HeadStart Programme

Qualitative Insight Report

Year 2 - School Implementation Interviews

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Executive Summary

This report is the output of the third wave of interviews conducted with HeadStart Kent (HSK) schools. The interviews were conducted with school staff to primarily discuss the implementation of HSK and to 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 across five HSK schools in Ashford, Canterbury and Folkestone & Hythe.

Thematic analysis was applied across four key themes with the related issues identified below:

Approach to wellbeing in schools

School staff explained they were hopeful that HSK would assist them in developing the resilience of their students and provide support through early intervention and access to services or grant funding. They described the support available to students with emotional wellbeing issues and were confident there was a robust pathway to identify those in need of support.

Staff explained the challenges they faced accessing support outside of school due to the lack of continuity and availability of community services. They described how these challenges, alongside the length of time taken to accept referrals by specialist mental health services, meant schools were under pressure to bridge the gap in provision. However, they did recognise that sometimes a lower level of support was all that was needed.

Several staff mentioned perceived changes to the KCC Early Help support levels and explained how it was beneficial being a HSK school during these changes, as they have access to additional services and are able to confidently signpost to information.

Student and staff awareness of support

When explaining the level of need of students in their schools, staff described a multitude of influences that could impact on students' emotional wellbeing, with issues ranging from problems at home to anxiety around the pressure to achieve.

Staff were confident that students know how to access support in their school as they felt there was a well-established pathway to support students, which some commented would exist in the absence of HSK.

Staff illustrated how students were aware of HSK through promotional activities such as assemblies and explained that those directly benefitting from the programme were also likely to be aware. However, some staff did recognise that students may not always make a direct link between HSK and the services or support provided.

Staff also expressed confidence that their colleagues had a basic level of awareness and understanding of the programme, however, a number of staff did state there were differing levels of awareness and involvement which was dependant on the staff member role within the school. Those in pastoral support roles were described as the ones with an in-depth knowledge around the support provided by HSK.

HeadStart influence, training and tools

Staff explained how HSK had focussed their minds on the mental health agenda and had helped to raise the profile of supporting mental health and wellbeing within their schools. They recalled how HSK had motivated them to review their existing student wellbeing provision and develop it where needed. Staff also commented that HSK had assisted them to deliver a consistent approach in supporting students with emotional wellbeing issues.

The access to staff training was a topic mentioned by several staff as having influenced their thinking around emotional health and wellbeing. They recalled difficulties accessing training to support students' emotional wellbeing prior to being a HSK school and explained how the training had enabled them to enhance their skills and had improved staff confidence. Training was an element of the programme staff interviewed considered to be a success, with some looking to sustain the training in the future.

Staff explained that the Youth Mental Health First Aid and Mindfulness training was well received and described how they were embedding learning from the training into practice or were planning to implement this in the future. There were mixed reviews when staff mentioned the Introduction to HSK training delivered by HSK staff, with some finding it useful to find out more about the programme and others commenting that it was not training all school staff needed to attend. The Building Resilience training was mentioned by very few staff and those that did comment explained that their expectation of the training was different to what was delivered.

The comments regarding the Resilience Conversations (RC) echoed last years' interviews with school staff. Staff regard them as a useful, however, they are considered time consuming. Several staff mentioned how the introduction of the Self-Reflection tool had been valuable, with some now preferring to use this. It was explained that a limited number of school staff were having RCs with students and those most likely to have them were in pastoral support roles. Some staff considered the tool to be something that would be sustained when the programme had ended.

Some staff expressed that the administration surrounding the recording of RCs and the referrals to services was a barrier. The completion of the monthly data return to support the evaluation was explained as a challenge and the completion of paperwork to refer onto HSK services as onerous.

Students benefitting from HeadStart

When discussing how students had benefitted from HSK, all staff spoke about the development of Safe Spaces within their schools, with a number noting the use of the space by students as a particular success.

Several staff explained how students were aware of the online support and counselling available to them through the programme and explained how they were signposting to the support. However, feedback from students had been that it was sometimes difficult to access a counsellor.

As with the feedback from last year, a number of staff praised the HSK Participation Workers for their work in facilitating the involvement and voice of students in the development of elements of HSK within the school. Staff also described how the Participation Workers had supported students on a one to one or group basis and beneficial it is having support from adults outside of the school.

The Intensive and Volunteer Mentors were considered by many interviewed as a valuable resource and one they would like to sustain going forward. Staff explained how students more effectively engage with support from adults not associated with the school or a statutory organisation. Although those interviewed considered having mentors beneficial, they did explain there had been some initial difficulties with mentor availability or suitability and that managing the expectations of students offered this support had been challenging. A potential future change going forward mentioned by one staff member related to the improvement of communication around mentor availability to manage these expectations and that having feedback regarding students' outcomes following mentoring would also be helpful.

The access to funding through Talents and Interests or Pay If Forward grants was an area mentioned by several staff as being beneficial to students and they recognised funding of this kind was rare. It was an element of the programme several staff considered a success, especially as students were involved in the development of bids where their peers would benefit from the support provided.

A number of staff also commented that parents and carers would be directly benefitting from the programme through access to training or the Resilience Hub, or indirectly benefitting through support provided to their children through the HSK services available or funding to support their child's hobbies or interests.

Conclusion

Schools welcome the support provided by HSK, especially access to staff training, additional services and grant funding. HSK has aided school staff in focussing their minds on the mental health agenda, raising the profile of supporting mental health in schools and has motived them to review and improve the provision they already have in place. Staff are using the tools provided to support students and embed learning from training into practice, with this being more likely to happen for those in pastoral support roles rather than teaching staff. Students are aware how to access support around their emotional wellbeing and are benefitting from support provided within schools, externally through mentors, or from access to hobbies and interests. Elements of the programme considered to be a particular success by school staff are the support provided to students who have accessed Talents and Interests grants or those who have been involved in Pay It Forward bids and also the availability of staff training. Challenges expressed by staff related to the HSK administrative processes and availability of some HSK commissioned services.

Context

This report forms an agreed deliverable of the internal evaluation of HSK. It is intended to outline the findings from qualitative data collection, in the form of interviews, around schools' experience of the programme so far.

As can be seen in the HSK Theory of Change (see Appendix 1), ensuring that teachers and wider school staff are confident and knowledgeable in the wellbeing issues that students face, and are skilled in their ability to identify these, are key mechanisms to ensure that the wellbeing of students improves. During the implementation of the programme, various tools were provided to schools to better equip them to do this. These interviews also intended to explore if, when and how the tools and training has been utilised and also explore the views of school staff around the additional support provided by externally commissioned delivery partners.

Views will be collated at various stages throughout the phased rollout of the programme to identify any gaps or opportunities for development in future areas. Themes identified will also be examined alongside previously recorded experiences, such as the baseline interviews and the first round of implementation interviews, to qualitatively assess changes made to the programme or improvements as a result of the programme.

This report has aimed to reflect the wide variety of engaged and enthusiastic voices that were encountered during these interviews, and where possible, contains anonymous direct quotes and extracts from the interviews for each point made.

Methodology

Due to the phased rollout of HSK across different areas over five years, the local evaluation identified the need to explore schools' experiences of the implementation of the programme in the initial areas, with the aim being to learn what has worked and identify any potential opportunities for development in future areas. This process was repeated with the second wave of schools who started working with HSK in September 2017.

In September 2018 a topic guide was developed to guide the interviews and five HSK schools in Ashford, Canterbury and Folkestone & Hythe were invited to participate in interviews. All interviews took place between October and December 2018.

Schools were selected to take part to ensure the designation of all schools involved in the programme were represented. All participating schools were engaged in the programme since September 2017. The level of seniority within the school of each staff member interviewed, and the degree to which they have been involved in HSK, varied across all that participated.

This report contains themes gathered across nine interviews in five schools. Interviews were held face to face with trained interviewers following a semi-structured format, lasting roughly thirty minutes to an hour each. This allowed for full exploration of the topic guide, which included but was not limited to:

- Explanation of the interview focus and approach
- Explanation of how data would be used
- Informed and signed consent process
- Introductory questions about the school, it's students and their families, and the staff member's role
- An exploration of how they were introduced to HSK, their expectations, what they were asked to deliver, if they had the opportunity to shape change and awareness of the programme in school
- An exploration of how involved young people were in implementing the programme
- An exploration of how HSK may have influenced the school's thinking around resilience and emotional wellbeing and any tools/training that may have assisted
- An exploration of student awareness of the programme and how they, and others, may have benefitted
- An exploration of barriers or challenges during implementation and any successes
- An exploration of potential future changes to the programme and sustainability

Interviews were recorded and transcribed in full for thematic analysis using the MAXqda software package. This analysis was performed following stages of data familiarisation, initial coding and development of a thematic framework for structured analysis. This framework allowed for themes to be contrasted across interviews to find overarching patterns and disparities.

The key themes resulting from this analysis are recorded in the next section.

Key findings

Approach to wellbeing in schools

When discussing their expectation of HSK several staff explained how they hoped the programme would assist them in developing the resilience of their students and provide support through early intervention, which would reduce the onset on mental health disorders and the need to access services later in life, when issues may have potentially escalated. Some staff also mentioned how access to additional services to support students and the availability of grant funding would be beneficial.

> *"I suppose it was the whole resilience side of things […] it's about trying to get in there early on […] That is very much where we were hoping HeadStart could help us."*

As identified in the baseline report[1] and last years' implementation report[2], the support schools have in place for students with emotional issues is varied and dependant on school size and designation. However, staff interviewed were confident a robust pathway was in place to identify students potentially in need of support.

A number of staff illustrated the types of support already provided within the school, such as access to pastoral staff or thematic workshops around emotional wellbeing, and also external support in the form of counselling or mentoring, which some explained was already provided in the absence of HSK.

> *"We do a lot in school already […] we have set things that are run on a regular basis that everyone knows about and can refer through to."*

Several staff explained the challenges they faced in getting support for students around emotional wellbeing and mental health problems outside of school, with particular issues being the lack of continuity and availability of services, a challenge also expressed during the baseline interviews with school staff[3]. Finding support for students in the community was also a challenge identified by school staff in the implementation interviews last year[4]. One staff member was of the opinion that services were disappearing, and the onus was now on schools to deliver the support these services previously provided.

> *"Services which chop and change it's difficult to know. And that's what we need, both in school but also outside school, ones that we can rely on because the changes we've had outside school as well have obviously impacted […] we can't control what's happening outside. So it's right, we need to be very clear what we can offer in school…"*

[1] KCC SC Analytics (2017). *Insight Report Qualitative Baseline p9*
[2] KCC SC Analytics (2018). *Qualitative Insight Report – School Implementation Interviews p13*
[3] KCC SC Analytics (2017). *Insight Report Qualitative Baseline p13*
[4] KCC SC Analytics (2018). *Qualitative Insight Report – School Implementation Interviews p13*

Another frustration expressed by some staff related to the length of time taken to accept referrals by providers such as CAMHS or Specialist Children's Services. Staff in the baseline interviews also felt the response time from CAMHS was inadequate[5]. Some staff explained how the support provided by schools and the community was bridging the gap in provision while students waited for specialised support from these services, but also recognised that sometimes a lower level of support was all that was needed.

"The mental / emotional health for young people is so bad at the moment, and it takes so long to get any support from the actual mental health services that sometimes these, whatever we refer kids to, mentors, counselling in school, anybody, it holds them and keeps them safe until they can get that proper support that they need. And sometimes just that mentoring is enough."

Another challenge mentioned by several staff were the perceived changes to the KCC Early Help support levels and the responsibility of the school to now support students who staff felt historically would have been supported through Early Help. They explained how it was beneficial being a HSK school during these changes as they have access to additional services to support students and are able to confidently signpost to information.

"Anything below tier three comes back to us and we have to deal with it. Which is why things like HeadStart, and all the other agencies, are so important to us […] It's just a constant battle to get the right support at the right time."

[5] KCC SC Analytics (2017). *Insight Report Qualitative Baseline p10*

Student and staff awareness of support

Staff described a multitude of influences that could potentially impact on students' emotional wellbeing when explaining the level of need of students in their schools. These echoed some previous findings in the baseline[6] and implementation reports[7]. Issues varied from problems at home to feelings of anxiety around the pressure to achieve. One staff member explained how the fear of failure and lack of resilience in students was potentially holding them back from new experiences.

> *"The students across the board struggle to know how to manage when things are going wrong and things do go wrong […] When they haven't got that resilience, they don't try things and that's when they miss out and that's when that whole experience bypasses them."*

When asked to what extent they felt students know how to access support in their school, all staff interviewed expressed confidence around this topic, with some staff explaining how students either seek out support themselves or friends approach staff on their behalf. However, some staff did remark this may happen as there are well-established pathways to support students in place, which would exist in the absence of HSK.

> *"I think that's because they feel supported and they know as a school, as a community, that we stress the values of addressing mental health. And it's not something that should be swept under the carpet but something that we address and talk about."*

Most staff illustrated how students had been made aware of HSK through promotional activities in school such as assemblies or lunch stalls. They also explained how some students may be aware of the programme as they are directly accessing resources, grant funding or services. However, a number of staff recognised the students may not always make a direct link between HSK and the services or support provided.

> *"…I certainly think students know more about where to go to, who to go to. Whether they realise that it is directly HeadStart or not, is another matter."*

Staff also expressed confidence that there was a basic level of awareness and understanding of the programme among their colleagues at school, with some explaining how this was provided through the Introduction to HSK training. However, a number of staff did state that there were differing levels of awareness and involvement which was dependant on staff member roles within the school. Those in pastoral support roles were described as the ones who had the in-depth knowledge around the support provided by HSK and teaching staff to a lesser degree.

> *"We had the introduction to HeadStart [training] at the very beginning […] the teachers, they're not really involved in the pastoral care of the kids, so they probably wouldn't be as aware of [HSK] as maybe pastoral staff."*

[6] KCC SC Analytics (2017). *Insight Report Qualitative Baseline p6*

[7] KCC SC Analytics (2018). *Qualitative Insight Report – School Implementation Interviews p12*

HeadStart influence, training and tools

Several staff explained how HSK focussed their minds on the mental health agenda and had helped to raise the profile of supporting mental health and wellbeing within their schools.

Some staff recalled how HSK had motivated them to review their existing provision to support and promote the emotional wellbeing of students and build upon this where needed. The Resilience Toolkit was not explicitly mentioned by staff interviewed as a resource that aided them in assessing their school's approach to resilience and wellbeing, however, the absence of comment may not indicate that the Toolkit has not been used as intended.

> *"I think it has really focused our minds. I think it's really made us sit back and think, right, what do we do as a school and what can we do?"*

Some staff also commented that HSK had brought staff together to deliver a consistent approach in supporting students with emotional wellbeing issues, as they are now using the same language, tools and skills provided by the programme.

> *"I think it's helped us to have more of a universal vocabulary when we're supporting people."*

Having access to training was a topic mentioned by several staff when reflecting on how HSK had influenced their thinking around emotional health and wellbeing. Staff explained that prior to their involvement with HSK accessing training to support students' emotional wellbeing could be difficult and the type of training needed was not always available through the existing Continuing Professional Development structure for schools. They explained how being a HSK school and having access to the training had enabled them to enhance their skills and improved staff confidence in supporting their students.

> *"The programme is absolutely fantastic, and I think it's about time that we had something like this existing that can really empower schools to support their students' wellbeing […] I can already see how much of a change it's making."*
>
> *"I think that as an initiative it's absolutely vital. You can't, in today's modern times, not have something like this to help schools deliver that support to students."*

Some staff reflected that training was an element of the programme they considered a success and stated it was something they were looking to sustain in the future.

> *"I think the key thing for us was the amount of training that it has enabled us as a staff to have, it has been massive, and we would never have been able to access that without HeadStart […] we'll keep [the training] going organically within school…"*

When discussing the different types of training available through HSK, the Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) training delivered by Maidstone and Mid Kent Mind was an element that was very well received by many of the staff interviewed.

They expressed how the delivery and content was *"excellent"* and explained how the training had *"demystified"* mental health issues and strengthened their knowledge in this area.

Some staff demonstrated how they were putting learning into practice within their schools by either establishing Mental Health First Aiders who are as visible and accessible as the regular First Aiders, or by having the confidence to support students with mental health issues or signposting them to reliable resources such as websites.

Some staff also explained how they had seen the importance of the YMHFA training and had either secured additional funding to enable other school staff to attend or were looking to secure future funding to reach others in the community, such as parents.

"It was factual, the delivery was outstanding, and it was relevant. And all the kind of processes within it that taught you the tools, you left there feeling confident."

"I think the mental health first-aid stuff was brilliant. I think people felt really empowered and felt confident."

A number of staff also mentioned the Mindfulness training delivered by MindfulKent and explained how those trained in the school were either already delivering Mindfulness on a one to one or group basis to students or were looking to implement it in the future. Staff in alternative settings explained how the application of learning from the training and delivery of mindfulness in their schools was being tailored to consider the needs of their students, such as those with attention or behaviour difficulties.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the mindfulness […] there was more to it than I sort of first realised and as a result I have actually used it, some of it, with the students."

The Introduction to HSK training delivered by HSK staff was mentioned by some staff interviewed, however, the reviews were mixed, with some commenting it was useful to find out about the resources and support available through the programme and others commenting that it was potentially not something that needed to be attended by all school staff.

The Building Resilience training delivered by Kate Cairns Associates was mentioned by very few staff and those that did comment explained how their expectation of the training was different to what was delivered. They remarked that the trainers may not have considered the practicalities of working in a school or appreciate that participants were likely be already be using a similar approach to support students.

"The domains training wasn't necessarily that focused on what people thought…"

Many of the comments regarding Resilience Conversations (RCs) echoed findings from last year's implementation interviews with school staff[8]. They were regarded by staff as a useful tool to enable a constructive conversation with a student, however, having the conversation and then the process of completing the paperwork and recording the RC was considered time consuming.

> *"…having the domains-based conversations has enabled me to be more targeted and succinct in my supportive conversations to young people."*

Those interviewed explained that a limited number of school staff were having RCs with students and those most likely to be carrying them out were in a pastoral role.

One staff member also mentioned the challenges they faced in having follow up conversations with students due to lack of time and the demands of dealing with new issues from other students.

> *"Because you are front line, you are firefighting a lot of the time. If someone is settled down, and things have worked out, it's finding the time to actually [have a follow up conversation] because you'll have had another half a dozen [students] by that point that have suddenly come up that need your [help]... So that is a struggle actually just from a practical point of view, so following that through."*

Several staff reflected on how they were able to shape changes to the RCs through feedback to HSK and explained that the introduction of the Self-Reflection tool had been valuable, with some staff now preferring to use this tool with students.

When discussing future changes to elements of the programme, one staff member did express that the development of an online App to record RCs could be beneficial, especially for those students who find visual aids helpful.

Some staff were of the opinion that RCs would be sustained as a tool within the school after the programme had ended.

The administration surrounding recording RCs and referrals to services was expressed as a barrier by a number of staff. They explained how chasing and recording information for the monthly data return to support the evaluation of the programme was a challenge and also that completing the paperwork to refer onto HSK services was onerous.

> *"If we referred, we have to do the resilience conversation, then we have to do the referral form which is three pages of information that we have to put together, which is very time consuming."*

When discussing the tools staff were aware of and using, one member of staff mentioned the Resilience Hub as a resource they were signposting parents to.

[8] KCC SC Analytics (2018). *Qualitative Insight Report – School Implementation Interviews p20*

Students benefitting from HeadStart

When discussing the extent to which students had benefitted from the programme, all staff spoke about the development of Safe Spaces within their school, with a number of staff noting the use of the spaces by students as a particular success. Some staff also described how students had contributed to the decisions around how the grant money was spent to add resources to the Safe Spaces.

One school explained how they were given the flexibility to creatively develop their Safe Space in the absence of room within the school to have a physical Safe Space for students.

> *"I think it's just that they actually like the atmosphere in the room, and they can do something while they're there."*

The online support and counselling provided by Kooth was mentioned by several staff. They explained how the students were aware of the service as it was visible throughout the school via posters or cards and through promotional assemblies. They also explained how they were signposting students to Kooth when needed. However, some staff stated that students had commented they sometimes found it difficult to access a counsellor and there was the assumption from some school staff that Kooth may be under staffed and unable to meet demand at peak times.

> *"I think there are problems with Kooth and from students that I talk to, they can't actually often get hold of a counsellor on Kooth […] They can look at all the forums but getting someone at Kooth to contact them has been quite hard."*

As with last years' interviews, a number of staff praised the HSK Participation Workers for their work in facilitating the involvement and voice of students in the development of elements of HSK within the school[9].

They also described how the Participation Workers had provided one to one and group support to students through various mediums, such as RCs, training and Talents and Interests or Pay it Forward grant applications, also a finding from last years' interviews[10]. Staff explained the benefit of having someone from outside the school working with the students.

> *"[Having a Participation Worker in school] has been a real key thing. It gives the kids someone different, someone outside the school is possibly more approachable […] [there] will be a gap when that goes."*

[9] KCC SC Analytics (2018). *Qualitative Insight Report – School Implementation Interviews p11*

[10] KCC SC Analytics (2018). *Qualitative Insight Report – School Implementation Interviews p10*

The Intensive and Volunteer Mentoring provided by Salus, Young Lives Foundation and Porchlight was also considered by many interviewed as being a valuable resource and one they would like to sustain going forward. As with the Participation Workers, staff explained how students more effectively engage with support from adults who are not associated with the school or a statutory organisation as they are less authoritarian and potentially have fewer preconceptions.

Although many of those interviewed explained the benefits of having mentors as an additional resource, a number also explained there had been difficulties with mentor availability or suitability at the start. Some staff stated that managing the expectations of students when offering support had been a challenge and highlighted the potential risk that the mentoring services were not always meeting the demand.

When discussing future changes to the programme, one staff member did comment that in order to manage expectations of students and to also effectively allocate appropriate resources, it would be beneficial to have improved communication around mentor availability. They also remarked that having feedback from the mentors regarding students' outcomes following support would be helpful to school staff.

> *"It's very hard to find support for students, particularly external support in the form of things like mentors because one-to-one work, it takes a lot of time […] To have that time for a mentor to spend one-to-one quality time with a student is so beneficial to them, so I think that works really well. I think it's valued, definitely."*

Having access to funding through the Talents and Interests or Pay It Forward grants was an area mentioned by several staff as being beneficial to their students, with some staff also commenting that parents and carers could be indirectly benefitting as they have limited funds to support their child's hobbies or interests. Staff recognised that access to funding of this kind was rare both within school and outside of school.

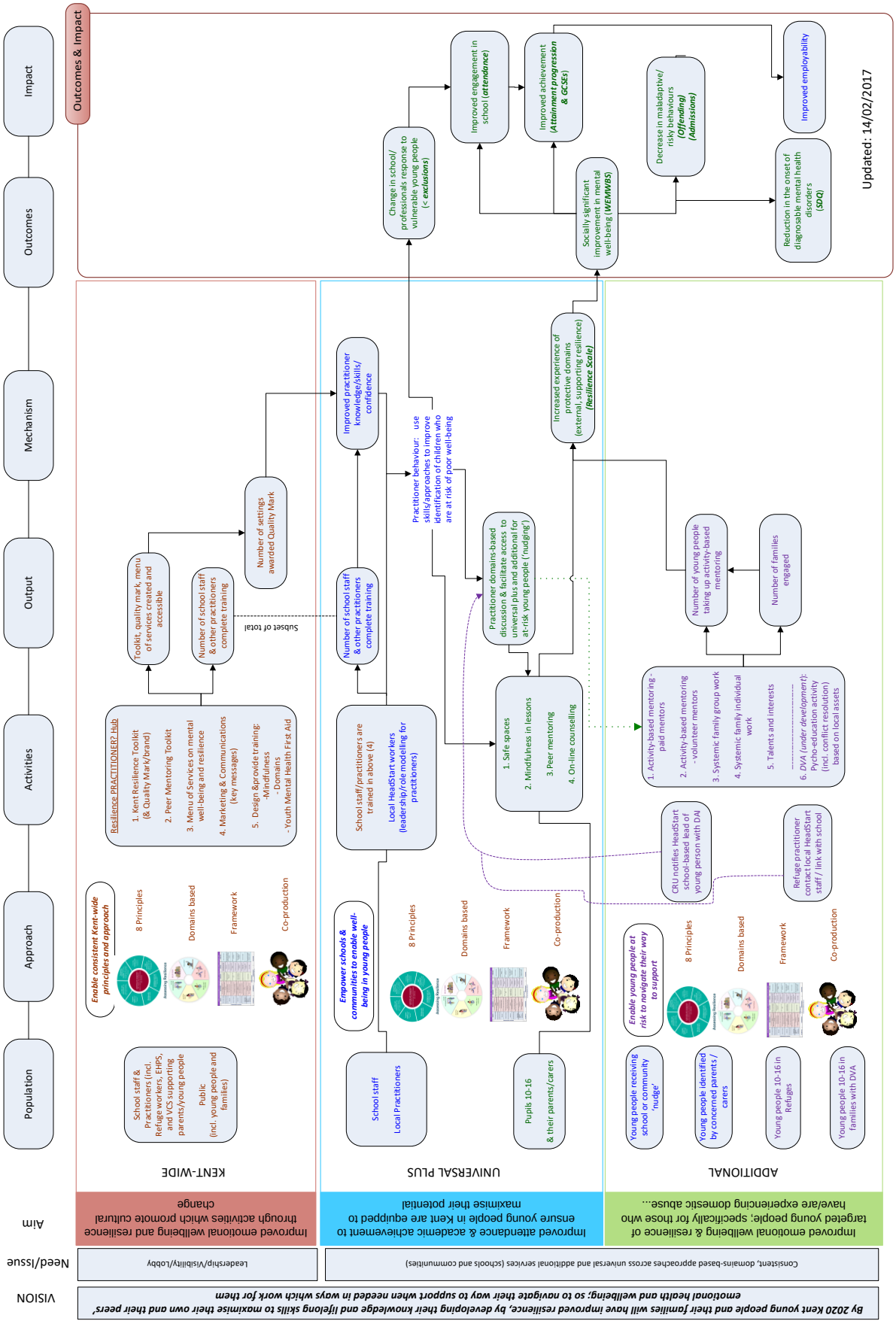
Several staff expressed that this was one of the elements of the programme that could be considered a success, especially as students were directly involved in the development of bids where their peers would benefit from the support provided through the grants.

> *"I think the fact that we have been able to tap into the funding bids […] What's been brilliant is it has got to be student led and that makes a massive difference as well. Some of our students with the highest need have been the ones that have been involved doing the bids."*
>
> *"The Talents and Interests grant was a really good idea too because there are so many kids that, for whatever reason, come from a home where they don't have the finances to support a child with an interest. For me that was brilliant, and it's worked really well."*

Peer Mentoring in schools, the youth SpeakOut groups and the Family Focus Transition support were elements of programme briefly touched on by a few staff interviewed, however, no specific themes were identified from the discussions.

When exploring those that may have benefitted from the programme other than school staff or students, a number of staff did comment that parents and carers would be benefitting directly through access to training or the Resilience Hub, or indirectly through support provided to their children through the HSK services available or access to funding to support their child's hobbies or interests.

Appendix 1 – HeadStart Kent Theory of Change



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