



## **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.*

Jennifer Nock Training and Consultancy  
43 Clark Street  
Stourbridge, DY8 3UF

Carole Cox  
ISP School Teynham  
Castlewood Farm  
3 Conyer Road  
Teynham ME9 9EA

1<sup>st</sup> April 2025

Dear Carole,

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 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 April 2025 to April 2027.

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 several 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 and outside agencies. The staff group

itself provides a strong and effective circle of support around individual members. There is great staff cohesion and strong bonds of friendship. 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, burnout and compassion fatigue, including referral to external services and debrief and recovery sessions after challenging situations. Staff members interviewed shared that leaders are approachable, flexible and empathic. They feel that their needs around work/life balance and mental health and wellbeing are understood and respected. Leaders are fully aware of many avenues of support to which staff can be referred, formal and informal, in-house and external. This is a particular strength of the school.

- Staff described a range of strategies which are in place for supporting families in understanding child development and attachment relationships. Strategies are largely informal in nature, and particularly engage parents who may find it difficult to trust service providers, including educators. Staff demonstrated a depth of understanding and empathy about why some families may be described as 'hard to reach', recognising that their relationship to 'help' may not have always have been positive in the past. You actively aim to avoid retraumatising parents and make every effort to accommodate their needs. You make home visits where appropriate. The school is committed to sharing practice and understanding with parents and carers to ensure that the children are experiencing consistency between adults at home and at school. They described how, over time, the disconnect between home and school can decrease and the gap closes so that the narrative in the home is consistent with the one used in school. Staff encourage and enable parents and carers to view the child through a trauma lens, by 'unpicking the story' and trying to understand what unmet needs the child is trying to communicate through their behaviour. You demonstrate deep empathy in relation to the daily struggles that families face. Connection with and care for families is a particular strength of the school.
- There is an emphasis on children's past experiences as a tool for understanding the child in the present. There is a broad range of strategies in place for gathering backstory information, including home visits and timelines. Throughout all the interviews, staff demonstrated sensitivity to children's histories and experiences. They were able to share comprehensive details about the background and adverse experiences of pupils in the

school, to explain how these experiences have impacted development and to describe how they are working with the children to support regulation and develop pro-social behaviour. Staff also take into account educational history and recognise that many of them have been traumatised in education. Staff understand that this can significantly impact a student's academic performance, emotional well-being, and social interactions, leading to challenges in learning, behavior, and overall development. Using historical information to understand and respond to a child in the present is again, a particular strength of the school.

- Children, including the most vulnerable, are supported in communicating emotions, feelings and worries, and the primary vehicle for this is the relationship between the child and adult. Staff at ISP School strive to be physically and emotionally available to the children in order to build strong, trusting attachments. Staff interviewed described the importance of the child's voice and how listening, validating and accepting their feelings is more important than trying to 'fix things' for them. Staff reassure children that uncomfortable emotions are absolutely acceptable. This reassurance normalises uncomfortable emotions and helps children to develop self-regulation skills, in the knowledge that while the feeling might be uncomfortable, it is not dangerous and can be managed. There is a recognition that children need to 'sit with', to fully experience their emotions, rather than being distracted from them, and distraction is only used when the emotion has been named and validated. Using multiple strategies such as naming emotions, reflecting back, being curious, relational games, Zones of Regulation, curiosity, wondering, Inside Out characters and staff modelling, to name but a few of the examples given, enables children to be their authentic self and also help build self-regulation skills. The support the school offers to children to enable them to communicate their emotions is a further 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 coregulation, using a 'connection before correction' approach, so physiological and emotional comfort is restored as part of the coregulation process, and reflection and restorative dialogue only takes place once a child is regulated in their body and emotions. Children are protected from, and given significant support with potentially explosive situations. Staff frequently mentioned the importance of supporting children to stay within their window of stress tolerance through recognising and minimising stressors. They described a wide range of

grounding strategies and spoke of the importance of having a deep knowledge of each child as an individual; there is no 'cookie-cutter' approach to meeting needs and all support is individualised and personal. Exit plans, where required, are developmentally appropriate and enable children to ask for help and support when becoming uncomfortable or overwhelmed.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J A Nock'.

Dr Jennifer A Nock, CPsychol, AFBPsS, PhD, BSc (Hons)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bridie White'.

Bridie White LLB MA