

Introduction

This document summarises the learning from the third wave of interviews with staff in HeadStart Kent (HSK) secondary schools. The interviews were conducted primarily to discuss the implementation of HSK and explore certain elements of the programme, with the view to learn what is working and identify any opportunities for change. Findings are based on nine in-depth interviews conducted between October and December 2018.

Approach to wellbeing in schools

Staff explained how they were hopeful that HSK would assist them in developing the resilience of students and provide support through early intervention and access to services or grants. They described the support available for students with emotional wellbeing issues and were confident there was a robust pathway to identify those in need of support within their schools. They explained the challenges they faced accessing support outside of school due to the lack of continuity or availability of community services and described how these challenges, in addition to long waiting times for specialist mental health services, meant they were under pressure to bridge the gap in provision. Schools explained how it was beneficial being a HSK school as they have access to additional services and are able to confidently signpost to information.

Student and staff awareness of support

When discussing the level of need in their schools, staff described a multitude of influences that could impact on students' emotional wellbeing. They were confident that students know how to access support as there are well-established pathways, which some commented would exist in the absence of HSK. Staff explained that students are aware of HSK via promotional activities or through directly benefitting from the programme, however, some staff did recognise students may not make a direct link between HSK and the services or support. Staff expressed confidence that colleagues had a basic level of awareness and understanding of HSK. However, they did state there were differing levels, with those in pastoral support roles being described as the ones with an in-depth knowledge.

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HSK influence, training and tools

Staff explained that HSK had focussed their minds on the mental health agenda, helped raised the profile of supporting mental health in schools and had motivated them to review and develop their existing student mental health provision. The training provided through HSK was well received and staff explained how it enabled them to enhance their skills and had improved confidence. Staff described how they were embedding learning from the Youth Mental Health First Aid and Mindfulness training into practice. Resilience Conversations continue to be regarded as useful, however, they are also considered time consuming. Only a limited number of staff within the school are having the conversations and those most likely to have them are in pastoral support roles. The introduction of the Self-Reflection tool was described a valuable by staff. The administration surrounding recording the conversations and the paperwork for referrals to commissioned services were expressed as barriers by staff.

Students benefitting from HSK

The development and use of Safe Spaces within schools was noted as a particular success. Staff explained that students were aware of the online support and counselling available, however, feedback from students had been that it was sometimes difficult to access a counsellor. The HSK Participation Workers were praised for their work facilitating the involvement and voice of students, and directly supporting them either on a one to one or group basis. The Intensive and Volunteer mentors were considered a valuable resource, with staff explaining how students more effectively engage with support from adults not associated with the school. Although considered beneficial, staff did explain there had been initial difficulties with mentor availability or suitability, and managing the expectations of students offered this support had been challenging. Access to funding through Talents and Interests or Pay It Forward grants was an area staff described as being beneficial to students and they recognised that funding of this kind is rare. Staff also commented that parents and carers would be either directly or indirectly benefitting from the programme.

Conclusion

School staff are embedding learning from training into practice and using the HSK tools provided, however, this is more likely to be those in pastoral support roles than teachers. Schools consider access to grant funding for students a particular success. Administrative processes and the availability of some HSK commissioned services were described as challenges by staff.

