



Queen Mary's Grammar School

WAS Wellbeing award for schools

Parent and student guide, February 2022

Background and updates

At QMGS and across the Mercian Trust we recognise that the emotional wellbeing and positive mental health of all members of the community is integral to our continued success. Following our experiences over the past 2 years, we know it is more important than ever that we keep our wellbeing at the forefront of all we do. In order to help us do this we are embarking on a formal review of our wellbeing culture. The intention to highlight and celebrate what we already do well and to recognise ways in which we can keep improving upon what we already do.

The MAT have signed up to the WAS Wellbeing award for schools:

<https://www.awardplace.co.uk/award/was>

From a QMGS perspective, I would like to use the award as an opportunity to celebrate the amazing work done in the school and to fine-tune our approach. I have been proud to be part of this journey so far and want to continue to keep well-being at the front and centre of my leadership as headmaster.

Introduction

Developed in partnership with the National Children's Bureau (NCB), the Wellbeing Award for Schools is intended to help schools prepare and equip themselves to promote emotional wellbeing and positive mental health across the whole-school community. NCB's vision is an education system where good emotional wellbeing and mental health are at the heart of the culture and ethos of all schools, so that pupils, with the support of their teachers, can build confidence and flourish. Evidence shows us that wellbeing is of central importance to learning and attainment, with high levels of wellbeing associated with improved academic outcomes. Conversely, pupils who have mental health problems are more likely to have academic difficulties at school and experience social disadvantage later in adult life.

We have done a huge amount of work over the past few years to develop our provision for mental health and this award can provide the framework for this to be sustainable.

To achieve this vision, NCB advocates the use of a 'whole-school approach' where all aspects of the school experience are harnessed to promote the emotional wellbeing and mental health of pupils and staff. It is an approach where emotional wellbeing and mental health is everybody's business.

There is a growing recognition of the impact of the COVID-related restrictions on the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children, their families and school staff. Bereavement, social isolation, the loss of opportunities for staff to spot emerging needs in pupils, the suspension of school-based services and the reluctance of children, families and staff to seek medical help during lockdown have all contributed to both acute and longer term challenges to emotional wellbeing and mental health.

The Wellbeing Award for Schools is a welcome opportunity to recognise the exceptional work that schools do in this area. The key features of a whole-school approach form the basis of the award, and it provides schools with a benchmark of best practice against which to test itself. We believe that this celebration of success will encourage more schools to adopt an approach that puts emotional wellbeing and mental health at the heart of what they do.

Principles behind the award

There are four key principles driving the ideas and recommendations behind the award:

1. Emotional wellbeing and mental health are a continuum. Related issues can range from positive attitudes and behaviour, through to experiences of emotional distress and mental disorder.
2. Schools already experience and manage emotional issues on a daily basis; the objective is to minimise the impact of such issues and maximise the effectiveness of any responses.
3. Emotional wellbeing covers a range of dimensions, such as resilience, character building, relationships and self-esteem, etc. Understanding both developmental and mental health awareness is critical.
4. Creating a positive school culture requires a whole-school approach that is led from the top while involving all in the school community.

Embarking on the award process does not imply that the school is failing in this area, but rather that we have recognised the needs and demands of the school are changing and we are committed to responding to these. Much of this change will be apparent in the issues the school faces on a daily basis. Seen through the lens of academic achievement and attainment, our appreciation of the positive and negative impact of emotional and mental health challenges improves. As a school community already stretched with many demands, re-visioning how we view emotional wellbeing and changing a school culture to accommodate this vision can be challenging.

The national picture

Before the Covid pandemic, the national agenda was becoming more supportive of schools that give a high priority to emotional wellbeing and mental health. Department for Education (DfE), the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Ofsted have all made commitments on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

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The government sees whole-school approaches and effective joint working as key to successful implementation of the Green Paper, *Transforming children and young people's mental health provision*. Practical proposals following the Green Paper will, over time, increase access to appropriate support for children and young people with mild to moderate mental health conditions, through local Mental Health Support Teams and training for school staff; and to improve access to and reduce waiting times for specialist NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS).

Ofsted's 2019 Education Inspection Framework (EIF) sets out how Ofsted will evaluate schools' overall effectiveness through graded judgments in 4 areas: quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management. Threaded through the framework (and particularly strong in the personal development judgment) is a consideration of how schools support pupils to become confident and knowledgeable about keeping themselves both physically and mentally healthy. The EIF makes the connection between healthy relationships and good mental health and wellbeing.

A whole-school community approach

At QMGS, we really are invested in this process. We recognise the increased demands placed upon us as professionals and upon the students are changing and we need to change with them. If we are proactive in our approach, we will be able to continue to thrive and grow as a school and as a community

One theme that is central to the award is the need for schools to draw the wider community and relevant stakeholders into the centre of the change process. Parents and carers are one such group. Evidence shows that, for parents, the emotional and mental health needs of their children is of increasing concern, and often parents look to the school to support and inform them.

Students also need to be given the opportunity to express their own voice and this can be an influential source of good ideas for any school looking for innovative and appropriate solutions.

As another critical group of the whole school community, the award views the wellbeing of staff as significant as that for pupils. Staff wellbeing is increasingly recognised as 'under challenge' while schools encounter increasing pressure from over-stretched resources. Expecting staff to respond to the emotional needs of their pupils while feeling exhausted and overwhelmed themselves is a barrier to the wellbeing of all involved. Equipping teachers and others with the knowledge and skills on the issues surrounding mental health is essential.

I would like as many parents and students to take part in the initial stakeholder surveys as possible. You can complete the survey by clicking on the links below:

[Parent survey](#)

[Student survey](#)

The award process

There are five stages in the WAS process and the school will be supported throughout in order to evidence best practice and to achieve the award:

1. School self-evaluation (initial audit and stakeholder surveys)
2. Preparation of an Action Plan (formation of change team)
3. Implementation of actions and collecting evidence into a portfolio
4. Interim assessment of progress
5. Verification of achievement of the award

The award is expected to be completed within this academic year

Thank you for your support

RJL, Feb 2022