



## **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 Jill,

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 your school today to conduct the verification visit for the Award. I should like to extend my thanks particularly to you, and also to your pupils, Senior Leaders, Teachers, Key Workers, Teaching Assistants and other Support Staff, Therapeutic, Clerical and Site Staff for making the visit so purposeful and enjoyable.

I should like to warmly congratulate you and your staff on achieving the Award, which is an external sign of recognition of your commitment to the steps you have taken at Whitefield Primary School to develop a culture of compassion and nurture. This, as you well know, plays a pivotal role in getting your young people into a state of 'learning readiness'. The Award is valid for two years and will run from November 2018 to November 2020.

The evidence you have submitted comes from a variety of sources: from my own observations and learning walk today, from extracts and examples of key documents and policies provided by you; from pupils' work products; from interviews with staff, including you and other members of the team, conversations with pupils and from photographic evidence. There are a number of significant points that are worthy of special mention:

- You provided me with much evidence to further support my own data gathered today, and this has added depth and context to the completed evidence folders.
- Evidence for Criteria 1.11 *The curriculum is sensitive to pupils whose life experiences may contain chaos and uncertainty*, and Criteria 1.12 *Pupils' histories are used as a framework within which to interpret behaviour* was of a particularly high standard. You and your team were able to spontaneously share comprehensive details, from memory, of the background and adverse experiences pupils in the school and explain how these experiences have impacted development and how information has been shared with key staff in order for them to understand and interpret behaviours, and how best to support children during activities which may present emotional challenges. The in-depth knowledge and detailed recall of particular case histories was admirable.
- The children with whom I spoke conveyed an authentic feeling of belonging, of loving school and of the deep trust that underlies relationships. One child, who has a complex trauma background, spoke of Whitefield being 'like a second home' to him, and he described how staff have helped him to develop on all levels: 'My teachers have helped me to develop confidence, my education, physically, and my mental health. They have even prepared me for my future... I can deal with anger and anxiety now much better than I could before.' Other pupils talked of the attention to pupil voice: 'Everybody gets a turn. My teacher uses lolly sticks to make sure everyone gets chance to answer questions.' Several shared their experiences of being supported in emotional development through interventions, such as 'Time to Talk'.
- My meeting with parents was moving. Both families have experienced real challenges, and the children in question have trauma backgrounds. Both families spoke of the deeply compassionate and practical support they and their children

have received at school. One mother described the school as ‘a life line; changed my life really. They’ve done things for us that go over and beyond what I could have expected.’

- It is quite difficult to encapsulate the ethos of your provision through reference to the Award criteria. Whitfield Primary School is trauma-responsive, with systems, practices, values and principles that are infused with sensitivity to trauma; thus, therapy is not something that the school simply *provides*, rather, the environment itself and the relationships therein are therapeutic. Trauma sensitivity is embedded across the setting.
- The commitment of the leadership team to developing a culture of attachment and trauma sensitivity has been demonstrated through a high investment in CPD for all staff, and a willingness to make significant changes. Leaders’ passion has led to a shared vision of how to deliver the best experiences and outcomes for all the pupils at Whitefield Primary School. Staff are trained to a very high standard and show comprehensive understanding of attachment and trauma related issues.

I hope that you will celebrate your achievement with pupils, staff, parents and other stakeholders to celebrate the school’s commitment to its young people, successfully removing barriers to learning and participation in the life of the school. I have felt particularly privileged to share your journey and I hope to continue to support you through the next steps. I am delighted that you intend to register for the Silver Award – Attachment and Trauma Friendly, and eventually, the Gold Award – Attachment and Trauma Committed. I shall be in touch with you shortly to get the ball rolling.

We are particularly excited by your achievement, and believe that you will be a beacon of best practice for other schools who are on the attachment and trauma sensitive journey.

Yours sincerely,

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