St. Sebastian's C of E Primary School

Behaviour Policy & Statement of Behaviour Principles

Approved by:	**Full Governing Body**	Date:	**September 2026**
Previous Review:	**October 2022, September 2023, 2024 & 2025**		
Last reviewed on:	**September 2026**		
Next review due:	**September 2027**		

Aims

Our behaviour policy helps us to create a caring, stimulating and secure environment in which staff and pupils can work and play safely and to encourage the involvement of parents/carers in the development of their child. It links directly to our school vision and values which underpin everything we do at St Sebastian's Primary School.

The school acknowledges that behaviour can sometimes be the result of educational needs, mental health issues, or other needs or vulnerabilities, and will address these needs via an individualised graduated response.

Our Motto

'Together in Faith We Aspire to Achieve Excellence'

Our Vision

Through our Christian values, we strive to create an inclusive, nurturing community where everyone can flourish, unlock their potential and widen their horizons. Faith inspires all that we do, ensuring we become responsible global citizens who promote equality and celebrate individuality.

We have four School Rules which the School Council developed in line with the vision, they are:

- Be kind to everyone.
- Treat everyone how you want to be treated.
- Always do your best.
- Look after your environment.

Each class has a copy of these, this is on display and used as a reference point for reminding children of our expectations. They are also displayed in central areas around school and outside. There is an 'expectation poster' also displayed in each class and centrally with reminders about our 'bests' and our choices, see Appendices.

Our central Christian text is:

'Love your neighbour as yourself'. *Matthew 22:39*

We aim to do this through promoting a positive approach to school life: with adults encouraging children and children encouraging each other to 'love one another' to be the best they can be, working together to create an 'inclusive, nurturing community where everyone can flourish'.

Our Values

Aspiration
Compassion
Creativeness
Perseverance
Respect
Thankfulness

Outcomes and Choices at St Sebastian's C of E School

We work hard to use the language of 'choices' at school, helping children to understand that where they make a 'good' choice, the outcome could be a Values Point or opportunity to share their work with another adult or class, Other outcomes might include having a reflective conversation with an adult or using part of their breaktime to reflect on the outcome from the choice that they have made.

At our schools we aspire to work alongside parents to support and inspire children to reach their maximum potential. We want to help our children to grow socially, spiritually, personally and academically and to ensure that we are always doing our 'best'.

The 'bests' are displayed centrally in school and children are regularly reminded of what these are. The Early Years children have a copy in their classroom including photographs to ensure that this is explicit to all children. It is our firm belief that behaviour should be embedded through a whole school ethos and philosophy.

Our Behaviour policy is designed to recognise, promote and celebrate the fact that most children make good choices most of the time. We work closely with parents to support our Behaviour Policy and we will share it as fully as possible with them. Staff are involved in formulating policy and are properly trained to implement it.

Legislation and Statutory Requirements

Our policy is based on advice from the Department for Education (DfE) on:

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education Act 1996
- Education Act 2002
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Health Act 2006
- The School Information (England) Regulations 2008
- Equality Act 2010
- Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019
- DfE (2013) 'Use of reasonable force'
- DfE (2015) 'Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years'
- DfE (2018) 'Mental health and behaviour in schools'
- DfE (2024) 'Behaviour in schools: Advice for headteachers and school staff'
- DfE (2025) 'Keeping children safe in education 2025'

- DfE (2022) 'Searching, Screening and Confiscation: Advice for schools'
- DfE (2023) 'Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement'
- DfE (2024) 'Mobile phones in schools'
- DfE (2024) 'Creating a school behaviour culture: audit and action planning tools'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy

Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Board

The Governing Board is responsible for reviewing and approving the written statement of behaviour principles (appendix 1).

The Governing Board will also review this behaviour policy in conjunction with the executive headteacher and monitor the policy's effectiveness, holding the Executive Headteacher to account for its implementation.

The Executive Headteacher

The Executive Headteacher is responsible for reviewing this behaviour policy in conjunction with the Governing Board, giving due consideration to the school's statement of behaviour principles (appendix 1). The Executive Headteacher will also approve this policy.

The Executive Headteacher will ensure that the school environment encourages positive behaviour and that staff deal effectively with poor choices by individuals, and will monitor how staff implement this policy to ensure outcomes are applied consistently.

Staff

Staff are responsible for implementing the behaviour policy consistently, modelling positive behaviour, providing a personalised approach to the specific behavioural needs of particular pupils and recording behaviour incidents on Child Protection Online Management System (CPOMS). The senior leadership team (SLT) will support staff in responding to behaviour incidents.

Supporting Children with Additional Needs

We recognise that some behaviours are linked to unmet needs, trauma or neurodiversity. We ensure that staff are trained to recognise and respond appropriately and consult with BOSS and other outside agencies to provide the best that we can to support these children. Staff will make reasonable adjustments for children who cannot access all or some elements of the behaviour expectations

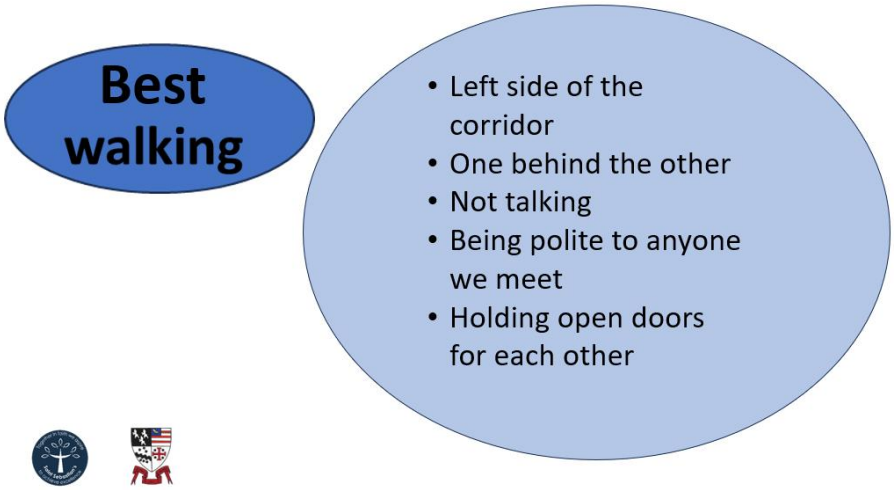
because of their additional needs. Our inclusive approach as outlined in our vision, is key, and we believe that all children should have equal access to a safe, orderly and positive environment. Where an individual is preventing this happening, staff are expected to take action in line with this policy to keep all children in their care safe.

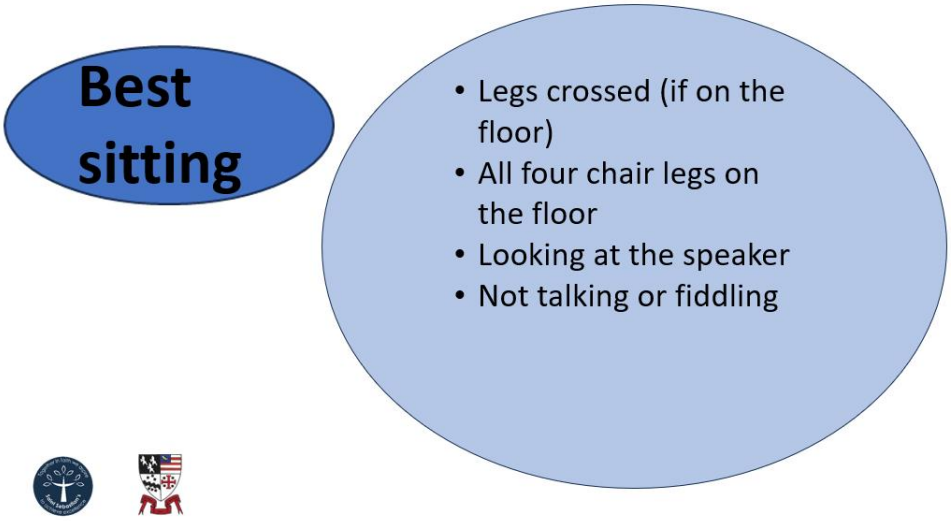
Staff will work closely with the SLT, SENCo and ELSA to ensure that pupils at risk receive specialist support when necessary. We employ 'Solution Focused' approaches to de-escalate conflict. When physical intervention is required to ensure a safe environment, staff use the appropriate techniques to secure a calm and safe outcome. All incidents are recorded as soon as possible after the event using an RPI form that is uploaded to CPOMs. Incidents are analysed by the Headteacher and discussed at SLT meetings to ensure that the best and safest resolutions are made.

Outside Agencies

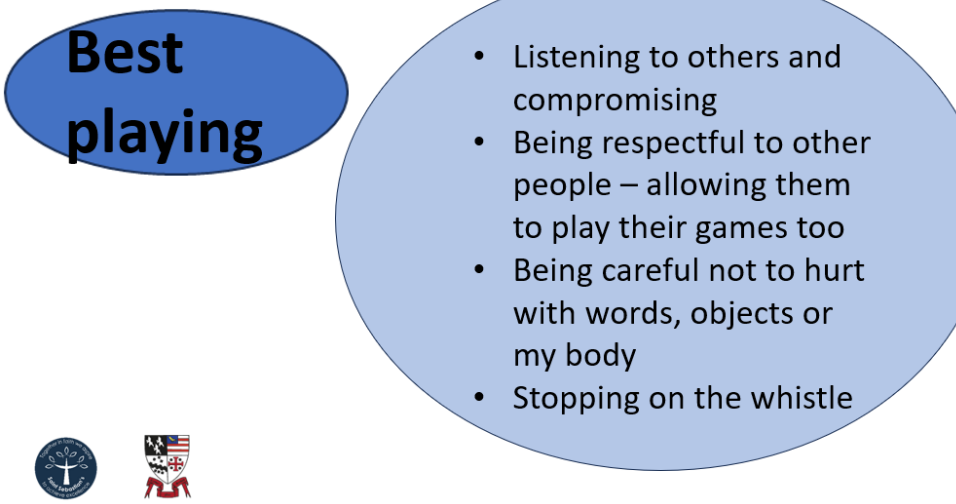
School will work closely with the child and parents and carers to improve the situation and issues in school that are causing concern. If it is appropriate to do so the school will involve outside agencies who have professional training – this is used as a positive support strategy for all involved. Such agencies will often offer support to parents and carers who have out of school concerns over a child's behaviour.

What We Mean by Our Bests?




Best sitting
• Legs crossed (if on the floor)
• All four chair legs on the floor
• Looking at the speaker
• Not talking or fiddling


Best listening
• Looking at the speaker
• Thinking about what is being said – do I have a question or comment to share?
• Sitting still
• Nothing in my hands


Best playing
• Listening to others and compromising
• Being respectful to other people – allowing them to play their games too
• Being careful not to hurt with words, objects or my body
• Stopping on the whistle



We actively encourage this approach in every area of school life e.g. entering and leaving the school, in the corridors, at lunchtimes, in the playground, as well as inside the classroom. We believe in the ethos of children making correct choices at all times and we actively look to 'spot' children doing this. We believe that a positive approach to behaviour management is about making choices.

Belonging

We aim to develop a sense of 'belonging' in children and adults so that there is a sense of shared purpose and team work. We encourage this so that everyone feels like they are contributing to the positive atmosphere we are aiming to create.

See Appendix for further information: **Nurturing a sense of belonging at school: what helps pupils feel connected?**

The report from the National Children's Bureau highlights several elements that contribute to a sense of belonging, all of which we aim to provide in our school:

- Teacher-pupil relationships – we aim to create and build these with children from initial transition visits before the new year starts and to develop these by showing an interest in the individuals in our care and sharing in their successes and struggles

- Peer Relationships – we encourage these through such activities as choosing a 'Special Mention' for Shine and encouraging children to praise their peers for good work or choices.
- Reflections on Personal Characteristics – through PSHE lesson and Collective Worship, in particular when focusing on spirituality, we encourage children to reflect on their thoughts and feelings and those of others.
- Parental Support – we aim to develop positive relationships with families on an informal basis as well as through the Early Help/TAC processes.
- Extra-curricular Activities – we provide a wide range of these and regularly change these to provide as many opportunities as possible for children to engage with school and find new interests and talents we can celebrate together.
- School Climate – through the implementation of this policy and the sharing of our expectations, we aim to create a positive and safe environment.
- Pupil Aspirations – we focus on the value of Aspiration for one term a year, encouraging children to think of their own aspirations and draw inspiration from others in school and beyond.
- Academic achievement and attendance – we provide opportunities to celebrate academic achievement during Shine and by rewarding with Values points and visits to other classes as well as stickers and stamps.
- Wellbeing – we provide multiple opportunities to improve wellbeing through daily check-ins with staff, Shine worship, PSHE, Collective Worship and also through additional support from ELSA and where necessary, private counselling, Bereavement Counselling and other additional external support services.

'Zero Tolerance'

There are certain things that we strongly believe have no place in our school community including:

- **Bullying** – this can take different forms including emotional, physical, prejudice based (including racial, faith based, gender, homophobic/biphobic, transphobic, disability based), sexual, direct or indirect verbal and cyber
  (For more information, please refer to our Anti-bullying policy.)
- **Physical violence** towards other people or the school environment.
- **Swearing**.
- **Racism**
- **Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence -** The school will ensure that all reported incidents of sexual harassment and/or violence are met with a suitable and immediate response, and never ignored.
  We recognise that even if there are no reported cases of child-on-child abuse, it may still be taking place but is just not being reported. We have a zero-tolerance approach to abuse and it will never be tolerated. Pupils are encouraged to report abuse or anything that makes them uncomfortable, no matter how 'small' they feel it might be.

The school's response will be:

- Proportionate
- Considered
- Supportive
- Decided on a case-by-case basis

Outcomes for sexual harassment and violence are in line with the rest of the school behaviour policy. In addition to this there will also always be a meeting with parents to discuss the concerns and to make a plan moving forward.

The school has procedures in place to respond to any allegations or concerns regarding a child's safety or wellbeing. These include clear processes for:

- Responding to a report
- Carrying out risk assessments, where appropriate, to help determine whether to: Manage the incident internally, refer to early help, refer to children's social care or report to the Police.

The school follow the following statutory guidance: KCSIE 2025, Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Between Children in Schools and Colleges and the Child Protection and Safeguarding policy - please refer to these for more information.

Positive Outcomes

In order to support the positive ethos our schools, we explicitly role model and promote excellent behaviour to foster positive attitudes to life. We aim to develop our 6 Christian values of **Aspiration, Compassion, Creativeness, Perseverance, Respect** and **Truthfulness,** alongside British Values and developing an understanding of Protected Characteristics**,** ensuring our children are tolerant individuals who show respect and understanding for the opinions and beliefs of other people.

As well as developing self-confidence, our children learn the value of friendship and social interaction in a safe and happy environment where they can grow and achieve. We encourage children to play an active role in their education. Essential to this is a stimulating environment where children feel confident to contribute, without fear of failure or ridicule.

Children's sense of identity will flourish in our care and they will develop and understand the need for a high degree of self-motivation and self-regulation. As teachers, we aim to meet the needs of all pupils; excellent behaviour helps to facilitate this - enabling us to teach effectively with very few behavioural problems. We believe this allows for a positive learning climate in which all children are free to maximise their potential. We expect supportive contributions from parents and carers as we know that working in close collaboration has a significant impact on children's choices and learning.

Our aim is that parents and carers feel confident that their children are growing personally, socially and academically. They can be assured that their children will receive support when they need it and, above all, they can feel welcome in the school to discuss their children's choices and progress in a positive atmosphere.

How We Encourage Excellent Behaviour

At St Sebastian's Primary School, we want our children to feel that they have an active role in the running of the school. This in itself promotes excellent behaviour and we aim to achieve this through:

- A high profile and active School Council.
- Weekly shine assembly to celebrate success.
- Play leaders
- Promoting the culture of 'self-regulation' and teaching children about choices and responsibility.
    - Emphasising our School Rules in classes, Collective Worship and during class, group or individual discussions and highlighting their links to our vision.

As adults we:

- Recognise and reward positive choices as they occur.
- Explain and role model the expectations we wish to see.
- Encourage children to be responsible for their own choices and seek out help and support from others when needed.
- Create strong links with parents and carers to ensure they are informed about their children's excellent choices and achievements.
- Work in partnership with parents when expectations are not being met.

Outcomes and Choices

Our behaviour policy is based on 'outcomes' and 'choices' and this is the language we use with children. A reminder of the expectation and application of this is given at the start of each year in Collective Worship and part of annual staff training. This is then referred to as necessary by all staff using the poster displayed in classrooms and around school (see Appendices).

The focus of our strategy is that children are encouraged to make the right 'choice' about how they move around school, learn, play and interact with others. We make clear that we expect the 'best' and are explicit with children about what the 'best' looks like (see above). Where they choose to demonstrate their best, the consequences are that they:

- Receive verbal affirmation/praise from adults
- Are given Values Points which are added to their individual tally chart in their classroom
- Are asked to visit another member of staff to share completed work or other success
- Receive a sticker or stamp on their work or their uniform

Where children have chosen not to show their 'best':

- A reminder by staff – sometimes using the poster or referring to the central 'best' display in school
- A warning that they are making the 'wrong choice'

- For younger child, ones with particular additional needs there may be more than one warning as deemed appropriate by adults
- Where the child continues not to make the right choice, they may choose to miss one minute from their break/lunchtime. This is recorded on a laminated sheet on the teacher's desk.
- Minutes can be added at increments of 1 or 2 at a time where this is necessary
- Minutes lost are spent in 'reflection time' (in Giraffes Class/Hall)
- Reflection Time is staffed on a rota. Staff carrying this out recorded it in the book so that issues can be monitored and responded to as necessary by SLT. At the end of the reflection period, a conversation takes place with the adult where the child uses the 'mirrors, windows, and doors' approach outlined on the poster to reflect on what happened and the impact of this on themselves and others using the prompt questions.

Where a child choses not to do their best during an afternoon:

For children in Key Stage 1, where there would be a consequence for not meeting expectations after lunchtime break, this will be replaced with a reflective conversation with a member of SLT. If there is a situation where no staff are available, they will spend their reflection minutes in the Year 3 classroom during that afternoon. This is to avoid consequences being left to the next day.

Serious incidents where a child has made the wrong choice:

On the rare occasion where there has been a serious breach of the Behaviour Policy such as refusal to work, hurting of another pupil, swearing within the hearing of others, damage or other incident deemed serious by a member of staff, a 'reflection card' is sent to SLT. SLT staff will judge each case separately but are likely to ask the child to come out of the room and support them to regulate before a reflective conversation and planning a consequence with the child where they are able to do this in an appropriate manner. Where this leads to an 'internal' or 'external' exclusion, parents will be informed. External exclusions/suspensions are only ever the decision of the headteacher. This is avoided wherever possible and is a last resort.

Foundation Stage:

As children begin to settle into school life, the expectations or 'bests' are shared with them and encouraged in a supportive and clear manner. Photographic reminders are on display in the classroom to help them gain a clearer understanding of these. It would be a rare occasion where a Reception child experienced reflection time at break or lunch in the same way as older children, although each case is assessed separately by the staff. Instead, where necessary and after warnings, a reception child may need reminding of their 'best' by a member of SLT.

Apologising

Children are encouraged to recognise when and where they need to apologise for any choices they have made that have caused someone else upset or hurt them in anyway. The Expectations Poster outlines a script for this which pupils are encouraged to use in this situation. The aim is to ensure that they have properly considered the effects of their choices and the impact on others.

Incentives:

We strongly believe that once a child has earnt a reward that it is never removed from them.

Values Points
Given by all staff for displaying any behaviours linked to our school values anywhere in school. The School Council develop a Values menu to share with the school with a range of rewards available for reaching significant thresholds such as 25, 50 and 100 Values Points on the way to receiving a gold pin badge for 125 points.

Stickers

Stickers are given out by all staff to praise children for positive behaviour.

Shine Celebration Worship

- Each class choose a child for a 'special mention' in Shine Assembly once a week.
- Each teacher chooses a 'Star of the Week' for showing one of our values in school during the week.
- Children are also encouraged to bring in achievements they have had outside of school.

Class Rewards:

100 Square Credits (displayed on classroom wall)

Given by all staff for:

- Consistently meeting school expectations and showing their 'best's around the school.
- Behaviour on trips.
- Wow moments.

Once the class have collected 100 class credits, they can choose a reward with their class teacher like a non-uniform day or trip to the park.

Off-Site Expectations

Consequences may be applied where a pupil has not met our expectations off-site when representing the school. This could be when the pupil is taking part in any school-organised or school-related activity (e.g. school trips), travelling to or from school, wearing school uniform or in any other way identifiable as a pupil of our school

Consequences may also be applied where this has happened at any time, whether or not the conditions above apply, if the incident could have repercussions for the orderly running of the school, poses a threat to another pupil or member of the public or could adversely affect the reputation of the school

Consequences will only be given out on school premises or elsewhere when the pupil is under the lawful control of the staff member (e.g. on a school-organised trip).

Malicious Allegations

Where a pupil makes an allegation against a member of staff and that allegation is shown to have been deliberately invented or malicious, the school will impose consequences for the pupil in accordance with this policy.

Where a pupil makes an allegation of sexual violence or sexual harassment against another pupil and that allegation is shown to have been deliberately invented or malicious, the school will take action in accordance with this policy.

In all cases where an allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious, the school (in collaboration with the local authority designated officer, where relevant) will consider whether the pupil who made the allegation is in need of help, or the allegation may have been a cry for help. If so, a referral to children's social care may be appropriate.

The school will also consider the pastoral needs of staff and pupils accused of misconduct.

Please refer to our child protection and safeguarding policy for more information on responding to allegations of abuse against staff or other pupils.

Physical Restraint

In some circumstances, staff may use reasonable force to restrain a pupil to prevent them from causing disorder, hurting themselves or others and damaging property. This would always be:

- **Used as a last resort**
- Be applied using the minimum amount of force and for the minimum amount of time possible
- Be used in ways that maintains the safety and dignity of all concerned
- Be recorded and reported to parents

Pastoral Support Plans

Where a child is struggling to meet expectations over a period of time, it may be necessary to implement a pastoral support plan. This plan will seek to address trigger points, difficulties and behaviour issues through a specific set of actions and adjustments which will enable the child to continue with their learning and bring about change to their behaviour. The plan will be written with the child and parents. The school recognises its legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to prevent pupils with a protected characteristic from being at a disadvantage. Consequently, our approach to challenging behaviour may be differentiated to cater to the needs of the pupil. The school's SENCo (Amy Richardson) will evaluate a pupil who exhibits challenging behaviour to determine whether they have any underlying needs that are not currently being met. Where necessary, support and advice will also be sought from outside agencies, medical practitioners and/or others, to identify or support specific needs. When high levels of need are identified in a pupil, we will liaise with external agencies and plan support programmes for that child. We will work with parents to create the plan and review it on a regular basis

Exclusions

At St Sebastian's Primary School, we use exclusions as a last resort. If it is deemed an appropriate action to support a child in school, then an individual child will be placed in a different class to continue with their learning for a set period of time. This can help to de-escalate situations and allow for other support mechanisms to be put in place. Should it ever be necessary, the school will put a 'temporary exclusion' in place for an individual child – this is usually between 1-3 days in length. This will be considered where a child has deliberately hurt a member of staff or other pupil and staff are concerned for the safety of themselves or others.

When the child returns to school a re-integration meeting will take place where a set of agreed actions will be decided to improve the behaviour of the child and an individual behaviour plan will be put in place.

In very extreme cases where a number of temporary exclusions have been used but were unsuccessful in bringing about positive change in the child's behaviour, then the school may take the decision to 'permanently exclude' a child. This would only ever be a final resort where all other options and support strategies had been exhausted.

All exclusions/suspensions are recorded as such on CPOMs with parent and the Local Authority informed at the earliest opportunity.

Safeguarding

The school recognises that changes in behaviour may be an indicator that a pupil is in need of help or protection. Where this is the case, we will follow our child protection and safeguarding policy and concerns will be referred immediately to the Senior Designated Person in school (Elaine Bedford) or the Deputy Designated Persons (Nicola Woolerton and Amy Parnham) in school.

Appendix 1

Written Statement of Behaviour Principles

Every pupil understands they have the right to feel safe, valued and respected, and learn free from the disruption of others

All pupils, staff and visitors are free from any form of discrimination

Staff and volunteers set an excellent example to pupils at all times

Rewards, sanctions and reasonable force are used consistently by staff, in line with the behaviour policy

The behaviour policy is understood by pupils, governors and staff

Exclusions will only be used as a last resort

Pupils are helped to take responsibility for their actions

Families are involved in behaviour incidents to foster good relationships between the school and pupils' home life

The Governing Board also emphasises that violence or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated in any circumstances.

This written statement of behaviour principles is reviewed and approved by the Governing Board annually.

Appendix 2

Through our Christian values, we strive to create an inclusive, nurturing community where everyone can flourish, unlock their potential and widen their horizons.
Faith inspires all that we do, ensuring we become responsible global citizens who promote equality and individuality.

Our School Rules

Be kind to everyone.
Treat everyone how you want to be treated.
Always do your best.
Look after your environment.

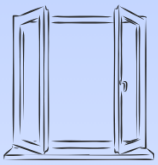
walking, talking, sitting, **Best**, eating, listening, playing

How to apologise

1	Say what you are sorry for	"I am sorry for..."
2	Say why it was wrong	"It was wrong because..."
3	Accept full responsibility	"This was my fault that I did this/said this..."
4	Ask how to make amends	"How can I make this better?"
5	Commit to not doing it again	"Next time, I will..."
6	Ask for forgiveness	"Will you accept my apology?"
7	Thank them	"Thank you for listening."



What happened? How have you reflected on this?



How has this affected other people? How do you think they felt?



What will you change next time? How will you show that you have reflected on what happened?

Verbal Praise
Show your work to another adult
Values Points
Class Credits
Shine Awards

Reminder about your choices
2nd Reminder (as appropriate)
Play/lunchtime reflection time (increments of 2 mins)
up to a max of 12 mins followed by a reflection conversation.

Reflection card to SLT
Internal/external Exclusion/parental phone call

Our Christian Values

Thankfulness, Compassion, Perseverance, Respect, Creativity, Aspiration

'Encourage one another and build each other up.' 1 Thessalonians 5:11,

Appendix 3

End of Break/Lunch – St Sebastian's

At the start of Break/Lunchtime…

1. Ask children to stop and listen, "show me your best listening", refer to expectations e.g. nothing in my hands.
2. Tidy up
3. When asked to leave the room, remind about 'best walking'. A member of staff to lead children out to break/lunch – this can be support staff or classteacher.

End of Break/Lunchtime…

1. Blow the whistle to indicate an immediate stop to break. This is reinforced by staff on duty.
2. During this time, children are expected to stand still. Only once we have the attention of the full playground, do we provide our expectations.
3. Announcement made by staff. Economy of language here is key. 'Thank you, everyone. When I call your class, you will show me your Best Walking.' This must be completed perfectly or you make them do it again. Permit what you promote.
4. All staff will circulate and issue reminders if needed or sanctions if necessary. Class teachers will be on the playground and responsible for their class.

Appendix 4

Nurturing a sense of belonging at school: what helps pupils feel connected?

Published May 2024, National Children's Bureau

Feeling like you belong can have a very positive social and academic impact, says Director of the Anti-Bullying Alliance Martha Evans, but a significant number of schoolchildren don't.

Recent government research shows that just three-fifths of pupils at school feel a sense of belonging at school. Meanwhile, 15-year-olds in the UK report some of the lowest levels of life satisfaction in OECD countries (PISA, Department for Education, 2023).

This matters because evidence increasingly demonstrates that children and young people's sense of belonging plays a decisive role in shaping their social, emotional, and mental health outcomes and academic performance. At the National Children's Bureau (NCB), we've recently worked with researchers at Goldsmiths, University of London, to understand what influences pupils' sense of belonging in school. These are the issues that are starting to emerge.

What do we mean by a sense of 'belonging' at school?

Since the early 1990s, we have seen growing evidence of the importance of feeling included and having a sense of belonging at school. Researchers argue that a pupil's subjective sense of school belonging is "a potentially important influence on

academic motivation, engagement, and participation" (Carol Goodenow and Kathleen Grady 1993).

A useful definition of belonging is summarised in 'School Belonging: The Importance of Pupil and Teacher Relationships' (Allen et al 2021) which defines it as:

"The extent to which pupils feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment."

Key Factors that Influence Pupil Belonging

Teacher-Pupil Relationships

Research shows that teachers are more than educators: they are mentors and guides shaping a pupil's journey. Studies consistently indicate that the emotional resonance a teacher creates significantly impacts a pupil's sense of belonging. Empathy, availability, and emotional support emerge as pivotal elements, as highlighted by research from the PISA in a 2018 study across 75 countries.

Peer Relationships and Support: building connections

The power of peer relationships should not be underestimated either. Positive social interactions and peer support play a direct role in fostering feelings of acceptance and closeness. Friendships forged during extracurricular activities are particularly influential, offering a strong predictor of school belonging, as evidenced by various studies.

Research consistently shows that bullying levels are lower where a sense of belonging in schools is evident.

Individual Traits: reflections on personal characteristics

A pupil's character traits are defining factors in their sense of belonging. Factors such as self-efficacy, conscientiousness, and hope have been shown to foster a positive connection, with those feelings being associated with a greater sense of belonging at school. Gender also plays a part, with studies showing that girls are more likely to form a sense of belonging in school than boys.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are more likely to say they do not feel a sense of belonging at school. We must do all we can to remove the barriers that children with SEND experience in accessing learning and inclusive school environments.

Parental Support: a foundation for belonging

The importance of the parent-child relationship extends beyond the home, profoundly impacting a pupil's connection to their school. Research shows that parental involvement and support create an environment of care, compassion, and encouragement, contributing significantly to a child's sense of belonging.

Extracurricular Activities: beyond the classroom walls

Participation in extracurricular activities emerges as a key factor in enhancing school belonging. While involvement is positive, studies caution against an excess of activities, emphasising the need for a balance with academic studies.

School Climate and Safety: shaping perceptions

Research shows that a school's 'climate', sometimes referred to as its culture or ethos, along with safety measures, significantly influences pupils' perceptions of

belonging. Fairness, both in policies and interactions, plays a crucial role in creating a supportive environment.

How safe a school may feel to a child, both emotionally and physically, can influence their sense of belonging. For example, unsupervised periods during the day can impact negatively on their interactions with others, and how school classrooms are set up can influence pupils' wellbeing.

Pupil Aspirations: bridging the present and future

A pupil's sense of belonging can extend its influence on to future career decisions. Confidence in making these decisions often correlates with a strong sense of belonging during school years. Therefore, the benefits of having a positive connection with school is palpable whilst in education and stretch into adulthood.

Academic Achievement and Attendance

Research shows pupils' sense of belonging impacts their academic outcomes, including academic achievement, classroom engagement, motivation, and attendance. Positive peer relationships and emotional wellbeing also play significant roles. Conversely, low academic achievement often coincides with a lack of belonging.

Attendance rates are also closely tied to belonging, with higher levels of connectedness correlating with better attendance, particularly among at-risk pupils. Addressing belongingness is crucial for improving outcomes.

Wellbeing: Understanding Self-Esteem

Lastly, literature shows that having a strong feeling of belonging at school is very important for pupils' happiness and mental health. Feeling connected and supported by others around you helps protect you against feeling down or stressed, no matter your background.

Research shows that when pupils feel like they belong at school, they tend to be happier, more confident, and do better overall. When pupils are moving from primary to secondary school, feeling like they fit in can really make a difference in how they handle changes and challenges and feel about themselves.

Additionally, school belonging is linked to better mental health outcomes, including reduced levels of suicidal ideation and depression, and improved sleep quality, especially among secondary school-aged children.

However, challenges such as bullying, disciplinary practices like isolation, and feelings of loneliness can diminish pupils' sense of belonging and negatively affect their mental health and self-esteem. A sense of belonging in school is a basic requirement to fully experience and optimise school life.

Conclusion

In our quest for academic achievements, let's not forget the importance of fostering an environment where pupils feel a sense of belonging. Teachers, peers, personal characteristics, and various external factors intertwine to create a tapestry of connection.

As we navigate the evolving landscape of education, understanding and addressing these factors will be instrumental in nurturing a positive and inclusive learning environment for all pupils.

After all, education is not just about what's taught in the curriculum; it's about building a community where every pupil feels they truly belong.

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