: Emotional health and well-being

### School context

Hele's School is located in a suburban area of Plymouth and takes a range of students from varying backgrounds. The school is quite mixed in its demographics and is made up both from some fairly affluent families as well as children and young people from more deprived areas.

### Health issues

We wanted to address issues around mental health, particularly amongst boys, and were primarily interested in learning more about the mental health and emotional literacy of boys making the transition from primary in Year 6 to secondary education in Year 7.

Anecdotal evidence had suggested that the transition could be quite difficult for some of them, and we wanted to tailor a targeted intervention that would identify boys (and girls) who would benefit from extra support to help address the emotional challenges they experience. The intervention was not necessarily aimed just at boys who had emotional and behavioural issues, although this was one factor, but it was also offered to any student who was feeling this pressure.

### Partnerships & activities

By partnering with the Humans Givens Institute at Mind Fields College, a charity organisation which deals specifically in mental health, we established an emotional needs audit which was adapted to relate to 180 Year 6 students. From here, we identified 20 boys who we wanted to work with. The audit was completed by both male and female students which allowed us the chance to compare the needs of both, and this formed our baseline from which to plan the right interventions and measure our impact against.

They commented that "having their own space" was important, as was having a positive male role model. From the young people's answers, we also identified that they needed education around anger management and so we worked with a number of external partners including a theatre and drama group, which worked with Year 6 students for a day on a production about emotional journeys. The production was interactive and the young people had to make up their own stories about change, using the characters in the play.

Another partnership with a local football club saw us holding an evening with players at the school, where they not only spoke to children and young people about dealing with emotional challenges, but also to dads and carers.



The players also focused on how food can influence mood, motivation and emotional resilience. At the end of the evening, participants were also given football tickets to a home game to encourage fathers and sons to spend more time together.

### Measuring success

When dealing with issues around mental health it can be a challenge to measure success, but we achieved a number of milestones which indicated that we were on the right track. Gaining support from local primary schools was one milestone. Sometimes for primary schools, it can feel like the secondary school is taking charge when getting involved in joint initiatives such as this, but in this case, we worked closely with primary schools to help them identify the need for such an initiative and to ensure they were fully on board.

We also measured our impact by comparing the answers given by students in a questionnaire, which participants filled in whilst in Year 7, against their responses in the baseline survey taken when they were in Year 6. Their answers were analysed and presented in a series of pie charts and other graphs. From this data, we were able to clearly show that participants felt safer in the playground and felt they belonged in their friendship group. They also commented that they wouldn't react violently when physically challenged – a marked change from answers given in their original emotional audit.

Anecdotally, some participants also wrote letters back to the theatre company thanking them for the experience, and by reading their comments, it was clear to staff that it had been a huge influence on their level of emotional resilience within a changing environment.

### Lessons learned

Our advice to other schools considering mental health issues is to seek the support of outside organisations who are professionally trained in this field. Mental health is incredibly complex and sensitive, and still remains a taboo subject. The Human Givens Institute was very supportive in establishing and implementing an intervention programme, and it's not something we could have done without their support.

Another step we found to be particularly important was to get parents on board. We found that not using the term mental health was helpful as well, because there is a lot of stigma and negative connotations still attached to the title. Instead we always used the term emotional literacy, which we felt was a more accurate explanation of what we were doing.

### Contact

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