

## Pupils identified with emotional wellbeing barriers to learning

The emotional well-being of children is the business of everyone in St Stephens Community Academy - we all have a role to play. The impact of grief, loss and change affects us all, including children and young people – whether it is a family breakdown, bereavement or even moving schools. Some of these life experiences, such as bereavement, may occur when we least expect them. Others such as family breakdown may occur gradually. An event such as moving schools, while something most children experience in their lifetime, can be extremely stressful. It is therefore vital that we help all children to develop the skills that they need to cope with challenging events (both expected and unexpected) – skills they need throughout their lives. Without functional coping strategies, including knowing when to seek help, children may turn to behaviours such as self-harm and disordered eating in an effort to manage their stress.

There is evidence to show a clear link between special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and challenges to wellbeing. Children who are disruptive or acting out in class are referred to the Thrive / Behaviour Lead or SENCO. These children may have unmet learning needs and they also may be vulnerable to mental health difficulties. There is now a growing importance in supporting children's social, mental and emotional health, whether they are deemed to have SEND or not. One of the core principles of the SEND Code of Practice is a focus on removing barriers to learning. This principle applies, to all pupils, not just those with an education plan or record of need.

There is an undeniable link between mental well-being and attitudes to learning. This link is back by findings from the DfE in 2014, which showed that pupil well-being predicted their later academic progression and engagement in school. For example, pupils with better emotional well-being at age seven had a value-added Key Stage 2 score, 2.46 points higher than pupils with poorer emotional well-being (equivalent to more than one terms progress).

If children are dealing with distressing life circumstances, they may well find it difficult to concentrate in class and their academic performance may subsequently suffer. If schools are tasked with reducing barriers to learning, then promoting positive mental health and well-being across the whole school community can only support this aim.

Supporting children's emotional and mental well-being in schools and providing opportunities for them to develop important coping skills for life can improve a range of issues, including greater capacity to learn, enhanced academic progress, better attendance and lower exclusion rates – giving children the opportunity to grow up with prospects rather than ongoing mental health problems. Children are also less likely to suffer from serious mental health difficulties in later life if they receive support at an early age, providing a cost saving to adult mental health services.