

Wellbeing Award for Schools (WAS)

Verification Report

School name:

Knowsley Village Primary School

Award verifier:

Dr Helen Mills

Date of verification:

03/03/21

Commentary on the evidence provided:

The award evidence was presented clearly during the verification. All staff, pupils, parents and the governor spoke with great passion, pride, openness and honesty during the interviews. A real sense of belonging was evident, demonstrating the schools ability to work effectively as a team. This provided detailed information and allowed the adviser to better understand the context and background to the schools outstanding developments and achievements.

Strengths identified during verification:

Knowsley Village Primary School is such a welcoming, positive and calm school, where everyone is cared for, valued, listened to, respected, nurtured and encouraged. Strong leadership is a key factor in understanding the success of the school in promoting emotional wellbeing and mental health as core to the whole school community. The autonomous style, financial investment, skills, commitment, and approach of the Headteacher, SLT, Staff and Governors have created positive change for the whole school community, and a seamless and consistent, welcoming, none judgemental, happy, kind, caring, respectful, supportive, safe, fun, positive, creative and aspirational culture.

An excellent and clear vision, values, mission statement and ethos are central to the success of the school, are shared by everyone, and has for a number of years, created a sense of autonomy, belonging and shared responsibility, referred to during the verification as the 'Knowsley Village Family'. Throughout the award process and during lockdown, the school has demonstrated continued progress to support and improve the wellbeing and mental health of the whole school community. The result offers a powerful template for how emotional wellbeing of pupils, families and staff supports whole school progress.

An open door policy, being visible on the playground, stakeholder voice, listening to the needs of others, breaking down barriers, implementing change and empowering people are very much part of how the school has achieved a shared sense of family, where pupils, families and staff are confident to ask for or seek support, and staff can identify those who require support. The award evidence and interviews demonstrated how extensive, innovative and open this feature is, with staff going above and beyond what is expected to ensure that the whole school community is supported, and this is valued greatly by all stakeholders.

Significant investment in people, facilities, environment, wide range of activities, staffing, with formal and informal support systems, and in provision and monitoring of interventions, school development plans and policies was apparent during the school verification. The award process also highlighted the multiple examples of outstanding 'wellbeing' practice. Many of these have a major impact on the whole school community. For example, 1-1 and group targeted sessions including play therapy, ELSA, Nurture groups, SEND, worry boxes, circle time, child and staff Wellbeing Champions, PSHE curriculum, wellbeing assemblies, 5 ways to wellbeing, curriculum Maestro, outdoor learning, smile, creative curriculum and lessons, school trips, extra curricular activities, the proactive approach to supporting families, parental groups, workshops and the PTFA, 10 ways to wellbeing, wellbeing calendar, power of kindness, rainbow of hope, music, physical activity, sport, the importance placed on the school vision, values and mission statement, termly vision values, health and wellbeing activities including meditation, mindfulness, breathing and relaxation techniques, dragonfly mental health and wellbeing information booklets, mental health awareness training, anti-bullying work, COVID wellbeing recovery curriculum, achievements and rewards, school and student council, wellbeing ambassadors, sports leaders, circle time champions, reading wellbeing buddies, ECO team, digital leaders, positive quote of the week, NSPCC, Early Help, CAMHS, safeguarding and excellent working relationships with outside agencies, the local community, schools and Knowsley Local Authority.

Children feel extremely safe and happy in school, have many friends, and articulated well how the school supports them with their emotional wellbeing and mental health and how they are confident to express their feelings, to ask for support and actively help each other and are kind. Pupils commented on the enjoyment and satisfaction they get from learning, how they make decisions to improve the school, can identify and talk openly about their feelings, are proud of their roles and celebrated achievements and described numerous tools that they can use, activities they can do and trusted adults they can talk to and work with to promote their wellbeing. This has enabled the day-to-day and longer-term emotional wellbeing and mental health activities to flourish and was evident throughout the verification with the promotion of wellbeing, positivity, aspirations, achievements, coupled with a sense of calm and nurturing relationships, with children demonstrating exemplary behaviour and manners, confidence, kindness, engagement and enjoyment in learning.

Children commented, "We know we are in a safe place and everyone is friendly and kind. It's a really nice, happy school. We do loads of activities for our wellbeing like crafts, playing and the trim trail. Everyone treats each other the same. We have really nice teachers. If we're worried we can tell the teachers and staff, or put it in the worry box and the teacher talks to you. We learn how to keep our minds good in PSHE and Mrs Greensmith talks about it. We have a calm corner to sit in if we're feeling overwhelmed, there's music, books and puzzles to help us calm down. We get rewards for being nice to our friends and if we someone is sad, we are kind and include them. We have a school and house council and buddies give out rewards, we ask the class what they'd like and make a list, we made a greenhouse and plant. We have spin the wheel for class attendance and get team points, we had a cooking session. Teachers are still doing what they can for us and we're all still happy. I'm not afraid to talk to teachers, they help you if you're stuck. If we don't understand, we help each other. There's always someone to make you happy again".

The proactive approach and numerous opportunities for parental engagement, effective communication, breaking down barriers, the development of trusting relationships between staff, parents and pupils, and excellent working relationships with outside agencies, should be commended and ensure that all children, including vulnerable children and their families are supported swiftly and effectively. This includes the Headteacher and Deputy who meet and greet parents on the school gate, numerous opportunities for parents to get together (Covid has paused some of these) and attend various workshops and training, including wellbeing, PTFA and fund

raising events, wellbeing information and signposting via the school website, social media, newsletters, seasaw, parent app, zoom meetings, telephone wellbeing check ins, and wellbeing booklets, school based interventions, signposting and referrals made to outside agencies, and most importantly the whole school staff working alongside parents in a none judgemental way, listening to and implementing parent suggestions. The excellent communication methods demonstrate a real sense of connection and belonging to the school community. Parent praise and gratitude for staff in school is exceptional.

Parents commented, “School for parents is fantastic. We receive weekly wellbeing news and there’s information on the website and the parent app. They have been fantastic in lockdown, the wellbeing phone calls asking how I was and how my son was. The good choice nominations on the newsletter are nice. I’m part of the parent group and we usually have coffee mornings, discuss ideas and it’s very encouraging. The Headteacher and Deputy are on the school gate in the morning to deal with worries and concerns and they are brilliant at dealing with them. Strategies are put into place for mental health and wellbeing, I met with the teacher and discussed what was helping and working, the wellbeing week helps too. They are wonderful and very helpful with the children. They’re very caring about the children and the parent’s emotional wellbeing. The school is brilliant, my child was really worrying about COVID and I felt comfortable speaking to the teacher who was really helpful and sent social stories and made phone calls to see how he was and to check in on me. There’s lots of mental health and wellbeing information in the newsletters and activities on seesaw, and they’re always asking if we have queries and concerns. My child loves coming to school, he feels safe and happy, and it makes you feel the same, it’s everything really”.

Attention must be drawn to the value and priority given, along with significant financial investment, to staff wellbeing and professional learning, and this is valued greatly by the highly skilled and dedicated staff who feel that the training and strategies in place support their wellbeing, enabling them to provide the most effective support to the children. The Headteacher and SLT have committed to reducing staff stress, workload and improving wellbeing through listening and acting upon staff views, writing a comprehensive school development plan, wellbeing policy and strategy that places staff wellbeing as a priority, committing to a dedicated wellbeing budget, carrying out staff workload surveys and reviews, providing staff wellbeing workshops, having regular staff wellbeing meetings and sending out information including a focus on self awareness and self care, ensuring support mechanisms in place, implementing staff wellbeing reviews, recognition of staff including shout outs, anonymous feedback box, wellbeing board, appreciation cards and gifts, PPA can be done at home, family circumstances are supported, social events and nights out including relaxation, yoga and walking sessions. Furthermore, the long-term CPD plan includes academic and personal development and emotional wellbeing. The programme of mental health awareness training has been accessed by the whole school staff, and has included mental health champion, NSPCC, Altru Drama, ELSA, external counsellors, Desty, Butterflies, Relax Kids, Growth Mindset, Kind Minds Staff Wellbeing and Resilience workshop alongside sharing of good practice during staff forums. The impact of staff wellbeing and training was evident in the outstanding staff questionnaire results. Staff commented how supportive and approachable all staff are and how everyone looks out for each other. Staff feel valued, connected, supported, enjoy their jobs and are proud to be a part of the Knowsley Village Family.

Staff and the governor commented, “We have very strong relationships with parents, they know they can contact us. We are a closely knit staff, we know each other so well and can ask for help. There are channels to ask for help and outside agency links. We have regular mental health and wellbeing meetings and we are sent newsletters with information to help the children and ourselves. We’ve started a new PSHE scheme on mental health and mindfulness and have weekly lessons and we can do more if necessary. We have wellbeing emails, display boards with ideas, staff shout outs,

we've had yoga sessions, social events, a WhatsApp group for sharing ideas, it's fun, wellbeing ideas to keep fit, received wellbeing bags, everyone genuinely values and cares for each other. The children know they can come to me, I know them well. Parents can get in touch with me and I liaise with the councillor. ELSA programmes impact positively on children's growth mindset and resilience. The feedback policy has changed and is more manageable and emails are kept to office hours. In the current lockdown, SLT are helping by giving time at home to mark and plan home learning. We get a full day PPA and can work from home. Workload is more manageable and it's decreased stress. The school have worked really hard to achieve the award. The Headteacher gives the governor's regular updates and steps completed. Wellbeing is at the heart of the school. They've done lots of wellbeing work and training with staff. The Headteacher is so kind and goes above and beyond, asking for feedback and how they can improve things. There's so much support, putting our wellbeing to the top along with the children's makes a big difference. It feels like home, definitely valued as a teacher and a friend. Staff work as a team, we have friendship groups and communication is great. I received bereavement support; it's nice to know I am supported in many different areas. It's the Knowsley Village family; everyone is respected and included and the school works hard to make everyone feel part of that family. I'm proud of the whole feel of the school, everyone cares and the children, staff and parents know this. We have good relationships with parents, we are approachable, and we ask if they're OK, we value them. We've a much better understanding of mental health and what to do, it's normal practice now, we're confident to speak about mental health and wellbeing, we share a lot more, we ask if you're OK, notice changes and will say, and are more open with the wider family; it's part of us. Wellbeing is embedded whole school; it's our ethos".

The school has drawn together the threads that connect all the different work done and aspirations, and is able to demonstrate positive change in children, staff and parents. The school understands the importance of valuing each other, working as a collective team, promoting positivity, building resilience, supporting and looking after the whole schools mental health and wellbeing, ensuring that children feel safe, secure and happy, which in turn impacts positivity on their educational attainment.

Impact:

Effective stakeholder voice and consultation mechanisms, clear communication, vision and values has created a sense of belonging, which has lead to a shared responsibility and ownership that promotes and empowers the whole school community to take responsibility of their own and others wellbeing and mental health.

Significant investment in staff wellbeing and training has resulted in a reduction in staff workload, stress and an improvement in work life balance and staff managing their own wellbeing, which has further strengthened staff's sense of belonging, pride, motivation and job satisfaction.

Staff training in mental health and wellbeing has resulted in increased awareness and understanding of mental health. Staff are confident to talk about their own mental health and are confident that they have the skills and tools to support their own and their pupils' emotional wellbeing and mental health. Staff feel that school listens to their views and needs. Staff are confident in recognising the factors that affect their children and families mental health and know how to refer for support to ensure that children and their families receive support quickly, preventing escalation of mental health issues.

Whole school initiatives have increased awareness of mental health and wellbeing, resulting in open conversations, using shared language and people asking for support and supporting each other to improve their wellbeing by using a range of techniques contributing to improved resilience.

An embedded welcoming, happy, kind, respectful, positive, caring school culture and ethos, valuing everyone's voice, investment in highly trained, passionate and nurturing staff, along with a creative and varied curriculum and extra curricular activities and targeted interventions has resulted in all pupils, including those with additional wellbeing and mental health needs, being provided with a safe space and for interventions to be delivered, enabling their needs to be met. This has promoted confidence in children's ability to talk openly about their feelings, to manage their own mental health, and to support each other, demonstrating developments in their social and emotional skills, confidence, independence and resilience, enabling young people to thrive and excel in their learning.

Areas for development:

Add a wellbeing tab to the school website to bring together all the excellent mental health and wellbeing information and signposting. Clearly display in school and on the website the wellbeing ambassadors and their roles.

As already highlighted by the school, continue to monitor the stakeholder feedback, hold regular change team and parent/carer meetings once lockdown has ended, review the school environment and develop outside space to further support the 5 ways to wellbeing and implement long term support for children, parent and staff mental health following the pandemic, embed the 5 ways to wellbeing into the PSHE curriculum and use it as common language for all stakeholders and include a wellbeing video to Y6 transition materials.

Having become more aware of the multiple examples of outstanding practice, continue to share the experiences and approaches with other schools and your local authority.

Verifier recommendation:

Knowsley Village Primary School has achieved the Wellbeing Award for Schools. This award covers the following 3 years. I look forward to the work the school will undertake over this time.