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A 'whole school' approach to improving wellbeing and mental health in children and young people.

Outcomes from a one-year pilot developing integrated child and adolescent mental health services within mainstream schools, October 2016.

Background

Improving children and young people's mental health and wellbeing is one of the Government's key priorities as part of the drive to put mental health on an equal footing with physical health. There is now a strategic vision for shaping sustainable system-wide transformation, to close the treatment gap and ensure support is built around the needs of children and young people.

There is an increased awareness on the part of education and mental health sectors, of our responsibility to provide mental health support to children and young people within our schools. It is recognised that children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing has a huge impact on their ability to learn and achieve. The Department of Education recognises that: "in order to help their pupils succeed; schools have a role to play in supporting them to be resilient and mentally healthy".

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Public Health England (2015) advocate that schools, both primary and secondary, should implement a broad 'whole school' approach to promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. A 'whole school' approach aims to develop an ethos and environment that supports learning and promotes the health and wellbeing of all the school community. It is an evidence-based model that brings about and embeds cultural change in schools and is effective in improving and maintaining children and young people's wellbeing (Adi, Killoran et al., 2007; Adi, Schrader McMillan et al., 2007).

The focus of this pilot project has been to evaluate the effectiveness of an integrated model of mental

health support within a mainstream primary school. The primary aim of these services is to ensure that children and families experiencing emotional, behavioural or mental health problems have access to timely, integrated, high-quality, mental health support. The service provided a 'whole school' approach to responding to pupils' emotional health needs through a bespoke service for its pupils and local families.

The service provided to North Denes Primary School was facilitated by a Senior Mental Health Practitioner (0.4wte) and an Assistant Psychologist (0.6wte) who were employed by the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT). The package included a number of services, including:

- Individual and group therapeutic intervention
- Family intervention and parenting work
- Consultation and training to school staff
- Supervision to school pastoral care team

Methodology

A number of measures were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the service. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) were completed by parents / carers and teachers of the young people who accessed the Wellbeing Service. Child service users completed the Me and My School questionnaire (M and MS). Qualitative measures were also utilised by conducting semi-structured interviews with service users and focus groups with staff members.

Results

Pupil exclusion data shows the school experienced an immediate 60% drop in exclusions after implementing the Wellbeing Service. After one month of the Service, exclusions dropped by 100% and remained at this level

throughout the pilot. Pupil Asset scores, measuring academic attainment, increased by an average of one point during the pilot project.

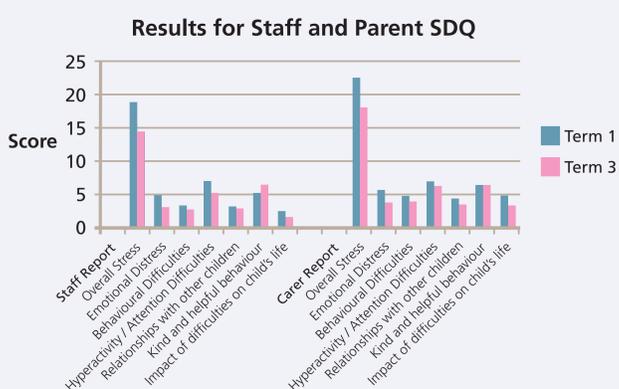
Questionnaire measures for parents and teachers illustrated a reported drop in Overall Stress presented by the child over the year. They also reported a decline in Emotional Difficulties, Behavioural Difficulties, Hyperactivity and Attention Difficulties, and Difficulties in Relationships with Other Children, in addition to a reduction in the impact a Child's Difficulties had on their life. Teachers and parents also noticed a positive rise in children's Kind and Helpful Behaviour following their work with the Wellbeing Service.

The semi-structured interviews allowed service users to voice their opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of the project in their own words. Without exception, every interviewee reported that they had noticed an increase in general wellbeing, either in their child, themselves or the school overall.

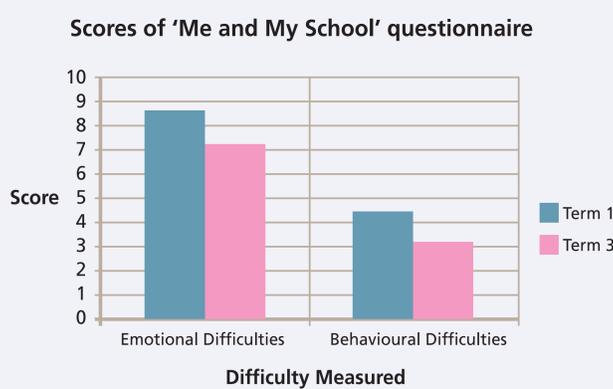
Teachers discussed how the school felt 'calmer' now that they had the opportunity to access 'expertise that is readily available to help children deal with the emotional crisis that they encounter', while parents and carers noticed that their children 'don't come home as angry'; were 'calmer' and 'more confident' and 'more focused' on their learning.

Conclusion

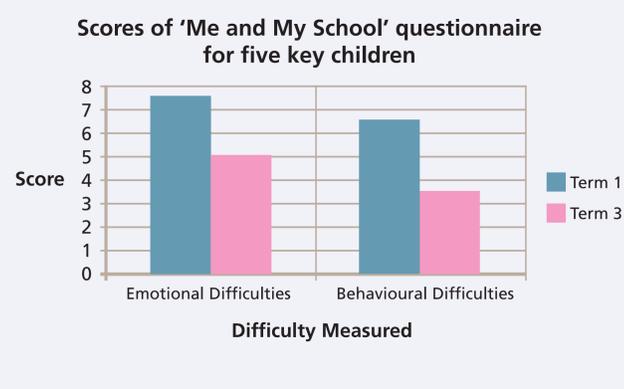
North Denes Primary School made the decision to continue to fund another year of the project, deeming the support they received indispensable in transforming the culture of their school into an environment where children can learn and achieve irrespective of the social, emotional or behavioural challenges they faced.



Graph 1: A graph to show the difference in scores of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires between Term 1 and Term 3, as reported by school staff and parents.



Graph 2: A Graph to show the difference in self-reports Me and My School scores for children between Term 1 to Term 2.



Graph 3: A graph to show the difference in Me and My School scores of five children who received the most intensive support from the Wellbeing Service between Term 1 and Term 3.