

Case Study

Setting Name	Rowhill School
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Audit Focus Area	Becoming a trauma informed relational practice setting
Title of Research Project	Opening doors: Our journey to a restorative, trauma-informed school.
Action Research Question	How has Rowhill's school move to being trauma informed and relational improved behaviour and outcomes?
Brief description of your action research project	This action research project looks to identify
Share one aspect of the project in more detail	
Person/situation background	In October 2023, our pupil referral unit received a disappointing OFSTED inspection outcome. It was a difficult moment but gave the school an opportunity to reflect on and review our ethos and vision. Since then, we've been on a determined journey to review, rebuild, and reframe our relationships and culture. One of the most transformative steps we have taken has been the introduction of restorative and relational practice, underpinned by a trauma-informed approach.
What happened?	Following the inspection the school was approached by a charity called "Why me?" who were willing to sponsor us working with Belinda Hopkins, a leading voice in restorative practice, Initially, we began by training our Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in restorative practice. However, after just two sessions, it became clear that this top-down approach wasn't having the impact we needed. The real change needed to happen on the ground—with the inclusion team, who work directly with students and staff every day. These are the people who support lesson attendance,



	<p>manage behaviour, and build trust. Once they were trained, the shift was immediate and powerful.</p> <p>Through our training with Belinda we not only learnt how to complete effective restorative enquiries and meetings but we also learnt the importance of being trauma informed. This has allowed us to step back from the behaviours we see and ask: <i>what's behind this?</i> Instead of reacting to incidents, we're learning to respond with empathy and curiosity.</p> <p>We often use the metaphor of an open door to describe our approach. As staff, we keep our doors open to students—even if they never walk through, or even if they stand there shouting. It's about being available, consistent, and safe. This mindset has required deep support for our staff, helping them to regulate themselves so they can co-regulate with students.</p>
<p>What has changed/developed?</p>	<p>One of the key changes we made was to our behaviour policy (we now call it a students needs and relationships policy) and learning and teaching policy. We reduced our reliance on suspensions as a way to change behaviour and instead focused on restoring. This has come in the form of a series of actions should a student show a particular type of behaviour. This ranges from restorative enquiries to have ELSA/TALA sessions to completing an AQA with specific and targeted outcome. These allow us to focus on the relationships between staff and students and attempt to change behaviour using that as opposed to stereotypical forms of discipline. We have also attempted to change our vocabulary around suspensions (as they do still happen) and use the term 'space' as opposed to 'suspension' when a child needs some time away from the school.</p> <p>One of the practical challenges we faced by doing this was the time it takes to conduct a full restorative enquiry. In a busy school day, this isn't always feasible. So, we've worked to condense the enquiry process, integrating it into regulation strategies and informal conversations. This flexibility has made restorative practice sustainable and effective in our setting.</p>



<p>What impact has this had on the individual/the setting?</p>	<p>We have started to create a culture of care and connection</p> <p>The impact of this shift is reflected in our recent Staff Wellbeing Survey. Staff shared that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The greatest thing about our approach is we don’t just shape our pupils; we are building a fantastic team where it is a joy to come to work.” • “Most days I don’t feel like I’m going to work, I feel like I’m hanging out with my friends at a workplace.” • “I am incredibly proud to be part of such an amazing team, who look out for each other and always check in.” • “The atmosphere around school and in the staff room is feeling more positive.” • “Everyone seems to be working happily together more.” <p>These comments speak volumes about the transformation in our school culture. Staff feel supported, connected, and proud to be part of Rowhill. The restorative, trauma-informed approach has not only improved student outcomes but also strengthened the wellbeing and cohesion of our team.</p> <p>Further to this we have seen a serious reduction in suspensions – particularly those related to physical or verbal aggression towards staff and or students.</p>
<p>What has been learned for the whole setting community?</p>	<p>We have learnt that a dysregulated staff member is never able to work with a dysregulated student and therefore we need to be making sure that our approaches ensure both staff and students are as regulated as possible. We have also learnt that the more about our students we know the better prepared we are to deal with the behaviours they present. This allows us to accept them and the behaviour they present as it is not a surprise and then from there, we are better able to work with them on trying not to let it happen again.</p>
<p>What is essential for other settings to know from this case study?</p>	<p>The key element to our success has been the work completed on making sure that staff are trauma informed and have regulation strategies for both them and the students. This has meant that when the restorative conversations have needed to happen, they</p>



have been a success as the students and staff have both been regulated. In addition to this it is understanding that staff and or students may not always be in the right place to complete restorative to the full extent. However, if we are able to get them to complete a reflective piece of work in a calm manner and reflect on the wider impacts of their behaviour then this is a success. We work in an environment where too many interactions happen at too quick a pace to be able to always complete something restorative and so, sometimes just a restorative enquiry completed whilst going on a walk or kicking a ball around is enough.