

Spotlight Transcript_Ep7

This One Activity Got 80% of School Staff Engaging in Their Own Wellbeing

Yasmin London (00:04.034)

Hello and welcome to Spotlight on Student Digital Safety, the Qoria podcast where we unpack the most interesting stories, strategies and learnings on student digital safety for schools, by schools all around the world. I'm your host, Yasmin London, and I'm incredibly excited to welcome today's Spotlight guest, Mark Wilson, head of school at ACS International School in Egham in London, England. I hope I pronounced that okay for you, Mark. How are you doing today?

Mark Wilson (00:31.885)

We're all good here, thank you very much. How are you?

Yasmin London (00:34.228)

Excellent. I'm really well, thanks. I think there's some great content that we're going to be talking about today. A bit of a, I guess a worrying one for lots of schools dealing with teacher wellbeing and school wellbeing in general when it comes to staff. That's, know, teachers are sort of under digital attack when students are using technology to harm or hurt staff. Sounds a little bit wild, but let's dive into it a bit because it is.

a that is affecting schools all around the world. I was looking at some research recently, Mark, and I read in the UK that 49 % of UK teachers have experienced some level of harassment by students online or on social media platforms and that the Department of Education has said that 21 % of teachers report derogatory comments about them posted on social media by students or even parents. What are your thoughts on all of this?

Mark Wilson (01:29.807)

Look, I think it's an important issue for us to be discussing. And we've been fortunate that we've not really faced direct instance like that at ECS Ecom. But we certainly take it for granted. Our approach has been to stay ahead through education, vigilance, and culture. And I think it's important that we are able to talk about the social challenges and how they impact schools and teachers for several reasons. mean, firstly, I think

It's really important that we all need to be aware of how technology can be used in both positive and negative ways. And sadly, one of those negative ways is how social media is used to attack each other. Schools and teachers are certainly not immune to that. I mean, this includes, for us,

it's about creating a culture where staff feel confident to talk about their challenges, where they know their voice matters and they can be heard to be able to discuss these sorts of things. It's also important for us that they stay aware of the latest trends.

and they need learn how to protect themselves from potential attacks. Our social media policy advises and guides teachers about safe use. We have very strong IT teams and digital teaching and learning experts at the school who support teachers to ensure they've locked down their own social media accounts to minimise potential threats. It's just a sad state of affairs that we live in, but it's important that we help teachers understand that...

Yasmin London (02:43.32)

Mm.

Mark Wilson (02:54.014)

they have to take those kind of proactive responses. We also provide our staff with free access to a website called the Wellbeing Hub, which can help with such things. I just this last week, I was showing an article about a TikTok trend and I was drawing staff's attention to it so they're aware of the things that young people are involved in and what that could mean for us that are perhaps not as up to date with the latest trends on things like TikTok.

Yasmin London (03:02.637)

Mm-hmm.

Yasmin London (03:21.678)

you

Mark Wilson (03:21.72)

And I suppose as school we practice being on the lookout for such threats. For example, we carry regular fishing audits and provide training that is quick and easy to access and acts as a good reminder for staff about how to protect themselves and their data online. And we approach all these things in lots of different ways to create a culture that's all about helping people feel safe. So one of the changes that we've made this year is we've introduced a weekly staff check-in.

via a digital platform that gives staff that quick and simple way to let us know if they've got any well-being concerns. So should there be a situation that's happening on social media or where they feel they've been attacked or identified in some kind of way, it's another platform in which they can let us know that we can get support to them quickly.

Yasmin London (04:08.882)

Yeah, absolutely. It sounds like you've put some really important tech tools and obviously culture builders in place. if we sort of loop back to some of the experiences that teachers and educators

are experiencing, you know, I know from schools that I speak to, the things that worry them the most are things like impersonation, image-based abuse, of course, is a really big one now with the emergence of AI and deepfake technology.

secret filming that can happen as well within schools. So it is really important that we think, I guess sometimes beyond just the students and very much to the people who are supporting our schools, who are the fabric really of all of it. Can you talk me through a bit more about the check-ins that you do with staff and the benefits that they've had with those?

Mark Wilson (04:58.765)

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's been really helpful. Put it in context, it's something we brought in this year, so it's relatively new, but it's having some real positive impacts for us. It provides a really simple and consistent way for staff and students. We do it with students as well. We started doing it with students actually, to repose and reflect on how they're feeling. From a student perspective, the data helped us spot patterns, for example, if someone's wellbeing score dips or if there's particular stress of surfacing, we can intervene early.

before challenges escalate. I also hope that because we're using a tool for our community, we're demonstrating that we care about their well-being and we want to check in with them all the time. So from a student perspective, I start there because it will lead into what we got to the staff pieces. We've been doing that for a couple of years now. And it's helped us collect data that's enabled us to address

issues that may be arriving in grade levels quite quickly. So example, we noticed that some of our grade eight girls in particular were scoring quite low on the self-esteem section of the tool and that flagged the concern for us. Our director of wellbeing worked with the grade level leads, the student advisors and the PSHE teachers to intervene with the change of the curriculum and change the focus in PSHE that the students were working on. Also provide opportunities for us to discuss with students their concerns with trusted staff in small groups.

or even one-to-one with counsellors. And we've even brought in external groups to reinforce messages to help students to talk about their concerns in safe environment. And it was the success of that that started to raise the question for us is we're doing this well with students, so why are we not doing this with our teachers? Why are we not providing sort of a similar thing for our teachers? Now, when you're working with teachers, I would say that initially that was met with some healthy scepticism, but...

Yasmin London (06:41.026)

Yeah.

Yasmin London (06:49.262)

I bet.

Mark Wilson (06:52.054)

But it certainly has provided the right tool for other teachers to feel they can reach out and let us know how they're feeling. In addition to CLAA, it's about the closest we can get to real-time data as to how staff might be feeling about a situation. Mean, the tool has a private option. This is for students and for staff. But from the staff perspective, it enables them to connect with a member of leadership team. They can just pick someone they feel comfortable talking to and just let them know that it's not having a great day or a great week.

Yasmin London (07:07.672)

Yep.

Yasmin London (07:18.862)

Thank

Mark Wilson (07:21.632)

and it flags it for us. An SRT member will receive that notification. And then that helps us to then go and connect with that member of staff really quickly and just check in and find out what may be going on and offer what kind of support we can do, we can provide for them. And nearly, you know, started off a little bit of healthy skepticism, but nearly 80 % of staff now have used that tool to check in. And that data has helped us to sort of stay focused on staff well-being.

Yasmin London (07:35.79)

Yeah.

Mark Wilson (07:49.385)

Really important as well to react and provide support quickly when needed. Think if someone's having a difficult experience, a difficult week for whatever reason, and we all bring our lives into our jobs, it's inevitable. Sometimes people just need someone to talk to about, or be aware of what they're also dealing with and a problem shared.

It's a problem half as the old saying goes, but sometimes it's as simple as just letting people know that you're there and that you understand and you're there to listen and other times it's been directly about us guiding staff towards other support that we have available within our network.

Yasmin London (08:15.042)

Yeah.

Yasmin London (08:31.734)

Yeah, I think that's such a great point. Mean, ultimately, what you're trying to do is detect those early warning signs and understand those patterns of behavior that are starting to come up so

you can intervene and it doesn't exacerbate. an 80 % response rate is absolutely huge. How have you got there? Can you talk us through some of the steps that you sort of went through as a school to decide to do this? And I guess how you convinced staff to utilize it at such a high rate?

Mark Wilson (09:02.347)

Well, they're using it with the students. what's interesting is they've been encouraging students to use it for a couple of years now. So they've also, I guess, experienced themselves some of the people that have been very happy to call early adopters. Yeah, I'm happy to tell you how I'm feeling. The students are doing that sort of thing. And they also, I think, work with some young people that perhaps they'd be more reluctant to sort of engage with it. So they've kind of...

Yasmin London (09:28.366)

Mm.

Mark Wilson (09:30.953)

help them overcome some of those challenges. They've kind of convinced them from a teacher to student perspective in terms of just a check-in, we're here to support you, let's know what's going on, how can we help? So I think that because we've done it with students first of all, and they could see the impact it was having with students, and they could see how the data was used to really target and look for themes and trends that were happening, rather than pull out individuals. But then there is this individual function that if

Yasmin London (09:55.339)

Yep.

Mark Wilson (10:00.01)

a student or a staff wish to reach out directly, they can do. And we've actually had that function from a student perspective set directly up to our sort of safeguarding platform. So if a student reached out to a member of staff, it automatically logs into our safeguarding program as well. So we can then make sure we've got a record of it and intervene. We haven't done that with the staff. We don't use the same kind of platforms in the same kind of way. But I think the fact they're confident using it has helped them to kind of approach using it well for themselves.

Yasmin London (10:03.95)

Mm.

Yasmin London (10:29.293)

Yeah.

Mark Wilson (10:29.514)

And I think it's, you know, I think it's, I think it's just been about small steps really, you know, sharing the data, talking about how we utilise it, giving people confidence that this is coming from a place of positive intent. This is about looking out for each other. This is about living our values. So this is, I think when you're reinforcing those messages like that, that really helps.

Yasmin London (10:49.784)
Yeah.

Mark Wilson (10:59.338)
I was, like any of these things, you can't expect these things to kind of suddenly be implemented and they're just working. You just, kind of gradually let it grow organically and build people's confidence with it.

Yasmin London (11:10.914)
Yeah, I think it's clever that you've used, I guess for a lack of a better word, like the staff influences and the student influences that people will follow. And I think there's a really strong trend just listening to you right there of teachers feeling like they need to role model help seeking. there's a request or encouragement that we want young people to sort of behave in a particular way and to seek help if something's going wrong, we've kind of got to walk the talk a little bit, don't we? Do you think that that...

plays a role for a lot of educators that are using these tools.

Mark Wilson (11:46.249)
Absolutely, think we're all role models all the time. one of the things about just working in an educational environment, whether you are a teacher or a member of the grounds team or the catering team or the facilities staff or administrative staff, you're going to recognize that you're a role model in everything you do. And young people are looking up to you, they're picking up conscious and subconscious indicators as to how to behave the whole time. So I think that you have to do that. And I think it's...

You know, as a leader, you need to be understanding that our job is to role model and provide that kind of support for young people. Now, we can do that also by making sure that we use the tools ourselves. And that we're also using the tools to promote our own well-being and develop those sorts of things. As well as, you know, we're fortunate we have an employee assistance program, many schools do.

Yasmin London (12:30.7)
Yep. Yep.

Mark Wilson (12:46.76)

Sometimes it's directing our staff to recognise there is an independent programme out there as well from an Employment Assistance Programme that can support you if you have any particular needs that you want to do. And I think it's important to help you grow in confidence by being real clear what the purpose of the tools are. And you to be consistent with how you approach it. In my experience, you're trying to overcome some of that, what can sometimes be

Yasmin London (12:57.366)
Yeah.

Yasmin London (13:03.053)
Yeah.

Mark Wilson (13:14.425)
default skeptical view of an adult about any kind of platform being about surveillance and you need take them on to understand by showing people the positive ways in which you can utilise these things. It takes time, it's a balance of promoting a range of opportunities to people as well. The Digital Tools is one platform, it's also the opportunity to remind people about talking to their sort line managers, leadership team members, you've got the Digital Tools, you've got other employee assistance programmes. Over time people can

Yasmin London (13:20.45)
Yeah.

Mark Wilson (13:43.464)
can begin to recognise and normalise that all of these different ways in which you can reach out to members of staff are safe. The digital platform is interesting because it is really quick and I suppose you have a sense of distance. Sometimes I think in a busy school, if you're not having a great day or you want to talk somebody about something, first you've got to find your time to do it as a teacher, then you've to try and find someone that you trust who's also free at the same sort of time to do it.

It can be a challenge. I think can be a barrier for people to then kind of make those kind of connections with a digital platform You're just it's it's a few minutes. Yeah once a week It's five simple questions and it's can be you know Click click click click click and the top you to reach out if you need to and I think that that because of that it can encourage people to make those connections because it then puts the Owners back on a leader to kind of say oh I need to go and check in with that person alright, so I think that

Yasmin London (14:13.282)
Yep.

Yasmin London (14:21.12)

Yeah. Yeah.

Yasmin London (14:39.618)

Yeah, that's right.

Mark Wilson (14:41.616)

It kind of it makes it easy for people to do that and there is a sense as well I guess a bit like what you're talking about the beginning about the fact that the way that people can sometimes negatively behave in a way via social media or digital platform that they wouldn't necessarily do to someone's face the positive Yeah, exactly. The positive impact of that is people could also perhaps feel more confident to tell a computer program how they're feeling

Yasmin London (15:00.096)

Yes, the online disinhibition effect.

Yasmin London (15:10.583)

Yeah.

Mark Wilson (15:11.388)

then they might, more difficult to sit down and talk to somebody. But then proactively someone reaches out to them. The key to that of course is that the leadership team needs to take it seriously and they need to react and they need to have the skillset. We take a restorative approach in our school to managing behavior and things anyway, but also the coaching skills and know how to better check in with somebody that's taken that courageous step to just sort of say, even to a computer, yeah, not having a great day.

I do apologize, but this is my,

Yasmin London (15:41.366)

Yep. This, no that's okay. This happens more often than you think.

Mark Wilson (15:48.327)

We'll just wait, because it's just a test. It gets tested every Wednesday morning this time. Okay.

Yasmin London (15:49.698)

Yeah, no, that's okay. Perfect. Did you want to repeat the last line or do want me to go on to the next question? Which I was going to actually just go on to that visibility through leadership and trust question.

Mark Wilson (16:06.947)

Yeah, that's fine. We've kind of missed out the learning the piece of it, which I can go back to at some point in the two. So I've got some data I can share with that.

Yasmin London (16:13.578)

Yeah, I, we sort of went between like, there's a, I try not to make it too restrictive because I think you, you're quite good in terms of, yeah. And I love that because in the end, it's just where it's a lot more natural. but what I'll do is I'll do.

Mark Wilson (16:16.346)

Yeah.

No, I was just trying to follow the cues. Yeah.

No, it's fine.

So at some point, if we can just loop back at some point and just talk about what we've learned from creating an environment where staff speaks so fast, we'll link into some other stuff that I'm gonna say later.

Yasmin London (16:37.076)

Yes, absolutely. Well, let's do that. So what we've learned about creating an environment, I'll start there. So Mark, it sounds like you've learned a lot about ways to create an environment where staff really feel safe to speak up. How have you done that?

Mark Wilson (16:55.568)

Well, I think first of all, it is important, I mentioned it before, that we need to recognise that we bring our full selves to work. You know, it's a false concept to think that we can all just, we leave our work, like our personal lives at the door, we walk through a school in the same way that we don't leave our work, and we walk back into our personal lives. And we all bring, therefore, different struggles and challenges of our lives.

Yasmin London (17:06.402)

Yes.

Mark Wilson (17:24.938)

with us. Now people are professional about it and they're you know, they're gonna, but it's there, you know, it'd be naive to think that people aren't carrying their own challenges that are going on. I they've got sick family members or challenges, other things that they're trying to deal with it, they go in their lives, of course it impacts you. So I think if you have a mindset that again, that assumes a positive intent, right, we have a belief here that everyone comes to work to do a good job.

Yasmin London (17:54.901)

Yes.

Mark Wilson (17:54.906)

But there needs to be an acceptance that life can be hard. And if you can kind of acknowledge that, that everyone comes to work to do a good job, but life can be hard. And therefore those things are gonna sometimes impact each other. I think you've got a better chance of connecting with people. So in short, I think, you know, we talk about the phrase that we use a lot here is we talk about meeting people where they are.

Yasmin London (18:19.992)

Mm.

Mark Wilson (18:20.835)

And to do that, also think it's important that leaders showed vulnerability themselves. When I share honestly about my own challenges or where the senior leader acknowledges the pressures that they're facing, in a strange way, I think it's giving permission for others to do the same. We've tried to work hard to remove the stigma of asking for help. I often, when I'm talking to staff, talk about this idea that...

Yasmin London (18:25.624)

Yeah. Yeah.

Yasmin London (18:37.026)

Yes.

Mark Wilson (18:49.478)

There's a line from a songwriter I like, which is, the losers are last to ask for help. And I think it takes great, I actually think it takes strength to ask for help. I think to be aware, to be aware enough that you need to talk to somebody else, you need somebody to help you do something, I think that's a sign of strength. And we try and create that culture where people understand that's how we view it, is a sign of strength. To be that aware and recognizing each other, right? So, with that's for an informal check-in.

Yasmin London (18:56.215)

Yes.

Yasmin London (19:01.411)

Yep.

Yasmin London (19:13.891)

Yep.

Mark Wilson (19:17.827)

like a wellbeing conversation, using digital tools. I think safety comes from feeling that speaking up won't result in judgment. It's only about support. And I guess, so think the other thing I've really learned is it's important from when I talk about the digital pieces, I think it's really important to share the data to create an open dialogue. So let me give you an example. So recent analysis of our staff wellbeing data that we get from

Yasmin London (19:20.609)
Mm, mm.

Mark Wilson (19:47.461)
pulse system, we're getting a 93 % positive reaction to questions around enjoying your job, right? Which is brilliant. So they get questions like, you my work gives me a good feeling. I do my work with a lot of enjoyment. I feel happy in my work. So we were getting really positive. There were still 7 % of people that weren't positive, which, you know, that's going to be a balance, but really positive feedback. So you want to celebrate that and share that.

Yasmin London (19:56.354)
Wow, that's amazing. Yeah.

Yasmin London (20:10.829)
Yeah.

Yasmin London (20:16.995)
Yeah.

Mark Wilson (20:17.028)
Because in a busy, busy working environment, sometimes it's important to share these kind of positive things. But in that same audit that we did a few weeks ago, we only had an 11 % positive reaction in the section that was called this type of recovery at work. So in the recovery at work section, they're asking questions like, how often do you take a break to recover at work? How often do you take a walk? Do you meditate? Time for yourself to reflect?

Yasmin London (20:33.922)
Right.

Mark Wilson (20:47.011)
Now, how often this week have you spent some time debriefing or just having a social interaction to help you recover with a colleague during a lunch or a break time? Only 11 % of people were saying that they were doing that. So I was like, OK, that's interesting.

Yasmin London (20:57.198)
Wow.

Yeah, that's, yeah. I mean, that's unsurprising, I guess, in some ways, isn't it? Because teachers are so burnt out, know, school leaders have got so much on their plates. And, you know, that's, I guess it's helpful to have that data though, to really prove that point, isn't it?

Mark Wilson (21:17.316)

But it's also, what do we do with that? So you're absolutely right, yes, I mean, yeah. So we do a weekly briefing. So there's the last month since we've done that piece of analysis, what we've been doing is continually sharing that data and encouraging people. And it might sound silly, because like you said, teachers are hardworking. They give much of their time to help students. It seems crazy to remind adults that they also need a break. They also need to enjoy each other's company lunchtime.

Yasmin London (21:42.755)

Yeah.

Mark Wilson (21:42.893)

It's all too easy for them to end up eating their lunch at their desk or running between meetings. So again, it sounds strange because they don't need permission to do it, but just by sharing the data, it's another way of sort of saying to people, we're telling you it's important that you take some time for yourself. Yeah, it's just, you know.

Yasmin London (22:01.848)

Yeah, I guess you'll need to show that you walk the talk, I guess. And that's where coming back to what you mentioned about school leaders needing to take this seriously, you know, there's one thing to have data, which, you know, we know people are overburdened and overworked and theoretically they know, yes, I should go for a walk and I should be in nature, green time versus screen time, all of that. the justification and the normalization of being that

person that does it can sometimes be the challenging school.

Mark Wilson (22:35.35)

Yeah, because exactly you don't want to think that people are thinking, this person is not working particularly hard because I see him every day walking around. We're very fortunate here in the UK. Our school is on the edge of the Royal Great Windsor Country Park. It's beautiful green spaces. So we have this wonderful opportunity and we recognize not all schools have that.

Yasmin London (22:54.478)

amazing.

Mark Wilson (23:02.749)

whatever you've got in your local area that just encouraging people to do it and then modeling it. Yeah, showing people that it's okay. So I've got a couple members of staff that like to regularly walk the campus during the lunchtime. It's just their thing. It's what they do. And it's just something it's just going up to them occasionally saying, lovely to see you taking a break. Yeah, it's genuinely it's nice to see you getting a bit of fresh air. it just let you reinforce positive reinforcement. This is good. You know,

Yasmin London (23:07.992)
Mm. Yeah.

Yasmin London (23:22.178)
Yeah.

Yasmin London (23:27.81)
Yeah, yeah, that's right.

Mark Wilson (23:30.403)
Sometimes it's encouraging. We had a little group, we had a group a little while back, they haven't done it for a while, maybe it's British weather, but we had a little group that would gather together and go off in a small little group of them or just kind of go and take a little walk together. So they're kind of like a social down time, but also taking in the advantages of being on a campus like ours. But it's encouraging that and celebrating it. You've to celebrate it.

Yasmin London (23:41.646)
Hmm.

Yasmin London (23:45.282)
Yeah, walking club.

Yasmin London (23:53.09)
Yeah.

Yeah. Well, I think.

Mark Wilson (23:57.407)
In other words, the danger is if you don't do that, people will think that you're judging it negatively. So you've got to continually celebrate it.

Yasmin London (24:02.526)
right. Well, I guess that's exactly what you're doing, I guess, is where leaders visibly respond to those wellbeing concerns. Trust really grows, doesn't it? So when you're walking up there and finding people walking and saying, is great, great to see you doing this, that reinforcement and

justification, you know, that's really important because you're out there saying, yes, it's okay. And I think, you when we talk about it,

sense of trust in schools, that's incredibly important, isn't it, for staff and their wellbeing. To be able to share, as you mentioned, vulnerability from leadership creates that sort of knock-on effect where people feel like they can actually step forward to, and whether it's eventuating into walks around the campus or, you know, sharing about something more serious, it's such an important area of a school that's so overlooked, isn't it?

Mark Wilson (24:57.219)

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. It's a slight aside, I think, from the theme of our conversation, Jasmine, but you just made me think about something. So if I may just react to that. One of the things that we introduced over the last couple of years is a thing called Human Library. We're talking about trust and building connection. So in a human library, you are the book. So we have members of staff. And again, I've written a couple, or been a book.

Yasmin London (25:06.328)
course.

Yasmin London (25:15.117)
Yes.

Yasmin London (25:20.642)
Mm-hmm.

Mark Wilson (25:26.356)
of times and you come and you're the book and people you write just a little kind of like briefs about what story is you're telling about your life, something to do with your experiences, people do it about places they've traveled, people do it and we've got some phenomenal ones, some quite really quite emotional ones, know, living with terminal diagnosis and dealing with neurodiverse conditions themselves as adults, people that have suffered bereavement and there's different stories that people are telling about their lives.

But we do a thing where three times a year, our staff meeting is given over to have our human libraries and people sign up for it and they check out the people. So you come and sit in a small group of sort of like six or seven people and you kind of tell your story, they ask questions. And again, this is opportunities for all of us to demonstrate vulnerability and all of us to create this sense of trust. And I would say that, do you know what, honestly, I think it's been one of the things that's culturally

Yasmin London (26:09.922)
Yeah.

Yasmin London (26:17.122)

Yes.

Mark Wilson (26:25.666)

had one of the biggest influences for us in breaking down those, like I'm gonna say, I think they were inevitable, because I'm hoping they're not just in schools that I lead, because that would be really bad, really badly on me, but I've experienced them all the schools that I've been in, but I think there's always a sense, in lots of environments, there's be a sense of sort of them and us, that kind of the leadership or administration, whatever language is used in a school, and the teachers, and every opportunity you can have to make people realize that,

Yasmin London (26:44.781)

Yes.

Yeah, between the teachers and the leaders,

Mark Wilson (26:55.234)

you know, we're all human beings, first and foremost, we're all human beings, right? And we all struggle, we live different challenges and that's who we are. We might have different titles and different jobs that we do, but we are fundamentally just people trying to figure out how to navigate the world. So those sort of moments as well create opportunities again to demonstrate and be vulnerable, but when they're kind of framework.

Yasmin London (27:09.122)

Yeah, yes.

Yasmin London (27:19.82)

Yeah. Yes.

Mark Wilson (27:21.729)

that helps people to recognize so that when you are then having a conversation or doing a checking with somebody or people hopefully feeling they sat and listened to I think it's no coincidence that a few people that have reached out to me directly from the platform have attended some of my human library book sessions they've heard me share challenges myself builds that connection with people, you know?

Yasmin London (27:36.846)

Mm-hmm.

Yasmin London (27:42.018)

Yeah, great. Amazing. It absolutely does. So with the human library, just so I'm clear and anybody else who's listening today that might want to replicate this, you have, I guess, sharing circles and you also write in a book, is that right? And that people can read the book or is it just?

Mark Wilson (28:02.274)

No, so it's an oral tradition, it's an oral experience. people can write their thoughts down, and some people write down their thoughts and kind of use it as a framework to have the conversation or just perhaps even read out what they want to do. But many people just sort of sit there and explain or talk about this is what happened to me. I mean, some of them are some great, it's always interesting from teachers as well. There's a few teachers that are very happy to talk about their experiences of being a student.

Yasmin London (28:05.41)

Okay, all oral, okay?

Yasmin London (28:15.032)

Right, sure.

Yasmin London (28:31.042)

Yeah, how important is that?

Mark Wilson (28:31.775)

I wasn't the best behaved, I wasn't the best behaved child at school. Or academically I struggled. Yeah, exactly. Or academically I struggled at school. And it's really interesting how they didn't talk about it, but that's why I ended up wanting to be a teacher. Because it made me realise that there were lots of young people like me that were struggling and I didn't know something, my teachers were recognising that and I was inspired. So there's all kinds of stories like that. it's just an oral, it's just an opportunity. It's normally like about a 10 minute period of time and then one of our staff rings a little bell.

Yasmin London (28:36.366)

Talks too much.

Yasmin London (28:45.475)

Yeah.

Mark Wilson (29:02.415)

And then there's like a little crossover, freshen up your tea or coffee, and then you kind of head to your next book. And we tend to do sort of like, you know, sort of three books in a session, and then have like a little reflection at the end of it. And before that, people just sort of sign up, they go for like a Google doc and kind of go, oh, that person's talking about this, or I'll go listen to

them. And we always do a thing that, so like I'm always a book, so of the three sessions, I always...

Yasmin London (29:06.601)

Yeah.

Mark Wilson (29:29.342)

I'm a book for one or two of them, but I get to go and be, you know, listen to somebody else's story for another one as well. So it's just a great way of creating that kind of connection as, and building that trust amongst the team of professionals.

Yasmin London (29:33.752)

a listener.

Yasmin London (29:41.837)

Yeah.

Yasmin London (29:45.752)

I just love that idea of human library and that opportunity, I guess, that's created beforehand though. People feel safe to share in those environments, I guess, because of all of the other facets of effort and wellbeing that you've started to put into place. And it reminds me of a conversation we had a little while ago where you started to talk about marginal gains around the school and this concept that we don't have to make big sweeping changes all of the time.

Mark Wilson (30:15.072)

Mm-hmm.

Yasmin London (30:15.896)

that sometimes it really is just about marginal gains and when they consolidate, that's when we really start to live our school values and our school culture. Would you agree with that?

Mark Wilson (30:27.986)

I would, and I think there's a really important message there for all leaders. One that I have to remind myself on almost a daily basis, because I think, you know, when we're, particularly in schools, when you want to do the best you can for young people, and you know that young people have only got really one chance at this journey with you, you want it to be the best it can be, and therefore if you're trying to implement change, you want that change to happen quickly so that all students get it. But I think to remind ourselves that...

if it's important and cultural change and focusing on things like this are important. it's one of my, my director of wellbeing has got a lovely line on his whiteboard, his office, which I saw the other day, which I thought was brilliant. And he had, he had an epiphany himself. And I can't

remember the exact quote, who it's from, but he now says to himself, this is important, slow down.

Yasmin London (31:21.73)

Yes.

Mark Wilson (31:22.161)

And sometimes it reminds ourselves that we want to get things done and we want things to be fixed and be better for people. But his mantra at moment is, this is important. Don't rush it. Slow down and get it right. But those small things add up. The data points add up. So when you've got regular well-being feedback, we're talking about the tool that we were using, you can see what's working over time. And you can look for themes and trends. So for example,

There is also on our tool that we use a gratitude function. Now if that's underused and people aren't really engaging with it, my rule of data is it doesn't really give you answers, it helps you ask better questions. So if people aren't engaging with it, the question that might come up is why aren't people engaging with it? Are people feeling that they want to be, is there a lack of positivity? What's going on? How do get people to engage with it? So that function, for example, in Pulse,

Yasmin London (31:54.2)

Yes.

Yasmin London (32:15.043)

Yeah.

Mark Wilson (32:20.042)

encourages staff to send each other thanks. And then the recent audit that we did, it was really interesting to think, to look at and then share with staff what kind of things they've been thanking each other for. It's also really interesting, before I share the data with you, that the students get to share thanks with the staff. And that's been really powerful. Really powerful. Because you get an email. Fortunately, I had two yesterday.

Yasmin London (32:41.262)

That's awesome. Gosh.

Mark Wilson (32:48.911)

from students who were just thanking me for some things that are done and it's little things. So for example, about 27 % of our staff and the recent audit have thanked each other just to say thanks. There's one of options is just to say thanks. But 22 % of the thanks were about kindness, which is one of our values. We're about 15 % where people thank each other for collaboration.

Yasmin London (33:04.759)

Wow.

Yasmin London (33:10.178)

Mm. Yep.

Mark Wilson (33:16.19)

14 % of the thanks were about contribution that people were making. 13 % were people thanking them for their determination, for being determined with their elements. But 5 % of them were about people's humor. Thank you for your humor. then you get that data in, you begin to share that data again. So it loops back into the system, reminding people that everyone likes to be thanked and be recognized.

Yasmin London (33:19.555)

Mm-hmm.

Yasmin London (33:31.022)

So good.

Mark Wilson (33:44.52)

but we all have a role to play in that. So sending thanks yourself also reminds us as leaders to use the function to celebrate how much thanks we can share and build momentum. But each small data point builds towards those bigger cultural changes. And what's really important when you've got data, which is quite hard to get around well-being, because it, so when you've got, I like to.

Yasmin London (33:51.786)

this time.

Yasmin London (33:55.628)

Yeah.

Yasmin London (34:08.47)

Mmm, super hard.

Mark Wilson (34:13.266)

I like data. because I think it helps us ask better questions. But the other thing I've really learned about when you've got data is how you share it to close that feedback loop and to build the momentum. So keep sharing those sort of things. This is the percentage that people have shared thanks and stuff for each other. So those little, every little step you can take with it builds that momentum and culture.

Yasmin London (34:23.022)
Mm.

Yasmin London (34:26.477)
Yes.

Yasmin London (34:39.384)
Yeah, small step.

Mark Wilson (34:39.783)
That's not to say, of course, that you don't take step back at times. Of course you do. It's not always going to work, and you learn from that. But generally, those small steps. But just celebrate each small step that you make. And don't expect ourselves, we shouldn't expect ourselves as leaders, to be able to come in and do sweeping, transformational changes with things at a time. All really good, lasting change. Change that sticks, if you like, use Chip and Dan Heath's kind of concept.

often begins with just this idea of small steps and building upon it and creating that momentum.

Yasmin London (35:15.458)
I really, really love that because I think it can be really overwhelming for a lot of school leaders and a lot of people listening today who really want to start acting on initiatives like this, but it can just feel like another thing, know, another thing to implement. And it doesn't have to be that it can be small steps and even simple things like you mentioned around gratitude.

you know, humor in the workplace, you know, nobody wants to come to work and be sort of drab and sad all day. It's those little moments, those water cooler conversations, or you have a giggle or look at a meme that really make the day, doesn't it? And if you're that, that staff member that became a teacher because you wanted to do just that bit better than you got, having that gratitude reinforced from students, especially ones that maybe have had some challenges that you've really sort of gone the extra mile with that just

I imagine for educators, that's the absolute sort of goal, isn't it? That's the gold at the end of the rainbow that they're in this business for. And it is small steps.

Mark Wilson (36:18.205)
I think the digital platform piece is interesting from a wellbeing perspective here because again, it's quick and easy. So sometimes you might want to say to, you know, you want to thank a member of staff or something done for you and just, I don't know how many times I've looked at my draft inbox to find emails I've started to write and not, you know, they just disappear. What's quite nice about the platform because we, we don't, again, the other thing I say to people is

when you're doing this kind of stuff, you've got some choices to make. We didn't force it upon people.

Yasmin London (36:23.843)

Yeah.

Mark Wilson (36:46.717)

Here's an opportunity for you to engage. And gradually it builds a momentum over time.

Because other people start talking about it you begin to share the data and people kind of go, I need to get involved in that. So again, they do this five quick check in questions and it ends with sending gratitude. So it takes two minutes. But the ripple effect of that email, you've got 100 staff.

Yasmin London (36:49.773)

Yep.

Yasmin London (36:59.832)

Yeah, it's that contagion effect.

Yasmin London (37:05.518)

Mm. Yeah.

Mark Wilson (37:15.996)

And even if only 50 % of them are sending a gratitude once a week, right? The ripple effects of that are quite, yes, massive. It can be really massive. And sometimes I can be all very, I can certainly get on the cynical train in terms of some of the negative things about technology, but there are some positives to it when you can learn to utilize it. And here's one for me that I think has really helped us.

Yasmin London (37:26.05)

That's huge, isn't it?

Mark Wilson (37:44.272)

demonstrate to staff that wellbeing is something that is talked about a lot, at taking action on it is hard. It's also a very personal thing. Each of us deal with our own wellbeing in a different way. But sometimes these sort of simple tools to go quick, check, check, check, check, send some gratitude, bang. That is easy. Not at all, no, exactly.

Yasmin London (37:53.933)

Yes.

Yasmin London (37:57.87)

Mm-hmm.

Yasmin London (38:02.338)
Yes.

Yasmin London (38:07.608)
Yeah, exactly. It's not onerous.

Mark Wilson (38:15.002)
directs people towards you if you need help, it gives us some data if we're looking for themes and trends, but it also just spreads that kindness through thanks.

Yasmin London (38:24.81)
Yes, yeah, it's amazing. think when you think about it, it's small micro actions that over a year over a number of years give you such an amazing picture to act upon. And it really is about a culture changer. So for schools listening today, if they wanted to implement something like this, what

What should they do? What are the first sort of couple of steps that they could take tomorrow, let's say, to start sort of integrating these sorts of tools or do we even start to address it? I guess if there's educators listening, going to their school leaders, if there's leaders who want to implement this and they want to sort of broach it with their staff, what are your sort of top tips for them to start?

Mark Wilson (39:11.967)
Don't expect too much of yourself. Don't expect to make major changes overnight. But be prepared for the fact there's a journey. And particularly with the tools, what I would say, it's not about the tools, about the data really. It's not really... The tools help you collect as much real-time data as you can kind of get. And the data just helps you ask better questions. And I would argue that the questions are the key to good conversation and dialogue.

But all that's only as good as the culture that you've got. So, you know, if you want to create a climate where data leads to action, where people feel safe to share how they're really doing, where there's... that's where the change can begin. But you don't need to overhaul things overnight. Small, thoughtful steps can make a huge difference. Don't be put off if you get that healthy skepticism early days. You know, we talk about...

In the tech world, we talk about this idea of early adopters, right? So you can have your early adopters and your champions and that's okay. And it's kind of just give it some time. But stick to your guns in terms of reinforcing the messages about why this is important. The fact that we, I'd like to think that any school that says the fact that we ask you about your wellbeing should be a signal that we care about your wellbeing. Yeah. So.

Yasmin London (40:36.554)

Yes, it should be. Not a trick, ever.

Mark Wilson (40:39.258)

No, just that, just the fact that you're saying, we're just checking in. How are doing? How are you doing today? How are you doing this week? And again, most people are like, great, enjoy my work. This is a bit stressful. I mean, the big theme that comes through for us from the data piece is all about workload. That's the big one. So that just makes us leaders sit back and think about what do do about it? How can we tackle that? How can we best support stuff? But it makes you be really sensitive to things like, you know,

How are you using meeting time? And is it really clear why you're meeting so it's got an effective use of time, the staff don't feel that you're wasting their time? Because that's one thing you can control. My personal mantra is control the controllable. So one thing that we can control is how we can, how we set these sort of things up. But I think also it's about listening. So if you reach out, if you start something like this.

Yasmin London (41:18.563)

Yeah.

Yasmin London (41:24.758)

Yes.

Mark Wilson (41:35.61)

or if you're going to start anything, I think the key thing I say to anybody is it's about listening. And I mean really listening, like actively listening. Not listening because leadership tells you a good thing that a leader does is listen. Because people don't respond to that and they can see through it really quickly. Yeah. So you've got to be prepared to really listen. And if you're prepared to really listen, you've got to be prepared to take on board that.

Yasmin London (41:52.258)

Yes. They can smell a rat, can't they? Yeah.

Mark Wilson (42:02.596)

there is going to be challenges and people have different perspectives on how we do things and what we need to do better and stuff like that. And it's okay. It's okay that we might disagree on stuff. If it's creating dialogue and if that dialogue then creates a culture where people can explain why certain things can't be done the way that a member of staff might want it to be. I often say to staff, can't talk to me about it. We might not always agree, but I'll always let you know why we can't do something.

Yasmin London (42:31.896)
Yeah. Yeah.

Mark Wilson (42:32.056)
It's never, that's not how we do it. I've been here three years, but one of my most hated phrases in any leadership job I've done is, that's not how we do it here. That's not an answer to anything for me, So really listening and and getting, so exploring and asking, know, big Simon Sonning stuff. Let's start with the why. So why are we doing this? Let's start with that first. All those kind of things. think just, but, my big advice would be give yourself time.

Yasmin London (42:45.432)
Yeah, no.

Yasmin London (42:53.698)
Yeah, start with the Y.

Mark Wilson (43:01.78)
Seek feedback on how things are going, right? Celebrate each step of the journey, even the little ones that didn't quite work. Because if you have an idea and it works brilliantly, brilliant. Great. All right, they don't happen very often in my experience.

Yasmin London (43:16.15)
or perhaps you weren't aiming high enough. I think that's the thing. just, nothing worth doing is easy a lot of the time, is it?

Mark Wilson (43:23.097)
No. And I think it was Nelson Mandela who said, never lose. I either win or I learn. And again, if your mindset is, I want to make a positive difference, I'm going to try something. Let's say it's to implement a digital platform to check on well-being. For example, we were talking about that one a bit today. It's not always going to work. It's not going work for everybody. But if you listen, you'll learn from people as to what's not working about it. And that will help you.

Yasmin London (43:31.65)
Yes.

Yasmin London (43:46.968)
Yeah. Yes.

Mark Wilson (43:52.739)
towards making it better. So it's that idea of just listening and just cut yourself some slack. I think the biggest thing I learned, if I look back on my early career as a leader, I just wanted things to happen too quickly. I was frustrated by the fact that these, but this grade level are gonna be

leaving, so they're gonna miss out on it. Let's get it done now, let's kind of push it through. And what I've learned over.

Yasmin London (44:00.856)

Yeah.

Mark Wilson (44:21.689)

the hard way is to really get transformational change. You've got to recognise it's going to take time. And it's going to be, and it's not a linear journey. No progress is linear, It's forward-backwards, forward-backwards, forward-backwards, sideways for a bit, changing. It's just reacting to where you're at, adapting to the environment you're in.

Yasmin London (44:33.048)

Mm-hmm.

Yasmin London (44:37.976)

Yes, that's right.

Yasmin London (44:48.748)

Yeah, that's right.

Mark Wilson (44:49.581)

But just try and stay positive yourselves and if nothing else, this concept of giving thanks is powerful. Really powerful for creating that culture, certainly the culture that I've been looking for in our school, this culture of living our values, welcoming everyone, acting with kindness. These are some of our values I think that we can do through little things. Through a two minute thing every single week, the ripple effects can be big.

Yasmin London (44:59.406)

I

Yasmin London (45:14.542)

Mm.

Yasmin London (45:20.344)

think that's a lovely way to finish our conversation. There's so much that I could unpack. We started this discussion around some really serious heavy kind of online harms that can happen for staff as well as students. Forgetting about the students for a moment, if we don't sort of pop the oxygen mask on those who are trying to protect kids in these school environments, we don't have a great school.

But what we sort of move towards when we talk about wellbeing and I think the implementation of this tool, but also the culture is this increased sense of psychological safety that you've really implemented within the school. You've talked about the human libraries as a great way to showcase vulnerable leadership. You've talked about having a healthy skepticism for different things and I guess addressing that.

Mark Wilson (46:02.231)
Thank

Yasmin London (46:10.35)
particularly from staff, I've written lots of notes of marginal gains, the 1 % rule, making sure that you remember as well, this is one of my favourite quotes, that courage is contagious. And when we're courageous as leaders, and when we step forward, when we're visible and we're prepared to sort of shake up the status quo, if you will, great things can really happen from there. So thank you so much, Mark.

for joining us today on Spotlight. One of the things that we say at Coria is that as the digital world evolves, so do we. And I think you've done an incredible job helping us do just that. So thank you so much for joining us today.

Mark Wilson (46:47.349)
You're very welcome. Enjoy the rest of your day.