



A Whole School Approach to Resilience, Mental Health, and Emotional Wellbeing

1. Introduction

At Halling Primary School, we strongly believe that now more than ever a whole school approach to Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing is essential in building our children's resilience. The government's paper 'State of the nation 2020: children and young people's wellbeing' highlighted that there was evidence to suggest that during the height of the pandemic children and young people's subjective wellbeing may have decreased in comparison to previous years. The level of uncertainty and social isolation was bound to test their resilience and for some have a significant impact upon their emotional wellbeing and mental health.

As we came out the other side of the pandemic, we could reflect upon what worked well in terms of our mental health provision here at Halling and consider areas in which we needed to develop. Like so many other schools across the country we have seen a significant rise in comparison to previous cohorts of the number of children requiring additional social, emotional and mental health support. In December 2021, the government published a briefing on the continued effects of the pandemic and education recovery in schools. It highlighted the effects of the pandemic on not only the pupils but staff, leaders and families. It was therefore felt essential that we look to introduce and develop an effective 'whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing' at our school.

To effectively achieve this Halling Primary School took up the Department for Education's one time offer of a grant to schools to successfully train one member of staff to become a senior mental health lead. In June 2022 after seven months of studying, myself, Mrs Tyler the schools Pastoral Lead successfully completed the course. This training now equips us as a school to work together to implement a whole school approach.



2. Why implement a whole school approach?

The Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) statutory guidance 2022 outlines that schools have a significant role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their children. Here at Halling Primary School, this is already a top priority. We aim to work together as a school community to reflect upon our current practice to ensure that we provide an inclusive approach that supports and promotes positive mental health for all our children, their families and staff.

Recent research by the Mental Health Foundation shows that mental health problems affect about one to ten children and young people, and that one in five of those children will have a mental health issue by the time they are eleven. They include depression, anxiety and conduct disorder, and are often a direct response to what is happening in their lives. Statistics show that seventy percent of children who experience a mental health problem have not had support at an early age or the opportunity to build and develop upon their resilience. At Halling, we recognise the need to intervene early when mental health and emotional issues begin to emerge. Provision and processes relating to children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties (SEMH) are defined in the SEND code of practice 2015. They define SEMH as:

“Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties, which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children may have disorders such as ADHD or attachment disorder. The requirement specific to this condition is that schools should have clear processes to support children and young people



including how they will manage the effect of any disruptive behaviour, so it does not adversely affect other pupils.”

Research for the 2020 Teacher Wellbeing Index (ONS 2020) took place during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Lockdown when schools and colleges were mainly closed. Those that remained open continued teaching vulnerable children and those of key workers. Findings discovered that:

- ♥ Nearly two-thirds (62%) of education professionals described themselves as stressed
- ♥ Senior leaders experienced the highest levels of stress (77%) and one major factor was long working hours, with 70% of senior leaders working more than 51 hours a week
- ♥ Education professionals displayed much higher levels of depression (32%) than the general population (19%)

They also reported large increases in symptoms such as:

- ♥ difficulty concentrating
- ♥ insomnia
- ♥ tearfulness

These symptoms may become associated with clinically diagnosed mental health conditions, including depression, over time.

There was a large variation in the wellbeing support offered to staff by schools and colleges. 53% of education professionals said they do not receive sufficient guidance about their mental health and wellbeing at work – while this is down from 69% in 2019, it is still far too high. 20% reported they had no mental health support. 42% stated they either did not have, or were unsure if they had, a wellbeing policy. 50% of education professionals felt their schools or colleges supported staff who had mental health problems well.



In light of these figures, at Halling, we feel it was essential that we consider our processes and pastoral systems not only for children and families but for our staff too. By devising our own whole-school approach to mental health, emotional wellbeing and resilience, we aim to holistically assess and develop all our children's emotional resilience and devise clear support systems for staff. The approach will aim to help children flourish, learn, and succeed by providing opportunities to build upon their coping skills and resilience.

3. What is resilience and why is it so important?

Resilience is most frequently described as 'positive development despite adversity' or the 'ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges, strengthened and more resourceful'. The following factors can affect children's emotional wellbeing and resilience:

- ♥ Parental mental illness
- ♥ Physical, sexual, neglect, substance, and emotional abuse
- ♥ Bereavement
- ♥ Family disharmony or breakup
- ♥ Attachment difficulties
- ♥ Inconsistent parenting styles
- ♥ Disability or poor health
- ♥ Pandemics such as the recent Covid-19 virus
- ♥ Socio-economic disadvantage

With such a broad range of factors affecting children's emotional wellbeing, it is inevitable that schools are going to experience children with poor levels of resilience and coping skills. It is therefore essential that as a school community, we all support our children's resilience and emotional development the best way we can and teach them how to cope and learn from failure or difficult events.



Focusing on strengthening protective factors is key to building resilience. The following is what we consider to be protective factors for our children:

- ♥ The presence of at least one unconditionally supportive parent/carer - secure attachments - combined with consistent emotional warmth and responsiveness
- ♥ Harmony between parents/carers
- ♥ Consistent guidance, rules and boundaries
- ♥ Structure and routines at home
- ♥ Parent/carer competence
- ♥ Positive school experiences
- ♥ A sense of self-worth and positive self-esteem
- ♥ Opportunities to participate in hobbies/extracurricular activities
- ♥ Not to be excessively sheltered from challenging situations that provide opportunities to build resilience and develop coping skills/mechanisms
- ♥ Equally, not to be exposed fully to adults' problems and issues

4. What are the purposes of mentally healthy schools?

As we know, mental health is a continuum and all of us are on it somewhere. Where we are on it however depends on our life experiences and our own levels of resilience. The World Health Organisation considers mental health to be:

'a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.'



A mentally healthy school therefore is one that adopts a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing (Heads Together – Mentally Healthy Schools):

"It is a learning environment that allows children to learn, flourish and succeed by providing opportunities for them and the adults around them to develop the strengths and coping skills that underpin resilience."

A mentally healthy school involves the whole-school community working together if it is to be effective. This means teachers, parents/carers, governors and children need to show a commitment and partnership in order for it to work. A whole school approach is about developing a culture and mind-set where everyone feels they are valued that they belong and are respected.

5. What will Halling Primary School's whole school approach and strategy look like?

5.1 Pupil Voice

All children at Halling Primary have an equal voice in the school and steps are taken to ensure that all children, including our most vulnerable, are appropriately represented. Mental health and wellbeing depend on having a sense of self-efficacy and control and children need to feel they have positive influence and a voice. Quite simply, at Halling, 'Every Voice Matters!'

5.2 Staff Awareness, Training and Support

Structures and processes will be put in place to allow staff to reflect upon their own resilience and wellbeing. Training opportunities will be provided as well as wellbeing development opportunities, for example, Jenny Mosley (January 2022). Staff will be invited to offer suggestions of ways of improving the wellbeing of themselves and the children, ensuring that Halling is fully inclusive. This can all be achieved by regular staff training, continual reflection, and staff support networks.



5.3 Structures and Processes

There will be a clear, systematic way of identifying those children who face greater adversity before things go wrong. As a school, we will aim to assess children and families' emotional wellbeing as they start in Reception and we will continue to monitor this throughout their time at Halling, referring to the appropriate universal services and offering support within school, wherever possible. We aim to have a more skilful proactive approach rather than reactive. Supportive school climates include a sense of strong and positive discipline and boundaries, with clear and high expectations. Policies and procedures will be reassessed and strengthened particularly those, which are key to mental health.

5.4 Working in Partnership with Families

Often as Pastoral Lead, I experience families who are struggling to access the appropriate and timely mental health support for their children. With mental health services, being overwhelmed and thresholds being so high it is becoming more and more of a struggle for children to access mental health support early on. We are therefore seeing schools having to cater for a higher level of need meaning that now, more than ever, there is a need for staff to be trained in mental health and for schools to have effective policies and procedures in place.

As part of our whole school approach, Halling will be implementing policy and procedure in our drive to fully support children, their families and staff. At Halling, regular parent/carer workshops and forums will run throughout the year where the community can come together to share their concerns and experiences in relation to their children's mental health.



5.5 School Culture, Ethos and Environment

We aim for the whole school community to become actively involved in the work we do to build children's resilience and for them to have a good understanding of what support is available to them. We will be gaining pupil, staff, and parent/carer voice on their understanding around this.

6. What does a resilient child look like at Halling?

- ♥ A child who can solve friendship problems with the support of an adult or independently
- ♥ A child who can learn from their mistakes
- ♥ A child who can accept constructive criticism
- ♥ A child who can challenge them self
- ♥ A child who can regulate and manage emotions at an age-appropriate level
- ♥ A child who can problem solve
- ♥ A child who can, with support, rationalise their fears and worries
- ♥ A child who can participate in team games whether they win or lose

7. Curriculum Planning, Teaching and Learning

The Senior Mental Health Lead (Pastoral Lead) will liaise with the PSHE Lead and Head teacher to reflect on Halling's current PSHE curriculum and where this can be further developed. The aim is to ensure that all children have a good understanding of what mental health is through assemblies, our nurture provision, displays and workshops. Children will have the opportunity to learn about a range of issues that impact emotional health and will have opportunities to practice emotional literacy, resilience and mindfulness skills during their playtimes and lunchtimes. A comprehensive Anti-Bullying Policy will be developed with all stakeholders and adopted across the whole school community. Halling's children will understand what bullying is and the difference between bullying and falling out with their peers. Children will know what to do if they feel they are being bullied and understand how the pastoral system in school can support them. Parents/carers will be invited into workshops where they can discuss



varying social, emotional and mental health needs of young people and discuss what support is available to them and their children.

8. Leadership and Management

The Senior Leadership Team, including Governors, is fully invested in the whole school approach. Leaders at Halling play an active role in promoting an ethos and culture around positive mental health for all and to enable all children to overcome specific barriers to learn.

9. Conclusion

At Halling, we strongly believe that whole-school resilience approaches are paramount, now more than ever, and are more likely to result in greater outcomes for more children than time-limited interventions.

A mentally healthy school is one that adopts a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. A school should help children to flourish, learn and succeed by providing opportunities to develop their coping skills and resilience.

At Halling, we believe a mentally healthy school is one where every child, member of staff and family recognise wellbeing as 'everybody's business' and work together as a community and team.

In order to achieve this, we recognise the following:

- ♥ Leaders will need to 'walk the talk'
- ♥ Our curriculum, planning and teaching must promote resilience
- ♥ Pupil voice matters
- ♥ Staff voice matters
- ♥ Parent and carer voice matters
- ♥ Clear structures and processes must be in place with an appropriate pathway of support for targeted pupils

Halling's culture, ethos and environment will need to fully embed this whole school approach and all stakeholders will need to work together, consistently, as a community.

Mrs Debbie Tyler (Pastoral Lead)