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Working towards the Wellbeing Award for Schools (WAS)

St. Patrick's Grammar School's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021 - 2024

In February 2021, Education Minister, Peter Weir and Health Minister, Robin Swann, launched the 'Children and Young People's EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING in Education Framework'.

They noted, 'Children and young people should feel supported and encouraged as they traverse the challenges of growing up. In supporting them to develop the skills that will help them overcome these challenges, we are helping to shape the adults they will become. Indeed, today they face a lot more challenges than our generations with the advent of the online world which can provide huge benefits including education and learning opportunities but can also present a risk to our children and young people...This Framework recognises our collective responsibility in supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of our children and young people and those working with them.'

The Ministers referred to the concerning statistic that 50% of mental health problems are established by the age of 14, so the importance of promoting emotional health and wellbeing at the earliest stage, is vital. They also addressed the significant impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic: 'The context within which this [Framework] is to be delivered is foremost in our thinking – the impact of Covid-19 has certainly created an added dimension to the challenges in supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of our children and young people. In addition, the day-to-day workload concerns highlighted by staff and their trade unions are acknowledged and the focus is to ensure the necessary support is in place for staff to undertake this support role.'

Schools play a key role in promoting good mental and emotional health and wellbeing. The pastoral care system within our school strives to ensure our students' wellbeing is paramount and that we do all we can to support our students to flourish and achieve their potential. Indeed, in their Framework the Ministers noted: 'Individuals who perform well at school and achieve qualifications are more likely to adopt healthy lifestyle behaviours and to find employment. They are also less likely to engage in risk taking behaviours. Alongside the importance of educational experiences to enable children and young people to maximise capabilities and have control over their lives, there is a need to also ensure physical, social and emotional wellbeing are promoted and developed, in schools, families and communities.'

The staff of St. Patrick's is committed to the overall development of the whole young person, within a nurturing environment. Our aim is to empower students to become 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,' (Joanna Brown *Creating a Nurturing School*) we understand that we have a vital 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 healthy and happy young people.

It is our belief that our Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy will give us the opportunity to maximise our efforts to ensure we provide the very best levels of pastoral care and support for our young people and that we teach them the skills necessary to ensure they know how to look after one of their most precious assets, their emotional health and wellbeing.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing – Definitions

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 of mental health, as noted in the 'Children and Young People's EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING in Education Framework' – 2021.)

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.

Education Authority's Regional Assessment of Need 2018

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%)

Summary of actions to be taken by St. Patrick's Grammar School to promote wellbeing and resilience:

ACTION 1: Audit emotional health and wellbeing across school community using the Wellbeing Award for Schools (WAS) surveys for students, staff and parents.

ACTION 2: Create an action plan for promoting emotional health and wellbeing throughout the school community.

ACTION 3: Initiate a Wellbeing Team with representatives from student, staff, parent and BoG bodies.

ACTION 4: Train Wellbeing Champions across all classes to join Student Council Representatives and Class Prefects in promoting Student Voice.

ACTION 5: Review the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Policy and other related policies (e.g. Safeguarding and Child Protection, Anti-Bullying, Relationships and Sexuality Education, Inclusion and Diversity) as per review schedule.

ACTION 6: Introduce emotional and mental health as area of study across PD curriculum for all year groups and source materials for students and staff training to support delivery and source support workshops facilitated by experts in the field.

ACTION 7: Review Personal Development (PD) curriculum to ensure it meets needs of young people currently.

ACTION 8: Promote awareness of importance of emotional wellbeing and mental health across school community – publicity/Facebook/information sessions/assemblies.

ACTION 9: Emotional health and wellbeing to be standing item on agenda of ALL meetings in school.

ACTION 10: Promote staff emotional health and wellbeing by having sessions on INSET set aside for this purpose; promoting self-care; support of colleagues via team-leaders' meetings with colleagues (group or one-to-one to discuss matters of concern/potential causes of stress).

ACTION 11: Promote emotional and mental health with parents – e.g. information leaflets, presentations, sign-posting to relevant courses, webinars, support groups.

ACTION 12: Have a renewed focus on using Form Class time to encourage students to interact with each other and for Form Teachers to interact with students to monitor students' emotional wellbeing and relationships within the class.

ACTION 13: Promote social engagement between students/ between staff /between students and staff/between staff and parents within school and in extra-curricular activities – at break, lunch times and after school, in knowledge that social interaction creates positivity and ensures those who need help have someone to turn to. This will be achieved not only in daily interactions but by providing clubs/societies/playground infrastructures/team building/fun/wellbeing days.

ACTION 14: Seek to attain the Wellbeing Award for Schools (WAS) to ensure focus is kept on this crucially important area, for all members of our school community.

Summary of actions to be taken by St. Patrick's Grammar School to ensure we provide the right support at the right time for our students – early intervention and referral to professional services when necessary:

ACTION 15: Increase the funding for pastoral care to enable restructuring of pastoral staff team to ensure it meets the needs of young people: Year Heads to receive additional point; KS3 Coordinator to provide support for Year Heads; expand links between pastoral teams and senior leadership team; recruit SENCo Assistant.

ACTION 16: Provide enhanced and accessible counselling service/ positive life-coaching for those who need it – recruit life coach to be available one day each week to work with individuals and small groups of students.

ACTION 17: Widen the Safeguarding and Child Protection Team to ensure key pastoral leaders all have training and for purposes of peer support.

ACTION 18: Use PASS to identify concerns and source programme to measure aspects of wellbeing, in order to address needs of students, staff and parents and to identify those who need support.

ACTION 19: Continue to work with community and voluntary partners to develop links with these groups that will enable signposting and speedy referral for those students who need further support.

ACTION 20: Introduce a programme of training in mental health for all staff.

ACTION 21: Continue to collaborate with partner schools to maximise expertise and ensure best services for our young people.