



St Joseph's In The Park

Independent Prep School

Helping Pupils To Stay Positive In The Pandemic

The staff at St Joseph's In The Park are thinking creatively and doing all they can to help pupils remain positive and mentally fit through the Covid-19 pandemic.

A recent survey 'Mental Health of Children and Young People' (MHCYP) published by NHS Digital showed that the increase in probable mental health problems reported in adults also affected 5-16 year olds in England with the incidence rising from 10.8% in 2017 to 16.0% in July 2020 across age, gender and ethnic groups.

More than a quarter of children (aged 5-16 years) and young people (aged 17-22) reported disrupted sleep and one in ten (54% of children and 13.8% of young people) often or always felt lonely. 18% of the children with probable mental health problems felt fearful of leaving the house because of Covid-19.

Douglas Brown, Headmaster recognized that the lockdowns posed a challenging time for children and parents. While the school remained open for children in the Nursery and those of key workers, the majority were working from home and not able to spend social time with their friends.

"The teachers have been really impressed by our pupils and the way they have adapted to online lessons. They have risen to the challenges and shown real resilience in this uncertain moment in time."

Teachers worked creatively to make the timetables engaging and varied. Registration took place as normal with teachers actively checking how the pupils were feeling each day. Live lessons via Zoom ensured continuity of social interaction within the classes. Even school trips went ahead in virtual form with Year 6 visiting the Houses of Parliament and Year 2 visiting Monterey Aquarium in California for example. PSHE and wellbeing sessions helped pupils to keep fit, well and healthy and also safe online.

'Wake Up and Shake Up' fitness sessions, art and cookery were included in the timetable to ensure the children could enjoy activities away from the screen. A Wellbeing Day was enjoyed by the children, parents and teachers as it allowed children to interact with the whole school cohort – sharing photographs and experiences from the day.

The school also offers a counselling service for children or parents who ever need extra support. Katrina Gibbons-Marshall offers parents a forum in a virtual coffee morning where they have a chance to raise concerns or worries.

"The staff recognize the importance of looking after children's mental and physical health – the two should run in parallel," comments Douglas Brown and this has proved to be invaluable when dealing with the uncertainty surrounding the Covid-19 situation.