CHALKTALK

SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding, Student Wellbeing and Effective
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Schools have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
Safeguarding involves protecting children from maltreatment, preventing the
impairment of children's health or development, ensuring that children grow up with
the provision of safe and effective care, and working to enable children and young
people to achieve the best outcomes. This is important for learning because children
with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school wellbeing, are, on
average, more engaged in school and have higher levels of academic
achievement (Morrison Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012).

Addressing mental health problems can be a key component of safeguarding.
Research shows that 50% of lifetime mental illness starts by the age of 14 (Hagell et
al., 2013). Behavioural problems in children can indicate a risk of developing mental
health problems (Brown et al., 2012), and school staff may be in position to identify
and respond to this as a safeguarding concern. Introducing social and emotional learning into
the classroom improves mental health as well as learning outcomes and benefits young people
in the long-term (Taylor et al., 2017). Evidence suggests that the following school support
systems can improve both academic and mental health outcomes, by promoting positive social
and emotional wellbeing (Weare, 2015):

Adopt whole school thinking– this involves everyone working consistently
in developing an ethos and culture which promotes trust, focus and purpose;
the promotion of communication, acceptance of emotion, respect and the
celebration of diversity; the promotion of staff wellbeing, providing support
systems to address staff stress; the development of an environment that
supports school 'connectedness': a feeling of being accepted, respected and
bonded to the school environment. In turn, levels of conflict and disruptive
behaviour will decrease and a sense of responsiveness to the individual

needs of children will be encouraged. Promoting the voice of the child and engaging parents adds strength and depth, making interventions more effective, while also developing parenting capacity and attitudes (Adi et al., 2007).

Prioritise professional learning – this includes working to develop staff understanding of risk factors to wellbeing, helping children become more resilient, raising awareness of mental health, supporting children and young people with transitional arrangements and keeping up-to-date on the impact of social media and challenges posed by new technology.
Develop supportive policy and practice– robust policies on behaviour, anti-bullying and diversity will help with tackling prejudice and taking positive steps to de-stigmatise mental health.

Implement targeted responses and identify specialist pathways– this involves provision of work on social and emotional skill development for children with difficulties, the use of one-to-one support and group work, using specialist staff to initiate innovative and specialist programmes before transferring responsibility to mainstream staff, ensuring that there are clear pathways for help, referral and intervention and developing a coherent teamwork approach.

Connect appropriately with approaches to behaviour management– this means responding wisely to 'difficult' behaviour, use of clear consequences while understanding its deeper roots; taking opportunities to model and teach positive behaviours. Taking a well-planned and clear approach to safeguarding through the curriculum, reinforced by a stimulating, positive and solution-focused continuing professional development programme for staff, can support a strong school ethos, enabling a positive learning environment for students and a better working environment for staff.

References

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This article was published in February 2018 and reflects the terminology and understanding of research and evidence in use at the time. Some terms and conclusions may no longer align with current standards. We encourage readers to approach the content with an understanding of this context.