**Case Study: Drove Primary School -Autumn 2023**

Drove Primary School has developed a supportive system to have a whole family approach to compassionate conversations with parents and carers about their child’s weight as early on as possible and normally when the child is in nursery. This includes a range of interventions including several clubs for children to choose from, workshops for parents and a proactive approach to opening up conversations with families. The work started before the pandemic; staff had noticed that several pupils were struggling socially, physically and mentally in relation to being overweight.

For instance, a pupil who wanted to ride a bike and had poor balance, probably due to her weight. The whole family experienced barriers relating to weight management. As a result, her father had limited mobility. The pupil struggled socially and she could also not take part in some other physical activities. Staff noticed that older pupils were bullying her. The school arranged to meet with her parents. At first, they were reluctant to engage and to talk about overweight. The school gently persisted and met with them again. The school helped the pupil to ride a bike. Twelve months later, she was able to ride a bike, attend girls club, and had a circle of friends. Her parents joined Slimming World. Over a year, her parents lost 10 stone between then. Her Dad is now able to walk without sticks and has bought a bike for her. The school managed to engage our reluctant family by persistent meetings. They were direct with the family about the impact it was going to have on her at Secondary School in terms of potential bullying and physical health. She was embarrassed as she was year 5 and could not ride a bike and so Drove Primary School arranged 1-1 sessions before school started for a term until she gained confidence and then she was supported in the cycling club.

Drove Primary School has a wide approach to overweight, with several interventions to chose from. For instance, pre-COVID, the school had a running club with a children’s version of couch to 5k. The pupils in the running club took part in the Race for Life at Lydiard Park. Now, the schools runs Born to Move in the mornings, open to children who are targeted by observation. ‘By observation’, explains Kelly Reynolds, Year 4 Teaching Assistant and Sports Coach, ‘We look at overall health and not size. We target children who chose not to be active or are showing signs of withdrawal, etc. For example, we have a boy in the school at the moment who is experiencing hip pain’. The school also runs swimming for children and their parents/carers at Ridgeway Leisure Centre and is currently working with GLL to explore options around women’s only swimming with their children following feedback from parents and carers.

Another part of the jigsaw puzzle that Drove aim to solve is what else is happening at home. E.g. How sedentary are the pupils at home? What about their diet at home? How much exercise do they do in holidays? Drove organises clubs outside of school hours to support this, and refers eligible pupils to the Holiday Activity and Food programme.

Drove runs workshop for parents and carers while their children attend clubs. These workshops have a gentle and informative approach to overweight, including portion sizes and healthier lunchboxes, which can be a minefield for families. These are culturally accessible and well attended. Families learn from each other. ‘We are constantly learning from the parents and carers around their cultural needs’, explains Emma Rant, Family Support Worker. “We aim to discuss healthy food options that fit in with different cultures, which can create interesting conversations”. This is particularly important at Drove, as 85% of children have English as an additional language. The school community includes Goan, SriLankan, Afghani, Central African and Nigerian families. Many have settled status and some are currently seeking asylum. Drove are willing to share the presentation with other schools considering this approach.

Since developing a compassionate approach to conversations with parents and carers about their child’s weight at Drove Primary School, staff’s observations include that children are bringing in healthier lunch boxes. Furthermore, regular weighing by the Public Health Nursing service indicates some reduction in weight for the pupils targeted.

Drove Primary School promote Free School Meals and note that several of their families have English as an additional language and need support around applying for these.