GOVERNOR VISIT REPORT – Mental Health and Resilience Awareness

Visit made by: Tracy Gardiner
Wednesday 19 October 2016

Purpose of visit:
As part of governor monitoring of the School Development Plan, governors were invited to observe the twilight training session for staff on the topic of raising mental health and resilience awareness. The visit links to focus 6 of the SDP (2016-2017).

Report:
Governors will be aware that one of the key areas for development for 2016-2017 is to ensure that all staff are suitably trained in awareness of mental health issues, and know where to access help (if necessary) in order to develop resilience across the school community.

During my visit I observed a bespoke training session which was well attended by staff from across the school, including non-teaching staff, in New Hall. The presenter excellently conveyed how teenagers are exposed to a wide range of stresses which result in stress being the number one cause of illness to affect them. She explained the difference between feeling stressed and being ill from stress. Latest statistics reveal that 23% of young people experience mental health issues with one in ten having a serious mental health disorder.

Staff considered what issues may trigger mental health problems in young people and how the symptoms of mental health issues may manifest themselves in a school environment.

She recommended to staff that they become aware of the 10 common warning signs of mental health conditions in teens published by NAMI.

1. Feeling very sad, withdrawn or unmotivated for more than two weeks.
2. Making plans or trying to harm or kill oneself.
3. Out-of-control, risk-taking behaviours.
4. Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart or fast breathing.
5. Not eating, throwing up or using laxatives to lose weight; significant weight loss or weight gain.
6. Severe mood swings causing problems in relationships.
7. Excess use of drugs or alcohol.
8. Drastic changes in behaviour, personality or sleeping habits.
9. Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still.
10. Intense worries or fears getting in the way of daily activities like hanging out with friends or going to classes.

http://www.nami.org/Press-Media/Press-Releases/2015/10-Warning-Signs

The trainer also outlined the characteristics of the more common mental health disorders which affect young people, such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm etc.

Staff discussed and shared their opinions on how the school might practically support students to cope with mental health issues and develop resilience. These ideas along with the plan already in train provide many opportunities to help the school achieve Focus 6 of the SDP and it was rewarding to see the staff so positively engaged with this priority of the Governing Body.

In conclusion, the trainer not only drew attention to the need for awareness of mental health issues but also to help students learn to be resilient in order to cope and prepare for life.

My understanding is that further workshops are proposed on resilience. This is an opportunity to consider how the school explicitly teaches resilience characteristics and provides opportunities for students to

practice them.

- perseverance, resilience and grit
- confidence and optimism
- motivation, drive and ambition
- neighbourliness and community spirit
- tolerance and respect
- honesty, integrity and dignity
- conscientiousness, curiosity and focus

The aim of the Government is to make sure children develop these skills at school, alongside their academic skills. All of these attributes are felt to be things that help young people to become autonomous, preparing them to live independent and rewarding lives.

Comments and Recommendations:
It would be useful to know from staff how familiar they are with the Promoting Positive Mental Health policy, how well they think it works and whether it could be improved. This can be considered by governors, through the planned Governor investigation - Promoting Positive Mental Health policy planned for April 2017 by the Welfare Committee, which will report on how well the policy is working. The report could also include considering the extent to which students are aware of mental health disorders and how they might access support for them.

It would be useful to follow up and to ask staff how students are able to develop and practice their skills and training in resilience characteristics through the curriculum and through extra-curricular opportunities. This could be through a further governor visit and discussion with staff or picked up in the policy investigation above.

That governors continue to engage with staff, including considering how the school might support and further develop the strategy to work on mental health awareness and resilience as outlined in the school development plan, and report back to governors.

Signed Tracy Gardiner Date 16.11.16