BEDE COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Relational Policy

Agreed: November 2026

Review date: November 2028

A note from the Director of Education, Schools and Inclusion:

Across Education, Schools and Inclusion, we are committed to working alongside school colleagues to engage in a shared progress journey, grounded in relational practice for our children and young people.

This thinking is integral to our inclusion statement of Equity, Belonging and Collaboration.



In Education, Schools and Inclusion, we passionately advocate modelling relational practice in every element of our work. We champion an inclusive, compassionate and boundaried approach to our ways of working both with young people and with our colleagues and stakeholders.
We have therefore created a relational framework for our work across ESI and now share this model policy for schools which will align with the Gateshead Relational Framework, creating a shared approach, dialogue and values system which allows more effective collaboration and hopefully secures improved outcomes for our children and young people.

We hope that you will fully embrace this policy and approach and use this as a basis to adapt for your school's community.

We look forward to working with you all on our relational journey together.

Bede school agrees fully with this relational approach towards collaboration and understanding between all peoples involved in school life. We are committed to using dialogue and a shared approach to secure better life chances for all our families and young people.

Aims of this policy:

1.1. **At Bede Community Primary School,** our vision is for everyone to strive purposefully to be the best they can and to have self-belief in their own abilities. We believe that children should be challenged and stimulated within a happy, learning environment and so we will always provide enriched opportunities to raise their achievements and to help them become strong, independent learners.

Everyone is regarded as having something worthwhile to contribute towards our school community and life, irrespective of their academic abilities, ethnicity, religious beliefs, physical abilities or social background. We strive to help every individual to see their potential, become the very best they can be and be proud of what they achieve daily.

We want to create a safe and nurturing environment in which human relationships are put at the heart of school life, fostering trust, consistency and connection to create inclusive and healthy environments for all those who are part of our school.

1.2. This policy aims to enable staff to:

- Understand the whole school relational stance.
- Be able to effectively anticipate needs and meet the needs of learners.
- Be able to adopt a reflective approach, becoming self-aware and enabling the "best fit" intervention for the child.
- To understand what behaviour is communicating in terms of unmet needs.

2. **Underlying Research and principles:**

- 2.1 Research in neuroscience in particular the Triune Brain Mdel.
- 2.3 Child development theory
- 2.4 Attachment theory
- 2.5 Thrive Approach Practices

3. **Rationale:**

Children who understand their behaviour and can actively change that behaviour will have improved outcomes and greater success throughout their lifetime. At Bede, we believe in creating safe and nurturing environments which support learners to achieve their full potential and build secure and healthy relationships. Some of our children may display distressed behaviours as a result of significant or prolonged trauma. There may also be emerging additional needs and developmental gaps in their emotional and social learning. Children at different stages of childhood development will manage their emotions differently, and as adults we know we need to look at what is going on for the whole child.

This policy aims to support all learners to recognise their triggers, to experience and survive overwhelming emotions, and to support children to make informed choices around their own behaviour, leading to becoming well regulated, steady and safe adults. It also aims to support our staff, who are alongside our children and young people as co-regulators, helping and supporting our children by meeting their needs and understanding their story.

STAFF VIEWS AND CONSULTATION:

This model policy was shared with the Stronger Together group for consultation and feedback. All feedback has been reflected on and included in this current version.

Emerging themes were:

- Positively received by the group, a welcome addition to the school policy cycle.
- It was welcomed that the policy could be embraced 'as is' or elements adapted for individual settings.
- Training would be needed to support the implementation of the policy (PACE). *(All Bede staff have had PACE training in the academic year 2025 – 26)*

Our relational model:

The focus and implementation of our relational model will depend on the level of need presented by the child.

Tier 1: Whole school relational approach.

1. Use of the VRFs (Vital Relational Functions). This is our state of being in all interactions with the children. The VRFs will involve all staff ATTUNING, VALIDATING, CONTAINING and SOOTHING when interacting with learners.
2. Maintaining a PACE stance – remaining PLAYFUL, ACCEPTING, CURIOUS, and EMPATHIC.
3. Teach, promote & model positive social interactions.
4. Design enabling, proactive & predictable environments.

Tier 2: Focused support (1:1) or small group support: Where children present a moderate developmental need, these children will need focused support. This may look like:

- An adapted curriculum to help support need.
- 1:1 baseline reparative Thrive sessions and profiling.
- Thrive behaviour profiling.
- Sessions with the pastoral support available within school.
- Environmental changes – classroom space, sensory space.

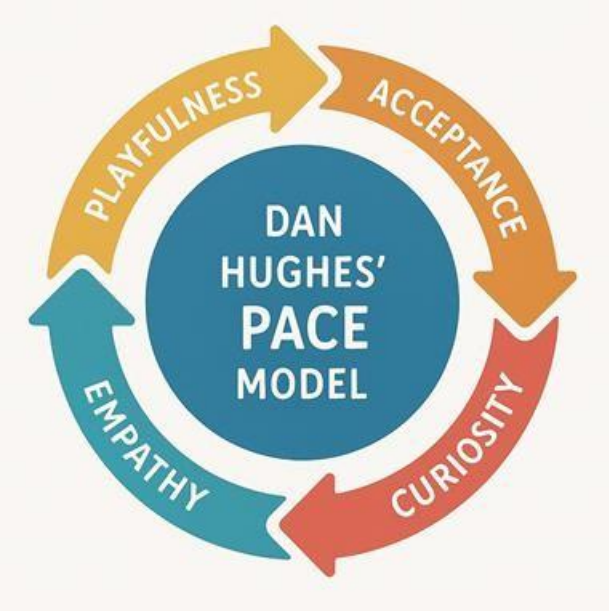
- Possible support with the family.

Some of this support we will be able to provide through our existing resource at school and some of this support will be sources via our Local Authority and the referral to the Vulnerable Pupil Panel.

Gateshead's Stance:

PACE and the Vital Relational Functions are our ways of being alongside children in relationships and support our everyday interactions with our children and young people.

Gateshead advocates the PACE stance. This is supported by the Vital Relational Functions (VRFs) to support our communication approach. PACE is the acronym used by psychologist Dan Hughes to describe the optimal adult stance when working with people to reduce stress, enhance connection, promote safety and engender the learning of new social and emotional skills.



Playfulness: sensitive and appropriate playfulness helps the child feel safe and promotes positivity. This is embodied through connection and shared joy/interests.

Acceptance: unconditionally accepting the child makes them feel safe, secure and loved. Accepting a perspective without judgement helps us to validate and create emotional safety.

Curiosity: genuine and non-judgemental interest in the child helps them become aware of their inner life. This also opens the door to 'wondering aloud' to understand the why behind the presentation without confrontation or conflict.

Empathy: demonstrating deep compassion for the child and their feelings supports the child's sense of self-worth and helps the child feel connected, loved and safe.

Helpful scripts to structure interactions:

WIN - Wonder, Imagine, Notice

In order to help children engage with us in relationship, we need to reshape some of our language. A non-confrontational approach will yield much more regulated results and use of the WIN acronym is a strong way to engage with children without them feeling confronted. Here are some useful sentence starters:

- "I wonder if Mrs Smith is aware that you are struggling with this task…"
- "I imagine that must be a really strong feeling for you right now, that must be really tough…"
- "I'm noticing you seem really tired…"

Helpful scripts for positive noticing and appreciating

- "I noticed that you really focused today in class, thank you"
- "I love having you in my class"
- "I really enjoyed seeing you share so well with others".
- "It's such a joy to see you play so well with your friends…"

At Bede, we will model how to build strong, steady and secure relationships at all times. We will work as a team, so that in moments where adults are not emotionally available, there will be others to help alongside.

The Relate Rupture Repair Cycle:



Inevitably, there will be times when there is a break in the nurturing connection between the adult and child, for example, if the adult is tired, busy dealing with something else, or is emotionally unavailable due to a major life event, and so on. While we might do our best to minimise these breaks in connection, when they do happen, they can be repaired, and learning can come from this experience. Research scientist Suzanne Zeedyk shares with us that "making up is more important than messing up." Dr Zeedyk refers to the everyday scenarios where relationships between two people go through a rhythm of

relating (in relationship), a rupture happening in the relationship, and then making a necessary repair to the rupture in order to return to relationship.

The repair not only rewires patterns of behaviour; it also establishes trust. This is known as the relate–rupture–repair cycle. When we look at each element of relate, rupture and repair, we examine the specific skills we, as adults, can use to help support these interactions with the children we work with.

Relate: The 'relate' phase refers to the times in a relationship when we feel connected and attuned with one another, things are going well, and we are making efforts to maintain this positive and mutually beneficial relationship. In this phase, we are effectively building a bridge of connection between ourselves and the other person. Caregivers and their infants start building this bridge from before the baby is born and continue to build it after birth and throughout the child's life. In the relate phase of the cycle, the adult can monitor their own emotional state and can regulate themselves physiologically, relationally and cognitively to be optimally present and accessible for the child. The adult can connect with the child and focus on their needs being met. The adult is present and can contain the child's emotional experience for them. The connection between the two is reciprocal.

Rupture: The 'rupture' phase refers to those times in a relationship where there is a misunderstanding or misattunement, in other words, when we don't get it right for the other person and we feel like the relationship experiences a setback. At this point, the bridge of connection might feel weakened or more vulnerable. Although we might think of ruptures as being problematic and therefore to be avoided where possible, in fact, they are an inevitable part of any relationship. They become a crucial component in the relationship when the rupture is subsequently repaired because this helps to develop the child's resilience. Ongoing attunement between the emotionally available adult and the child will inevitably move through different phases, being at times fully synchronised and all-encompassing and at other times disconnected and misattuned. When a rupture happens, it is likely that we will see the child's behaviour change. The child no longer feels the presence of the adult as supportive or alongside them, and their nervous system quickly reacts to the withdrawal of these cues of safety with survival responses of fight, flight or freeze; distressed behaviour from a fear state.

If an adult is able to stay regulated themselves, they will be able to notice subtle changes communicated by the child, stay attuned to the child and repair the rupture effectively with compassion. Conversely if they are triggered and become dysregulated, they won't be able to attune to the child and this could also trigger them into further dysregulation. It is therefore important for adults to be aware of their triggers and possible reactions and have access to ways they can stay regulated in challenging circumstances. It is important that ruptures in the relationship are noticed so they can be repaired. If the adult is unable to or does not notice the rupture then it can't be repaired. This is a lost opportunity to build the child's capacity for relationship and regulation.

Repair: The 'repair' phase of the cycle involves correcting the misunderstanding or misattunement of the rupture by trying to share understanding of intentions, feelings, thoughts and actions in order to come back into relationship. The repair part of the cycle

is an essential component of healthy growth, boosting our resilience and helping us to cope with challenges by giving us greater trust that difficulties can be resolved.

The emotionally available adult becomes aware that there is a misattunement between themselves and the child. The adult is able to deal appropriately with their own reaction, in that moment, to stay regulated and is then able to reach out to the child and repair the rupture in their relationship. The adult may do this by apologising and reaffirming the attuning and validating stance, and by demonstrating acceptance, curiosity and empathy to the child. In this situation the adult has the capacity to stay steady and regulated in the presence of the dysregulated child. By repairing the relationship, the child's arousal state can settle and the relationship can continue in an attuned way.

One of the strategies to help the repair process, which helps promote cognitive problem solving, is using a social story to reflect on what has been tricky and the impact of this. This reflection needs to be done when the child is fully regulated and thinking carefully about when this happens is critical to ensuring the reflection is authentic and meaningful. This may be the next day, or even a few days after the incident.

Some questions we might use could be:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
- Who else has been affected by this?
- What do you need, and what needs to happen now, so that we can 'Repair and Restore'

It is also incredibly important for the adults to also consider any learning needed. Staff should model humility and where appropriate, share what they feel they might do differently next time as part of the process.

How do we build emotional and environmental safety?

Maintaining an empathic and connected stance with our children and young people helps us to build emotional safety within our school. This creates a sense of belonging and real grounding for the children. There are also things that we can think about to help our children feel environmentally safe, particularly with children who are experiencing trauma or anxiety:

- Who has the strongest relationships with the child? Can opportunities for connection be built into the school day?
- Think about the physical environment, do they need to have their seating plan reconsidered, their movement breaks around the building?
- Where do the children enter school? Can they manage coming in through the main entrance or do they need adjustments?
- Would the child benefit from a supported meet and greet?
- Would the child benefit from check-ins throughout the day to help them regulate and stay on track?

Creating emotional and environmental safety when repairing ruptures:

When repairing conflict, we will also consider:

- The location of the communication; meetings in offices, particularly with professionals in authority may have considerable associations with previous traumatic interactions and could cause fear and anxiety.
- The adult letting the child choose where they would like to meet, or meeting somewhere neutral. Often a 'walk and talk' or meeting off site can feel less intimidating.
- That the 'Repair and Restore' conversation does not have to be with certain people; e.g. with the adult who was most involved in the incident or the most senior member of staff. In fact, it might be appropriate to allow the adult who has the best relationship with the child to lead on the process.
- It can be helpful to work through others. For example, communicating with parents / carers and allowing them to scaffold the conversation at home can be helpful if the child does not yet have a strong enough relationship to feel able to engage with staff in school.
- Preparation and pre-warning can help. If a child knows ahead of time what will be discussed, what the potential outcomes might be, where it will be held, how long they need to be there and who will support them, they will feel empowered to engage more readily.
- Changing the usual formats. A conversation is a complex interaction and may be too difficult. An exchange of notes or letters, or reflections through visuals or creative activities can be very supportive and brings the formal temperature down, making this a more reflective moment rather than a combative one.

Links to our values:

Here at Bede our values are lived, not laminated, and our relational approach is woven throughout our core values, represented by our SUPER LEARNING POWERS (**Bravery** – incorporating integrity, resilience, courage and honesty- **Cooperation** – incorporating empathy, trust, teamwork, unity, acceptance, generosity and justice, **Progress**- incorporating mission, vision, purpose, achievement, career. **Concentration** – incorporating discipline, focus and commitment, **Positivity** – including growth, influence, leadership, motivation and passion, **Curiosity** – Including respect, interaction, open mindedness, growth , **Imagination** – including dreams, decision making, vision and **Perseverance** - including – will power, identity, excellence, responsibility and quality. (See the appendices)

We want to actively demonstrate and promote our values each day, and we are supported by our super learning powers stories, charts and ideas as well as our Wonderful Me books, which are filled out each term..

Our School Culture:

In our school, we recognise that regulation can occur in many different forms depending on the situation. When a child is in distress, physiological regulation may be the best method for restoring calm and steadiness. This might look like:

- The use of safe contingent touch such as a side on hug, a hand on the shoulder to reassure, hand holding to quell anxiety.
- Taking a pause and stepping away to engage in an energy release activity and then waiting for the right moment to make the repair.
- Having a drink or something to eat to restore balance and support recovery.

We recognise these strategies as critical to regaining regulation and will ensure our students, staff and wider community understand this is not about 'not holding a boundary' – a repair will happen. But we think that repair happening at the right time, and in the right way is paramount to maintaining relationships. We don't see this as 'rewarding poor behaviour' but as 'wrapping care and compassion around the child' and will always make sure we follow up with the students to help them understand the rationale for this and why different things might be needed for different people at different times.

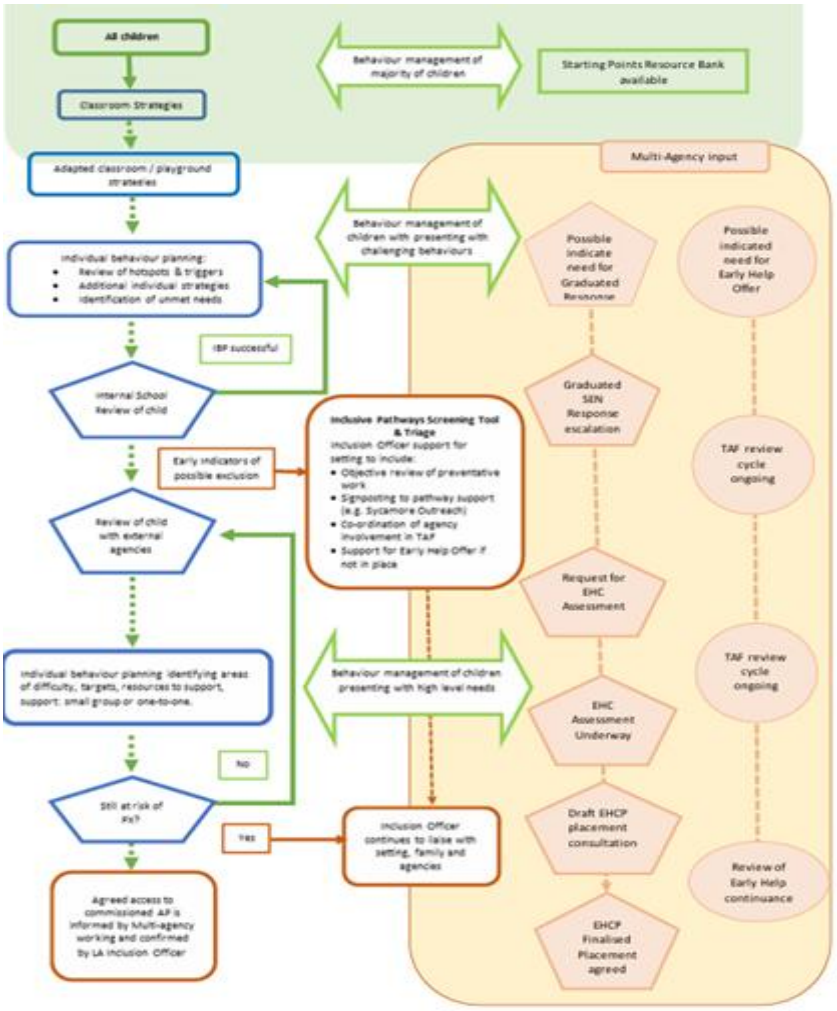
Sanctions and consequences:

We believe that relationships are at the heart of what we do and this enables us to have a positive, caring and compassionate school community. For the most part, our relational stance will help us understand need, anticipate and plan appropriate responses and repair any ruptures. However, we do recognise, there may be certain circumstances where significant incidents occur, and further guidance may need to be sought from our formal behaviour policy. We hope that through our relentless drive and focus on relationality, we see transformative growth and can avoid punitive based sanctions. However, our approach is always to be alongside the child to help them understand through restorative conversations why a consequence may be explored and how we can support them with this. Understanding the boundary and knowing the impact of stepping beyond that is an important part of life, and a lesson which strong relational practice can help consolidate with our children for their life now and in the future.

Appendices

Bede Community Primary School - Super Learning Powers

An example flowchart of action to ensure children's needs are met and to prevent permanent exclusions.


All children
Classroom Strategies
Adapted classroom / playground strategies
Individual behaviour planning:
Review of hotspots & triggers
Additional individual strategies
Identification of unmet needs
IBP successful
Internal School Review of child
Early indicators of possible exclusion
Review of child with external agencies
Individual behaviour planning identifying areas of difficulty, targets, resources to support, support: small group or one-to-one.
No
Still at risk of PX?
Yes
Agreed access to commissioned AP is informed by Multi-agency working and confirmed by LA inclusion Officer
Behaviour management of majority of children
Starting Points Resource Bank available
Behaviour management of children with presenting with challenging behaviours
Inclusive Pathways Screening Tool & Triage
Inclusion Officer support for setting to include:
Objective review of preventative work
Signposting to pathway support (e.g. Sycamore Outreach)
Co-ordination of agency involvement in TAF
Support for Early Help Offer if not in place
Behaviour management of children presenting with high level needs
Inclusion Officer continues to liase with setting, family and agencies
Multi-Agency input
Possible indicate need for Graduated Response
Possible indicated need for Early Help Offer
Graduated SEN Response escalation
TAF review cycle ongoing
Request for EHC Assessment
TAF review cycle ongoing
EHC Assessment Underway
Draft EHCP placement consultation
Review of Early Help continuance
EHCP Finalised Placement agreed