

Manor View Farm School

What the Judges Said

The use of emotional intelligence to replace a traditional behaviour approach we felt was innovative. A well evidenced entry.

Entry

Meadow View Farm School caters for 36 pupils. Each child has an EHCP with the primary needs being SEMH or Communication and Interaction. One third of our children are LAC or post-adoption. The school structure comprises of four 'mainstream' style classes that follow the National Curriculum alongside the outdoor opportunities of the farm and forest school with integral structured and incidental opportunities to develop social, emotional and mental health strategies. We have created a Bespoke Learning Provision (BLP) which was established to meet the needs of some children with very complex needs.

These children were unable to access the 'mainstream' learning environments successfully after a sustained period of time given to enable them to 'settle in'. The BLP's primary function is to help the children to learn the skills they need to manage their high levels of anxieties and enable them to begin to trust in the adults to help them to co-regulate. The school has a system for success rather than a traditional behaviour policy, a system that is built on high expectations and trust-where staff, children and their families work alongside each other to anticipate and prepare the children for day to day life; we recognise all elements of mental health and how they can impact on a person's success and remove all the pressures seen in standard systems of consequence and rewards and the benefits are outstanding. Meadow View Farm School has worked tirelessly to refine and develop a model that can be, and has been, adopted by mainstream schools, and the Success Model has been celebrated nationally and internationally.

This year, two national publications ran articles outlining how any school could make the leap and remove reward systems which are proven to impact on the mental health and wellbeing of all stake holders in schools by taking onboard the system we use. The importance of what we do has gathered international recognition with visits from professionals in education and healthcare from Australia and Turkey. We, as a school, support local state funded mainstream schools directly and indirectly and have ran whole school training; a week-long, highly-intensive school development

intervention; and we support children from a secondary school directly. The success of the system can be seen in the academic progress we make with our pupils.

In English, Maths and Science we make outstanding progress closing the considerable gap which some of our pupils arrive with as a result of long periods out of education. Our children not only make accelerated academic progress but learn to self regulate and manage many of the behaviours which led to them being excluded or being placed with MVFS in the first place. One headline figure in connection to this is the success of one of our current Year 6 pupils who in his first year at MVFS was involved in 46 interventions to manage his crisis behaviours. Over the four years this has reduced this and this year he has not required an intervention as a result of negative behaviour.

Case Study 1

Our journey to becoming an Attachment and Trauma informed school was recognised and shared nationally in a publication in NASEN magazine as detailed below.

Following the whole school implementation of Emotion Coaching two years ago, the well-being of staff members, pupils and their families have improved, “it is as if the staff and children feel more relaxed and the behaviour in the school has improved beyond recognition” reported one staff member.

The impact has been far reaching, not only has the use of physical interventions with pupils been reduced, but academic progress has improved and staff confidence has increased. Parents have reported that a less stressful family life has had far-reaching consequences for individual families. Ryan Kilby, notes simply “the children have been much happier, the challenge now is not how we manage behaviour but how we continue to increase progress and close the gap.”

Background

The Senior Leadership Team at Meadow View Farm School were keen to make a difference to the life and education of the children attending their school. Whilst they were following standard practices advocated for specialist SEMH settings e.g. consistency, rewards and sanctions, and were doing a “good enough” job in supporting their pupils, the school felt that they could be doing more to promote the social and emotional skills of their pupils: difficulties with these skills lay at the root of the barriers their pupils faced with learning.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT) attended an Attachment and Trauma training course. This course followed what has since been published as NICE Guidelines (2015) on Children's Attachment where it is advocated that all school staff receive training in:

- how attachment difficulties affect learning, education and social development
- understanding the consequences of maltreatment, including trauma
- how they can support children and young people with attachment difficulties.

Emotion Coaching was one of the specific interventions advocated by the training. Emotion Coaching derives from John Gottman's work with families in the USA and supports the relationship between children and key adults, with the goal of improving children's abilities to manage difficult feelings. It is now being developed for use in schools in the UK as a relational approach to promoting emotional regulation and positive behaviour.

Implementation

In-house training was delivered by the SLT. Initially staff were encouraged to focus upon Emotion Coaching one particular child. A variety of on-going support for staff was built into the implementation of the project: including SLT modelling Emotion Coaching and noticing when other staff members did so, group discussions and personal supervision.

Benefits for staff

Staff felt that the on-going support and training on Attachment, Trauma and Emotion Coaching was really important to developing their own ability to manage children's behaviour. The staff felt that they were "all working towards the same outcome and were a united team". Staff morale and feelings of effectiveness improved, and staff felt that following the introduction of Emotion Coaching they were "calmer", "more in control when a child was in "crisis" and "more confident in dealing with children". Staff absences in the year following the introduction of Emotion Coaching were noticeably fewer.

Benefits for Pupils

Emotion Coaching promotes positive relationships between staff members and pupils. This has allowed pupils to trust the staff members and from this trust, children were empowered to regulate their emotions.

Children in Meadow View Farm School became better able to understand their emotions, started to verbalise their feelings through speech rather than actions,

calmed much quicker and started to tackle problems positively. One pupil reflected upon what happened for him when a staff member used Emotion Coaching with him: the adult “helps me think about things, helps me calm, helps me understand why I am feeling the way I am”. Within one term of using Emotion Coaching the number of instances of physical interventions used by staff reduced by 49%. This lower level has become the new norm.

As a result of being emotionally regulated more often and therefore emotionally ready to learn in the classroom, pupil’s rate of academic progress has accelerated. In the two years following the introduction of Emotion Coaching, average pupil progress in Reading Attainment has increased 110% compared to that expected by an average pupil in a mainstream school; progress in Numeracy was 67% higher than that expected. Even Writing progress, which is often notoriously difficult for children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, saw an average increase of 27% compared to that expected for non-statemented pupils in a mainstream school. Children are aware that after being helped to regulate their emotions they are able “to go back to work”. One pupil said that he was able to do “loads of things....writing, walking and lessons – Science and Maths. I’m really good at Maths now.” See chart 1 for details of children’s academic progress.

Benefits for families

Constant calls from mainstream schools asking parents to collect their children had previously had a significant impact on family life. For some families, Meadow View Farm School’s no exclusion policy and the staff’s ability to understand and deal with behaviours in the moment can be quite life-changing; their children start to develop their ability to understand and regulate their emotions, and school staff feel confident and secure in their ability to support the children. For some families the fact that their child was able to remain in school all day was significant. One father recounted that since his child began attending Meadow View Farm School his business was saved as he didn’t need to keep coming to school to collect his son in the middle of a day because of an ‘incident’.

A mother also feels that life has changed: the lack of phone calls from school during the day means that she been able to start a college course and will soon have a new qualification.

Families also notice that life at home is different. “Life was just so different as to how it is now. He didn’t sleep at night and was always on the go – we both couldn’t function”. A mother has noticed the difference in her son’s ability to regulate his emotions “although he does get frustrated and still shouts he never now physically attacks me when it used to be a daily occurrence.....I am no longer concerned that

anyone will get seriously hurt [in altercations with siblings]”. In this family “we can now play quite complicated games as a family and he doesn’t even mind when he doesn’t win”.

The OFSTED inspection reported that “a major strength of the school is in the understanding shown by staff about the conditions affecting individual pupils and the continuous support and sensitive encouragement for pupils to self-regulate behaviour.” Children at Meadow View Farm School are being supported to master their emotions and as a result are succeeding in school and life.

Comments from a parent of a Warwickshire child May 2018

“Prior to this, L was attending a mainstream school setting but had not been in an actual classroom setting for several months and required 2 to 1 support in a room with a lock as he was a flight risk. He displayed daily physical and controlling behaviour which resulted in him being excluded on a number of occasions and also placed on significantly reduced days. This all played into the downfall of his emotional wellbeing.

L’s needs are primarily emotional, and he does not have any academic difficulties in that he is an intelligent and capable child.

L has had the benefit of a psychologist identifying that he has significant attachment difficulties and sensory processing difficulties and at that time his emotional development had regressed to that of a 2 year old because of the significant anxiety he was experiencing in a classroom setting. L has attended play therapy, occupational therapy and additionally we have the ability of the PASF resource as L is adopted.

L requires a strict routine, consistency and struggles with any form of transition. His behaviour when he perceives a risk / threat to himself can escalate quite rapidly and he does require significant support.

As parents, my husband and I were unable to see a way through so far as a school setting was concerned for since the end of reception through to the January of Year 2, when matters had escalated to such an extent that L was unable to cope at all in school.

We successfully applied for an EHCP for L. The Local Authority Liaison put me in touch with MVFS and we arranged a visit and met with Ryan (Head) and Katie

(Deputy Head). It was almost instantaneous in terms of their ability (having had sight of relevant reports and assessments in respect of L) to put us at ease and speak to what L needed in order to be successful in a classroom setting and the ability of MVFS to meet those needs. Further they were able to assure us of his emotional wellbeing and addressing those concerns and working with L to develop coping strategies in terms of anxiety or indeed strategies to self-regulate in times of distress/ crisis.

This all sounds very clinical, but our son was in a really negative place in the run up to his transition to MVFS and it was having a profound effect on us all.

The sea change in L has been absolutely tremendous. He is accessing and more significantly loving learning and being in a classroom setting. There is a warm and welcoming staff at MVFS from the reception through to Jane the dinner lady.

There is a holistic approach throughout the school which promotes not only the children but supports the family as a unit if there are any issues which do arise. L has struggled on occasion emotionally at school and at home for one reason or another and this is accompanied by physical and verbal outbursts which he will on these occasions display challenging behaviour which sometimes contain no warning or explanation as to their trigger.

However, Ryan and his team are on top of it immediately and they foster a really strong and positive home school link where consistency is key, which is vital for L. We are all on the same page. L does not feel the deep shame that he used to feel in his old classroom setting which enables him, with the support of the staff, to quickly repair and work through any shame and lack of confidence he feels after such incidents.

L has developed friends and come from a place where he trusted nobody but himself to keep himself safe. The school have worked really hard on this and the outcome has been absolutely wonderful. L is happy and confident and funny and settled in an educational environment, a prospect which seemed completely out of reach for us some 15 months ago. As parents, we were exhausted and very distressed about the complete lack of hope so far as L attending a school setting. MVFS has given us the ability to feel safe in the knowledge that between 9 and 3 pm each day L is happy and safe.

Ryan and Katie and all of the teaching and support staff are tireless in their efforts for the children to achieve their very best. I have seen first-hand the lengths they go to in what can be challenging circumstances.

I also know that as parents, Stuart and I have very much landed on our feet with MVFS. The farm setting, the various additional activities, the classroom setting, the presence of Meadow (the school dog), these all add to the success of the school and enable, in my view the children to succeed. They have set term targets so far as behaviours are concerned which L has responded to really well, and the consequence has been that he recognises and challenges himself to work on these targets even outside of the school setting.

Academically L is thriving and is where he should be. He is learning through doing and is enjoying it. He is challenged on a daily basis but given the support to enable him to step up to those challenges.

MVFS gave us our son back and also gave us hope for his future and that he would be able to achieve to his ability and further that he can just be accepted and cherished despite the difficulties that can arise.

The positive impact of MVFS has had a domino effect, enabling him to succeed at external activities because of the increased acceptance of his own self-worth and confidence. He successfully attends a number of external activities.

I should add they also listen to what we have to say and constantly strive to work together through any issues.

I can honestly say I do not know how we would have coped if L was not at MVFS. I am incredibly grateful to them all. There should be more schools out there like it.”

Case Study 3

James (name changed for purpose of anonymity) joined Meadow View Farm School when he was in Year 2. He has a diagnosis of attachment disorder and ADHD. James has experienced early trauma when his mum was diagnosed with cancer and after a year of intense treatment, died. He then experienced a sustained period of instability- travelling to numerous different locations around the country with his father- attending up to 5 different schools before joining Meadow View Farm School. He now resides with his grandmother in kinship care. She is also diagnosed with a mental illness.

James' ADHD and impulsivity plus learnt behaviours meant that his Grandmother found it increasingly challenging to keep him safe. He would abscond and be verbally and physically aggressive. He is subject to a Child Protection Plan to support his grandmother with keeping him safe and meeting his needs long-term.

James was unable to access any medical appointments due to his behaviour during appointments; as James had been verbally and physically aggressive towards health professionals, they had refused to see him. This meant that James' ADHD symptoms could not be treated in the way professionals thought they needed to.

Experienced school staff supported James and his Grandmother at future appointments in order to manage his behaviours resulting in medical staff working with him.

James' unsafe behaviours impacted on Grandmother's mental health, and her deteriorating mental health impacted on his insecurity and need to display controlling behaviours.

The impact of facilitating these positive CAMHs meetings (and other medical appointments) has had an astounding impact on James' progress- emotionally, socially and academically.

He is now able to access his class of 8 children and 4 adults (with gently decreasing 1:1 adult support), he regulates his emotions and rationalises his responses in a calmer and safer way. Grandmother's mental health and anxieties around James' disruptive behaviours have decreased significantly, therefore creating a positive cycle of responses. Everyone around James can see first-hand the progress he is making and that there is no longer the need for him to remain on the Child Protection Plan.

The commitment towards developing the whole child and meeting all of his needs, within and outside of school, have paid dividends towards his future outcomes.

Evidence of National recognition of the work we are doing can be seen below in an article that was published in SecED magazine and Headteacher Update.

After years of battling with and reshaping behaviour systems and reward charts, I believe I am in a position to say that traditional behaviour systems are limiting and make the assumption that all young people can conform and follow the same systems and achieve the same outcomes as their peers. And with this in mind I am confident to say that I believe the negatives outweigh the positives for the majority of young people.

As a headteacher in a independent specialist provision for children with social, emotional and mental health needs, I regularly see the fallout and result of pupils not having the ability, capacity and support to reach unachievable requirements in what are very unrealistic behaviour systems. What does this fallout look like? Exclusions, low self-esteem, trauma and attachment issues. What do we do about this? We have a system for success that looks at nurturing, supporting and developing independence and self-regulation, all of which go to better the life chances of the children we work with. However, sanctions and rewards continue to be seen as the answer to improving and ensuring positive behaviour in schools.

The advice from the Department for Education (DfE) in January 2016 states that schools should have sanctions and rewards: “Schools should have in place a range of options and rewards to reinforce and praise good behaviour, and clear sanctions for those who do not comply with the school’s behaviour policy.” (Behaviour and Discipline in Schools: Advice for headteachers and school staff, DfE, January 2016). But do such systems really ensure that we are developing well-rounded, intrinsically driven individuals whose life chances have been improved as a result of such interventions – for example star of the week, rain clouds and sunshine charts and table points?

Personally I can make reference to my experience as a parent: my daughter’s anxieties around rewards such as “Star of the Week” outweigh the positives and therefore I struggle to see the value in persistent use. So what should schools be doing to eradicate the harm that is caused by the outdated requirements to have sanctions and rewards? Heads need to be brave and think about the drivers for the behaviours which their systems are trying to eradicate. My pet hate is the sunshine and rain cloud example, often found in the early phases of education.

If you are a sunshine child, where do you go next? What motivation is there for you to behave other than the intrinsic motivation that I would guess nine out of 10 such children had long before the first ray of light or drop of rain was placed on the behaviour display board?

Our school – Meadow View Farm School – has worked hard to create a system that is forward-thinking and recognises that all behaviours are driven by emotions. With this in mind the school has a behaviour system that has high expectations, anticipates and prepares the children and focuses on the children as individuals (See Image) Consequences and rewards are replaced with high expectations and outcomes to actions. We strive to develop emotional intelligence and intrinsically motivated individuals who will achieve the best possible outcomes in life.

The school tries to create an environment that is proactive rather than reactive and the staff work tirelessly to ensure moments of crisis are reduced by using our bespoke system to ensure success. The success system in action is relentless and exhausting but the outcomes for all stakeholders can be life-changing. The three key elements are constantly revolving with no one area taking permanent prevalence, they just move with fluidity and flexibility, working to meet the requirements of the pupils and staff at any given time. Our work has been supported by, among others, the Attachment Research Community (ARC) and Emotion Coaching UK.

High Expectations

The basis of everything relies on high expectations and this reduces the need for school rules. Why do we have high expectations rather than rules? Rules are necessary in games, but in relationships they are counterproductive. Dr William Glasser, the developer of Choice Theory, states: "Traditional education often produces problems that stem from poorly conceived and poorly administered rules." Rules foster obedience rather than intrinsic motivation, and can not always be applied inclusively.

A child with Tourette Syndrome may shout out in class as their tics are heightened by the pressure not to do so, the same theory applies to a child with social, emotional and mental health needs. The stress of conforming to unrealistic rules and expectations will often heighten and increase the behaviours the "rules" have been applied to eradicate. High expectations if managed appropriately can be as powerful and bring about greater success than the strict list of rules that many schools feel forced to adopt. Our system around high expectations enables transferability between home and school – families can adopt the system and use this to improve home life with great success. When applied successfully the consistency between home and school reduces stress/anxiety and leads to improved outcomes for all. The high expectations are clear, explained and future-focused. They are underpinned by a vision of creating well-rounded and regulated individuals who have the greatest chance of success in society.

Preparation and anticipation

This element of the success model is exhausting and requires 100 per cent investment by staff and senior leaders. Everyone needs to ensure staff wellbeing and resilience is considered and supported to gain the best outcomes for all. Stress is natural and when regulated can be good for us, it can inspire us and bring out the best in us. The issue comes with unregulated stress – this can be toxic and lead to life-long neurological damage.

We reduce the risk of unregulated stress caused by the pressures of the education system by knowing our children so well that we are able to redirect their thinking, label their emotions and regulate their responses. If we anticipate difficulties, crises and triggers for negative behaviours then we can prepare and put systems in place to reduce the impact.

Attachment and trauma awareness

This is where we use emotion coaching and a consistent script around the school. The script labels the emotions, it validates them, limits the negative behaviours associated with them and looks for alternatives. One thing that is imperative is that the emotions are not dismissed. To know how a child is feeling we need to have relationships that are trusting, nurturing and respectful. Staff ensure that they learn about the children we work with, that they know what life is like for them, and this enables us to be there for them, no matter what: "Show them you care, always be there." For many of our children staff act as a sea defence in a coastal storm. Staff brace themselves for what is thrown at them knowing that in time things will settle. The children need to feel valued, develop a sense of worth, confidence and self-esteem. Only when they have this can they begin to think about self-regulation and developing a repertoire of approaches to deal with the challenges life will throw at them.

It is a journey

If a child struggles with writing, as professionals we differentiate the work to ensure their success. So why are we reluctant to make such adjustments to avoid negative behaviours? Knowing what we know about children who have had challenging early life experiences leading to decision-making pathways being damaged, we need to be equipped to support and develop the life-long skills of emotional intelligence and self-regulation. Leaders need to embrace the change within their schools and empower their staff to think about more than ensuring conformity and think about the mental health of all the young people we work with. What inspires one can excite another, what is a positive for one person can be a negative for the next. By preparing and anticipating and knowing the whole child we are much more equipped to move children forward in every way possible and better their futures.