

Supporting staff wellbeing

Ben Levinson, Headteacher, Kensington Primary School.

When Ben heard about the Well Schools movement at the YST Conference in 2020, it chimed so true to the ethos of Kensington Primary School that he signed up as a founding school straight away.



Kensington Primary is based in Newham, East London, an area of significant deprivation with the highest levels of child homelessness and overcrowded housing in England. 97% of children at Kensington have English as an additional language, many cannot speak English at all, some children arrive from abroad with no prior education and the turnover of pupils is huge. This all makes a challenging job even tougher for our staff.

When I arrived as headteacher, our Ofsted rating was 'requires improvement' and staff morale was low. Seven years on and we are rated Outstanding, we've held a Gold YST Quality Mark for a number of years and have just won a Silver Pearson National Teaching Award. I also now sit on the Department for Education advisory group for teacher wellbeing.

We got here thanks to our supportive culture, where teachers are listened to, pupils given the tools they need to succeed and parents have complete trust in staff, with 100% attendance rates at parents' evenings.

Life at Kensington wasn't always like this. Staff used to struggle to teach the national curriculum alongside all the additional elements children needed to be equipped for their future. Unlike schools where children have enrichment opportunities from birth, Kensington provides the only opportunity to gain these life experiences for many of our pupils.



This led to a huge piece of work finding out what universities, businesses and secondary schools felt children needed in the 21st century. The outcome is Curriculum K, Kensington's bespoke curriculum for our unique cohort of pupils. Instead of geography, history and music, pupils learn about health (physical and emotional), communication and culture, which enables pupils to transition to secondary school with enthusiasm, a love of learning and the ability to effectively communicate with their peers.

So much innovation can be difficult for teachers to adjust to, so we ensure that wellbeing is embedded throughout our entire school culture. Staff members do get to enjoy Bollywood dancing sessions and massage days to support wellbeing, but more importantly they are consulted with and genuinely listened to. If things aren't working for teachers, we either improve or remove them. When you've got a class of 30 pupils and all of the stress that comes with that, you don't need tiny issues making that more difficult. You need the path to be as smooth as possible so that you can focus on what really matters.

For example, we tried to introduce a wristband system to help children remember what they'd ordered in the morning for lunch. While on paper this was a good idea, in reality the children would lose, swap or play with the wristbands, creating unnecessary stress for teachers. When we found out that it wasn't working, we got rid of the system. This openness to feedback is also paired with a supportive approach across the school. If a teacher hasn't done their marking, they're not met with "why haven't you done it?" but instead with "what's preventing you from getting this done and how can we support you?"

There is a real feeling among schools that they should have more agency to be able to support, develop and grow together and Well Schools does just that. The community feel of it being driven by schools for schools is something I feel is absolutely the right way to go.

Kensington Primary is one of 33 Founding Schools of the Well School Movement and is also a member of the Education Board that ensure Well Schools is truly driven by schools.



To find out more about the Founding Schools and the Board visit www.well-school.org

How ITE at the University of East London prepares PE trainees to support young people's wellbeing

Dr Shrehan Lynch, Senior Lecturer in Initial Teacher Education, University of East London.

Dr Lynch outlines the ways in which the physical education programme promotes wellbeing at UEL during a teacher training course.



When teaching at the University of Alabama, I had the opportunity to teach a course entitled the 'Ecology of Health and Wellbeing'. This course taught nine concepts of wellness to university students: physical, emotional, intellectual, interpersonal, cultural, spiritual, environmental, financial, and occupational. While teaching this course over repeated semesters, I became enlightened to how students struggled with each component of the wellness spectrum during university. Now, as a teacher educator at a large teacher training provider, I have first-hand experience observing the barriers to wellness for our secondary trainee teachers at the University of East London. Just a few daily issues they face include workload, financial support, juggling personal and professional identities while having children/spouses/families, retaining and actioning the new knowledge of learning to teach and keeping hobbies. These are even more burdensome on PE trainees whom, unlike many other subjects in secondary, receive no bursary to help support their studies. Consequently, many are paying not only for their tuition but for travel to placements and accommodation. Thus, preparing trainees to teach wellness, means that I am morally and professionally obligated to ensure that the wellbeing of my trainees comes first.

Over the year, I facilitate several interventions aimed primarily at supporting trainee wellness but also are dual purposed – trainees can use the strategies themselves or use them to support young people's wellness in school. I asked several of them to comment on this topic and what we've done at university that prepares them in this area. Here are their responses:

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At university, we had a guest speaker speak to us about mindfulness and wellbeing. This allowed us to discover different mindfulness activities that we could use as trainees but also bring into schools to teach our students. I particularly enjoyed the meaningful breathing activity which focuses on breathing to help you relax and calm down. This is something that is easy, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere in school." Princess Adeosun



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During my PGCE year, I have been supported through a range of workshops, activities, and meetings that have allowed me to focus on my wellbeing as well as inform me of creative and engaging ways we can support the young people we teach. Dr Shrehan Lynch has engaged me in a range of activities such as yoga, wellbeing sessions, circle time, and origami. These activities were thoughtfully planned and were fun and engaging. These strategies are fun ways of supporting students' wellbeing in the classroom. I have found them particularly useful in theory lessons when some lessons are two hours long." Tina Clark

Some of the activities in the training have included chalking positivity messages on campus, origami, visual and guided meditations, wellbeing drop-in sessions with a professional counsellor, guest lecturers discussing stress/wellness/teacher resilience, breathing exercises, yoga, and a group Christmas lunch. Moreover, I frequently share UK Education Support details so that trainees have the details beyond teacher training. They offer several free counselling services online: www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk. Their helpline is free and available to all teachers, lecturers and staff in education (primary, secondary, further or higher education) in England, Wales and Scotland 24/7, 365 days a year.

To conclude, my top tip for a Well School would be to forefront staff members' wellness, not just teachers, but the entire staff community. Having a pleasant staff room space means that staff have a sanctuary to go to during working hours. This could mean repainting and decorating the space into an adult-friendly area. Furthermore, leaders should prioritise wellbeing activities such as staff cooking classes, kickboxing clubs and BBQs. Without well, cohesive staff members, we cannot begin a conversation about providing wellness opportunities for young people. This work begins by asking staff members what they need and want for a well school and actioning their requests.



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As a cohort, we have had training and seminars on students who have been through trauma inflicted situations and different safeguarding issues and how providing a safe environment for them to learn that supports their mental wellbeing. Also, providing a holistic physical education curriculum supports students' physical, social, and mental wellbeing." Sahim Ahmed



Dr Lynch is co-founder of the BAME physical education network, a social change movement with a vision of equitable physical education. <https://bamepe.wordpress.com>