

Link for May

There has been a lot written in the media recently about the issue of Mental Health and Anxiety in children (and also teenagers and adults). For some time now Offwell has recognised that these issues do exist and we have been steadily building up our knowledge base and expertise in learning how best to help children overcome their concerns and ensure they can fulfil their potential. We recognise it's essential to have a 'whole school' approach that each member of staff and volunteer can honestly and wholeheartedly support. It is too easy sometimes to make assumptions about behaviour but at Offwell we recognise that our behaviours are an outward expression of an internal emotion, and when that's difficult to understand or cope with it's easy to see why the resulting behaviours can be challenging

There are a number of initiatives we adopt since no two cases are the same and all children must be treated as individuals.

In the last few years our local Educational Psychologist and a Behaviour Support expert produced an excellent training package based around Attachment Based Mentoring. Initially aimed at Children in Care it has nevertheless proved extremely effective helping all children who have difficulty managing their emotional wellbeing and / or behaviour. Research is always on-going into Autistic Spectrum Conditions and a number of our staff have followed coaching on 'Good Autism Practice'. There is a very telling quote by Christine Breakey who has worked with autistic people for over 20 years' *"Any understanding of autism should not be approached from a position of 'deficit', but rather from a position of 'difference'..... They are different. If we are serious about equality and inclusion within any area, then we must first of all understand that difference."*

Mindfulness. One of our parents is a Mindfulness practitioner and comes into the two Key Stage 2 (7-11 year old) classes to teach the children why our brains and bodies respond to what's going on in the way that they do. She also takes the children through a series of exercises designed to help their brains relax and focus on the 'reality' of what's going on around them - in this way we are all much more able to make wise decisions.

Four members of staff form the Wellbeing Curriculum Team. Whilst not engaged in individual cases they hold the remit to look at the fields where the overall wellbeing of the school links in with the academic side of education. If a child is happy, secure, feels safe and knows they are loved / highly valued, they will do well academically and socially. We recently held a Family Learning Afternoon where families and carers were welcomed in to school to work with their child/ren on areas connected with our wellbeing topics of the term: 'Going for Goals' and 'Good to be Me'. This was very well supported and the feedback from parents included a number of comments on how good it was to see their child working with others in the class – it gave them a window into the life of the school and their child's place within that community.