

St Mary's National School

Self-Evaluation report and Improvement Plan 2020-2021

Introduction

Wellbeing has been defined by W.H.O (2001) as 'present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life'. Furthermore, according to the 'Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice' (Government of Ireland) 'research indicates that a multi-component, preventative, whole school approach to the promotion of wellbeing, with interventions at both universal and targeted levels, is the most beneficial and evidence informed approach for schools and centres of education'.

The focus of the Evaluation

A school self-evaluation in relation to Wellbeing was begun in Term 3 of the 2019/2020 academic year during Covid related school closure. This School Self-Evaluation was delayed because of the continuing difficulties and challenges posed by Covid but was resumed and completed in Term 3 of 2020/2021. The finding will be used to support the introduction and implementation of the School Well Being Framework, through which we will focus on the setting up and embedding of Well Being initiatives in the school.

School Context

St. Mary's N.S. is a co-educational DEIS band one school situated in inner Limerick city, with 100 pupils from Junior Infants to Sixth class in single stream mainstream classes. On staff we have 10 teachers, of whom 3 are SET. (Travelling SETs) We have 5 SNAs, a HSL teacher, a school secretary and caretaker. At present, our Principal (Mary Hanley) is walking and our Deputy Principal is a class teacher. S.E.N. is organised around the curricular and behavioural/emotional needs of pupils and is a mixture of in-class support and withdrawal from class. S.E.N. supports class teachers in the formulation, implementation and assessment of behaviour plans and a collaborative approach is taken with children who have emotional/behavioural issues.

To date, we have addressed wellbeing through discrete teaching of S.P.H.E. using the RSE and Stay Safe programme supported by school based programmes such as 'Incredible Years', 'Friends For Life', Mindful Matters and others. We also address SPHE themes through other subjects and within all aspects of school life in keeping with the school mission statement and ethos.

St. Mary's is also involved with an 'After School Completion' programme and has a HSL teacher who runs initiatives for parents/guardians to promote a sense of wellbeing and self-efficacy. These programmes also benefit the overall school community through self-development and relationship building.

The school also benefits from an 'Art Therapist' and the S.O.W.S. programme. The school has a 'relaxation room', a library, an art room and a computer room which provide opportunities for children to explore curricular areas, pursue personal interests and have 'down' time.

Covid-19 has had a detrimental effect on the Wellbeing of our school community however there have been unforeseen and possibly beneficial consequences. Many children have become more proficient and confident in the use of digital platforms such as Zoom and Seesaw. It may be that the school can use Seesaw to support student learning in the future.

From Trauma Reactive to Trauma Responsive

All staff attended training on **ACE** (Adverse Childhood experiences) in Barnardo's (2018) and received an introduction to trauma informed education and teaching practices. Staff attended online CPD provided by Dr Aideen Flynn entitled **From Trauma Reactive to Responsive** on several dates in Spring 2021.

Identification of Focus Areas for School Self-Evaluation

Staff

In order to identify our focus for the School Self-Evaluation process,

- Marian Kennedy (post holder for SPHE) canvassed staff opinions on **Statements of Effective Practice** under the 4 **Key Areas** :-Culture and Environment, Curriculum, Policy and Planning and, finally, Relationships.
- Staff was encouraged to identify one area of concern and one area in which the school was perceived to be doing well. Staff were also asked to reflect on and suggest ways in which areas of concern could be targeted for improvement. Feedback was provided to the staff at the June 2021 Staff Meeting.
- All feedback was anonymised.
- It was decided to focus on staff wellbeing in the coming academic year and that this would be an ongoing responsive discussion.
- It was decided that a student council would be set up.
- It was decided that parental wellbeing might be assessed and advice would be sought from the school psychologist in relation to same.

Students

- A random sample of students from 2nd-6th did a questionnaire (Wellbeing Measurement Framework for Primary Schools).
- Feedback presented to Staff at the May 2021 Staff meeting and in an age/need-appropriate manner to the students.
- Parent wellbeing will be assessed in 2021-2022.

Findings for Staff based on Staff Wellbeing questionnaire

Findings for Staff (Feedback)

14/6/21

Introduction

Starting in February 2021 and concluding in March 2021 all teachers were sent by weekly email 4 separate sets of statements under the following headings;

- Key area 1-Culture and Environment
- Key Area 2-Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)
- Key Area 3-Policy and Planning
- Key Area 4-Relationships and Partnerships

The following are the findings from feedback on these statements. While all teachers received the statements, not all teachers returned feedback. Feedback is presented anonymously within this report. Feedback is securely held for the required period.

- I looked for repeated positive and negative patterns in responses. I present these here and any 'stand out' responses and/or statements to reflect teacher's voices.
- The findings may not reflect your own feedback.
- The feedback was given during a school lock-down in the 2nd year of a global pandemic.
- These findings are presented impartially and non-judgementally and with the intended goal of improving the wellbeing of the whole school community.
- Some points outlined in 'areas for improvement' below may need clarification and not improvement e.g. staff may not be aware of the existence of a policy or need clarity on particular points. In some Feedback, some statements received many 'unsure' responses. These are presented below as questions and can be discussed/clarified.

*Some statements in Key Area 2 may have been more relevant or only relevant to Secondary.

Key Area 1-Culture and Environment

Strengths

- Positive approaches to discipline where issues are resolved with care, respect and courtesy.

- Opportunities for CPD are provided for teachers to ensure that they have the relevant knowledge and understanding to promote wellbeing and to create a positive classroom environment
- The school is proactive in meeting the professional development needs of teachers.
- School leaders and management understand the link between physical activity and wellbeing and facilitate physical activity and movement breaks within the school environment

Areas for Improvement

- While the school may recognise that Staff Wellbeing is of equal importance to student wellbeing, are there appropriate supports for staff wellbeing?
- Do children and staff feel a sense of belonging, safety, connection and support?
- Need for better communication with parents about the supports that are in place regarding the promotion of wellbeing of children.
- Need for children to understand the link between academic achievement and wellbeing
- A universally expressed need for improvement in the school's physical environment in terms of building, outside areas, equipment etc.
- Need for all stakeholders voices to be heard-staff, children and parents, need for Students council and Parents council
- Need for freely available drinking water. (lead in the pipes)
- School related emails and text messages to be scheduled to arrive at 'appropriate' times-e.g. not too early or too late.

Selected quotations from Feedback

'I would worry that the voices of English Language Learners in our school community is difficult to gather'

'It is often hard to practice consistent wellbeing skills when the (outside) school community lacks skills of timekeeping, attendance, resilience and perseverance'

Positive approaches to discipline-'Approaches are still very much teacher and child dependent... (Leading to) inconsistency in methods'

'I believe that work load and initiative overload is very intense in the school'

'I believe that the pastoral committee will develop in-staff CPD which will benefit our pupils greatly'

'Teachers are aware of families and children who are at risk and colleagues regularly communicate and document changes in behaviour and offer supports to children and families'

..'It's mainly the pupils with challenging behaviour that command the most support.'

'I would query the use of 'consistent' (when we talk of discipline)...as I don't believe that we address matters () consistently and that the school code of behaviour should be refreshed to re-establish agreement on what we are doing so that we have full school community buy in and ownership of the policy'

Key Area 2-Curriculum

Strengths

- Teachers preparation for teaching and learning explicitly references teaching, learning and assessment approaches that promote collaborative learning, peer and self-assessment and a sense of achievement
- Teachers design and prepare teaching/learning approaches and assessment of learning outcomes which are differentiated
- Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to attend relevant CPD, incorporate and model learnings in their practice and engage in collaborative work.
- Teachers use opportunities to promote wellbeing across the curriculum
- There are opportunities for training and on-going practice, support and guidance for SNAs to further build their capacity to support children and young people with additional needs.

- A broad range of children's success is rewarded and celebrated to demonstrate the value that the school places on all types of achievement.

Areas for Improvement

- Need to motivate children to learn, need for children to see themselves as learners and these positive dispositions to be demonstrated in classwork and homework
- Need for a dedicated team (Student Support Team and/or Pastoral Care Team) to support all teachers and SNAs to implement appropriate strategies for children with additional and/or complex needs, including those recommended by professionals. (This was highlighted in Feedback as 'maybe' or 'no'. It is currently happening. Should it be reviewed within the context of this statement?)
- More need for teachers to deliver specialised and targeted programmes() to individuals and/or small groups
- The school deploys resources under the Teacher Resource Allocation Model based in Individual learning, behavioural, social and emotional needs-overall consensus that SEL and behavioural needs dominate.
- A need for more peer assessment
- Where an extra-curricular programme is provided, children and parents are invited to actively participate in planning the programme (unsure/no in many feedback responses)
- Where an extra-curricular programme is provided, the school links with community based clubs and organisations to ensure that it is broad, accessible and inclusive.(unsure/no)
- Where extra-curricular activities are planned, children with additional/complex needs and their parents are actively involved in planning and evaluating the programme (unsure/no)

Selected quotations from Feedback

...'Who decides what success for all is...success in what...academic progression, social interactions?? How do we measure success for all? What is our base line? Has data to be quantifiable and comparative in nature so our pupils are compared to their peers or do we take into account mitigating factors that impact on pupils' lives?

'When behaviour breaks down, we are just managing to get through the day'

'We need to choose one template for planning'

(In relation to differentiation)...'The Department pressures focus on standardised testing and this is a requirement which defeats the overall differentiation approach'

'I would like to see a collaborative sharing approach among staff' (referencing CPD)'

'Teachers shouldn't feel like failures if everything doesn't work out according to plan'

In response to the statement 'Teachers use various teaching and assessment methods that promote a sense of achievement and differentiate their expectations to promote full participation and achievement for all children'-

'Staff meetings could be used to do some of this preparation'

'Teachers can sometimes be overwhelmed by CPD and not use it effectively'

'Schools can only do a certain amount. They cannot fix everything'

Key Area 3-Policy and Planning

Strengths

- Schools have appropriate wellbeing policies in place and are made available to staff, children, parents and relevant school community.
- Policies and plans set out how inclusive practice will be implemented in a way that fosters school connectedness, acceptance and celebration of diversity
- The school uses the Education Passport (NCCA) for children and young people transitioning to post primary school.
- The school gathers information on risk factors such as bullying, absenteeism, truancy and disruptive behaviour to inform wellbeing programme planning.

- The school has regard to the Department's policies and circulars that outline how to support children with additional/complex needs.
- School based information is used, in conjunction with reports from external professionals, to set guidelines and recommendations for individualised supports for children with additional/complex needs.
- The school engages in a collaborative problem-solving approach to support a child's needs, identified through the continuum of support.
- A student support file is used to plan, record and review progress
- At times of transition, information is gathered and transfer review meetings are held for those children with additional/complex needs
- The school has regard to the Department's policies and circulars that outline how to identify a range of evidence-based strategies and programmes for groups at 'further risk' of developing mental health difficulties *
- The school ensures that children with complex needs will be supported to understand and follow school policies e.g. bullying/school code of behaviour

Areas for Improvement

- A need for the wellbeing of the whole school community underpins all school policy and plans
- A need for the voices of children, parents and staff to inform the development, review and updating of school policies
- Need for a comprehensive CPD plan to ensure all teachers have the necessary training to incorporate wellbeing promotion in their teaching practice to meet the particular needs of the school population-this was queried by some. We have CPD but do we/should we have a plan?
- Need for systems to support all members of staff (by school leaders and management)
- *(see strengths) Does Art therapy benefit the children? This question was posed in some feedback. Does the school have regard to the Departmental policies and circulars which outline how to identify a range of evidence-based strategies and programmes for groups at 'further risk' of developing mental health difficulties? (unsure/no in majority of Feedback)
- Need for the Assessment policy to outline how additional school based screening and intervention tools are used to assess social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Does the school have (an adequate) procedure for gathering, storing and sharing confidential information which is guided by data protection regulations **and which is conducted in partnership with parents, children and teachers to inform programme planning?** The bold section queried in feedback and the question posed-Is our procedure for gathering, storing and sharing confidential info. adequate?
- Does the school have mechanisms in place for identifying and supporting vulnerable children in the event of a critical incident? This question was posed in some feedback.

Selected quotations from Key Area 3

In response to 'schools and centres of education use a Self-Evaluation Wellbeing Promotion Process to develop, implement and review wellbeing promotion- 'I don't agree that this is an indicator of success. I find these evaluations have expectations that are very high and usually give cause for disappointment and a sense of failure'

In relation to the provision of school support at times of challenge-'I have receive support on an informal basis but am not aware of any formal support'

'Staff not supported and often feel the blame for events or that they have not done enough to prevent a situation. Everything leads to more pressure and paperwork. (Sometimes feels that) there is no acknowledgement/recognition that a lot lies outside our control'

On filing and storage of data-'No cohesive plan on how info is filed on Aladdin (plan/policy etc.)...so difficult to get into quickly

Key Area 4-Relationships and Partnerships

Strengths

- *School staff model openness, respect and listening in their interactions with children and parents.

- Relationships and partnerships are supported through a range of agreed formal/informal structures, such as, student councils, buddy systems, mentoring systems, assemblies, newsletters, student journals and through teaching and learning (as far as possible/impacted by the pandemic)
- The Board of school leaders and management promotes the establishment of a parent's council.
- The school (does its best to) establish good links with Dept. support services; community based statutory and voluntary support services and external agencies.
- Children and young people and their parents are invited to engage in collaborative problem-solving and decision making with regard to their individual needs and the interventions to support them.
- Children have access to one on one or small group support to support their personal/social and educational development.
- At times of transition, the school links with other education settings to ensure successful transfers

Areas for Improvement

- Need for school leaders and management to acknowledge the importance of staff wellbeing and promote this in a variety of ways
- Need for school leaders and management to ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are put in place for staff wellbeing, -details of the Employee Assistance Service and other relevant supports be made available to staff.
- Need for promotion of professional networks for Principals and teachers
- Need for the school to promote engagement in networks for teacher collaboration
- Need for mentoring systems to be put in place wherein more senior staff can offer practical/social support to newly qualified /new staff members.
- Need for individualised support (for staff) from school leaders and management in times of difficulty or during personal crisis
- Need for senior students to mentor younger children (impacted by POD system)
- Befriending/buddy systems needed to support children's interaction with peers (impacted by POD system)
- Need for reflection on the following: - relationship building for children who are experiencing difficulties can be achieved through a variety of initiatives including having a 'named staff member' allocated to the child to act as 'one good adult'. Two questions posed- How does this work in practice? Is there a danger of creating a 'good cop', 'bad cop' scenario?
- *Does school staff model openness, respect and listening in interaction with each other?

Selected quotations from Key Area 4

'Staff wellbeing not promoted in a real way. Too many emails during the school day, overload of info in the emails, overloaded agendas at staff meeting....'

'Are (details of) EAS and other relevant supports displayed in the Staffroom?'

As regards good links with Departmental support services etc.-'I think the school is doing all it can, sometimes the effort does not pay dividends'

Recommendations:

The findings should be discussed at a whole-school level and one or more areas targeted for improvement. 2 or 3 goals may be identified and actions decided for next year. Feedback can be taken for the targeted areas only in 2022/2023.

Note- correction to Key Area 3 (Areas for improvement)

- Does the school have (an adequate) procedure for gathering, storing and sharing confidential information which is guided by data protection regulations **and which is conducted in partnership with parents, children and teachers to inform programme planning?** The bold section queried in feedback and the question posed-Is our procedure for gathering, storing and sharing confidential info. adequate?

Action plan drawn up within the context of LAOS to address some issues within wellbeing. Wellbeing of staff and students will continue to be revisited and different areas targeted for improvement. In the coming year it is intended to:

- Trial a wellbeing programme in Term 1 which teaches children wellbeing strategies
- To set up a student's council to give greater participation to pupils and allow children's voices be heard. Children will help run initiatives and model good behaviours for others.
- To provide parents with more information on wellbeing through information leaflets, on school Facebook page and on seesaw.
- Staff wellbeing will also be a focus next year as the staff is exhausted and stretched after several difficult years. Staff will revisit the topic of wellbeing in the next academic year and may call on the Board to support them in looking after their own wellbeing.

3. Pupil Survey Spring 2021 - Findings presented to staff February 2021

Wellbeing Survey (based on Anna Freud publication/see Questionnaires)

19 children surveyed from 2nd -6th. Children were selected that would be able to understand and answer questions asked. Boys and Girls were asked. Children wrote class number on the questionnaire but not their name

Student Resilience

- A positive relationship with an adult at home

16 yes

1 No

2 Sometimes

- A positive relationship with an adult at school

16 yes (nearly 3/4)

1 No

2 Sometimes

- A member of a club or group outside of school or has a hobby

10 No (over 50%)

9 yes and sometimes

- A positive relationship with classmates and/or other children in the school

14 Yes (nearly 3/4)

5 No

Me and My Feelings

- Overall positive-feeling calm and happy and in control

8

- Overall negative feelings-feeling worried or dysregulated

2 (another 9 were 'in between') (over 50%)

Satisfaction with life

Overall Happy-9

Sometimes Happy-9 (over 50%)

Unhappy-1

Summary

50 % of our children feel unhappy and or dysregulated.

Area of focus

Action plan drawn up within the context of LAOS to address some issues within wellbeing. Wellbeing of staff and students will continue to be revisited and different areas targeted for improvement. In the coming year it is intended to:

- to re-purpose the **Pastoral Care Team** to support staff and students .
- To teach **Weaving Wellbeing** to all classes
- To trial in term 3 of 2021 and in term 1 of next academic year (2021-2022) some recommendations made by Dr Aileen Flynn (From Trauma Reactive to Trauma Responsive).
- Marian Kennedy will run termly whole school activities which promote student wellbeing and self-regulation.
- To set up a **Student Council** to give greater participation to pupils and allow children's voices be heard. Children will help run initiatives and model good behaviours for others.

Conclusion

Action plan drawn up within the context of LAOS to address some issues within wellbeing. Wellbeing of staff and students will continue to be revisited and different areas targeted for improvement. In the coming year it is intended to:

- implement already mentioned goals (see above)
- To provide parents with more information on wellbeing through information leaflets, on school Facebook page and on seesaw.
- Staff wellbeing will also be a focus next year as the staff is exhausted and stretched after several difficult years. Staff will revisit the topic of wellbeing in the next academic year and may call on the Board to support them in looking after their own wellbeing.

Our Improvement Plan

See Improvement plan

We have recorded the **targets** for improvement we have set.

The **actions** we will implement to achieve this.

Who is responsible for implementing, monitoring and reviewing our improvement plan.

How we will measure progress and check outcomes (criteria for success).

As we implement our improvement plan, we will record;-the **progress** made, **adjustments** made and when, **achievements of targets** (original and modified) and when made.