

London, United Kingdom

London Academy of Excellence, Stratford

How wellbeing programmes can boost attendance and attainment



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL**
Supporting
Healthy Lives

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Introduction

London Academy of Excellence, Stratford is one of the highest-performing sixth-form colleges in the United Kingdom. The average A-level grade is an A* and it is often placed in the top 1% of schools nationally for progress. It sends more students to Oxbridge than most private schools.

After studying rigorous research on mental health that showed student wellbeing has a strong impact on attendance and attainment, and auditing its own strengths and weaknesses, the London Academy of Excellence launched a comprehensive Wellbeing Strategy focused on improving students' healthy habits, behaviour, knowledge and skills.



Profile:



Country:

United Kingdom



Region:

Stratford, London



School type:

State school



Location area:

Urban



Student population:

450 to 500



Prize Category:

Supporting Healthy Lives

“We’ve succeeded through a broad and holistic definition of education not just in terms of the academic curriculum... really encouraging our students in increasing degrees to take responsibility for their own education, to find agency in their own education.”

**– Alex Crossman,
Headmaster at London
Academy of Excellence,
Stratford**



In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

London Academy of Excellence, Stratford consistently secures top university destinations for all students. The school is particularly proud of its success in helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain places at the finest universities in the UK and around the world. Over 1,200 of its alumni have progressed to a Russell Group university and over 120 to Oxford or Cambridge. Its A-level Performance System score was 1 and its students achieved an average grade of an A* in both 2021 and 2020.

The school is an academically selective, but socially inclusive sixth form, which has been among the highest-performing academic sixth forms in England since 2014. The school has 473 students, 158 of whom are eligible for free school meals.

Thirty-three students have additional needs affecting their education, of whom four have Education Healthcare Plans. The school also has three students who are in the care of a Local Authority (LAC).


A core aim of the school is that all students are in school on time, all the time, every day.

The school identified a very strong positive correlation between A-level results and the average attendance of the student. The data demonstrated that students with above 97% attendance achieved more than twice as many A* and A grades compared with students in the 94-96% attendance range and more than five times as many compared with students with below 90% attendance.



When analysing historic attendance there are two trends that can be identified. Firstly, year 13 attendance tends to be lower than year 12 attendance. Secondly, there is a drop in attendance from the Autumn to the Spring terms. The absences were categorised into Medical appointments, Illness (Physical health), Illness (Mental health) and Other authorised. The data demonstrated that the main reason for absence was an illness, with the category of illness due to mental health being the highest and also the area where the school can have the most influence. With this in mind, it began to train staff on how to build resilience in students through coaching and instilling a growth mindset, with the aim to empower students to overcome obstacles to being within the school.





"Right from the beginning, I want people to be actively choosing to come here. We do things differently, I do not for one moment say we do things better, but we do things differently than other people and I want people to make that as a deliberate choice."

**- Robert Wilne, Former Headmaster at
London Academy of Excellence,
Stratford**



EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

The school has developed trailblazing expertise in the area of adolescent wellbeing that has tangibly improved the healthy habits, behaviours, knowledge and skills of its students. It has analysed student wellbeing and the correlation with attendance and attainment and generated a whole school Wellbeing Strategy.

The school's research found that student wellbeing had a direct impact on attendance and attainment. Research from the Department for Education showed that in order to help their pupils succeed, schools have a role to play in supporting them to be "resilient and mentally healthy" and that schools with effective programmes showed an 11% improvement in achievement tests.

The Wellbeing Strategy delved in-depth into the research around adolescent mental health, audited the school on its current strengths and weaknesses, and formulated a comprehensive action plan to improve the wellbeing of students.



Firstly, the school worked with a local university, which sent 50 Year 2 and Year 3 Psychology students to provide all Year 12s with a wellbeing course. Students met together in small groups for four, one-hour sessions, where they were taught strategies for improving wellbeing. 90% of students agreed/strongly agreed that their mentor was a good listener and the majority agreed/strongly agreed that overall, they found the experience a positive experience.

Secondly, the school developed the empowerment of students by running a bespoke Wellbeing Ambassador training programme for the student-led Mental Health Network, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to provide peer support. These students then proposed three interventions, with impact measures, that would lead to an increase in wellbeing and these were presented to the leadership team for approval. This has improved the annual wellbeing strategy by providing a meaningful and rigorous student voice element and has led to successful interventions, such as improvements in academic mentoring and the quality of 1:1 support that students receive from their tutors.

The school also provided a day of staff training on mental health among adolescents and staff wellbeing. Student-led networks were included in the evaluation and auditing of the school's strategy. These included the Mental Health Network, BAME Network, LGBT+ Network and Gender Equality Network. This ensured that LGTBQ+, BAME and gender equality matters were a lens through which wellbeing was considered.



It worked alongside designated student leaders to create a workshop that can be delivered in other schools to support them in setting up their own student equality groups, which play an important role in the wellbeing of students.

Thirdly, the London Academy of Excellence ran a “MindSpace Conference”, collaborating with a number of different schools and mental health organisations. Feedback from the conference was positive, with 94% of students who responded to the student feedback survey “agreeing or strongly agreeing” that the conference sessions were enriching. Students reported that they learned “positive coping mechanisms for stress that will be useful in life,” that the “keynote speaker was truly inspiring” and that it showed that “the school attempts to ensure the wellbeing of the entire school, including staff”. At the conference, external facilitators delivered wellbeing sessions on issues such as suicide prevention, psychoanalysis, work/life balance, meditation, student leadership and managing wellbeing.



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“There is a profound focus on young people's mental wellbeing within schools, it's unavoidable in the national agenda now.”

- Alex Crossman, Headmaster at London Academy of Excellence, Stratford

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OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

London Academy of Excellence, Stratford was guided by the principle that positive student wellbeing results in a wider awareness of their environment, which enables them to develop creativity, solve problems, and utilise the skills they need to be healthy and successful. The strategy proved effective, boosting attendance and in turn the number of A* and A grades.

Each half term, a dashboard was used to identify all students with below 97% attendance and each of these students had an attendance meeting with either a tutor, middle leader or senior leader. Training on these meetings was provided to all staff, including how to provide strategies to improve wellbeing when this was identified as a factor impacting attendance. Students received an attendance target that was then reviewed the following half term.

The data analysis at the end of the academic year demonstrated that there was a clear increase in attendance within both year groups of two percentage points.

Furthermore, the number of students with below 90% attendance decreased and the overall KS5 outcomes increased from 90% A*/B to 93% A*/B. The attendance and attainment analysis demonstrates that there was an increase in the number of students in the 97%-100% attendance range and within the 94%-96% attendance range and that this corresponded with a higher number of A* and A grades.



Key Steps



LEADERSHIP MODELS

The first step was researching and developing the leadership behaviours required to design and implement the project. The transformational leadership and pedagogical leadership models had contrasting views on the role teaching and learning should play in educational leadership. The school developed the transformational model by having a clear vision, whilst also establishing clear educational goals and having a close focus on the quality of teaching and learning and student outcomes.





RESEARCH

The school started to research adolescent mental health and the correlation between wellbeing, attendance and attainment. This was a time-intensive stage that engaged with a wide body of research that allowed the wellbeing strategy to be refined to six domains: building resilience, student voice, staff wellbeing, teaching wellbeing, parents and carers and growth mindset. This research showed that mental wellbeing is not simply the absence of mental illness but is a broader indicator of social, emotional and physical wellness. It is influenced by the wider contexts within which a child or young person lives.



AUDITING

The school audited its strengths and weaknesses within each of the six domains. For example, the audit into the promotion of resilience considered the strengths of the school's extracurricular activity programme, but there wasn't universal buy-in from students in seeing the benefits of engaging with this. Within the audit of its promotion of a growth mindset,



the school found that it has the potential to be a chronic stressor for adolescence. Exam stress is seen to be a significant trigger for mental ill-health.



DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

The fourth step was the development of the action plan, including consultation with key stakeholders. The Wellbeing Strategy identifies six different areas of implementation (building resilience, student voice, staff wellbeing, teaching wellbeing, parent and carers and growth mindset). The action plan at the end of the strategy details the actions and owners associated with each strand. The strategy also details the wellbeing measures that will be used to assess the impact of the project through the termly student survey. The success of the project relies on increasing attendance, as measured within the dashboard and increasing student wellbeing as the main means of improving attendance.





INITIATING THE ACTION PLAN

The fifth step was the implementation of the action plan. One significant development was creating a new Attendance and Behaviour dashboard. The dashboard was updated and shared with pastoral leaders weekly and used within fortnightly 1:1 meetings with Heads of House to identify causes for concern and discuss intervention strategies. The dashboard was adapted through feedback from Heads of House, for example with the inclusion of the “Attendance by Week” tab that provides a visual indicator of student attendance over time.



EVALUATION

The school started an evaluation of the impact of the project on wellbeing, attendance and attainment. The data analysis at the end of the academic year demonstrated that there was a clear increase in attendance within both year groups of 2%.



Advice and Guidance

Outreach with other schools is important in making the research-based methodology better in enhancing the mental wellbeing of students and should be a key factor if other schools want to develop this type of expertise. There should be a means of monitoring students' experiences and their welfare to measure their character development, which in turn helps outline whether they are growing resilience and other traits that will enhance their education and own emotional wellbeing.



More information

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Download the [Wellbeing Strategy 2021](#)
[report](#)



Watch this [school's video](#)

