

# A Quiet Place at the Heart of Stockton Wood Primary School

Our school shares an ambitious and aspirational vision - we are passionate about 'Laying the Foundations for Life' and providing values and the skills for life for our children so that they can thrive and achieve their full potential.

We recognise the vulnerabilities and strengths within our school community, gaps in experiences and opportunity and challenges faced by children.

We are committed to inclusion and we conscientiously strive to meet the wide-ranging needs within our school community and ensure that our school is a happy, safe place to be.

Within our community there are high proportions of children who are vulnerable and experience complex SEND and social and emotional barriers and we are focussed upon overcoming barriers to learning, securing children's emotional wellbeing, establishing behaviour for learning and promoting aspiration and opportunity.

Securing children's emotional wellbeing and mental health is a priority for us and developing the children's emotional intelligence lies at the heart of all we do and is a huge part of our ethos.

Emotional intelligence develops the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing our emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.

Emotional intelligence helps our children to be ready to learn, to achieve, to develop relationships, to overcome barriers to their learning and thrive.

'A Quiet Place' has played a vital part in helping us to develop the children's emotional intelligence and to help them overcome barriers to learning and lies at the heart of our school. 'A Quiet Place' is not an intervention it is a 'way of life' at Stockton Wood that all children benefit from and all staff support – it is universal whilst also providing personalised and targeted programmes of support as needed for children and their families.

Through 'A Quiet Place' (AQP) children learn to

- Manage feelings
- Develop resilience and empathy
- Build self esteem
- Develop confidence and self-awareness
- Communicate successfully and develop positive relationships

A calm place ..., A sanctuary..., A happy, safe place..., An oasis... phrases commonly used by others to describe our school as a result of our ethos and the impact of AQP upon our school community.

Step into our school on any day of the week and you will see and feel the impact of AQP – witness 'heart breath' during whole school assembly or in the classroom after playtime and lunchtime led by a 'heart breath' monitor; join a breakfast nurture group in 'A Quiet Place'; visit a classroom as a facilitator leads meditation or peer massage; observe our psychotherapist supporting parents and modelling strategies for use at home; look out for personalised provision for individual children – for example children independently seeking out 'sanctuary place', using 'Heartmath' before the start of the school day, visiting our psychotherapist in 'A Quiet Place' for their weekly session or choosing 'a smelly tissue'!

As early as Nursery, children learn self-awareness. For example, they learn that:

- ✓ a racing heart may be a sign of excitement, frustration, anger and by using 'heart breath' – a simple breathing technique taught to all children, we can slow our racing heart, manage our feelings and in

turn become calm and focussed ready to listen, ready to learn, ready to solve a problem or a falling out.

Or

- ✓ a 'smelly' tissue (aromatherapy – a tissue soaked with an oil of choice eg lavender) can offer comfort and an anchor which again enables children to calm and re focus.

Such simple yet effective strategies become part of children's everyday self-management toolkit which they use at transition points through the day, at moments of anxiety or loss of concentration and at home.

Other strategies and techniques within the toolkit include use of:

- Bio feedback programme – 'HeartMath' (learning to change your heart rhythm pattern to create physiological coherence)
- Breathing techniques in tandem with the 'A Quiet Place' music.
- Meditation consisting of simple, calming and focused brain exercise

Alongside 'A Quiet Place', 'Sanctuary Place' offers a safe place to go for individual children when they recognise and understand that they need to move away from a particular situation.

A sanctuary place in our school is as simple as a 'ball chair' which offers a quiet, enclosed space outside the classroom whilst still under the careful eye of staff. Children using the sanctuary place know how to use a variety of simple self-management techniques to manage their feelings so they can re-engage with the classroom environment and enable them to be ready to learn and/or ready to solve a problem.

AQP staff build supportive, caring relationships and children, families and staff seek out their support within the safe haven of 'A Quiet Place.' (A room – a special, safe place within the school - carefully and specially designed to complement the AQP programmes and strategies.)

AQP staff include psychotherapists, facilitators and body workers working in classrooms with whole classes, within the haven of AQP with small nurture groups or individual children and out in the community with parents. Not only do AQP staff support children and families they also support staff again in universal and personal ways – offering group relaxation sessions and massage and when needed supporting individual staff with their own personal wellbeing or that of their family.

'A Quiet Place' staff provide personalised programmes that run for 6 weeks (3 sessions each week) designed with children, parents and staff with unique outcomes for each child and family. Children experiencing a loss, anxiety, behavioural difficulties, a lack of confidence and many other reasons may be referred to AQP.

The success of the personalised AQP programmes is that they build seamlessly on the existing AQP universal provision within the school. On completion of the individual programmes, children continue to be supported by that universal provision and also by further drop in sessions over time. Support is scaffolded and graduated ensuring children learn to manage their feelings successfully and independently using their AQP strategies and building resilience over time.

*'A Quiet Place has created an Emotional Intelligence Curriculum which is a carefully crafted, scripted programme that helps a person develop all elements of Emotional Intelligence by harnessing the imagination through strategies such as visualisation and storytelling.'* <https://www.aquietplace.co.uk/schools/>

'Massage is an important part of the 'A Quiet Place' protocol and is done with care to keep children safe. Much research shows the connection between touch, emotional health and wellbeing. Massage is offered to assist with relaxation and reduce tension.' The use of aromatherapy oils also helps to create a perfect relaxing environment.

By being at the heart of the school ethos and day to day provision and physically based within the school, AQP offers a unique service unlike other therapeutic providers whose staff work externally to the school offering, for example, 6 hourly sessions over 6 weeks with the visiting therapist attending the school for each weekly session which then come to a finite end. And... whilst new ideas and services have come and gone 'A Quiet Place' has continued to support our school and others for over 20 years.

AQP has continued to evolve and be responsive to need within our school and wider community contributing to the development of nurture breakfast groups providing a supportive start to the day; providing support for our nurture base for vulnerable early years children and their families, leading outreach support for schools within our local network and of course a vital source of reassurance and support throughout the pandemic reaching out to children and families at home during lockdowns.

AQP is embedded within the children's learning journey throughout their time at Stockton Wood and a way of life and we are proud that children take their toolkit of skills and knowledge with them as they continue their journey to the next stage of their education and life, ready and prepared to embrace the opportunities and challenges ahead.

As a head teacher, 'A Quiet Place' has personally informed my practice and my relationships with children, families and staff, enabling me to shape the school's ethos, placing wellbeing at the heart of the school and creating a genuinely unique child centred environment – one of calmness, gentleness and resilience. A place where children can thrive and achieve their full potential. 'A Quiet Place' has touched the lives of so many!

External Feedback:

*'The most vulnerable children within the school receive highly individualised nurture and support programmes through which they both feel valued and are able to learn alongside their peers, progress academically and achieve well.'* **South Liverpool Learning Network Headteacher Peer Review 2019**

**OFSTED 2019** *'Pupils thoroughly enjoy attending this school. For many pupils, school provides a sanctuary where they have fun, feel safe and learn new things. Pupils' attendance and punctuality are excellent. The atmosphere around the school is calm and purposeful.'*

*'A particularly unique feature of the school is its strength in developing pupils' life skills and values. Teachers model respect and kindness and pupils mirror these behaviours both in and out of class. Pupils learn to pay close attention to their feelings and those of others. They are taught how to manage stress by regulating their heartbeat, for example. The school's 'A Quiet Place' provides a relaxing haven for pupils who are experiencing anxiety or personal difficulties...'* **OFTSED 2019**

Suzy Price

Headteacher of Stockton Wood Primary School

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