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Promoting Positive Relationships Policy

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This policy will be reviewed in three years unless there are changes to legislation or Local Authority guidance

**Chair of Governors: Ian Thompson
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Policy Outline – Promoting Positive Relationships

Introduction

We want all Enfield schools and settings to be positive and proactive places where good teaching and learning takes place in a safe environment and there are good relationships between staff, pupil, parents/carers and the community.

We expect students to be taught in suitable, safe environments where good behaviour is clearly evident and backed up by effective policy and practice which is consistently and fairly enforced. Staff also have a right to feel safe and supported in their working environment.

We know that the ability to develop and sustain effective relationships is central to the success of our schools and that good relationships with parents and carers are key to supporting children's learning. We need to be able to demonstrate and model how we build and maintain effective relationships.

We want all Enfield schools and settings to be recognised for good practice in managing behaviour within school and in their relationships.

We recognise that there are increasing challenges facing our schools and settings which place a strain on our ability to manage these relationships. This document aims to provide schools with some good practice examples and guidance on both how to set out a good foundation on which to build good relationships and where to find help should things start to breakdown.

This document has been produced to convey two fundamental messages:

- **Be prepared** – You can't prepare for a crisis in the middle of one. Devise policies to try to prevent them and prepare in advance. Having clearly thought out, current policies and procedures will help support you in this and preparation, including regular review, is time well spent.
- **You are not on your own** - and you don't have to deal with issues on your own. Seek early advice or support from others – colleagues, LA Officers, professional associations/Unions, other professionals.

We would like to thank colleagues from schools and the local authority who have made a contribution to drawing up this document.

Positive Relationships

This guidance aims to provide support to schools in building and sustaining Positive Relationships and identifying where to find help if things go wrong. It applies to and encompasses the many relationships within schools including those with pupils, parents, staff, governors, the community and the local authority.

Successful relationships between schools, students and their families are built on a good foundation and are sustained through regular maintenance. On occasion things go wrong, they have a difficulty, but with work they can get back on track. We also need to recognise that sadly relationships sometimes reach a point where they are not salvageable and they break down. If that happens we need strategies to support schools and families to help all parties move on and ensure that pupils are able to access their education.

The Enfield Model

Our model has five stages designed to help support a Positive Relationship. Details of these are set out below.

The basic stages apply to all schools

Building Sustaining

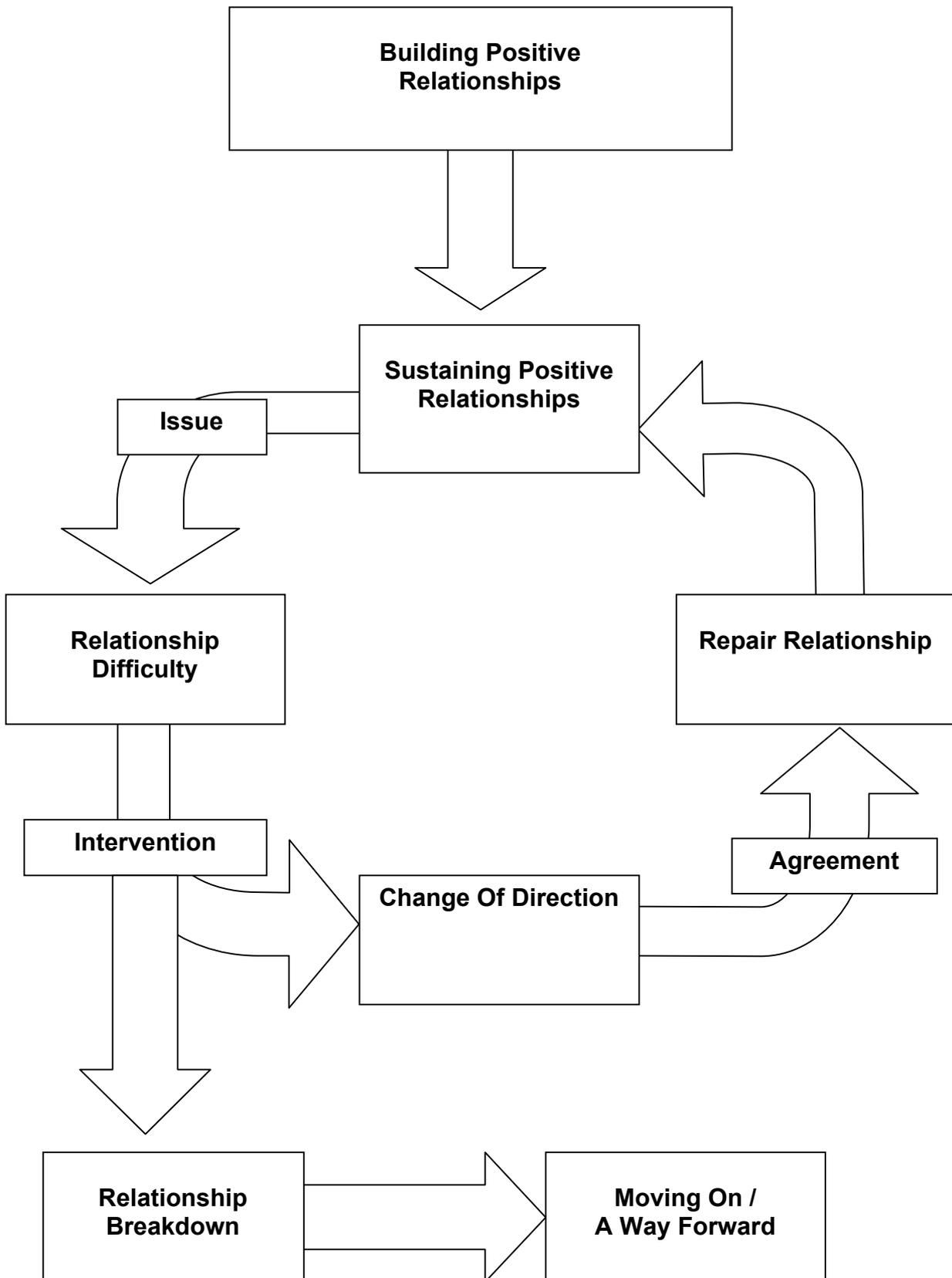
Unfortunately relationships do, on occasion, experience a difficulty. This may be the stage at which schools will consider seeking external support – see details of the Local Authority Support Team, page 3. These initial breakdowns can usually be repaired and the relationship can go back to sustaining stage. We are referring to this as

Repairing / Change of Direction

Occasionally, in a few very extreme cases, there is such a serious break down that it results in the fourth and potentially fifth stage. Where an issue looks set to cause the relationship to break down schools should be seeking urgent advice from the LA, colleagues, governors or their professional association.

Relationship Breakdown Moving on / A Way Forward

Promoting Positive Relationships



Stage 1 – Building Positive Relationships

Every school needs:

Policies and procedures that are clear, regularly revisited and shared across the whole school community including parents/carers. These must have a rigour and be applied consistently.

In some instances policies or procedures are a statutory requirement and must be ratified and reviewed by governors – these are shown in italics. Others are good practice or have been established due to a previous incident or the particular circumstances of a school. Some relevant examples of these types of policies and procedures include:

- *Behaviour/Pupil Discipline*
- Attendance
- *Home/School or Parent/Partnership Contracts*
- *Complaints* and a process for investigation and for resolution – further advice for dealing with complaints and a model policy are appended to this document
- Visitors – also covering health and safety issues, bullying and harassment
- Homework
- E-Safety Policies covering a range of safeguarding issues such as use of the internet, data sharing, safe use of images
- Anti-bullying including cyber and online bullying
- Code of conduct for staff, governors and parents
- Use of force or physical restraint (physical intervention)
- Health and Safety (including school security)
- Home visit/lone visits
- Equal opportunities / Equality and Diversity
- Recruitment and Selection
- Personal Records/Central Records
- Whistle-blowing
- Safeguarding – this covers a range of different subjects such as
 - Child protection (*including management of allegations*)
 - Children Looked After
 - Drugs and substance misuse
 - First aid (*including management of medical conditions, administration of medicines and intimate care*)
 - Safeguarding statement in school prospectus
 - Work placement
 - Educational Visits

This list is not exhaustive and it is not expected that each policy will necessarily stand alone - it may be appropriate to combine policies under different headings as a school wishes.

Induction, ethos and expectations

All schools have expectations of how they will work with pupils and their families, what behaviour is acceptable and how they would wish to be treated. These expectations need to be clearly set out, shared widely and reinforced regularly.

Schools should set up induction processes for

- parents
- children
- staff - both for new staff and refresher training for existing staff

which clearly set out expectations and acceptable standards of behaviour.

Induction needs to include information on

- Ethos and vision of the school
- Expectations- the ground rules
- Procedures
- What to do when things go wrong/how to complain
- Information sharing/confidentiality

For staff this should to be backed up by a Staff Handbook providing advice and support for new and existing staff. In addition to school staffing policies this will include advice on the appropriate use of e-communications with pupils and parents, Facebook, Twitter, e-mail and other social media.

Schools should consider whether there is any specific training you should provide for your staff.

Regular reminders need to be given to ensure the whole school community has a good level of understanding. These don't need to be formal occasions – staff meetings, newsletters, coffee mornings etc. - unless you are formally responding to a particular issue.

Dealing with minor issues

- Deal with minor issues as they arise - if dealt with quickly, consistently and appropriately they are less likely to develop further
- Empower staff to deal with issues
- Use learning from ongoing minor issues to change practice

Be Proactive

- Inform parents about incidents as soon as possible or at the end of the day
- Brief other staff before meetings with parents

Stage 2 – Sustaining Positive Relationships

Relationships are constantly changing and need regular maintenance and renewal. If the foundation has been laid under Stage 1 staff, pupils and parents will know the practice in your school and staff can refer back to readily recognised procedures. However, regular reminders and reinforcement consistently applied will ensure that good practice is familiar and maintained and will also provide a useful prompt when it becomes outdated and needs refreshing.

Schools need to be clear and explicit about their expectations. These need to be firmly and consistently applied and “warning letters” are an effective way of giving a quick reminder and heading off problems before they develop further.

Ways to sustain and maintain the Positive Relationship include:

- Regular communication such as newsletters to keep all informed and updated. There is no one good model for this but it should be appropriate for your parents based on the level of detail they need or expect.
- Set up a range of formal and informal ways of meeting parents and ensure they know who to contact to discuss any issues they have at an early stage and how to arrange this.
- Identify staff with specific responsibilities for parent support/liaison. Make sure they have the appropriate skills, training and support to carry out this role and that parents are aware they have the authority deal with issues. Parents’ expectations may be that all issues, however, minor can only be dealt with by the headteacher. This can be draining, take up too much headteacher capacity and deny other staff the opportunity to develop the appropriate skills and experience.
- Establish a two stage approach to provide potential for escalation and allow the headteacher to concentrate on the more serious issues – issues are raised initially with the class teacher/year head and are escalated to a member of the Senior Management Team.
- Establish clear systems to monitor behaviour and record incidents, good and bad, which are clearly understood and regularly reviewed. These can be invaluable when handling repeat incidents which have occurred over a number of months or years.
- Prioritise a rapid response to queries and issues as they arise. This does not mean always reacting immediately when feelings are potentially running high. A short delay, with a set appointment to deal with the matter can be a more effective way to deal with an issue, allowing you time to gather necessary facts and information and time for all parties to calm down. However, do not delay this too long as resentment will build.
- Provide a regular, visible and accessible staff presence in the playground to meet and greet parents and pupils.
- Offer training and support, repeated regularly as appropriate, for all staff in avoiding and dealing with complaints, conflict and your duty of care.
- Provide regular reminders to staff of good practice.

- Be mindful of the effect of complaints on members of staff with less experience of dealing with them.
- Try a charm offensive to defuse the situation.
- Identify and interact with specific families
- Provide training and support for office/front of school staff and all other school staff.
- Don't jump to conclusions - remember there may be an element of "the customer is right", there may be a genuine mistake or messages may have been misinterpreted
- Have a clear system for reporting incidents to the Senior Management Team and, where appropriate, governors
- Have a formal process for recording evidence and complete this as close as possible to the time an incident occurred.
- Use a multi agency meeting/approach to brainstorm/consider solutions
- Encourage parents to take up external support mechanisms or advocacy.

Template or standard response letters may be appropriate to provide a quick response, however, these need to be used cautiously as they need to address the specific issue.

Stage 3 – Relationship Difficulty / Change of Direction - Dealing with Problems if they Escalate

If more serious issues or conflicts do arise headteachers need to have or be able to access accurate information advice and/or support from agencies outside of the school including the local authority, professional associations or other local headteachers.

- **Ask for help and advice** from the local authority support team (see page 3), your union, other headteachers or professional organisations. A Peer coach from cluster/local school may be appropriate where the possibility of relationship breakdown is identified.
- **Use your Chair of Governors** if serious incidents have occurred ensure governors, particularly the Chair, are informed. The Chair should be able to provide you with support or guidance. Bear in mind that governors may be required to hear a formal complaint so be careful about the level of details provided.

Also bear in mind

- **Parents may need specialist support** so consider signposting or providing information on other support, guidance or advocacy which is independent in relation either to the issues which have arisen or other pressures in their lives. Schools are well placed to provide information on other local services available or to suggest other referral routes.

First Steps

- Consider a quick response letter before a formal, considered response – prepare a standard template thanking the person for raising the issue and advising when they will have a response
- Give yourself time to consider before giving an answer, do not be rushed but don't delay too long either.
- Prioritise a rapid response to queries and issues as they arise. As in stage 2 this does not mean always reacting immediately when feelings are potentially running high and in fact if they have escalated it is more important to set a more formal timetable and structure.
- Ensure you have followed your agreed procedures and sent out warning letters etc. as appropriate for example stating that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated and what the consequences will be. This will be important if the situation escalates as you will need to have evidence that you have told them that behaviour is not acceptable and that it should cease.

Investigating and Meetings

- Investigate incidents promptly and with an open mind to reduce bias
- Ensure there is an accurate record/evidence trail of incidents.
- Ensure meetings are minuted independently and are agreed to be accurate
- Agree and record plans and next steps

Ongoing, repeated or reoccurrence of issues

- If an incident is/has been at stage 3 and behaviour repeats or escalates you are strongly advised to contact Legal Services in the first instance to seek advice. Legal Services will be able to provide standard template letters such as banning orders.
- Implement a stepped approach – advise on the escalation process and the consequences of further incidences including that this could result in a charge of harassment. Formal notification of unacceptable behaviour is important as if the situation escalates as you will need to have evidence that you have told them that behaviour is not acceptable and that it should cease.
- If you believe that a criminal offense has taken place, or is likely to, contact the local Police for advice and support.

Supporting Staff

- Ensure staff, including senior leadership, are supported and kept informed and advised on their day-to-day interaction with parents ensuring consistency
- Remember staff with less experience of dealing with complaints or issues may be more affected.
- Staff need to be aware of how their behaviour could be misinterpreted. They should be briefed on not leaving themselves vulnerable and open to allegations eg assault
- Ensure supervision for staff involved in extreme situations provides the opportunity to talk and work through the emotional response to the issue
- Consider the impact on the child's behaviour and how to mitigate effects on classroom teaching and learning. Ensure all staff feel confident in their dealings with the child and able to treat them in a consistent and equitable way, not treating them with "kid gloves" or "blaming" them for the actions of their parents/carers
- If a concern has reached this level an appropriate risk assessment should be carried out and measures put in place to mitigate any risks.
- Consider personal safety input into staff inset days

Whole school approach

At this level all staff need regular reminders, support and guidance to

- follow agreed policies and procedures
- not take risks or put someone else at risk – be supportive of each other, not put themselves in any situation that makes them vulnerable
- support them to work through emotional issues

The school will also need to develop a strategy for all staff (teaching and nonteaching) who work or interact with a pupil or a family involved in a complaint in order to avoid blame or special treatment.

Conclusion and next steps

- Be prepared to "own" where things have genuinely gone wrong and review future policy and procedures
- Consider a restorative justice process

Stage 4 and 5 – Relationship Breakdown and Moving On / A Way Forward

Although it is very rare ultimately it may not be possible to repair every relationship and the school will need to find a way to move forward and resolve the difficulty. Individual solutions to each issue will need to be found as there is no “one size fits all”. However, there are some general principles which still apply.

It may be that it is necessary to instigate formal processes and Legal procedures. If this is the case it is essential that the school:

- Has the appropriate, current policies and procedures in place and has followed them.
- Has ensured there is a current complaints procedure in place and that it has been followed.
- Can demonstrate that the allegations have been treated seriously and investigated properly and that this has been recorded. It is often easy to dismiss issues out of hand without establishing and considering the full facts.

As an interim measure Legal can provide specific advice and proforma letters for example barring abuse or violent parents from the school site

The school should ensure that:

- The Local Authority is kept fully aware of plans and developments
- Governors are kept fully aware of the situation

In the very rare and extreme circumstance that there is a complete breakdown between parents and a school it may be in the best interests of the child that they are educated elsewhere. However, such a solution may be difficult to achieve as the school retains the responsibility for educating the child unless there has been a permanent solution. With agreement it may be possible to arrange a managed move through the Fair Access processes. Alternatively it may be that parents make the decision to move the pupil themselves.

Where a pupil who has been involved in an incident does move to a new school it is important to ensure that the receiving headteacher is kept aware of the facts. Induction processes for the pupil and their family at the new school will need to be considered carefully. The receiving headteacher may, for example, wish to set out clear guidelines for the parents.