

Wellbeing Award for Schools (WAS)

Verification Report

School name:	Holy Cross Catholic Primary School
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School website:	www.holycrossprimarysthelens.co.uk
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Award verifier:	Dr Helen Mills
Award adviser (if applicable):	
Date of verification:	07/06/2024

Commentary on the evidence provided:

All staff members and pupils at this wonderful school welcome you with warmth and kindness. The detailed portfolio was outstanding and the presentation delivered by Mrs Carol Gillespie (Head Teacher), Mrs Kate Chauveau (Award Coordinator/Assistant Head teacher) and Miss Davies (Pastoral Manager) demonstrated how the passionate school change team and staff have developed, reviewed and embedded the outstanding mental health and wellbeing provision for pupils, staff, parents and the community, listening to the views of all stakeholders, breaking down barriers, building trusting relationships and ensuring every member of the school community experiences a sense of belonging. All staff, pupils, parents and the governor, spoke with great passion, pride, and honesty during the interviews. A strong community approach and connection was evident, demonstrating the school's 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:

Outstanding 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 Head Teacher, Deputy

Headteacher, Assistant Head Teacher, Change Team, whole school staff and the school community has created innovative ways of working and a seamless and consistent, welcoming, none judgemental, inclusive, diverse, caring, supportive, nurturing, respectful, safe, happy, honest, positive and aspirational culture.

The school's catholic ethos, mission statement, gospel values, wellbeing vision and strategy, are all reflected in the positive and nurturing culture and ethos of the school, and central to the success of the school, and have created a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, referred to during the visit as 'family'. Throughout the award process, the school has demonstrated continued and innovative 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 and mental health of pupils, families and staff supports whole school progress.

An open door policy, voice, listening to the needs of others, effective communication, and breaking down barriers have led to trusting relationships between the whole school community, and are very much part of how the school has achieved a shared sense of belonging where children, families and staff are confident to ask for 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. The numerous opportunities that promote wellbeing has led to children, families and staff developing the skills needed to monitor their own feelings, confident to ask for support and to use techniques to manage their own wellbeing. There are numerous experienced and knowledgeable teams available to swiftly support those children who need it and the School Mental Health Lead, Pastoral Manager and St Helens Mental Health Practitioner communicate wellbeing messages, promote resilience, and offer support to the whole school.

Pupils are at the heart of change in their school and commented that they 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 encouraged and confident to identify and express their feelings, described numerous tools that they can use and activities they can do to regulate their emotions, trusted adults they can work with to promote their mental health and wellbeing and how they actively help each other. Pupils commented on the enjoyment and satisfaction they get from learning, how they try their best and are proud of their celebrated achievements. This has enabled the day-to-day and longer-term emotional wellbeing and mental health to flourish and was evident throughout the verification with the promotion of positivity, aspirations, achievements, coupled with a sense of calm and interpersonal, caring, respectful and trusting relationships between staff and pupils. Children were engaged and encouraged in learning, happy, confident, resilient, nurtured and displayed impeccable manners, exemplary behaviour, respect and kindness.

Pupils commented, "If anyone is feeling angry or sad, we breathe, take brain breaks or talk to someone and it helps us calm down. One child is using the tent less now. It's a great school; you get a lot of help from teachers and they are very caring and understanding. It's fun and we help in assemblies like on kindness and friendship, we take turns and sign Makaton to communicate. Everyone has at least one job so nobody is left out; we feel involved and have a role and are included. We are a little family. I'm very proud of everyone in school; there's always someone to talk to about problems at home and in school and Megan talks to children. The Den is for children who need additional support. The teachers know if someone's not OK and they help us, ask us if we're OK. People use the zones [of regulation]. Learning is really good; teachers help us and give us ideas and reminders. They prepare you well, like for SATS and to behave better. In PSHE lessons we talk about our feelings and emotions; you can be happy on the outside and not on the inside. Things you

can do to get your mental health better like talk to someone, colour, anything that makes you feel better. We get to relax and forget about everything in Golden time; it's a nice treat. There's no bullying; if there was it would be sorted calmly".

Pupils commented with pride on the roles they have in school, "We have lots of jobs around school, Rota kids raise money and take octopuses' to Whiston Hospital to help people feel comfortable. School council have meetings and talk about things we want to add or change to school. Reading buddies help Y1 children to improve their reading. We have office monitors and Mini Vinnies do presentations. House captains lead our houses and prayer leaders choose the prayer and start it off. We get dojo badges and trophies for the year. Jobs help you know what the responsibilities are with having a job".

Further pupils commented, "It's a really friendly school, we're very welcoming to newcomers. If someone leaves, we make a big card and write messages and congratulation cards too. We get free breakfasts and fruit and toast and snacks in afterschool clubs. We go to lots of tournaments. I'm excited for PGL. We spend time in our new class before summer and it gets you used to your new teacher so you don't worry about it. Fig [therapy dog] is so cute; it's very nice to have her, she's gentle and we have Fig's jobs too and I've fed and stroked her. School is brilliant, excellent, an amazing place to talk about your feelings. It makes me feel special. It's home".

Investment in a therapeutic environment, wide range of activities, nurturing staff, with formal and informal support systems, and in robust identification, provision and monitoring of interventions, 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, the outstanding range of interventions including DESTY, Nurture and emotional literacy, play and Lego therapy, young carers, drawing and talking, bereavement, mental health support team interventions and parental workshops, EAL support, trauma informed approach including safe/calming areas to regulate emotions, use of zones of regulation, positive affirmations, free breakfast for all pupils, resourced provision in Nurture base, 'Fig' the therapy dog, inclusive therapeutic school approach, rewards, awards, praise and recognition celebrated, the range of pupil leader roles established, PASS and Boxall assessments, CPOM's, outstanding SEND and transition provision and support, dedicated Nurture base, reflection areas/prayer spaces, wellbeing promotion and information sharing including pupils delivering mental health and wellbeing assemblies, Pastoral Manager including outstanding support for parents, identification of need and referrals to outside agencies, PSHE and RSHE curriculum, participation in mental health events, and partnerships with the local parish church and community. Many of these have a major impact on the whole school community. Furthermore, the excellent stakeholder questionnaire results, demonstrated how well staff in school support pupils, families and each other.

The proactive approach and endless opportunities for parental engagement, effective communication between staff and parents and excellent working relationships with outside agencies, should be commended and ensures that all children, including vulnerable children and their families are supported swiftly and effectively. The support given to parents is exceptional, with staff going above and beyond to establish trusting relationships. Staff are available on the school gate for parents to discuss concerns and can contact the office to arrange a telephone call or meeting with staff. The school provided outstanding evidence of regular parental communication methods and signposting to mental health and wellbeing including newsletters, website, school spider, twitter and parent wellbeing learn and share events. The Pastoral Manager works tirelessly to promote information, events and support at school and in the local community for parent/carers, hosts coffee mornings, supports families in need and completes referrals to outside agencies and community support services.

Parents and the Governor commented, “The schools mental health practitioner has reassured my son and helped him and me to help him with his mental health. School got him into Barnardo’s and he loved it; speaking to someone. He will ask for things now and we’re getting there. School gets back to you; I can’t fault them. I believe in mental health now and the children love the school. I knew about the wellbeing award. Mental health is at the forefront of school life; it’s so important. My daughter is a different child now through the clubs, teambuilding and mental health practice. We’ve had lots of help and she feels safe and is now a happy child and she gets upset when she can’t come to school. Staff are amazing, ‘we care, we share, we value’ and they really do. They’re almost like a parent; they connect with the child, they’re like a second family. I can come with my own issues and ask for help. It’s a safe space. School helped her go to young carers; they’ve helped so much and I have lots of confidence in the school. The assemblies and mental health days educate everyone; they’re brilliant and my child understands everyone is different. My son will talk to me about the zones, he knows he can speak to anyone in school. They sent home an emotional workbook and drawing our feelings in it was fantastic; support is there. Small groups access enjoyable sessions with the sports coach; they’ll talk and he feeds back to us. You can feel the happiness, warmth and support from everyone”.

Attention must be drawn to the value and priority given to whole school staff wellbeing and training. This has created a positive and caring culture where everyone checks in on each other. Staff feel that the strategies in place alongside the support from all the staff contribute to their emotional wellbeing, enabling them to provide the most effective support to the children. The Head Teacher addressed staff stress and workload and improved wellbeing through implementing the staff wellbeing policy and strategy that the whole staff team agreed to, introduced monthly wellbeing awards, praise, thanks and recognition, supervision for the safeguarding team, added wellbeing as an agenda item to meetings, and introduced two annual wellbeing meetings and an annual questionnaire, purchased mental and physical health support via SAS, improving the staff room and toilet environment, added PPA pods, providing refreshments, end of term lunches, welfare products, and all staff have access to the trained senior mental health lead. The whole school team have set up KD’s café, Holy Cross Hikers Club and HC Fitness Class. The SLT have an open-door policy and have embraced listening to staff and implementing changes to improve wellbeing. There is a genuine team approach and staff are confident to talk openly and honestly about their mental health and wellbeing, knowing that they are treated with respect and dignity. Staff know how to manage their own wellbeing and use these strategies effectively. Staff celebrate as a team and socialise together. Staff feel listened to, valued, cared for, connected, supported, have a sense of purpose, are passionate about making a positive difference to the lives of the children and families at their school, enjoy their jobs and are proud to be a part of the school family.

Extensive training has included Mental Health Lead, Barnardo’s PATHs school, DESTY school, self-regulation, EAL, capturing the voice of the child, curriculum, sensory, trauma informed approaches, promoting children’s mental health and wellbeing, sign language, safeguarding, young carers, supporting the mental health and wellbeing of autistic pupils, St Helens transitions, relationships and change festival, St Helens Mental Health Support Team delivered training, Thriving referral and support and ongoing SEND. This has ensured that staff are well informed and confident to support their pupil’s mental health and wellbeing.

Staff commented, “I’m proud that there’s no stigma attached to mental health through increased awareness. The whole school approach to wellbeing is embedded in the culture and there’s support for everyone; it’s really open. The staff wellbeing workshops have helped me to look after myself. KD’s Café and appreciation days create a unity; people sit and talk. We’re so lucky; everyone gets on

and it stretches to parents and Governors. People comment that the school looks nice. Everyone looks out for each other. I feel really valued and happy here. Loads of training including National College online courses; it's helped me. Trauma informed training has helped in the classroom. We can access mental health and wellbeing training to support ourselves. All staff have access to the free SAS package including G.P. appointments for family. We have an open-door policy and staff are really valued; the Head Teacher and SLT have created that. The Head Teacher improved my office and it was a nice surprise. The school environment has improved; there's so much, lovely displays and flags, the outdoor space, signs and friendship board make it nicer, it makes us smile. We belong here. We're really happy coming in. Everything is neatly put together, prayer area, bench to have time out; it feels serene. I'm really proud to be part of this family; staff and the children really care about you. The children are so safe and cared for".

Staff and the Governor were proud of the support they provide to parents and commented, "Parents know they can ask for help; there's now really good uptake. We have coffee mornings in school and bring in different services; it's a safe space. I'll walk with them to the Pantry. Our parents do come to Donna; she's the school mum. We remind parents we will get them uniforms and they're taking pride in their uniform. I'm proud of the relationships we have with parents, built up on trust; that they're confident to ask for support".

Staff spoke passionately about the pupils, and commented, "I'm proud of how tolerant and accepting the children are. Every child is individual and are proud of who they are. Children found it really hard to regulate, one child used the tent all the time at first and now doesn't need it. The children use bean bags to regulate and the zones and strategies are for everyone; they will say what zone they're in and ask to go for a walk. The ethos and approach have improved; the children use the hall for equipment and go on movement breaks; they're more settled now in class. Mental health referrals to Megan's service [St Helens Mental Health Support Team] including parenting groups for behaviour, 1-1 and group sessions and summer programmes for anxiety, emotional regulation and whole school assemblies are excellent and have benefited the children and their families".

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, parents and staff. The school understands the importance of looking after the whole school's mental health and wellbeing, and how this supports children to feel included, valued, connected, happy, loved, safe and secure, enabling them to thrive and achieve.

Impact:

The stakeholder questionnaire comparison of results demonstrated impact in all areas.

Investment in staff wellbeing and training has resulted in a reduction in staff workload and an increase in staff managing their own wellbeing, which has further strengthened staff's sense of belonging, pride, motivation and job satisfaction.

Whole school promotion, activities, programmes and training in wellbeing and mental health has increased whole school community awareness and removed the stigma attached to mental health. This has resulted in people having open conversations, recognising their feelings, confident in asking for support or supporting themselves and others, using a range of techniques, contributing to improved wellbeing and resilience. This has led to a shared responsibility and ownership that

promotes and empowers everyone to take responsibility of their own and others wellbeing and mental health.

Staff have increased awareness and understanding of mental health and are confident to talk about their own mental health. Staff are confident in recognising the factors that affect their children and family's mental health and either provide or refer to welfare, financial and emotional support to ensure that children and their families receive support quickly, preventing escalation of mental health issues.

The nurturing ethos of the school, investment in the environment, trusting relationships and effective partnerships across the whole school community has ensured that children, families and staff feel safe, supported, secure and happy. The whole school team at Holy Cross Catholic Primary School work passionately to make a positive difference to the lives of all the pupils, parents and staff.

An embedded welcoming, caring, happy, positive, inclusive school culture and ethos that prioritises whole school community mental health and wellbeing, investment in highly trained passionate and nurturing staff, outstanding community links and partnership working, informal and formal support, robust monitoring systems 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, and has resulted in a reduction in behavioural incidents and improved attendance, impacting positively on learning. This alongside the PSHE and RSHE curriculum, 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, independence and resilience, enabling young people to thrive.

Furthermore, breaking down barriers to parental and community engagement, effective consultation and communication mechanisms has led to improved working relationships and families accessing support and feeling empowered to make positive changes to their own and their children's lives, improving resilience and ensuring that pupils are ready to learn. Holy Cross Catholic Primary School is a safe haven for every member of the school community, where everyone experiences a sense of belonging and has the opportunity to shine.

Areas for development:

As already highlighted by the school, continue to further develop the outside space to support mental health and wellbeing and achieve the actions identified in the strategy.

Train pupil Wellbeing Champions using the Anna Freud peer mentoring programme.

Train pupil EAL buddies and visit Springfield Community Primary School, who have achieved the Wellbeing Award for School for ideas to further develop EAL provision and therapeutic approach.

Use the zones of regulation or a digital platform such as Zumos to facilitate daily wellbeing check ins.

Consider whole school staff to complete the free Place2Be online Mental Health Champion training.

Consider recruiting parent Wellbeing Champions.

Consider introducing a staff wellbeing day/afternoon leave of absence.

Apply to wooden spoon to further develop the Den Nurture room.

Continue to showcase the schools' multiple examples of outstanding practice in emotional wellbeing and mental health work, and continue to share the experiences and approaches with other schools.

Verifier recommendation:

Holy Cross Catholic 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.