

Achievement for All: Keeping Wellbeing At The Heart of Learning

Wednesday 11 November, 2020

With the recent celebration of World Mental Health Day, it's important to acknowledge the heroes of society, our educators and senior leadership teams who have worked tirelessly to overcome the challenges of lockdown and have been vital in creating a safe space for young people in these confusing and uncertain times. To ensure our educators are feeling the best version of themselves, AfA are currently offering wellbeing sessions led by their expert coaches in over 2000 schools globally to do just that, by creating a safe, empathetic and nurturing environment.

Achievement for All is a leading not-for-profit organisation that works in partnership with early years settings, schools and colleges to improve outcomes for all children. The organisation recognises that it's people, who help other people, they truly make a difference in the life of others. They use this philosophy with their expert coaches, who have been extremely successful in embedding themselves within the existing school environments and establishing strong relationship headteachers.

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was a bewildering time for all headteachers. The AfA coaches were at the forefront of supporting their wellbeing, stepping in to be their confidant, listening to their worries and woes and ultimately helping them to navigate these new uncharted leadership territory.

Achievement for All has provided training in emotional coaching for all, which in turn has helped to mould exceptionally empathetic and encouraging coaches. The relationships they have built and established have enabled headteachers to reach out directly to the coaches for support in time of need. As AfA is an external organisation, headteachers are able to be more honest and transparent and can share their concerns openly. This is a contrast to the traditional communication normally undertaken within their organisation, where they may find themselves holding back due to their senior position.

"Schools are now the front line triage service for the increasingly complex mental health needs of pupils and in many cases families. At a time when society and communities are awakening to the importance/impact of mental health, with the additional demands such new knowledge brings in terms of unanswered questions and seeking of support, school staff in all positions need to have the skills and training to develop, implement and maintain a culture and climate of positive mental health. This is a challenge both in terms of the daily practice of individual school staff but also for school leadership who need to support staff well being in achieving the desired outcomes for the whole school community." - Gary Hilton, Headteacher at Berwick St Mary's School, Northumberland.

AfA's coaches have been supporting leaders within schools through group coaching sessions and one to one support for senior leaders. Not only has the support been provided virtually but also over the phone and face-to-face especially in areas with Tier 2 and Tier 3 restrictions.

To alleviate some of the stresses from educators, in addition to working with vulnerable young people with high needs, coaches have also been working with a large percentage of young people who have struggled to keep up with learning, or have not been engaging in online learning. The coaches have been supporting those students to help develop their independent learning skills and resilience in these situations.

"It has been fantastic to see the outcomes improve for our vulnerable students. I feel the interventions that we have in place for our vulnerable students are significantly improving their outcomes. The more bespoke approach has allowed

us to understand the needs of our students better and put the support in place that they need."

"Having the coaching made me assess my role and my leadership style. The questions posed and the reflecting that followed made me consider my approach and role within the school. I felt that moving

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forward I could assist the CLL more with key strategic decisions. Subsequently, I have taken on a more active role in the department's exam analysis. This has given me more confidence and helped me develop my skills." Jo Redfern, Executive Headteacher at All Saints C of E, Sutton-in-Ashfield

In the current situation, teachers are having to revert to a more traditional style of teaching, where young people are asked to stay in their chairs and not to interact with their peers due to social distancing restrictions, where previously they were encouraged to confer with their friends and partners within class. Some secondary schools and colleges have been teaching entire year groups at once with young people of mixed abilities, which can be quite challenging. Teachers are now having to change what they are delivering, by preparing additional resources to support students online and the AfA coaches have been there to support them with these demands and help them with their wellbeing every step of the way.

Senior leadership teams are stepping in to elevate the stress from teachers, with the majority providing constant cover for break and dinner time. AfA coaches who have been working with headteachers have shared how headteachers are feeling the strain of social distancing, and are unable to undertake typical classroom visits because of the isolation bubbles in place within school environments.

The AfA coaches have done a lot of work with head teachers about their own resilience and awareness of their stress levels. Coaches are supporting the wellbeing of headteachers by asking them about the changes they are putting in place, what support they are receiving and what networks they are able to access. AfA are running sessions which gives them time to pause, develop and look for a way forward.

Staff have really valued these sessions as it allows them time to think and reflect. They have appreciated speaking to a coach who is independent, there is no judgement and it's confidential with tremendous empathy for them and their situation. Staff look forward to these sessions and have shared that it helps them to stay sane.

If your school is looking for additional support to make a difference in the lives of students, staff and SLT, reach out to the team here at AfA.

Achievement for All is a leading not-for-profit organisation that works in partnership with early years settings, schools and colleges to improve outcomes for all children. AfA Education's proven ability to accelerate academic progress closes the gap for all ages and stages, regardless of their background, challenge or need. AfA Education offers coaching programmes, step up reviews and regional CPD events to improve achievement and empower students and educators across the country.

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