



# Innovative new centre puts well-being at the heart of school life

The Felsted School, Essex, Wellbeing Centre – believed to be the first in-school facility of its type – was formally opened last month (April). The Centre has one large sensory room, two counselling rooms, and a private meeting room that can be used by Felsted's team of counsellors for one-to-one therapy sessions and therapeutic group work. The Centre offers the 1,000 pupils and 300 staff across Senior and Prep Schools easy access to Counselling Support providing fast and accessible intervention to prevent any on-going distress and long term problems.

The Centre is managed by Felsted's Deputy Head, Counselling and Wellbeing, Mrs Karen Megahey, who describes more about the new facility in this exclusive Q&A session with ISM:

**Q** What led you to the conclusion that a separate Wellbeing Centre could provide a useful service?

**A** Like many schools, Felsted is a very busy and energetic place, with staff and students being involved in a multitude of activities. It was felt that by creating a large sensory room right in the heart of the school, with natural decor and furnishings, attractive lighting and soft music, would encourage people to come and sit, take stock and quietly reflect for a few moments during their busy day. They could then return to their commitments with a sense of renewal. The reality is that this is now happening – students and staff are dropping in regularly in between lessons or after lunch and are enjoying the calm and relaxing space.

The new building is a statement that wellbeing matters at Felsted. It is part of what our school is, at the heart of our pastoral care for our community whether it be pupils, staff, or parents.

**Q** The Centre is used for PSHE (personal, social, health and economic) lessons and a number of activities associated with wellbeing including Mindfulness, Counselling,

Yoga, Pilates, and Peer Counselling. Does this routine familiarity with the environment help significantly when and if they need to seek mental health support?

**A** Absolutely and this was an intentional move on our part. Many of our students have a reason to come to the Wellbeing Centre for curriculum lessons and some co-curricular activities and now we see them dropping in just for a recharge. My office/counselling room adjoins the main room and I or one of the other counsellors is usually around so conversations can begin very naturally. If you build it, they will come...

**Q** The new Centre provides calming and restful space away from the hustle and bustle of school. It is easy to imagine that it might soon become swamped with pupils who seek some chill-out time rather than those with pressing issues requiring support. How will you manage this practical 'triage' side of things?

**A** We encourage all students to drop in when they have a free moment and as long as the space is used appropriately and respectfully, we are happy for them to do so. There seems to be a natural ebb and flow and there are private rooms available for individual conversations if necessary.

We want to deliver well-adjusted young people who are happy; happy in themselves, happy in their relationships with one another, and happy with who they are, ready to go out and face the world.

**Q** Have you had to recruit further staff to run the Centre? What do you expect the annual running costs to be?



**A** I am now based in the Centre full time; all my lessons and activities take place there so I am doing what I was doing anyway but in a tailored and appropriate environment. We employ two part-time counsellors who are now also based here. So there has not really been an increase in staff costs but a change in how it is budgeted for. It is a big improvement to have all the counsellors working together and I feel the service we offer our community has already improved significantly. The main expenditure has been in the conversion of the existing site into creating an appropriate space. We took specialist advice for this and would certainly recommend doing so.

**Q** What advice can you offer other schools' managements who may be thinking of following your initiative?

**A** We know this initiative is already having a very positive impact on our students and staff and have testimonials to prove it. We expect this to continue. It is important for the whole school community to be fully behind a project such as this, including House Parents, SLT and Governors. Key staff need to be assigned to contribute to the planning and vision.

