Identifying Need 2: Exeter Road Community Primary School

Exeter Road Community School (ERCS) is a primary school in a small, seaside town in Devon, with around 200 pupils from Reception to Year 6. The school has above average levels of deprivation, owing largely to irregular employment patterns in the area.

Fewer than 10 years ago, ERCS was performing poorly and had gained a bad reputation among the local community. Following a change in leadership, the school focused on data collection as a crucial step in identifying pupil need, setting up the required support for pupils, and improving overall standards. ERCS now uses two strategic data collection and management tools to identify mental health need:

1. **School Pupil Tracker** – The Pupil Tracker is the main data management tool used at ERCS to record data for all pupils. In addition to recording student attendance, progress and attainment data, ERCS has also developed a bespoke internal mechanism to record pupil confidence and well-being. All teachers have access to the Pupil Tracker and are expected to analyse their students' data.

2. **Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)** – SEAL is used when pupils show a lack of progress or attendance. It involves a questionnaire with both the pupil and their parents to track emotional well-being. The school SENCO and one other staff member trained in the programme have access to the data generated through the SEAL programme, which requires parental consent. The information is selectively shared with other staff members others on a "need to know" basis, and is used to devise specific interventions for that particular pupil and their family.

Embedding this approach

The use of data has become a key element of ERCS's mental health provision. The Pupil Tracker feeds into the use of the SEAL questionnaire, by identifying pupils who might benefit from further attention. When the data from either source flags a pupil at risk, individual attention is provided to such pupils by one of two full time staff members trained in pastoral care. While all pupils are offered regular chat times with a pastoral carer, the carers will dedicate additional time to talk to pupils at risk and engage their parents on a more intensive level.

Data, particularly on pupil confidence, is also used to monitor the impact of mental health interventions and activities. For example, while engaging in an activity such as cooking, drawing, wood carving or art therapy, pastoral carers ask students suffering from anxiety or a lack of confidence how they feel about trying new challenges, taking risks, going to different places, and mixing with different children. They then monitor students' responses over a period of time to track progress.

Benefits of this universal data collection

Staff at ERCS have found using data to identify mental health need to be beneficial in several different ways:

- **Informing and improving provision.** Initially, analysing pupils' attainment, progress, and attendance data helped the school to systematically identify pupil needs and develop their overall approach to mental health need. By speaking to parents of children identified as struggling to progress, the leadership team found that many pupils came from difficult and complex backgrounds, and often needed someone they could talk to. This led them to employ two full time pastoral carers who dedicate their time to talking to pupils. Since then, the school's pupil progress, attainment, and attendance data have improved.

- **Enabling early intervention.** The Pupil Tracker flags changes in pupil data in real time, helping to identify pupils who may be at risk of developing mental ill health at an early stage. For example, in one instance, the data showed that a pupil who had been doing quite well in school was starting to fall back on her progress in a particular year group. After a few weeks the data also showed that she was absent from school quite often. The school was able to dispatch the pastoral carer to investigate the situation and found that the child was exhibiting a change in behaviour as a result of parental separation. The school was able to intervene early and provide the pupil and her parents with the support needed. ERCS feels strongly that without the data identifying her change in progress immediately and without the individual care given by the pastoral carer, the student could have become a "school refuser" in the long term.

- **Engaging parents.** Universal data collection has also provided the school with the supporting evidence needed to engage parents more actively in supporting their children's mental health. While many teachers intuitively recognise when something is wrong with a child, that perception may not be sufficient to convince parents that something is wrong. Staff at ERCS believe that having objective data that indicates changes in a child's progress and behaviour provides a strong starting point for a conversation with the family, and offer the support needed to both the child and the family.

Challenges

Government changes to tracking pupil progress have posed one challenge to ERCS's universal data collection processes. Previously, National Curriculum levels were used by every school nationally to measure pupil performance and the pupil tracking tools that are used at ERCS were based on National Curriculum levels. Since these levels were removed two years ago, the data that ERCS use has become harder to monitor, analyse and compare with other schools. The developers of the tools that ERCS use are continuing to work to come up with a solution that produces data that is common across different schools. In the meantime, ERCS recognise the important of looking at children's work in the classroom as well as the data that they hold.

Identifying Need 6: The Priory School

The Priory School is a Local Authority maintained secondary comprehensive in Hertfordshire, with 1200 students across Year 7 to Year 13. The school has a high proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and high levels of disadvantage.

At The Priory, using universal data to identify mental health need is at the forefront of providing support around mental health and wellbeing. Every year, all students complete a **bespoke online survey**. The survey takes 10-15 minutes to complete and consists of approximately fifteen questions, tailored to each year group's needs and the challenges they will face such as transition for Year 7 and exam stress for Year 11. The school works hard to ensure that these questions are age appropriate, accessible and not leading. Data from the online survey is used to respond to mental health need in three key ways:

- To **identify and respond** to the needs of each Year. The school uses PSHE sessions and learning days to address issues that arise across a cohort.

- To **inform further intervention** for individual students already receiving mental health support; and

- To detect mental ill health in students **not previously identified** as needing support.

Students identified as having particular mental health needs through the survey are referred to the school's wellbeing team for further assessment and support. Tools used for targeted assessment include the YP-CORE Outcome Measure and several well-established mental health assessment tools including the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (R-CADS), which allow the wellbeing team to quickly identify the level of the need for the young person. The student will then be signposted to appropriate internal support such as counselling or external support from CAMHS.

Benefits of this universal data collection

The Priory School's bespoke survey highlights issues occurring for large numbers of students, enabling the school to appropriately **adapt mental health provision and teaching** at a whole school level. Having a strong data set on mental health also means that the school can **justify investing** in mental health provision. The data collected through the survey has, for example, been used as evidence of the need to employ counsellors.

The survey also provides a **straightforward and immediate** method of identifying individual students with particular needs, enabling the school to put appropriate support in place before a pupil reaches crisis point. Collecting this data importantly means that access to support is **not dependent on students self-referring**:

"Having a really, really straightforward, universal survey [...], it means that they don't have to find the emotional language, they don't have to have an uncomfortable conversation with somebody, they can just answer a survey."

Data from both the survey and standardised mental health assessment tools has also made **referrals to CAMHS** quicker and easier, and aided handovers between the school and CAMHS. On the other hand, not all students require support from CAMHS or clinicians and data from the survey has helped the school to distinguish between different levels of mental health need. In-school support offered at the Priory includes counselling, mentoring and drama therapy.

Keys to success

Staff at the Priory identify three key factors that have enabled them to successfully use data to identify mental health need:

- Using a **bespoke, simple and short** survey has minimised costs and the burden on staff. Keeping the survey short also helps students to stay focused and answer the questions meaningfully.

- Having a **mental health lead** in the school has been vital to the success of the approach. The mental health lead's commitment ensures that data is collected and actively used to identify need and inform provision.

- Using a **universal approach** to data collection has helped to guarantee that mental health is taken seriously across the school, and to ensure consistency in the way that pupils' mental health is monitored.

Challenges

Staff at the Priory acknowledge that student surveys cannot be solely used to identify mental health need, as there is no guarantee that all pupils will answer honestly and disclose potential mental health issues. Nevertheless, the survey has helped them to identify some pupils with mental health needs that had been otherwise missed, and to uncover common issues within year groups, including for example concerns about weight and sex and relationships.

Initially, some staff at the Priory were alarmed when survey data indicated that students who they thought they knew well were experiencing problems. The leadership team has endeavoured to reassure staff that this is not an oversight on their behalf, but somewhat inevitable due to the nature of mental health. Pupils may not feel comfortable starting a conversation around mental health and so a problem may remain hidden. Over time, this has served to highlight the importance of the survey for helping staff to identify pupils in need of support.