



Supporting schools to support emotional wellbeing - Learning from HeadStart partnerships during Covid-19



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HeadStart is a £67.4 million National Lottery funded programme set up by [The National Lottery Community Fund](#), designed to test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16, and prevent serious mental health problems from developing. HeadStart understands that the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people is shaped by experiences in different aspects of their lives, including at school, at home, in relationships with family and peers, interactions with digital technology and within broader mental health systems. In collaboration with schools, families, universities, charities, voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), public and clinical services, and young people themselves, HeadStart aims to:

- Build young people's emotional resilience
- Respond to the early signs of common mental health problems
- Provide joined-up, cross-organisational support when and where it is needed

The programme has implemented a range of universal, evidence-based interventions to meet its aims, and involves six local authority partnerships identified as having higher levels of social and economic deprivation than the national UK average. These are:

- Blackpool
- Cornwall
- Hull
- Kent
- Newham
- Wolverhampton

In addition to their universal programmes, each partnership has also provided targeted support services and interventions for young people experiencing at least one particular '[vulnerability](#)'. This helps HeadStart provide more specialised and targeted support to young people whose mental health is, or may become, affected by a particular personal, social and/or economic disadvantage at the same time as offering programmes that all young people can engage with and benefit from.

The National picture: schools, Covid-19 and children and young people's mental health

Schools are a vital source of support for many children and young people; providing space for social connection with peers and trusted adults, physical activity, academic progression and opportunities for creative expression and development, all of which are essential for good mental health and wellbeing. The physical environment of a school and in-person attendance of pupils are central to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing (Allen et al, 2018).¹ Schools also have a responsibility to support and retain pupils with high levels of absences and those at risk of exclusion, and evidence shows that how schools respond to these challenges is indicative of its overall effectiveness at promoting its pupils' wellbeing (Denham, 2021).² The health and wellbeing of school staff, the ethos,

culture and policies of the school and the leadership of Senior Leadership Teams and governors are all central factors in the existence of a mentally healthy and inclusive school that works to protect the mental health and wellbeing of everyone within its community.

The challenges faced by pupils and schools during Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to present, sizeable, chronic and unpredictable challenges to children and young people of all ages attending school. Not only through prolonged school closures, staff shortages and 'home learning', but through exam delays, cancellations and qualifications awarded on the basis of coursework, mock exams and teachers' predictions, which have varied considerably between schools and areas across the country.

School closures have impacted the lives, mental health and wellbeing of pupils by restricting contact with trusted adults in the school environment, preventing in-person social contact with peers and stopping organised activities in and after school. An estimated 90% of school pupils faced school closures in 2020 alone (Clemens et al, 2020),³ and while many children will have drawn upon resilience and available sources of support to cope with the loss of the school environment, many young people, especially those with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and other vulnerabilities, will have experienced the changes more profoundly (Institute of Education, 2021)⁴.

School closures have also impacted upon parents and carers of school children, since many were required to supervise or teach their children at home, while simultaneously working from home, or required to attend work in person, and therefore find child care during a period where everyone is asked to restrict social contact and remain at home.

The stresses and pressures borne from home-based learning are experienced unequally by pupils and families across the country. Many families living in poverty relied on their children's school attendance to attend work, or for their children to be fed (Armitage et al, 2020).⁵ Such children and families are found to be at greater risk of becoming more seriously unwell with Covid-19, and are more likely to be exposed to the virus through low-paid and manual work which cannot be done from home (Whitehead et al, 2021)⁶. Children and families from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds are also shown to be more likely to contract Covid-19 and develop more severe illness than White children and families (Aldridge et al, 2020).⁷ Mental health problems such as depression and anxiety have increased in young people overall, and a survey of 11,000 adolescents (Manfield et al, 2021)⁸ found that the most



vulnerable groups of pupils were:

- those living in poverty and areas of socio-economic deprivation
- females
- those who were receiving in-school pastoral support prior to the pandemic
- those with upcoming exams

The National Mental Health of Children and Young People study showed that likely mental health disorders in English children and young people increased from 1 in 9 to 1 in 6 during the pandemic (Vizard et al, 2020).⁹ At the same time, it's important to note that some young people reported a decrease in anxiety when they were away from the school environment and struggled to reengage when restrictions first lifted. Subsequently, concerns over attendance have increased significantly since the start of the pandemic with an increased prevalence of school anxiety-based avoidance and a rise in elective home education (ADCS, 2021).¹⁰

A majority of school staff found this time difficult, and many did not feel fully equipped or supported to deal with these emerging challenges around pupil mental health, wellbeing and safeguarding during times of school closures and school returns (Müller, Goldenberg, 2020).¹¹ Entering January 2022, almost two years after the pandemic began, the uncertainty continues. Schools have been closed, reopened and closed again multiple times since March 2020, and every school community across the country will have been touched in some way by the pandemic. Schools have demonstrated great resilience and capacity for recovery and adaptation during times of immense pressure, anxiety and loss. Here we set out some examples of learning from the HeadStart partnerships, who have each responded to the challenges of the period in effective, structured ways to support school pupils, their parents and carers, and school staff.

HeadStart's work with schools

Fundamental to the HeadStart programme is whole-systems change, and an ambition to increase young people's positive engagement in school and improve their academic attainment. As of 2021, HeadStart had worked with over 430 schools and over 250,000 young people. Its approach has shifted over time from a 'test and learn' to a 'learn and embed' approach. Partnerships initially developed and tested strategies for supporting pupils and whole-school systems to promote positive mental health and wellbeing through new and innovative interventions and training packages. Latterly, partnerships have sought to embed the effects of their work, establishing ongoing and sustainable systems-change for pupils and whole schools in their local authority areas.



The school-based programmes of the six HeadStart partnerships have been delivered in collaboration with schools, pupils, voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), universities, parents and carers, the NHS, Public Health and multi-disciplinary teams. Universal and targeted support programmes have been offered in schools, and outside of school for pupils who have not been able to attend school or have been excluded, to promote their mental health and wellbeing through a variety of approaches and frameworks.

Whole School Approaches

Much of the work conducted by the partnerships has centred around the development of Whole School Approaches (WSAs) to mental health and wellbeing, grounded in evidence-based frameworks such as Public Health England's 8 principles (shown below) in [Promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing](#).



Each partnership has developed a WSA training offer, with accompanying resources and tools for schools to implement the approach and monitor their effectiveness independently. They have also established school award schemes and rigorous application processes with young people, who are responsible for the assessment of schools' successes at embedding WSAs and evidencing the work they have done. Although every partnership has developed a WSA training offer, each one has modelled a slightly different approach and provided unique supporting and [complementary materials](#), [training offers](#) and [assessment and evaluation tools](#) to support their schools and their pupils.

School support and response

As much of this work began prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the HeadStart partnerships had already trained and supported schools in mental health and wellbeing approaches and schools that were already on that journey were better placed to respond. Training had been provided in mental health and trauma, and schools were equipped with knowledge of community and clinical services open to children and young people, should they be required. One partnership had established a highly effective [multi-disciplinary assessment panel](#) prior to the pandemic, which school staff could refer their

pupils into and sit on if they had concerns. Another partnership set up a [similar model](#) in response to the pandemic, which proved successful, helpful and efficient for school staff and the wider professional community in their area.

The partnerships' responses to the challenges of this period demonstrate how creative, ambitious and collaborative responses to complex and unprecedented problems can defy odds and lead to good outcomes for children, young people and the adults supporting them. Such examples may be useful for schools and local systems as they continue to prioritise wellbeing as the pandemic continues into 2022. The valuable learning provided by HeadStart can underpin longer-term approaches to mental health and wellbeing, leaving a positive legacy from a period of challenge and adversity for so many people.

The below sections outline the different approaches by the HeadStart partnerships, and detail the pandemic-specific responses set-up to continue to support schools and pupils during this period.

HeadStart Blackpool

HeadStart Blackpool have been leading a Resilience Revolution: a whole town approach to resilience and mental wellbeing that trains professionals across organisations and services to respond to signs of emerging mental health problems in children and young people. They have focused on 'beating the odds and changing the odds', with a resilience approach that goes beyond the individual and aims to address structural inequalities that impact young people unequally across local and national society.

Whole-school resilience approach

HeadStart Blackpool have developed a whole-school resilience offer for all Blackpool schools, providing training, assessment and auditing to empower and enable schools to develop whole-school, resilience-based approaches to mental health and wellbeing. This work is modelled on the [Academic Resilience Approach](#) developed by Professor Angie Hart and Lisa Williams from the BoingBoing Community and the University of Brighton. It refers to helping pupils achieve good academic outcomes despite adversity, promoting improved behaviour and results for disadvantaged pupils, and supporting schools to develop whole-school resilience approaches.

Covid-19 guidance for schools

Responding quickly and effectively to the challenges posed to schools during the Covid-19 pandemic, HeadStart Blackpool published a research-based [guide](#) for schools to support them to continue implementing their WSA during lockdowns. In the guide, HeadStart Blackpool acknowledge the substantial challenges faced by school staff and senior leadership teams in continuing to support pupils and families remotely whilst also managing their own experiences of the pandemic. The guide provides practical advice and solutions to problems that school staff may experience during this time, including information about how to spot mental health challenges in pupils, and how to escalate concerns.

The guide includes advice for schools given in the ['Actions for educational and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1st June'](#) (DfE, 2020), but adds further detail for schools, with a particular focus on vulnerable young people such as those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and those transitioning from year 6 to year 7. It also places emphasis on the school system and the role of management in implementing flexible working practices to protect the mental health and wellbeing of school staff which, in turn, helps the pupils too. The guide describes how the

Resilience Framework can be helpful in these contexts, with practical ideas and information for staff to take active steps to support their pupils.

Content is structured under the five headings within the Resilience Framework:

Basics: Clearly signpost parents, pupils and staff to any help they can access for basic needs. Reach out to local businesses and charities to ensure there is increased support available.

Belonging: Implement regular times for pupils, staff and senior leaders to reconnect, checking in with staff, pupils and parents to ask how they are feeling or predominantly display a means for them to express their concerns.

Learning: Recognise, value and build on what children and staff have learned during lockdown. Discuss how their skills can be used in an uncertain future.

Coping: Reinforce a culture in the school where everyone is curious about why others behave in a certain way, rather than being judgmental. Teachers and leaders can admit the things they do not know and model the celebration of mistakes as platforms for new learning.

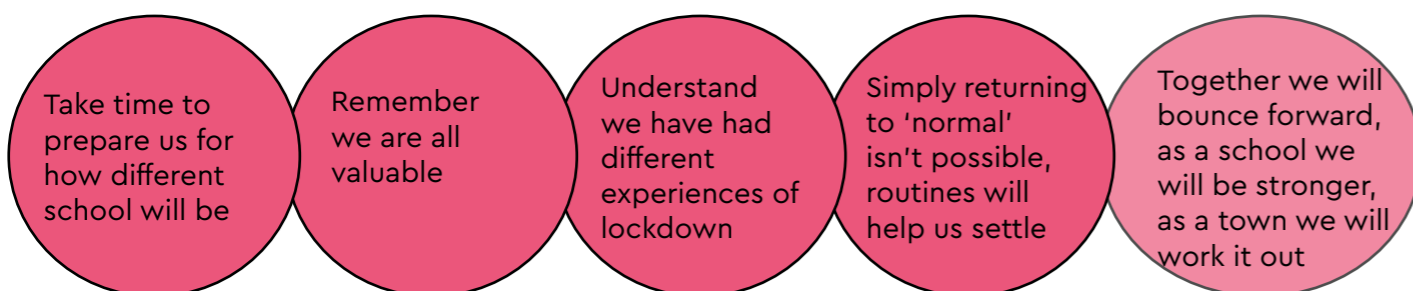
Core self: Create opportunities for reflection by staff and pupils about what they consider to be important and what their sense of purpose is. Be mindful of those who do not seem able to articulate purpose or motivation and consider giving them additional support.

The guide contains a detailed planning framework is provided for schools to continue to model WSAs through the curriculum, staff development, co-production with pupils and parents and through strong senior leadership. It ends with information about the mental health problems that children and young people are more at risk of facing during the pandemic, including anxiety, low mood and trauma, and how to recognise and act upon signs of these problems emerging.



Trust document

In addition to this Covid-19-specific guide, the [TRUST document](#) was created and published by the Resilience Revolution Education Voices (RREV) co-production group.



RREV is a group of young people, parents, carers, teachers, academics and workers who met online weekly throughout the pandemic to envisage what a positive return to school would look like for all pupils and school staff after lockdown. Their vision was captured through the TRUST document, which has since been distributed to all schools in Blackpool and showcased to the Department for Education. The document provides schools with a comprehensive and collaborative template for creating a healthy, welcoming whole-school environment for everyone within the school community to return to.

In June 2020, HeadStart Blackpool's young co-researchers designed, disseminated, analysed and [published the results](#) of a survey on young people's thoughts and feelings about returning to education after the first Covid-19 lockdown. 129 young people responded to the survey, reporting the ways that their schools and colleges had done a range of helpful things which had improved their experiences of home learning and coping emotionally during lockdown. Schools across Blackpool found different ways to keep in contact with pupils, such as through texts, emails, phone calls, video chats and personalised letters, and pupils appreciated that they were able to speak to a range of school staff, who checked-in regularly. Some young people valued being able to continue to attend school or college, with one young person describing school as their 'safe place'.

HeadStart Cornwall

Evaluating a Whole School Approach

HeadStart Kernow have used Public Health England's eight principles to train schools across Cornwall to develop whole-school approaches to mental health and wellbeing. Alongside whole-school and all-staff training on mental health, wellbeing and resilience, and working with senior leadership teams to adapt school policy, culture and practice, HeadStart Kernow has developed [free tools](#) for schools and colleges to use to assess their whole school approaches on ongoing bases, which meant that they were able to continuously evaluate their approaches during the Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions. The first tool, [the Litmus test](#), was created in collaboration with HeadStart Kernow and Dr Pooky Knightsmith. It asks schools to rate themselves against the following six statements:

- 1) 'Staff at my school are happy and healthy'
- 2) 'My school feels safe and welcoming'
- 3) 'The voice of every learner is heard and valued'
- 4) 'We recognise and support our most vulnerable learners'
- 5) 'Parents and carers positively engage with my school'
- 6) 'Students, staff and parents seek help when needed'

Members of the senior leadership team are advised to provide their answers first, which are self-ranked from 1–10, where 1 signifies 'not at all' and 10 signifies 'completely'. They are encouraged to ask as many other people within the school community to evaluate how different responses match, and in which areas different people within the school have different perspectives. A mixture of pupils from across year groups, engaged and less engaged parents, members of teaching staff from different years, and governors are recommended. The purpose of the tool is for schools to be able to continually assess how 'mentally healthy' their systems are, and to be able to easily identify which areas could benefit from improvement. The Rapid Self-Assessment Test, provides a more in-depth assessment using the same statements as above, but also encompasses Public Health's eight principles.

HeadStart Kernow expanded and tailored their training offer, creating and sharing more free resources for schools across Cornwall to use.

Resources

This included an online interactive [Whole School Approach tool](#) which provides 6 areas of reflection using the [SWAN framework](#). The SWAN framework stands for Safe, Warm and Welcoming, All Together, and Nurturing, and was created in response to the Covid-19 pandemic to help schools to foster a caring, collaborative and creative environment that staff and pupils feel supported and safe to return to. HeadStart Kernow's tool provides a series of conversation starters and prompts covering six areas of reflection that support a whole school approach:



Questions include:

- 'How will the curriculum need to change, in content and delivery?'
- 'How will the strengths and resilience of the school be recognised and celebrated?'
- 'How will we prepare children and parents for transitions?'

This tool is complemented by a [virtual ring binder](#) to help staff keep track of resources and training. The ring binder draws together resources, information and service directories from Cornwall and nationally, including [Trauma Informed Schools UK \(TISUK\) Online](#), [Cornwall School Nursing and Health Visitors](#), and [BBC Teach](#).

Resources for young people

In addition to support to schools, HeadStart Kernow developed a range of resources to support young people during the pandemic. The [Transition Mission guide](#) contains resources for young people transitioning from Year 6 to Year 7, featuring a self-care checklist, a mindfulness breathing guide, and tips for getting good quality sleep each night. Transition Mission was delivered to all secondary schools in Cornwall to provide to all pupils in Year 6 in 2020, and was adapted into an online and interactive guide for any young person to access. The [Start Now](#) website – HeadStart Kernow's website designed and curated by and for young people – also published an Online [Wellbeing and Resilience Action Plan](#), [lockdown workshops](#) and a [Back to School campaign](#).

Training and development

An extended training offer was created for all school staff across Cornwall in response to the first 2020 lockdown, including:

- TISUK virtual training, which was attended by 918 delegates by October 2020
- 3 hour Return to School training, attended by 690 delegates
- Virtual Whole Staff Approach 3-hour training parts 1 and 2
- Pathway to Mental Health support guides produced by TISUK
- A conference on '[brain-based attachment interventions to informed troubled lives](#)', led by [Dr Dan Hughes](#) and Dr Jon Baylin, attended by over 500 delegates



Furthermore, [the Bloom professional consultation model](#), adapted in response to the Covid pandemic and facilitated by HeadStart Kernow, brings together a multidisciplinary team of professionals working with children and young people across Cornwall to offer a holistic and specialist multiagency assessment of each case. During the pandemic, Bloom moved from a locality-based model with a weekly two-hour-long meeting, to a centralised model with four 1-hour meetings per week. All 81 referrals received up to April 2020 were triaged through Bloom, and an additional 50 Covid-19 response assessments were held in between March and October 2020.

This provided support not only to the young people and families referring into Bloom, but also helped make best use of local resources and alleviate pressure from the NHS by signing young people up to the right kind of support for them. The Bloom network includes a seat for school staff on the multi-agency panel to discuss cases, which gives them an opportunity to seek advice and provide their perspective on any of their pupils' needs. This multi-agency supervision model has led to benefits for the whole workforce, especially for school staff supporting pupils with high levels of trauma. Attending the panel has helped to build confidence in school practitioners to continue supporting young people in school environments and emotionally during lockdowns. The virtual delivery of Bloom continued throughout and in between lockdowns, which has provided a continuous service to children and young people with more practitioners able to attend.

HeadStart Kent

Similarly, with other sites, HeadStart Kent have created their own [Resilience Toolkit](#), based upon Public Health's eight principles, which forms the basis for their WSA training for Kent schools. Focusing on resilience, the toolkit breaks the approach down into three stages: 'Assess', 'Planning Actions and Outcomes', and 'Reviewing Impact'. A 'Support for Schools' section contains guidance, resources and activities to help schools to assess and develop their whole school approach. The toolkit can support schools to monitor their whole school community, PSHE and other strategies and activities that support mental wellbeing, and guides schools through planning, implementing and review phases of work.

The Toolkit allowed us to identify that we wanted to set up a Speak Out group for students, which has run ever since. Students are more aware of the support available to them and want to support each other more. Training the students, for example, as peer mentors and young evaluators, has given them the confidence to do this. We also included in our action plan for students to have the opportunity to carry out projects of their own – Kent school.

Once schools have completed the Kent Resilience Toolkit and can evidence the 8 principles, they can apply for the [Kent School Award for Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing](#). The award process verifies and validates the school's work, and is awarded by HeadStart Kent. A minimum of three pieces

of evidence are needed to confirm how they meet the requirements in three areas: student voice, parents and carers, and environment.

Evidence that schools can provide include:

- Student voice meeting minutes
- You said/we said cards
- Student council members and meetings
- Testimonials from young people and parents
- Notice boards that young people have developed themselves and put up

In our action plan we identified the need for an additional safe space for students, so we set up a Wellbeing Room, which is now used for peer mentors, interventions and mindfulness as well as drop-ins. In addition, we ensure students and staff are aware of the college offices, sensory garden, the Hub for SEND students, the Snug for students with English as an Additional Language and children in care as safe spaces. Students have also been involved in updating display boards to demonstrate a culture of speaking about emotions, difference and resilience – Kent school

HeadStart Kent have worked with Kent Community Health NHS Trust on the sustainability of the Resilience Toolkit and School Award. This has led to Kent Community Health NHS Trust providing training, support and review of future award applications to encourage schools to continuously review their whole school approach. This includes two-year reviews for those who have already received their School Award, to recognise schools continued focus on wellbeing and resilience.



The Kent Education for Wellbeing Return Project

[The Kent Education for Wellbeing Return Project](#) (WER) offered training and resources to all schools and colleges across Kent, to support staff and pupils. Schools and colleges were provided with an introductory webinar and two tailored training sessions, both co-delivered by HeadStart Kent, followed by ongoing support up until the summer of 2021. The training sessions were supported by existing resources published by HeadStart Kent, to ensure continued consistency of approach to supporting schools and colleges across the county.

In addition, HeadStart Kent designed, hosted and recorded further webinars delivering 12 interactive training sessions to 272 delegates from schools and colleges across the county. A separate webinar was developed for school governors, designed to support their role in promoting wellbeing in schools as they reopened. 184 delegates attended the governor webinars, bringing the total number of delegates to over 700 in its first phase. In the second phase of the WER project, HeadStart Kent delivered two bespoke workshops at the Kent Further Education Conference in February 2021. More than 100 members of college staff attended the workshops and were provided with resources and tools to share more widely within their settings.

I am feeling very inspired to take this training and implement some of the ideas to help support the families, the children and the staff within our school community. Thank you very much – attendee of HeadStart Kent WER training

The Kent WER project contributed to the sustainability of the HeadStart programme by utilising and adapting existing resources and evidence-based models to support schools and colleges to respond to the unique challenges presented by the pandemic. As more than 100 schools had used the Resilience Toolkit to develop a WSA by 2021, much of the content was already familiar to them, and the WER workshops acknowledged the challenges of implementing a WSA during Covid-19 restrictions, providing information, tips and good examples of how to overcome these challenges. After the WER webinars, HeadStart Kent found that there was a significant increase in the number of new schools signing up to complete the Resilience Toolkit.



HeadStart Hull

Whole School Approach

Through delivery of their training offer for schools and academies across the city, HeadStart Hull found WSAs to be fundamental to embedding change on a larger scale. Their approach to the work has been structured around [Public Health England's eight principles](#), and HeadStart Hull have aimed to make mental health and wellbeing in schools 'everybody's business', in the same way as safeguarding of pupils is the collective responsibility of all school staff. To develop whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing, HeadStart Hull trained members of school staff of all roles and from different departments, including teachers and teaching assistants, reception staff, caterers, caretakers and members of senior leadership. The buy-in of senior leadership is recognised as the fundamental principle that holds the other principles together, and HeadStart Hull worked with senior leadership teams to consider the strengths and difficulties of individual schools, and how policies and procedures could be changed to help create a better whole-school approach for staff, students and parents.

Whilst the training is structured around Public Health's eight principles, HeadStart Hull's bespoke approach has involved exploring and establishing what each school wants to prioritise, and what outcomes they would like to see. Policy and Practice Officers work across the school system to gather expertise and understanding of what was working well and what may need to change, which was collated into comprehensive ideas and action plans. This has led to various individual changes across many of Hull's schools, such as the development of a more fully-developed and defined pastoral team, improved links with and involvement of parents, creating new models to support staff wellbeing and expansion of youth councils to involve young people in more areas of decision making.

HeadStart Hull subsequently developed the [Mark of Excellence Award](#) that schools and colleges can apply for to showcase their success in developing a WSA to mental health and wellbeing. Application and assessment for the award lasts between 6 to 12 months, and young people are involved in verifying whether a school has developed a successful WSA by visiting the provision and checking that the policies and procedures are reflected and evidenced in the school's practice. This means that young people's involvement is central to the development of a WSA in schools, embedding student voice in decision making, and through young people's scrutiny and verification of each school's progress.

Since HeadStart became involved with us, we have embarked on a huge journey. We now have a dedicated wellbeing coordinator and team that provides daily support to our children. Covid-19 has seen child mental health concerns increase, so daily support has been necessary. Recent pupil voices tell us our students feel very supported. We now have a dedicated department and team that support youngsters on a daily basis and provide referrals to several external agencies. – Academy Vice Principal

Covid-19 resources

As schools began to close during the first wave on the Covid-19 pandemic, HeadStart Hull conducted surveys with schools and pupils across the city to develop recovery and restoration plans. They sought to understand the needs of children and young people during lockdown, their experiences as lockdown eased, and the needs of schools as they planned to reopen. HeadStart Hull used this information to curate and publish resources on their website for schools, young people, and parents and carers, and also to inform the city plan for infants, children and young people from 0–25 years old, such as adapting their offer to meet young people's needs, ensuring services continued virtually or developing reduced contact service delivery, such as walk-and-talk in the community. They also provided additional services and training offers, including a range of [pre-recorded training](#) films designed to support staff to work with children and young people facing anxiety and trauma, as well as normalising anxiety and practicing mindfulness.

Many schools across the city reported feeling inundated with information, yet lacked shared, trusted and useful resources for staff on recovery planning and return to school. HeadStart Hull's links with the community and its own diverse offer for children, young people and parents meant that it was well-placed to provide support, sharing relevant and evidence-based resources for schools across the city.

[Life After Covid lesson plans](#), [Returning to School Life after Lockdown](#), and [My Back to School Bubble](#) are examples of these resource. They aimed to help children and young people returning to school feel supported and informed about the pandemic and what the new school environment might be like including new terminology such as 'support bubbles' and 'social distancing'. Resources were designed to help children and young people reflect on what they had enjoyed or found difficult during lockdown, encouraged them to think about their achievements, map out any worries and provided daily and weekly planners for them to fill out. A resource called [Stepping into Secondary School](#) also provided tips, wellness tools and advice from current year 7s to year 6s transitioning from primary to secondary school, which recommended the opportunity for year 6 pupils to virtually explore their new school environment.

The autumn term will have been the first time many pupils have been with their classmates since schools closed to prevent the spread of the virus. It is only natural that some children and young people may still be feeling anxious or sad as a result of coronavirus, especially those who have been away from the classroom for so long. The [HeadStart] programme empowers teachers and parents to spot the signs when young people are struggling and enables them to listen to any concerns and respond in a calm, supportive and reassuring way. – Hull school staff member

HeadStart Newham

In addition to providing a range of schools-based interventions for children and young people, HeadStart Newham works closely with schools to help them build and maintain WSAs to mental health and wellbeing. Their approach to WSAs is, like HeadStart Blackpool, based on Academic Resilience, and their approach to whole-school training is collaborative and individualised, as opposed to prescriptive. Primary and secondary schools are both encouraged to develop and implement WSAs with the support of HeadStart Newham, and parents of primary and secondary pupils are encouraged to engage in their [Being a Parent course](#), which began in school settings and enables parents to train and qualify as course facilitators, to support other parents in the future. This links to the WSA by recognising that parents are a part of the school system, and that they also therefore share the responsibility of promoting wellbeing and resilience through their roles as parents.

The HeadStart Newham [BounceBack programme](#) is a resilience-based behaviour change course that is delivered by HeadStart-trained Youth Practitioners with individual pupils and groups. It began as a face-to-face intervention for primary school pupils, with course materials and information provided [online](#), and later became available for secondary-school pupils. In addition, secondary school pupils have been offered evidence-based activities such as [Team Social Action](#) and [More Than Mentors](#), and pupils from either primary or secondary are encouraged to participate in [co-production](#) with HeadStart Newham, and in community-based creative and sports activities.

Your Time

Whilst developing their schools offer, HeadStart Newham began planning for a new intervention called Your Time, designed as a school-based befriending service for primary and secondary aged pupils with one of HeadStart's Youth Practitioners. Your Time was formulated as a universal-level intervention designed to tackle loneliness and social isolation, offering less-structured and intensive support than programmes such as BounceBack, with an additional source of support from an emotionally-available adult. As the planning for Your Time was already underway before 2020, when schools closed in March of that year HeadStart Newham were well-placed to respond swiftly and appropriately to the increased social needs of children and young people in schools, by swiftly implementing the Your Time offer of support to school pupils over the phone, online and in the community when and where possible.



Your Time helped to support pupils during school closures and lockdowns by providing wellbeing check-ins on a weekly basis for 12 to 18 weeks, for school children and young people aged between 5 and 18 years, and up to 25 years for those with SEND. As the pandemic greatly exacerbated loneliness and isolation for all children and young people, and posed even greater challenges to mental health and wellbeing for those most vulnerable, the service was welcomed as a timely and appropriate response to these challenges. Youth Practitioners conducted sessions with pupils over the phone and online via Zoom or Teams during lockdown, and then moved to outdoor and community-based support in-person as restrictions eased, and then back into schools once they had reopened. The purpose of the sessions has been to provide the opportunity for meaningful social connection and a place for young people to share their worries and feelings with a trained adult who is there to listen to and support them.

As Youth Practitioners are trained by HeadStart Newham and work in other school services within the programme, they are highly knowledgeable of what else is on offer through HeadStart and the wider Newham community, and have been able to signpost children and young people to other sources of support and opportunities to keep them engaged and socially connected during lockdown. Although the intervention is not a structured programme, Youth Practitioners signpost children and young people to places and services that can benefit their mental and physical health during the pandemic. This has included community activities and events, the sharing of online resources that help develop positive mental health and wellbeing, promoting physical health and exercise and continuing to deliver resilience-based HeadStart interventions virtually and in person where possible.

Your Time began in March 2020 and ran throughout the remainder of HeadStart Newham's programme. Since its development as a Covid-19 response, HeadStart Newham have implemented the use of [Outcome Stars](#) to monitor a young person's development through their engagement with Your Time. Their development is monitored through the categories of:

- Feelings and emotions
- Healthy lifestyle
- Where you live
- Friends and relationships
- School
- Training and work
- How you use your time
- Self-esteem.



Sessions are tailored to young people and take place wherever they feel most comfortable, and they can now refer themselves into the service by scanning a QR code on a flyer designed in consultation with young people. Children, young people and parents are also offered a pre-referral consultation, which gives them the chance to meet with a Youth Practitioner to discuss their difficulties and think about the kind of support they would like to receive through Your Time in conjunction with the Outcomes Star categories. Your Time has also developed to become more inclusive of school pupils with SEND, and uses the [Shooting Star](#) outcomes tool to monitor their progression through the programme. This outcomes tool tracks the progress of the student through aspiration, contribution, confidence, learning, people and support, and communicating. The service has also expanded its partnership, working with Specialist Education Support Service Newham Partners and SEND professionals in school to ensure no young person is missed out. Your Time now also seeks the feedback from the young person and their parents/carers to refine the service. In January 2022, HeadStart Newham have been developing sensory tools and a supplementary resource package for Your Time to help young people increase and improve their peer relationships.

HeadStart Wolverhampton

HeadStart Wolverhampton created their own Wellbeing Toolkit, a comprehensive PSHE package for primary and secondary schools in Wolverhampton to teach pupils about resilience and help them learn ways to build it. The Toolkit is mapped against the Physical Health and Wellbeing strand of the statutory guidance in Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (2019). The aim of the programme is for pupils to learn about resilience and other components of positive mental health and wellbeing featured in The Five Steps to Mental Wellbeing NHS guidance. Each of the six lessons has a different focus, and they run in this order:

- Wellbeing and resilience
- Handling emotions
- Empathy
- Problem solving
- Growth mindset
- Aspirations

The toolkit is designed to enhance the wellbeing of young people by giving them the tools to look after their own wellbeing, including problem solving skills, learning how to handle emotions and ways to practice empathy. Each lesson in the toolkit includes lessons and resources for teachers to deliver. By the end of 2021, the Toolkit had been delivered to approximately 5,000 young people in primary and secondary schools in Wolverhampton, with versions adapted separately for Key Stages 2 and 3.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, HeadStart Wolverhampton delivered weekly surveys to understand the needs of schools and families while schools were closed for most children and, as restrictions begun to ease, to find out how young people were coping. The surveys found emerging issues around young people's loneliness, parental anxiety, and need for more practical support and fun activities for the whole family. These findings prompted HeadStart Wolverhampton to hold weekly check-ins with school staff to signpost to resources, and to offer practical support to families in communities, providing doorstep support to those unable to access education online and running online workshops.

Tips and learning

Each HeadStart partnership has developed training programmes to support schools and colleges to develop and sustain Whole School Approaches to mental health, wellbeing and resilience, but each has approached the work differently. Central to all HeadStart partnerships' approaches are their focus on the whole school system and the inclusion of all staff within a school, alongside the recognition that for whole-school change, there must be sustained investment from Senior Leadership Teams. To promote sustained change, the partnerships have all created assessment tools that can be used independently by schools to continually identify and assess how their school is integrating their WSA, and to highlight areas where improvement may be needed. All ways of developing Whole School Approaches rely on an ethos of collaboration and equality, with all stakeholders across a school community playing an essential role in the development and sustainment of a truly mentally health and resilient school structure, ethos and culture.

Central to all HeadStart partnerships' approaches to supporting schools during Covid-19 recovery are their established links with other services and community organisations, understanding of local need and school populations, and collaborative ways of working. This has enabled them to respond swiftly to the challenges presented by the pandemic and to continue to make use of all services available within the community in response to increased demands of children, young people, families and schools.

The HeadStart partnerships themselves have acted as responsive, reliable and consistently available sources of support throughout the pandemic, to children, young people, families and schools. The trauma-informed approaches of the partnerships have enabled them to be sensitive to the overwhelming pressures that school staff have faced throughout the pandemic, and helped them to continue to support their pupils despite the substantial challenges that all schools and school staff members have faced. They have enabled young people to voice their thoughts and feelings in productive and empowering ways, and have continued to build their resilience during a time where it was most needed.



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