

## **Spotlight on Wellbeing at Kingswear Primary**

As research continues to emerge about the negative impact of the pandemic on children's mental health, one local school has taken a proactive approach to addressing issues of wellbeing, supporting its children and families since the return to school in September.

A 2020 government report, *Mental Health of Children and Young People in England*, compiled by the Office for National Statistics in conjunction with the University of Exeter has revealed that one in six (16%) children aged 5 to 16 years were identified as having a probable mental disorder, increasing from one in nine (10.8%) in 2017. Of these children, more than half reported that lockdown made their lives worse.

As Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator for a group of primary schools when the pandemic struck in the Spring, Head of School at Kingswear Primary, Sarah Lord, noticed a pattern emerging as she contacted families throughout the lockdown:

"Families frequently reported increased anxiety in their children as the lockdown progressed. However, the anxiety predominantly stemmed from two distinctly different viewpoints. Some children missed the routine and structure of school, whilst others thrived in the home environment and were anxious about returning to school."

As a qualified counsellor, Sarah recognised that schools needed to consider the therapeutic needs which would be evident as the children returned to school, as well as the academic 'catch up' requirements. As she transitioned to the role of Head of School at Kingswear Primary in the summer term, she worked with the school staff to create a curriculum and policies which would address these needs.

The school has adopted relational practice which places relationships at the heart of all the school does. Staff work hard to build strong, trusting and resilient relationships with pupils and their parents. The return to school focused on supporting children to feel safe and comfortable in the school environment once more, with emotional support taking priority. The leadership also signed up for the Wellbeing in Schools Award, which gave them a framework for developing this approach; from pre-school to year 6, feelings are discussed daily and the whole school participates in weekly lessons which help them to recognise and support their own mental health. They also take part in Forest School sessions once a week as the mental health benefits of being outdoors are so well-recognised.

So far, it has been a great success, with children and parents reporting reduced levels of anxiety and greater awareness of their own feelings and wellbeing. The school recently carried out parental surveys and 100% of parents said they would recommend the school to others, as their child feels happy, safe and is well looked after at Kingswear Primary. One parent commented: "This new 2020 start feels really positive. Particularly the increased focus upon the children's emotional education/wellbeing."

The school continues to look at building upon this positive start, and take the children forward in their learning to catch up on any gaps emerging from their lockdown experience. The teachers are keen to ensure that the children use the skills they are building as confident and happy learners to maximise their opportunities for academic success. "We are aware that as a small school we have a unique opportunity to really get to know our children and families, and offer a very personalised learning experience for each individual child. We also know that when our children feel happy,

supported and listened to, they are more able to thrive academically, socially and emotionally,” says Sarah Lord.

But the final word must go to the children; the school frequently seeks their views and opinions. “This school is always so kind,” said a child in year 6. “They care about everyone,” added their friend.

Matthew Shanks, CEO of Education South West said *“The welfare of pupils, staff and families is of paramount importance during these difficult times and I am proud of the work that Sarah and the team at Kingswear are doing to support their community.”*

Kingswear Primary is holding a virtual open evening at 7pm on 15<sup>th</sup> December; further information can be found on their website [www.kingswearprimary.org.uk](http://www.kingswearprimary.org.uk) or by emailing [admissions@kingswearprimary.org.uk](mailto:admissions@kingswearprimary.org.uk)