

Integrated Therapeutic Curriculum
Deep Dive

Personal Development

Intent

As a specialist setting supporting autistic pupils with complex SEMH needs, we understand the significance of personal development. Being able to recognise how you feel and then make appropriate, and contextually specific, decisions based on this is a fundamental skill necessary to live a happy and healthy life.

We value the knowledge, expertise and research of others and believe that a coherent, respectful and inclusive approach to promoting personal development is paramount. Alongside our own bespoke resources and approaches, we have drawn on well-respected and evidence-based approaches from the Autism Education Trust (AET), Social Thinking, Nurture UK and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

Our Personal Development curriculum aims to support pupils to:

- Recognise their own emotions and feelings
- Identify and use appropriate strategies for emotional regulation
- Experience happiness, fun and enjoyment
- Know and understand how to keep themselves and others safe
- Develop resilience, self-esteem and a positive sense of self
- Foster and maintain positive and safe relationships
- Promote strong mental health and wellbeing
- Broaden their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development
- Be prepared for their next stage of education and life

We pride ourselves on our deep knowledge of trauma-informed approaches and practices (OFG), which strengthen our expertise in supporting children and young people in their personal development.



Implementation

Our Personal Development curriculum strand is split into four key areas, each with its own assessment framework and curriculum resources:

- Social, emotional, mental health
- Personal safety
- Relationships (and sex) education (RSE)
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

The EEF (2022) identifies the use of metacognition and self-regulation approaches as having a ‘very high’ positive impact for pupils, based on extensive evidence. Specifically, ‘metacognition and self-regulation strategies are most effective when embedded in a school’s curriculum’.

The Zones of Regulation (2011) and Bounce (2022) approaches are central to our Personal Development curriculum. Pupils learn how to organise their feelings into different Zones and use metacognitive strategies to self-regulate in order to meet their personal and social goals. Staff continually model how they recognise and manage their own emotional regulation, with a significant focus on reflection and restoration. Our social cognition curriculum (Social Thinking 2023, also see Language and Communication Deep Dive) supports to pupils to understand how their thoughts and feelings may differ to other people, and that anyone’s behaviours influence how other people think and feel. We emphasise choice and agency, and work in a neuro-affirming way to support improved acceptance, awareness and celebration of neurodiversity.

The AET’s Progression Framework (2019) is based on their own research and consultation with education practitioners, parents, pupils, and autistic adults. Aspects of the AET’s Progression Framework are directly incorporated into our Personal Development curriculum: personal safety, road safety and travel, and leisure. Teachers plan lessons that promote development in these core areas as part of the school’s universal provision.

RSE and PSHE content is supplemented through the use of 1Decision (2022) schemes of work and resources. This is a PSHE Association Quality Assured Resource and provides teaching staff with a secure and validated starting point from which content is then adapted and differentiated to meet individual class and pupil need.

Impact

Teachers, therapists and senior leaders directly monitor and evaluate the impact of our curriculum and pupils' personal development progress throughout the academic year via our curriculum framework, SOLAR. Our Personal Development curriculum strand is intentionally designed to meet pupils' SEMH outcomes on their EHCPs and Individual Therapeutic Education Plans (ITEPs). Staff have knowledge and experience of approaches and strategies identified through Nurture UK. All pupils have a Boxall Profile (2019) assessment completed three times a year. The action plans and strategies identified contribute directly to pupils' ITEPs.

Through engaging with our curriculum, our pupils are able to expand their social lives and build positive relationships with peers and staff. We have pupils who, as a result of their own progress in their personal development, are now able to invite friends to a birthday party or attend a play date out of school. For many, this is their first experience of having an extended social group. One Year 6 leaver reflected that their proudest moment at school was 'When I helped my friends'. Another shared that their biggest achievement was 'Being kind to friends, because I used to be a bit rude'.

Progress in personal development is demonstrated through a clear sense of school community. As a result of their progress, the majority of pupils can now attend weekly assemblies which inform, celebrate and challenge their understanding of the world. Pupils vote for and represent each other on the School Council, and recognise the value and importance of tolerance, respect and equality. Our pupils celebrate both their diversity and their commonalities.

Pupils' improved self-awareness and knowledge of safety provides a secure foundation from which they can access the community with greater confidence. Our pupils are real ambassadors for the school. They consistently demonstrate independent application of the skills and knowledge they have acquired, accessing offsite visits and local amenities with pride.

We regularly seek the views of our pupils and parents. Our pupils typically join us with negative views of school, and often themselves. However, they leave with these views significantly challenged and improved, ready to embrace their next stage of learning. A parent of a Year 6 leaver shared that their child, since joining Mountfield, had 'Learnt to love school and now loved to learn'.

References

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