



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 and Marie,

Thank you for registering for the Attachment and Trauma Sensitive Schools Award (ATSSA) at Gold Level, and for providing comprehensive evidence in support of your application.

Thanks also for inviting me to conduct the verification visit for the Award. I should like to extend my thanks particularly to you, and also to other staff, for making the virtual 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, and to become a truly attachment- and trauma-responsive setting. The Award is valid for two years and will run from November 2020 to November 2022, at which point you will be invited to renew your accreditation.

All six criteria have been evidenced adequately, and in most cases, more than adequately. The evidence you have submitted comes from a variety of sources and of particular value

have been my interviews today with a range of staff members. 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:

- *Become a Beacon of Best Practice for other schools working towards Attachment and Trauma Sensitive Practice.* This is a particular strength of the school. Knowledge, strategies and skills have been shared across the Local Authority through dialogue and shared training and resources with staff from other schools. You have also worked and shared expertise county- and nationwide in a variety of contexts, through a broad range of organisations and settings. This has generated interest in the ATSSA from at least three other schools and settings. Going forward, you show commitment to continuing to share practice with other schools and to participate in a meeting for other schools across the country, who are striving for meaningful, multi-layered, whole-system wide trauma-responsive practice. This is a particular strength of the school.
- *Provide professional supervision for front line staff and SLT at least termly.* This is a particular strength of the school. All staff interviewed shared examples of the organisational understanding of, and response to, the psychological and emotional fall-out for staff working with children and young people with complex trauma backgrounds. Over the past months, SLT report that staff have increased capacity to speak about their vulnerabilities, and increasingly, to access formal and informal supervision, which in turn, impacts upon personal and professional well-being. Marguerite spoke about the crucial importance of supervision when working with complex families with complex difficulties, and the dangers of 'taking on' their burdens. She spoke about the necessity of supervision in order to be able to stay connected and involved, whilst not being overwhelmed by the problems of others.
- *Employ attachment- and trauma-informed recruitment, interview and induction processes.* Emma, who as the most recently recruited member of staff, gave evidence for this criterion, felt that the process, from recruitment to appointment and induction, was a positive one. She felt that the job description was clear, and that she was well prepared for the complex nature of the job. The interview process was reassuring and she said that she was enabled to perform at her best. Emma shared that the interview panel wanted her to 'do well', and that they drew out the best in her, enabling her to talk

confidently about her experience and skills in terms of what she could bring to the school. She felt listened-to and valued. She was asked at interview about her understanding of the emotional impact of the work and her recognition of the importance of self-care. Emma shared her relief at not being expected to 'hit the ground running'. She felt that the induction process was thorough, transparent and engaging. I was particularly moved when she said that when she first arrived at Whitefield for her interview, she felt that she had "found [her] tribe". What a great feeling!

- *Reference attachment and trauma-informed practice in people's development plans, performance management, appraisals etc.* This is a particular strength of the school. Through the staff interviews today, and through evidence presented in the Evidence Folders, I was able to ascertain that it is a priority in the school for every member of staff to understand and respond to the children's needs, and this priority drives and informs CPD. Although staff are trained to a very high level, there are lots of plans for further training and extension of knowledge and skills. No shaming or critical practices are used, and all staff are treated with respect and valued for what they bring to the community. A wider leadership team has been formed in order to move to a wider distributed model of leadership. Discussions are open, frank and sometimes challenging, and this contributes to increasingly open and transparent school culture. Whilst play is not directly referenced in the Gold Standards, it was clear from Steph's evidence that her role as Sports Coach has been developed to provide rich and rewarding play opportunities during playtimes. Playtime has been extended to 30 minutes to allow children time to become absorbed in play. As a direct result of the play work development, there has been a significant reduction of children dysregulating during playtime. Steph described this as 'a work in progress' rather than a job done, so this will continue to be high profile in her and other people's development plans.
- *Provide an attachment- and trauma-informed and -responsive physical environment, not only in pupil areas, but throughout the entire school site, including staff and public areas.* There is a strong focus on the physical environment at Whitefield Primary School, with the safety and comfort of all being a priority. Leaders recognise the importance of a comfortable sensory and physical environment, so the setting is well ventilated, well lit, with comfortable spaces and availability of food and drink. Reception staff and the physical reception area are warm and welcoming. Beyond that, leaders understand

about felt psychological and emotional safety, so there are spaces for staff to share together and also, quiet spaces where staff can work alone, or simply relax and reflect. The Headteacher's 'office' is a warm, comfortable and relaxed space with soft lights and furnishings. Many meetings take place here and it is where induction meetings for new families are based. Staff and children can use this space during times of stress. The inclusion room has been repurposed, with soft lighting and furnishings, and provides a bespoke 'time out' space for staff. Security practices are robust and frequently updated and assessed. Despite the challenges of the current limits required for the purposes of infection control, the physical environment has been adapted in such a way that children and staff experience felt safety within the school.

- *Strive to ensure that all meetings and communication systems between all participants and stakeholders employ the principles of multileveled safety.* This is a particular strength of the school. Communication systems are transparent and easy to access. All staff interviewed said that they feel well-informed and receive regular information and briefings. Communications with parents have been enhanced during the Covid-19 pandemic, with greater parent engagement. It is clear that at all times, great care is taken to ensure that communications throughout the system are positive and inclusive. There has been a strong focus on keeping in touch during the pandemic, for both social and professional purposes. Bella's evidence was compelling. She spoke about the support mechanisms in school, which have been invaluable for her as an NQT. More experienced staff have supported her in developing resources, teaching strategies and practice in general. The Headteacher is flexible about her approach and ensures that staff have a good home/work balance, for example releasing staff for special occasions such as their own children's Christmas plays and special assemblies.
- Whilst there can be no doubt that excellent practice is a whole-team achievement, it is also only fair to say that the most significant factor in achieving the ATSSA Gold Award is the inspirational, strong, and visionary leadership of the Headteacher and the SLT.

This is just a brief snapshot of the evidence I gathered today and previously through visits and reading the evidence in your Gold Folder. It would be impossible to communicate adequately in this letter the breadth and richness of your practice. In short, Whitefield Primary School is a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive organisation, which prioritises

humanising systems, making them healthier, more relational and interpersonal, more integrated, more reflective, and more interconnected, not only focusing on the pupil population, but by ensuring that trauma-informed knowledge, language, values, principles, assumptions and processes are embedded deep into the culture of the organisation; and are owned and shaped by everyone who is a part, regardless of role.

We talked today about next steps, which include continuing to develop play work, and to extend practice with parents to enhance their knowledge and skills around attachment, relationships and the impact of early trauma, and providing training for parents to help them respond to their children's emotional needs. This will entail a recognition of the different, even competing narratives and priorities of educators and parents, and next steps should include working towards streamlining and/or accommodating priorities, agendas and narratives across the school community. It will also require facilitating future-thinking and developing a shared vision through mutual respect, active listening and an acceptance of the messiness and complexity of the journey. I hope to continue to support you going forward.

I hope that you will celebrate your achievement with pupils, staff, families and other stakeholders to celebrate the school's commitment to its children and whole community, successfully removing barriers to learning and participation in the life of the school. I have felt particularly privileged to share your journey and am delighted make the Gold Award to you, our first Gold mainstream Liverpool School. Tony and Bridie add their congratulations to mine.

Yours sincerely,

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

Bridie White LLB MA