CASE STUDY 2

Supporting Students with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs

Introduction

This is one of six case studies that have been written as 'finger-tip' guides to inform and enrich your support for students with SEND. Each offers an accessible, evidence-informed summary of advice. This support is both immediately actionable and can be used to enrich further discussions. All the case studies are aimed at supporting busy professional colleagues so that they can further develop their inclusive educational practices. Other case studies in the series include:

- Case Study 1: Supporting Students During a National Emergency
- Case Study 3: Appreciating the Role of the SENCO
- Case Study 4: Improving Attendance, Behaviour and Inclusion
- Case Study 5: Supporting Vulnerable Groups of Students in Our Schools
- Case Study 6: Supporting the Identification and Assessment of Needs

Each case study follows the same format. They are divided into six short sections, the first being a summary as to why this particular study might be relevant to you. The next section shares selected professional knowledge that could help to inform your context. The third section offers a summary of key motivations for change. Section four offers some ways to address these. The final two sections build on this by highlighting how professional support can be further developed, including identifying selected further sources of support.

We very much hope that you will find these guides to be both informative and actionable. We wish you well in your endeavours and thank you for all that you do for your learners.

1. Why this Case Study might be relevant to you.

Research has identified that schools have a particularly important role to play in positively developing students' social, emotional and mental health. There is recognition that there has been a significant increase in the presentation of such needs within our school communities. Schools can help to improve outcomes for students in later life by addressing emotional, physical and mental health needs. School readiness and academic achievement, can be improved, crime reduced and employment and income opportunities increased through an evidence informed approach to the promotion of social, emotional and mental

health. The Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) analysis suggests that a focus on SEMH may be especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who on average have less developed SEMH skills at all ages than their more affluent peers. It is therefore highly likely that there will be much to be gained for your school community by prioritising supporting social, emotional and mental health.

2. Accessing Professional Knowledge

To help inform our responses, we accessed the EEF's materials to support evidence-informed practices. This can be found at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/social-and-emotional-learning/

The EEF have also created an excellent Guidance Report,' Improving Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Primary Schools', which is available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/social-and-emotional-learning/

Whilst this has been written for colleagues working in the primary phase, we feel that its' recommendations are relevant to all phases. The six recommendations include:

- Using a range of strategies to teach social and emotional learning skills (SEL) explicitly, both in dedicated sessions and in everyday teaching and incidental moments
- Model social and emotional behaviours that you would wish for your students to adopt
- Plan carefully, perhaps by reviewing evidence-based programmes, to develop a carefully sequenced programme
- Ensure that opportunities are built in for a cumulative curriculum, it will help to be explicit and identify the skills being taught and why they are important
- Establish school wide norms, expectations and routines that support students' social and emotional development
- Establish a shared vision for SEL: ensure that it is connected to rather than competing with other school priorities

Evidence from the EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit suggests that effective SEL can lead to learning gains Yet – even though SEL is already a large (and often unrecognised) part of their current job – few teachers receive support on how they can develop these skills in their everyday teaching practice. This is particularly important at a time when schools are reviewing their core vision and curriculum offer, and planning to implement statutory Relationships and Health education. The EEF offer the following key questions for consideration. You might like to take a moment to think about how you and your school teams might respond to these:

- How do you link the teaching of social and emotional skills with academic content?
- How do you provide appropriate professional development for school staff to effectively support SEL approaches?
- How do you support all staff to consistently apply aspects of SEL more widely in school and embed them in routine school practices?
- How do you sensitively target social and emotional approaches to benefit at-risk or vulnerable pupils?
- The impact on attainment of social and emotional aspects of learning is not consistent, so it is important to evaluate the impact of any initiative. Have you considered how you do this?

3. Key Motivations for Change

As professionals, we are always ambitious to do more for our young people. In order to do this, we found that it can often be helpful to clarify both our motivations for change and to identify some of the dilemmas that we face. By making these explicit, we can then prioritise strategies that might help us to address such concerns. We hope that you may find the lists below helpful. There could be both some drivers and dilemmas noted here that you also recognise. As you consider these insights, you may find yourself thinking of others, which are not recorded here. Please share them in your own teams and see if any of the strategies shared in section four might be helpful.

Drivers

We identified that we were ambitious to:

- Enhance our provision for students experiencing poor SEMH
- Develop in depth and evidence informed professional learning for all staff, including TAs, Class-teachers and SENCOs with regards to meeting the needs of students with SEMH needs.
- Improve the behaviour of students with SEMH needs by introducing strategies that enabled self-regulation, particularly during unstructured times.
- Develop strategies to better identify students with SEMH needs and to know what effective interventions and/or strategies to put in place.
- Acknowledge that addressing SEMH involves an investment of time and resource and that there are no ‘quick wins’ with SEMH needs.
- Develop more timely access to Educational Psychology support

Dilemmas

We identified that we were concerned by:

- Some of the difficulties that schools faced in accessing external support to help to identify and deal with SEMH issues

- Occasions when we found that there was a lack of consistency in the way that SEMH issues and needs were assessed and supported
- The ways in which attendance can be impacted negatively when students SEMH needs are unmet
- The consequences for some students with SEMH needs who suffered from a lack of parental support and good role models at home.
- Staff not always knowing their students well enough to recognise 'triggers' and changes in behaviours.
- The under representation of students with SEND within schools' student councils, ambassadors, librarians etc. All were identified as ways of developing self-esteem and thus impacting positively upon students' mental health.
- The ways in which social media and gaming had a huge impact upon many student's mental health needs.

4. Putting professional knowledge and understanding to work.

By drawing particularly on the EEF resources and materials in relation to the drivers and dilemmas listed above, we then considered evidence informed ways in which we could develop and improve our professional practices. The list is indicative, rather than exhaustive. We have tried to highlight how each action created the time and space for us to be more effective.

- The SENCO was supported to raise the profile of SEMH and appropriate provision. This helped to increase staff members' expertise.
- Schools implemented student referral forms so that staff could identify SEMH needs and / or issues so that these could be acted upon. They could also be collated for ease of reference.
- Dedicated rooms were organised, structured and assigned for respite for those students with SEMH needs. Staff in these dedicated rooms were trained to support students with SEMH needs. This enabled a more considered and effective approach.
- Providing meet and greet at the start and end of the day ensured a structured and supportive start to the beginning and end of the day. This gave staff the opportunity to notice their students' needs.
- The creation of planned opportunities for break and lunch-time emotional re-fuelling by meeting with dedicated staff and or visiting a dedicated room. This reduced the number of unanticipated moments that previously created additional pressures for staff teams.
- Interventions such as mentoring and specialist clubs/nurture groups e.g. Think Bricks, Lego clubs, Calm Brain etc., helped to reduce the number of incidents that were triggered by an SEMH need.

- The effective use of Boxall Profiles, Leuven Scales (5-point scale to measure both well-being and involvement) and SEMH Matrix available via the Local Authority were used to inform interventions.
- Evidence informed professional learning strategies were implemented in a co-ordinated way to raise staff awareness of SEMH needs, e.g. Nurture UK, Butterfly Print, Stoke Local Authority Inclusive Learning Service SEND, and the work of the PSHE Association.
- The development of an appropriate local area strategy to support SEMH needs.
- Integrating advice/support groups for parents e.g. PEGISS into school provision
- Facilitating a close and productive relationship between the school and the Educational Psychology teams so that effective strategies were put in place. This increased knowledge and reduced crisis points.

5. Contributing to collective professional knowledge

The strategies prioritised in section 4 will often be enacted by individual members of our school teams, supported by our whole school ethos. In our reviews we also found it particularly helpful to highlight strategies that will depend on our collective and collaborative endeavours. Here we share some approaches that could usefully inform local area dialogues.

- Early identification: Primary and Secondary schools to be supported locally to consider how a collaborative approach can be taken to supporting primaries with their feeder secondaries to identify and support students with SEMH.
- Early identification: consideration to be given to whether the system currently in place to fund the first 10 hours/£6K of support is a disincentive to early identification of students with SEMH.
- Staff to be signposted to the most up-to-date CPD available at a local level so as to develop the subject knowledge and expertise of staff relating to SEMH.
- Review considered of the exclusion service to ensure all officers are equipped to apply a SEND lens to the writing of policies, interventions and strategies.
- Evaluation at a macro level of the issues leading to changes of staff causing lack of stability within schools.
- Parents to be offered timely support and training in SEMH.
- Mental Health First Aid training or an equivalent to be made available to all schools.
- Recruitment and retention of high-quality Educational Psychologist support to be prioritised.

6. Sources of further information:

Nurture Training https://www.nurtureuk.org/our-services/training

Boxall Profile online https://www.nurtureuk.org/introducing-nurture/boxall-profile

Emotion Coaching https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/

Mentally Healthy Schools https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/