

# AN EEF SCHOOL CASE STUDY: SUPPORTING PUPILS' SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

## Woodhall Primary School

### School context:



Woodhall Primary School is a two-form entry primary school and nursery situated on the outskirts of Sudbury. Part of a multi-academy trust, the school serves a predominately White-British community. The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium funding and free school meals are above the national average at approximately 35% and 30% respectively. The number of students we have on roll with special educational needs and disabilities is around 20%.

### 1 What problem were you looking to solve?



We noticed many children experiencing challenges with their well-being, often due to complex situations at home. As a school, we were keen to mitigate these as we were witnessing the impact of these issues on children's attendance and educational performance. We knew from the EEF's Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools guidance report that when carefully implemented, SEL approaches can increase positive pupil behaviour, mental health and well-being and academic performance.

Our priority was to find meaningful ways to support those children affected and to help them cope with the issues they faced. Recommendation 1 from the EEF's guidance report advises schools to teach SEL skills explicitly, such as how to use self-calming strategies and positive self-talk to help deal with intense emotions. It was our hope that if we could equip pupils with these skills, they would view school as a supportive environment and attendance would improve. Once in the classroom, with our support, they would be able to focus on their learning, enjoy success and achieve.

### 2 What were the anticipated barriers/challenges?



The main barriers we anticipated were time and space: we needed to ensure that enough time was allocated for the support offered to be purposeful and that there was an appropriate safe space in which staff could work with target pupils.

We chose to implement ELSA; an intervention programme created by Educational Psychologist, Shelia Burton. Evidence-based, the approach trains practitioners in planning support sessions which explicitly teach SEL skills to enable pupils to self-regulate their emotions.

Initially, two learning support assistants were trained as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs). We decided that sessions with pupils should take place during protected time in the school week and 'The Glade', our safe space, was born.

As our ELSA's caseloads have grown, we have increased the number of trained ELSAs within school to ensure that our capacity to support continues to match the level of need. We now have five ELSAs, each with an allocated afternoon to work with their pupils, both in and out of class.

### 3 What did you do?



Staff responsible for delivery received specialist training to ensure they could confidently provide the individualised support for the children in their care. We also implemented regular clinical supervision for ELSAs, from an educational psychologist.

Training was also provided for all other members of staff in order to establish a strong set of new school wide norms, including regular assemblies devoted to social and emotional development, the creation of a new set of 'rights' for all (at Woodhall, we have the right to learn, be respected and be safe) and providing worry boxes around the school.

Staff were encouraged to model their own SEL behaviours as we know that children learn by observing other people, getting ideas about how new behaviours are formed and guiding their own actions.

Once operating, ELSAs identified two common areas with which pupils required support: self-awareness and self-regulation. Focussing on these skills, children developed the language to explain how they felt; knowing it was okay to feel these intense emotions; and, learned ways to cope and deal with them.

### 4 How are you monitoring the success of this intervention?



We are conducting regular surveys of teaching staff, parents and carers to ascertain whether those children who have been supported by our ELSAs have benefited from being able to spend time with a trained practitioner. The main focus of these surveys is on whether learners have been more willing to engage in both group and class discussions, or less reliant on adult direction when tackling set tasks.

Our attendance data is being closely monitored by our specialised team, who are conducting monthly reviews to gauge whether the input from an ELSA has had a positive effect on the attendance of those pupils receiving support.

### Additional:

#### Suggested reading:

- EEF [SEL audit tool](#)
- EEF [SEL Core Skills](#)
- *Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools* [eef.li/primary-sel/](http://eef.li/primary-sel/)



### Reflection questions



- How do you plan and monitor targeted interventions?
- How are TAs prepared for their role and trained in any intervention approach?
- How are interventions linked to the wider work in the classroom?