



## **Attachment and Trauma Sensitive Schools Award (ATSSA)**

*A framework of support and understanding for schools and other educational establishments within which children and young people who have experienced adversity, can heal, thrive, play, and learn.*

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Dear Caroline,

Thank you for registering for the Attachment and Trauma Sensitive Schools Award (ATSSA) at Bronze Level, and for providing comprehensive evidence in support of your application. Thanks also for inviting me to conduct the verification for the Award today. I should like to extend my thanks to you, your senior team and other staff for making the virtual visit so purposeful and enjoyable.

I should like to warmly congratulate you and the rest of the staff on achieving the Award, which is an external sign of recognition of your commitment to the steps you have taken at ISP School to develop a culture of compassion and nurture. This, as you well know, plays a pivotal role in getting your pupils into a state of 'learning readiness'. The Award is valid for two years and will run from November 2023 to November 2025.

All the criteria have been evidenced adequately, and in most cases, more than adequately. The evidence you have submitted comes from a broad variety of sources: case studies; extracts and examples of key documents and policies provided by you; from your website; and from interviews with a range of staff, including you and other members of the team. You provided me with much evidence to further support my own data gathered today and previously, and this has added depth and context to the completed evidence folders.

There are a number of significant points that are worthy of special mention:

- Quality staff care and emotional support to protect mental health and well-being is multi-levelled and provided through the leadership team. Leaders are aware of the multiple risk factors to staff mental health and well-being and are proactive in providing support to cope with the psychological and emotional demands of the job. There is an extensive range of processes and strategies to protect staff from overwhelm or burnout. There is an Open-Door policy and staff are actively encouraged to speak up about things that are concerning them. Staff receive regular supervision and support is available to staff as and when needed. Staff access regular group process and daily debriefs. They appreciate the praise and gratitude they are shown by Leaders, and say this makes them feel valued and respected. Support for staff is non-judgemental and that leaders are approachable, flexible and empathic. Personal family needs are given high priority and staff greatly appreciate the flexibility of deadlines and workloads. Care for staff is a particular strength of the setting.
- Staff are fully aware of the importance of viewing a child through a developmental lens rather than a chronological one. Throughout the interviews, staff demonstrated sensitivity to children's histories and experiences. They were able to explain how adverse experiences have impacted development and describe how they are working with the children to support regulation and develop pro-social behaviour. They talked at length about building trust through emotional and physical availability, recognising that this is a long process for some children, because many of the adults they have encountered in the past simply have not been trustworthy. Staff demonstrate a deep curiosity about how to make the best possible provision for each individual child through meeting them at the developmental stage they are in at that time. Viewing children through a developmental lens is a particular strength of the school.
- There is a strong focus on multi-sensory learning and play and play is integral to the curriculum. This, combined with the emphasis on making learning fun and individual attention for each child, is an excellent recipe for helping children to become fully engaged with learning. The range of opportunities offered to pupils is impressive, and again, individually tailored to each child. I loved hearing about the Chocolate Project, with its multiplicity of learning opportunities. Multisensory learning is an effective way to make teaching and learning inclusive, as it offers a wide range of strategies for children to learn, and does not depend upon just writing, reading and listening alone. Such enriching

experiences provide a gateway to being ready to learn, to be able to settle to learn and to eventually become fully engaged with learning. Multisensory learning is beneficial to the children in so many ways, for example building cognitive skills, such as cause and effect reasoning; sensory development; social and emotional development and to decompress, reflect and relax. This is a particular strength of the school.

- Staff are skilled in monitoring excitement and anxiety, and they have a deep understanding of survival behaviours. They make appropriate interventions to provide co-regulation, using a 'connection before correction' approach, so physiological and emotional comfort is restored as part of the coregulation process. Staff mentioned the use of Zones of Regulation, breathing exercises, walking, being curious, active listening, reframing, and modelling, amongst others, as tools to sensitively and effectively support and maintain regulation. Children are protected from, and given significant support with potentially explosive situations. Staff shared lots of examples about triggers and recognising when a child is becoming dysregulated. Staff described a wide range of grounding strategies and spoke of the importance of having a deep knowledge of each child as an individual. Children are encouraged to do what makes them feel happy and safe. Exit plans, where required, are developmentally appropriate and enable children to ask for help and support when becoming uncomfortable or overwhelmed. There is a recognition that children need to 'sit with', to fully experience their emotions, rather than being distracted from them. It is only by being accompanied and supported while feeling an uncomfortable emotion that they can learn that while the emotion is painful, it is bearable and not dangerous. Managing anxiety and dysregulation is a particular strength of the school.

I hope that you will celebrate your achievement with pupils, staff, directors, parents/carers and other stakeholders to celebrate the school's commitment to its children, successfully removing barriers to learning and participation in the life of the school and I am thrilled that you intend to register for the Silver Award – Attachment and Trauma Friendly.

Yours sincerely,

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