Throughout the country, the topic of mental health is on everyone's lips. There are multiple groups working together with the aim of raising awareness about mental health and elevating the profile of the many organisations that are there to offer support and direction. There is one common purpose - to de stigmatise the topic of mental health and to educate ourselves on how to look after our mental health.

Suicide Aware in Rochestown, Cork is a voluntary organisation working in the area of depression and suicide. In May 2013 they, together with The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC), Cork GAA and Cork's Red FM, launched the Amber Flag campaign to promote and actively bring about a culture change in the promotion of positive mental health within the educational system and other organisations. It is to enhance the good work that is going on where mental health is concerned by offering an award. The Amber Flag! St Angela's College wanted very much to be part of this campaign.

Our school has many existing supports - the Meitheal Team, our Class Teacher system, our Pastoral Care Team, our Guidance Counsellor, our Management Team, our PE, Religion, SPHE and HWS programmes, our Learning Support Department, our 1st to 6th Year Buddies, our 'Respect for All' policy etc. We want to build on and emphasise all the existing supports in our school and therefore improve the quality of the lives of our students. In conjunction with the ethos of the Amber Flag Project, we want to work towards:

- promoting mental health and well-being for all our students and staff.

- preventing mental health problems through increasing awareness, education and social support.

- reducing risk factors such as self harm, bullying, eating disorders, depression, suicidal thoughts and isolation.

- improving quality of life for students with mental health problems by promoting recovery through awareness, acceptance and education.

In October 2013, all of our 4th Years attended the MentaliTY seminar in City Hall. In March 2014, our 4th Years engaged in an 'Anti Bullying Workshop'. And in April 2014, we launched our Amber Flag initiative. Our first task was to establish the 'St Angela's Amber Flag Team'. Six committed teachers and a group of 30 wildly enthusiastic, energetic and efficient 2nd Year students unified and the team was born. Under the guidelines of the Amber Flag Project, every organisation must meet certain criteria, work to promote understanding and acceptance of the topic of mental health, pledge to continue this work into the future and then make an application for 'The Amber Flag'.

Our campaign started with a drip feed poster campaign, featuring the slogan 'Check Up from the Neck Up!, the caption ‘Team berilliant’, the launch of our Facebook, Instagram, Amber blog and Twitter accounts and our specially student designed and commissioned stickers.

Next came our Amber Flag noticeboard, the production of a special school crest encapsulating our message, and escalated with a flashmob for our entire school to the song 'Happy', 'Orange Day' took place on May 2nd. All members of the school community were asked to wear orange to build awareness and buy into our campaign. Orange face painting and music greeted our students from early morning and this day peaked at lunchtime with an 'Orange Cake Sale for Pieta House'. The sale raised €266.80. Our Team ventured to St Luke's Cross and handed out cakes and goodies to locals in our area to spread goodwill, awareness and the spirit of what was happening in our school.

The following week, our students delivered special assemblies to each year group and addressed the topics of 'What is mental health?, 'What is the Amber Flag Project?', 'How can we look after our mental health?', 'How can you get involved?'. Custom made orange wristbands featuring the slogan 'Check Up from the Neck Up' and 'Amber Flag' were given to each student in our school.

All of these events were working towards our ' St Angela's Mental Health Day' on May 12th. We designated this summer's day to elevate the importance of what we are working to achieve. Many activities happened on this day. The 2nd Years organised a 'Mental Health Treasure Hunt' in the morning for the 1st Years and at lunchtime, the Team dressed up and offered ' 10 free bear hugs in exchange for one orange lollipop'! Eileen Keane from Jumpstart gave a talk to our 1st, 2nd and 3rd Years on self-esteem and the importance of looking after your mental health. Throughout the school day, we invited all members of our school community to come and 'sign up to' supporting our campaign. The signatures on our noticeboards are a symbolic gesture that represents a unification of our purpose.

One of the key messages of our mental health campaign is that we all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. We are advised to eat well, exercise, get lots of sleep and breathe in fresh air every day to keep our bodies fit and well. We now have to learn how to care for our mental health. We need to educate and move our girls towards being knowledgeable and pro-active students who try to avoid reaching crisis point through fear, shame, loneliness and isolation. Suicide Aware hopes that through developing this environment of openness and support, that students will be encouraged to 'talk, connect and share', thus making discussion about mental health part of our everyday conversation.

The energy and change is palpable in our school. Our corridors are now dressed in the colour orange and our walls beam with orange smiley faces and positive messages. Our noticeboard gives us information and our assemblies are educating our student body. Our campaign has well and truly begun.