

# FINAL REPORT

### Havering Education Services

Pilot of Pursuit Wellbeing Programme for Teachers, School Leaders and School Staff February, 2021

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Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of participants who completed the course saying that it had met or exceeded their expectations.





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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In order to assess the effectiveness of the Pursuit "5-step Wellbeing Action Plan", a pilot programme was carried out in partnership with Havering Education Services (HES) from November 2020 to January 2021. The programme was rolled out to 58 participants from 10 schools, and to some members of the HES and CAD (Children and Adults with Disabilities) 5-19 Support team.

Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of participants responding to the final survey saying that 'the course had met or exceeded their expectations'. The structure and content of the course received high praise, and brought tangible, lasting change to participants' lives. On average the wellbeing score of those who completed the course increased by 10 percentage points between starting and completing the course (from 76% to 86%).

Key challenges to the pilot were:

- **Timing:** the pilot coincided with major challenges for schools across the country related to Covid-19 (see Section 1.2), as well as with the Christmas period.
- **Participant workload:** many participants were under immense pressure and felt unable to prioritise this programme.

Key takeaways from the feedback were that:

- Though they were under intense pressure, participants found the practical tools provided by the programme useful and were greatly appreciated;
- Live support calls are crucial to complement the asynchronous (self-paced) content and reassure participants;
- Strong communication is essential to the successful completion of the course and was seen as an extremely positive aspect of the pilot;
- Participants found it helpful (though difficult) to schedule a regular time to work through the material;
- Participants found it helpful to complete the programme over a longer period of time than the two months initially proposed.

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In order to embed these learnings from the pilot, we have made three recommendations for future rollout of this programmes in school (with more detail in Section 4.2):

- **1** A whole-school approach to be taken.
- **2** A suggested schedule will help to scaffold participants' progress.
- **3** Continued personal support must be provided, by Pursuit as the course provider together with the school on the ground.

To take these recommendations forward we have suggested a possible alternative approach for rollout in Section 4.3, comprising a 'hybrid' model which combines self-paced learning with live, weekly support.

Pursuit would like to thank HES for all support and collaboration in carrying out this very successful pilot programme.

**Dave Smith**, Senior Inspector, Traded Services (Hsis) Havering School Improvement Services (HES) said of the pilot programme: *"The Pursuit Wellbeing pilot programme has provided structured support to address the physical and mental wellbeing needs of the school staff who worked with it.* 

Pursuit's range of strategies through short form video clips and practical advice and guidance have been well-received particularly when navigating the challenges faced by the pandemic. The workbook has been a useful way for participants to record their goals and progress and encouraged them to work both individually and collaboratively to focus on personal wellbeing.

Feedback has been very positive and the support from Maria Brosnan has provided extremely helpful support throughout the pilot."

**Liz Dunnett**, Manager, CAD (Children and Young Adults with Disabilities) 5-19 Support Team said of the pilot programme: *"Working with the Pursuit Wellbeing Pilot Programme has been an exciting and rewarding opportunity for staff in Havering schools.* 

The pilot has been timely, being launched soon after the Havering Staff Wellbeing COVID Survey coordinated by CAD 5-19 Educational Psychology Team in November 2020. We look forward to the Pursuit Wellbeing Programme having a positive impact and working together with Havering schools in the future."



# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Tracey Wraight**, Health and Wellbeing Advisor, Havering Public Health Team said of the pilot programme: "*The Pursuit Wellbeing pilot programme has offered school staff a clear, evidence-based and supportive approach to evaluating and addressing their own physical and emotional wellbeing needs.* 

The resources within the programme offer a balance of informative video clips, activities that encourage self-reflection and personal goal-setting, as well as suggestions on how to establish robust mechanisms for peer-support within the school environment.

By supporting the wellbeing of staff, the programme enables the adults within the school community to feel happier, healthier and valued...and better equipped to support the needs of the children in their care."

# **INTRODUCTION**

### 1.1 Objective

The proposal from Pursuit to Havering Education Services (HES) in early summer 2020 was to pilot the Pursuit "5-step Wellbeing Action Plan" - created specifically for teachers and school leaders - with a number of staff within HES schools.

The Pursuit "5-step Wellbeing Action Plan" is a practical, research-driven online training programme to help better understand and proactively manage mental, emotional, and physical health. From inception, the programme - which launched in July 2020 - was designed for both individual and whole school use.

Our objective was to assess the efficacy of this program with school staff across 10 schools.

### 1.2 Context

When discussions about the pilot began with Dave Smith, Senior Inspector at HES, in July 2020, the interruptions and pressures caused by the pandemic measures appeared to be well understood and - though difficult - in hand within the participating schools and the local authority.

Schools returned in September to complex 'bubble' arrangements; moving to enormous confusion and uncertainty around school closures; then legal action by unions. Christmas was not a time of rest for most SLT and lockdown was announced on Jan 4th with immediate effect. All of this led to mounting pressures on the school community, and a turbulent start to 2021.

All of this was the backdrop for the rollout of the pilot, which ran from November 2020 to January 2021.

Given the immense pressure schools were under, there was an understandably lower rate of engagement than we had hoped. Feedback from participants showed that there was a clear understanding of the value of the programme despite this, with participants saying that they could 'totally see the benefits', 'liked the idea of the course', and 'really wanted to complete it'.

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# **INTRODUCTION**

However, the reality of the situation took hold, leading to some participants committing less time than they had initially envisaged, due to:

- Overall lack of time: some participants felt that the timing was '*very unfortunate*', and felt disappointed to be unable to commit.
- Unmanageable pressure: several participants noted that the idea of the course felt like 'more pressure'- one noted that 'the thought of actually joining the session is causing us anxiety as we are pretty swamped'.
- Inability to prioritise this exercise: participants noted that 'other things took priority' and that 'it felt like we were behind'.

This context explains some of the low completion rates, as set out in Section 3.1.

# **PILOT ROLLOUT**

### 2.1 Participating schools

Ten schools participated in the pilot, across nursery and key stages 1 and 2. These schools were self-selecting; within hours of an email from HES to the 80 schools within the Havering Local Authority, inviting schools to express interest in participating in this pilot, all ten schools listed in Table 1 had responded.

Name of School	Level	Total Number of Pupils	No. of Participating Staff Members
St Alban's Catholic	Primary	209	5
Squirrels Heath Infant School	Infant	248	5
Towers Juniors and Infants	Infant and Junior	678	4
Harrow Lodge Primary	Primary	393	5
Mead Primary	Primary	688	6
Clockhouse	Primary	696	5
Drapers' Pyrgo Priory school	Nursery and Primary	483	5
St Ursulas	Nursery and Primary	440	5
Crownfield Infants	Nursery and Infants	407	6
Elm Park	Primary	411	5

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# **PILOT ROLLOUT**

### 2.2 Pilot Launch for Participants

A total of 58 participants started the course, from a variety of roles across schools and the HES team.



#### Figure 1, Roles of pilot participants

As part of the programme, all participants were invited to:

- An introduction and onboarding session on Zoom on November 12th or 18th 2020 (30 minutes);
- A check in session on December 8th 2020 (30 minutes); and
- A wrap up session on January 21st 2021 (45 minutes).

In between these live sessions, participants made progress through the programme independently.

These live support sessions were important and well received, especially the second 'check-in' session. As part of this check-in, participants were reassured that there was no pressure on them to complete the course in the originally agreed time and to use the course as a toolkit. They were reminded that they had lifetime access to the course and participants found this reassurance helpful.

# **PILOT ROLLOUT**

Throughout the course we found that reassurance was key, to separate out this programme from being '*yet another initiative*' and make clear that it was a supportive, personal programme. One Senior Leader started the programme feeling unsure that she would enjoy it at all. However personal reassurance led her to understand that the programme was 'a *personal course and that it was not meant to be a rod for your back*'. She noted that that piece of reassurance '*really helped me shift the weight of feeling pressured… it was a big help and getting the 'go ahead' to relax my way through it meant I could give it the time and attention it deserved.*'

Continuing this reassurance and support will be vital in the ongoing roll-out of this programme in future, as reflected in the recommendations set out in Section 4.

#### 2.3 Support for Participants and Schools

In addition to the course itself, and the live calls, we implemented two important ongoing support mechanisms for participants:

- 1 Wellbeing Buddies. Participants were invited to pair up with another person or small group, to share their goals and progress and hold each other (gently and kindly) to account. A guide document was shared to help them facilitate this. Participants responded well to this initiative, calling it 'useful' and 'enjoyable'. One participant cited that it helped with school closures due to covid. Participants felt that this support even if just a 10 minute call with their buddy each week helped to increase accountability and therefore completion of the course.
- **2 Lead Buddy.** Every school appointed a single point of contact for Pursuit, to share information. Calls were held between Pursuit and the great majority of appointed lead buddies during the course of the pilot, which were extremely valuable.

#### 2.4 Working through the Course

There were 3 core techniques within the programme that underpinned the toolkit for participants:

- 1 The Daily Check-in: a prompt to assess daily wellbeing and action steps.
- **2 WOOP:** (an acronym for wish, outcome, obstacle, plan), a goal setting framework and toolkit, helping participants to set and achieve personal or professional goals.
- **3 5:5 breathing:** a simple breathing exercise which acts as a powerful 'self-regulation' tool helping the body to go back to its place of balance after (or during) stressful moments.

Feedback on these techniques is shared in Section 3.

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### 3.1 Overview of Completion Rates

At the start of February 2021, at the end of the planned timescale for the pilot, 14 participants had completed the programme, 15 had dropped out (or not started), and 29 were still in the process of completing the course





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### Table 2 Participant progress, start of February 2021

Name of School	Number of participants	Completed by January	Completed by Februari	Not started/ dropped out	In progress	Full access to course*	
St Alban's	5	1	1	0	3	Yes	
Squirrels Heath Infant School	5	0	0	0	5	Yes	
Towers Juniors and Infants	4	0	1	2	1	Yes	
Harrow Lodge Primary	5	0	0	3	2	Yes	
Mead Primary	6	0	1	1	4	Yes	
Clockhouse	5	2	2		1	No	
Drapers' Pyrgo Primary	5	1	1	2	1	No	
St Ursulas	6	0	1	1	4	No	
Crownfield Infants	5	0	1	2	2	No	
Elm Park	7	0	0	2	5	No	
Havering Team	5	2	0	2	1	Yes	
TOTAL	58	6	8	15	29		

NB: \*Full access' refers to the invitation to all staff in the school to join the programme after the pilot, should they wish to do so and the basis on which they joined the pilot.

Of those participants who began the course and were still working through it at the start of February, eight stalled at lesson 3 of the introductory modules for the course. Of the remaining 21 participants who did not drop out but did not finish, progress varied but the majority were over half way through at the end of the pilot period. Most participants felt relieved that they had more time to complete, beyond the November to January window initially set out.

Our learning here is that this is a programme best completed over a longer period of time than two months, especially where there are conflicts with busy seasons (such as Christmas) and external pressures (such as those exerted by school closures due to Covid-19).

### 3.2 Impact Metrics

At the beginning of the course, we invite participants to take an anonymised clinical baseline assessment, to evaluate their wellbeing (where a higher score indicates a greater level of wellbeing.)

Figure 3 shows the change in these scores between starting and finishing the course, for the 14 participants who completed the course and shared their scores.



#### Figure 3 Change in wellbeing scores for completing participants

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As a percentage, the average score before starting was 76%, while afterwards this was 86%, so we can conclude that the course - on average - effected an uplift of wellbeing score of 10 percentage points. Whilst engagement has been somewhat lower than anticipated, as shown in Section 3.1, we can see a real tangible benefit to those who completed the course. As well as this, the feedback from those participating in the course, even without completing it, has been overwhelmingly positive, as we will explore in Section 3.3.

### 3.3 Participant Feedback: Quantitative Data

### 3.3.1 Approach to course

We surveyed participants on how they approached their work on the course. As shown in Figure 4, the vast majority of participants took an 'ad hoc' approach to working through the course, turning to it occasionally, rather than carving out a regular slot for it. It is possible that we can link this to the many external pressures on participants during this time period.

#### Figure 4, Approach to the coursework

How did you approach doing the course?



#### 3.3.2 Communication

We also asked participants for feedback on communication from the course team throughout the duration of the pilot. This was seen as an extremely positive aspect of the course, as shown by Figure 5. This data, linked with other feedback, tells us that strong communication is essential to successful completion of the course and is something that we should build on in future, as set out in the recommendations in Section 4.

#### Figure 5, Communication during the course

How was the communication from us during the course?



### 3.3.3 Overall satisfaction

Finally, we asked participants whether the course had met their expectations, as shown in Figure 6. All participants who had completed the course answered that the course had either met or exceeded their expectations, which was extremely encouraging feedback. Note that all 'other' responses in Figures 4-6 were by people who indicated that they had not completed the course.

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Figure 6, Course satisfaction



### 3.4 Participant Feedback: Qualitative Data

As well as gathering numerical data on completion rates, impact on wellbeing scores, approach to the course, and overall satisfaction, we have been able to gather a large body of qualitative feedback from participants, which is extremely helpful as we evaluate the programme and its rollout.

### 3.4.1 Feedback on Core Techniques

Participants found the three core techniques (see Section 2.4 'Working through the course') extremely helpful.

The 'WOOP' tool was particularly called out as helpful for teams, with participants saying that it '*helped enormously*', reduced feelings of overwhelm, was '*very useful*', and was even '*funny*'. This seemed to be something that could be embedded into teams, rather than being kept on an individual level. One participant said '*We are doing it without thinking (in our team), we don't realise we're even doing the WOOP automatically*,' and another indicated that sharing this thinking together had supported the team.

The breathing exercise (5:5) and daily check-in were also found to be useful. One headteacher did the breathing exercises before any difficult task or conversation. Another participant found the scoring part of the daily check-in to be a useful tool, saying: 'Throughout the course, giving yourself a daily score out of 10 was really helpful and thinking about how to improve the score by altering things in a small way.'

### 3.4.2 Feedback on Connect Module

'Connect' the first module of the course, encouraging connection with oneself and the building of relationships, led to real change. Participants indicated that this had \resulted in more encouragement shared between colleagues, and to greater communication, for example prompting the sending of keeping in touch messages to colleagues who were self-isolating.

One participant was prompted to set up walking meetings each week over lunch in a local park, encouraging movement (linked also to the second module, 'Be Active' - see Section 3.4.3) and in-person connection, which is so important during this time, despite limitations.

Participants also found the scientific information shared within this module helpful. One participant found that being informed in this way was 'all very helpful in understanding why I feel the way I feel (at particular times) and enabled me to help myself calm down quicker and get out of serious moments of anxiety.' This also overflowed into other relationships and enabled this participant to help family members and colleagues to respond more positively to situations in their lives.

### 3.4.3 Feedback on Be Active Module

The second module of the programme is 'Be Active', focusing on movement. As discussed above, it is difficult to view the course modules in isolation and participants found that - as well as encouraging them to keep moving - this module nurtured human connection. One participant began doing activities over Zoom with their family, while another did 'robot arms' (a reference to the 4-minute workout taught in this module) regularly with colleagues which led to laughter and greater connection.

Participants found creative ways to weave movement into their days, finding 'random spots' to do exercise, such as in front of the TV, and for one participant it encouraged a return to running and another to join a regular walking group and commit to a walking marathon in Spring. Participants appreciated the resources and suggestions shared.

Several participants referenced this focus on being active helped them to prioritise themselves, with one saying it helped them to 'find the time for my health' and another saying 'being active is something I do for me and not for other people'.

We did receive some negative feedback on this module - one participant noted that despite trying it was challenging to act on this due to 'the weather, lockdown and not being able to mix with groups of friends for exercise'. Given that other participants found ways to overcome this, perhaps in future we could encourage greater sharing of ideas across participants.

Overall, however, the impact of this module was profoundly positive, with one participant referencing feelings of pride '*[it] makes me feel proud when I complete a run*', another mentioning increased focus, and another overall general wellbeing '*I feel much better afterwards*'. Another referenced a feeling of empowerment, leading to decreased anxiety.

### 3.4.4 Feedback on Notice Module

The 'Notice' module was positively received, with one participant calling it a 'favourite', and another participant appreciated the element around focusing on the present saying, 'being able to focus on what is happening is quite a life skill to master'. This idea of focus and presence seemed to be a key takeaway.

One participant reflected: 'I often go for walks now and don't have my earphones in as I normally would. I listen to the birds and notice the leaves changing colour. I took pictures and sent it to my friends and family on Whatsapp.' It is encouraging to see these learnings from the course embedded into daily lives and create new habits; this is a sign that the programme is beginning to really influence long-term wellbeing.

### 3.4.5 Feedback on Learn Module

One participant called the 'Learn' module a '*favourite*' (alongside the 'Notice' module') and particularly referenced the content around '*conscious incompetence*', finding the suggestions for overcoming these types of feeling '*so, so helpful*'. Another participant noted that the content of this module had led her to learning how to complete a Rubix cube.

Throughout the course we know that participants learnt many new strategies and skills; the breathing techniques were referenced many times in participants' feedback. Learning is fundamental to this whole wellbeing approach.

#### 3.4.6 Feedback on Give Module

The final module, 'Give' made participants pause for reflection. They indicated that the content made them realise how much they already were giving, and allowed them to '*take a step back*'. Participants said they realised how easy it was to get overwhelmed with others' worries and made them question how and why they did things.

Putting this content into action also provoked a positive reaction, with participants saying that 'the pleasure of giving to others, even if it's something small, gives me a smile,' and 'just being kind makes a huge difference.'

#### 3.4.7 Overall Feedback

Overall feedback on the course, outside of the module-specific comments, was overwhelmingly positive once again. The course was described as '*very enjoyable*' and '*enlightening and refreshing*' and participants described how they have '*benefited greatly*' from completing it.

Participants felt that it both helped them to focus on their own wellbeing, and to support and nurture those around them. Some participants also indicated that the resources included in the course were helpful to share with the children in their classes and at home. Though the course had wide benefits for the spheres of influence of the participants, the individual and personal nature of the course was praised many times, for creating a safe, private space.

Many participants referenced practical steps and strategies that they have already put in place as a result of the course (see also Sections 3.4.1 - 3.4.5). The 'scientific background and research behind the course' was also highly praised, with this allowing participants to roll out 'trusted and reputable' insights more widely in their schools as well as helping participants to have a greater understanding of their own feelings.

Finally, the course structure received positive feedback. Generally participants felt that the structure worked well, and that the short, focussed video sessions made the course accessible and easy to dip in and out of around other commitments. One participant felt that the end of module quizzes could have been more challenging.

As we have discussed elsewhere in this report, the main criticism of the programme was its timing within this specific pilot, at a time when many participants had other conflicting priorities. Those who did complete the course, though, felt that it was of benefit particularly within this context.



# **ANALYSIS AND NEXT STEPS**

### 4.1 Summary of Pilot Outcomes

Research shows that self care and self compassion is strongly correlated with fewer mental health symptoms; suffering less from depression; experiencing less anxiety; less stress, and better overall health and happiness.

Whilst it is clear that school staff are experiencing extreme and sustained pressure, it is critical that they receive the support they need NOW or we face the very real risk and associated costs of increased sickness absence, burnout, or large numbers of staff leaving the profession adding to the already heavy burden of costs in recruitment and retention.

There has never been a more urgent need to support staff wellbeing. It is clear, both from the quantitative data (change in wellbeing scores and satisfaction rates - Sections 3.2 and 3.3), and the qualitative feedback in Section 3.4, that this programme is tangibly helping to do this. As a result of completing this course participants felt better in themselves, were able to put concrete strategies into action to improve their wellbeing, and were able to positively influence the wellbeing of those around them.

This email from a senior leader at a participating school summed up the tension between the deep-felt need for this programme and the lack of time to commit to it: '*It is a difficult* one as us teachers are a nightmare. We complain that we are stressed or do not have the time but we often do not make the time on the things that could have the greatest impact!'

Because of this, we need to offer the programme in the most supportive, accessible way possible, as set out in the recommendations in Section 4.2.

#### 4.2 General recommendations

In terms of rolling this course out in further schools in future - within or beyond Havering - we can make three key recommendations for how this should be approached:

- 1 A whole-school approach: Feedback indicated that a whole school approach, led by and including SLT, is not only better for everyone but also vital for the success of the programme. Participants need to feel that they have permission to put time aside for the programme, and that they have the support of their colleagues. Building a culture of wellbeing across the school might help mitigate against feelings of 'this is not important' or 'I should be doing something else.'
- **2** A suggested schedule for completion: Most participants did the work 'occasionally' as time allowed. There is clearly a delicate balance to strike between offering support, but not pushing it. Frequency of doing the work was important but hard to get right. We would recommend that participants schedule regular time without pressure. It is possible

# **ANALYSIS AND NEXT STEPS**

that a suggested schedule from the school would help with this. For example, we could advise participants to approach the course in a variety of ways: to set aside 5 minutes each day to do it or set aside a block of time once or twice a week. Either way, we need to ensure a clear message that the benefits of doing the course will pay dividends on the time invested in doing it.

**3 Continued personal support:** The live Zoom calls were popular and beneficial in reassuring and supporting participants, and spurring them on to complete the course. We would suggest a regular weekly check in or 'group-coaching' session.

#### 4.3 Proposed Subscription Model

We have developed a "hybrid" model of staff wellbeing provision going forward.

This comprises a combination of the pre-recorded video content (as was rolled out to the participants this time around) and weekly, live online 'Instant Calm' sessions, given the importance of the Zoom calls to participants in the running of this pilot.

This would comprise three pillars:

- 1 The "5-Step Wellbeing Action Plan" online course used for the pilot is the foundation of the programme. This is practical, proven, research-driven online training to help staff better understand and proactively manage their mental, emotional, and physical health. The course is simple to set up and use (given that it is web-based), includes full technical support, and allows participants to work through the course at their own pace.
- 2 Instant Calm This will be a short, live weekly wellbeing coaching session focussing on a single wellbeing topic or strategy. They will be held online during term time and will be recorded and uploaded to build a library of content.
- **3** A wellbeing masterclass each half term with experts in the field sharing wider knowledge on the topic in an accessible and engaging way. These will be recorded and uploaded to the library.

On top of these three pillars of the course, each member of staff will receive an e-copy of the Pursuit of Sleep book by Maria Brosnan.

We propose an annual fee per school for the entire package. A subscription model means that we can keep the pricing as affordable as possible, whilst also being able to swiftly respond to school needs and adapt to changing circumstances in the wider world.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to the team from Havering for all their support in rolling out this pilot:

#### Dave Smith

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Liz Dunnett CAD 5-19 Support Team Manager (Secondment).

**Tracey Wraight** Health and Wellbeing Advisor (Education Setting) LBH Public Health.

#### **Dr Louise Miller**

Senior Educational Psychologist.

#### **Dr Marco Cheng**

Educational Psychologist, who all went over and above in supporting this pilot and participating in the course.

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