

# Are You Smiling?

Exploring ways to wellbeing for school communities.

**Issy Jerrard of Forest Oak School, Solihul, writes.**



THE Emotional Health and Wellbeing (EHWB) of young people is central to their ability to learn and achieve yet the current shape of children & young people's mental health or their lack of mental wealth is a major concern. With one in eight (12.8%) 5 to 19 year olds assessed as having one or more mental disorders in 2017 (NHS digital, 2018) it's significance cannot be underestimated.

Hollingsley explains the critical nature of this as an epidemic of harm, suggesting a sporadic nature to support and an element of luck for those in need. (Hollingsley, J. 2018).

As Carpenter highlights, it is our most vulnerable and complex children; those with special educational needs, who are at highest risk and least likely to be

easily identifiable. He discusses mental health difficulties as the most frequent co-occurring, co-existing or compounding condition in those with complex needs. (Carpenter et al, 2015).

An issue on the lips of government, educators and parents, a school's responsibility for early intervention, a whole school approach and support has been made clear. (DoH, 2015, DoH DfE 2017). In schools we have been experiencing the complexity and urgency of this issue for some time. It is educators on the front line; holding young people's hands, supporting parents and navigating criteria and thresholds from before a Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) referral through to treatment and beyond. With

waiting times at 26 weeks for a first appointment and 10 months for treatment, (Hollingsley, J, 2018), we have had to learn fast. Alongside this, as a workforce of caring professionals, with an ever widening range of responsibilities, accountability and financial pressures of our own; we too can be susceptible to poor mental health, yet many are not confident sharing these difficulties with employers, fearing it will have a negative impact on students' studies and relationships with colleagues. The Education Support Partnership (ESP) which has evolved to support teachers' needs produced worrying statistics in their annual Teacher Wellbeing Index (2018): 31% of people working in education experienced at least one mental health condition in the past year

yet 74% felt they do not have enough guidance about mental health and wellbeing at work, (ESP, 2018).

An urgent and genuine focus on wellbeing is needed in every environment for children; not only to equip staff with knowledge, skills and confidence to respond effectively but to turn care inwardly; to understand and use positive tools for ourselves and colleagues, enabling us to sustain the stress of the profession and be proactive role models for mental wealth.

In 2014, in response to this need, Forest Oak, an all age school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, took part in a Mental and Emotional Health & Wellbeing focused project with Solihull Education Advisory team