Benhall Infant School and Pre-School
Whole School Relationships Policy

Members of Staff Responsible: Headteacher (Liaising with all staff)
Date of Last Review: Autumn Term 2019
Date of Next Review: Autumn Term 2020

Thinking of a child as behaving badly disposes you to think of punishment.
Thinking of a child as struggling to handle something difficult encourages you to help them through their distress.

The most important aspect in children feeling valued, safe and secure is the sense of connection with the member of staff. For most children this can be achieved by simple acknowledgement of the child and the child having the knowledge that you have them in your mind, care about them as a person and care about what they are doing.

Strong relationships between staff and pupils are vital. Staff must be fair and consistent with children (taking into account individual needs) and children need to have trust in the staff member enabling pupils to feel safe.

This policy is developed to ensure guidance for staff in order to promote positive behaviour in school. The procedures and guidance in this document provides a consistent approach across the school and enables children, parents and staff to understand our approaches to the management of behaviour in school. It is also recognised that for some pupils, variance on these procedures will be made in order to meet any specific social, emotional, learning or other needs which require a personalised approach. Such approaches can be discussed with our Inclusion Leader or member of SLT.

1. What a Positive Discipline (PD)-based Approach is and why we like it

- In the school year 2017-2018, as a school we started looking at our behaviour policy and decided to update our approach. This was triggered by finding out more about the effects that different behaviour approaches have on children and deciding that as well as focusing on children's academic progress, we needed to make their social and emotional learning a greater priority, because the former cannot really happen without the latter. So, we spent much of last year finding out more about the Positive Discipline (PD)-based Approach, which included learning about children's emotional needs, how to understand them, how to decipher their behaviour and find the best way of helping them meet those needs in socially acceptable ways.

- What is Positive Discipline-based Approach? It is a programme that teaches both parents and teachers how to respond to children's behaviour in a respectful, kind and firm, and encouraging way. It focuses on the hidden causes of children's behaviour and advocates that their behaviour won't truly be changed unless those hidden causes are addressed and the basic emotional needs are met. The goal is to foster connection between significant adults and children, and teach children life-long skills that will help them with various emotional and social situations.

- Why do we like this Positive Discipline-based Approach? It relies on recent scientific research, specifically neuroscience, and takes into account how the brain
develops and from this it draws conclusions about developmentally appropriate behaviour and expectations. Furthermore, it focuses on which practices encourage optimal brain development (how what we do affects children's brains) and psychological development (how what we do affects what sort of people children will become). Our PD-based Approach also reminds us that children are children, not small adults, and that they do not have the skills to deal with many situations that we as adults take for granted. This is why one of our most important jobs is to teach children these skills.

2. **The Principles of a Positive Discipline-based approach**
   In order to truly understand what a Positive Discipline-based Approach is, we need to explore the principles that underpin it.

- **Understanding the behaviour of children**
  *Understanding how brain affects behaviour*  
  (Based on the work of Dr Dan Siegel and Dr Tina Payne Bryson)
  Scientists and non-scientists agree that babies are born with brains not quite developed, but not many people will appreciate that it takes decades for a brain to fully mature. This is important for teachers and other adults who work with children because this immature brain will drive the behaviour of children in their care and it is this immature brain that will need all the help and guidance when it comes to social-emotional learning.

  **The Complexity of Brain - Two Sides and Two Levels**
  In simple terms the brain has two sides: left and right. These sides serve different functions: the left side is the one that helps with logical thinking and organising our thoughts into sentences, while the right side helps with emotions and reading nonverbal cues, for example.
  It is easy to see when a child's brain isn't integrated - they become aggressive, agitated, have tantrums, cannot control themselves. The reason why children's brains aren't always capable of integration is to be found in the fact that their brains haven't had time to fully develop. Children's brains do not fully mature until they reach mid-twenties - until then, brains rely on the experiences to determine their structure. The good news is that even after the brains mature, there is still room for change because the brain is mouldable and can be rewired.
  This means that any childcare provider needs to be aware of the impact their experiences make on the children's brains. They also need to question how (and if) they help children in their care develop resilient, well-integrated brains so that they can use their mental resources to full capacity.
  The rate in which a brain matures is mainly determined by the inherited genes. However, the degree and quality of integration can be influenced in our day-to-day interactions with children. The simplest way to help the healthy integration process is to offer opportunities to exercise different elements of children's brains.

- **Connection before correcting**
Alfred Adler, the founder of Adlerian Psychology (on which our approach heavily relies), stated that children's behaviour is goal oriented and their primary goal is to meet the two basic needs - the need to belong and the need to feel significant. Children get a sense of belonging when they get plenty of positive attention from significant adults. A sense of significance comes from feeling that they have some control over their lives and the ability to make meaningful contributions. If these two needs aren't met, children will find their own ways of meeting them - that's what we call 'misbehaviour': whining, nagging, interrupting, throwing tantrums, ignoring, back-talking etc. Furthermore, if children do not feel connected with significant adults, they are less likely to listen and cooperate, and cannot really be in the “teachable mode”, ready to learn. Some psychologists, such as Dr Laura Markham, even say that disobedience is not a discipline problem, but a relationship problem. This is why we at Benhall Infant School have decided to invest a lot of our time into meeting these two needs. We do this in many ways, for example, validating children's feelings before correcting their behaviour, utilising reflective listening and problem solving tools, and having Special Time with our pupils.

- **Encouragement**
  Rudolf Dreikurs taught, “A child needs encouragement like a plant needs water.” In other words, encouragement is essential. Children may not die without encouragement, but they certainly wither.
  A misbehaving child is a discouraged child. When children feel encouraged, misbehaviours disappear. Learning the art of effective encouragement is one of the most important teaching skills. As opposed to praise, which is usually generic and focuses on the end result and the person, true encouragement is selective, specific to the situation and the child, and focuses on the task and process.
  Descriptive encouragement works by you simply describing what you see. Most people who work with children believe that children crave their evaluation (“Brilliant picture!”, “Wow! That is amazing!”, “Super work!”). They don’t. What children crave is to be noticed and acknowledged, so a simple description of what you see is far better than “good jobbing”. For example:
  • “I can see that you are trying to use the solution we’ve agreed on. You are waiting your turn while counting to 10.”
  • “I’ve noticed you have been painting. You used red, blue and yellow. You drew a sun and some trees.”

- **Solutions not punishments**
  Dr Jane Nelsen, one of the PD founders, often states, “Where did we get the crazy idea that to make people do better, we first have to make them feel worse? People do better when they feel better.” In other words, a child that continuously 'misbehaves' is not a happy child; on the contrary, it is a very discouraged child. So, the answer to the 'misbehaviour' isn't to punish the child and thus make them feel even worse about themselves. This doesn't work because, a punished child very rarely focuses their attention on the lesson we want them to learn from the punishment. Instead, they focus on their own hurt feelings and start developing mechanisms to 'defend' themselves from the detrimental effects of punishments (for example, become
pleasers, retreat from adults, intensify the undesired behaviour, plan revenge, become sneaky, lose trust in adults...) The response will mainly depend on the severity of punishment and temperament of the child.

The only way to truly help children change behaviour is by creating emotionally safe environment which will allow children to understand that they have made a mistake, without blaming and shaming, and by encouraging them to focus on solving the problem that caused the ‘misbehaviour’ in the first place. Adults can create emotionally safe environments using the connection tools and by validating and accepting children’s feelings. Practically this means adopting the attitude that there are no ‘bad’, ‘wrong’ or ‘silly’ feelings - all feelings are OK. Our intervention starts when children express feelings in socially unacceptable ways.

- **Setting limits while being kind and firm**
  Most people working with children have a tendency to either be a little too kind, or a little too firm. The former might have difficulty with being firm because they do not want to be one of those autocratic teachers. The latter might think that kindness can be wishy-washy and they don’t want to be one of those permissive teachers. This is a false dichotomy - your reaction to children’s behaviour does not have to be either too kind or too firm. You can be kind and firm at the same time. This method of setting limits is respectful to everybody involved as it helps children thrive when they know that they will consistently be met with kindness, even when they make mistakes. At the same time, children learn order and know that expectations are firmly set in place. Finally, this approach expresses a sense of faith in children’s ability to handle tough situations and challenges.

Being Kind and Firm communicates to children “I care and understand, and you are still accountable."

Examples of setting limits while being Kind and Firm:

- “It's OK to have a bad day, AND in this school, we do not call each other names.”
- “You want to keep playing AND it is time to go in. Do you want to skip or bunny hop to the classroom?”
- “I can understand why you would rather be doing something else right now, AND it is time to line up.”

- **Taking time for training**
  Positive Discipline is not a quick fix for children who misbehave. It is a preventative approach which when consistently used by all staff to all children it results in children who develop effective social and emotional skills and who can self-regulate in situations. This does not mean that all our children will behave like ‘little angels’ all the time; we understand that they are children and that they will continue to explore their world and their place in the world by experimenting in situations and will sometimes make the wrong choices and make mistakes. It is the role of the adults in school to take plenty of time for training children in all the aspects of this Positive Discipline-based approach to ensure that they are given every opportunity to develop their skills.
Seeing and using mistakes as opportunities to learn

Here at Benhall we teach children to be excited about mistakes as perfect opportunities to learn. We respond to mistakes with compassion and kindness instead of shame, blame or lectures. When appropriate we use curiosity questions to help children 'explore' the consequences of their choices so that they can make better choices in the future. We believe that children need daily exposure to the value of mistakes and to learn from them in a safe environment. Children can truly learn the courage to be imperfect when they can laugh and learn from their mistakes and here at Benhall we encourage every opportunity for this.

3. Specific tools used across the school to help us achieve the above goals

- **Special Time** The most powerful connection tool that we have been using for a while now is Special Time. This is a dedicated, one-to-one time that teachers and teaching partners spend with children in school and in pre-school. The purpose of Special Time is to meet children's needs to belong and feel significant by giving them what they most want - our undivided attention. Most of the time, Special Time is spent doing things children want to do - we follow their lead and join in with their fun. Sometimes, however, we use Special Time to help children with their social and emotional learning. This is done by playing games that directly address the needs of these children and build their emotional intelligence.

  Why do we like this tool so much? It sends a very clear message to all children: we care for you and we value you as an individual. We also like it because this message is so important and powerful, that it transforms children's behaviour. When children feel that adults care, they are more likely to be engaged in learning and less likely to seek negative attention or engage in power struggles because their fundamental need to belong is being met. As connection increases, misbehaviour decreases. It is such a joy watching the children transform as a result of Special Time!

- **Reflective Listening** Healthy connections not only benefit the children, but also help adults understand children better and develop deeper empathy for them. The end result of feeling and showing empathy is that children feel understood. This feeling is crucial in helping children with any behaviour issues and wider social and emotional learning. If our goal is to bring up children who feel comfortable to talk to us about anything that troubles them, then we have to learn to listen. If we help children feel heard, we also help them drain the built up frustration that feeds the outbursts, attention seeking, aggression, anger and withdrawals. Special Time is a very powerful connection tool; however it is very time consuming and can only be done, on a regular basis, with a limited number of children. This is why we also use other ways of connecting that are more focused on allowing children to feel heard. Reflective listening is one of those tools. We like it for two reasons: it is highly effective in creating connection with children through the deepest form of empathy - helping the child feel understood and because it helps us get closer to understanding what drives children's behaviour. We use reflective listening on a daily basis, whenever a child shares a problem with us, whenever there is a
misunderstanding between children, or whenever we feel that there is something bothering a child. While using reflective listening, we focus on really listening - without hidden agendas, without evaluating, without judging, and thus creating a supportive and warm atmosphere. With more reluctant children or children who are struggling to express themselves verbally, we also use pictures, ‘feeling faces’ and similar tools to help them share their thoughts and feelings.

- **Steps for responding to behaviour issues**
  The steps for responding to behaviour issues are fundamental to our Positive Discipline-based approach.

  When a behaviour problem arises, the most vital thing for adults is not to be reactive and respond from our own heightened emotional state, but to stay calm and try to figure out why the observed behaviour makes sense at this particular moment. After this, if more than one child is involved, we use our intuition to figure out which one is more emotionally triggered (in other words, which child is finding it more difficult to control themselves and is more likely to explode). We then calmly approach children, go below their eye level, stay in physical contact with both of them and say to the less triggered child: “You are now going to hear something you won’t like or agree with but please, hold on and wait your turn.” You then encourage the more triggered child to describe their side of the story. When children are new to this approach, they can get confused and worried at this point. Some might even refuse to talk, some regress and use baby talk and some run away. This is all normal, especially during the ‘training period’. Children react like this when they do not feel emotionally safe to express own thoughts and feelings, and if they are used to being punished. Once they relax and realise that the adults are not looking to blame and shame, children become more open and happy to participate.

  After listening to the first child’s side of the story, we then use reflective listening) and repeat what children say using our own words. The purpose of this is to acknowledge their feelings, connect with them and make them feel listened to. This step is then repeated with the second child. Once both (or all) children have had a chance to share their feelings and versions of events, it is our job to then set the limit by re-establishing school rules. In practice, this sounds like this: “I can see that the problem started because you both wanted the same piece of scrap. You both became frustrated because neither of you wanted to compromise. Remind me what is our school rule about pushing? That’s right; in this school we use kind hands even when we feel frustrated.” After this we start problem solving with all children involved and agree on one solution to try: “We heard from all of you and we reminded ourselves of school rules, and we still have an unresolved problem: two children wanting the same piece of scrap. We’ve tried pushing. Did it work? What else can we try? How else can we solve this problem?”

- **Wheel of Choice**
  The wheel of choice is a visual reminder, created by children, that helps them with remembering that they don't have to be stuck in a situation they don't like, that they have options and that they don't always need adults to solve problems. It represents a practical application of the PD principles: focusing on solutions and offering limited choices. In most of our classrooms the wheel of choice is used to help children with anger management. However, in some of the classes, children use
the wheel of choice to help them with sitting nicely on the carpet and for solving conflicts.
For example, when children are experiencing a conflict or are feeling frustrated, we ask “Would it help you to find a solution on the Wheel of Choice?” Some of our Year 2 children are so used to using it now, that teachers don’t even need to talk anymore, they just hand out the Wheel of Choice and children sort themselves out. The wheel of choice boosts independence and self-regulation and it teaches children many life skills, including confidence, the ability to stand up for themselves, communication skills, problem solving. It directly appeals to children’s needs to feel belonging and significance and encourages healthy brain integration. It provides scaffolding in situations when children are struggling to even recognise own emotions, let alone find the right words to describe them and formulate solutions for problems.

4. Positive Discipline-based Approach and SEND
In the same way that the Positive Discipline approach encourages us to choose a tool appropriate for the child and the situation, it also encourages adaption of the tools to make them useful and appropriate for a child with special needs.

When supporting children with SEND the key is to recognise the innocent behaviours driven by a condition or disability and the misbehaviours driven by mistaken beliefs about belonging and significance.

Where SEND children present misbehaviours we determine which are behaviours related to a condition and which are socially motivated, so that we can respond appropriately. This can often be a bit of a puzzle because these misbehaviours present in the same way, despite having different causes at their root. For example, is a child who is often pushing other children seeking undue attention or does he have innocent Sensory Needs that are not being fulfilled in a positive way? Does the child who frequently makes noise on the carpet have an innocent tic or is she mistakenly believing ‘When I’m in control I belong. You can’t make me stop!’

Furthermore, if the adult reacts in a negative way by feeling annoyed, worried or challenged then an innocent behaviour associated with a condition can become socially motivated. When behaviours are misunderstood there is a danger that children with SEND will mistakenly believe that belonging and significance are achieved when they engage in behaviours associated with their particular condition.

Once we have determined the likely cause of the behaviour we can work out how to provide for the need. Whether or not we put extra provision in place for the child’s particular special need we will still be using Positive Discipline tools to train them to manage their own emotions and behaviour. Tools may need adapting and how we communicate them may need modifying but ultimately the aim is the same – we want to train and encourage all children to develop life-long skills to use in emotional and social situations.

5. Looked After and Previously Looked After children
Children who are, or have previously been in the care of social services will have experienced loss and are likely to have experienced early life trauma. At Benhall we recognise the long term impact of trauma and loss, the additional needs these children will have in school, and how their experiences may affect their behaviour. Often these children, who may have experienced multiple moves, have not developed a well-defined sense of belonging and significance.

Children may exhibit behaviours which come from a place of fear, stress, low self-esteem or dysregulation. The PD approach enables us to consider the distress behind the behaviour and help the child through difficult moments or situations. Once we have helped the child to return to a calm state we can help them to reflect and repair.

As with children with Special Educational Needs we try to work out the causes of distress, though we accept these cannot always be determined. If we can identify upsetting triggers then we can do our best to remove or ease them. Parents are a valuable source of knowledge in our quest for understanding. It may be that children feel they don’t belong and are not important and so have developed a mistaken belief that they can achieve belonging and significance through misbehaviour.

For all children strong relationships are vital in building trust, but children with attachment difficulties may take longer to form bonds with adults in school and are likely to need extra time and patience. Special time, for example, is an ideal tool to aid this bonding though it might need adapting if the child is reluctant to be singled out or unable to choose an activity.

We still have the aim to train children to be morally responsible but they may need lots of attention and nurturing before they are ready to learn. Similarly, a child who has lots of pent up anger inside, may need therapy to release that anger before they can learn to control it using such strategies as the wheel of choice.

Our key message is we won’t give up but will adjust and adapt to what works for the individual child. As with all children, Positive Discipline strategies still apply but may require even more understanding and sensitivity.

6. **School Rules**

We believe that children learn best in a supportive, safe and caring environment and that it is the responsibility of all staff, pupils, parents and governors to promote this. Every child is important and everyone has the right to feel safe at all times. We have 3 main principles which are: Ready, Respectful and Safe.

In practice this means:

- **Ready**: Ready for learning, ready to listen, ready to do our best etc.
- **Respectful**: Showing respect to themselves, to their peers, to adults, to their environment and everything that lives in it.
- **Safe**: Safe in their learning environment, safe with the people around them and safe in the activities in which they are taking part.

These rules are explained to our children when they start school and they are consistently reminded of them by all members of staff. Staff will ‘notice’ children when they follow our rules and will ‘notice and support’ children who are finding it difficult to follow the rules.
This consistent application ensures that children understand our high expectations and are supported in meeting them.

7. **Positive Handling**
At Benhall our staff are not trained in Team Teach positive handling and therefore all staff refrain from physically handing children. This policy determines that staff are to take reasonable action to minimise all risk in situations where a child might cause harm.

8. **Exclusions**
We believe that every effort should be taken to support individual children to ensure that exclusions are not necessary. However, as a final resort to extreme misbehaviour the result may be temporary or permanent exclusion. In accordance with the LA guidelines, pupils who display any of the following criteria, significantly or persistently, may be excluded:
- Physical aggression to staff/adults;
- Physical aggression to pupil/s;
- Verbal abuse to staff;
- Bullying/racism to other pupil/s;
- Refusal to accept rules/discipline;
- Possession of weapon/dangerous object;
- Theft;
- Alcohol related misdemeanours;
- Damage to property;
- Drug/solvent abuse;
- Sexually related incidents.

Of course, in an infant school, many of these behaviours will never be seen and in all cases exclusion would only be used as a very last resort. At Benhall we hope to avoid exclusion through the use of our Positive Discipline approach, appropriate support and early intervention, but where pupils do transgress the most serious rules, exclusion may be used. When the Headteacher makes the decision to exclude a pupil it is done in line with the ‘Gloucestershire Guide to Exclusions in School’ and the Governing Body is informed and involved in the process according to these guidelines.

9. **Bullying**
Whilst we recognise that bullying may occur from time to time in any school, through our Positive Discipline-based approach we aim to teach children empathy and improve emotional intelligence. This approach would inevitably equip children with the tools for dealing with unwanted behaviour, processing their feelings with regards to bullying or being bullied, understanding the mechanics of bullying and knowing the options for dealing with it.
All bullying incidents are recorded on CPOMS and reports generated and shared with governors.

10. **Racial Incidents**
All racial incidents, including racial comments or abuse, will be reported immediately to the Headteacher via CPOMS or verbally if the member of staff feels this is appropriate.
Such incidents will be regarded as extremely serious and recorded on CPOMS. A report can be generated in CPOMS as required by Gloucester County Council. The parents/carers of the perpetrator of any racial incident will be informed immediately, by telephone if possible. The parents/carers of the victim will also be contacted to explain what has happened and how it has been dealt with. School follows the county council guidelines and procedures for dealing with and reporting racist incidents in schools. Pupils must understand that any form of racism will not be tolerated in our school.

**Accessibility and Safeguarding Statement**

This policy is written with reference to our Safeguarding Policy, in particular the Child Protection section.

We will strive to ensure that the ethos of the school is such that everyone is equally valued and treated with respect.

Pupils will be provided with opportunities to experience, understand and value diversity. All pupils should have access to an appropriate education that gives them the opportunity to achieve their personal potential, whatever their abilities and needs might be. Benhall Infant School and Pre-School is committed to providing an outstanding safe learning environment that promotes the welfare and well-being of all children. We ensure that this policy considers those children and young people with additional medical needs such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy and allergies etc.