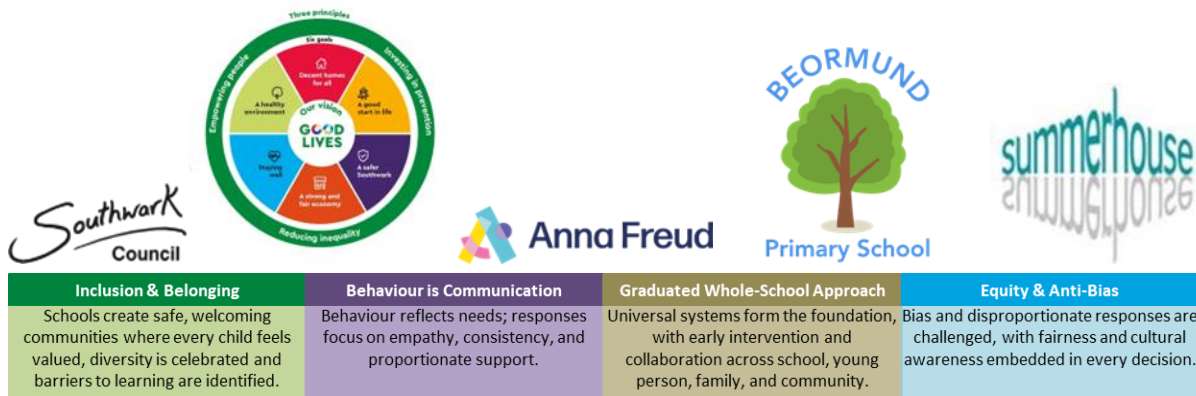




<p>Inclusion & Belonging</p> <p>Schools create safe, welcoming communities where every child feels valued, diversity is celebrated and barriers to learning are identified.</p>	<p>Behaviour is Communication</p> <p>Behaviour reflects needs; responses focus on empathy, consistency, and proportionate support.</p>	<p>Graduated Whole-School Approach</p> <p>Universal systems form the foundation, with early intervention and collaboration across school, young person, family, and community.</p>	<p>Equity & Anti-Bias</p> <p>Bias and disproportionate responses are challenged, with fairness and cultural awareness embedded in every decision.</p>
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Southwark Primary Behaviour Intervention Toolkit

Last updated 08/05/2026



Please use the following link, if you would like to access a website version of this toolkit:

[Southwark Primary Behaviour Intervention Toolkit | Southwark Schools](#)

1. Context

About Southwark’s Primary Behaviour Strategy Task Force contribution to the toolkit

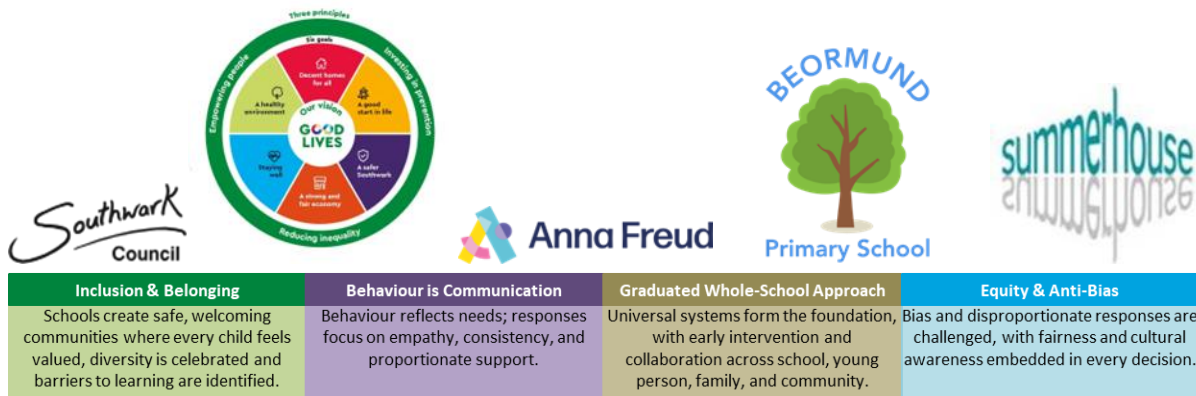
This toolkit was developed through the collective expertise of Southwark’s Primary Behaviour Strategy Task Force, which included senior leaders, SENCOs, teachers, speech and language therapists, local authority advisers, and educational psychologists. The idea for the toolkit emerged in response to head teachers identifying the need for practical support in working with pupils presenting behaviours that challenge.

The aim was to design a resource that would allow school staff to assess a child’s level of need and identify the most appropriate provision or intervention. To achieve this, the Task Force pooled their professional knowledge and classroom experience to compile a comprehensive list of strategies and resources proven to be effective in practice. The result is a toolkit rooted in real-world expertise, that brings together current research, evidence-informed practice and learning from schools already using relational approaches to behaviour. It brings together current research, evidence-informed practice and learning from schools already using relational approaches to behaviour.

About Anna Freud’s¹ contribution

Anna Freud is a world-leading mental health charity for children and families. They bring together research, clinical expertise and direct work with children, young people and their parents and carers. For more than 70 years, they have been developing and delivering pioneering mental health care, and today they combine leading science with frontline practice to create lasting change.

¹ Anna Freud. (n.d.). About us. Available at: <https://www.annafreud.org/about/>



Guided by a vision of a world where all children and young people can achieve their full potential, their mission is to close the gap in wellbeing and mental health. They do this by advancing, translating, delivering and sharing the best science and practice with everyone who impacts the lives of children and families.

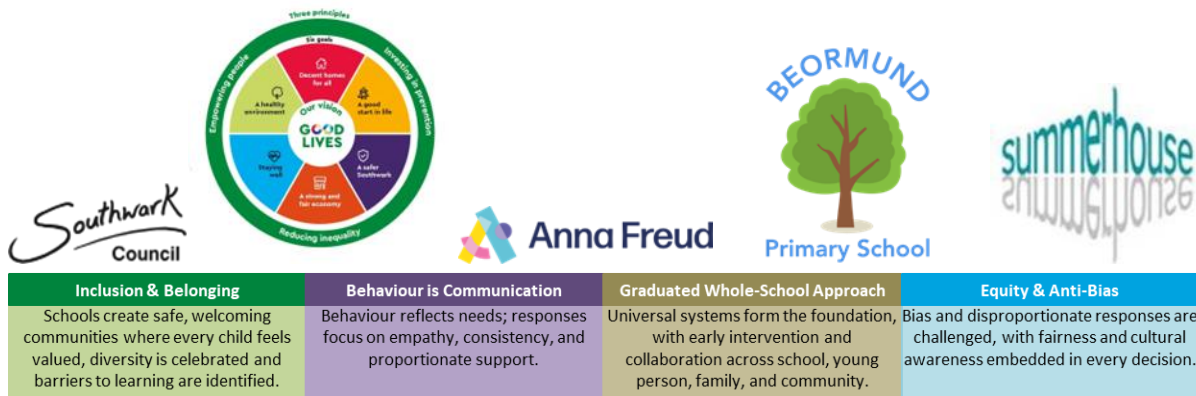
Anna Freud has been involved throughout the development and finalising phases of the toolkit, supporting the overall structure, content development and integration of evidence-informed approaches. Their input has helped guide decision-making to ensure that, where possible, resources and strategies have been selected based on their relevance to school settings and the strength of the available evidence.

In addition to the core content developed by Anna Freud, this toolkit highlights a variety of external programmes, interventions and organisations that schools may find helpful. These resources are provided for reference only. Anna Freud does not formally endorse or quality assure external content or providers and cannot accept responsibility or liability for their use or effectiveness.

While every effort has been made to highlight approaches with a strong or emerging evidence base, Anna Freud has not independently tested or evaluated the effectiveness of the external programmes listed. Schools are encouraged to use their professional judgement when exploring these materials and to consider what aligns best with their context, priorities and the needs of their pupils.

In this section:

- 1a. [Introduction](#)
- 1b. [Our ethos and principles](#)
- 1c. [How to use the toolkit](#)



1a. Introduction

Southwark’s Vision 2030 is for everyone to live a good life as part of a strong community. This guides Southwark’s behaviour and wellbeing strategy, which focuses on inclusion in schools and the importance of meeting children’s emotional as well as learning needs.

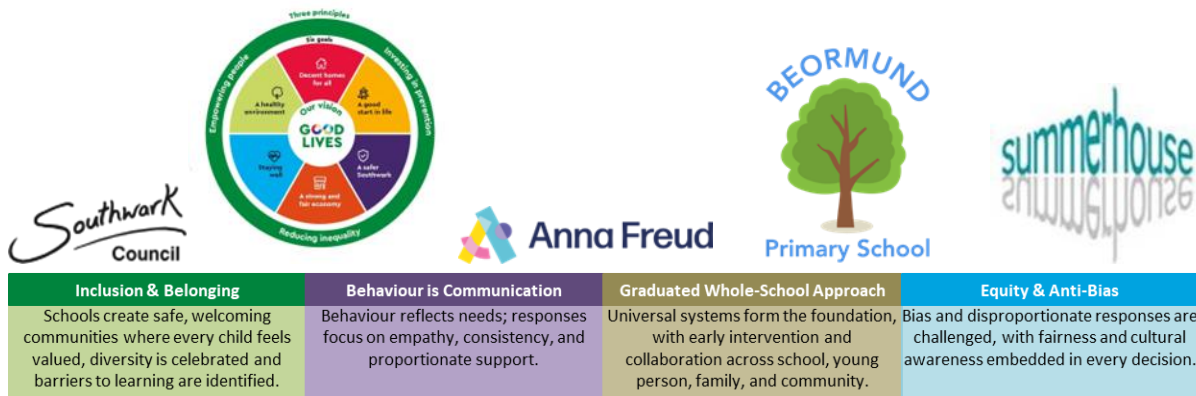
Recent national reports highlight rising concerns about children’s wellbeing and behaviour in schools, with more pupils needing targeted support. Local data in Southwark reflects similar patterns, showing increased demand for inclusive, preventative approaches.

The Primary Behaviour Intervention Toolkit was created in response to requests from Southwark’s primary head teachers, through the Primary Behaviour Strategy Task Force. They identified the need for a clear and practical resource to help staff put in place a graduated response for pupils whose behaviour gives cause for concern. The aim was to support school staff in assessing needs and choosing the right provision or intervention for each child.

This toolkit has been developed collaboratively between Southwark Local Authority and key partners, reflecting a shared strategic priority to support children’s wellbeing and inclusion. It is primarily focused on supporting primary school aged children, recognising the importance of early intervention and consistent approaches across settings.

While many behaviours that challenge² can be addressed through good quality teaching, schools also wanted support to understand the wider factors that influence behaviour. The toolkit therefore gives an overview of these factors, recognising behaviour as a form of communication shaped by experience, need, and context. It

²‘Challenging behaviour’ is being debated in education currently. Some professionals argue that the term stigmatizes pupils by labelling their behaviour, and therefore, them, as problematic. It also may imply that the behaviour is intentionally difficult, which is often not the case, particularly if students have additional (unknown/unassessed/unmet) needs. ‘Behaviours of concern’ is an alternative, as it’s proponents feel it encourages a problem solving, supportive approach, rather than punitive. The phrase shifts the focus from the behaviour/student being challenge, to it being a cause for attention and support.



is designed to help the whole school community look beneath the behaviour and use practical, evidence-based strategies at both whole-school and individual levels.

The toolkit is organised around the graduated response, with guidance across three tiers of support: universal, targeted, and specialist. It also recognises that children’s needs may not follow these stages in order, and staff may sometimes need to go directly to the type of support most relevant at the time.

By bringing together a wide range of tools, strategies, and resources, the toolkit aims to promote positive behaviour, emotional wellbeing, and a sense of belonging. It is an online, accessible resource that offers clarity and flexibility for staff, helping them provide effective, tailored support. It also includes links to further reading and external resources for professional learning.

1b. Ethos and Principles

This toolkit reflects Southwark Council’s commitment to inclusion, belonging and early support. We start from the principle that behaviour does not happen in a vacuum: it is shaped by relationships, environments and experiences, both inside and outside of school. What adults see in the classroom is not simply a reflection of the child alone, but of the wider contexts around them that we need to understand if we are to respond effectively.

The graduated pathway described below is designed to strengthen whole-school systems first, because we know that universal, environmental approaches are the foundations of good practice. This is not a set of steps to work through in order to access funding or external provision, but a framework to help schools reflect, plan and act in proportionate, preventative ways.

In Southwark we believe that all behaviour serves a purpose, often as a form of communication. Our task is to work together to uncover what lies beneath and to respond in ways that protect children’s wellbeing, nurture relationships and create positive conditions for learning. Supporting behaviour is therefore a collective responsibility, grounded in the ethos of our schools and the wider community.

Inclusion & Belonging Schools create safe, welcoming communities where every child feels valued, diversity is celebrated and barriers to learning are identified.	Behaviour is Communication Behaviour reflects needs; responses focus on empathy, consistency, and proportionate support.	Graduated Whole-School Approach Universal systems form the foundation, with early intervention and collaboration across school, young person, family, and community.	Equity & Anti-Bias Bias and disproportionate responses are challenged, with fairness and cultural awareness embedded in every decision.
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Useful links:

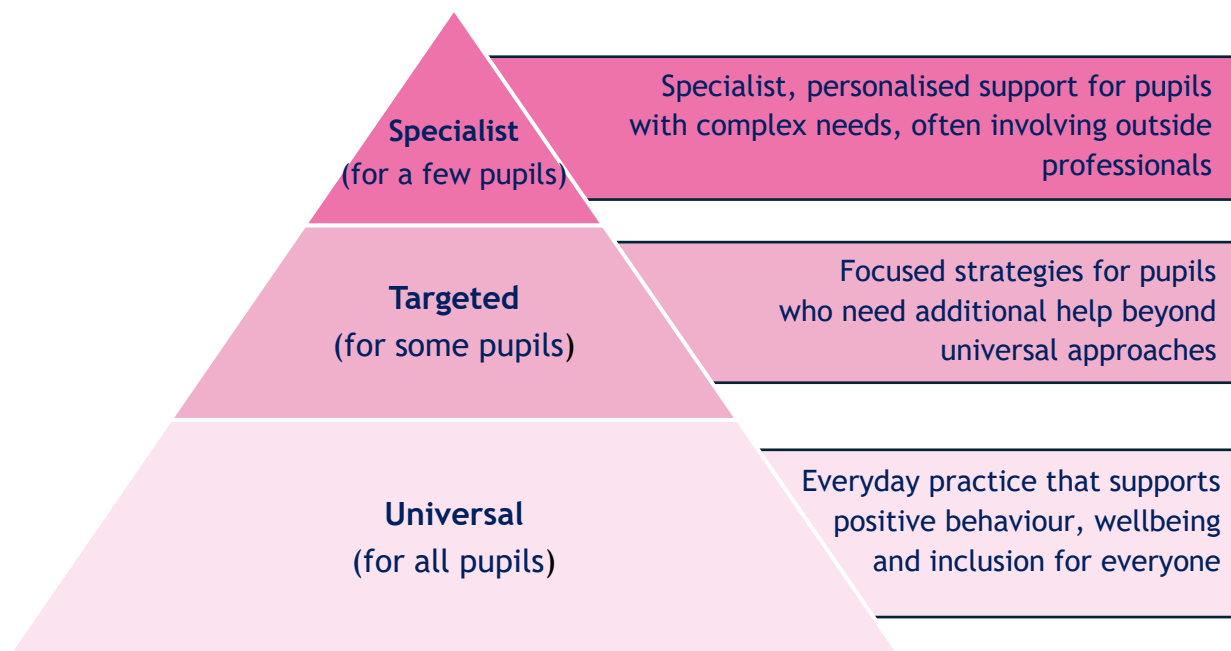
- [Southwark Council Delivery Plan 2022-2026](#)
- [Southwark’s Education Inclusion Handbook](#)
- [Southwark Inclusion Charter 2021 \(launched July 2022\)](#)
- [Southwark’s Neglect Strategy](#)

1c. How to use the toolkit

Developed in line with Southwark’s broader strategic priorities for children and young people, this toolkit strengthens local efforts to create inclusive environments that nurture emotional wellbeing and encourage positive behaviour. This toolkit is built around a graduated, approach to behaviour support, referred to in this toolkit as the behaviour support pathway. It draws on the SEND Code of Practice¹ which recommends the ‘Assess, Plan, Do, Review’ cycle as the framework for identifying needs, planning provision, delivering support and reviewing progress. Each tier builds on the one before it, ensuring pupils receive the right support at the right time.

The pathway begins with universal strategies, which are the consistent whole-school practices used with every pupil. These are the foundations: the routines, relationships and expectations that create a safe and positive environment for learning. ‘High-quality teaching, differentiated for individual pupils, is the first step in responding to pupils who have or may have SEN. Additional intervention and support cannot compensate for a lack of good quality teaching.’¹

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In some cases, targeted and specialist support will run alongside each other, so pupils benefit from both day-to-day adjustments in class and more individualised help. Where pupils are taken out of the classroom for interventions, these should be closely aligned with and reinforce the learning that takes place in class.

‘Both targeted interventions and universal approaches have positive overall effects. Schools should consider the appropriate combination of behaviour approaches to reduce overall disruption and provide tailored support where required’²

In most situations, following the graduated approach will be the most effective and sustainable way forward. However, there are scenarios where you might need to act outside the normal graduated order, usually in cases of immediate risk, safeguarding concerns or urgent needs.

For example:



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- If a pupil’s behaviour presents a serious and immediate risk to their safety or the safety of others, the priority is to act quickly to make everyone safe. That may mean moving straight to specialist assessment or crisis intervention.
- If a safeguarding concern emerges, schools must follow statutory safeguarding procedures immediately, regardless of where the pupil currently sits in the pathway.
- If a pupil arrives with an already-identified complex need (for example, an Education, Health and Care Plan requiring specialist provision). In these situations, universal and targeted work will still happen, but the starting point for support may need to be higher up the pathway.

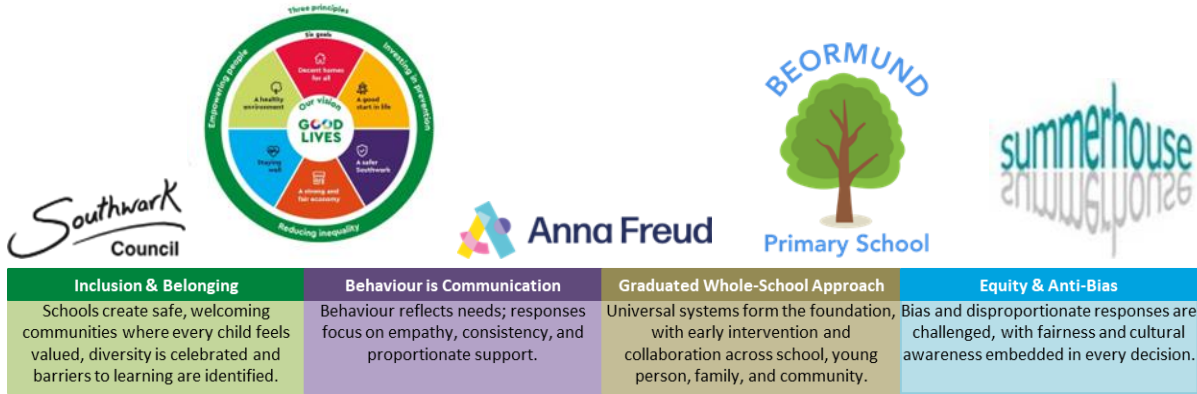
The example below shows how the Assess, Plan, Do, Review process can be applied to behaviour in your setting:

	What this means in practice	Where to look in the toolkit
Assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Observe behaviour in different contexts (class, playground, transitions) <input type="checkbox"/> Identify when, where, with whom and what triggers behaviours. <input type="checkbox"/> Gather views from the pupil, family and staff. <input type="checkbox"/> Review behaviour logs, safeguarding, attendance and attainment data. <input type="checkbox"/> Use tools to baseline and track progress. <input type="checkbox"/> Audit staff skills/confidence in behaviour management. <input type="checkbox"/> Involve SENCO in initial assessment and ensure alignment with SEN Support/EHCP if relevant. 	<p>Section 2</p> <p>Section 3a</p> <p>Section 3b</p>



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Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Agree clear, realistic behaviour goals with the pupil and family. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify strengths and protective factors to build on. <input type="checkbox"/> Decide on universal vs. targeted approaches. <input type="checkbox"/> Create/adjust an individual behaviour plan if needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure expectations align with school behaviour (relationship) policy. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify and record any reasonable adjustments required under the Equality Act and share these with the whole staff team <input type="checkbox"/> Identify available supports (e.g. mentors, nurture groups). <input type="checkbox"/> Involve relevant professionals if additional needs are suspected 	<p>Section 4</p> <p>Section 5a</p>
Do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Implement agreed universal strategies consistently (routines, safe spaces, positive reinforcement). <input type="checkbox"/> Use de-escalation and restorative approaches after incidents. <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver targeted support where needed <input type="checkbox"/> Record and monitor incidents to spot changes or progress. 	<p>Section 4b-f</p> <p>Section 5b-c</p> <p>Section 6</p>
Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Review progress against agreed goals regularly. <input type="checkbox"/> Check impact using observation, pupil/family feedback and behaviour data. <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate improvements and share successes. <input type="checkbox"/> Adapt strategies if progress is limited. <input type="checkbox"/> Step up to targeted or specialist support (e.g. CAMHS, MHST, Ed Psych) if difficulties persist or risks escalate. 	<p>Section 3</p> <p>Section 4-6</p>



Useful links:

- [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK](#)
- [Southwark LA SEND Guidance](#)
- [Education, Health and Care Plan | Southwark Local Offer](#)
- [Southwark Council Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\) Strategy 2022-2025](#)
- [Southwark LA SEND Guidance 2024/2025](#)

2. Understanding behaviour

[2a. What do we mean by behaviours that challenge?](#)

[2b. The interconnected nature of behaviour](#)

[2c. Behaviour in the Early Years](#)

[2d. Social, emotional and mental health \(SEMH\) needs](#)

[2e. Understanding adversity and trauma](#)

[2f. What is trauma-informed practice?](#)

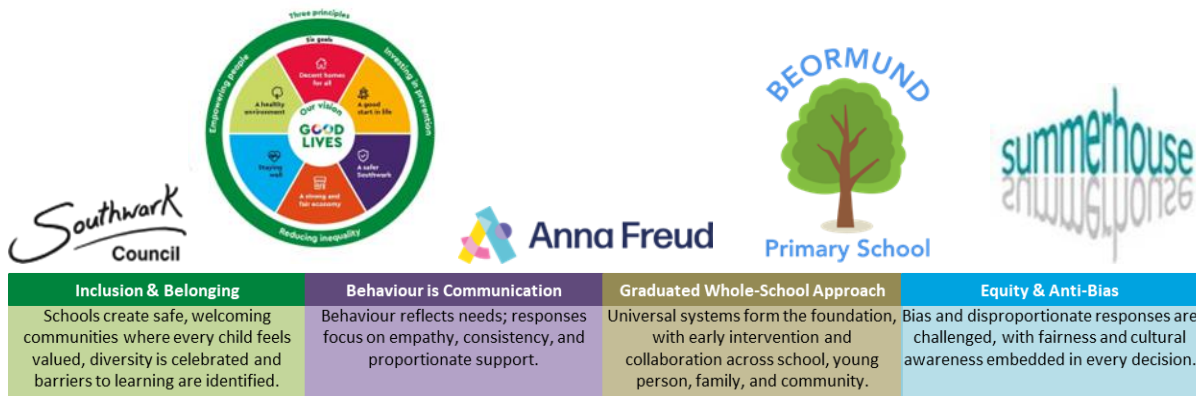
[2g. Bereavement](#)

[2h. Relationships and attachment](#)

[2i. Culture, race and bias in perceptions of behaviour](#)

2a. What do we mean by behaviours that challenge?

Most children will display behaviours that challenge at times. Feeling angry, upset, stressed or overwhelmed is part of growing up and learning to manage those



feelings takes time. As they develop, children and young people often express big emotions through their behaviour. For younger children, this might look like hitting, shouting or having a tantrum. For teenagers, it may involve arguing, withdrawing or pushing boundaries as they seek more independence.

These behaviours are a normal part of emotional development. However, in some cases, these can become more frequent, more intense or harder to support. It may begin to affect a pupil’s wellbeing, disrupt their learning, strain relationships or have an impact on others in school or at home.

It’s important to recognise that not all behaviour that is difficult to manage is intentionally defiant or ‘bad’. Those behaviours are often a form of communication signalling unmet needs, distress or difficulty in managing emotions. Many pupils who show signs of distress through behaviour may be struggling with anxiety, trauma, communication needs or other factors beyond their control. That’s why it’s important to focus on understanding the behaviour, rather than labelling the pupil.

Taking time to explore what might be driving the behaviour and responding with consistency, empathy and the right support, helps pupils feel understood and increases the likelihood of positive change over time.

2b. The interconnected nature of behaviour

For some young people, behaviour reflects a mix of overlapping influences: the impact of trauma, complex social scripts or needs that are recognised but do not meet the threshold for clinical intervention. This group represents a significant proportion of pupils in most schools. Some examples of what this might look like include:

- a pupil with recognised sensory processing difficulties who has also experienced increased anxiety since the pandemic
- a pupil with recognised social communication difficulties who is also navigating recent bereavement

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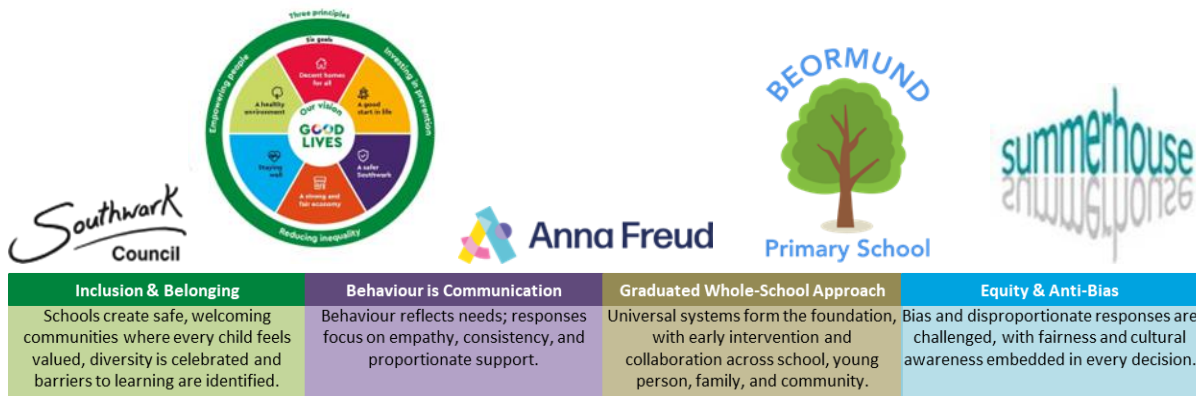
- a child with identified speech and language needs who has also experienced instability linked to temporary housing
- a pupil with suspected autism who is also adjusting after displacement and resettlement in a new country
- a child with dyslexia who is also coping with the emotional impact of domestic conflict at home
- a child on the SEN register for SEMH who has also experienced early trauma and adoption

Because these influences are interconnected, staff may see behaviour that is persistent, complex and not easily resolved through classroom strategies alone. Recognising this helps schools to plan proportionate support rather than waiting for behaviour to escalate into crisis.

2c. Behaviour in the Early Years

Children’s development between birth and age five does not follow a simple, linear path. While there are broad developmental milestones from birth into the early years, no two children move through them in the same way. As outlined in the Department for Education’s *Development Matters* guidance, this period is best understood through ‘broad ages and stages’ rather than fixed timelines, recognising that young children’s learning is rarely ‘neat and orderly.’ Growth over these years is often a series of shifts and changes, with periods of rapid progress, pauses in development and occasional regressions.

When looking at behaviour, it helps to consider where a child is within these developmental phases. Skills such as social interaction, managing emotions, language and physical coordination do not all develop at the same pace. A child might be advanced in one area but still catching up in another, for example, a four-year-old might have the physical abilities you would expect for their age but the language skills of a younger child, which could affect how they show



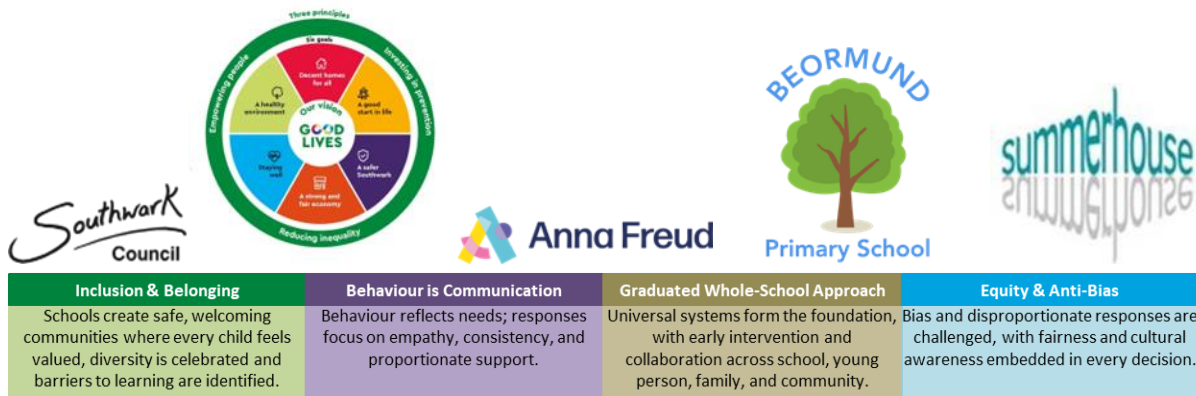
frustration.

Useful links:

- [Delivering the EYFS | Southwark Schools](#)
- [Department for Education: Early Years Foundation Stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#)
- [Education Endowment Foundation: Personal, Social and Emotional development in the Early Years](#)
Approaches and practices to support personal, social and emotional development in the early years.
- [Department for Education: Development Matters](#)
Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage.
- [Anna Freud: PSED for Early Years](#)
Guidance and activities to help early years staff support young children's personal, social and emotional development and wellbeing.
- [Specialist Autism Support Service B&NE](#)
Practical strategies to help early years settings create inclusive, autism-friendly environment.
- [Department for Education: Mental Health for Early Years Children](#)
Information on how to support babies and young children with their mental health.

2d. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs

Children and young people can face a wide range of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, often shaped by a range of interconnecting factors. These might include experiences at home and in school, relationships with peers and adults, unmet learning needs or wider social and economic pressures. These influences can affect how pupils feel about themselves, how they relate to others and how they cope with the demands of school life. Behaviour is often one of the main ways that children and young people express these needs.



SEMH needs can range from short-term difficulties linked to a specific challenge, such as moving school or changes at home, through to longer-term needs connected to trauma, adversity or unmet learning needs. For some, this may look like becoming quiet, withdrawn or losing interest in activities they previously enjoyed - patterns that can sometimes be missed in busy classrooms. Others may show their distress through behaviour that feels disruptive in the classroom or that may come across as challenging or unsafe. In both cases, these behaviours are not deliberate; they are ways children and young people communicate that something is difficult for them.

‘There is demand on schools to fill the gaps in provision for pupil mental health and wellbeing. Add to this the dwindling school budgets and universal service cuts, coupled with the demand to show positive outcomes in pupil attainment - there is no wonder that schools feel overwhelmed by the growing need for pupil SEMH support in education.’³

Although the pressure on schools is very real, leaders and staff are not expected to respond alone. What can make a difference is stepping back to consider the wider picture around a child or young person’s behaviour and using this understanding to shape proportionate and joined-up support.

As part of this, it is important to explore cultural considerations. Intersectionality and the diverse experiences pupils bring can shape how they feel in school and how their behaviour is understood. Recognising and addressing this diversity is central to creating inclusive schools where children and young people feel seen and heard. When pupils do not feel acknowledged in this way, it can affect their sense of belonging and how their behaviour is expressed.

The following prompts can support staff to reflect on the wider picture:

- **Developmental history** - has the child or young person had previous difficulties with communication, learning or regulation that might shape current behaviour?
- **Context of change** - what else was happening around the time the behaviour shifted (family changes, new school transition, peer group changes, safeguarding issues)?

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- **Parents and carers** - what insights can they share about the child or young person’s experiences outside school and how can school keep communication open and collaborative?
- **Pupil voice** - how does the child or young person describe their experience? Are there aspects of their identity and background that may shape how they feel in school and how they are understood by others?
- **Previous strategies** - what has been tried before, at home or in school? What helped, even a little, and what made things harder?
- **Patterns over time** - is the behaviour consistent or does it happen at particular times of day, in certain lessons or with particular staff?
- **Wider support** - which colleagues or external professionals (for example SENCOs, pastoral staff or health services) may need to be involved and how can their input be joined up?

Useful links:

- **[Education Endowment Foundation: Improving social and emotional learning in primary schools](#)**
Evidence-based guidance to help primary schools support children’s social and emotional development through structured programmes and everyday teaching practices.
- **[Education Endowment Foundation: Personal, social and emotional development \(Early Years\)](#)**
Evidence and guidance on approaches to support young children’s personal, social and emotional development.
- **[Education Endowment Foundation: Social and emotional learning](#)**
Evidence from the Teaching and Learning Toolkit on the impact of social and emotional learning approaches in schools.
- **[Anna Freud: Mentally Healthy Schools](#)**
Quality-assured resources, information and advice to help schools and colleges support mental health and wellbeing in their settings.

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2e. Understanding adversity and trauma

All children face challenges as they grow up, but some encounter adversities that can have a particularly significant and lasting impact on their wellbeing. It is estimated that around half of all adults in England experienced at least one form of adversity in childhood or adolescence.⁴

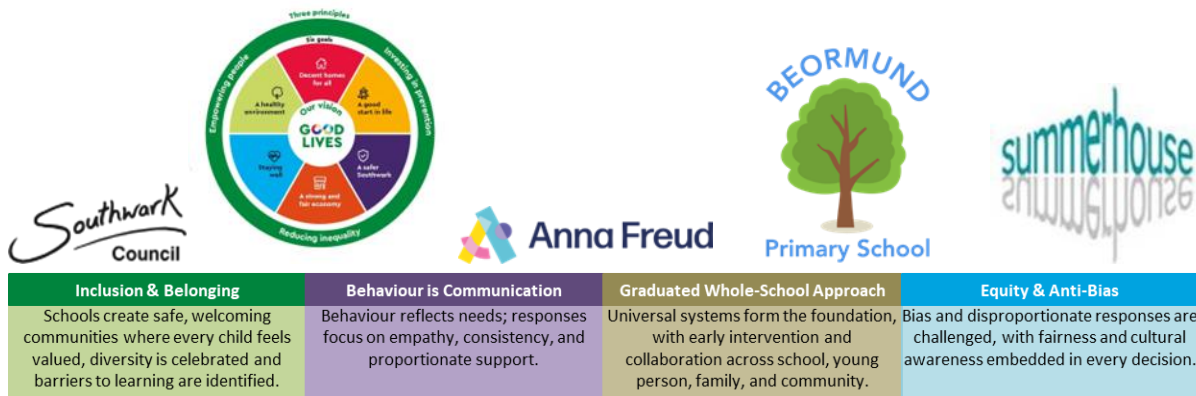
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are described as ‘highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence’⁴ (YoungMinds). These can take many different forms, such as maltreatment, prejudice, violence and coercion, as illustrated in the figure below.

WHAT KINDS OF EXPERIENCES ARE ADVERSE?

Forms of ACEs include:

 Maltreatment i.e. abuse or neglect	 Violence & coercion i.e. domestic abuse, gang membership, being a victim of crime	 Adjustment i.e. migration, asylum or ending relationships	 Prejudice i.e. LGBT+ prejudice, sexism, racism or disablism
 Household or family adversity i.e. substances misuse, intergenerational trauma, destitution, or deprivation	 Inhuman treatment i.e. torture, forced imprisonment or institutionalisation, or genital mutilation	 Adult responsibilities i.e. being a young carer or involvement in child labour	 Bereavement & survivorship i.e. traumatic deaths, surviving an illness or natural accident

Figure 1 Examples of adverse childhood experiences (YoungMinds, n.d.)



The concept of ACEs comes from a landmark study in the US that found strong links between adversity in childhood and health outcomes later in life. It showed that the more ACEs a child has, the higher their risk of mental health difficulties and long-term health problems.⁵

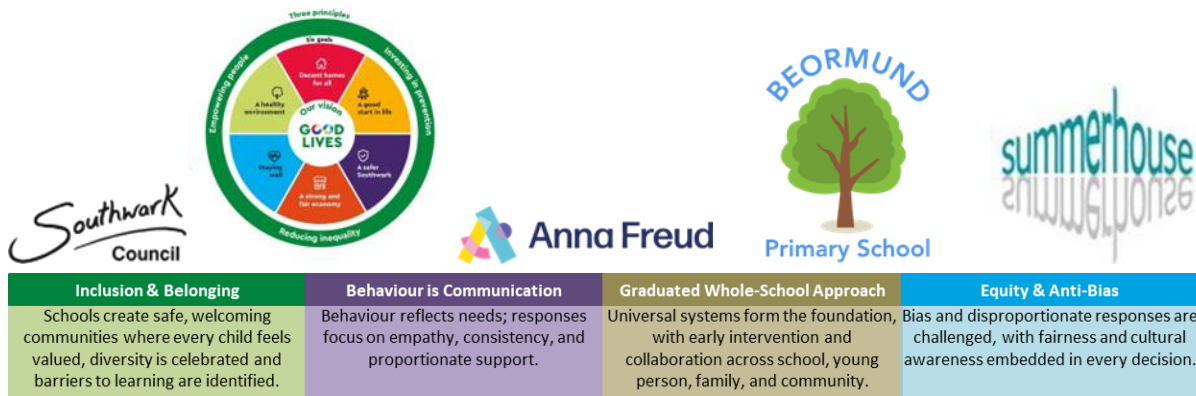
It is important to note that not all ACEs will have a traumatic impact. ACEs can be a useful starting point for thinking about adversity and its impact, particularly in showing broad patterns across groups of children. But they only tell part of the story and do not necessarily reflect the full complexity of an individual child’s life. Two children might share the same number of ACEs yet be affected in very different ways, depending on their circumstances and the support around them.

For schools, this underlines the importance of understanding ACEs and recognising their impact on children’s learning and wellbeing. It is now statutory for all staff to be aware of ACEs under the *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)* guidance: ‘where children have suffered abuse and neglect, or other potentially traumatic adverse childhood experiences, this can have a lasting impact throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. It is key that staff are aware of how these children’s experiences, can impact on their mental health, behaviour, attendance and progress at school’⁶

For leaders, the priority is helping staff understand how adversity shapes children’s experiences in the classroom. While schools cannot prevent adversity, they can reduce its impact by creating safe and consistent environments, strengthening partnerships with families and services and embedding trauma-informed practice across the whole school (see section on trauma-informed practice).

ACEs in context: what this means for Southwark

While ACEs are a useful framework for understanding how adversity can affect children and young people, it is important to consider them in the local context. In Southwark, most children and young people come from a Black, Asian or other ethnic minority background⁷. This diversity is a strength, offering opportunities for schools to celebrate a wide range of cultural identities and perspectives. It also highlights the importance of being alert to the potential impact of racism, discrimination and bias as additional adversities that may affect pupils’ wellbeing.



Alongside this, Southwark has one of the highest rates of child poverty in London, with around 40% of children living in poverty. **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Poverty can increase the risk of experiencing adversity and can shape how difficulties present in school for example, through attendance, concentration or behaviour linked to unmet needs.

When thinking about Southwark schools embedding trauma-informed practice, it helps to take this systemic view. Staff may encounter pupils whose experiences of adversity are shaped not only by individual circumstances, but also by broader inequalities. Understanding this context can support leaders and staff to:

- recognise how adversity may present differently across cultural and social groups
- reflect on the role of systemic factors, such as racism and poverty, in shaping trauma
- strengthen inclusive, community-based responses that values pupils' identities and reduce barriers to learning.

Key takeaways for school leaders:

- Adversity can affect how children learn, behave and build relationships.
- ACEs are a useful framework for recognising patterns of adversity, but they do not capture the full complexity of an individual child's life.
- Not all children who experience ACEs will experience trauma and the effects can vary depending on the support and protective factors around them.
- Staff awareness and a whole-school approach are essential for identifying needs and responding effectively.
- Schools can reduce the impact of adversity by providing safe, consistent and supportive environments where children feel valued and connected
- In Southwark, considering systemic factors such as poverty, racism and discrimination is important for understanding how adversity may present in school and for building inclusive, trauma-informed responses.

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Useful links:

- **[Early Intervention Foundation: Adverse childhood experiences](#)**
Summary of research on the prevalence and impact of ACEs, and what this means for practice in schools and services.
- **[UK Trauma Council: Adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\)](#)**
Video explaining what ACEs are, how they are measured, and the pros and cons of routine screening.
- **[Anna Freud: Relational approaches training and consultancy](#)**
Training and consultancy to help schools and services use relational approaches to support children and young people with complex emotional needs.

2f. What is trauma-informed practice?

The ACEs framework above highlights the kinds of adversities that can affect children’s lives and the potential long-term impact they may have. However, adversity alone does not explain everything. What matters just as much is how those experiences are felt and processed by each individual child. This is where the concept of trauma becomes especially important.

‘Trauma refers to the way that some distressing events are so extreme or intense that they overwhelm a person’s ability to cope, resulting in lasting negative impact’⁸ (UK Trauma Council).

Trauma can stem from a single incident, such as an accident or bereavement, or from ongoing experiences like neglect, abuse or discrimination. Children may react in different ways: some responses are immediate, while others appear much later; some are visible in behaviour, while others remain hidden.

For school staff, this means not assuming there is a ‘right’ or predictable way that trauma presents for children and young people. Instead, trauma-informed practice encourages staff to look beyond behaviours and ask, ‘What does this child need?’ rather than ‘What is wrong with this child?’⁹ (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities). It is not a quick fix but a cultural change that takes time, leadership

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commitment and staff development. Over time, this approach reshapes how behaviour is understood, how relationships grow, and the sense of safety and belonging that children experience.

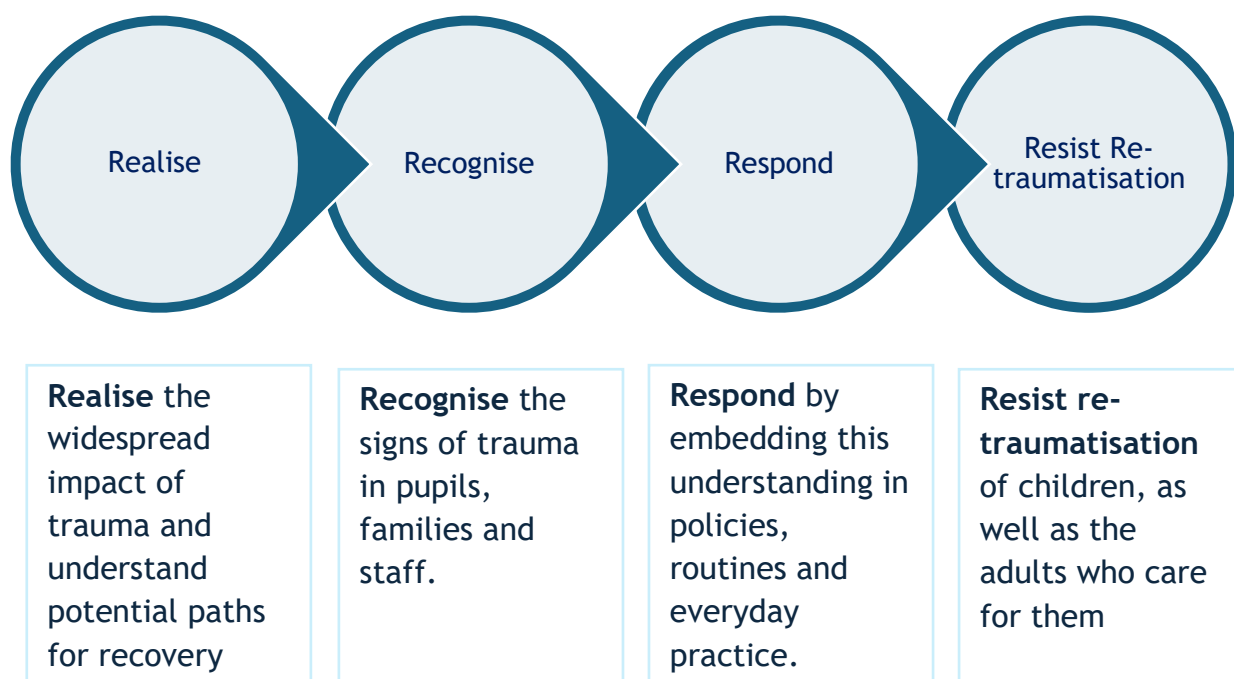
It is also vital to remember that trauma does not occur in isolation. Family life, community experiences and wider inequalities such as poverty, racism or abuse can compound its effects. Even within schools, certain routines or policies may unintentionally elicit painful memories - sometimes described as ‘systemic trauma’.¹⁰

For this reason, trauma-informed practice is not about asking children to ‘fix’ themselves. It is about school staff working with families and communities to create cultures that feel safe and supportive, where everyone is not only protected from harm but also feels understood and valued.

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The '4 Rs' overview

The US-based SAMSHA (Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) describes a trauma-informed approach through the '4 Rs'.¹¹ For schools, these can be adapted as practical starting points for thinking about what trauma-informed practice looks like day to day:



The six principles of trauma-informed practice

SAMSHA also set out six principles that build on the '4 Rs'. These can act as a practical framework for schools to reflect on culture, policies and everyday practice, while also rethinking how behaviour is understood and responded to.

Safety	Children and staff feel physically and emotionally safe in classrooms, playgrounds and staffrooms. Routines, boundaries and spaces are designed to reduce anxiety and promote calm.
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Trust	Consistent, predictable responses from adults help children know what to expect. Policies and decisions are transparent so staff, pupils and families can rely on them.
Peer support	Relationships between pupils are nurtured, with opportunities for teamwork, buddy systems and peer mentoring. Staff also support one another, recognising the emotional demands of the work.
Collaboration	Children, staff and families are included in decision-making wherever possible. Working together reduces hierarchy and builds a sense of belonging and shared responsibility.
Empowerment	Strengths and successes are noticed and celebrated. Children are given appropriate choices and opportunities to express themselves, while staff feel their voice is valued.
Cultural consideration	Staff are mindful of children’s diverse experiences and identities. Policies and classroom practices avoid stereotypes and promote inclusion and fairness for all.

Getting started in schools

Trauma-informed practice is best seen as an ongoing process and set of values, rather than a checklist of tasks. Becoming trauma-informed involves a whole-school approach where leadership, staff, families and pupils all play a role. It takes time and commitment and will look different in every setting.

For schools at the beginning of this journey, it may help to focus on a few starting points. These do not in themselves make a school trauma-informed, but they can act as practical first steps towards a broader cultural change:

Area	Examples in practice
Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily or weekly check-ins with children to build trust and connection Creating ‘safe spaces’ in classrooms for children to regulate when they feel overwhelmed and to consider carefully the rules, staffing and boundaries around the use of these spaces.



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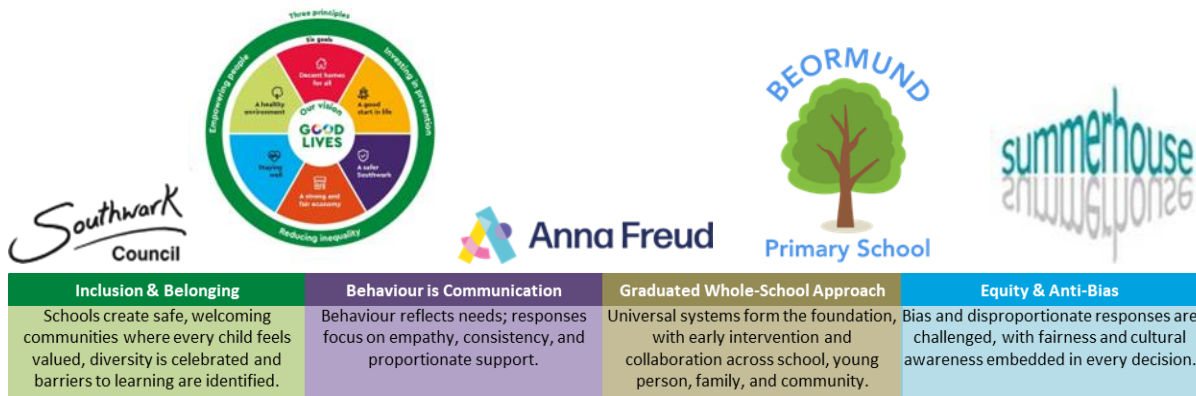


Inclusion & Belonging	Behaviour is Communication	Graduated Whole-School Approach	Equity & Anti-Bias
Schools create safe, welcoming communities where every child feels valued, diversity is celebrated and barriers to learning are identified.	Behaviour reflects needs; responses focus on empathy, consistency, and proportionate support.	Universal systems form the foundation, with early intervention and collaboration across school, young person, family, and community.	Bias and disproportionate responses are challenged, with fairness and cultural awareness embedded in every decision.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff modelling calm, respectful communication and repairing relationships after conflict
Regulatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to calming tools (e.g. sensory boxes, quiet corners, movement breaks) Clear, consistent routines that help children know what to expect Embedding short wellbeing practices into the day (e.g. breathing, stretching, story time to settle)
Reflective	<p>For staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular staff meetings or briefings that include space to share challenges and successes Peer-to-peer support or buddy systems for staff to talk through difficult situations Supervision or access to wellbeing champions to support staff resilience <p>For children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for storytelling, journalling or creative expression Circle time or class discussions where feelings and perspectives can be shared in a safe way Strengths spotting activities/celebrations, where peers or adults highlight each other's strengths and contributions.

Useful links:

- [UK Trauma Council](#)**
Evidence-based resources and training to help professionals and carers understand and respond to the impact of trauma on children and young people.
- [Trauma Informed Schools UK](#)**
Training and resources to help schools embed trauma-informed and mentally healthy practices.
- [NHS Education for Scotland: Trauma-informed Change Roadmap](#)**
Practical guidance to help organisations and workforces embed trauma-informed and responsive approaches across policy and practice.



- **Sowing seeds: trauma informed practice for anyone working with children and young people**
Short animation explaining trauma-informed practice and how staff can make a positive difference for children and young people affected by trauma.
- **Beacon House: Developmental Trauma Summary Sheet**
Brief overview of developmental trauma and its impact on children and young people.
UK Trauma Council: Childhood trauma, migration and asylum
Information for professionals on the impact of trauma linked to migration and asylum, with strategies to support children and young people.
- **UK Trauma Council: Childhood trauma and the brain**
A resource to help professionals and carers understand the latest neuroscience on childhood abuse and neglect, with practical insights and advice from clinicians, teachers and social workers.
- **UK Trauma Council: Critical incidents in educational communities**
Resources to help schools and colleges respond compassionately to traumatic events that affect many children, young people and staff.

2g. Bereavement

‘In 2004, the last time a national survey was done, around 3.5% of 5-16-year-olds had been bereaved of a parent or sibling. That is around 1 in 29 (or roughly one per classroom)’ (Childhood Bereavement Network, n.d.)¹².

Grief can be an overwhelming experience, bringing strong emotions and changes in behaviour that affect a child’s wellbeing. Research shows bereaved children are around one and a half times more likely to experience mental health difficulties than their peers.¹³ Some may become withdrawn or anxious, while others may show anger, struggle with concentration or find it hard to connect with peers. Although the pain of loss may not disappear, with understanding and consistent support most children do gradually adjust.

For some, however, the circumstances of the death can make bereavement particularly traumatic. The UK Trauma Council highlights that when a death is

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experienced as traumatic, children may find it harder to cope and the impact may last longer.¹⁴ These children may need more targeted support alongside the understanding and stability provided in school.

For schools, the key role is not to ‘fix’ grief but to provide stability, understanding and space for children to process loss at their own pace. Staff do not need to have all the answers, but small, thoughtful actions can make a real difference.

Some practical ways schools can support bereaved children:

Maintain routines	Keeping the usual classroom and school routines in place can provide a sense of stability when everything else may feel uncertain. Small, predictable structures such as morning welcomes, lesson timings and daily rituals help children feel anchored, even when they are grieving
Identify a trusted adult	It is important that every bereaved child knows there is someone in school they can turn to if they are struggling. This might be a teacher, a teaching assistant or a pastoral staff member. Agree this openly with the child so they feel confident about who is available to them.
Provide creative outlets	Some children may not be ready or able to put their feelings into words. Activities such as drawing, writing, music or storytelling can give them safe and accessible ways to process emotions and communicate what they are going through
Offer flexibility	Grieving children can find it difficult to concentrate or stay in class when they are feeling overwhelmed. Allowing them to step out of a lesson, access a quiet space or have a short break can help them regulate their emotions and return to learning when they feel ready.
Check with the child and family about acknowledgement	How the loss is recognised at school should always be guided by the child and their family. Some may want a private gesture such as a quiet word or a card from staff, while others may appreciate a more open



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	<p>acknowledgement. Taking their lead shows respect and avoids causing further distress.</p>
<p>Signpost support</p>	<p>While school staff play an essential role, some children and families will benefit from additional help. Being able to signpost families to bereavement charities, counselling services or community organisations ensures they can access the right specialist support when needed.</p>

Top tip: developing a bereavement policy

Schools and colleges may wish to consider having an agreed policy for supporting children and young people who are bereaved. Making this policy readily available for all staff means that everyone can access clear guidance on:

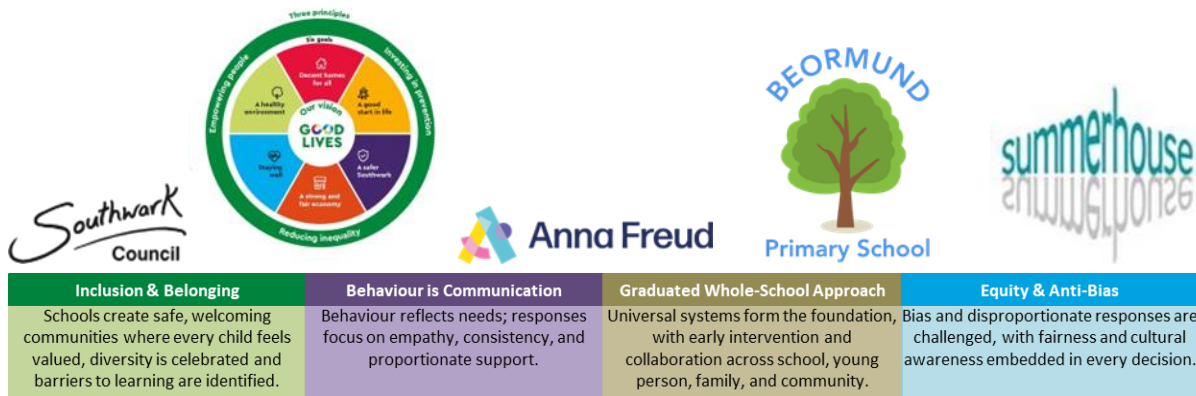
- how to respond to and support bereaved students
- understanding the process of grief and how it can affect wellbeing
- looking after staff wellbeing when supporting grieving children and young people

The policy could form part of the wider whole-school or college approach to mental health and may even sit within the setting's mental health policy. It can also outline how ongoing needs will be assessed, how staff agree to monitor and measure any challenges bereaved students may face and when referral to specialist services might be needed.

It is common for staff to feel uncertain about how to respond when a student is bereaved. A clear policy and readily available guidance can help ensure everyone feels confident and consistent in the support they provide.

Useful links:

- [Childhood Bereavement Network](#)



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- National hub offering resources and support for those working with bereaved children, young people and their families.
- **UK Trauma Council: Traumatic bereavement for school and college communities**
Evidence-based resources for schools and colleges to help children and young people who are struggling after a traumatic bereavement.
- **Emotionally Healthy Schools: Bereavement**
Tools and information to help the whole school community support children and young people experiencing bereavement.
- **Winston’s Wish: Free bereavement activities**
Practical activities to help children and young people explore feelings and keep memories of someone they have lost.
- **Child Bereavement UK: Books and resources**
Guides, books and activities to help children, young people and families cope with bereavement and loss.
- **Child Bereavement UK: Managing bereavement - A guide for schools**
Free guidance for schools on supporting pupils, families and staff after a bereavement.

Useful contact information

The organisations listed here provide bereavement support for children, young people, families and professionals.

Childhood Bereavement Network

- Website: [Childhood Bereavement Network](#) (postcode search for local free services)

Child Bereavement UK

- Telephone: 0800 02 888 40 (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday)
- Email: helpline@childbereavementuk.org
- Live Chat: Available via website (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday)
- Website: [Child Bereavement UK](#)

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Winston's Wish

- Helpline (Freephone): 08088 020 021 (8am-8pm, Monday to Friday)
- Email: ask@winstonswish.org
- Live Chat: via website (weekday hours)
- Text support (out of hours): Text WW to 85258
- General enquiries: 01242 515 157
- Website: [Winston's Wish - Bereavement Support for Children](#)

Candle Project

The Candle Project offers bereavement counselling for children and young people in Orpington, Sydenham, online and by phone.

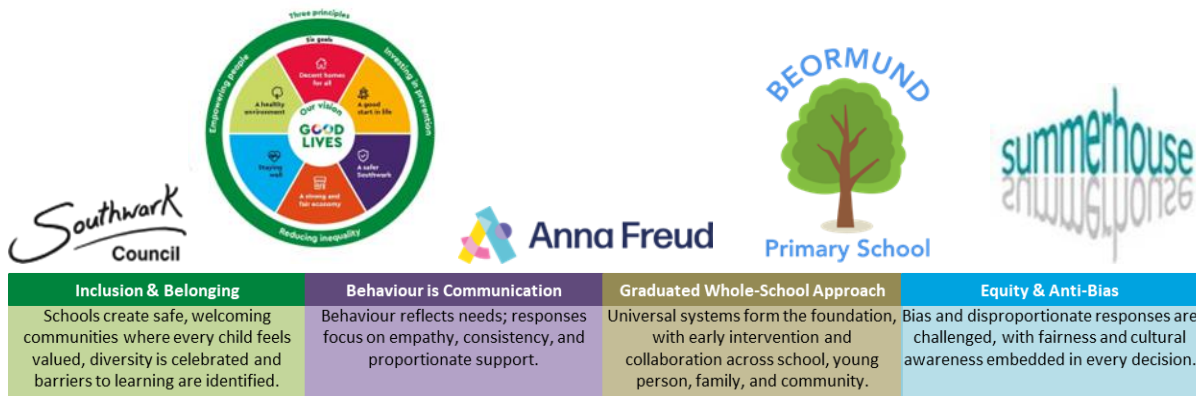
- Telephone: 0208 768 4533
- Email: candle.bereavement@stchristophers.org.uk
- Website: [St Christopher's Children and Young People's Bereavement Service](#)

2h. Relationships and attachment

Attachment theory has been influential in helping schools think about the links between relationships and behaviour. It suggests that early experiences can shape how children respond to adults and peers, and this lens has encouraged school staff to look beyond surface behaviour.

At the same time, its use in education is not straightforward. Attachment theory was developed within a Western cultural frame, and newer research, such as *Different Faces of Attachment* (Keller & Otto, 2014), highlights the importance of cultural variation and cautions against applying the theory too rigidly.

There is also new research influencing how professionals think about attachment. A recent report from the National Children's Bureau (NCB, 2023)¹⁵ argues for a



more flexible approach, moving away from rigid categories and encouraging practitioners to see attachment as dynamic and shaped by culture and context. Although this research is focused on social care, the recommendations are still relevant in an educational context. It encourages us to avoid over-pathologising behaviour, to be mindful of cultural differences and to keep relationships at the centre of how we support children.

Key takeaways

- Attachment theory helps explain links between relationships and behaviour, but it has limits and doesn't always fit across cultures.
- New research encourages a more flexible view, avoiding rigid labels and recognising behaviour in context.
- Positive, predictable relationships with trusted adults remain one of the most effective ways to help pupils feel secure and supported

Useful links:

- **[The ARC Website](#)**
The Attachment Research Community (ARC) is a charity supporting schools and colleges to embed attachment- and trauma-aware practice.
- **[The ARC: Training providers](#)**
Information on training providers offering courses and support in attachment, trauma and related approaches for schools and professionals. Southwark Virtual School funds membership of the Attachment Research Community (ARC) for all Southwark schools and colleges. ARC is a national charity that promotes trauma-informed and relational practice in schools. Membership gives schools access to free webinars, training and a structured pathway to national accreditation. Southwark Virtual School supports Southwark schools and colleges to access this accreditation.
- **[New approach to attachment theory - National Children's Bureau](#)**
Article explaining how an updated understanding of attachment theory can help improve support for children and families.

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- **Different Faces of Attachment**

An academic book exploring different perspectives on attachment and its impact on children’s development and relationships.

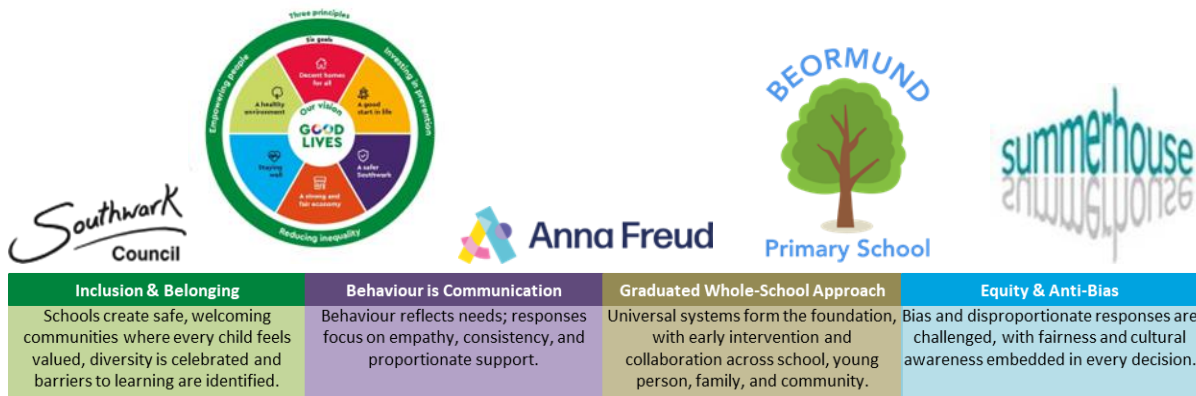
2i. Culture, race and bias in perceptions of behaviour

Southwark is home to one of the most diverse populations in the country, with over 280 different ethnic groups represented.¹⁶ This richness of culture is a strength for schools, offering opportunities for children to learn from one another and develop a broad sense of belonging. At the same time, it highlights the importance of ensuring that behaviour (relationship) policies and responses are inclusive, fair and culturally aware.

Research shows that pupils from Black and minoritised backgrounds are often judged more harshly for the same behaviour as their peers. Black boys in particular are at risk of adultification - being perceived as older, less vulnerable and more responsible than they really are.¹⁷ These biases increase the likelihood of disproportionate sanctions, higher exclusions and missed opportunities for early support.¹⁸

These unconscious biases can influence how we see and respond to behaviour, often without us realising it. In schools, this might mean assuming certain pupils are more likely to be disruptive, expecting different standards from boys and girls or interpreting the same behaviour differently depending on who shows it.

Alongside bias, cultural differences play a role in how behaviour is understood. Everyday behaviours such as eye contact, tone of voice, levels of formality, silence or physical proximity may hold different meanings across cultures. Without cultural awareness, these differences risk being interpreted as rudeness, defiance or disengagement. A recent scoping review highlighted how a lack of cultural knowledge among primary teachers can lead to misinterpretation of pupil behaviour. For example, one parent reflected that a teacher assumed her son was



being disrespectful because he avoided eye contact, when in their culture, looking down was actually a sign of respect.¹⁹

What this means for schools in Southwark

To build equitable and culturally responsive approaches, schools can:

- **Reflect on assumptions:** encourage staff to consider how their own cultural lens shapes perceptions of behaviour.
- **Review data:** monitor sanctions and exclusions to check for disproportionate impacts on particular groups.
- **Embed inclusion:** reflect diverse cultural identities across the curriculum and environment so that pupils feel seen and valued.
- **Listen to families and pupils:** seek feedback to understand how behaviour policies are experienced in practice.
- **Invest in professional development:** provide training on race, bias and adultification to strengthen confidence and consistency.

Useful links:

- **[Anti-racism and mental health in schools | Anna Freud](#)**
Podcasts, e-learning and resources about racism, its impact on young people's mental health, and what schools can do to address it.
- **[The Black Curriculum](#)**
An organisation providing Black British history teaching resources, training and workshops to embed inclusive practice in schools.
- **[UK Trauma Council: Racism, Mental Health and Trauma Research Round Up](#)**
Research and guidance on the impact of racism as a potential source of trauma for children and young people.
- **[National Education Union: Anti-racism charter](#)**
A framework to help schools embed anti-racist practice across their policies and culture.

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3. Identifying need

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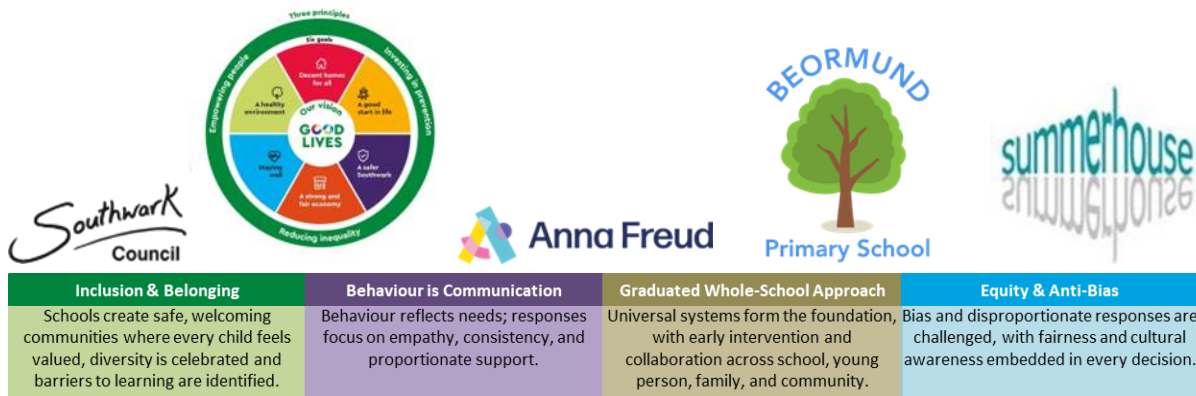
- 3a. Recognising patterns, triggers and unmet needs
- 3b. Behaviour in practice: common school realities

3a. Recognising patterns, triggers and unmet needs

While most pupils will thrive with consistent, whole-school strategies, some will require additional support at certain points in their school journey. Identifying need is about noticing early signs that a pupil may be struggling and understanding the factors that might be contributing to their behaviour. This stage helps staff decide whether targeted approaches within school are appropriate, or whether more specialist input may be required.

As a member of staff, you spend more time with your pupils than almost anyone else. This regular contact puts you in a strong position to be among the first to notice when something starts to change.

These observations can help you identify possible triggers - things that make it more likely for a pupil to feel unsettled or behave in a way that's difficult to manage. Some may be external, like noise, crowds, changes in routine or being asked to stop an activity. Others may be internal, such as hunger, worry, sensory sensitivities or difficulties with emotional regulation. In Southwark, where child



poverty and food insecurity affect a significant number of families, hunger can be a particularly common and powerful trigger for dysregulation in primary-aged pupils. **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Taking time to notice and reflect on these patterns can be an important first step in understanding what

When trying to understand what might be driving a pupil's behaviour, it may help to reflect on

- **When** the behaviour tends to happen - is it linked to a certain time of day, subject or routine (e.g. before lunch, during transitions)?
- **Where** it happens - in particular spaces or parts of the school?
- **Who/what is around** - are there specific people, groups, activities or transitions that seem to make things harder?
- **What happens beforehand** - are there early signs of frustration, tiredness, worry or overwhelm?
- **Frequency and context** - does it happen often or only in certain situations?
- **Impact** - is learning, safety or wellbeing affected for the pupil or for others?
- **Response to support** - do current strategies reduce the behaviour or does it continue or escalate?
- **Signals of need** - might environmental, relational or learning factors be contributing?

3b. Behaviour in practice: common school realities

The behaviours outlined here are not unusual in school life. Many pupils will show some of them at different times, especially when they feel tired, anxious or unsettled. In many cases these are short-lived and can be supported through everyday classroom strategies.

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This section is designed as a **reference**. It groups common behaviours into categories to help staff:

- recognise what they are seeing in the classroom,
- reflect on possible patterns, and
- plan proportionate, supportive responses.

The examples listed are not meant as labels, but as signals of need that can be shaped by different circumstances.

Category	Examples
Behaviours that interrupt learning	Calling or shouting out; talking over peers or teacher; constantly out of seat; interrupting; refusing instructions; making noises; throwing objects
Task avoidance behaviours	Delaying starting or completing work; going under table or leaving seat; damaging or scribbling on work; frequent requests to leave the room (e.g. for toilet, drink); appearing disengaged or distracted
Conflict-related behaviours	Hitting, kicking, biting or spitting; pushing or shoving peers; throwing items towards others; using raised voice or strong language; speaking to others in a threatening way
Emotional or dysregulated responses	Frequent crying; strong outbursts of anger; lying on floor or refusing to move; intense reaction to perceived minor incidents; suddenly becoming quiet or withdrawn
Social and relational difficulties	Struggling to share or take turns; leaving others out of play; frequent disagreements with peers; difficulties resolving conflict calmly; taking control of games; finding it hard to build or maintain friendships
Anxious or avoidant responses	Staying very close to adults; hesitating or refusing to enter classroom; hiding or leaving the room suddenly; frequent requests to go home; becoming distressed when routines change; repeatedly asking for reassurance



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Withdrawn or passive behaviours	Speaking very little or remaining silent in groups; avoiding eye contact; not joining group activities; spending playtime alone; low engagement in activities despite ability; being compliant but overlooked
Impulsive or connection-seeking behaviours	Answering before being called; using humour or silliness to get attention; frequently seeking adult approval; becoming over-excited and struggling to settle; interrupting group activities
Sensory-related behaviours	Covering ears in noisy spaces; avoiding certain textures (clothing, food, resources); rocking, fidgeting or stimming; finding it hard to remain seated; showing distress in crowded or busy settings
Behaviours that may place a child at risk	Leaving classroom or school grounds without permission; climbing furniture or structures unsafely; harming self (e.g. headbanging, biting); engaging in play that may cause injury (e.g. throwing stones, climbing high objects)

When patterns of behaviour begin to affect a child’s learning, wellbeing or relationships, it’s a sign that the current strategies aren’t meeting their needs. At this point, further support may be needed through targeted or specialist strategies, working with families and, where relevant, external professionals.

Understanding these everyday realities provides a foundation for the next section, which explores evidence-informed approaches to supporting positive behaviour and responding when difficulties arise.

Useful Links

- [8 sensory-friendly indoor games and activities](#) Practical tips and activities or children with sensory processing challenges
- [Senso Minds: What is a sensory diet?](#) Information on sensory diets, with examples and a free template to support children’s regulation and focus.

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- [University of Lincoln: Positive Sensory Profiling](#) Information to help schools understand children’s sensory needs, with profiles, strategies and tools to support learning and wellbeing.

4. Universal approaches (for all pupils)

In this section:

- [4a. A whole-school approach: building a mentally healthy school culture](#)
- [4b. Developing your behaviour \(relationship\) policy](#)
- [4c. Creating a welcoming and nurturing environment](#)
- [4d. Inclusive practice and SEND](#)
- [4e. Building staff confidence](#)
- [4f. Evidence-informed behaviour strategies](#)

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4g. Supporting behaviour through everyday practice

The first tier of the behaviour support pathway is universal. It refers to the consistent, whole-school practices that benefit **all pupils**. These strategies are embedded in daily routines, relationships and expectations, creating the conditions for positive behaviour and emotional wellbeing.

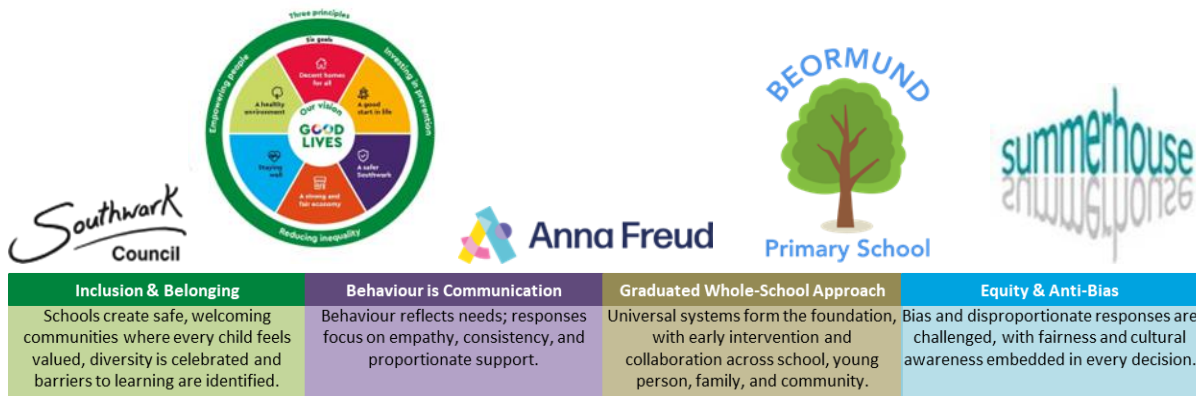
Universal approaches are preventative in nature, aiming to promote inclusion, strengthen a sense of belonging and support every pupil to engage with learning. They are part of everyday teaching and school life and do not rely on additional or specialist resources.

4a. A whole-school approach: building a mentally healthy school culture

‘Good mental health and wellbeing improves standards in schools and helps pupils achieve and thrive in education, setting them up well for life and work.’ (DfE) ²⁰

A whole-school approach to behaviour is not a one-off initiative or a fixed programme, but instead a long-term, strategic commitment that grows and develops over time. At its core, it’s about ensuring that high expectations are reflected in everything the school does: its values, its routines, its curriculum and its relationships. It is visible in the way pupils are greeted, the tone of communication between staff and families and the consistent way staff respond when things go wrong. It helps create a culture where positive behaviour becomes the norm, not the exception, and where all pupils, particularly those at risk of behavioural difficulties, are given the right conditions to succeed and thrive.

Both the Department for Education and NICE recommend that schools embed a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. DfE guidance sets out eight



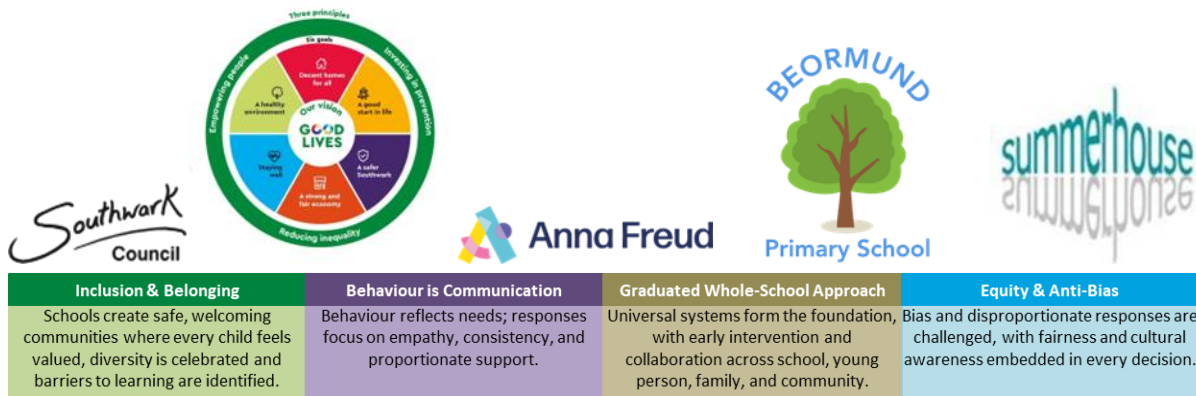
key principles, covering areas such as leadership, pupil voice, staff wellbeing, curriculum and partnerships with families.²⁰ NICE guidance echoes this, stating that schools should: ‘Adopt a whole-school approach to support positive social, emotional and mental wellbeing of staff, children and young people (including people with a neurodiverse condition) in primary and secondary education.’²¹

Both pieces of guidance underline that a whole-school approach really is the foundation for everything else.

Achieving this kind of culture relies on collective responsibility. Senior leaders, class teachers, support staff, governors, parents and the wider community all have a part to play. The most effective whole-school approaches focus on prevention, early intervention and targeted support, while also maintaining clear and fair boundaries that help pupils understand expectations, learn from their experiences and develop the skills they need to make more positive choices in the future.

Useful links:

- [**Anna Freud: 5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing**](#)
Free, evidence-based framework to help you develop a holistic, whole-school or college approach to mental health.
 - [**NICE: Social, emotional and mental wellbeing in education**](#)
Guidance on how schools and colleges can support the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people.
 - [**Department for Education: Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges**](#)
Guidance and resources to help schools and colleges develop a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.
 - [**Anna Freud: Mentally Healthy Schools**](#)
Quality-assured resources, information and advice to help schools and colleges support mental health and wellbeing in their settings.
- [**ISRCTN Registry: Forest School research**](#)
Research trial assessing the feasibility and impact of Forest School on primary pupils’ mental health, ongoing (2024-2026).



4b. Developing your behaviour (relationship) policy

Your behaviour (relationship) policy should act as the foundation for a consistent, whole-school approach. An effective policy sets out the expectations the school has for all members of the school community and it explains clearly how those expectations are taught, modelled and maintained.

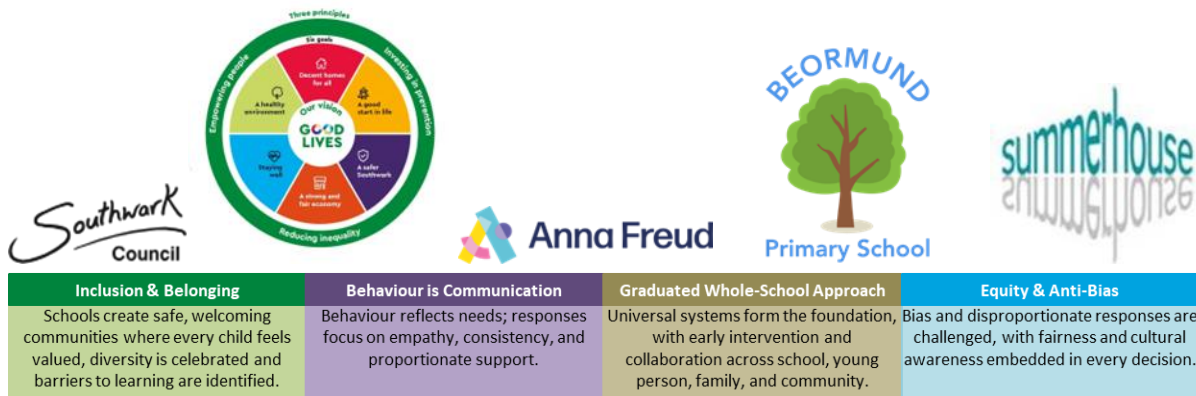
‘Creating a culture that promotes excellent behaviour requires a clear vision of what good behaviour looks like. The behaviour (relationship) policy is the starting point for laying out this vision and is one of the important ways the school culture is communicated to pupils, staff, and parents and carers.’²²

The importance of a strong, inclusive and consistently implemented behaviour (relationship) policy cannot be overstated. It sends a clear message that behaviour is everyone’s responsibility and that there is a shared language and approach across the school.

Taking a relational approach strengthens this further, by recognising that behaviour is shaped by the quality of relationships across the school community. Relational behaviour policies place connection at the centre. They emphasise co-regulation and shared responsibility, shifting the focus away from compliance alone. This helps staff to view behaviour as communication of an underlying need and creates opportunities for pupils to learn and practise the skills needed to manage feelings and relationships more effectively.

To be effective, a behaviour (relationship) policy must be developed with input from a range of stakeholders including pupils, families, school staff and governors. Pupil voice is especially important here; when children and young people are involved in shaping expectations and contributing to solutions, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and belonging in the school community. This collaborative process also helps schools identify where adjustments may be needed, particularly for pupils with additional needs, and ensures that the policy is not just understood but actively supported across the community.

The Department for Education’s *Behaviour in schools*’ publication provides non-statutory advice to support leaders in developing effective policies²². This guidance is not a complete statement of the law, but it offers practical recommendations

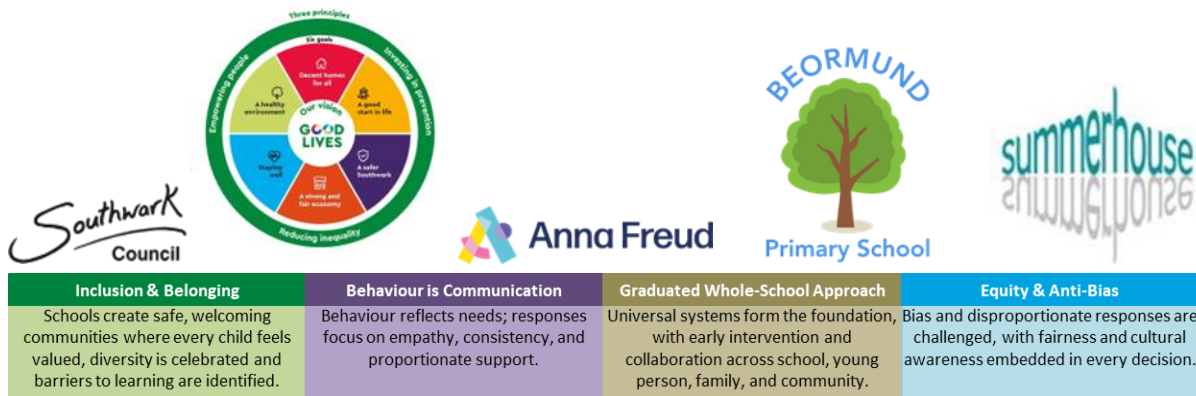


that schools can adapt for their context. In line with this guidance, a strong behaviour (relationship) policy should:

- define what good behaviour looks like in your context, linking expectations to the school’s values and culture.
- set out clearly how behaviour will be taught and reinforced e.g. through routines, modelling, curriculum and adult-pupil interactions.
- describe the system of recognition and reinforcement for positive behaviour.
- outline fair and proportionate responses to misbehaviour, making the distinction between one-off incidents and repeated patterns.
- include guidance for supporting pupils who may need additional help, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), mental health difficulties or wider social and emotional needs.
- explain induction and re-induction for pupils into rules, routines and behaviour systems
- set out measures to prevent and respond to child-on-child abuse, linking clearly to safeguarding policies
- include the school’s approach to mobile phones and a list of banned items.

A relational policy also takes a preventative stance, treating behaviour as something to be taught and practised rather than managed only when difficulties arise. This means supporting children and young people to build the skills they need for self-regulation, social interaction and conflict resolution, alongside academic learning.

It is vital that staff feel confident using the policy. This means regular training, opportunities for professional development and ongoing leadership support. Staff should understand how to apply the policy in a calm and consistent way, and how to use their professional judgement, particularly in situations where behaviour may be linked to a pupil’s wider needs. This is especially important when working with pupils whose behaviour may fluctuate due to anxiety, trauma, attachment difficulties or other mental health or developmental needs.

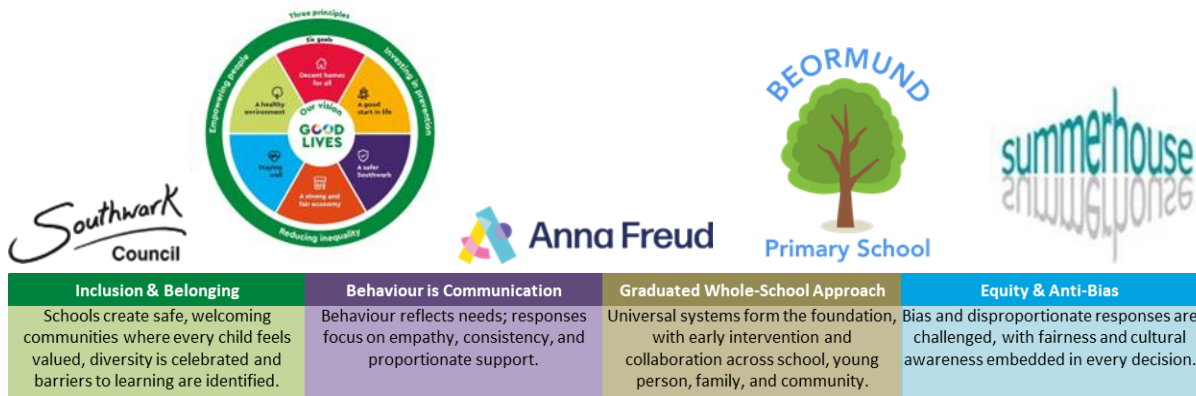


The behaviour (relationship) policy should not stand alone but should be closely aligned with other whole-school frameworks such as safeguarding, inclusion and mental health policies. This coherence ensures that all aspects of school life reinforce the same principles of safety, respect and support.

To remain effective, the behaviour policy should be regularly reviewed and evaluated, drawing on evidence from practice and feedback from the whole school community.

Useful links:

- **[Department for Education: Behaviour in schools](#)**
Non-statutory guidance to help school staff develop and implement effective behaviour policies.
- **[Department for Education: Mental health and behaviour in schools](#)**
Non-statutory guidance on whole-school approaches to promoting mental health and creating supportive environments for behaviour.
- **[The Key](#)**
Guidance, templates and resources to support school and trust leadership, management and CPD (*requires subscription*).
- **[The Key: Behaviour policy templates and examples](#)**
Guidance and model policies to support schools in developing and reviewing behaviour policies (*requires subscription*).
- **[EEF: Implementation guidance report](#)**
Guidance for school leaders and staff on managing change effectively, based on the latest evidence on implementation.
- **[Department for Education: Improving behaviour in schools](#)**
Resources to support schools and trusts in developing, implementing and maintaining a whole-school behaviour culture.
- **[Guidance for developing relational support plans](#)**
Practical guidance to help schools and colleges create tailored relational support plans that strengthen relationships and promote student wellbeing.



- **Anna Freud: Developing a mental health and wellbeing policy**
Information and tools to help schools and colleges develop a policy for mental health and wellbeing.

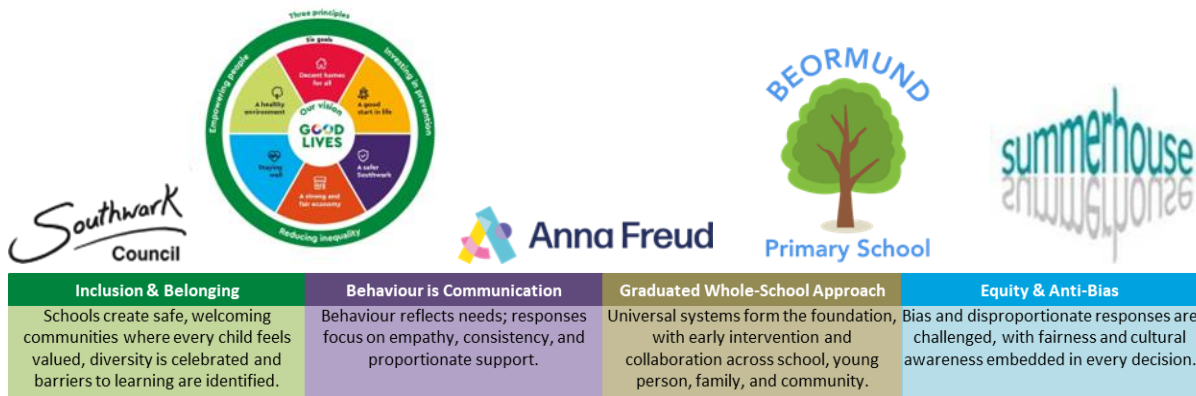
4c. Creating a welcoming and nurturing environment

Creating a nurturing school environment is central to supporting positive behaviour, emotional wellbeing and academic achievement. According to Nurture UK²³, the nurturing approach has the greatest impact when it is not treated as a standalone intervention but instead ‘reaches everyone in a setting’ and becomes integral to the school’s culture and daily practice. They emphasise that ‘the nurturing approach considers how a child’s social environment affects their emotional wellbeing, their social skills and how ready they are to engage at school and in the wider community.’

Effective nurturing approaches share common features, including:

- structured routines that provide pupils with predictability and reduce anxiety
- staff trained to respond with curiosity and care, seeing behaviour as communication
- emphasis on relationships, creating a sense of belonging and connection throughout the school
- flexible and personalised support within clear boundaries, recognising each pupil’s unique emotional and developmental needs.

This approach aligns closely with evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), which highlights that ‘consistency and coherence at a whole-school level are paramount’ and that schools should focus on ‘developing good relationships,’ as these are foundational in reducing behavioural issues and improving overall pupil outcomes²⁴. The EEF further states that effective schools adopt strategies such as ‘knowing individual pupils well,’ understanding the context of their behaviour and ‘ensuring pupils feel valued and supported, meaning they are less likely to misbehave.’²⁴



By integrating these principles into daily practice, schools can create an environment where all pupils, particularly those with additional emotional or behavioural needs, are supported to build resilience and thrive. As Nurture UK summarises, the nurturing approach helps pupils ‘develop the social skills they need to thrive, and the confidence and resilience to deal with whatever life throws at them - at school, and for the rest of their lives’²³

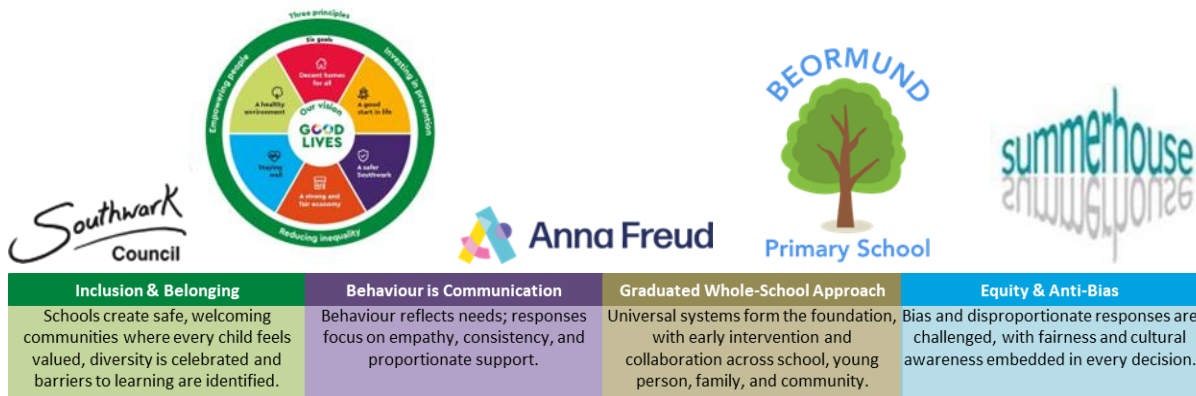
Useful links:

- **EEF: Improving behaviour in schools**
Guidance report with evidence-based recommendations to help schools promote positive behaviour and a supportive culture.
- **Nurture UK: Whole-School Approach to Nurture**
Information and resources on embedding nurture principles across the whole school.
- **Falkirk Educational Psychology Service: Nurturing approaches**
Practical guide to help schools build positive relationships and create supportive, nurturing environments for pupils.

4d. Inclusive practice and SEND

A whole-school approach to behaviour must actively consider inclusion and SEND at every level: from how expectations are communicated, to how routines are adapted and how staff interpret and respond to behaviour. This is not only best practice, but a statutory responsibility.

Schools are expected to apply behaviour policies in ways that are fair and inclusive, taking into account pupils’ individual needs. This includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, so that pupils with a disability are not placed at a disadvantage. The *Children and Families Act 2014* and the *SEND Code of Practice (2015)* further emphasise the importance of recognising behaviour as a possible expression of underlying need and ensuring that support is in place to remove barriers to learning and participation.



As the Department for Education (DfE) advises ‘schools should consider how a whole-school approach meets the needs of all pupils in the school, including pupils with SEND, so that everyone can feel they belong in the school community and high expectations are maintained for all pupils.’²²

Some behaviours may be linked to particular types of SEND. For instance, a pupil with speech and language needs might find verbal instructions difficult to follow. But it should not be assumed that every instance of misbehaviour is connected to SEND. Each case requires careful, individual consideration and a proportionate response, grounded in professional judgement.

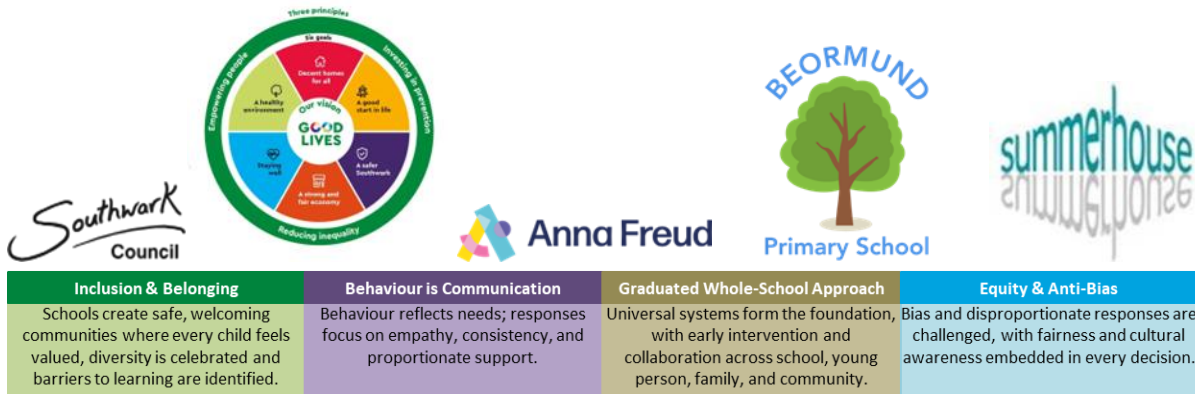
Inclusive strategies might include:

- using visual cues, prompts or alternative communication methods
- pre-teaching routines or social expectations
- offering sensory-friendly spaces
- flexibility around transitions or changes in routine
- close partnership with families and SEND professionals.

These kinds of adjustments benefit a wide range of pupils, including those with undiagnosed needs or those facing temporary emotional or developmental challenges. Not every behavioural concern will be linked to a diagnosis, but staff should feel confident in identifying when support is needed and how to respond in ways that reflect the pupil’s individual context.

Useful links:

- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Children and Families Act 2014](#)
- [Autism Support Team | Southwark Local Offer](#)
- [ACAMH: Autism spectrum disorder](#)
Online guide with information, research and multimedia resources on autism, including blogs, journal articles, videos and podcasts.
- [Ambitious about Autism: Autistic and OK](#)
Wellbeing toolkit co-produced with autistic young people, offering resources to support mental health and self-care.

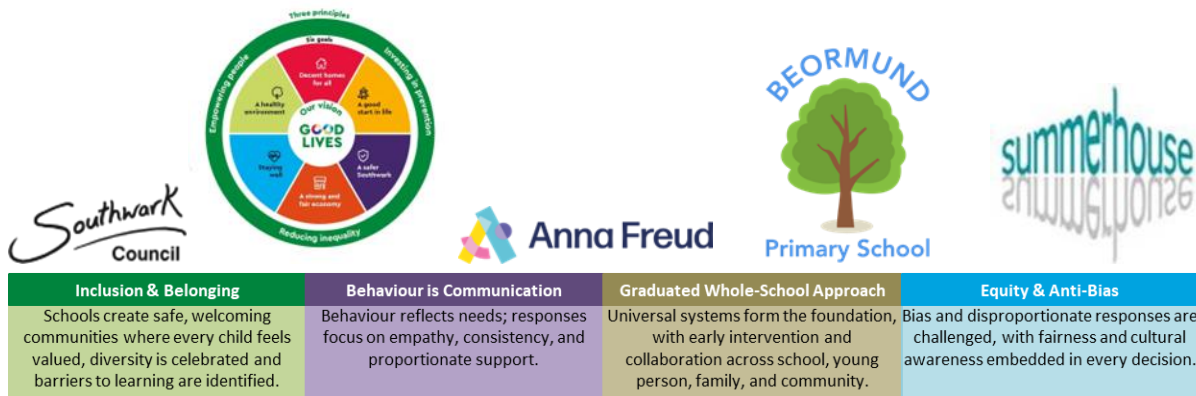


- **Department for Education: SEND code of practice (0 to 25 years)**
Statutory guidance on the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system for children and young people aged 0 to 25.
- **TEACCH | Autism Speaks**
Overview of the TEACCH approach, a structured teaching method designed to support autistic learners through visual supports and predictable routines
- **Strategies for supporting children on the Autism Spectrum in the Early Years Guide**
- Downloadable guide offering practical tips and inclusive strategies for early years practitioners working with autistic children
- **Whole School SEND**
Resources and training to help schools develop inclusive practice and support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- **Autism Education Trust: Resources**
Phase-specific teaching tools, guidance for schools and families and practical resources to support autistic children and young people.
- **nasen: Autism resources**
Charity providing advice, training and resources to help education staff support autistic children and young people.

4e. Building staff confidence

Staff confidence is a vital foundation for effective behaviour approaches. When education staff feel prepared and supported, they can respond with greater consistency and use their professional judgement in ways that strengthen relationships with pupils. Confidence develops not only through individual knowledge and skills but also from being part of a shared, whole-school approach that everyone understands.

It's important that all staff receive training on behaviour alongside mental health awareness training, so that everyone shares a common language and understanding. Alongside this, some staff will need more specialist training linked to their role, for example, designated safeguarding leads, pastoral staff or Senior



Inclusion & Belonging	Behaviour is Communication	Graduated Whole-School Approach	Equity & Anti-Bias
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Mental Health Leads (SMHLs). This helps to make sure there are people in school with the expertise to guide whole-school approaches, advise colleagues and link with external services when needed.

Ongoing professional development plays an important part in building staff confidence. Setting aside time in the school year for learning and reflection helps staff feel better prepared for challenges as they arise. CPD might focus on behaviour strategies or on broader themes such as emotional wellbeing. What matters most is that opportunities are regular and revisited, so staff can build on their experience and apply approaches in a consistent way.

Useful links:

- [Anna Freud: Mental Health Training For Schools and Colleges](#)
Practical courses to help staff build knowledge and confidence in supporting behaviour, wellbeing and whole-school mental health.
- [Mental Health First Aid](#)
Training that helps staff notice early signs of mental health difficulties and support pupils or colleagues in need.
- [nasen: Introduction to SEMH needs](#)
Webcast for teachers and support staff on understanding SEMH, recognising needs and using simple strategies to support pupil
- [Evelina London: Speech and language therapy training](#)
Training for professionals, parents and carers on topics including autism, developmental language disorder and social, emotional and mental health.

4f. Evidence-informed behaviour strategies

Effective behaviour strategies can be broadly categorised as either proactive (preventing behaviours that concern and/or challenge) or reactive (responding to behaviours that concern and/or challenge). According to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), 'implementing approaches strategically and consistently is likely to be more important than the choice of approach itself.'²⁴

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The EEF provides clear, evidence-informed recommendations to guide behaviour management. These strategies are best implemented as part of a coherent, whole-school approach.

EEF recommendations at a glance:

Recommendation	What this means in practice
1. Know and understand your pupils and their influences	Understanding individual pupil contexts helps schools respond effectively. Every pupil should have a supportive relationship with an adult.
2. Teach learning behaviours alongside managing misbehaviour	Encouraging pupils to develop self-awareness and learning behaviours reduces disruptive incidents. Teachers should explicitly teach skills such as emotional regulation and reflective practice.
3. Use classroom management strategies to support good behaviour	Effective management reduces disengagement and aggression. Staff should reflect on practice, trial approaches and review progress regularly. Reward systems are valuable within broader strategies.
4. Use simple approaches as part of your regular routine	Basic, consistent routines can significantly impact behaviour. These include positive greeting at the door, specific praise, clear policies consistently applied and engaging parents positively.
5. Use targeted approaches for individual pupils	One-size-fits-all strategies rarely work universally. Staff need tailored strategies and training to support pupils with higher behavioural needs effectively.

Useful links:

- [Education Endowment Foundation: Improving behaviour in schools - summary of recommendations](#)
- [Education Endowment Foundation: metacognition and self-regulated learning](#)

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- [Education Endowment Foundation: special educational needs in mainstream schools](#)
- [Education Endowment Foundation: working with parents to support children’s learning](#)
- [Education Endowment Foundation: improving social and emotional learning in primary schools](#)

4g. Supporting behaviour through everyday practice

This section builds on the recommendations outlined in Section 6f (Evidence-informed behaviour strategies) by exploring how these can be translated into everyday practice across the school day.

The examples provided are not intended as prescriptive solutions. Instead, they are designed to prompt reflection and support staff in identifying approaches that feel achievable and relevant. Schools are encouraged to adopt and adapt the ideas that best suit their setting, priorities and the needs of their pupils.

Task avoidance behaviours

Task avoidance can look like delaying the start of work, hiding under a table, making frequent requests to leave the classroom or seeming distracted. These behaviours can be better understood as an expression of difficulty rather than a lack of effort. There can be many reasons why a pupil avoids a task, for some it may be linked to anxiety or low confidence, while for others it may relate to concentration organisation or how the task is presented.

Universal ideas

- Break tasks into smaller, manageable steps
- Keep routines predictable and consistent
- Offer choice within tasks to increase engagement
- Give specific praise for effort and persistence
- Use personalised scaffolds or checklists to guide independent work



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- Plan short adult check-ins at the start of lessons

Targeted ideas

- Pre-teach key content to build confidence
- Provide small-group support focused on self-regulation and task initiation

Where to look in the toolkit

- Section 4d. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs
- Section 6d: Inclusive practice and SEND
- Section 6e: Evidence-informed behaviour strategies
- Section 7a-b: Targeted support

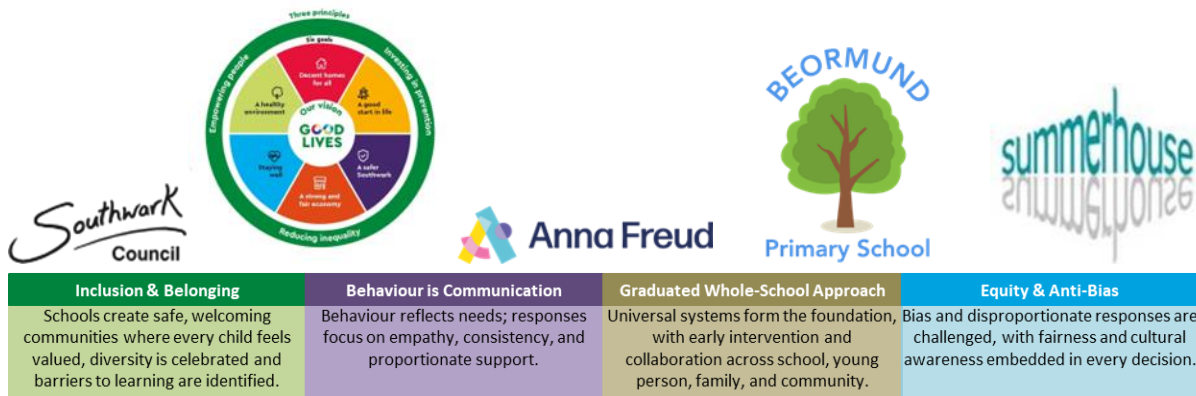
Reflection questions:

- *What patterns do you notice about when the pupil avoids starting tasks for example, certain subjects, times of day or after transitions?*
- *Does the pupil show early signs of worry before the task begins, such as asking repeated questions, hesitating or seeking reassurance?*
- *Could the length, level of challenge or presentation of the task be contributing to the avoidance?*
- *How does the pupil respond when offered encouragement, reassurance or a smaller first step?*
- *Are there strengths or interests you can draw on to increase engagement with less-preferred tasks?*
- *Could this be signalling an unmet need (learning, communication, emotional, sensory or relational) and what further information might help to build understanding?*

Useful links

- [A mixed study on the effectiveness of verbal praise in the primary](#)
- [Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust: Strategies to help with demand avoidance in the classroom](#)

Practical guidance with ideas to reduce pressure, offer choices and



support children and young people who may find everyday demands difficult.

- **Department for Education: Early Career Framework - Motivation**
Guidance for early career teachers on understanding pupil motivation, including the role of extrinsic and intrinsic factors.
- **Education Endowment Foundation: Scaffolding**
Article exploring how scaffolding can support pupils' learning and independence.
- **Just One Norfolk: Choice Board**
Guidance on using visual choice boards to support communication and decision-making for children

Conflict-related behaviours

Conflict-related behaviours can look like arguments, raised voices, pushing or using threatening language. These behaviours are better understood as signs of difficulty managing emotions or relationships, rather than deliberate defiance. There can be many reasons why conflict arises; it may be linked to frustration, feelings of unfairness or challenges in social interactions.

Universal ideas

- Model calm and respectful language in all interactions
- Set and reinforce clear, consistent boundaries
- Structure playground games to reduce opportunities for conflict
- Teach and practise problem-solving and turn-taking in class routines
- Use co-regulation strategies, considering where a child or young person may be on the arousal scale²⁵ and drawing on tools like the window of tolerance²⁶ to help them manage strong feeling

Targeted ideas

- Small group sessions to develop social and conflict-resolution skills
- Use restorative conversations after incidents



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- Provide small group or one-to-one mentoring to support self-regulation

Where to look in the toolkit

- Section 2d. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs
- Section 2f: What is trauma-informed practice?
- Section 4c: Creating a nurturing environment
- Section 4e: Evidence-informed strategies
- Section 5c: Supporting specific needs
- Section 6: Specialist approaches (if risks escalate)

Reflection questions:

- *Are there early warning signs that this pupil shows before conflict occurs?*
- *Are incidents of conflict for this pupil being recorded in a way that helps us see patterns over time?*
- *Do staff feel confident in de-escalation and restorative practice or is further training or coaching needed?*
- *Are there particular spaces, times or routines in our school where conflict is more common?*
- *What opportunities are we giving pupils to practise conflict resolution skills in a safe, supported way, rather than only addressing incidents after they happen?*
- *After a conflict, how is the pupil supported to reflect on what happened and to reconnect with others?*

Useful links

- **[NASUWT: Restorative Behaviour](#)**
Guidance for teachers and leaders on using restorative approaches to support positive relationships and conflict resolution.
- **[Beacon House: Window of Tolerance animation](#)**
Animation showing how to support children in moving from dysregulation into a calm and learning-ready state.
- **[What is restorative practice? Anti-Bullying Alliance](#)**
An overview of restorative approaches in schools with examples and case studies.



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- **Anna Freud: Healthy relationships toolkit (primary)**
Lesson plans and resources to help pupils aged 10-11 explore healthy friendships, wellbeing and conflict resolution
- **EEF | Self-Regulation and Executive Function**
Evidence-based strategies to support young children’s self-regulation and executive function in early years settings
- **Guidance for Developing Relational Support Plans**
Practical guidance to help schools and colleges create tailored relational support plans that strengthen relationships and promote student wellbeing.

Emotional or dysregulated behaviours

Emotional or dysregulated behaviours happen when a pupil feels overwhelmed and struggles to manage their emotions in the moment. This might look like shouting, crying, refusing to move or withdrawing suddenly. These behaviours are signals that what is being asked of the pupil, or the environment around them, has become too difficult to cope with.

Universal ideas

- Ensure every pupil has a supportive relationship with an adult
- Provide calm spaces in class
- Maintain consistent routines
- Model regulation strategies
- Use co-regulation strategies, considering where a child or young person may be on the arousal scale²⁵ and drawing on tools like the window of tolerance²⁶ to help them manage strong feeling
- Build in regular movement or sensory breaks across the day.

Targeted ideas

- Small group activities to support emotional regulation and coping skills
- Collaborate with families to ensure strategies are consistent between home and school



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Where to look in the toolkit

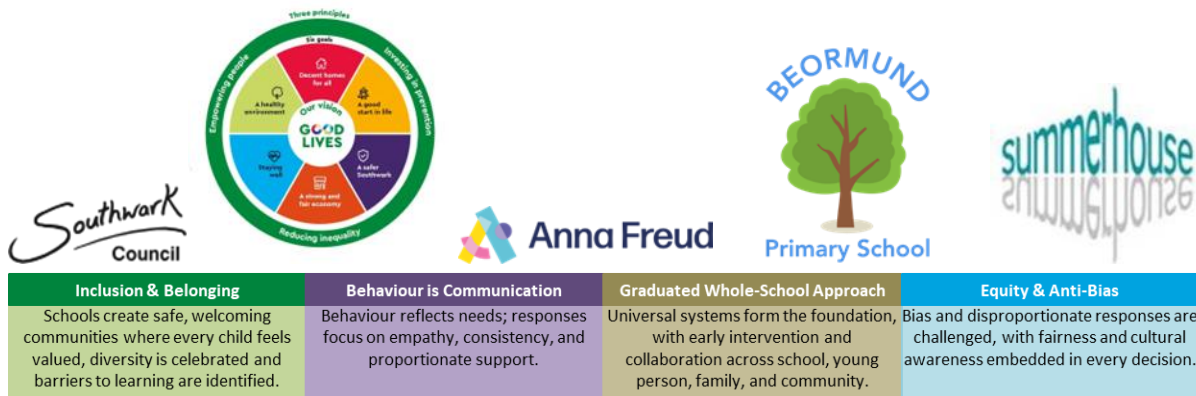
- Section 2d. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs
- Section 2f: What is trauma-informed practice?
- Section 4c: Creating a nurturing environment
- Section 4d: Inclusive practice and SEND
- Section 5c: Supporting specific needs
- Section 6: Specialist approaches (if risks escalate)

Reflection questions

- *Could this behaviour be signalling an unmet need for example, learning, communication, sensory or relational that has not yet been fully understood?*
- *Do staff maintain clear and consistent routines that reduce uncertainty and support emotional regulation?*
- *Is there a calm, safe space in class that pupils know they can use when they feel overwhelmed?*
- *Is there time built into the school day for movement or sensory breaks, and are these being used effectively?*
- *Does this pupil have regular access to a trusted adult who can support them when emotions feel unmanageable?*

Useful links

- [Leicestershire County Council: Creating a Safe Space](#)
Guidance for schools on setting up and using safe spaces to help pupils regulate emotions and manage behaviour
- [Beacon House: Window of Tolerance animation](#)
Animation showing how to support children in moving from dysregulation into a calm and learning-ready state.
- [EEF: Teaching assistants guidance report](#)
Evidence-based recommendations on how schools can make the best use of teaching assistants to improve pupil outcomes
- [YoungMinds: Helping a young person manage anger](#)
Practical advice and resources to support children and young people with managing feelings of anger



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- **Leicestershire County Council: Sensory breaks**
 Information for schools on using sensory breaks to support pupils' focus, regulation and wellbeing

Social and relational difficulties

Social and relational difficulties can show when a pupil finds it challenging to join in with others in positive ways. This might look like struggling to share or take turns, leaving others out of play, frequent disagreements or finding it hard to repair friendships after conflict. Some pupils may try to take control of games or avoid group play altogether. These behaviours are often signs that the child needs more support to develop the skills that help them build and sustain relationships.

Universal ideas

- Teach and model sharing and turn-taking
- Use class routines to practise co-operative play
- Provide inclusive rules for playground games
- Give regular, specific praise for positive peer interactions

Targeted ideas

- Small-group activities to build co-operative and friendship skills.
- Structured opportunities for pupils to practise repairing relationships after conflict.

Where to look in the toolkit

- Section 2d. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs
- Section 2f: What is trauma-informed practice?
- Section 4c: Creating a nurturing environment
- Section 4f: Evidence-informed behaviour strategies
- Section 5c: Supporting pupils with specific needs

Reflection questions



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- *Are pupils regularly taught and reminded of the skills that help friendships grow, such as sharing and listening?*
- *Are there safe and structured opportunities for pupils who struggle with friendships to try new social roles?*
- *Is there a clear approach to helping pupils repair relationships when conflict occurs?*
- *Do staff and families share approaches, so pupils experience the same messages about relationships across settings?*

Useful links

- **[Anna Freud: Healthy relationships toolkit \(primary\)](#)**
Lesson plans and resources to help pupils aged 10-11 explore healthy friendships, wellbeing and conflict resolution.
- **[Mentally Healthy Schools: Relationships and belonging](#)**
Information on how schools can build positive relationships and a sense of belonging to support pupil mental health.
- **[A mixed study on the effectiveness of verbal praise in the primary](#)**
- **[West Lothian CAMHS: Using praise and rewards to encourage good behaviour](#)**
A guide for parents on supporting children’s behaviour through praise and rewards.
- **[Tennessee Behaviour Supports Project: Behaviour-Specific Praise](#)**
A behaviour management guide on using specific praise to address pupils’ behavioural needs.

Anxious or avoidant behaviours

Sometimes pupils show their worries through anxious or avoidant behaviours for example, hesitating to enter the classroom, staying close to adults or asking to go home. Some pupils may experience such high levels of anxiety and distress that attending school feels overwhelming. They are best understood as signals that something in the environment or routine feels hard to manage, whether that is worry, sensory sensitivities or difficulty with change.

Universal ideas



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Schools create safe, welcoming communities where every child feels valued, diversity is celebrated and barriers to learning are identified.	Behaviour reflects needs; responses focus on empathy, consistency, and proportionate support.	Universal systems form the foundation, with early intervention and collaboration across school, young person, family, and community.	Bias and disproportionate responses are challenged, with fairness and cultural awareness embedded in every decision.

- Offer warm welcomes and predictable starts to the day
- Keep routines clear and consistent
- Use a buddy system to provide peer support
- Build in regular check-ins with a trusted adult

Targeted ideas

- Small group or one-to-one support focused on building confidence and coping strategies
- Structured group work to develop social and emotional skills in a safe space
- Joint planning with families to reduce anxiety about school routines

Where to look in the toolkit

- Section 2d. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs
- Section 2f: What is trauma-informed practice?
- Section 4a: Whole-school approach
- Section 5b: Targeted support in school

Reflection questions:

- *Do patterns emerge around certain times, subjects or transitions when the pupil is more likely to avoid class?*
- *Are there aspects of the classroom, timetable or expectations that may unintentionally increase this pupil's anxiety?*
- *How are we currently involving the family in understanding and reducing the pupil's anxiety about school?*
- *Could wider influences be impacting the pupil's sense of safety and belonging?*
- *Does this pupil have regular access to a trusted adult who can support them when emotions feel unmanageable?*

Useful links

- [School Attendance and Mental Wellbeing | Anna Freud](#)
Guidance to help schools understand the links between mental wellbeing and non-attendance

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- [School Anxiety and Refusal | Parent Guide to Support | YoungMinds](#)
Advice for parents and carers on understanding school-related anxiety, supporting children at home and working with schools and services to help them return to learning.
- [Anna Freud: Let's talk about anxiety - animation and teacher toolkit](#)
An animation and resource pack to help students aged 11 to 13 understand, normalise and manage anxious feelings, with tools to support classroom discussion.
- [Anna Freud: Supporting children and young people with anxiety](#)
Information and guidance for parents and carers to help children and young people manage anxious feelings and find appropriate support.
- [West Sussex Local Offer: Transitions throughout the day](#)
Tips and tools to support smooth, calm transitions for pupils

Withdrawn or passive behaviours

Withdrawn or passive behaviours can look like sitting quietly, avoiding eye contact or not joining in with group activities. While some pupils may naturally prefer time alone, persistent withdrawal can signal that something feels hard to manage such as low confidence, loneliness or unmet emotional needs. These behaviours are best understood as ways of coping, rather than a lack of interest or ability.

Universal ideas

- Pair with supportive peers to encourage inclusion and belonging
- Creating a safe and predictable environment
- Build emotional literacy through everyday discussion of feelings and experiences
- Notice and praise small contributions to reinforce participation

Targeted ideas

- Involve pupils in small group nurture activities
- Use structured peer mentoring to reduce isolation and encourage connection



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Where to look in the toolkit

- Section 2d. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs
- Section 2f: What is trauma-informed practice?
- Section 4d: Inclusive practice and SEND
- Section 5b: Targeted support

Reflection questions

- *Are there particular times or activities when this pupil is more likely to withdraw?*
- *How might classroom routines, groupings or expectations be affecting their confidence?*
- *What opportunities do we provide for this pupil to show their strengths in a safe way?*
- *How might experiences beyond the classroom be shaping the pupil's sense of safety, confidence and belonging in school?*
- *Is withdrawal being noticed and recorded, or might it be going under the radar compared to more disruptive behaviours?*

Useful links

- **EEF: Improving social and emotional learning in primary schools**
Evidence-based guidance to help primary schools support children's social and emotional development through structured programmes and everyday teaching practices.
- **YoungMinds: Building positive mental health resources**
A range of downloadable activities for those working with young people to help build positive mental health and wellbeing.
- **Anna Freud: Establish a peer support programme in your school or college**
Information to help schools and colleges set up peer support and promote student wellbeing.

Impulsive or connection-seeking behaviours



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Sometimes pupils seek connection or recognition in ways that feel impulsive such as calling out, using humour to draw others in or finding it hard to settle after a burst of excitement. These behaviours are best seen as expressions of a need for relationship or support with self-regulation, rather than as deliberate disruption.

Universal ideas

- Build clear and predictable turn-taking routines
- Provide positive reinforcement for patience or waiting
- Movement and sensory breaks
- Build in structured opportunities for pupils to contribute positively

Targeted ideas

- Create opportunities for pupils to work with a mentor or trusted adult
- Social stories or scripts
- Small group sessions on turn-taking, listening and using humour positively.

Where to look in the toolkit

- Section 4d. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs
- Section 6d: Inclusive practice and SEND
- Section 6e: Evidence-informed strategies
- Section 7c: Supporting specific needs

Reflection questions

- *Are there enough positive outlets in the day for the pupil's energy and need for interaction?*
- *Are there signs of restlessness or excitement before impulsive behaviours occur?*
- *What opportunities do we provide for this pupil to show their strengths in a safe way?*
- *Are there regular opportunities for structured positive peer interaction?*
- *Could these behaviours be signalling an unmet need for connection or support with attention and focus?*
- *What helps this pupil feel noticed and valued for their contributions?*



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- *Could wider influences beyond school be shaping how this pupil seeks connection or recognition?*

Useful links

- **LGfL: Learning Through Movement**
An overview resource for teachers on the role of movement in learning, with guidance to support students who have additional needs.
- **NHS: ADHD in children and teenagers**
Information on symptoms, causes, diagnosis and support for children and young people with ADHD.
- **ADHD Foundation**
A UK charity providing information, resources and training to support children, young people and adults with ADHD and other neurodevelopmental conditions.
- **Leicestershire County Council: Sensory breaks**
Information for schools on using sensory breaks to support pupils' focus, regulation and wellbeing

Sensory-related behaviours

Some pupils may show behaviours that are linked to how they process sensory information, such as covering their ears in noisy spaces, avoiding certain textures, rocking, fidgeting or finding it hard to remain seated. These behaviours can be ways of coping with sensory overload or under-stimulation

Universal ideas

- Build movement and sensory breaks into the daily routine
- Provide a variety of seating and resource options where possible
- Use visual timetables and clear routines to reduce uncertainty

Targeted ideas

- Nurture group sessions that incorporate sensory play and regulation activities



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- Incorporate sensory experiences such as weighted materials, textured resources or sound-based interventions to support regulation and communication
- Seek specialist advice (e.g. occupational therapy) for pupils with significant needs

Where to look in the toolkit

- Section 4d: Inclusive practice and SEND
- Section 4c: Creating a welcoming and nurturing environment
- Section 5c: Supporting specific needs
- Section 6: Specialist approaches (where additional expertise is needed)

Reflection questions

- *Are there particular times, spaces or activities where this pupil shows signs of sensory overload?*
- *What environmental adjustments could reduce sensory overload in classrooms and communal areas?*
- *How are pupils' voices included when identifying what helps them feel comfortable in different environments?*
- *Are there resources or spaces pupils can access independently when they need to regulate?*
- *Do staff recognise the difference between stimming/self-regulation and behaviours of concern?*

Useful links

- [Autism Support Team | Southwark Local Offer](#)
Information and guidance on local support for autistic children and young people in Southwark, including advice for schools and families.
- [National Autistic Society: Sensory differences](#)
Information on how autistic individuals may experience the senses differently, with practical guidance to create supportive environments.
- [Autism Education Trust: Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms](#)
Guidance to help staff assess and adapt school environments to support pupils with autism who experience sensory processing difficulties

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- **LGfL: Learning Through Movement**
An overview resource for teachers on the role of movement in learning, with guidance to support students who have additional needs.
- **Leicestershire County Council: Sensory breaks**
Information for schools on using sensory breaks to support pupils' focus, regulation and wellbeing
- **NHS Tayside: Sensory checklist**
Checklist from the Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Service to identify sensory needs

Behaviours that may place a child at risk

Some behaviours can carry an immediate risk of harm. In these situations, the first priority is always the safety of the child and of others. Examples might include leaving the classroom or school site without permission, climbing furniture or structures in unsafe ways, self-harming (such as headbanging or biting), or play that has the potential to cause injury to themselves or others. With these behaviours, it is paramount that they are managed within the school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure immediate safety and to reduce the risk of harm. Strategies should also be put in place to prevent incidents where possible, minimise risk when they occur and ensure the child and those around them are supported during and after the event.

Universal ideas

- Build safe physical environments that minimise opportunities for risk
- Develop clear routines and calm adult responses when behaviours may place a child at risk

Targeted ideas

- Put in place individual risk assessments and safety plans, developed with input from staff, families and where appropriate, external professionals.
- Ensure staff are trained in de-escalation and safe intervention techniques.



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Where to look in the toolkit

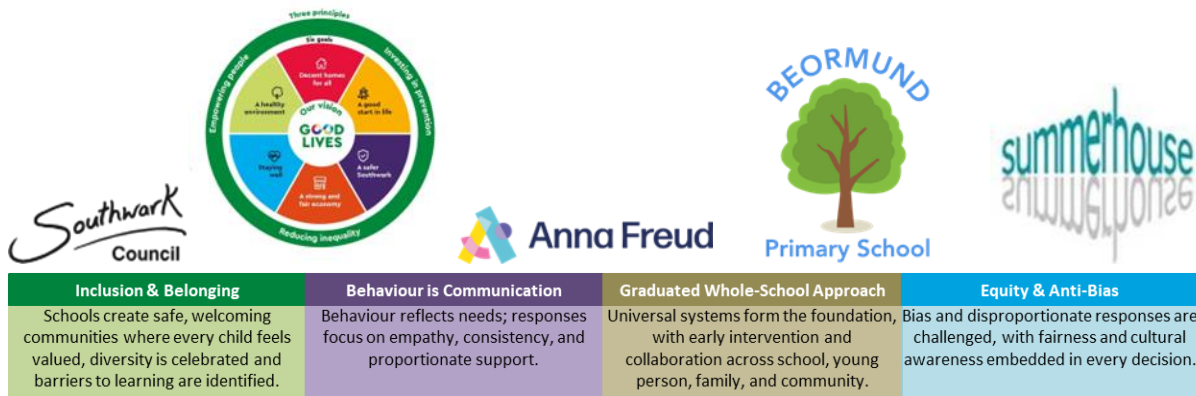
- Section 2d. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs
- Section 2e: Understanding adversity and trauma
- Section 4d: Inclusive practice and SEND
- 3a: Recognising patterns, triggers and unmet needs
- Section 5: Targeted approaches
- Section 6: Specialist approaches

Reflection questions

- *Do all staff know the safeguarding procedures and how to escalate concerns?*
- *Are risk assessments and safety plans in place for pupils who need them?*
- *How is information about behaviours that may place a child at risk shared across the team to ensure consistency?*
- *How are pupils supported in the aftermath of an incident to feel safe, understood and able to re-engage in learning?*
- *What opportunities are there for staff and pupils to repair relationships following incidents?*
- *Are follow-up plans in place to reduce the likelihood of recurrence (for example, adjustments, additional support, or changes to routines)?*

Useful links

- **Department for Education: Keeping children safe in education**
Statutory guidance for schools and colleges on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.
- **The Key: risk assessment for pupils with behaviours of concern**
Templates to support schools in assessing risk and planning for pupils with behaviours of concern (*requires subscription*).
- **Leicestershire County Council: Sensory breaks**
Information for schools on using sensory breaks to support pupils' focus, regulation and wellbeing



5. Targeted approaches

In this section:

[5a. Recognising when targeted support is needed](#)

[5b. Targeted support within school](#)

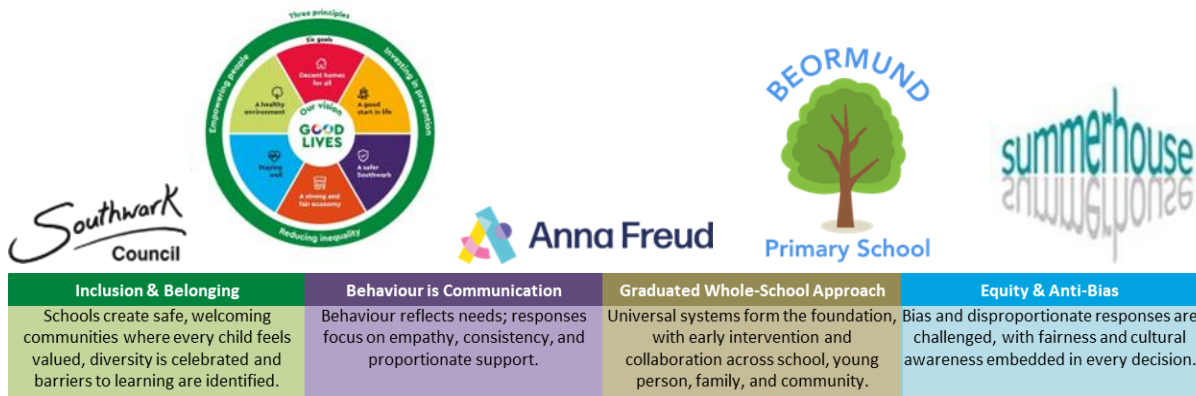
[5c. Supporting pupils with specific needs](#)

The second tier of the behaviour support pathway focuses on targeted approaches for **some pupils**, where universal strategies alone are not enough. This tier is used when a pupil is beginning to show patterns of behaviour that are having a noticeable impact on their learning, relationships or wellbeing, but where their needs can still be met within the school's existing resources and expertise.

Targeted approaches are tailored to the pupil's context and may be delivered in small groups or one-to-one. They are usually time-limited and aim to address specific skills or needs, such as emotional regulation, social interaction or coping strategies. The focus is on providing early, proportionate support to prevent difficulties from escalating.

5a. Recognising when targeted support is needed

Targeted support refers to strategies and interventions that go beyond everyday classroom practice and are tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils. These



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approaches are typically used when universal strategies have not been sufficient to support a child’s social, emotional or behavioural development.

This support can take many forms, including small group interventions, individual mentoring, therapeutic programmes or input from specialist services. While approaches will vary depending on the setting and the child’s needs, effective targeted support is always underpinned by strong relationships, good communication and a shared understanding of the pupil’s context and strengths.

Targeted support should not be seen as a last resort or a response only to behaviours of concern or challenge. Instead, it is part of a continuum of support that recognises that some pupils will, at times, need additional support to manage the demands of school life.

Useful links

- [Trauma Informed Schools UK: Relational Support Plan](#)
A template for schools to record and review personalised relational support for pupils.

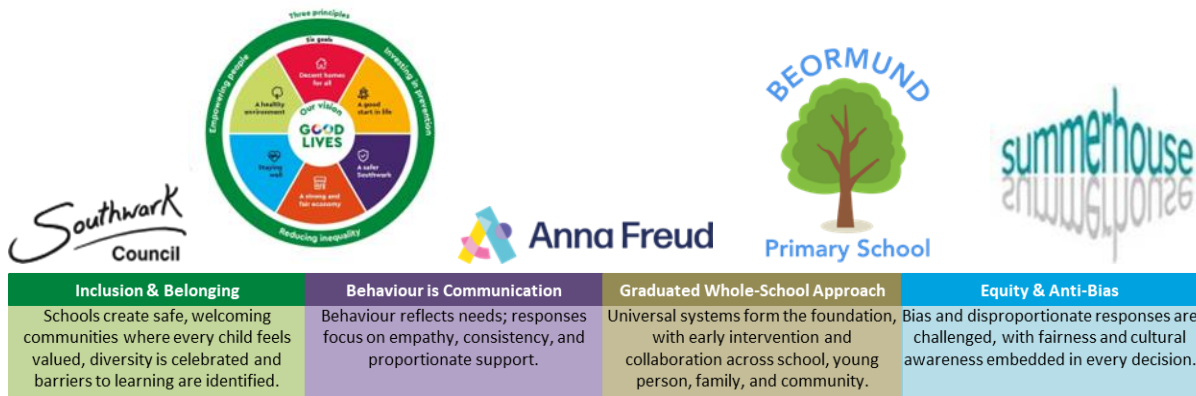
5b. Targeted support within school

Targeted support guide

The Targeted Support Toolkit is designed to help education staff review and develop targeted approaches that support pupils’ social, emotional and mental wellbeing. It can be used to explore what targeted support might be needed in your setting and to identify approaches that are likely to be a good fit.

The toolkit includes two parts:

- **Guide** - outlines a structured process for reviewing existing provision, understanding pupils’ needs and introducing targeted support. It covers practical steps including how to identify priorities, plan delivery and monitor impact over time.
- **Tool** - allows staff to explore different types of targeted support. Options can be filtered by delivery method, education phase, intended outcomes



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and other factors. This can be a useful way to narrow down choices and find support that is appropriate to your setting.

The guide is designed to be used first. It encourages staff to reflect on what is already in place and consider what further support might be helpful. This might involve identifying a gap in provision, responding to a specific pattern of need or adapting existing support for a particular group of pupils.

Once priorities have been identified, the tool can be used to look at potential approaches in more detail. Some of the support options included may be suitable for staff to deliver with appropriate training; others may require input from external providers. Both resources will give staff greater confidence in choosing the most effective support for pupils in their setting.

Useful links:

- **Targeted support tool: Mentally Healthy Schools**
A guide and tool for providing effective targeted mental wellbeing support in your school or college.

Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) Guidebook

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) Guidebook is a free, filterable resource with information on over 130 evaluated programmes that have shown evidence of improving outcomes for children and young people. While many are targeted or specialist in nature, it also includes a number of universal approaches relevant to whole-school planning.

You can filter by outcomes such as behaviour to find approaches that align with your priorities, from preventative, whole-school strategies to more targeted support.

For each intervention, the Guidebook outlines:

- what the intervention does and who it is designed for

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- how effective it has been found to be (its impact)
- how confident you can be in the impact (evidence rating)
- indicative costs.

The Guidebook can help schools identify approaches that might address their priorities, but it is not an endorsement or guarantee of effectiveness. Schools can use the Guidebook to review potential interventions against their own context, considering factors such as the needs of their pupils, existing provision, available resources and staff capacity.

The implementation information provided can help school leaders plan how an approach might fit within their current behaviour and wellbeing strategies, and whether any training or partnership with external providers would be needed.

Useful links:

- **Foundations: Guidebook**
A toolkit of over 130 evidence-based interventions, rated for their impact on children and families' outcomes.

5c. Supporting pupils with specific needs

Emotion coaching

Who may need this support

Children and young people who would benefit from developing emotional literacy, self-regulation and problem-solving skills. It can also support those showing behaviours of concern or finding it hard to manage strong feelings.

Overview

Emotion coaching helps adults build warm, responsive relationships with children by supporting both self-regulation and co-regulation. It encourages pupils to recognise their emotions, understand why they happen and learn constructive ways to manage them.

The approach was originally developed by psychologist John Gottman as a parenting method.²⁷

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Figure 2 Source: Emotion Coaching UK, 'Elements of Emotion Coaching.'

Potential benefits:
 Research and pilot evaluations²⁸ suggest that emotion coaching may lead to:

- reduced emotion dismissing by staff and more positive acknowledgement of children’s feelings
- improvements in staff professional practice, confidence and self-regulation
- reported improvements in children’s ability to manage emotions and behaviour
- better pupil wellbeing and engagement in learning
- fewer sanctions and exclusions
- improved attendance
- more effective support for children in care and those who have experienced early trauma

These findings are based mainly on staff reports and small-scale studies in the UK, alongside related international work, so more robust evidence is needed.

Theoretical underpinning and evidence base
 A 2022 UK study in six primary schools found that staff were generally positive about emotion coaching, with ‘over 90% of respondents [agreeing] or strongly [agreeing] with the statement ‘EC is a useful approach for professionals to use



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with children'. Staff highlighted benefits for children's emotional development and regulation and also described how the approach influenced their own practice and empathy.

The study also noted barriers, including time pressures, curriculum demands and inconsistency across staff. Some felt that emotion coaching did not work with every pupil, though this may reflect differences in practitioner skill or context.'²⁹

Limitations to research evidence

Preliminary findings suggest that emotion coaching has promise, but there is limited evidence of impact in UK schools. Most research so far reflects staff perspectives rather than long-term outcomes for children and young people. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is currently evaluating the approach, with results due in autumn 2026.³⁰

Useful links

- [Education Endowment Foundation: Emotion Coaching trial](#)
Webpage about a trial testing the impact of Emotion Coaching.
- [Emotion Coaching](#)
Training and resources to help adults use Emotion Coaching to support children and young people's emotional and behavioural wellbeing.

Emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA)

Who may need this support

Pupils who are experiencing anxiety, low confidence, bereavement, friendship difficulties or other barriers to feeling settled and ready to learn.

Overview

An Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) is a trained member of staff who helps children and young people build their emotional understanding, strengthen relationships and develop resilience.

ELSAs usually work with pupils in a calm, private space where they can talk and reflect without distraction. Sessions are planned and time-limited, focusing on specific areas such as:

- developing self-awareness and emotional vocabulary



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- building social and friendship skills
- learning strategies to manage strong feelings
- practising problem-solving and conflict resolution
- strengthening confidence and self-esteem
- finding ways to cope with change or loss.

An intervention is short-term and goal-focused, usually lasting between half a term and a full term. Most involve around six weekly sessions, delivered one-to-one or in a small group. Progress is reviewed before and after the intervention so that next steps can be identified.

Although much of an ELSA's work is proactive and structured, they can also provide short-term, reactive support after significant life events such as bereavement, family separation or illness. In these cases, sessions are led by the pupil, with an emphasis on active listening, reassurance and creating a safe space rather than working towards set targets.

Potential benefits:

According to the ELSA website³¹, potential benefits for children include:

- a safe space to share feelings
- tailored support for individual needs
- developing emotional and social skills
- improved wellbeing and readiness to learn
- greater confidence
- increased resilience and coping skills

Theoretical underpinning and evidence base

A recent scoping review (Rogers & Kelly, 2024) identified more than 50 studies, ranging from published research to local evaluations, which together suggest that ELSA can have a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing and on staff confidence in supporting emotional needs. However, most of the research to date is small-scale and qualitative.³²

Limitations to research evidence

Although the evidence base is growing, more robust and wide-scale studies are still needed. Much of the research is small-scale or based on local evaluations, so the findings may not reflect all schools. There is also little evidence on long-term outcomes, although existing studies do suggest positive effects for pupils and staff.³³



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Useful links:

- **Southwark - ELSA Network**
Contact details for local Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) in Southwark.
- **ELSA Support**
Downloadable resources and activities for Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) to use with students.

Nurture groups

Who may need this support

Children and young people with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties who may benefit from additional, small-group support.

Overview

Nurture groups are small, structured groups usually involving six to twelve pupils, supported by two trained staff members. They provide a warm and predictable environment where children can build trusting relationships and develop the skills they need to thrive in their classroom and wider school life. Pupils are usually identified through a combination of observation and assessment - most commonly using the Boxall Profile, an evidence-based tool that helps staff understand developmental needs and monitor progress over time. Placement in a nurture group is typically short-term and carefully tailored, with most pupils attending for part of the school day while remaining members of their mainstream class. This dual-placement approach helps pupils maintain a sense of belonging in their class, while giving them access to targeted support.

Nurture groups are guided by 6 core principles³⁵:

- learning is understood developmentally
- the classroom offers a safe base
- the importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing
- language is a vital means of communication

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- all behaviour is communication
- the importance of transition in the lives of children and young people
(taken from the Nurture Group website, www.nurtureuk.org).

Potential benefits:

A recent systematic review of 14 studies found that nurture group provision is, overall, effective at improving pupils’ social and emotional outcomes. However, the review noted that improvements were not consistent across both sections of the Boxall Profile, the main tool used to measure progress. Outcomes also varied depending on pupil characteristics such as age, baseline score, and gender. Further research is needed to explore these factors and to better understand how nurture groups bring about change.³⁴

Theoretical underpinning and evidence base

Nurture groups are grounded in attachment theory, which explains how early experiences with caregivers shape the ability to form relationships and manage emotions. For children who have experienced disruptions in these early relationships, nurture groups can offer the opportunity to experience secure, trusting connections within school.

A large-scale evaluation in Northern Ireland found that ‘the percentage of pupils exhibiting difficult behaviour dropped from 77.7% to 20.6% following nurture group attendance, with no significant change in the control group.’³⁵

Limitations to research evidence

While the evidence for nurture groups is strong, particularly in early years and primary settings, there are still some gaps in the research. For example, less is known about the longer-term impact once pupils leave nurture groups, and some areas of provision remain underexplored.³⁶ As with any approach, staff should consider whether nurture groups are a good fit for the pupil’s interests and needs, and how it complements existing support in school.

Useful links:

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- **Nurture UK: Nurture Groups**
An introduction to the theory and practice of nurture groups, including key principles and how they support pupils' social and emotional development
- **Nurture UK Pamphlet**
Introductory guide to the principles and benefits of nurture groups in education settings
- **Twinkl: Nurture Groups**
Information on how nurture groups support pupils, with ideas for resources and activities

Social skills training

Who may need this support

Children and young people who find it difficult to manage their behaviour, recognise and regulate emotions or build positive peer relationships.

Overview

Social skills training helps children and young people to develop clearer ways of communicating and to connect with others more effectively. It also supports pupils to recognise their emotions and to respond in ways that make everyday situations easier to manage. This can be particularly valuable for those who struggle to regulate their behaviour or who need extra guidance to feel confident in social settings.

Programmes can be delivered universally to all pupils, or in a more targeted way with those who need additional support. They are often school based, delivered through structured lessons by teachers who may receive additional training. Sessions can vary in intensity, from a single short activity to 40 or more sessions spread over several months.

Activities may include role-play, video demonstrations of positive behaviours, relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and teacher observations to track children's progress.



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Inclusion & Belonging	Behaviour is Communication	Graduated Whole-School Approach	Equity & Anti-Bias
Schools create safe, welcoming communities where every child feels valued, diversity is celebrated and barriers to learning are identified.	Behaviour reflects needs; responses focus on empathy, consistency, and proportionate support.	Universal systems form the foundation, with early intervention and collaboration across school, young person, family, and community.	Bias and disproportionate responses are challenged, with fairness and cultural awareness embedded in every decision.

Potential benefits:

Research suggests that social skills training can have a significant impact. The Youth Endowment Fund (2025) reports that ‘on average social skills training programmes have reduced the number of children involved in crime by 32%.’³⁷

Programmes may also bring wider benefits, including:

- building emotional regulation and self-control, helping pupils to respond more constructively in social situations
- strengthening communication and cooperation skills, supporting positive peer relationships
- reducing impulsive behaviour and the risk of conflict, contributing to a calmer school environment

Impacts appear strongest in targeted programmes, especially those delivered to boys aged around 9-10. Effects were smaller in universal programmes, and impacts were also lower for younger children, older children and girls (Youth Endowment Fund, 2025).

Theoretical underpinning and evidence base

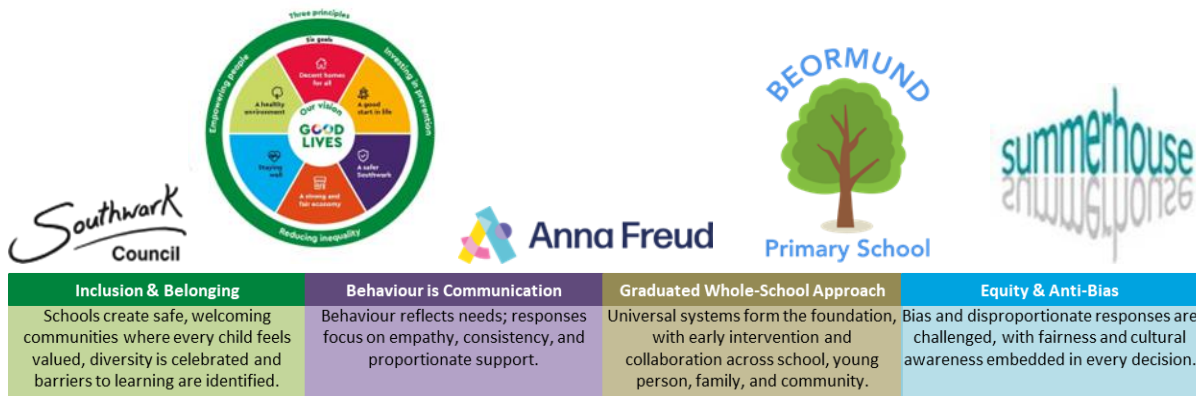
Social skills training draws on theories of social learning and emotional regulation, emphasising the importance of modelling, practising and reinforcing constructive behaviours.

The YEF notes that ‘we have high confidence in our estimate of the impact on violent crime. The estimate is based on a high-quality review of many studies. Many of the original studies are randomised control trials - a strong design for understanding the impact of an intervention’ (Youth Endowment Fund, 2025).

Limitations to research evidence

Although the YEF’s evidence review is relatively strong, it cautions that ‘we have downgraded our confidence rating because there is a lot of variation in the estimates provided by the underlying research. Although the majority of studies suggested a decrease in crime, one fifth of studies suggested that the intervention caused an increase’ (Youth Endowment Fund, 2025).

They also note that most studies come from the USA. In the UK, three evaluations of school-based programmes (PATHS and SEAL) ‘failed to find a



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sustained impact on social skills’ (Youth Endowment Fund, 2025).

Implementation challenges were also reported, including difficulties finding time in the curriculum and adapting materials developed in the USA to fit local contexts. In one study, ‘teachers were only able to deliver half of the planned activities’ (Youth Endowment Fund, 2025).

Much of the original evidence was produced in the 1990s and relatively little new research has been published since, despite the existence of ‘centres’ dedicated to social skills. The YEF’s recent review is therefore the most reliable source currently available, though its findings focus primarily on crime outcomes rather than broader measures of social and emotional wellbeing.

As with any approach, staff may want to consider whether social skills training is a good fit for pupils’ interests and needs, and how it could complement existing support already in place in school.

Useful links

- [Youth Endowment Fund: Social skills training](#)
Information about social skills training programmes, including evidence on their impact in helping children and young people manage emotions and build positive relationships.

6. Specialist approaches

In this section:

[6a. Accessing external and specialist support](#)

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The third tier of the behaviour support pathway is specialist intervention for a **few pupils** with more complex needs, often involving multi-agency collaboration. This tier is used when a pupil's needs cannot be fully met through the school's existing resources and expertise, even with targeted support in place.

Specialist approaches may still be delivered in school but will involve input from professionals with specific expertise, such as CAMHS practitioners, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists or specialist teachers. Support may also take place in the community or in a clinical setting. The aim is to develop a coordinated plan that addresses the underlying causes of behaviour and promotes long-term wellbeing.

6a. Accessing external and specialist support

Specialist services

Southwark CAMHS Services

Best for: children and young people experiencing emotional or mental health difficulties (e.g. anxiety, low mood, trauma), where specialist assessment or therapy may be needed.

Overview

In Southwark, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are provided by South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM). CAMHS includes a number of multidisciplinary teams offering specialist support for children, young people and families.

Child and Family Service

Provides specialist assessment and treatment for children and young people up to age 18, alongside support for parents and families. The service also includes *The Hope Project*, which supports children, young people and families affected by traumatic experiences. These might be single events, such as a road accident or longer-term experiences of abuse or violence.



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How the service supports behaviour and wellbeing in schools

How to access

referrals can be made by anyone who is concerned about a child, including their parent or carer, GP, teacher or social worker.

Contact

Email: CAMHS.SouthwarkReferrals@slam.nhs.uk

Phone: 020 3228 7777

Southwark CAMHS Neurodevelopmental Service (NDS)

Best for: children and young people with autism, ADHD or learning disabilities who also have significant mental health needs or behaviours that challenge.

Overview

The NDS supports children and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and intellectual disability (also known as learning disability). The team offers assessment, therapeutic support and advice, and works with parents and carers when a young person has significant mental health needs or behaviours that are hard to manage. Most appointments take place at Sunshine House, but support can also be offered at home or in school.

The service links closely with other CAMHS teams and community organisations in Southwark.

How to access

Referrals should be made using the [Southwark CAMHS Single Point of Access referral form](#). Referrals are screen to check suitability and urgency. If accepted, the young person will usually be added to a waiting list for an assessment to take place as soon as possible.

Contact

Telephone: 0203 228 7777

Email: CAMHS.SouthwarkReferrals@slam.nhs.uk

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SEND support and assessment

Southwark SEN Inclusion and Monitoring Team

Best for: pupils with SEND who need additional support or assessment (e.g. SpLD/dyslexia), or where schools need advice on inclusive strategies and statutory responsibilities.

Overview

This team supports schools to meet the needs of pupils with SEND, including those with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. They help schools to develop inclusive practice and ensure that provision is in place so that children and young people can learn, take part and thrive.

The team works with staff to explore how a pupil's behaviour may be linked to their learning needs and offers practical advice on strategies that can make a difference in the classroom. They can carry out assessments, such as for SpLD/dyslexia, and provide training and guidance that is adapted to the needs of individual pupils and settings. The service is flexible in how it works, tailoring support to each school's context and priorities.

Who can access

Schools in Southwark and out-of-borough schools with responsibility for Southwark pupils.

How to access

To request a SpLD /Dyslexia assessment the school must complete a referral form. Schools can also request other support e.g. in school training which is considered on a case by case basis

Contact

[Page Not Found | Southwark Schools](#)

Southwark Educational Psychology Service (EPS)



Inclusion & Belonging	Behaviour is Communication	Graduated Whole-School Approach	Equity & Anti-Bias
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Best for: children and young people whose learning, behaviour or wellbeing is not improving despite support in school and where specialist advice or assessment is needed.

Overview

The EPS is part of Southwark Council’s SEND team. Educational psychologists and SEND Inclusion Practitioners (SENDIPs) work with schools, early years settings, post-16 providers and families to support children and young people with additional needs, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), those who are looked after and those at risk of harm. Support includes consultation, assessment, interventions, training and advice at individual, group and whole-school level.

Who can access

Children and young people aged 0-25 who live in Southwark or attend a Southwark school.

How the service supports behaviour and wellbeing in schools

How to access

Concerns should usually be discussed first with a child’s teacher, SENCo, Inclusion Manager or Head Teacher. Schools can involve their link educational psychologist if a pupil continues to make less than expected progress despite support. Parents also have the right to request an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment, which will involve EPS input. Non-maintained schools can purchase EPS support via a service level agreement or daily rate (subject to availability).

Cost

Free to families, children and young people. Maintained schools are allocated a named link EP. Non-maintained schools can buy in the service.

Contact

Website: [Educational Psychology Service | Southwark Local Offer](#)

Email: SEN-EducationalPsychologist&EHO@southwark.gov.uk

Phone: 020 7525 5798



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Autism Support Team (Southwark Council)

Best for: early years and primary-aged pupils in Southwark with a confirmed autism diagnosis.

Overview

This team works with schools, settings and families to create autism-friendly environments and strengthen understanding of children’s needs. Support can include classroom observation, tailored strategies and visual resources, as well as workshops and training sessions for parents and carers.

How to access

Requests are made by schools using a referral form, which must be signed by parents and include confirmation of diagnosis. The team reviews requests regularly and allocates support as appropriate.

Contact

Email: AutismSupportTeam@southwark.gov.uk

Website: [Autism Support Team | Southwark Local Offer](#)

The Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) Service

Best for: children and young people with speech, language, communication or swallowing difficulties that are affecting their learning, behaviour or relationships.

Overview

The SALT service, part of Evelina London Children’s Community Services (Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust), supports children and young people with speech, language, communication or swallowing difficulties. Support may begin before school and continue into later years, depending on need. The team works with children individually or in groups and also provides advice to parents, carers and schools. Families are often given activities to try at home to help children make the best progress.

Who can access

Children and young people aged 0-19 who live in Southwark or attend a Southwark mainstream school, and their parents or carers

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How to access

For children under 5, support can be accessed through drop-in sessions, Chattertime, or referral from a parent, health visitor, GP, nursery or Children’s Centre. For children aged 5 and above, schools (via the SENCo) usually make the referral. Parents and carers can also contact the service directly for advice.

Contact

Website: [Evelina London SALT Service](#)
 Facebook: [Evelina London SLT](#)
 Email: contactslt@nhs.net
 Phone: 020 3049 8181

Behaviour support and exclusion prevention

Summerhouse Behaviour Support Service

Strengthening mainstream placements and reducing exclusions by working with pupils, families, and schools together.

Best for: Primary-aged pupils (5-11) in Southwark mainstream schools who are at risk of exclusion due to social, emotional, or behavioural needs.

Overview

Summerhouse is a short-stay, preventative behaviour support service. It is not a special school, but a partnership resource for Southwark mainstream schools. The service aims to strengthen pupils’ chances of thriving in mainstream education by addressing behaviours of concern before they escalate to permanent exclusion.

Pupils attend Summerhouse part-time for two terms while remaining dual-registered with their mainstream school. Alongside direct pupil support, Summerhouse works with schools and families to promote consistency, resilience, and long-term strategies for behaviour and wellbeing.

How the service supports behaviour and wellbeing in schools

- Pupil support: Small-group teaching and tailored interventions that help children develop emotional regulation, social skills, and positive learning behaviours.
- Family support: Close collaboration with parents and carers to reinforce consistency between home and school.



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<p>Inclusion & Belonging</p> <p>Schools create safe, welcoming communities where every child feels valued, diversity is celebrated and barriers to learning are identified.</p>	<p>Behaviour is Communication</p> <p>Behaviour reflects needs; responses focus on empathy, consistency, and proportionate support.</p>	<p>Graduated Whole-School Approach</p> <p>Universal systems form the foundation, with early intervention and collaboration across school, young person, family, and community.</p>	<p>Equity & Anti-Bias</p> <p>Bias and disproportionate responses are challenged, with fairness and cultural awareness embedded in every decision.</p>
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- School support: Guidance, modelling, and coaching for school staff, enabling them to better manage behaviour and embed restorative and inclusive practices.
- Reintegration focus: Structured transition planning to help pupils return successfully to their mainstream setting full-time, with ongoing advice and monitoring as needed.

How to access

Referrals are made directly by mainstream schools. Pupils remain on the roll of their home school. The success of the placement depends on active collaboration between specialist Summerhouse staff, the mainstream school, and the family to ensure consistent expectations and approaches.

Phone: 02086932592

Email: office@summerhouse.southwark.sch.uk

Website: www.summerhousesouthwark.org.uk

Beormund Primary school

“Working in partnership to inspire learning, empower individuals and enrich the community of the future”

Best for: Beormund Primary is a Southwark special school that caters for children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. All children arrive with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) because their complex needs could not be met in a mainstream setting.

Overview

Beormund is a small, nurturing and therapeutic provision with trauma informed care. Our children often find difficulty regulating their emotions, processing language and expectations, adhering to social norms, building relationships and verbalising how they think and feel. All of our children have speech language and communication needs. Some may have a diagnosis such as ADHD, ODD, PTSD or Autism. Many of our children have been impacted from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which affect how they view the world and their responses to it. Their complex emotions often manifest in behaviours that challenge - behaviours are, after all, a form of communication.



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How the service supports behaviour and wellbeing in schools

- BeyondBeormund is a training offer to all schools.
- Members of the Beormund team will have an initial meeting with senior leaders and inclusion leads within your mainstream setting, in order to understanding your school context, your expertise and skills set, the resources you have against the collective demands of behaviours that challenge. In response to the conversations and information gathering, BeyondBeormund can then offer a bespoke support programme and/or training offer with clear, agreed outcomes.

How to access

Requests can be made via the school office.

Phone: 0207 525 9027

Email: office@beormund.southwark.sch.uk

Website: www.beormundschoo.co.uk

Early help and community wellbeing

The Nest

Best for: young people and families in Southwark who may benefit from non-clinical support for their mental health and wellbeing.

Overview

The Nest offers early help for children, young people and families, with a focus on building emotional resilience and wellbeing. Support includes youth work, person-centred counselling, talking therapies, group activities, peer mentoring and access to online resources. The service takes a non-clinical approach, helping young people to develop the tools and confidence to manage challenges and thrive.

How to access

Young people, parents and carers, and professionals can get in touch directly to find out more about the support available. Referrals are not always necessary and the team can advise on the best route depending on need.

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Contact

Telephone: 020 7525 2714

Email: thenest@groundwork.org.uk

Website: [The Nest](#) | [Mental Wellbeing Support in Southwark](#)

7. Additional resources

This section offers additional resources and tools that schools can use alongside the main approaches in the toolkit.

The evidence for these kinds of resources is mixed. Some are widely used in schools and valued in practice, but do not yet have a strong research base. Others have some emerging or promising evidence. We've included links to research where available, as well as other resource links schools may wish to explore.

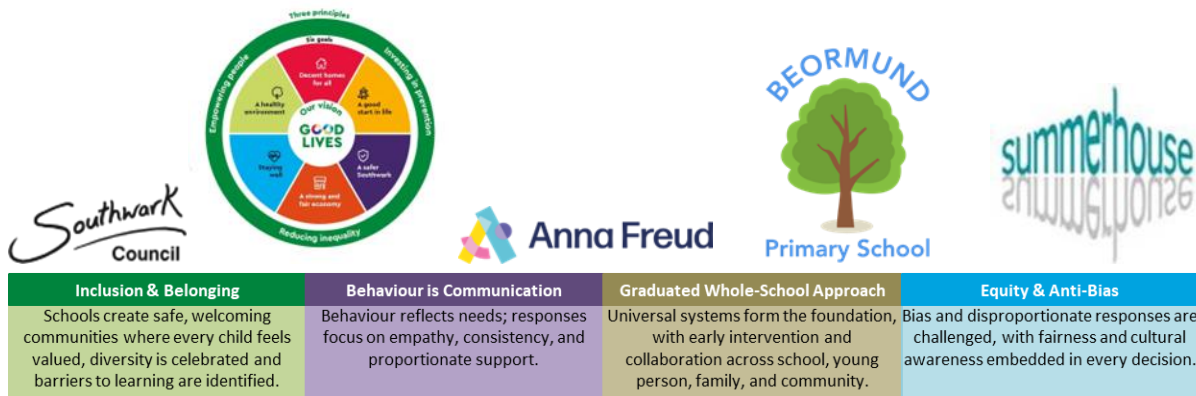
As with all approaches, schools are encouraged to draw on professional judgement, monitor the impact in their own setting and decide what works best for their pupils.

In this section:

- 7a. [Communication Passports](#)
- 7b. [Social Stories](#)
- 7c. [Visual Support](#)
- 7d. [Calm corners / Safe spaces](#)

7a. Communication Passports

- **What is it?** A simple, person-centred way to share important information about how someone communicates and what support works best for them.
- **Who is it for?** Pupils who find it difficult to communicate their needs, including those with SEND, communication difficulties or who may struggle to express themselves verbally
- **How does it support behaviour?** It can help staff understand and respond to a pupil's individual communication needs in a consistent way. This can make



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interactions clearer and more supportive, helping to build trust and strengthen relationships.

Useful links:

- [Communication Passport - NDTi](#)
Guidance and templates to help schools create person-centred communication passports for children and young people
- [Communication Passports - Communication Matters](#)
Overview of what communication passports are, how they work and why they are used to support children and young people
- [Creating Communication Passports](#)
Practical guidance and resources on how to design and develop personalised communication passports

7b. Social Stories

- **What is it?** Social Stories are short, descriptive narratives that help individuals, particularly those who are neurodivergent, to understand and navigate social situations. They offer a clear and supportive way to explain what might happen, what is expected and how someone might choose to respond.
- **Who is it for?** Social Stories were first designed for individuals with autism but are also helpful for people of any age with a range of social communication needs.
- **How does it support behaviour?** By improving understanding of what might happen in a situation, a Social Story can reduce uncertainty and create a sense of predictability. This often helps to lower anxiety and build confidence. They can introduce new experiences, such as a class trip or a change in timetable or explain social interactions that may not be obvious, including ways to join group activities or respond when disagreements arise.

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Useful links:

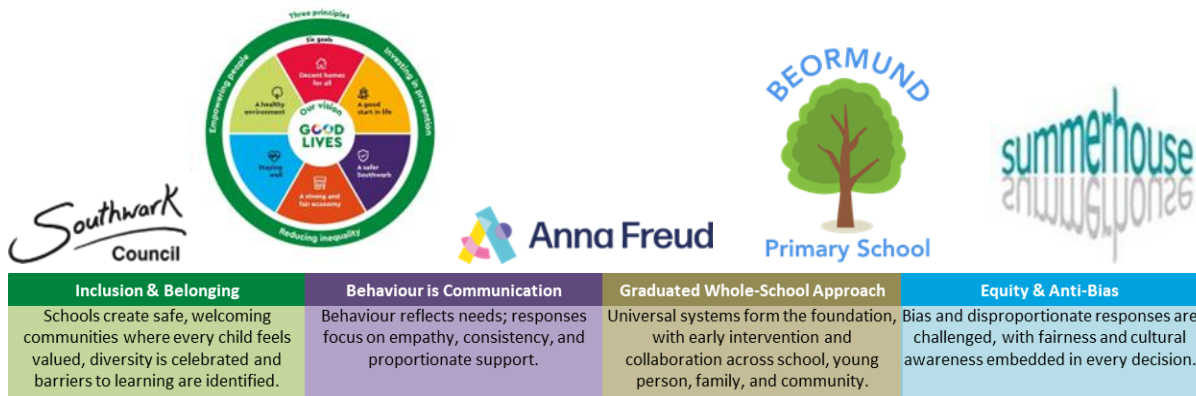
- [Social Stories randomized trial | 2025 CAMH journal \(Barry Wright et al.\)](#)
a UK school-based trial that tested the effectiveness of Social Stories for autistic pupils
- [Natural Autistic Society: Social Stories](#)
An online course for education professionals to build skills and confidence in using Social Stories effectively with autistic pupils

7c. Visual Supports

- **What is it?** Visual supports use images, symbols, pictures or objects (rather than just words) to help children understand routines, instructions or expectations. A common example is a visual timetable, which shows the order of activities during the day. Other supports might include task checklists, now-and-next boards or visual prompts for behaviour and learning.
- **Who is it for?** Pupils who benefit from extra structure and predictability, including those with SEND, communication difficulties, or who feel anxious about changes and transitions.
- **How does it support behaviour?** By making routines clear and consistent, visual timetables help reduce uncertainty and anxiety. They support pupils to anticipate what's coming next, build independence and transition between tasks more smoothly.

Useful links:

- [How visual timetables can support children with speech, language and communication needs in the early years](#)
A practical guide to creating and using visual timetables to support children's communication and learning



- **Visual Timetable**
Guidance on creating and using visual timetables to support children’s understanding of routines and transitions
- **Objects of Reference | Just One Norfolk**
An introduction to using everyday objects as visual cues to support children’s understanding of routines and spoken language
- **Choice Board | Just One Norfolk**
Guidance on using visual choice boards to support communication and decision-making for children
- **First and Then Board | Just One Norfolk**
Practical advice on using ‘first...then...’ visuals to support children with routines and transitions

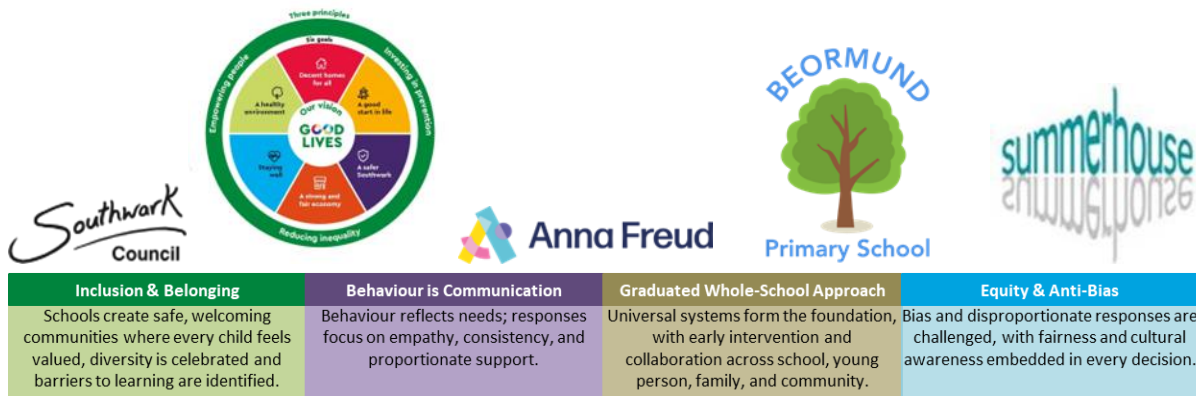
7d. Calm corners / Safe spaces

- **What is it?** A designated area in the classroom or school where pupils can regulate and take a short break when overwhelmed.
- **Who is it for?** Useful for any pupil, but especially those who experience emotional dysregulation.
- **How does it support behaviour?** Provides a safe, structured alternative to escalation, helping children regulate emotions and re-engage positively with school life.

Useful links:

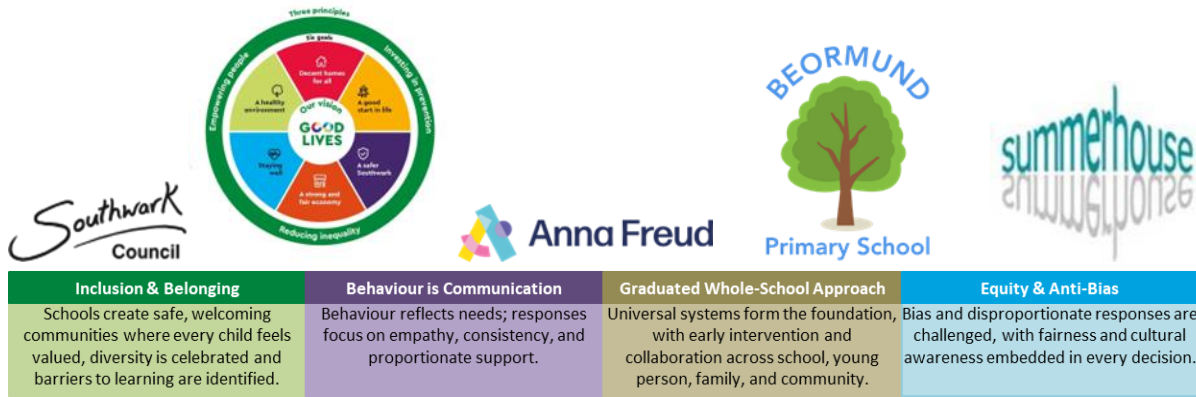
Leicestershire County Council: Creating a Safe Space

Guidance for schools on setting up and using safe spaces to help pupils regulate emotions and manage behaviour



7e. Further reading and resources

- **Council for Learning Outside the Classroom: Learning Outside the Classroom**
Charity supporting schools to embed high-quality outdoor and experiential learning through resources, guidance and accreditation.
- **Early Career Framework**
Statutory guidance outlining the induction programme and support for early career teachers.
- **Education Endowment Foundation: Moving from differentiation to adaptive teaching**
Blog reflecting on how schools can use adaptive teaching approaches to support all students' learning.
- **GL Assessment: Emotional Literacy**
A paid-for assessment tool to help schools understand and support pupils' emotional literacy and wellbeing.
- **Life Skills Education**
Evidence-based programmes to help children and young people build resilience, develop decision-making skills and reduce risky behaviours (*paid-for programme*).
- **National Autistic Society**
Charity providing guidance and resources for professionals supporting autistic people, including children and young people.
- **Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal: Teaching assistants and behaviour management**
Academic article exploring how teaching assistants view their role in



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managing behaviour and developing their practice.

8. Feedback

Please use the link below to complete a short feedback survey for Southwark's Primary Behaviour Intervention Toolkit:

[Primary Behaviour Intervention Toolkit – Fill in form](#)

If you have any questions regarding this toolkit please e-mail: office@summerhouse.southwark.sch.uk

8. References

¹ Department for Education & Department of Health (2015). *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

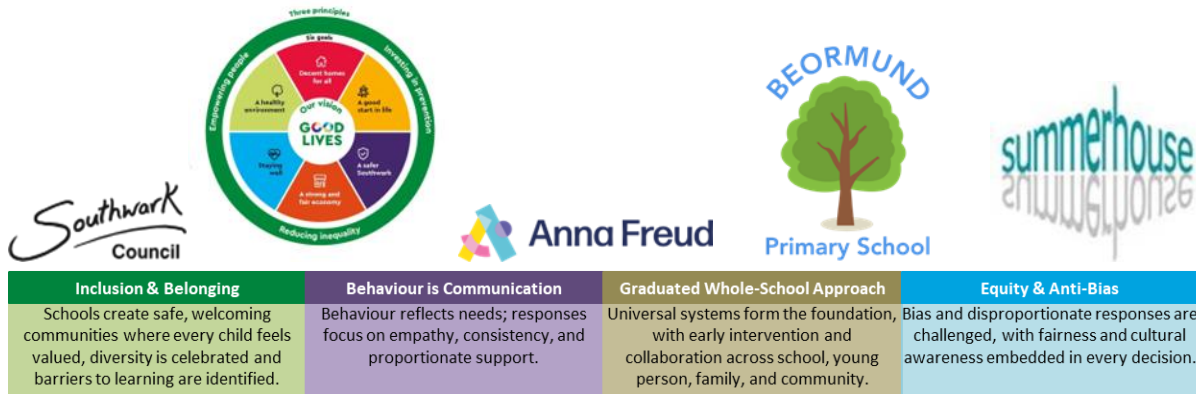
² Education Endowment Foundation (n.d.). *Behaviour interventions*. Teaching and Learning Toolkit. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/behaviour-interventions>

³ Anna Freud Centre, *The importance of early intervention for Social Emotional Mental Health: Why it improves pupil outcomes*. Available at: <https://www.annafreud.org/news/the-importance-of-early-intervention-for-social-emotional-mental-health-why-it-improves-pupil-outcomes/>

⁴ YoungMinds, *Understanding trauma and adversity*. Available at: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/professional/resources/understanding-trauma-and-adversity/>

⁵ Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, et al. (1998). *The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study*. *Am J Prev Med*, 14(4), 245-258. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/9635069>

⁶ Department for Education (2025). *Keeping children safe in education: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/686b94eefe1a249e937cbd2d/Keeping_children_saf



[e_in_education_2025.pdf](#)

⁷ Southwark Council (2023). *0-19 Population Data for Youth Service Review*. Available at: <https://services.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/202908/0-19-Population-Data-for-Youth-Service-Review-12042023-003-.pdf>

⁸ UK Trauma Council. *What is trauma?* Available at: <https://uktraumacouncil.org/trauma/trauma>

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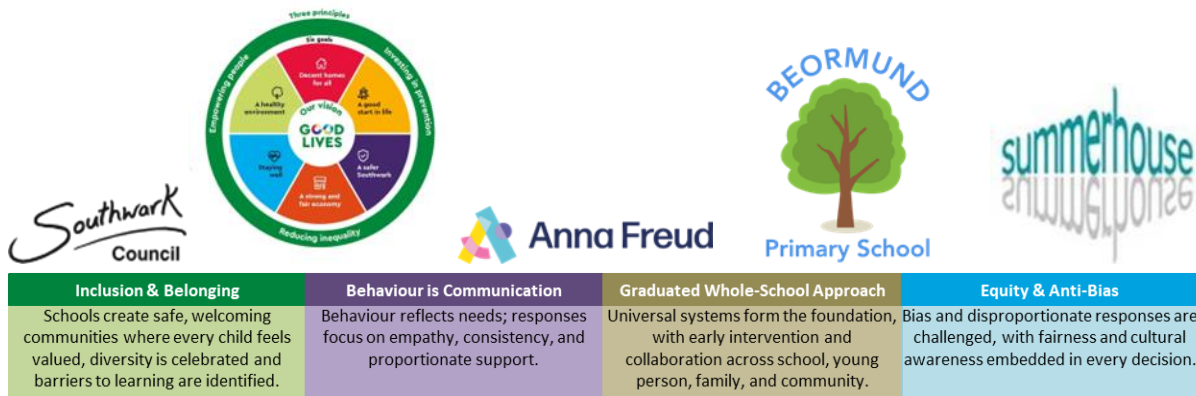
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Anna Freud



Inclusion & Belonging Schools create safe, welcoming communities where every child feels valued, diversity is celebrated and barriers to learning are identified.	Behaviour is Communication Behaviour reflects needs; responses focus on empathy, consistency, and proportionate support.	Graduated Whole-School Approach Universal systems form the foundation, with early intervention and collaboration across school, young person, family, and community.	Equity & Anti-Bias Bias and disproportionate responses are challenged, with fairness and cultural awareness embedded in every decision.
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