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Developing trauma informed practice to support social, emotional and mental health in an infant school

Targeted support and therapeutic provision

School/Background Context

Thurcroft Infant School has a significantly higher proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) than the national average, with 31% of pupils identified as having SEND compared to 18.4% nationally. Of these pupils, 45% are also eligible for Pupil Premium. Currently, one child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), with a further two EHCPs in progress.

Attendance across the school is strong, with whole-school attendance at 96.3% and SEND attendance slightly higher at 96.4%. Of the pupils identified with SEND, 59% are male and 41% are female.

Given this context, supporting pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs through a trauma-informed approach is a key priority for the school.

The Challenge

At the beginning of the academic year, Thurcroft Infant School had already taken several positive steps towards supporting children's emotional wellbeing.

All staff had received training on the Zones of Regulation with Cheryl, alongside trauma-informed training delivered by Clare Hopkins from CAMHS / With Me in Mind. This training was widely regarded as useful and informative by staff.

Self-regulation areas were already established in every classroom, and in the Foundation Stage, children were supported to identify and talk about their emotions using The Colour Monster. However, it quickly became clear that this approach needed to be developed further and implemented consistently across the whole school.

While these foundations were strong, leaders recognised the need to evaluate how confidently and consistently trauma-informed approaches were being embedded in daily practice.

Gathering Evidence

To assess the school's current position on its trauma-informed journey, evidence was gathered from across the staff team.

A questionnaire was completed by all staff to explore confidence and understanding in relation to trauma and SEMH needs. This focused on:

- How SEMH needs may present in children
- The impact of trauma, bereavement, separation and transition
- Staff confidence when supporting children with SEMH needs
- Understanding who the most appropriate adults are to support individual children

The *In Together: Early Years Enhanced Competencies – Competencies and Self-Assessment Tool* was used to support this process.

The findings from the questionnaire were encouraging. Staff reported a good understanding of trauma and its potential impact on children, felt confident in recognising changes in behaviour, and largely believed they knew how to support pupils effectively, including adapting their communication where necessary.

In addition to staff feedback, learning walks carried out by the Senior Leadership Team provided further insight. These highlighted that, although staff were delivering consistent messages to children, the language used across the school was not always the same. It was also identified that there was a need for increased "positive noticing" throughout school, following the principle of "praise in public, remind in private."

While children were making use of self-regulation areas within classrooms, it became clear that some pupils required a quieter, more protected space away from the classroom environment. In addition, some children needed more targeted support to help them regulate their emotions effectively.

Actions Taken

In response to these findings, a number of targeted actions were implemented to strengthen trauma-informed practice across the school.

A dedicated quiet space known as "The Den" was created in the only available area of the school. This space is now used to support children who are dysregulated, for sensory circuits, and for ELSA sessions.

Restorative practice was further developed using language and strategies introduced through Team Teach training with Emma Booth. A consistent "help script" was introduced to support the de-escalation of anger and anxiety, and all staff now use this shared language across the school.

Class teachers have allocated time to explore emotions in more depth with pupils, moving beyond simply naming feelings. Children have worked with staff to create personalised documents that help them understand what triggers certain emotions and how these feelings may present.

Emotional regulation toolkits have been created collaboratively with children, providing them with practical strategies they can use when they feel dysregulated.

The school has also worked closely with Fusion to support pupils with SEMH needs. This support has included teacher drop-ins, observations and written reports to guide practice.

Emotional wellbeing support sessions are delivered by Gemma, the school's ELSA-trained Pupil Wellbeing and Family Support Worker. Gemma has also completed Senior Mental Health Lead training with Andrew Hall. In addition, Sarah, an Early Years Practitioner, has completed Mental Health First Aid training to support both children and adults across the school community

Outcomes and Impact

There is much to celebrate at Thurcroft Infant School. A recent visit from Steve Baker from When the Adults Change provided positive external validation of the school's approach. He commented that:

"Adults at Thurcroft set a consistent positive example, and the behaviour of the children is first rate."

"I saw countless interactions between adults and children that were warm and friendly."

"The adults here understand that by being stable, reliable adults they are enriching children's lives."

These comments reflect the impact of a consistent, trauma-informed approach that places relationships and emotional safety at the heart of school life.

Challenges and Next Steps

One ongoing challenge is ensuring consistent communication with Teaching Assistants and SMSAs, as they are unable to attend all staff meetings. Important messages currently need to be shared via class teachers and the staff noticeboard.

To address this, the school plans to introduce twilight training sessions specifically for Teaching Assistants, ensuring that all staff receive the same training and support and that a fully consistent trauma-informed approach is embedded across the whole school.



More inclusive ethos/culture in the setting



Improved mental health and wellbeing of learners with SEND