

Aileymill Primary School ^(a)

Empowering primary school pupils and staff through a school-based community approach to ending mental health stigma and discrimination.

What is it?

In 2018 Aileymill Primary School decided to take a school-based community approach to tackle issues of stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health. To do so the school was used as a base for mental health education and support for pupils and staff within the school community. The project had three main aims:

1. To increase understanding of mental health and the role it plays in everyone's life by improving mental health knowledge and literacy.
2. To acknowledge the stigma and discrimination that is associated with mental health and the adverse effects this can have on individual pupils.
3. To help pupils develop coping strategies to ensure they are equipped to support themselves and peers.

Who is it for?

The project was initially developed to improve staff knowledge and confidence so they could recognise mental health needs and support pupils and colleagues. Moreover, the project aimed to introduce mental health terms and to educate the pupils – with a focus on stigma and discrimination and how to challenge this in a positive and empowering way. In this sense, the project has had a huge impact on the direct, and wider (see further case study), school community. For example, staff confidence has increased.

What was done?

Aileymill Primary School recognised the needs of their school community and undertook an extensive process to ensure that these needs were met – or were working towards being met. This included training, action planning, lesson development and involvement of everyone included in the school community. Initially, a 'Test for Change' pilot was delivered to P6 and P7 pupils and their parents to gauge the response to receiving in depth and explicit teaching regarding mental health issues and outcomes. From this an action plan was developed which fed directly into the school improvement plan – creating a school ethos focused on improving the mental health of its pupils, staff, and wider community. To action this:

- Four members of staff were trained by See Me Education and Young People (EYP) in Scottish Mental Health First Aid (SMHFA) in November 2018. A further, seven staff members were trained in March 2020.
- The school devised lesson plans that were tailored to meet the specific needs of P6/7 classes and relevant Curriculum for Excellence outcomes. These included explicit, but age and stage appropriate, education and discussion of the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions and how to seek support and practice self-care. These lessons were guided by the See Me EYP 'What's On Your Mind?' resource which teachers adapted to ensure it was appropriate for their classes needs.
- To compliment the hugely successful delivery of lessons, the whole school underwent an anti-mental health stigma and discrimination makeover using posters and displays. These displays were designed by the pupils and incorporated See Me logos and branding. The pupils also created a 'visual first aid kit' which was designed for use during wet playtimes if pupils were feeling low/emotional/lonely. These are still in use today. The staff in the school find that this promotes a clear and consistent message not only in lessons but throughout the physical school environment.
- For the wider school community, a 'Meet, Treat & Greet' mental health workshop was delivered to children and parents. For this, five specialists were invited to deliver short presentations on their role and experiences and then welcomed any questions. This included See Me EYP, a community psychiatric nurse, a play therapist, a local minister and the mental health lead (Grant Anderson) who spoke about his experience and journey from thinking mental health was a joke to now empowering a mental health movement within the school. This workshop also invited two P7 pupils to talk about their journey within the school and the changes they had experienced thus far. One of these pupils had just experienced two bereavements and felt very strongly about being able to share his experience due to their newly found confidence within the adapted school ethos and culture.
- The P7s in the school delivered a Minion themed school assembly which celebrated the mental health stigma and discrimination learning that had been undertaken and

to promote the importance of looking after your own, and others' mental health. This demonstrates how the information that is being shared can be adapted to suit any context and setting.

- Responses to the above were collected and reviewed.

Why was it done?

The school-based community approach to the project was devised to address needs identified within the school. As a school Aileymill wanted to ensure that the support and nurture their pupils received from staff was extensive and that the school was a supportive and nurturing environment. The school wished to ensure that education surrounding mental health and mental health issues was encouraged and that staff and pupils felt empowered to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination. To achieve this, the aim was to provide knowledge that would improve the school community directly, by both pupils and staff. For example, the P7 pupils who are going through a transition into secondary school were able to use their new found skills and knowledge to support one another and themselves during a stressful time.

What was the impact?

Grant Anderson, the Mental Health Lead at the school, said that the project had an "unbelievable impact". This impact was evidenced by a range of hard and soft data. This data was gathered through: wellbeing webs, pupil, staff and parent/ carer questionnaires, oral dialogue, behaviour tracking and Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) pathways. Analysis of the data identified several key impacts:

- Attitudes towards mental health improved significantly, which had a profound impact on the ethos of the school. This was found by the children who had received the lessons pertaining to mental health, stigma and discrimination education. They reported feeling more confident when talking about mental health. Pupils said they could recognise signs and symptoms of poor mental health and provide pathways of, and to, support themselves, their peers and their families. Moreover, they stated they felt confident to myth bust regarding mental health – a means of challenging the stigma and discrimination. Finally, the pupils were able to identify who they would or could turn to within the school community depending on their level of need.
- An additional unexpected, but welcomed, impact of the school-based community approach was that pupil behaviour within the school improved significantly. Aileymill Primary School partly attribute this to adapting the school ethos and culture to be more open, warm, compassionate and non-judgmental. By doing so their classrooms are now environments where pupils feel more respected and understood and able to ask for help on issues that may be impacting their academic attainment and development of peer relationships, and this increased their willingness to learn and engage in all lessons and interactions. With this, a number of pupils were able to exit the GIRFEC pathway, or now require reduced levels of support.

Resources

- 'What's On Your Mind' Pack
- More information on GIRFEC can be found [here](#) »

