

**"I believe that having mental health support in schools is invaluable as it helps students and teachers."**

## **Peter Watts**

### **Education Wellbeing Practitioner**

#### **Employer or university**

Off The Record

#### **Salary range**

Band 5 (£25,000 - £30,000)



### **How I got into the role?**

#### **Expand / collapse**

I was working as a teacher and felt frustrated that I couldn't support children and young people as effectively as I would have liked. I saw a lot of children and young people struggling with a variety of things, but being a teacher meant it was sometimes difficult to help them with the root cause. Being a teacher also meant my work-life balance could be skewed, especially during term time.

I saw a vacancy for Education Wellbeing Practitioner (EWP)/Education Mental Health Practitioner (EMHP) training online. I was excited at the thought of supporting children and young people in a practical way while still being in a school environment. I believe that having mental health support in schools is invaluable as it can remove barriers for

students and allow teachers to refer students for support without feeling that they need to offer it themselves.

As a teacher, I had no knowledge about the therapeutic side of my role when I started but the training at King's College London allowed me to learn throughout the year alongside colleagues and provided support for me as I learned.

## **What I do**

### **Expand / collapse**

I work in schools across my borough and provide 1:1 support for secondary-age pupils and some year six pupils. I also work with the parents and guardians of younger students. Research has shown that this can be more effective when supporting children's mental health.

I am based in different schools every day and have a mixture of face-to-face and online sessions with parents and guardians depending on their preference. I also provide group support for primary-aged children where we can explore topics such as anxiety and emotional regulation. One of the things that I really like about the role is making a noticeable difference to people's lives. My week is structured by the schools and the people I am seeing so there is also a lot of variety week to week.

Being based in schools is helpful as it allows students to easily access the support they need and there is a simpler referral route for parents and guardians.

## **The best bits and challenges**

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I am particularly proud of completing my training during the pandemic as it threw up lots of unforeseen difficulties. I also feel particularly rewarded when clients that I am working with take steps to help themselves and make positive changes in their lives.

There are some challenges, especially when students have low school attendance and they do not reply to messages. This means that there can be times when you are unsure if they will be attending or not.

The term 'mental health' can also have pre-conceived connotations to some people (both adults and children) and can be a barrier. Part of my role as an EWP is to try to remove this and make the support easier for all to access.

## **Life outside work**

### **Expand / collapse**

One of my biggest interests is playing sports. It has shown me the importance of teamwork which is essential to my work. I work as part of a mental health support team in schools, meaning that we need to work together so that our clients get the most relevant support. We also work closely with teachers and support staff in schools, and it is important to positively maintain these relationships.

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

### **Expand / collapse**

I am looking at my next steps in my professional development and what I would like to focus. I am based in cognitive behaviour therapy, an area that I would be interested in doing some further training in. I am also keen on looking at counselling training. There are also opportunities in my team for further training and to take on additional managerial responsibilities.

Don't be put off by a lack of experience in either the therapeutic side or in education. The training will help fill the areas that you are less confident in. It's also essential to be empathetic, caring and have good listening skills.

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