



Relationships Policy

Ratification Date: -

December 2021

Review Date: -

December 2022

Introduction

The Bents Green School Relationship Policy embodies our culture and ethos. Our ideal is to build on this using the Trauma Informed approach, where relationships are at the heart of every interaction.

Purpose

At Bents Green School we believe in providing every student with the opportunity to experience an outstanding education academically, emotionally and socially. The way all stakeholders feel about being in school largely depends on the relationships they experience there.

- A feeling of being valued promotes cooperation
- A feeling of being cared for enhances understanding and compassion
- A feeling of being respected promotes respects for others and willingness to listen to them
- A feeling of being included raises commitment and motivation
- A feeling of fun relieves stress and fosters belonging
- A feeling of belonging builds resilience

(The Big Book of Whole School Wellbeing, 2021)

We strongly believe that by identifying the barriers to learning, we can provide an inspiring and relevant curriculum that considers the whole child and provides the necessary support for students to achieve, develop and reach their true potential. We are committed to ensuring that our school develops a Trauma and Mental Health Informed Approach to ensure that all our students develop positive mental health and resilience, enabling them to fully engage in life and learning.

Through a trauma informed approach our focus is not only the physical environment, but the relational environment and the very culture and ethos of our school. This requires emotionally regulated and available adults who can provide essential calming for our Students, their parents/carers or each other when they are overwhelmed by an event, a situation or their feelings.

We recognise that the impact of trauma can be presented in different ways, including through behaviours that challenge. There is a growing body of research and understanding of the impact of Childhood Adversity Experiences (ACE) on long term mental and physical health and the protective factors that mitigate the potential impact. It is our aim to maximise the protective factors of school by creating an environment of safety that has strong, positive and supportive relationships at its heart.

Whole School Approach

As a school we are committed to providing an environment that has safety, connection and compassion at its heart and are built around our school values of Compassion, Honesty, Respect, Courage, Integrity, Responsibility and Resilience.

All staff are responsible for adhering to positive practise that promotes a student's ability to engage in, and access their learning. This is based on the understanding that student's best achieve, develop and reach their true potential when staff are: fair, flexible, trustworthy, respectful, and model positive relationships.

It is our aim that every member of the school community is respected, supported and valued by promoting positive relationships, and with everyone accepting responsibility for their behaviour, the aims of this policy are as follows:

- Promote high expectations of positive behaviour, courtesy, mutual respect and consideration of others, within and beyond the school environment
- Help all students grow in a safe and secure environment, to become positive, responsible and increasingly independent members of the school community and, ultimately, of wider society

- Help all students to understand, regulate and manage emotions, to apply thinking between feeling (sensation and emotion) and action, and to increasingly show empathy and understanding to others
- Encourage and celebrate individual strengths and achievements of children and staff
- Promote self-esteem
- Build a community which values kindness, care, good humour, respect and empathy for others.

It is the expectation at Bents Green School, that all staff, regardless of role act in this way. We believe that our parents/carers know their child best and we are committed to working in partnership to identify the best ways of providing support for everyone within our school. We aim to develop positive, non-judgemental working alliances with all our parents/carers.

Therefore, our school is invested in supporting the very best relational health between:

- Parents/Carers and child
- Student and student
- Student and Bents Green School staff
- Parent/Carer and Bents Green School staff
- Bents Green School staff
- Bents Green School staff and senior leaders
- Students, Parents/Carers and other agencies
- Bents Green School staff and external agencies

Positive Relationships

‘It is the small stuff, the daily acts of care, the perpetual generosity of spirit, the interest that you show in (Students’) lives that matters most – what my friend Hywel Roberts calls botheredness.’

(When the Adults Change, Everything Changes by Paul Dix)

Positive relationships are at the heart of everything that we do at Bents Green School. Promoting positive relationships involves responsibilities and rights on the part of teachers, support staff and learners. Teachers and support staff are expected to act as role models for students, in terms of their behaviour, appearance and modelled relationships. Students have the responsibility to work together and have the right to enjoy respect and friendship. To support these responsibilities and rights, it is important that there is consistency in practice across the school. This includes;

- Consistent language and response – using Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy (PACE) responses which all staff have had training on
- Consistent follow-up – ensures certainty in the classroom; problems are never passed up the line, with all adults taking responsibility for behaviour interventions – support from more senior staff can be given, but never delegated
- Consistent positive feedback – routine procedures for reinforcing and encouraging students learning
- Consistent consequences – defined, agreed and reflected upon
- Consistent respect from adults
- Consistent routines – in the classroom, on the playground, in the dining hall, routines should be the same
- Consistent environment – positive, visual messages need to be given

We adopt a trauma-informed approach, underpinned by research into what is most effective in helping students who have suffered adverse childhood experiences to thrive and predicated on the belief that one

emotionally available adult can make all the difference to a child. Everyone is treated with dignity, respect and kindness at all times in order to build safe, stable and nurturing relationships.

All staff have completed training on trauma-informed practice in order to better understand behaviour; new staff will complete this training as part of their induction and we have four SLT members who have completed Trauma Informed School (TIS) Senior Lead staff training, our Safeguarding Manager has also completed the 10 day trauma informed course, we are also awaiting our TIS Award visit.

At Bents Green School we want our students to be self-motivated and curious about the world in which they live. They deserve an engaging curriculum and a caring atmosphere so they can act on their natural desire to find out about the world.

The trauma-informed approach to building and maintaining healthy relationships is based on the following 4 areas.

PROTECT

Increased 'safety cues' in all aspects of the school day, e.g. 'meet and greet' at the classroom door, staff around at break time and lunchtimes for positive interactions.

- Staff assigned specific duties during lunchtime: e.g. Play leaders, role play leaders, football, art club, library club, indoor sports club to ensure that students have opportunities to develop relationships across school.
- Staff trained in 'PACE' modes of interaction (Hughes, 2015): being warm, empathic, playful and curious to enable our young people to move out of flight/flight/freeze positions and into relationships and trust.
- Knowing colleagues strengths and working to them

Ensuring contact with 'every family, every week'

- As a school we ensure that interactions with students, parents/carers external agencies and one another are socially engaging and not socially defensive.
- A whole-school commitment to using positive and complimentary language in with a calm and controlled approach (put-downs, criticisms and shaming have proven to be damaging psychologically and neurologically).
- Staff aim to 'interactively repair' occasions when they themselves move into defensiveness.

Pedagogic interventions that help staff to get to know students better on an individual basis e.g. "I wish my teacher knew" (what matters to them, who matters to them, their dreams, hopes). This is key to enabling students to feel safe enough to talk, if they wish, about painful life experiences, which are interfering with their ability to learn and their quality of life. This information is gleaned when staff complete Pupil Profiles.

Vulnerable students have easy and daily access to a member of their Tutor Team, who is an emotionally-available adult and students know when and where to find that adult. If the student does not wish to connect with the allocated adult, an alternative person is found.

Bents Green School staff adjust expectations around vulnerable students to correspond with their developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress. This includes removing vulnerable and traumatised students in a kind and non-judgmental way from situations they are not managing well (e.g. students who are continually triggered into outside during dinner time can access a calmer, smaller inside provision with an emotionally regulating adult such as art club or the Library).

Review, reflect and restorative opportunities are available in several ways for staff and students to assist them in managing situations that have caused or may cause distress.

The nurturing of staff in such a way that they feel truly valued and emotionally-regulated and in so doing to support them to interact throughout the school day with positive social engagement rather than defensiveness.

RELATE

A whole-school commitment to enabling students to see themselves, their relationships, and the world positively, rather than through a lens of threat, danger or self-blame.

Bents Green commits to offering a wide variety of interventions to support students. These include but are not limited to:

- Mighty Minds
- Talk Time 10 (TT10)
- 5 Point Scales
- Behaviour Box
- Lego Therapy

Our school provides everyone, including staff and students with repeated relational opportunities (with Emotionally Available Adults) to make the shift from 'blocked trust' (not feeling psychologically safe with anyone) to trust, and from self-help to 'help seeking'.

REGULATE

Relational interventions specifically designed to bring down stress hormone levels (e.g. from toxic to tolerable) in vulnerable students, enabling them to feel calm, soothed and safe. This is to support learning, quality of life and protect against stress induced physical and mental illness, now and in later life.

Evidence-based interventions that aim to repair psychological damage and brain damage caused by traumatic life experiences, through emotionally regulating, playful, enriched adult-child interactions. This is offered alongside the PACE approach.

The emotional wellbeing and regulating of staff are treated as a priority to prevent burn-out, stress-related absence, or leaving the profession through stress-related illness, secondary trauma and/or feeling undervalued, blamed, or shamed. Staff can access our wellbeing group where issues are raised regularly and fed back to SLT to action where possible.

- The Behaviour Team creates flexibility to allow staff to regulate post incident.
- A recently adapted and refurbished staff room to allow staff a safe, relaxing place to utilise their lunchtime.

REFLECT

Staff development and training in the art of good listening, dialogue, empathy and understanding (instead of asking a series of questions/giving lecture

Trained Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) staff to support all students with Emotional Literacy – enabling them to communicate their feelings without expressing through anger or behaviours that challenge

Provision of skills and resources to support parents/carers and staff in meaningful empathic conversations with vulnerable students who want to talk about their lives. This is to empower students to better manage their home situations and life in general.

Within the context of an established and trusted relationship with a member of staff, students are given the means and opportunity to symbolise painful life experiences through images as well as words, as a key part of 'working through' these experiences and memory re-consolidation. Means include the provision of different modes of expression, e.g. art/ play/ drama/music/sand-play/emotion worksheets/ emotion cards.

Staff development and training to help students move from 'behaving' their trauma/painful life experiences, to reflecting on those experiences. Staff learn to do this through empathic conversation, addressing students' negative self- referencing and helping them develop positive, coherent narratives about their lives.

A Behaviour Policy that models enquiry, reflection, resolution and interactive repair (such as restorative conversations), only using 'actions' where appropriate to the context.

Links with other policies

- Behaviour Policy
- SEND Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

The above policies are available on the Schools website at www.bentsgreenschool.co.uk . Staff can access all policies on the staff shared area.