



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 Robert and Laura,

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 conduct the verification for the Award today. I should like to extend my thanks to you, your senior team and other staff for making the virtual visit so purposeful and enjoyable.

I should like to warmly congratulate you and the rest of the staff on achieving the Award, which is an external sign of recognition of your commitment to the steps you have taken at St. Michael-in-the-Hamlet Primary School to develop a culture of compassion and nurture. This, as you well know, plays a pivotal role in getting your pupils into a state of 'learning readiness'. The Award is valid for two years and will run from July 2023 to July 2025.

All the criteria have been evidenced adequately, and in most cases, more than adequately. The evidence you have submitted comes from a broad variety of sources: case studies; extracts and examples of key documents and policies provided by you; from your website; and from interviews with a range of staff, including you and other members of the team. 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:

- Quality staff care and emotional support to protect mental health and well-being is multi-levelled and provided at a very high level, through SLT and varied therapeutic and

peer support. Reflective practice is at the heart of your approach, and multiple opportunities allow practitioners to reflect on what works, what doesn't, and what can be improved. Reflective practice protects practitioners from burnout and compassion fatigue and contributes to wellbeing in staff, as well as improving understanding of and response to children. Leaders are aware of the multiple risk factors to staff mental health and wellbeing, and are proactive in providing support to cope with the psychological and emotional demands of the job. Informal supervision and debrief are available to staff as and when needed. Informal and spontaneous mentoring is in place and there is an extensive range of processes and strategies to protect staff from overwhelm or burnout. Staff appreciate the praise and gratitude they are shown by Leaders, and say this makes them feel valued and respected. All staff interviewed shared that support for staff is non-judgemental and that leaders are approachable, flexible and empathic. Some staff shared their gratitude that personal family needs are given high priority and they greatly appreciate the flexibility of deadlines and workloads. Care for staff is a particular strength of the school.

- You have a range of strategies in place for supporting parents and carers in understanding child development and attachment relationships. Strategies are largely informal in nature, and particularly engage parents who may find it difficult to trust service providers, including educators. Staff demonstrated a depth of understanding and empathy about why some families may be described as 'hard to reach', recognising that their relationship to 'help' may not have always have been positive in the past. Staff interviewed mentioned the school's holistic approach to support – that all hands were 'on deck' when building relationships with parents and carers. Staff also spoke about how they try to make meetings and conversations with parents and carers as informal as possible in order to strengthen trust and support. Sharing information with families about useful strategies, for example, shows an understanding of the importance of including parents and carers in the school's development. Evidence about the support you offer to children and families was compelling and moving. You demonstrate deep empathy in relation to the daily struggles that families face. Connection with and care for families is a particular strength of the school.

- There is a strong focus on multi-sensory learning and play, and many and varied examples of this were shared. Staff spoke about enrichment activities such as Forest School, pond dipping, and Monster Phonics. This, combined with the emphasis on making learning fun and individual attention for each child, is an excellent recipe for helping children to become fully engaged with learning. The range of opportunities offered to pupils is impressive and thoughtful, linking practical activities to ideas and concepts. These activities will be beneficial to the children in so many ways, for example building cognitive skills, such as cause and effect reasoning; sensory development; social and emotional development; and to decompress, reflect and relax. I was most impressed to hear that music, art and PE are given high priority, and that no child is ever denied access to these really important topics in order to access academic interventions (as is sadly common in so many schools). It is refreshing to hear that all interventions are delivered within the current lesson and by the teacher rather than by support staff. This is a particular strength of the school.
- The methods the school uses to Meet and Greet pupils are thoughtful and comprehensive. SLT meet children and families at the gates and class staff greet each child personally at the classroom door. Staff shared a good example of how one pupil has a daily meet and greet by a particular staff member and has tea and toast with her on arrival. Some children have access to sensory circuits as soon as they arrive, reducing the likelihood of dysregulation and crisis. Staff are thoughtful and tender towards the emotions children feel at different times in their school lives and recognise that when things change at home, a child who has previously entered school happily may experience temporary anxiety. One example was given of a child who has welcomed a new baby into his family. This has been difficult for him but the sensitive and compassionate approach from staff has been very supportive and effective. The environment you have created on arriving at St. Michael-in-the-Hamlet Primary School Primary School is a particular strength.
- Staff are skilled in monitoring excitement and anxiety, and they have a deep understanding of survival behaviours. They make appropriate interventions to provide coregulation, using a 'connection before correction' approach, so physiological and emotional comfort is restored as part of the coregulation process, and reflection and

restorative dialogue only takes place once a child is regulated in their body and emotions. Children are protected from, and given significant support with potentially explosive situations. Staff frequently mentioned the importance of supporting children to stay within their window of stress tolerance through recognising and minimising triggers. They described a wide range of grounding strategies and spoke of the importance of having a deep knowledge of each child as an individual; there is no 'cookie-cutter' approach to meeting needs and all support is individualised and personal. Exit plans, where required, are developmentally appropriate and enable children to ask for help and support when becoming uncomfortable or overwhelmed. Managing anxiety and dysregulation is a particular strength of at St. Michael-in-the-Hamlet Primary School.

I hope that you will celebrate your achievement with pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and other stakeholders to celebrate the school's commitment to its children, successfully removing barriers to learning and participation in the life of the school. I have felt particularly privileged to share your journey. I am thrilled that you intend to register for the Silver Award – Attachment and Trauma Friendly and I already look forward to continuing to support you through the next steps!

Yours sincerely,

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