



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 Rita,

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 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 Foxfield 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 July 2025 to July 2027, at which point you will be invited to renew your accreditation.

You have maintained and extended the ATSSA Bronze and Silver Standards, and you shared numerous examples of your attachment- and trauma-sensitive practice with your children.

All six Gold 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 SLT, staff members, and children. All of these confirmed your commitment to the principles of trauma-informed practice: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration. 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 several significant points that are worthy of special mention:

- *Become a Beacon of Best Practice for other schools working towards Attachment and Trauma Sensitive Practice.* You are working closely within the Trust and other local schools. You are particularly trying to give a voice to parents and carers so that their lived experience can help to shape support. Going forward, you show commitment to continuing to share your own vision with other schools who are striving for meaningful, multi-layered, whole-system wide trauma-responsive practice.
- *Provide professional supervision for front line staff and SLT at least termly.* Staff interviewed shared examples of the organisational understanding of, and response to, the psychological and emotional fall-out for staff working with children with complex trauma backgrounds. Front-line staff regularly access formal and informal supervision, which in turn impacts upon personal and professional well-being. Staff feel that supervision has a very positive impact; it provides a safe space for reflection; it enables the supervisee to share the emotional labour with an empathic listener, and thus, protects against loneliness, stress, depression, compassion fatigue, exhaustion and burnout. Staff also commented on the importance of being heard, of collaborative planning of next steps and problem-solving. Informal and spontaneous supervision is also readily available, particularly after difficult interactions or meetings, but staff shared that while such meetings are really advantageous, supervision is central to professional practice and reflection. The multi-layered approach to supervision is a particular strength of the school.
- *Employ attachment- and trauma-informed recruitment, interview and induction processes.* I spoke to a fairly recently recruited member of staff and members of the SLT about the recruitment process. There is always reference to trauma-sensitive practice in job specifications, which indicate that this is an area of high importance in the school. It is made clear from the first contact with the school and prior to appointment that many children have Social, Emotional and Mental Health challenges, and that many have experienced trauma, including educational trauma before arriving at Foxfield Primary School. Applicants are welcomed warmly and put at ease when they arrive for interview and are encouraged to make a visit to the school prior to interview. Interviewers strive to

make candidates physically and emotionally comfortable and to listen carefully throughout. The trauma-sensitive ethos of the school is communicated clearly during the interview, regardless of the role applied for. A number of attachment- and trauma-related questions and tasks that are used for interview were shared with me. Applicants are informed whether or not they have been successful in a timely manner. The induction process into the Trust is comprehensive, welcoming, thorough, transparent and engaging, without being over-managed and every effort is made to make the newly recruited person welcome and included from the start. Training on attachment- and trauma-sensitive practice takes place during the induction period and questions are welcomed and invited during the settling in period and beyond.

- *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. One member of staff said that the performance management process is 'a two-way process ... participatory, collaborative ...' Performance Management is tailored towards meeting individuals 'where they are ...' rather than using a one size fits all model. The SLT invest in career development and training needs are given high priority. Development targets are not exclusively curriculum-based, but also focus on providing a safe social and emotional environment for children with a focus on wellbeing, mental health and attachment- and trauma-sensitive practice. No shaming or critical practices are used, and all staff are treated with respect and valued for what they bring to the community. Strengths are identified and acknowledged, and where difficulties arise, they are dealt with in a timely and supportive manner. Discussions are transparent and honest and this contributes to an increasingly authentic and congruent school culture. On the rare occasions that disciplinary procedures are necessary, they employ trauma-sensitive principles and demonstrate the core values of trauma-informed practice.
- *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 Foxfield 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. 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. Whilst human relationships are central to co-regulation at Foxfield Primary School, it is recognised that interacting with outdoor spaces helps to soothe and regulate the body's stress response system. The calming sounds of nature and even outdoor silence can lower levels of cortisol, which in turn reduces survival behaviour. The physical environment is organised in such a way that children, visitors 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. Staff are well-informed and receive regular information and briefings. It is clear that at all times, great care is taken to ensure that communications throughout the system are positive and inclusive. Compelling evidence was shared relating to the many and varied communications systems, which are invaluable. Leaders and managers are flexible about the approach to deadlines and ensure that staff are empowered to have a good home/work balance. There is a clear and shared understanding of the purpose, focus and aims of staff/team meetings and the agenda is shared in a timely manner. You work hard to develop strong, trusting partnerships with families and communities based on open communication. Communications with parents and carers are addressed sensitively and thoughtfully, ensuring that parents are 'kept in the loop' whether or not they live with their child, and when painful or challenging issues are raised, school staff are supportive and empathic, striving to make a safe space for difficult conversations.
- *Planning of services includes collaboration with representation of 'lived experience' of children, parents/carers and staff at all levels within the school.* Decisions, large and small, are made in collaboration with staff, families and children. There is great emphasis on team work and a true desire to understand each other's strengths and vulnerabilities, ensuring that people are best placed to draw on their strengths. Leaders are always willing to try out new ideas and suggestions and have a 'can do' attitude. In addition to collaboration with staff and children, the school works closely with families and carers.

You have developed practice and strategy to meet needs at every level, for example, how to support family contact; supporting and transporting families in medical and other meetings, for example, with Social Services; providing emotional and practical guidance in pre- and post-adoption support. Leaders show commitment to continue to grow collaborative, inclusive leadership, informed and guided by the lived experience of all members of the school community, embracing co-production and personalised care. There is a recognition that all agencies, partners and participants have a significant impact on experience, process and outcomes, and therefore, all need to contribute and be heard.

- *All policies respect culture, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical ability. The organisation has a detailed understanding of the diversity of their service users and provides resources that are accessible and reflect that diversity. Staff have an understanding of how cultural and historical influences can impact on individuals using the service.* One member of staff, echoed by others, summed up the approach to cultural diversity and humility when she said that regardless of characteristics and differences, everyone is accepted and celebrated. This is clearly demonstrated in displays, books and resources. I loved seeing the multi-faith prayer room and was interested to hear plans for making role play more representative of the diversity in the school population. Staff are courageous in discussing challenging issues with children, and while they recognise that children may be exposed to narrow views and attitudes at home or via social media, they confront unhealthy attitudes and facilitate healthy discussion even with young children. There is a focus on equity versus equality, and again, from an early age, children are taught that equity is providing various levels of support and assistance depending on specific needs, characteristics or abilities, and I observed numerous examples of this celebration of diversity throughout my visit.
- *Organisational language and non-verbal communications are based upon the key principles of trauma-informed practice. Strengths- hope- and resilience-based language is used in all communications and policies.* There is a focus on avoiding institutionalised language and you shared examples of how you 'humanise' language, resisting jargon and distancing language. Staff are aware of language, both verbal and non-verbal, that can be triggering. Written records and reports use strength-based language rather than drawing on a deficit model. There is a deep awareness that language can play an important role

in the context of trauma, and staff recognise that how they speak about children to colleagues, parents and carers and to the children themselves is impactful, and can shape opinions. They understand that the words that are used and the way in which we speak and communicate is crucial. Casual conversations about children and their families are actively discouraged and there is a deep respect for the dignity of each child.

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 virtual 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, Foxfield Primary School is a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive organisation, which prioritises improving systems and practices, making them healthier, more relational and interpersonal, more cohesive, more integrated, more reflective, and more interconnected, not only focusing on the pupil population, but by ensuring that trauma-informed knowledge, narratives, language, values, principles, assumptions and processes are embedded deep into the culture of the whole school, and are owned, moulded and maintained by everyone who is a part, regardless of role or status.

I hope that you will celebrate your achievement with pupils, staff, families, governors 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. Tony and Bridie add their congratulations to mine.

Yours sincerely,

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

Bridie White LLB