

Case Study: PINS (Partnership for Inclusion and Neurodiversity in Schools) – Mental Health and Anxiety

Ellesmere Primary School

1. Project Details

Ellesmere Primary School launched the PINS (Partnership for Inclusion and Neurodiversity in Schools) project with the primary objective of addressing mental health and anxiety among pupils, particularly focusing on inclusion and support for neurodiverse learners. The rationale for this intervention stems from the school's commitment to fostering a nurturing, safe, and inclusive environment where every child can thrive academically and emotionally. This initiative aligns closely with the school's vision of "Opening children's eyes to the world of possibility" and its values emphasising respect, compassion, and responsibility.

The importance of this project within the educational context is underscored by the increasing number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), now at 22% of the school population, alongside a growing awareness of mental health challenges in primary-aged children. The intended impact of the project is multifaceted: to improve pupils' emotional regulation, bolster positive relationships between staff and pupils, and create physical learning environments that support diverse sensory and emotional needs, thereby enhancing overall teaching and learning outcomes.

2. Implementation

The PINS project was implemented through a strategic partnership with a specialist in mental health and anxiety, who conducted a comprehensive audit alongside the headteacher to identify staff training needs and areas for school adaptation. Bespoke training sessions were delivered to all staff, with targeted support for Nursery and Year 5/6 teachers to address the specific challenges faced by these age groups.

Key strategies included:



Relationship Building: Staff were equipped with approaches to build trustful and respectful relationships with pupils, particularly in Years 5 and 6, balancing firm boundaries with empathetic support.

Sensory Audit and Classroom Adaptations: A sensory audit led to a transformation of classroom environments. Walls were stripped back to natural, neutral colours with hessian backing to reduce sensory overload. One classroom was designated as an inclusive model, featuring flexible seating options such as standing desks, low lighting, and calming spaces where pupils can kneel or relax. This environment acts as a 'brain break' space, allowing children to self-regulate without removal from the classroom.

Reading Corridors: Dedicated reading corridors were established as safe spaces accessible during break and lunchtime, providing children who feel overwhelmed with a calming retreat. This innovation supports emotional regulation and reduces behavioural incidents.

Communication Boards and Whole-School Strategies: The project introduced communication boards and promoted strategies to be adopted consistently across the school to support inclusive communication and emotional wellbeing.

The implementation involved close collaboration among leadership, teaching and support staff, and the specialist consultant. Significant milestones included the completion of the sensory audit, classroom redesign, staff training completion, and the establishment of reading corridors.

3. Evaluation and Impact

Evaluation of the PINS project was conducted through qualitative observations, staff and pupil feedback, and behavioural data analysis. The outcomes demonstrate clear effectiveness in meeting the project's objectives:

Enhanced Relationships: Staff reported positive changes in how they perceive and interact with pupils, shifting from expecting children to conform to rigid norms towards adapting the environment and their approaches to meet individual needs. This cultural change has deepened trust and rapport, especially with older pupils.

Improved Behaviour and Attitudes to Learning: There has been a noticeable improvement in pupil regulation, with fewer behavioural incidents recorded during break times. The reading corridors have become a successful intervention point, supporting children who previously struggled to cope during unstructured times.

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Inclusive Classroom Environment: The trial inclusive classroom has fostered a calm, supportive atmosphere conducive to learning for neurodiverse pupils. The 'brain break' approach within the classroom reduces disruption and supports continuous learning.

Pupil Wellbeing: Staff and pupils alike report a greater sense of safety and happiness within the school environment. Children feel less overwhelmed and more understood, which aligns with the school's OFSTED report noting pupils are "happy, safe and well cared for."

These impacts contribute directly to the school's ongoing improvement priorities, particularly around inclusion, behaviour, and personal development, and support the school's commitment to embedding the 'Ellesmere Way' culture.

4. Next Steps and Recommendations

Building upon the successes of the PINS project, the following next steps and recommendations are proposed:

Expand Inclusive Classrooms: Following the inclusion panel meeting scheduled for 6th February, secure funding to extend the inclusive classroom model to additional rooms. This will allow more pupils to benefit from flexible, sensory-sensitive learning environments.

Extend Reading Corridors: Broaden the availability of reading corridors across the school to ensure consistent access for pupils needing emotional regulation spaces during unstructured times.

Parent Engagement Workshops: Organise inclusion workshops for parents to showcase the adaptations and strategies in action, fostering understanding, and strengthening home-school partnerships critical for supporting pupil wellbeing.

Embed Communication Boards School-wide: Fully integrate communication boards and other inclusive communication strategies across all classrooms and communal areas to support pupils with diverse communication needs.

Ongoing Staff Training and Reflection: Continue professional development focusing on mental health, anxiety, and neurodiversity, including reflective practice sessions to sustain the cultural shift in staff attitudes and approaches.

Data-Driven Monitoring: Implement regular monitoring of behavioural and wellbeing data to evaluate the ongoing impact of adaptations and interventions, ensuring continuous improvement.



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These steps align with the OFSTED framework's focus on safeguarding, inclusion, curriculum and teaching, behaviour and attitudes, and personal development, ensuring the project supports the school's broader improvement agenda.

5. Conclusion

The PINS project at Ellesmere Primary School exemplifies a thoughtful, evidence-based approach to enhancing inclusion and mental health support within a primary school setting. Through specialist partnership, targeted staff training, environmental adaptations, and innovative pupil support strategies, the school has created a more inclusive and emotionally supportive environment that meets the diverse needs of its pupils.

This project has not only improved pupils' behaviour, emotional regulation, and attitudes to learning but also fostered a school culture that values and responds to neurodiversity and mental wellbeing. The initiative's alignment with the school's vision and values, alongside its positive reception in the recent Ofsted inspection, underscores its significance and potential as a model for similar settings.

By continuing to build on this foundation, Ellesmere Primary School is well positioned to further enhance educational outcomes and wellbeing for all pupils, contributing meaningfully to ongoing discussions on educational improvement and innovation in primary education.

Images to support the culture of change at Ellesmere Primary School below:

Communication Board – Nursery



Inclusive classroom Year 3/4

Sofa area





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Standing desks



Low/Mood lighting



We have even introduced low lighting in the admin office



Reading corridors around school





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