

Children's Mental Health Week: a Visit from Ben West

On the 5 February, marking the beginning of Children's Mental Health Week, the Head Girl Team invited in one of the UK's leading mental health campaigners, Ben West, to speak about his story, provide his best tips to help tackle mental health and promote the importance of speaking out about how we feel. We were inspired by his story, alongside his book: *This Book Could Save Your Life – Breaking the Silence Around the Mental Health Emergency*, and we hoped his words would similarly inspire the rest of the Highsted community and get them talking.



He did three talks to KS3, KS4 and KS5 – all being very powerful and motivating. At the end of each session, there was the opportunity to ask Ben questions – an opportunity in which many were keen to participate.

Ben spoke to us about the importance of looking after your own mental health and the mental health of others, drawing on experiences in his own life after his brother, Sam, sadly passed after a battle with depression. Ben's words were powerful and engaging, delivering a message that our Highsted community truly values. The most inspiring lesson he taught us is that 'it's okay to not be okay' – showing all students that the people who speak out and ask for help are often the strongest people you'll meet. Overall, Ben's life so far was motivating journey to listen to, from meeting with the prime minister, charity walks and changing the modern world of business – someone every member of Highsted looked up to.



Afterwards, Highsted's Peer Mentors, alongside the Head Girl Team met with Ben in the Hi-Pod for a short Q&A session, where we were given the chance to ask any further questions. Many were interested in his next steps as a mental health advocate, alongside his tips for balancing mental health with studies in university and actually, how we, as peer mentors, are best able to support our mentees and help them to open up about their mental health – which is a prospect that requires great strength.



Inspired by Ben West's own Walk2Talk, which was further reinforced by his deliverance on the power of walking, the Head Girl Team organised and participated in Highsted's own Walk2Talk running throughout Children's Mental Health Week. It was an amazing sight to see so many people engaging in such an important and worthy cause. The first day was a success and will certainly pave the way for a healthier and calm rest of the week. We can't wait to see many more students join us, as Highsted takes steps to show their commitment to children's mental health.

Overall, we believe Ben was incredibly motivating and was a driving force to inspire change in the way we view mental health, and helped immensely to show the ways we can tackle it and support our peers!

