



## CASE STUDY REPORT

# SEAL: Communication and conflict

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*This study was originally published in 2009 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.*

## Abstract

**Background:** The purpose of the study was to develop children's social, emotional and behavioural skills, enhance conflict resolution skills, create a consistent approach to communication, and create a supportive learning environment for the whole school community.

**Aims:** The main aim was to develop social, emotional and behavioural skills in pupils, reduce reliance on staff for resolution, create a supportive learning environment, and ensure consistency across the whole school for PSED and PSHE.

**Methods:** Participants included school staff, parents, children, governors, and LA support advisors, all of whom were involved in developing the SEAL curriculum and increasing awareness of PSED and PSHE.

Methods used include LA SEAL training, Jenny Mosely circle time training, whole staff meetings, clear action plans, staff training, exemplar plans, assemblies, parent meetings, and family SEAL materials.

**Findings:** The main findings are that a whole school focus with a high priority over a period of time allows SEAL to become embedded in the school, leading to improved staff awareness, better problem solving, increased confidence in discussing feelings, and improved learning outcomes.

**Implications:** The findings suggest that a whole school focus on SEAL and PSHE can have a positive impact on teaching, school organisation and leadership. It can lead to increased confidence in discussing feelings, improved learning outcomes, and increased self-management and risk-taking among staff.

*This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.*

**Keywords:** Primary education; Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL); Personal, social and emotional development

## Introduction

### What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

Develop children's social, emotional and behavioural skills.

Enhance pupils' conflict resolution skills, develop a level of consistency to managing incidents and reduce pupil reliance on staff for resolution.

Develop a consistent approach from staff to communicating with pupils in a manner which is mindful of their life circumstances and promotes an effective environment for learning. A number of staff members felt that the development of these skills was not a priority and removed the focus from core subjects.

Develop a learning environment that is supportive to emotional health and well-being for whole school community.

Secure consistency across the whole school provision for PSED and PSHE, ensuring progression and development of skills.

Watch the Teachers TV video of this case study:

### Who might find this case study useful?

- Head of school improvement
- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- National Strategies consultant
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- SIP (School Improvement Partner)
- Subject leader
- Teacher

## Description

### What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)
- Personal, social and emotional development

### How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

We expected to increase the quality of interactions by children between peers through becoming more aware of their own and others' feelings.

We also wanted to increase the awareness and modelling of the different social and emotional aspects of learning among the whole school including senior management, governors, parents, children and all members of staff. A number of staff members felt that the development of these skills was not a priority and removed the focus from core subjects.

Another intention was to develop the PSED and PSHE whole school curriculum by using the whole school theme based approach to learning. We wanted to show clear progression and development of skills and understanding, reinforcing the knowledge year on year.

Conflict resolution was an area where we needed to develop the children's skills and we thought the SEAL programme's Peaceful Problem Solving process would help us to improve these skills, thereby impacting on

learning by giving children the knowledge and strategies to deal with issues before they came back to the classroom, allowing them to focus on learning.

A key intention was to secure a safe supportive learning environment where everyone feels emotionally safe.

### What were your success criteria?

What did we want to see/hear?

- Children being able to resolve issues independently with lower levels of adult intervention
  - Reduction in the number of incidences of inappropriate behaviour with an agreed process and consistency of response to incidents
  - Increased ability to manage feelings
  - Confident children
  - Empathetic children
  - Staff modelling social and emotional skills
  - Staff recognise their own needs and have strategies to manage these professionally
- What did we want to notice?
- Children becoming more vocal and articulate about their feelings – expressing their concerns and discussing their views
  - Children using strategies to build their own friendships
  - Children being able to stand up for themselves and others
  - Children being able to notice their own barriers for learning and having the strategies to overcome these barriers.

### What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Learning walks / study visits
- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupil consultation data

### Describe the CPD approaches you used

- Staff and support staff meetings focusing on some of the class based activities from an adult perspective
- Staff circle time training
- Using the LA support advisor to help with planning across the whole school for PSED and PSHE
- Whole-school CPD on staff and pupil social emotional and behavioural skills.

### What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

- LA SEAL training
- LA advisor support
- DCSF PSHE CPD course
- Jenny Mosely circle time training
- Coaching from external agency.

## Who provided you with support?

- External agency
- Local authority staff
- Senior management

## How were you supported?

The senior management supported the co-ordinator to implement the SEAL curriculum and ensured flexibility to change the existing PSHE curriculum, with a clear budget and advice on resources.

The coordinator had time out of class to develop curriculum, write policies, prepare resources and support other members of staff.

LA Advisor support – staff meeting support, lesson observation, developing curriculum.

Coaching from external agency in policy writing, vision for the programme, team development, monitoring, leadership styles and skills.

## Impact

### What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

- Children are able to resolve issues more independently, effectively and fairly and need lower levels of adult intervention.
- There is a focus on learning and a readiness to learn.
- Playground squad can solve problems between others using problem solving model.
- There is a reduction in the number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour recorded at playtimes – more are being sorted by themselves.
- Children have an increased ability to manage feelings, frustration or anger.
- Children with particular needs in social and emotional areas are developing their skills in these areas and staff are more confident and able to support them effectively.
- Children are more vocal about their feelings, they are able to express when they have concerns, discuss their views and feelings.
- Children are more comfortable in talking about issues that they may be experiencing.
- Children are becoming more empathetic with their peers and in some cases helping children to resolve problems by suggesting strategies.
- Children are using strategies learnt to build friendships.
- There is a whole school expectation of the behaviours and strategies that will be followed and how staff and children speak to each other.

### Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

All of the impact points mentioned above have supported in the development of an effective learning environment and therefore have impacted on the pupil learning in school.

Staff and children are aware of the part that emotions play in learning and the need for a calm environment and calm children who are confident and able to express their needs, feelings, strengths and concerns.

## Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Pupils report to adults following incidents generally include the opening phrase 'It's sorted'.

## Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Data comparison of cohorts

## Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Pupil consultation data

## Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Pupils' work.
- Teachers' planning.
- Pupil consultation.
- Circle time observations.
- Photographs of children during circle time and during playtimes.
- Records of incidences of inappropriate behaviour – There has been a reduction in incidences of around 75%, it is now rare for children to be sent in during playtimes and most incidents can be dealt with effectively and immediately either by the children themselves or with a lower level of adult support. Children are now more able to resolve issues for themselves and discuss the causes and consequences of their behaviour and recognise the steps that need to be taken to both resolve the problem and to reduce the likelihood of it happening again.
- Issues that arise are dealt with promptly at the time and as a result are not taking away time from learning and teaching in the classroom.
- Children report enjoying SEAL time, find it easier to communicate feelings – have the language and skills and an increased confidence in doing this. They use sentence structures to support in resolving problems/conflicts that arise and are also able to suggest strategies and support others in resolving issues.

## What has been the impact on teaching?

- Staff awareness of social and emotional aspects of learning has improved.
- Staff have changed the way they talk to children when problems arise.
- PSHE lessons well planned and are consistently taught. Learning intentions are evidenced in children's work. See example SEAL and PSHE curriculum attached.
- Consistent approach to problem solving – children and staff follow the same routines and strategies.
- Staff are increasingly aware of how their emotional needs have an impact on their work and also the children they work with.
- Learning environments are conducive to children's needs.

## Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Improvements in curriculum documentation
- Teacher perceptions

## Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

- Clear learning outcomes in teachers' planning.
- Weekly timetables include one session of circle time a week.
- Children's quality of work in books, discussions and assemblies.
- Documentation of teachers' perceptions of the curriculum and the impact that it has had on their children. They reported that: Children seem more confident in discussing feelings. Children know why they are feeling a certain way. Activities are good but some staff find it more difficult to clearly plan in each lesson.
- Children seem more confident in discussing feelings.
- Children know why they are feeling a certain way.
- Activities are good but some staff find it more difficult to clearly plan in each lesson.
- The programme has led to staff thinking about what the specific needs of their children are and adapting plans to meet these rather than blindly following a lesson plan.
- Staff are more confident in their delivery of PHSE.
- Children are more likely to sort problems out rather than bringing them back into class; this is having a positive impact on learning and teaching as children are coming into class ready to learn at each transition point during the day e.g. after morning play, following lunchtime.

## What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

School staff have been reorganised into vertically grouped teams with a focus on each team one half term per year across the school. These include teams on health and well-being, access and inclusion, extended schools, science and technology, arts and humanities and the primary national strategy. The profile of non-core subjects has been significantly raised.

## Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Staff are more self managing, proactive and risk taking.

Leadership and management has been judged as good by Ofsted.

All staff, including support staff are involved in the leadership and management of different areas through their involvement in teams e.g. Health and Wellbeing team.

Clear action plans are in place for developing provision across all areas of the school.

Staff have completed Subject/Area SEFs, which continue to be reviewed and updated. They have clear priorities for action from these and implement the changes and developments that are needed. All staff take a key role in this and will develop provision in line with the school priorities.

## Summary

### What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

A whole school focus with a high priority over a period of time allows SEAL to become embedded in the school. The focus raised the profile of the importance of PSED and PSHE. SEAL is a flexible tool which will meet the needs of staff, children and the community.

### What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

- LA SEAL training
- Jenny Mosely circle time training
- Whole staff meetings using the SEAL resources and activities.

### If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- Identify a clear leader to implement programme with SLT support.
- Seek LA training for SEAL leader and visit other schools already in project.
- Gather stakeholders views on the current PSHE provision.
- Collate results from stakeholders views and use in action plan.
- Clear action plan developed with SLT.
- Carry out a learning walk of current learning environment.
- Provide staff training for all staff teaching and support staff.
- Provide exemplar plans for teachers.
- Allow teachers to 'try out' the materials for a term before implementing fully.
- Develop introductory and celebratory assemblies and timetable them for staff and parents to see progress.
- Set up regular parent meetings to use the family SEAL materials if possible.

### What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

- Planning parent and family sessions introducing the theme and using the activities.
- Develop the use of the small group work activities.
- Ensure the planning and teaching of SEAL is consistent and strong throughout the school.
- Increase the resources for circle time.

## Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- SEAL and PSHE overview Y6

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## About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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