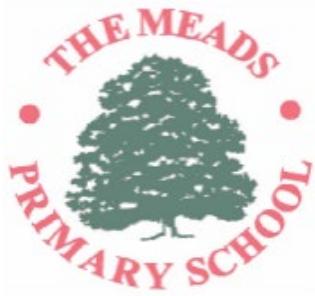




The Meads Primary School's journey with Therapeutic Thinking

'A caring community growing curious minds'.



The Meads Primary School is located on the southern edge of East Grinstead. It has places for 320 children. Currently 13.5 % of children are eligible for pupil premium funding, 14.3% are on the SEND register and 13.8 % speak English as an additional language.

Therapeutic Thinking has become an integral part of The Meads Primary School's community. Parents and carers, pupils, staff, and Governors have all been adopting a new approach to children's personal development, which encourages them to regularly think and talk about themselves and their feelings. Therapeutic thinking has taken The Meads on a holistic journey, from the introduction of an emotions word wall to revising the school's Behaviour and Wellbeing Policy.

The Head Teacher, Nicole Essex, discussed the school's journey so far with the Therapeutic Thinking approach, having attended the 3-day training delivered by Angela Wadham in 2020.

Why did The Meads want to take part in Therapeutic Thinking training?

We wanted something that aligned with our values of 'Kindness, Respect, Community, Curiosity and Independence', and with our holistic vision for our community. Therapeutic Thinking complements all that we do.

From the beginning of our Therapeutic Thinking journey, we knew how important it was that everyone was invested: Governors, staff, parents, and pupils. Our Governors have been fully on board from the start, and they recognise that the approach fully aligns with our principles. We talk to our community about being a therapeutic school. We ensure our policies and procedures are visible, and welcome discussion with all stakeholders. We hold parent coffee mornings and send out parent wellbeing surveys.



What actions have you taken so far, and what impact have they had?

We challenge children to think and talk about themselves, and to reflect. In addition to the 3-day training, Therapeutic Thinking tutors have attended the 1-day Principles of Emotional Literacy training. Following training, we created an emotions word wall to support self-regulation, conversations, and reflection. This development of emotional vocabulary is central to all we do. Children are supported and encouraged to think about how feelings, behaviour and actions intertwine. We also support them to recognise the physiological signs related to how they might be feeling, using a range of tools and resources to support this. Our pupil wellbeing surveys indicate that children are feeling happier and safer at school.



It is so important to us to ensure an emphasis on being proactive, not reactive. We work hard to develop clear systems and processes for staff to follow, and to ensure accountability. Referral forms for support from the Inclusion Team require staff to indicate how they have followed the graduated approach. This includes how they have utilised the West Sussex 'Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP)' document and other support and resources available, and the impact.

If an incident has occurred, our response centres around the pupil having reflection time with an adult, and not around reprimanding them. Maria, our former Learning Mentor, has become our Inclusion Mentor, and she completes all the Early Prognosis analysis sheets. From September, she will be supporting the class teachers as they learn to take this on themselves.

The Early Prognosis tool is in our Behaviour and Wellbeing Policy. Staff training and termly update meetings have ensured that class teachers are all able to use this tool to support the APDR cycle. The tool is shared with all key staff, including cover teachers when appropriate. This is in the best interests of the pupil, as it supports all key adults to know how best to develop and maintain relationships, as well as how to ensure consistency of provision.

We have developed low arousal, calm spaces for pupils to access as needed. Identified staff are available at playtime in the 'Wellbeing Room', and we have created spaces in the library and around the school.



We ensure that our Therapeutic Thinking tutors attend Refresher Training and network meetings. This has allowed us to keep informed with new resources, learn about what other schools are doing, discuss any areas to develop and to share good practice.

What are your next steps going to be?

We recognise that is always a 'working document'. We are continuously developing systems to monitor behaviour and wellbeing across the school, and we have begun to collate 1-page summaries, which will be used to identify next steps. For example, if we identify that playtime can be a challenge for some pupils, what can we do to change that and support progress and wellbeing?



From September, we will be putting our new vision and values to further use: we will be encouraging all visitors to recognise and promote our values by handing out tokens to staff and pupils when they observe 'Kindness, Respect, Community, Curiosity or Independence'. These tie in very nicely with the Therapeutic Thinking approach.

We plan to further develop Pupil Voice to ensure all pupils feel listened to and heard. In addition to the current School Council, we are developing a Junior SLT from September.

Top Tips

- Ensure that staff who can impact change attend everything, to ensure they keep up to date and have a clear oversight and understanding.
- Don't rush. Following the initial 3-day training, we created a strategic action plan to cover the first 2 years. This kept us focused and on track. Three years on and we are beginning to see impact.
- Do what your school community needs, always come back to your children and families.
- Link policies and practice so that a therapeutic approach threads through everything that we do

Links to West Sussex Inclusion Framework:

Aspect 1- The Environment, Culture and Ethos

Leaders recognise how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can manifest in many ways, including behaviour. Leaders are skilled at balancing the needs of the child/ young person and other stakeholders.

Professional learning and development in relational practices, such as nurture, attachment, and trauma informed approaches, is recognised to be a continuous process that involves initial training, collaborative enquiry, collegiate sessions, coaching and on-going discussion.



3.1 Social and emotional well-being and self-awareness

Staff try to see the world through the children and young people's eyes. They carefully listen to their experience, even though they may not truly understand exactly how this feels.

There is an open and supportive atmosphere that promotes self-awareness and allows children and young people (CYP) and staff to reflect on their own emotional needs and triggers.

CYP are given opportunities to share their feelings and emotions, and these are acted upon by the adults within school.

Staff at all levels understand CYP's behaviour in context, in terms of communicating or attempting to address unmet needs. Staff understand their role in co-regulating and developing CYP's capacity to become independent, regulate their emotions and manage their behaviours effectively.

Staff understand the link between emotional regulation and readiness to learn.

Strategies to support CYP's social and emotional needs, including those derived from a therapeutic thinking approach, are embedded within the classroom and used consistently across the school. CYP see these tools and structures as useful and purposeful tools.

Aspect 3.2 Respecting each other

Positive relationships support all members of the school community and shared values are understood by all.

All children and young people (CYP) feel individually valued and known.

Aspect 3.3 A safe place to be

There are designated calm, low arousal spaces within the school / setting and its grounds. These have been identified with and can be used by the child or young person to self-regulate when needed.

Calm places and routines are identified within individual support plans for those who need support to maintain their emotional regulation.