

One of the NHSS pilot schools reflect on how results from the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire provided a focus for the school and helped identify patterns and possible causes for concern regarding the whole school's emotional and mental health.

Larry Thompson is PSHE Co-ordinator at Sir James Smith Community School, Camelford, Cornwall.

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Larry Thompson

Joining the Healthy School Scheme

The whole school was surveyed and an action plan developed to address the issue of emotional and mental health.

My schools cross-curricular Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) Team recommended in the Spring of 1999 that Sir James Smith's School should:

- ✓ volunteer to join the pilot phase of Cornwall's Healthy School Scheme
- ✓ opt to focus on improving our whole school emotional and mental health

Our Social and Moral Team (SMT)/Ethos Team concurred and we applied, were accepted, and our School Development Plan suitably amended.

It was decided to establish a multi-agency steering group to oversee the management of the scheme. The steering group would represent interest groups and have relevant expertise. Consequently, the following were invited and agreed to join:

- ❖ Headteacher
- ❖ Chair of Governors
- ❖ PSHE Co-ordinator (who was also one of the pastoral managers in Ethos Team)
- ❖ School Secretary
- ❖ School Doctor
- ❖ School Nurse
- ❖ Youth Service Representative
- ❖ Educational Welfare Officer
- ❖ Mental Health Promotion Co-ordinator
- ❖ Sixth Former

This steering group drew up an Action Plan

whose principal targets were:

- ✓ to survey the emotional and mental health of the whole school population
- ✓ to produce a developmental model which would seek to improve matters;
- to improve matters
- ✓ to produce a whole school report by the end of 1999/2000 academic year which would include recommendations for action.

We were fortunate to have the results of three Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ) surveys of students in Years 8 and 10 which were done in 1991, 1995 and 1999. We used these to focus on their relevant emotional and mental health responses and to identify patterns and possible causes for concern.

Then, two focus groups of sixteen mixed ability, mixed gender, mixed background students in Years 9 and 11 were established. Using their responses to the 1999 HRBQ, a senior youth worker plus colleague and school nurse then interviewed these students to 'tease out' more substantive opinions from them concerning school issues which were affecting their emotional and mental health. A report on the findings was then produced by the Youth Service.

Parenthetically to all this were decisions to:

- ✓ Develop our Anti-Bullying Council (ABC) peer support scheme into other year groups. At present, our ABC service is provided, for any students who need

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it, by trained Sixth Formers. We are likely to extend peer monitoring into Year 10. Exploratory meetings have already taken place with the Youth Service and with the Red Cross ACHE (Advice, Care, Help and Empathy) Service.

Meanwhile, as far as staff were concerned, I had led an introductory Personal Development (PD) session in September 1999 which was designed to:

- 1 Raise awareness of the Healthy School Scheme and our specific commitment to it
- 2 Explain what the steering group had embarked upon and that the prime initial objective was to produce a whole school report by Summer 2000
- 3 Explain that more work on ascertaining staff views would be requested at a subsequent PD session in January 2000

Meanwhile, the steering group had agreed to invite staff to participate in any anonymous and confidential questionnaire that was designed to take a snap-shot of their emotional and mental health.

Just before Christmas, Ian Sinnett, Mental Health Promotion Co-ordinator, explained the questionnaire to staff and tried to allay anxieties. Copies of the questionnaire plus SAEs addressed to Ian were placed in pigeon holes. Staff were asked to complete and send them to Ian ASAP for processing over the Christmas holidays. The questionnaire responses would be used to help inform Ian's PD session with staff in January.

At this session, Ian:

- ✓ Fed back the general results of the survey and explained their meanings
- ✓ Asked staff in small cross-curricular groups to report back responses about what the school did which added to or detracted from their emotional and mental health

All this was used by Ian to produce a staff report.

One result of all this was an SMT decision to establish a working group to begin drawing together the whole school implications

We hope that this group will report by the summer and that it will both outline problems and propose solutions. Obviously, it will then go out for full consultation with all partners and interest groups.

Throughout this whole process so far, priority has been attached to:

- ✓ Effective co-ordination
- ✓ Thorough surveys
- ✓ Using this first year to find out and own up to both what we are doing well and what needs improving
- ✓ Recognise that this is only 'the first step in a journey of a thousand miles'.

Finally, it is my personal opinion, that unless and until schools properly address the issue of whole school emotional and mental health, other areas of PSD and PSHE are unlikely to be as effective as they should be.