

Relational Inclusion Policy

Date Policy Written: November 2024

Date Policy Adopted by Trust Board:

To be reviewed: Every 3 years

1. Policy Statement

At Ambition Community Trust, we are committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment where every individual—student, staff, parent, and community member—is valued, respected, and empowered. Our Trust believes that relationships and truly inclusive practice are central to the well-being and development of all members of our community. This policy sets out our commitment to creating an environment where positive, respectful, and inclusive relationships are at the heart of our work.

Relational inclusion refers to an approach aimed at fostering a holistic, compassionate, and trauma-informed environment for **all** students, including those with complex needs. It is grounded in the understanding that children's behaviour and emotional responses are often shaped by their experiences, particularly adverse or traumatic ones, and that meaningful relationships are central to their sense of belonging, emotional well-being, and ability to learn.

In practice, Relational Inclusion means adopting a preventative, supportive approach to education, where everyone from school leaders to support staff is involved in creating a nurturing environment. This shift contrasts with traditional behaviour management models, which are often reactive, compliance-driven, and focused on discipline, potentially exacerbating distress among vulnerable students.

By focusing on five guiding principles, Relational Inclusion promotes the well-being and development of **all** children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), helping them to regulate emotions, feel safe, and thrive academically and socially.

Ambition Community Trust, through the use of *Relational Inclusion*, will support schools in **improving academic outcomes, attendance, behaviour regulation, and supporting SEN through better approaches towards mental health.**

2. Guiding Principles

1. We believe that if a child could do better, they would
Many children and young people don't know why they behave the way they do. As a result of early negative experiences, their autonomic* nervous system is convinced that adults cannot be trusted and all environments contain hidden threats. We understand that we all play a role in supporting a child to do better.
*involuntary or unconscious
2. Relationships, Relationships, Relationships
By relationships we mean:

- RELATIONSHIP from the student's perspective
- RELATIONSHIP from the staff's perspective
- The priority given to RELATIONSHIP formation and maintenance from school leadership' (Riley 2011)
- The RELATIONSHIP we have with ourselves and our own well-being.

We understand that positive staff–student relationships have been shown to contribute to students' attendance, academic grades, psychological engagement and reduced disruptive behaviours. We know that supportive staff–student relationships can also help in overcoming family education disadvantage.

We know we must recognise *blocked care** and our risk of slipping from our social engagement system.

*when it becomes difficult to remain open and engaged

▪ We accept all emotions but not all behaviours

We see all behaviours as an opportunity to learn. We believe in the unconditional acceptance of the emotional experience that lies behind behaviour, while communicating that the behaviour is indeed unacceptable for the child's life as it gets in the way of healthy relationship development or learning.

We believe that discipline is based on the needs of the young person not our adult wants.

We develop strategies aimed to work with a student's biology instead of against it.

We understand that co-regulation must occur before self-regulation can be learnt.

We know that a child must 'feel safe' and not be told they are safe.

4. We identify and address the cause not the symptoms

Beneath every behaviour there is a feeling. And beneath each feeling is a need. And when we meet that need rather than focus on the behaviour, we begin to deal with the cause not the symptoms. We understand that complicated behaviour deserves a more complex response which involves a 'state dependent' intervention rather than a one size fits all.

5. We foster a culture of compassion and repair

Compassion to accept the individual experience: why people are suffering and what has happened to them.

Compassion of understanding: every function is an adaptation and everyone is doing the best they can with the resources they have inside them and around them.

Compassion of possibility in the here and now: every interaction is an opportunity for repair, reattunement and growth for a positive vision of the future and self.

Compassion for the importance of voice, choice and empowerment: we give voice and offer choice within our relationships with children, families, staff and are inclusive in the process of transformation.

3. Vocabulary

We believe that our words reflect our state of mind and our expectations of the world. We consciously craft our words to support a relationally inclusive approach. Our five key vocabularies are:

Dysregulation
When a student is in crisis and are struggling to manage their emotions
<i>Emotional dysregulation is a poor ability to manage emotional responses or keep them within an acceptable range of typical emotional reactions. (e.g. sadness, anger, irritability and frustration.)</i>
Co-regulation
When an adult helps a student to manage their emotions
<i>Warm and responsive interactions that provide the support, coaching and modelling children need to understand, express and modulate their thoughts, feelings and behaviours.</i>
Self-regulation
When a student can manage their own emotional responses
<i>Conscious personal management allowing someone to guide and manage their own thoughts, behaviours and feelings.</i>
Window of tolerance
The zone in which a person can function most effectively
<i>The zone where intense emotional arousal can be processed in a healthy way allowing you to function and react to stress or anxiety effectively.</i>
Attachment Seeking
As opposed to 'attention seeking'
<i>Often anxious students need a secure base as a result of on/off parenting. They use over developed verbal skills to gain reassurance.</i>

4. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Promote a truly inclusive culture where diversity is celebrated, and every individual feels a sense of belonging.

- Ensure that all members of the Trust community are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness in all relational interactions.
- Build and maintain healthy, supportive, and positive relationships between staff, students, parents, and the wider community.
- Encourage relationally inclusive approaches in all we do including resolving conflicts and fostering understanding.

5. Scope

This policy applies to all academies within the Trust, covering all staff, students, governors, volunteers, and stakeholders involved in any aspect of Trust activities.

6. Commitment to Relational Inclusion

We are committed to:

- Equality of Opportunity: Ensuring equal access to learning, support, and development for every individual, irrespective of their background, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, or socio-economic status.
- Diverse Relationships: Promoting positive, inclusive relationships that reflect the diversity of our community, celebrating individual differences.
- Creating a Culture of Compassion and Repair: Using relationally inclusive practices to resolve conflicts, focusing on repairing harm, and restoring relationships rather than punitive measures.
- Safe Environments: Providing a safe, supportive environment where all voices are heard, and every individual feels valued and respected.
- An Emotional Curriculum: Delivered through our five core competencies of self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; relationship skills; responsible decision making. (appendix 1)

7. Responsibilities

The Trust Board is responsible for:

- Ensuring that Relational Inclusion is implemented effectively across all academies
- Ensuring Relational Inclusion remains key and central to the culture and ethos of Ambition Community Trust
- Holding the Director for Relational Inclusion to account for implementation

The local governing bodies are responsible for:

- Reviewing and approving the written statement of relational inclusive principles
- Reviewing this relational inclusion in conjunction with the headteacher
- Monitoring the policy's effectiveness
- Holding the headteacher to account for its implementation
- Advocate the school's core values to all members of the community

The headteacher is responsible for:

- The school's ethos and culture reflect and aligns with the Trust's guiding principles for relational inclusion
- Ensuring that staff support children through a relationally inclusive approach
- Monitoring that this policy is implemented by staff consistently with all groups of pupils
- Ensuring that all staff understand the guiding principles and the school's interpretation and application of them
- Providing new staff with a clear induction into the school's behavioural culture to ensure they understand its expectations and routines, and how best to support all pupils to participate fully
- Offering appropriate training in relational inclusion, and the impact of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) mental health, adverse childhood experiences (ACES) trauma and attachment needs on behaviour, to any staff who require it, so they can fulfil their duties set out in this policy
- To act strategically to support in changing inappropriate behaviours.

Staff are responsible for:

- All staff are expected to model positive behaviours, underpinned by the principles of Relational Inclusion, create inclusive classrooms and learning environments, and foster a culture of respect. Staff are responsible for supporting students' emotional and social development.
- Students: Students are encouraged to respect others' differences, engage in positive interactions, and seek help when difficulties arise. This may be supported through the delivery of an emotional curriculum based on our five core competencies.
- Parents and Community Members: We encourage parents and community members to actively participate in fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment, promoting positive relationships within and beyond the school community.

8. The Relational Inclusion Approach

This approach is underpinned by 5 pillars:

- Guiding Principles
- Work force Development
- Enabling Compassion
- The Relational Inclusion Profile tool (appendix 2)
- Cultural Fit (appendix 3)

We advocate for the use of a Relationally Inclusive approach in all that we do. This does not excuse 'bad behaviour' but provides clear boundaries to support everyone in our community. Relational Inclusion is firm on behaviour but gentle on the child. This approach identifies and addresses the cause and not the symptoms and is applied to all that we do, especially where there is conflict and challenge. This includes:

- Encouraging open and honest dialogue between those involved in conflicts.
- A focus on understanding the impact of actions and working towards mutually agreed solutions.
- Providing training to staff and students on Relational Inclusion.
- Ensuring repair processes are timely, sensitive, and non-judgmental.

We recommend that our schools use a relational policy in preference to a behaviour policy. A relational policy promotes curiosity, and the exploration of cause as opposed to symptoms. A relational policy focuses on learning opportunities as opposed to consequences. Whereas a behaviour policy generally considers an approach in terms of right and wrong and leads to rewards or punitive consequences.

We acknowledge that our schools may be on a journey towards a relational approach and that this takes time to embed. Some schools may initially adopt hybrid policies until relational practice is imbedded.

Relational Inclusion is not simply an initiative that can be 'completed'. Our academies must be fully committed to creating a Relationally Inclusive culture. This must be revisited regularly through an ongoing training programme and includes responding to the latest research and critical thinking.

Our schools and headteachers do all that they can to avoid suspension and exclusion wherever possible.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored and reviewed regularly through:

- Feedback from students, staff, parents, and the community.
- Analysis of behaviour and conflict resolution data across academies.
- Annual policy reviews by the Trust Board to ensure continuous improvement in relational inclusion practices.

10. Training and Development

We are committed to providing ongoing training for school leaders and staff to develop their understanding of relational inclusion. Training will include:

- Current research around Neuroscience, ACES, Trauma and Attachment
- The Relational Inclusion Audit Tool
- Guiding Principles
- Core Competencies
- Emotion Coaching
- The Student Profile Tool

This policy establishes the values and practices that our Trust commits to, ensuring that relationships are nurtured and inclusion is prioritized across all academies.

Appendix 1

Core Competencies

(Taken from EEF Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools)

Core competency	Definition	Associated skills
Self-awareness	The ability to accurately recognise one's own emotions, thoughts and values and how they influence behaviour. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.	- Identifying emotions - Accurate self-perception - Recognising strengths - Self-confidence - Self-efficacy
Self-management	The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours in different situations – effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work towards personal and academic goals.	- Impulse control - Stress management - Self-discipline - Self-motivation - Goal setting - Organisational skills
Social awareness	The ability to take the perspective of and empathise with others. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour and to recognise family, school and community resources and supports.	- Understanding emotions - Empathy/sympathy - Appreciating diversity - Respect for others
Relationship skills	The ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively and seek and offer help when needed.	- Communication - Social engagement - Relationship building - Teamwork
Responsible decision making	The ability to make constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions and a consideration of the wellbeing of oneself and others.	- Identifying problems - Analysing solutions - Solving problems - Evaluating - Reflecting - Ethical responsibility

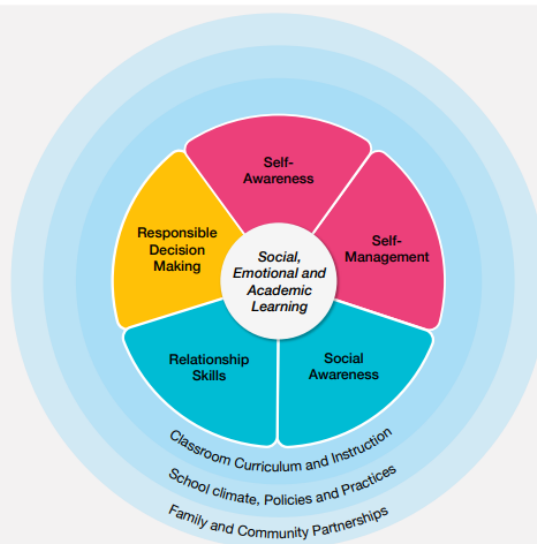


Diagram adapted from [CASEL 2017](#)

Why do social and emotional skills matter?

There is extensive evidence associating childhood social and emotional skills with improved outcomes at school and in later life, in relation to physical and mental health, school readiness and academic achievement, crime, employment and income.⁴ For example, longitudinal research in the UK has shown that good social and emotional skills—including self-regulation, self-awareness, and social skills—developed by the age of ten, are predictors of a range of adult outcomes (age 42), such as life satisfaction and wellbeing, labour market success, and good overall health.⁵

There is also evidence that children's skills can be improved purposefully through school-based SEL programmes, and that these impacts can persist over time.⁶ Numerous large evidence reviews⁷ indicate that, when well implemented, SEL can have positive impacts on a range of outcomes, including:

- Improved social and emotional skills;
- improved academic performance (see Figure 1);
- improved attitudes, behaviour and relationships with peers;
- reduced emotional distress (student depression, anxiety, stress and social withdrawal);
- reduced levels of bullying;
- reduced conduct problems; and
- improved school connection.

Efforts to promote SEL skills may be especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who on average have weaker SEL skills at all ages than their better off peers.⁸ This matters for a range of outcomes, as lower levels of SEL skills are associated with poorer mental health and academic attainment.⁹

There is also evidence to suggest that the benefits of SEL may extend to teachers and to the school environment, including a less disruptive and more positive classroom climate, and teachers reporting lower stress levels, higher job satisfaction, better relationships with their children, and higher confidence in their teaching.¹⁰ For example, in one survey, 72% of UK teachers said that teaching SEL had improved their own relationships with their students.¹¹

However, it is important to note that most of the evidence to date is from the US, and how SEL is delivered is important.¹² So, schools should think carefully about how recommended approaches apply to their own contexts. This is discussed in the recommendations that follow.

Appendix 2 – Pupil Profile Tool

ACEs	(✓)
Sexual Abuse	
Physical Abuse	
Emotional Abuse	
Neglect	
Medical trauma	
Natural or Manmade Disaster	
Witness to Family Violence	
Witness to Community/School Violence	
Victim/Witness to Criminal Activity	
War/Terrorism Affected	
Disruption in Caregiving/Attachment losses	
Parent Criminal Behaviour	

Stress Response	(✓)
Late Arrival	
Early Arrival	
Often Dysregulated on Arrival	
Hungry	
Tired	
Inappropriate Clothing	
Complaining of Illness	
Poor Personal Hygiene	
Hyperarousal	(✓)
Overactive Responses	
Defensive Talk	
Verbal Outbursts	
Physical Outbursts	
Violence Towards Students	
Violence Towards Adults	
Exiting	
Running Away	
Hiding	
Refusal	
Hypo-Arousal	(✓)
Day Dreaming	
Rocking	
Making Odd Sounds	
Using a Different Voice	
Taking on a Different Persona	

Risk Behaviours	(✓)
CSE (at risk of/involved in)	
CCE (at risk of/involved in)	
County lines (at risk of/involved in)	
Fire Setting	
Substance Use	
Drug dealing	
Oppositional	
Overly sexualised behaviour	
Racism	
Sexism	
Carrying of or use of weapons	
Theft	
Non-violent vandalism	
Anxiety/Depression	
Self-Harm	
Anger (Lack of Self-Control)	
Bullies or Is Bullied (specify):	

Ambivalent Attachment (On/Off)	(✓)
Often anxious/overly dependent on staff	
Acts helpless/stuck without adult support	
Unable to work independently	
Needs constant reassurance	
Easily distracted	
Continually looking for teacher	
Easily upset if loses the teacher's attention	
Engages in strategies to avoid work	
Verbal skills more advanced than written	
Avoidant Attachment (Off)	(✓)
Denies support and help from staff	
Doesn't want staff standing in close proximity	
Apparent indifference to anxiety in new situation	
May refuse to work with a TA	
Wants to do tasks independently	
Frustrated/destroys work rather than ask for help	
Limited use of verbal communication	
Limited creativity	
Reacts badly to direct verbal praise	
Disorganised Attachment	(✓)

Being Floppy	
Not Being <i>with it</i>	
Risk Taking	
Unable to Stand	
Collapsing	

Changes rapidly - very agitated to switched off	
Gets very frustrated –bang their heads / punch	
Runs around uncontrollably	
Runs out of class unexpectedly	
Explodes into temper for no apparent reason	
Can be very abusive to teacher or other children	

Appendix 3 – Cultural Fit

Working in a school where you are not aligned with the culture is a miserable experience. So ... we both need to have alignment if you come to work here!

- Our **Vision** is ...
- Our **Purpose** is ...
- Our **Core Values** are ...

- We believe that staff come first.
- We believe that we all have a professional obligation to improve as teachers, instructors, teaching assistants and support staff.
- We are a learning community.
- We believe that every child deserves a Champion.
- We believe in a culture of the possible, where we can all make progress beyond what anyone, including ourselves, could have imagined.
- We believe in the TEAM and we support each other continuously.
- We believe in talking first.
- We believe that truly great teaching is that which improves students' progress.
- We believe an evidence-informed approach to teaching and learning helps us identify what works best in the classroom.
- We believe that hard work is the key to success for staff and students.
- We believe that you cannot just wish for staff and students to be better - you have to create the conditions for them to grow.
- We believe basic literacy and numeracy are essential to students making good progress.
- We welcome diverse ideas to solve problems and are solution focused
- We value generosity of spirit.
- We acknowledge that we all make mistakes.

- In this school we integrate therapeutic and relationally inclusive interventions into our everyday practice.
- From research we are aware that any disruption within the early years from pregnancy onwards can impact minds and bodies in three key areas: affect (emotion) regulation, attachment and executive function.
- From research we understand that the toxic stress involved in ACEs impacts the nervous system of human beings.
- From research we know that over-compensatory, rich, relational interventions can bring about recovery so that children and young people can function well at home, school and out in their communities.



- We view ourselves as an important part of any pupil's recovery journey. We believe in recovery in community.
- We will not discriminate how we relate to the pupils in our care as we believe each pupil is worthy of our time, energy and patience. However, we will differentiate, according to need.
- We will have compassion for those who are dysregulated, are hurting and/or grieving for whatever reason.