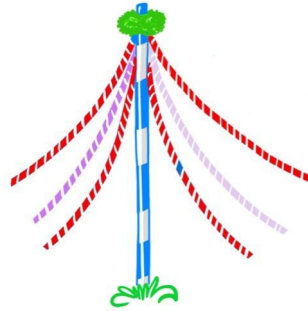


Maypole School



NURTURE POLICY September 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

This policy explains why the pupils at Maypole School will benefit from a nurturing approach, to outline our nurturing approach, and to set out how the School will implement nurture-based education. This policy must be read by all staff on joining. It should also be used as a vehicle for discussion and reflection with all staff, annually.

Maypole School is a special school working with children and young people who experience social emotional and mental health difficulties and additional complex needs.

2. THE CHILDREN AT MAYPOLE

The children referred to our school exhibit a wide spectrum of challenging behaviour. Each child arrives with a unique set of circumstances, and an individual profile. So that we can understand their behaviour, we first need to understand how children develop, how children who have not been nurtured are affected by this, and how their experiences have contributed to their difficulties.

How a baby feels secure, and develops secure attachments

A baby ideally experiences unconditional love within a secure attachment to their caregivers. He grows confident in the actions of his carers and is secure in a world where his needs are unquestioningly catered for. He learns the feelings of security and well-being and can sleep peacefully in the expectation that he will be safe. Parents shield their baby from any outside influence that may distress or bewilder them. Although a child may become upset or in pain, the adults do everything in their power to minimise the chances of any long-term damage to the child. The parents love the child unconditionally, and their thoughts are preoccupied with the needs of this new life. As the child develops within this secure and emotionally responsive environment, he feels safe enough to take the risks involved in learning and taking in new experiences. He learns how to relate to others, communicate about his needs and feelings and cope with distress and frustration.

Many of our children have not had this experience, nor the chance to develop while feeling secure.

The effect of having not been nurtured in early years

In some cases, the children's early nurturing experiences have been interrupted, fragmented, abusive and traumatic. Their emotional and social development has been limited in the early years. The children lack the solid foundation that a sustaining, untroubled nurturing provides. Instead, they struggle to make sense of the world from a disadvantaged viewpoint, and their responses become inevitably more out of line with their peers as they enter school. Their impulsive and inappropriate behaviour bears witness to the missing nurturing years. In addition, unresolved feelings around trauma and abuse lead to unconscious behaviours that initially evolve as a survival mechanism, but are often incredibly destructive to the child's ability to form relationships, stay safe and engage successfully in education.

The children are emotionally immature and will often appear and behave as much younger children. They seem to be "stuck" at an earlier developmental level. At times they feel like a very determined toddler demanding their own way at all costs. Equally, they can also present as an over-dependent baby relying on the constant closeness of the adult to feel safe.

Resulting attachment difficulties, and inability to trust

For some children early attachments have been damaged and they find it hard to bond and attach to even familiar adults. They children lack trust in the intentions of the grown-ups and can resist any attempts to form relationships. They test the adults as much as they can before they will take the risk to rely upon them or accept guidance from them. In this way the children can appear self-determined and overly self-reliant.

Extreme behaviour

The children exhibit extreme behaviour at times, which may include destructive and violent outbursts. Some of these episodes can be regarded as “tantrums” familiar in a toddler. They are often provoked by an adult thwarting the child’s wishes or simply insisting on a “no”. Alternatively, some children express out of control behaviour, which is best described as “panic” or “rage”. This can cause the child to be a danger to themselves and others, and requires careful supervision and long-term help from the carers.

It is not always easy to recognise the triggers which tip a child into destructive episodes. Sometimes a sound or touch will remind them of a past suffering, and instigate a panic attack or rage, which appears to overwhelm them.

The need to be in control

As we begin to have a deeper understanding of each child it becomes easier to predict the onset of panic. It also becomes possible to recognise when a child’s initial belligerent stance is a desperate need to control events. Some children have been at the mercy of chaotic conditions and have learned how to take charge for themselves. Attempts to undermine their dominance will initiate a battle. Being in control can represent a fragile security for the child and having lived with massive uncertainty it is not something to relinquish lightly. A child may escalate into full-blown rage and subsequently into panic rather than surrender the need to control the situation.

Inability to think ahead

A child may have little self-preservation. They place themselves in danger and have no understanding of the consequences of their actions. Often they are unable to think before they react. They are impulse driven and forethought is not yet a process they employ. At the beginning we do their thinking for them and they learn from us.

Many of the children have had some very tough and painful experiences to deal with. They do not as yet have the skills to understand and overcome their worries. Some have survived by kicking and screaming out their distress. Others have developed patterns of behaviour which hinder their healthy growth.

The difficulties of peer-group relationships

Peer group relationships are fraught for most children. Learning to make friends is a slow and arduous process. For our children it is doubly hard. They are fundamentally egocentric and therefore find all sharing, giving and taking unpalatable. They cannot perceive another’s point of view and are often slow to feel empathy for another child. Remorse and reparation for any injury they may inflict are qualities which take time to learn and internalise. They are quickly envious and view any nice experience happening to another child as a direct injury to themselves. They perceive any negative remark as persecution and become very aggrieved with the perpetrator.

Inability to tolerate rules and uncertainty

The children have no boundaries and will not at first recognise any attempt to moderate their behaviour. They will try anything to re-establish themselves in a position of power. In many cases they have had to be “in charge” of themselves and have become compulsively self-reliant. They are not about to readily take on the rules and restrictions imposed on them by an unknown adult.

The children find any change problematic. It is a measure of their insecurity that they cannot tolerate any uncertainty no matter how small. For instance, any change in routine can tip them into chaos. Life may never have felt safe and predictable and so any minor alteration can remind them of an imminent crisis.

3. THE NURTURING APPROACH

Staff attitude - must be positive

Faced with so many facets of behaviour, which are complex and difficult to change, we could easily become overwhelmed and pessimistic. We might also begin to concentrate on the child’s problems and find ourselves on a negative cycle. Although we certainly need to be insightful and work with the child to overcome their difficulties, this does not constitute the focus for our intervention.

Our school is a nurturing school and our main purpose is to find the healthy growing point of each child and to provide them with the experiences which encourage them into healthy emotional maturity.

We concentrate on what is going right, and build on the positive abilities of the child. We reach them at the growing point and build a scaffold around them to support their tentative climb to maturity.

The thrust of our work must be to be positive, and look forward with hope; not backwards with despair.

The purpose of nurture

Our purpose is to provide the early learning experiences that our children have missed, that will nurture the children emotionally, behaviourally and intellectually. Our aim is to educate, and to heal.

The nurture environment

Within the classroom setting, staff will create an environment which is safe, secure and nurturing.

Furniture and fittings need to be maintained at a high standard, and take into account the predisposition of the children to explore and seek danger. Just as parents of wilful toddlers alter their living space to adapt to the changing needs of the children, then so must we. For example, it may at first be necessary to cover all plug sockets until a child is mature enough to recognise and deal with the concept of electricity and its dangers.

Children should understand the particular functions of rooms and be able to learn the rules surrounding certain areas. The environment should be orderly and clean but allow for the normal disarray in a family home. The children are encouraged to respect their surroundings and to take shared responsibility for keeping their classes acceptably organised.

Our children are vulnerable to any dangers within the environment and extra caution is needed with regard to health and safety issues. The children do not readily understand the dangers implicit in everyday situations, and need to be guarded against them.

A warm and pleasing environment is vital in demonstrating to the children how much they are valued. An ambience is generated which acts as an intangible container for “holding” and “anchoring” the children. The care and attention to detail implicit in home-making, is an essential ingredient in preparing a nurture environment.

The need for familiar routines and predictability

It is necessary to bring order and predictability into the sometimes chaotic lives of the children. This is not to imply oppressive control, but rather to underline the necessity for the children to experience a safe and predictable world. As an infant learns to expect the arrival of warmth and sustenance, so our children begin to feel safe in the predictability of events.

We introduce patterns into the daily activities. Familiar routines punctuate the day, and serve to slow the pace of the children.

Preparing pupils for any change

Transitions from one activity to another, or from one place to another, are often flash points for unmanageable outbursts. So staff need to prepare the children for any change, however small. The changeover from school time to play time has to be handled carefully, and almost seamlessly, for the children to retain their composure.

Movement from one activity to another can also precipitate distress, and children have to be rehearsed and gently prepared for the introduction of change.

Crucial importance of good beginnings, and good endings

The children need to know the satisfaction of completing an experience. If they are engrossed in an enjoyable activity and this is brought to an abrupt end, an angry outburst may be instigated. Children will need advance warning before the end of an activity or lesson to help them prepare. Where possible we make it possible for the children to wind down an activity, giving them plenty of guidance and reassurance as they do so. Remember they are emotionally very fragile and quickly become frustrated and helpless if their best efforts are inadvertently spurned and cut short.

Small details can make all the difference

How a child begins the day can affect the whole day. Mornings may hold anxiety for the child. If they have had a nightmare or wet the bed or have feelings of hunger, then all of these factors can affect their mood. Particular routines need to be established for individuals where possible and the child should be included in devising them. Small details put in place make all the difference. It is in the detail that we make the child feel safe and settled.

Managing big transitions

Children will also need a lot of preparation and support around big transitions such as a staff member leaving or progressing from year 6 to year 7. The therapy services the school uses can be used as sources of advice on how to support children during these times.

4. IMPLEMENTING NURTURE BASED EDUCATION

Introduction

Our priority is to enable all our pupils to become positively involved with learning, in spite of their difficulties. Our aim is to recognise the potential of each child and ensure that they access a broad and balanced curriculum. We do this through delivering nurture-based education.

To deliver this, we not only need to understand early child development, and the implications of deprivation, developmental trauma, unsettled or interrupted early development as outlined above. We also need:

- to provide a sustaining nurturing experience for the children;
- a strong belief in the ability of the children to change;
- an understanding of our own emotions, reactions and responses when dealing with the children;
- to help each other to work creatively through a shared commitment to enhancing the lives of the children;
- and to share responsibility for the children and to hold in high esteem the importance of our work.

Where to start – establishing close, bonding relationships

We recognise that our essential task is to build close and bonding relationships with the children. This is the cornerstone of our work. We must and will offer unconditional acceptance of the child, and although we will often disapprove of the behaviour, this never extends to the child. In simple terms, we must be a “good parent”; and we must “stick” with the child throughout their difficult times, and work with them towards a solution. Vitally, we cannot give up on them when things are hard.

With some children, forging a relationship will be a one-way ticket for quite some time. We may need to begin at the beginning and encourage that important mother – baby eye contact. Through our consistent interactions the child will gradually learn to trust the adult and bond with them.

The relationships between adults and children are positive and trusting and founded on mutual respect. We practise how to really listen to the child and we teach them how to really listen to others. They learn how to adopt the strategies we offer them to help understand themselves. They trust that in speaking about their difficulties a solution can be found. They realise that circumstances can change and that they have the power to make changes. These positive relationships give the child an enhanced self-esteem and they feel important and valued. They develop real thinking skills and engage in the learning process.

Managing our own behaviour and emotions

Our patience will be tested to the limit, and it is necessary to remain “the adult” at all times. The children will have mastered ways to push the most sensitive hidden buttons in us, and we need to be aware of how we can be made to feel. We are all vulnerable in our own ways, and subject to our own insecurities.

It is important we know ourselves, in order to be able to withstand the testing delivered by the children. We have high expectations of our own professionalism and we need to remind each other and ourselves regularly that how we are behaving towards the children is the essence of our task.

How we go about it

Our checklist might include:

Consistence – insistence – persistence

served with

care and concern

mixed with

understanding and intelligence

topped with

endless humour and bags of stamina!

When to start “letting go”

In time it will be necessary to allow the child to become more self-determined. They will begin to make more decisions regarding their futures. It is important that we know when to start to “let go” and to empower the child to walk alone. This is part of a process that is undertaken with them from the onset of their time at school. From the first day the children are working towards a successful leaving. The process involves regular risk assessment on the part of the carers and close monitoring of the flexibility of provision. The closeness of the relationships ensures a thorough knowledge of the children which is our best guide in gauging how much independence they can manage.

Our ultimate aim is that the children can learn to manage their own behaviour and we can separate from them. As any “parent” we carefully measure the amount of support that is needed as the child matures. We are always ready to bring them back if they have wandered beyond their depth. At all times we stay alongside the children as the relationship follows a natural course.

Play is vital

Play is vital for children’s emotional, social and behavioural development. Play is children’s equivalent of science – it is their way of exploring and testing their world, and experimenting with new experiences and new ways of behaving. Play is both “real” and “not real”. The “not real” element keeps it safe and allows them to take social and emotional risks that would be too threatening for them in real-life situations. However, the imaginary element is closely linked to the child’s experience of reality, and lessons they learn in play are transferred to their real world.

Because many of our children are stuck at an early developmental age, they will need opportunities for play that are appropriate to their developmental age, and not necessarily their calendar age. With older pupils, this needs to be done sensitively to avoid feelings of shame and embarrassment. For some older pupils, 1-1 therapy sessions may be the safest environment for them to experience the early play they need. However, teaching staff can also help by demonstrating that it is okay to play with sand (for example) by modelling such play themselves.

The valuable role of Creative Arts, Games and Sports

Play is also an important element of the creative arts (music, dance, drama, art, film etc), sport and games and these activities can also provide vital therapeutic experiences for our children. These activities offer other benefits as well. The arts also allow children a safe way to communicate about difficult experiences and feelings. This is made use of in the children’s therapy sessions but can also be used outside of actual therapy sessions as long as children are not directed to explore difficult personal experiences.

Within a safe and creative activity, however, children may spontaneously process difficult experiences. Sport allows many pupils to negotiate the complex boundaries between acceptable levels of aggression and unacceptable violence, and how to read subtle body language signals. It

also offers a physical release for their feelings. Games are also very useful in helping children learn social skills, in a fun way that engages them. Making friends can be particularly challenging for adolescents as the importance of being accepted by peers is an overriding concern to them. Engaging a group of young people in a shared activity involving sport, the arts or games can enable them to raise their self-esteem, behave as a significant group and to respect each other.

Learning how to Play

Many of our children need to learn how to play. We may have to begin at the baby stage where the adult encourages the baby to smile and the baby enjoys the playful behaviour inherent in these early communications. Early play is often very sensory and involves the baby / child exploring body / not-body boundaries and their ability to physically manipulate their environment through media such as water, sand, clay and paint and toys/objects. This is often very therapeutic for children who have experienced violence or abuse and may have a fragile sense of bodily boundaries. Such play may be messy and chaotic with such children and they will need an adult to maintain boundaries and keep the play safe. Construction play also allows opportunities for children to feel pride in their achievements and risk failure in a safe context. This can help develop their self-esteem.

Gradually we help the child to play with objects and toys and to know the joy of being absorbed in a world driven by their own imagination and curiosity. The child becomes absorbed in the wonders of these pastimes and learns how to engage in activities, to concentrate and to learn. The child experiences control in the play situation and can direct the course of events and exercise power in a safe and non-threatening situation.

Learning how to Play with Others

Eventually, we will be able to help the children learn how to play with other children. At first the adult will take the major role and the child will need maximum guidance and direction to maintain the play as a positive experience. Like children at playgroup, it is the adults who do the work. The children left to their own devices soon lose the plot and mayhem ensues. They are able to participate in parallel play alongside another child but any attempts to manoeuvre them into comradeship will take patience and time. Soon they will begin to share and with supervision will be ready to join in with other children. That is when the adult can feel that all the rehearsal time was worthwhile. Once the children can play together they can begin to make relationships with each other and a peer group develops.

At this point the children are ready to attempt cooperative play and although the fallings out and the necessity for reparations are frequent the children have passed through several play stages. They are much better equipped for dealing with disappointments and squabbles and are on the road to making friendships.

Learning to make and keep friends is a life skill, and **play is the child's training course for this.**

Play and play resources are vital to our purpose and it is important to feel confident in understanding the level of play needed for individual children. It is also necessary to be familiar with the resources needed to meet children's needs. Play rekindles their curiosity. It absorbs them in meaningful activity. It teaches them how to concentrate and how to think. **Play is the child's real work.**

How our Children feel about School

The children referred to our school have usually experienced repeated failure in the mainstream school setting. In the majority of cases they demonstrated unmanageable behaviour at the onset of their infant education and despite receiving extra support they were unable to adjust.

School presents enormous obstacles for children who have not yet mastered the early social skills required in a large group situation. There is a general expectation that children will be generally biddable and willing to participate in the enjoyment of school life. But our children are largely defiant, egocentric and unwilling to compromise. They find being a member of the group foreign and unpalatable as they are reluctant to share, take turns, give and take or accept anything other than instant gratification. No wonder they stir up trouble. They do not accept the grown-ups with trust and do not recognise the rules and boundaries set down.

Their behaviour is uninhibited and difficult to moderate. Their formal learning is hindered by their emotional immaturity, they risk falling behind in all aspects of school life and their fragile esteem is further crushed by repeated failure.

How our classes should operate

Each class operates in a way that meets the nurture needs of that particular group of our children. With younger children this will be based on the traditional nurture group model. This would gradually become less formalised as the children progress up the school so that by key stage 4, elements of the nurture approach would be incorporated into a more traditional class format. We need to bear in mind though that young people who join the school late in life may need their nurture needs met more intensively than pupils who have progressed through the school. The nurture classes have a high staff ratio. Typically one teacher and two assistants will support up to four children.

The classroom environment is carefully structured. It allows for a whole spectrum of work and play activities to co-exist. It incorporates a domestic setting that allows for early, pre-school experiences to take place.

A home area /relaxing area for regularly gathering the children together to attend to their teacher is fundamental. This is where the first learning takes place.

Space is carefully structured and provides areas where children feel anchored and secure, alongside more open areas that allow for group play and free movement.

The children embark on a nurturing process that provides the early learning experiences necessary for the child to engage in the learning process. The child gains a solid foundation education on which to build all future learning. As the children progress the nurturing input is adapted to match their developing needs. As they become more capable and independent the structures and routines are adapted and flexibility used to allow for this developing autonomy.

Delivering the Curriculum within the Framework of the Nurture Group

The curriculum is delivered within the framework of the nurture group, and individual and group social needs form part of the school day. The emotional needs of the children are catered for and the learning matches the maturity of the child and the pace at which they can absorb and engage in the set tasks.

Expectations are high and the children are encouraged through a culture of praise and positive reinforcement. They are supported and encouraged to attempt the challenges set for them and any achievement is celebrated. The work is initially presented in bite-size pieces in order for the children to taste success. Gradually, as befits the nurturing process, the child begins to tackle more demanding tasks and develops the capacity to think for himself.

The National Curriculum is followed throughout the school. A broad and balanced curriculum is planned and implemented which acknowledges the need for variety and relearning.

The learning tasks are differentiated to account for a range of abilities and individual learning styles.

Monitoring Pupil Progress

Daily monitoring and individual educational records all assist in tracking and monitoring the child's development throughout their time in our community. It is through this process of continual assessment that we are alerted to particular needs of children e.g. a special programme for literacy may need to be implemented or a child may benefit from an assessment or programme of therapy from the school's therapy team. The necessity for additional support is identified through careful monitoring and child focused meetings.

The staff work to ensure a high standard of primary childcare. The children are very testing of the physical environment and a great deal of effort is invested in maintaining a pleasant and inviting school. Children are encouraged to be a part of this process and they learn to take pride in their classroom.

Educating Staff and other Adults

All adults in the community are inducted into the ethos and expectations of the school. They are fully committed to the nurturing ethos and the aims of therapeutic education. Senior members of staff continually lead by example and junior members are able to "shadow" more experienced practitioners during their induction period. This training is invaluable and equips new staff with a shared language, a wealth of strategies to use in challenging situations and an insight to the stamina required to cement relationships with the children. In order for the children to attach and form positive bonds an emotional commitment is necessary. This is equally true of the adults.

Working Therapeutically

It is expected that all staff will be working therapeutically with children through their relationships with them. "Therapeutic" in this context means helping children to realise their full potential in terms of their social skills, emotional well-being and behaviour. However, it is important to realise that many of our children will also require additional professional (specialist) Therapy programmes.

5. WORKING WITH FAMILIES & PROFESSIONALS

Nurture support to families

We strive to provide children with a secure and consistent nurturing environment at school, in which they can thrive. However, our children still spend most of their time at home, and it is essential that we work closely with their families to provide them with the support that they need to enable children to thrive at home as well.

Be sensitive about the difficulties

Providing a consistent and nurturing school environment may involve some painful realisations for some children about the difference between school and home and we need to acknowledge this and work with it. We need to ensure that we spend time building good relationships with families to ensure that there is not an unhealthy split between school and home.

Working as a Team with Parents / Carers

Pupils' development will also be greatly assisted if school and carers work together, to ensure that children are being given consistent messages about behaviour and expectations. Children need to know that the adults in their lives are working together and communicating with each other – this helps them feel safe, and is also good modelling for them. This may be hard work as many of our pupils' carers are struggling with the consequences of their own difficult childhoods; and here we will need to use the same patience, perseverance, good humour and non-judgemental approach that we use with the children. Respect for families' knowledge of their children can be a good bridge-builder, as well as giving carers a voice in terms of what they expect from the school.

Liaison with Professionals, and the Team around the Child

Our children often arrive with a network of professionals working with them and their families. Close co-operation and shared decisions are initiated at the beginning of the child's placement and these links are maintained throughout the child's stay.

Informal contact is established, with parents and social workers becoming friends and colleagues. Educational and Looked After Children reviews include all relevant agencies and the child is encouraged to attend. The school is proactive in triggering Team Around the Child / network meetings and taking the lead if necessary to ensure that pupils' needs are met.

6. NURTURING OUR STAFF

The nature of our work can at times be distressing

We recognise that the nature of our work can at times be distressing and can have an impact on our emotional well-being and our relationships. Pupils' "project" a lot of the difficult feelings they cannot bear into us. Part of our role as secure attachment figures is to hold onto those feelings and help the children think about them without projecting them back at the children in a retaliatory manner but this obviously comes at a cost to us. At the end of the day, we are often left with a lot of emotional residue that has come from the children. If we don't find ways to deal with this residue, it can have a toxic effect on staff dynamics and can also affect our ability to work in a caring way with the children as well as affecting our lives outside of school.

Our duty of care to our staff

Good staff morale is the foundation of a successful SEMH school. The school as an institution recognizes that it has a duty of care towards staff as well as pupils and strives to ensure that staff emotional welfare is always taken seriously. This includes ensuring that staff are able to take adequate breaks, ensuring that there is an effective structure in place for staff to raise any concerns about their work and providing clear training and career progression pathways.

In addition, the school's leaders will provide regular staff supervision opportunities, which are a confidential space for staff groups to support each other around the emotional impact of the work, and think in a reflective way about the children's behaviour. Therapists who work with the school will also be available to support staff with advice and guidance.

Leaders have an important role to play in ensuring they check in with everyone on their team on a regular basis on a personal level.

7. OTHER POLICIES THAT SHOULD BE READ

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Play Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Assessment Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Curriculum Policy