

# **St. Patrick's Grammar School Downpatrick**



## **Emotional Health and Wellbeing (EHWB) Policy**

**September 2022**

The Board of Governors, leadership and staff of St. Patrick's are committed to the overall development of the whole young person, within a nurturing environment. Our aim is to empower students as mature, independent, responsible and resilient young men and women, able to cope with the challenges they will face in life in the twenty-first century. Recognising that 'teachers are the most significant role models in a child's life, external to home,' (see Appendix 1 - Joanna Brown *Creating a Nurturing School*) we understand that we have a role to play in supporting our students, to be resilient and mentally healthy; emotional wellbeing, including developing students' social, emotional and behavioural skills, is crucial in developing a healthy and successful school community. Research suggests that the best way to protect life is to promote positive mental health.

The overriding aims of the policy reflect those of the *Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework*, launched by Robin Swann and Peter Weir in February 2021, that is: to ensure that children and young people are empowered and assisted to understand and manage their emotional health and wellbeing and that their needs are identified early and addressed effectively when required.

This policy draws on the Framework document referred to above and also: *Teaching About Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing*, PSHE Association (March 2019); *Supporting Staff Wellbeing in Schools*, Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families; *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools*, Department for Education (November 2018); *Protecting Life in Schools - Helping Protect Against Suicide by Supporting Pupils' Emotional Health and Wellbeing* Department of Education for Northern Ireland (March 2016); *What Works in Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing and responding to Mental Health Problems in Schools?* Professor Katherine Weare, Partnership for Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools (2015).

This policy works in conjunction with the school's Pastoral Care Policy, the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, the Learning and Teaching Policy, the Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy, the Special Educational Needs Policy, the Anti-Bullying Policy, the Inclusion and Diversity Policy and the Attendance Policy.

## **Rationale**

### **Background Facts and Figures - Mental Health Data for Northern Ireland**

#### **Children and Young People Mental Health Survey 2020 (Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Survey)**

- One in eight children and young people in Northern Ireland experienced emotional difficulties, one in ten had conduct problems and one in seven problems with hyperactivity.
- Almost one in ten (9.4%) 11-19 year olds reported self-injurious behaviour and close to one in eight (12.1%) reporting thinking about or attempting suicide.
- Children whose parents had current mental health problems were twice as likely to have an anxiety or depressive disorder themselves. The presence of parental mental health problems increased the rate of any mood or anxiety disorder by a ratio of 1:4.
- When the 20% most deprived areas were compared to the 20% least deprived areas, there were higher overall rates of emotional and behavioural problems (16.5% vs 7.8%), emotional symptoms (18.1% vs 10.6%), conduct problems (13.3% vs 6.0%), hyperactivity (19.6% vs 9.9%) and peer problems (5.1% vs 3.7%).

- Young people in NI are 25% more likely to experience common mental health problems, like depression and anxiety, compared to young people in England, Scotland or Wales.

### **Self-Harm Registry**

- Between 2012 and 2018 there has been a 15% increase (782 to 1096) in presentations of self-harm by those under 18 years of age to Accident and Emergency Departments.

### **KLT (Kids Life and Time)/ YLT (Young Life and Times) Research**

- In general, subjective wellbeing decreases with age, particularly between childhood and adolescence.
- It is noted that there is poorer wellbeing amongst those who have been bullied, or amongst older children who are/have been sexually attracted to people of the same sex.

### **Suicide**

Northern Ireland has a persistently high suicide rate; this includes disproportionately higher rates of deaths by suicide of young people.

The data from the Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Study shows that one in 10 young people self-harmed and one in 8 had suicidal thoughts.

### **Family Support Hubs**

Emotional behavioural difficulty for primary school age children is year on year the most common presenting problem at Family Support Hubs.

| Age group    | All respondents       | Age 9-13                | Age 14-25                             |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Top 5 issues | Exam Stress (45.9%)   | Bullying (40.5%)        | Mental Health (37%)                   |
|              | Boredom (34.5%)       | Racism (31.2%)          | Suicide (39.4%)                       |
|              | Body Image (34.4%)    | Mental Health (29.8%)   | Bullying (31.8%)                      |
|              | Confidence (32.7%)    | Internet Safety (29.6%) | Making positive relationships (25.9%) |
|              | Mental Health (30.2%) | Physical Health (29.5%) | Lack of confidence (25.4%)            |

Research over the past two decades on developing EHWB and social and emotional learning (SEL), including systematic reviews of programmes using the most rigorous and exacting criteria, are repeatedly demonstrating that a deliberate focus on EHWB by schools impacts positively on the following:

- Raising pupil achievement and attainment;
- Pupil engagement and motivation in all aspects of school life;
- School connectedness;
- Behaviour and attendance (e.g. reductions in bullying, violence and juvenile crime in schools and in the community);
- Staff and pupil mental health (e.g. reduced stress, anxiety and depression);
- Health outcomes (e.g. reductions in teenage pregnancy and drug abuse);
- Staff morale.

All the facts and figure above demonstrate that it is incumbent on the school to take action to promote the wellbeing of the young people in our care and to promote staff wellbeing.

### **Definitions - Emotional Health and Wellbeing**

The definitions below are embraced by St. Patrick's and reflect what we want to support our students to achieve:

'Being mentally and emotionally healthy means, that we believe in ourselves and know our own worth. We set ourselves goals that we can achieve and can find support to do this. We are aware of our emotions and what we are feeling and can understand why. We can cope with our changing emotions and we can speak about and manage our feelings. We understand what others may be feeling and know how to deal with their feelings. We also understand when to let go and not overreact. We know how to make friendships and relationships and how to cope with changes in them. We understand that everyone can be anxious, worried or sad sometimes. We know how to cope with, and bounce back from, changes or problems and can talk about them to someone we trust.' (Department of Education's *Pupils' Emotional Health and Wellbeing Project Board* - 2009)

'A state of wellbeing that allows children to develop and become aware of their own unique personality, to build their own identity, to fulfil their own potential, to cope with the challenges of growing up; to feel loved, secure and accepted as unique individuals and to be able to be happy, play, learn and to participate and contribute to family and community.' (World Health Organisation's definition, referred to in *Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework* – 2021.)

### **The 'Mentally Healthy' School**

As noted in the *Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework*, a 'mentally healthy' school setting is one that 'adopts a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing, helping children to flourish, learn and succeed by providing opportunities for them, and the adults around them, to develop the strengths and coping skills that underpin resilience. The school considers positive mental health and wellbeing as fundamental to its values, mission and culture,

where child, staff and parent wellbeing is seen as “everybody’s business”.

The Department of Education’s *Pupil Emotional Health and Wellbeing* self-assessment audit tool - April 2018 (see Appendix 2) and the Wellbeing Award for School’s (see Appendix 3) evaluations, have helped the school to identify areas of need for pupils, staff and parents, in relation to EHWB. This has informed the EHWB strategy and action plans drawn up by St. Patrick’s Grammar School.

## **A Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Wellbeing**

Effective practice in the area of EHWB, to which St. Patrick’s is dedicated, includes:

- Commitment to whole school wellbeing by the Board of Governors, the Principal/ leadership teams, including the importance of staff wellbeing.
- Promoting a caring, supportive culture and ethos embedded throughout the whole school community involving children, young people, staff, parents and carers.
- Promoting a sense of belonging and respect for all, and providing an emotionally secure and safe environment that encourages and instils a sense of self-esteem, self-regulation, skill development and overall resilience.
- Integrating emotional health and wellbeing in all policies and practice, and throughout all areas of the curriculum.
- Ensuring the culture and ethos impacts on teacher wellbeing and pedagogy, including the teacher-pupil relationship, the culture within individual classrooms and classroom management strategies, all of which mediate a range of pupil wellbeing and academic outcomes.
- Giving children and young people a voice - ensuring they have the opportunity to contribute to decisions that may impact on emotional wellbeing.
- Reviewing pastoral structures regularly to identify and meet children and young people’s need.
- Delivering universal evidence-informed programmes to promote resilience and wellbeing.

The model of *Support for All*, as noted in the Department of Education’s Framework Document is supported by St. Patrick’s.

St. Patrick’s prioritises a culture and ethos that promotes a sense of caring, belonging and respect for all and plans strategically to improve emotional health and wellbeing for all. It is committed to providing an emotionally secure and safe environment and spaces. We recognise parents and carers as being integral to the school and the child’s wellbeing and also that effective teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships are crucial for wellbeing.

## **Wellbeing for Children and Young People**

St. Patrick’s is committed to:

- Adopting a holistic, integrated approach.
- Recognising that a child or young person entering school feeling happy, healthy, safe and connected to school, is more likely to fully engage in learning.
- Identifying those children who may not be feeling this way and ensuring that additional support is provided to address their individual needs.
- Encouraging, supporting and challenging (where appropriate) to better prepare children and young people for further education, work and adult life.
- Recognising that all behaviour is communication – not just “acting out” or being aggressive, but also silent and withdrawn behaviours that can also present in a distressed or worried child or young person.
- Creating opportunities to hear the voice of the child.

### **Wellbeing for Staff**

Leadership within the school is committed to:

- Placing a high value and significance on staff wellbeing.
- Understanding that if staff are not effectively supported, they cannot be expected to properly support children and young people in their care.
- Developing a culture of trust where all staff feel valued and know how to access support if needed, for example through the use of staff debriefing/supervision.
- Supporting and providing comprehensive and on-going training.
- Accessing support from appropriate bodies, including the EA, to support the emotional health and wellbeing of school leaders.

### **Wellbeing for Parents and Carers**

St. Patrick’s is committed to:

- Encouraging and promoting the involvement of parents to contribute to the life of the school.
- Building on the sense of connectedness between parents and school and continuing to foster mutual respect, recognising that when parents are involved in an intervention there is a higher degree of success.
- Encouraging parental and carer engagement through a welcoming open-door policy, invitations to attend events, helping to build up trust and mutual understanding.
- Empowering parents to promote emotional wellbeing within the home environment, reinforcing the wellbeing culture and ethos of the school.

### **Wellbeing in the Community**

St. Patrick’s recognises and is keen to promote the school as a key hub in the local community and will strive to link with local voluntary and community services including youth services, sports clubs, churches and local businesses to maximise engagement for the benefit of all.

## **Identifying Need and Monitoring Impact**

Staff are aware that delays in identifying and meeting emotional health and well-being needs can have far-reaching effects on all aspects of young people's lives, including their chances of reaching their potential and leading happy and healthy lives as adults. Those working with children and young people on a regular basis are likely to have developed healthy relationships with them and may often be the first to identify behaviours that suggest there may be an underlying problem or difficulty that requires specific help and support. In St. Patrick's there is a variety of activities which support the early identification of students who may need support.

The priority of the Form Teacher and Year Head is to get to know the young people in his/her care. Form classes meet for fifteen minutes each morning, before lessons begin. This is a valuable opportunity for Form Teachers to promote the principles of the nurturing school (see Appendix One), to get to know their students in an informal setting, to set a positive tone for the day, to promote wellbeing. Therefore, Form Teachers are in an ideal position to identify students' emotional needs and hopefully, to begin a conversation with the student who is in need. Form Teachers are given time during the school week to meet with their students, to discuss academic progress and welfare concerns.

All staff are encouraged to be vigilant regarding how students present, particularly when teaching or discussing subjects or topics that are likely to have an emotional impact on students e.g. Personal Development lessons covering topics like emotional health and wellbeing, relationships and sexuality education; RE or English lessons, exploring personal feelings, life events and relationships. Staff are trained regarding how to respond to a distressed student and what steps to take to ensure their needs are met.

Feedback from in-house student questionnaires and the Student Council are useful in identifying needs and analysis of the feedback from questionnaires (most recently the Wellbeing Award for Schools questionnaire) allow staff to monitor the impact of strategies put in place. The Pupils Attitude to Self and School Questionnaire (PASS - assessment specifically designed to spot attitudinal or emotional issues in children before they impact on school performance) taken by students in Year 8 also allows staff to identify students who will benefit from support or mentoring.

Students' evaluations of workshops and presentations provided by external bodies, for example, *Love for Life* and *Action Mental Health* - help to identify needs and monitor the impact of strategies implemented in the school.

## **Targeted Support**

Some young people are at greater risk of experiencing poor mental health, for example, those who are in care, young carers, those on the child protection register, those with specific special educational or medical needs, those who have had previous access to CAMHS, those living with parents/carers with a mental illness, those living in households where there is conflict, domestic violence or instability, newcomer children, those who persistently refuse to go to school, those who have experienced adverse childhood experiences or life events, and also young people identifying as LGBTQ. While confidentiality for the student and family is vital, the safeguarding and pastoral teams' staff will work to ensure the sensitive support of students who are experiencing difficulties in their personal situations and do their best to ensure that their needs are met.

Staff training ensures staff act swiftly on their concerns. Staff are encouraged to raise *any* concerns they have about a student as soon as possible to the Designated or Deputy Designated Teachers for Safeguarding and Child Protection, or, the Form Teacher/Year Head, or, the SENCo, depending on the nature of their concern. The Pastoral Care system within the school ensures young people have access to care and support, as well as specialist services, so that emotional, social and behavioural problems can be dealt with as soon as they occur. It also ensures that young people are provided with clear and consistent information about the opportunities available to them to discuss personal issues and emotional concerns.

### **Additional Support in School**

All students are made aware of the support which can be offered by the school counsellor, Rachel Johnston (Family Works) and our life coach, Oisín MacManus, and how to access this help. Drop-in appointments, counselling sessions, group work and workshops on a range of issues (e.g. organisational skills, time management; avoiding anxiety in the lead-up to exams) are all available.

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and Assistant are proactive regarding addressing concerns raised by staff and parents. They ensure testing, identification of need and implementation of support strategies as swiftly as possible.

Peer mediation and mentoring are also employed effectively to support students.

### **Engaging with External Services for Enhanced Support**

The pastoral team works closely with students and parents to source support that cannot be provided in school; the Head of Pastoral Care maintains links with a range of external services e.g. EA, CAMHS, Family Support Hubs, Children's Services, Barnardos, MACS, AWARE, Action Mental Health, PIPS, Youth Initiatives, SBNI.

### **Policy Review and Dissemination**

This policy will be reviewed every two years; input will be sought from staff, parents, students and the Board of Governors.



## Appendix One:

### Creating the Nurturing School - Joanna Brown May 2015

#### What do I need? (taken from Teenagers and Attachment 2009 Louise Bomber)

- Meet and greet – welcoming, warm, same staff.
- Clear messages – I don't make sense of the world in the way you do.
- Organisational support – model to me how to get organised as I learn that through others.
- Regular time-tabled support.
- Check ins – with one adult I know and who knows me – who I know is holding me in mind.
- Don't let me get overwhelmed.
- Home school partnership.
- Teachers who I KNOW, want me to do well.
- My dignity – I am very easily misunderstood.

In practical terms in school...

- Meeting and greeting – being 'available' in the morning/just after school;
- Making good use of Form Period to get to know students, vigilance re. relationships within class and swift action to address issues e.g. dealing promptly with bullying;
- Embracing precepts of *Investors in Pupils*;
- Planning and delivering relevant and effective PD lessons; relevant assemblies;
- Form Teacher interviews;
- Supervision – interaction with students/vigilance.

#### Creating the Nurturing School - A Summary

- Teachers are the most significant role models in a child's life external to home.
- Attachment theory (Bowlby, Ainsworth) A child's first relationship, the one with the mother, acts as a template – it permanently moulds the capacity to enter into all later emotional relationships (Allan Schore 2001).
- People are biologically predisposed to develop relationships that provide safety and protection: proximity seeking behaviour, provision of secure base in times of distress (Bowlby 1982).
- Need embedment of nurturing principles into every classroom practice.
- Reliability and predictability of adults within learning environment is central to child's/young person's development.
- Classroom – planned routine, reliable structure, clear rules, manageable routine brings sense of trust.
- Whole school ethos – positive, supportive, caring, optimistic (*'Optimism is the immunisation against mental ill health.'* Seligman)
- Secure attachment relationships in school, is a crucial factor in promoting positive outcomes for children.

## **Appendix Two:**

**The Department of Education's *Pupil Emotional Health and Wellbeing* self-assessment audit tool - April 2018.**

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/self-assessment-audit-tool-information-and-questionnaires>

## **Appendix Three:**

### **The Wellbeing Award for Schools (WAS)**

This award is designed to promote emotional and mental health and wellbeing across the school and ensure that it sits at the heart of school life. There are eight objectives which must be met before the award can be achieved.

#### **Objective 1:**

The school is committed to promoting and protecting emotional wellbeing and mental health by achieving the Wellbeing Award for Schools.

#### **Objective 2:**

The school has a clear vision and strategy for promoting and protecting emotional wellbeing and mental health, which is communicated to all involved with the school.

#### **Objective 3:**

The school has a positive culture which regards emotional wellbeing and mental health as the responsibility of all.

#### **Objective 4:**

The school actively promotes staff emotional wellbeing and mental health.

#### **Objective 5:**

The school prioritises professional learning and staff development on emotional wellbeing and mental health.

#### **Objective 6:**

The school understands the different types of emotional and mental health needs across the school and has systems in place to respond appropriately.

#### **Objective 7:**

The school actively seeks the ongoing participation of the whole-school community in its approach to emotional wellbeing and mental health.

#### **Objective 8:**

The school works in partnerships with other schools, agencies and available specialist services to support emotional wellbeing and mental health.