

NGA MHFA pilot

I am writing to share with you a pilot project North Gosforth Academy have been involved in this academic year. Alongside 15 other schools in North Tyneside we have looked to develop schools to be more mental health aware.

The initial phase of this pilot was to upskill several members of staff in respect to mental health. We are pleased to report we have successfully trained three members of staff in an accredited Mental Health First Aid course to become Mental Health First Aiders. We have completed training with a further seven members of staff who are able to support and work alongside the three Mental Health First Aiders.

This has allowed us to prepare a plan for the school on:

- Improving confidence in discussing mental health.
- Establishing a common language.
- Developing an openness and acceptance of what mental health is.
- Directing students and colleagues to the most appropriate help for those that have mental health concerns.

Mental health influences how we think and feel about ourselves and others, and how we can interpret events. It affects our capacity to learn, to communicate and to form, sustain and end relationships. It also influences our ability to cope with change, transition and life events: having a baby, moving home, experiencing bereavement. I am sure you will agree COVID-19 and related restrictions have certainly challenged our mental health, and the added pressures of home schooling and unusual exam conditions are further examples of why we need to address mental health.

As a school, we include these topics in our tutorial programme which includes assemblies and opportunities for discussions during morning registration. As part of the pilot, we have also attended monthly network meetings and shared resources and ideas with other North Tyneside schools. We have participated in initial surveys, and we will be asking you to participate again before the end of May so we can gather further opinions to allow us to continue this momentum.

By training staff to a national standard, we can ensure our students get the best support and help they can, we can also support all staff so that they too can address any worries individuals may have. We have included staff welfare in this project as they are the frontline of our school, and their happiness and confidence in dealing with any issues is the key to ensuring our children are fully supported. I would also like to extend this project further to parents and have therefore set up an email address (MH@northgosforth.co.uk) for all interested parties. This can be used to ask for help or to make suggestions on how the school can further better the opportunities and services available. Mental health is positive and having the coping strategies to take on challenges is key; we want everyone to understand and recognise that we can support each other.

I am pleased to confirm that each Head of Year and the SEND department have completed further training in completing wellbeing profiles with students to help individuals identify their limitations, as well as the resources they require to cope and control their mental health.

Additionally, we have engaged with several counselling services and students have benefited from this. We have been able to signpost external organisations which can offer specialist support, and we continue to develop an awareness of mental health in all aspects of the school.

So, what next?

In tutorial we have covered various strategies which allow students to understand when their mental health is being challenged and how they can stay in control of this, but also what to do if it begins to interfere with everyday activities and how to recognise signs of struggles in their peers. We hope to repeat these strategies to continually address changes in needs and support.

We will be sending out North Gosforth Academy questionnaires for students and parents, and we will also ask you to complete a questionnaire from North Tyneside Local Authority.

We would like greater parent and school communication around this topic. We will be reviewing our action plan and continuing to develop strategies to benefit all involved. If you would like further information, have any contributions, or you are concerned please let us know at MH@northgosforth.co.uk

Rachel Smith