

# FLY HIGH

*Orchard House* works hard to make sure its children are happy

Words **MARIA EDWARDS**

**T**he late great Agatha Christie once said: "One of the luckiest things that can happen to you in life

is to have a happy childhood." Here at Orchard House School we aim to maintain a happy ethos. But we don't rely on luck to do this. We have introduced a number of initiatives to build a fulfilling and productive environment for our school community.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, mental health problems affect about one in 10 children. Problems that include depression, anxiety and conduct disorder are often a direct response to what is happening in a child's life. The vast majority of children are, of course, resilient, but every child may on occasion need help to rebound back to a state of happy equanimity.

The issue for any school is how to recognise a child with a growing issue and help him or her with early intervention. Following extensive discussions, my staff and I have introduced additional whole school initiatives which we believe have had significant impact. We began with a review of the school's Pastoral Plan. This new plan has broken ground in that it involves children in their own pastoral care and enables staff to monitor much more closely how each pupil feels. A simple questionnaire, easily completed by the children, allows each child to record his or her feelings confidentially. This in turn helps the children to enjoy school life to a fuller extent, as it alerts teachers to any little anxieties or



parents have learnt additional positive techniques to deploy at home and across the school we have seen marked improvements in children's self-esteem. We have also further developed the school's behaviour policy, which now focuses additionally on pupils taking responsibility for their own behaviour and learning from their mistakes.

Following an extensive consultation with pupils, the playground was redesigned to enable more activities to take place. Alongside traditional playground games, themed days have been introduced to encourage further interaction and these have proved a winner with the children.

We have also introduced breathing techniques, and brief yoga sessions and meditation take place daily, as a calm and relaxed child will always perform better. Indeed, despite being a non-selective school for children entering at nursery and reception, our academic results at 11+ are enviable, with many scholarships gained to the top London schools.

Holiday homework tasks have also been changed, to encourage families to spend time together while each child adds to his or her learning experience.

As Graham Greene once said: "There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in." That is our job at Orchard House, to open the doors and let the future in: the happier we can make each child's experience of school, the greater each child's success. ♦

“*These whole school INITIATIVES have had a SIGNIFICANT IMPACT*”

concerns and allows them to address these before they escalate.

In addition to working with individual children, the school has a specialist Life Coach who works with children to help each to resolve any emotional queries, often equipping a child with a tool kit he or she can use on other occasions to overcome difficulties. We have also introduced sessions for both staff and parents. As a result, teachers have implemented additional child-centred techniques into their classroom practice,

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