

# TIS UK Award Visit Report

<b>School/Organisation</b>	The Old Pheasantry Merrywood Grove Tadworth Surrey KT20 7HF
<b>Headteacher/CEO</b>	Lucy Lee
<b>Date:</b>	1/3/24
<b>Consultant:</b>	Siobhán Garrett

## Documents received prior to the visit included:

- Exclusions data
- Newsletters/website links
- Ofsted report
- Behaviour policy
- Completed implementation checklist (self-assessment)
- School agreed timetable for the day
- Evidence and self/assessment implementation checklist for Protect, Relate, Regulate, Reflect (Used by the consultants during the visit)

## Protect

	Criteria	Evidence
1	Ensuring children feel psychologically safe in school due to an established culture of warmth and social engagement in staff-pupil Interactions	In this setting's exemplary practice, ensuring children feel psychologically safe in school stems from the establishment of a culture characterised by warmth and meaningful social engagement in all interactions between adults first. The senior leadership team at this school have been deliberate in actively cultivating environments where staff feel valued, respected, and supported, to make explicit that this is the relational experience they expect staff to provide for students.  Staff greet students warmly each day, taking genuine interest in their lives, and fostering open communication channels where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns. Several interventions are in place to support smooth transitions from home into school, including sensory circuits, family breakfasts, planned access to EAAs, or scheduled time with the school therapy dog.  Staff prioritise building authentic connections with students, actively listening to their needs, and providing empathetic support when challenges arise. By consistently demonstrating care and understanding, this school creates an atmosphere where children feel emotionally secure, often for the first time in an educational context, enabling them to thrive both academically and personally. Students vocalised this experience of safety-in-relationship frequently during discussions and spoke of the feeling of unwavering support from the staff, who were always there to PROTECT them when they felt upset, scared, or dysregulated.
2	The environment supports and promotes the psychological safety of children and young people	
3	Key interventions implemented to support a culture of warmth and social engagement in staff-pupil interactions	
4	Staff trained in empathic and playful modes of interaction (attending specifically to use of their language and voice)	
5	Staff using empathic and playful modes of interaction (attending specifically to use of their language and voice) PACEFUL approaches are used effectively.	
6	Vulnerable children knowing when and where to find at	

	least one specific and emotionally-available adult	<p>This school environment is designed to be therapeutic and womb-like to give a feeling of warmth, protection, and sensory stimulation. The physical spaces are designed to be calming and inviting, with soft lighting, comfortable seating, and breakaway areas. Sensory experiences are carefully curated to provide gentle stimulation, such as soothing music, pleasant scents, and tactile materials, to evoke feelings of security and relaxation. Rituals and routines are established to provide predictability and structure, offering students a sense of stability and belonging.</p> <p>The commitment to TISUK practice in this setting is commendable. There are trained practitioners on site, more staff currently undergoing the diploma, staff who have accessed SLT and SMHL training, and a programme of ongoing CPD to embed the PRRR model into school practice. The leadership team also attract high quality early career teachers by offering to fund places on the TISUK diploma.</p> <p>There is a strong social justice curriculum underpinning learning here, which serves as a powerful catalyst for fostering equity, empowerment, and inclusivity. For these vulnerable learners, who often face systemic barriers and discrimination, a social justice curriculum provides a framework for understanding and challenging these injustices.</p> <p>SLT want students here to be equipped with the critical thinking skills necessary to reflect on complex social issues, such as racism, sexism, poverty, and ableism, which may directly impact their lives. By centering diverse perspectives and experiences, this curriculum validates the identities and lived realities of vulnerable learners, affirming their worth and agency within society. Moreover, it cultivates empathy, compassion, and solidarity, encouraging students to become active agents of change in their communities.</p> <p>Merrywood enriches student's educational experience through intentional exposure to a wide range of experiences, providing students with opportunities to explore their interests, develop new skills, and build meaningful connections outside the classroom. Gaming, rock-climbing, parkour, and food tech are some examples. SLT are determined that students at Merrywood have the same access to experiences that students at mainstream settings would and go above and beyond to facilitate such experiences to help young people believe in themselves and have high aspirations for their future. Again, this is something that was articulated beautifully when speaking to young people themselves. They know that the adults here will go the extra mile to support them academically and it helps them believe in their own aspirations for the future.</p>
7	Vulnerable children having daily, easy access to at least one specific and emotionally-available adult	
8	The school community actively promotes equality and acceptance. It addresses discrimination in terms of race, culture, religion, sexuality and all forms of difference with rigour and compassion	
9	Promote and value the development of the whole child to ensure that children understand that their self-worth and the worth of others cannot be measured simply by tests/exams. 'Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all' Aristotle	
10	Continually provide experiences for the child that promote and foster a child's love of learning, protect their innate joie de vivre and desire to explore the world around them and engender a sense of purpose in life.	
11	School staff adjusting expectations and practices around vulnerable children to correspond with those children's developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress and loss	
12	The emotional wellbeing of staff is a high priority that is reflected in policy and practice across the school. The school demonstrates proactive and high quality interventions in discharging its duty of care	
13	Ensuring that school staff feel valued and highly respected by Senior Leads, with frequent feedback from Senior Leads on what they are doing well with specific reference to how they are enhancing the children's wellbeing.	

## Relate

Criteria	Evidence
14	A Relationship Policy or protocol (for staff) alongside Behaviour Policy (for pupils) is in place.
15	Staff trained in interventions that help them get to know children better on an individual basis
16	Staff using interventions that help them get to know children better on an individual basis
17	A whole-school approach to supporting vulnerable children to see themselves, their relationships and the world more positively
18	Helping vulnerable children shift from 'blocked trust' to trust, and from self-help to help-seeking
19	Provision of repeated positive experiences for children with key emotionally-available adults
20	Staff work within an environment and culture that supports them to have daily repeated positive relational experiences

This settings dedication to creating a safe and supportive environment where relationships are valued and nurtured is commendable. By fostering strong, positive relationships among students and staff, they create a foundation of trust and understanding between all.

Merrywood's behaviour policy is linked to a relationship policy. Both are underpinned by reflective, restorative, and relational approaches to helping children stay within their window of tolerance, with the emphasis being on the practice of the adult rather than the responsibility of the child. The school has fully embedded PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy) as a way of interaction in all relationships and SLT know that this approach is having a transformative impact on the entire educational environment.

Playfulness is a particular strength of the setting, with an air of joy flooding interactions between staff, beginning with a morning staff check-in that involved singing, dancing and movement. A joy to witness! By integrating playfulness into daily interactions, staff create an atmosphere where students feel safe to explore, experiment, and learn at their own pace. Staff are especially skilled at "holding things lightly" and some excellent examples of using playfulness to pull children into connection were witnessed in classrooms and corridors. The early years classroom had adults enthusiastically involved in child-led play and the sense of delight and joy in the face of the child involved was pure magic to see.

Acceptance ensures that students are valued for who they are, regardless of their challenges or differences, promoting a sense of belonging and self-esteem. One young person described a sense of knowing that adults "were on his side", unlike the feeling he had in other schools where he thought adults were quick to punish him when he made a mistake. Children said that "no matter what", they could count on adult support when needed, demonstrating the team's ability to hold each child in unconditional positive regard in a profound way.

Curiosity encourages staff to approach each student with an open mind, seeking to understand their unique perspectives, interests, and needs. SLT & the therapeutic team do an excellent job of helping staff to stay curious, both about what a child's behaviour might be communicating, and the effect that behaviour might be having on the adult. The team's professional curiosity enables everyone to remain compassionate and empathic to the needs of children, despite some challenging contexts, and as a result, punitive ways of responding to need is never needed. There is timetabled reflective supervision for staff, led by the highly effective therapy team, and key team members talked about how valuable this space was helping them to think therapeutically about children's needs.

Empathy forms the foundation of all interactions, allowing staff to connect with students on an emotional level, validate their

experiences, and provide personalised support. Again, this relational approach is modelled by the leadership team. They are authentically interested in the lives of their staff, and through their genuine understanding, compassion, and support, these leaders create a culture where staff members feel valued, respected, and heard. By taking the time to listen attentively to their concerns, acknowledging their emotions, and offering practical assistance when needed, these leaders foster a sense of trust and psychological safety within the school community. Their empathetic approach not only validates the experiences of staff members but also empowers them to navigate challenges of their role with resilience and confidence.

## Regulate

Criteria	Evidence
<b>21</b> A variety of evidence-based interventions designed to bring down stress levels in vulnerable children from toxic to tolerable	The impact of staff thinking neurochemically and actively working to reduce toxic stress could be seen in every classroom. By understanding the neurobiological underpinnings of stress and its effects on the brain, staff members are able implement strategies that promote a positive and supportive environment for both them and their students.
<b>22</b> Evidence-based interventions that may go some way to repair brain damage caused by painful life experience where there was no social buffering	Through practices such as mindfulness, emotional regulation techniques, and fostering strong social connections, staff mitigate the impact of toxic stress on their own well-being while also modelling healthy coping mechanisms for students. As a result, the overall culture of the school is one of resilience, empathy, and mutual support.
<b>23</b> Whole-school training has been undertaken in the evidence-based research on emotional regulation	There are bespoke visual check-ins available in every space in the school to optimise opportunities for co-regulation. Students are encouraged to identify and express their feelings in a non-verbal and intuitive manner. These check-ins provide a tangible framework for students to understand and communicate their emotions, fostering self-awareness and emotional literacy. This practice not only normalises emotional expression but also empowers students to take ownership of their emotional well-being. Furthermore, it enables teachers and staff to quickly gauge the emotional climate of the classroom and respond appropriately, whether through targeted interventions or providing additional support to individual students. Staff flexibility to meet the regulation needs of young people is endless with some beautiful practice witnessed during the visit.
<b>24</b> School Staff apply knowledge gained in training to ensure that there is a whole school approach to regulation using PACE (play acceptance curiosity and empathy) PRRR, Key Relational Skills and cues of safety including when working with distressed/ stressed parents, staff and other adults so the whole school community feels calmed, heard, connected with and valued	The school's emphasis on regulation begins with the adults and all staff know that their nervous system state directly impacts the well-being of students. By managing their own stress, emotions, and reactions effectively, staff are better equipped to handle the demands and challenges of the classroom environment. This, in turn, enables them to maintain focus, patience, and empathy in their interactions with students, fostering a conducive learning atmosphere. Additionally, staff regulation contributes to a more harmonious and collaborative work environment among colleagues, enhancing overall job satisfaction and reducing burnout. Visual tools for staff to self-check their state is present in every classroom, and staff know that there is support available from their SLT if need it.
<b>25</b> Senior Leaders to be aware of high stress states in staff	Staff members say that the level of wellbeing support they receive at this setting to be like nothing they have ever experienced before. Through proactive initiatives, empathetic leadership, and a commitment to fostering a positive work culture, senior leaders significantly enhance the well-being of their staff. By prioritising open communication channels, providing for professional development and self-care, and promoting a healthy work-life balance, these leaders create an environment where educators feel valued, supported, and motivated. Moreover, senior leaders lead by example, demonstrating empathy, resilience, and a genuine concern for
<b>26</b> Senior Leaders to provide stressed staff with sufficient emotional regulation e.g. 'Reflect and Restore' staff-only spaces and evidence-based stress reducing interventions, e.g. clinical supervision, timetabled time in a protected calm environment e.g. sensory zone, or for mindfulness	

the welfare of their staff which inspires trust and loyalty among their team members. This, in turn, cultivates a sense of belonging and camaraderie, fostering a collaborative and cohesive staff community. The ripple effects of such leadership extends beyond individual wellbeing, positively influencing morale, job satisfaction, and ultimately, the quality of education provided to students.

All staff are trained in SEMH play based interventions, therapeutic transition training, Zones of Regulation, emotion coaching & empathic commentary and creating sensory integrated environments to support regulation to support their practice in relation to REGULATE.

Adjustments are made in line with sensory preferences and children can wear ear defenders, choose from a sensory diet, and are provided with personalised sensory bags and toolkits when they start at Merrywood that they can access whenever needed. Both sites are well equipped with sensory and physical tools to enable children to regulate through movement and their senses. These include sensory swings, climbing walls, outdoor trim trails, sensory gardens, rocker chairs, wobble cushions and use of community green space.

## Reflect

	Criteria	Evidence
27	All staff trained in the art of active listening and have the words to say it' for empathic response to pupils, staff and parents	There is an exceptional therapeutic offer provided at Merrywood. The dedication and commitment of this team to addressing the complex needs of these students is commendable. Through a holistic approach that integrates trauma-informed practices, one-to-one therapy, and specialised support programmes, the therapy team supports a nurturing and healing environment for all. The emphasis on building trusting relationships, promoting emotional regulation, and fostering resilience equips both staff and students with the tools they need to navigate and overcome the challenges associated with ACEs. Moreover, the collaborative efforts between therapists, the SLT team and staff demonstrates a strong commitment to meeting the diverse and complex needs of each student.
28	Key staff trained in reflective conversations to enable vulnerable children to edit the inaccurate narratives they have told themselves and move towards trauma recovery.	
29	No child left without help to process, talk through and make sense of major painful life events when they want to, with someone trained to provide empathic response.	The therapy team plays a pivotal role in supporting school staff to think psychologically and in a trauma-informed way. Through regular training sessions, workshops, and consultation opportunities, the therapy team equips staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to recognise and respond to the diverse emotional needs of students affected by trauma. By providing insights into the neurobiological effects of trauma and its impact on learning and behaviour, the therapy team helps staff understand the underlying reasons behind certain student behaviours, fostering a shift away from punitive approaches towards more empathetic and supportive interventions. While there is strong therapy team here, everyone is expected to work therapeutically.
30	Children provided with the means (e.g. through poetry/music/art/sandplay/drama) to symbolise painful life experiences through images not just words	Additionally, the therapy team offers individualised support and guidance to staff members, helping them process their own emotions and develop healthy coping strategies to prevent burnout and vicarious trauma. By empowering staff to think psychologically and through a trauma-informed lens, the therapy team enables a whole-school approach to supporting the well-being and academic success of all students. Many staff members said that this approach not only enabled them to change their professional practice but had transformed many personal relationships and how they parented their own children too.
31	Through the teaching of PSHE (Personal, social, and health education) the wider curriculum and other opportunities children and young people are well informed by the latest research on the neuroscience and psychology of emotion and mental health and ill-health (causes as well as symptoms).	
32	Through the teaching of PSHE (Personal, social, and health education) the wider curriculum and other opportunities children and young people are informed by the latest research on the neuroscience and psychology of relationships that harm and relationships that heal and on how to use life well.	

		<p>Merrywood also has a therapeutic social worker and a family link worker, again demonstrating their unwavering commitment to offering students and their families the best possible opportunities to heal.</p> <p>Merrywood serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration, setting a high standard for what a seamless approach between therapy and education can look like.</p>
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The following strengths were evident:

Areas to consider developing:

<p><b>PROTECT</b></p>
<p><b>RELATE</b> This setting has plans to expand on the work they already do involving families. Family workshops and support sessions will enable this setting to spread their impact further.</p>
<p><b>REGULATE</b> Articulating the work the setting already does in relation to Panksepp’s model and using it as a tool to help staff think neurochemically may be another useful tool in Merrywood’s toolbox.</p>
<p><b>REFLECT</b> Engaging in research to demonstrate the effectiveness of Merrywood’s good practice and to provide empirical evidence of improved student outcomes is an important next step.</p>

Evidence of Impact (e.g., attendance/exclusions/learner engagement/learner outcomes/staff absence/retention etc)

Received.

Best practise / case study requests: (if applicable)

N/A

Further support discussed/required:



**Overall Assessment:**

The implementation of TISUK’s trauma-informed approach within Merrywood Education has had a profound and often life-changing impact on students who attend this setting. By fostering an environment that prioritises compassion, understanding and support for individuals who have experienced trauma, this setting has significantly enhanced student well-being and academic outcomes. Students feel safer, more understood, and better equipped to cope with challenges, leading to improved attendance, engagement, and overall success. Teachers and staff members are fully equipped to recognize and respond to signs of distress, creating a culture of empathy and empowerment within the school community. This work is supported by a comprehensive therapeutic offer. The ripple effects extend beyond the classroom, positively influencing families and the community at large. In essence, this trauma-informed school doesn't just educate; it nurtures resilience, fosters healing, and transforms lives.

**Trauma Informed School Award:**

- Recommended
- Deferred pending further evidence

**Copies sent to:**

- Headteacher
- Rachel Toller (TISUK)

Reported completed by:	Siobhán Garrett
Date:	15/3/24