

Trauma and Mental Health Informed Schools and Organisations Visit Report

School/Organisation (name and address):	Stopsley Community Primary School, Hitchin Rd., Stopsley, Luton, LU2 7UG.						
Primary:	✓	Secondary:		Special:		PRU:	
Headteacher/CEO:	Mr Richard Fordham						
Date:	20/10/25						
Consultant:	Siobhán Garrett						

Documents received prior to the visit included:

✓	Document
✓	Exclusions data
✓	Newsletters/website links
✓	Ofsted/Estyn 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.	<p>Stopsley Primary School demonstrates a deeply embedded culture of emotional and psychological safety where <i>PROTECT</i> is not a standalone policy, but a lived experience. Leaders have intentionally moved away from legacy models of control and zero tolerance, creating an environment defined by calm, presence and authentic care. Physical and relational environments are purposefully designed to offer containment — from morning triage at the gate, the visible presence of trusted adults, sensory and regulatory spaces such as the Zen Den and Peake Room, to the integrated use of a therapy dog.</p> <p>Parents actively choose this school because it is known to hold and support children, not manage them. Families actively choose the school because of this relational ethos, recognising it as a place where their children will be known, listened to and accommodated. Despite a transient population linked to the local airport and other contextual factors, the school has created continuity through relationships rather than compliance, ensuring that children’s journeys - past, present and future - are honoured. This is a culture that lives its values daily, not through policy alone, but through consistent human practice.</p> <p>Relationships are the cornerstone of practice here, with staff demonstrating a profound understanding of the impact of trauma, major life events and ruptures on a child’s emotional world. Empathic listening is not seen as an intervention, but as an organisational norm - modelled by leaders and sustained by every adult in the building. Staff are skilled in responding to distress with sensitivity and PACE, supported by structures such as the pastoral TAs protected morning time, the leadership team’s open-door policy and the safeguarding lead’s unwavering commitment and passion for developing a school culture that creates opportunity for healing and growth for all. Staff speak openly about making mistakes, apologising, repairing and moving forward - an approach that disrupts power imbalances and builds trust, particularly for students with school-based trauma. This approach is outlined in the school’s Relationship Policy, a document that demonstrates unwavering commitment to trauma-informed approaches.</p> <p>There is clear recognition of the intersection between trauma and SEND. Practice is grounded in the belief that behaviours communicate unmet need, and leaders explicitly articulate the</p>
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 the 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.	
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	

<p>9</p>	<p>Promote and value the development of the whole child to ensure that children understand that their self-worth and the self-worth of others cannot be measured simply by tests/exams. 'Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all' Aristotle</p>	<p>need to "heal the trauma you cannot see" to avoid mislabelling or exclusion.</p> <p>Every child in this school is physically and emotionally protected through knowing and being known. The school moto "<i>No child is invisible</i>" is evidenced through rigorous pupil progress meetings, daily check-ins and safeguarding oversight that tracks not only attainment, but story, context and family journey. Through pupil progress meetings that consider the whole child - learning, attendance, family context, emotional world - staff ensure that every child's story is understood and valued. The leadership and safeguarding teams operate with precision, compassion and immediacy, providing psychological safety for staff as well as pupils. The school's ethos of "one life - make it matter" guides decision-making.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Continually provide experiences for the children 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</p>	<p>PROTECT for staff is equally prioritised. There is a strong recognition that to reach the children who need it most, adults must first be held, trained and empowered. There are structured wellbeing provisions, drop-ins, clinical supervision and wellbeing days and an effective EAS, ensuring adults are held so they can hold others. This is a staff team that feels backed-up, contained and united in purpose, with no pockets of resistance - only shared accountability and collective commitment to doing what is right for children. The result is a workforce that is emotionally literate, professionally reflective and relationally courageous. This shows that the school demonstrates a whole-system commitment to mental health and safety for all.</p>
<p>11</p>	<p>School staff adjusting expectations and practices around vulnerable children to correspond with those children's developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress and loss</p>	<p>The Sports Academy is a shining example of Stopsley Primary's commitment to equity, aspiration, and inclusion. It goes far beyond physical education - it is a vehicle for social justice, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access</p>
<p>12</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>The Sports Academy is a shining example of Stopsley Primary's commitment to equity, aspiration, and inclusion. It goes far beyond physical education - it is a vehicle for social justice, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access</p>

<p>13</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>to high-quality coaching, leadership opportunities, and the experience of belonging to something aspirational. The partnerships with professional coaches and local clubs open doors for children who might otherwise be overlooked, creating pathways that transform possibility into reality.</p> <p>The new Crazy Golf initiative is a brilliant embodiment of Stopsley Primary’s systems-aware approach - turning play into purposeful connection. Fundraised by the school community, this project provides children with regular access to SEEKING-system activating experiences: joyful, exploratory play that stimulates curiosity, motivation, and social engagement. More than just a play space, it is a community equaliser. By offering families the opportunity to use the space for birthday parties and celebrations - especially those who might otherwise be unable to afford such experiences - the school has created a setting that promotes dignity, belonging, and shared joy.</p> <p>Careers education is not treated as a secondary focus but as hope work - building aspiration, inspiration and excellence, aligned with their motto. Representation is strong, across sports, music, and arts, ensuring every child sees themselves reflected in the life of the school.</p> <p>Stopsley Primary’s recruitment process is exemplary in its alignment with the school’s relational and trauma-informed ethos. Each stage of recruitment is designed to identify individuals who naturally embody empathy, curiosity, authenticity and relational presence. Interview questions are crafted to explore how candidates respond to challenge, how they hold children in moments of distress, and how they see relationships as central to learning. Scenarios focus on connection rather than control, and personal statements are valued as opportunities to understand each applicant’s capacity for reflection and compassion. This approach ensures that new staff join the school not simply for a job, but for a shared mission — to protect, relate, regulate and reflect with integrity and heart. The result is a cohesive, emotionally intelligent team with remarkably low turnover, where every adult contributes to the calm, connected and caring culture that defines Stopsley Primary.</p>
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<p>Relate</p>		
	<p>Criteria</p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<p>14</p>	<p>A Relationship Policy or protocol (for staff) alongside Behaviour Policy (for pupils) is in place</p>	<p>Relationships are the heartbeat of this community. <i>RELATE</i> is fully embedded through every layer — from leadership to lunchtime — with PACE, WINE and trauma-informed language</p>

15	Staff trained in interventions that help them get to know children better on an individual basis	deeply understood and actively embodied. Relationships at Stopsley Primary are more than positive interactions - they are protective lifelines that children understand, trust, and can name.
16	Staff using interventions that help them get to know children better on an individual basis	The concept of the <i>trusted adult</i> is explicitly taught across the school, using a hand model of secure attachments: “ <i>Me, and the adults I can go to when I need help or am upset.</i> ”
17	A whole-school approach to supporting vulnerable children to see themselves, their relationships and the world more positively	Empathic listening is organisational norm, not optional behaviour. Adults consistently demonstrate warmth, playfulness and presence. There is a clearly articulated and updated <i>Relationships Policy</i> , which does not sit on a shelf but lives through daily relational practice: meet and greet routines, mentoring circles, “I Wish My Teacher Knew” systems, EAAs for all pupils and pupil leadership roles such as wellbeing champions and MH ambassadors.
18	Helping vulnerable children shift from ‘blocked trust’ to trust, and from self-help to help-seeking	Every child is supported to identify these key adults — people who help them feel safe, calm, and heard. This teaching is not tokenistic; it is embedded in PSHE lessons, wellbeing mentoring, and everyday conversation. Children talk confidently about who their trusted adults are, and why they matter. They know that
19	Provision of repeated positive experiences for children with key emotionally available adults	Every child is supported to identify these key adults — people who help them feel safe, calm, and heard. This teaching is not tokenistic; it is embedded in PSHE lessons, wellbeing mentoring, and everyday conversation. Children talk confidently about who their trusted adults are, and why they matter. They know that

<p>20</p>	<p>Senior Leads ensuring staff have daily repeated positive relational experiences</p>	<p>these adults are there to PROTECT them, REGULATE with them, and REFLECT alongside them when life feels hard. This clarity creates a tangible sense of psychological safety. Children describe knowing “where to go” and “who will help.”</p> <p>Adults across the school — from teachers and teaching assistants to pastoral leads, lunchtime staff, and the premises manager — all play a part in this network of safety. The consistency of response, the calm tone of voice, and the open body language communicate care long before words are needed. Pupils could confidently identify who their safe adults are and speak of school as a place where they are listened to, where friendships and mental health skills are taught, and where it is safe to speak.</p> <p>Stopsley Primary’s Wellbeing Champions are special not only because of the compassion they show, but the age at which they begin to embody vital relational skills. These are very young children learning how to notice, name and nurture the emotions of others - an extraordinary example of early emotional intelligence in action. Through their role, they are taught to tune into cues of distress in their peers and to respond with acceptance, curiosity and empathy - the same PACEful principles modelled by the adults around them. They practise listening and offering reassurance, developing the ability to co-regulate and connect at an age when most children are still learning to identify their own feelings. In return, they gain something profound. This role builds self-awareness, empathy, confidence and social understanding - skills that form the foundations of emotionally intelligent adulthood. The Wellbeing Champions are learning what it means to be trusted, to lead through kindness, and to use their voice to bring calm and comfort to others. These young people are already shaping the culture of their school - and, in doing so, they are shaping their own future selves: compassionate citizens, emotionally literate leaders and the next generation of relational changemakers.</p> <p>The school extends its relational commitment beyond pupils to families and the wider community through adult learning courses for EAL parents and the establishment of safe space hubs offering domestic violence support and practical advice. These community touchpoints reflect a deeper ethos: education here is not confined to academics but is a vehicle for safety, empowerment and belonging. This is a school that listens, adapts and builds collective capacity—ensuring that care for children is shared by every adult who walks through its doors.</p>
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Regulate		
	Criteria	Evidence
21	A variety of evidence-based interventions designed to bring down stress levels in vulnerable children from toxic to tolerable.	Stopsley Primary excels in its ability to hold both children and adults in states of calm readiness. Regulation here is not seen as a behaviour management strategy but as a whole-school nervous-system approach. The language of regulation and co-regulation is understood, modelled and lived throughout the school day.
22	Evidence-based interventions that may go some way to repair brain damage caused by painful life experience where there was no social buffering.	Staff recognise that emotional regulation begins with the adult. Morning triage meetings allow for early identification of children's emotional states, ensuring that those who arrive dysregulated are met, not reprimanded. The pastoral TA's early-morning availability, the structured use of sensory and movement interventions, and a wealth of therapeutic spaces all contribute to an environment where stress is noticed and soothed.
23	Whole-school training has been undertaken in the evidence-based research on emotional regulation.	Adults are consistently present in those <i>"first vital seconds"</i> —the moments that matter most. They are trained and trusted to hold children through emotional storms until regulation returns. This creates a contagion of calm: the school feels anchored, not reactive.
24	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 community feels calmed, heard, connected with and valued.	Physical and creative regulation opportunities abound—from the golf programme and Sports Academy, to the Zen Den, art-based interventions, and the beautifully designed sensory garden. Children are given agency to choose what they need to return to balance, and staff model this too - recognising when they need to pause, breathe and co-regulate together. The leadership team demonstrates extraordinary understanding of the science behind safety. CPD has been thoughtfully designed around attachment, neuroscience and intergenerational trauma, ensuring adults are equipped to meet need with compassion. Supervision, wellbeing sessions, and open-door leadership keep the adults' nervous systems supported and safe.
25	Senior Leaders to be aware of high stress states in staff	
26	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	Stopsley is a school where regulation is contagious. Calm has become culture, and safety is felt in every corner—from the sensory garden to the smiles that greet each child at the door.

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	REFLECT is the golden thread that connects all aspects of practice at Stopsley Primary. Empathic listening is recognised across the organisation as a core skill for children, staff and parents alike. Every adult understands that reflection — not reaction — is the key to growth and healing.
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	Staff show exceptional skill in their reflective responses, demonstrating the ability to pause, wonder and mentalise: <i>“What might this behaviour be telling me?”</i> All staff have a clear understanding of the impact of major painful life events and respond swiftly and sensitively when issues arise.
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 culture of reflection at Stopsley Primary is sustained and deepened through the safeguarding lead’s unwavering commitment to high-quality professional learning on trauma-informed thinking and approaches. Staff are continually supported to move beyond awareness into true embodiment of relational practice. Through a carefully designed and responsive CPD programme, adults are invited to think, feel and act with a trauma-aware lens in everything they do.
30	Children provided with the means (e.g. through poetry/music/art/sandplay/drama) to symbolise painful life experiences through images not just words	The safeguarding lead ensures that professional development is purposeful, research-informed and emotionally contained — a programme that blends neuroscience, attachment theory and reflective thinking with practical application in the classroom. Training is dynamic and iterative, with feedback loops, Q&A sessions and reflective discussions ensuring that learning remains live and contextual.
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)	Children are given multiple pathways to reflect on their own emotions and experiences. Through wellbeing journals, PSHE lessons, therapeutic interventions and creative expression (art, sandplay, Lego therapy), they learn to make meaning of their feelings and experiences. The PSHE curriculum itself reflects contemporary neuroscience, teaching children how their brains

<p>32</p>	<p>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 relationships that harm and relationships that heal and on how to use life well</p>	<p>and bodies respond to emotion and stress — and how they can recover and repair.</p>
<p>33</p>	<p>Senior Leaders to provide staff with a forum to talk in confidence about their feelings and particular stress triggers from their work</p>	

The following strengths were evident:

Exceptional safeguarding leadership: The safeguarding lead provides visionary, compassionate leadership that anchors the school’s trauma-informed approach. Her depth of understanding, professional integrity and relentless commitment to children’s safety and wellbeing set the tone for the entire organisation.

High-quality, research-informed CPD: Professional learning is expertly designed and delivered by the safeguarding lead, ensuring every adult not only *understands* trauma-informed theory but *feels* it in practice. Training is reflective, responsive and emotionally containing, enabling staff to work with confidence, sensitivity and skill.

A reflective, emotionally intelligent workforce: Staff are empowered to think deeply about their impact, supported through coaching and open dialogue. Reflection is part of daily culture — alive in corridors, classrooms and staffrooms alike.

Strong relational culture: Every adult understands that relationships are the foundation of learning and healing. Staff consistently model empathy, curiosity and respect, with relational language embedded across the school day.

Child leadership through wellbeing champions: A remarkable group of thoughtful, kind young people who model empathy and acceptance, notice when others are struggling, and act with courage and compassion. They are the next generation of relational leaders.

Social justice through opportunity: Initiatives like the Sports Academy and Crazy Golf project exemplify systems thinking — offering access to play, aspiration and community belonging for all families, regardless of background.

A community of hope, safety and joy: Staff and children describe the school as a place where they are seen, valued and understood.

Areas to consider developing:

Protect	Family Workshops: Develop short workshops or parent cafés that share the principles of psychological safety and co-regulation with families, enabling consistent protective messages between home and school.
Relate	
Regulate	
Reflect	

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

As above

Best practise/case study requests: (if applicable)

The case studies shared on the day powerfully illustrated Stopsley Primary’s unwavering commitment to families and its belief that healing and learning happen in partnership. Each story reflected a school that not only supports children but stands beside their families with compassion, persistence and respect. Staff consistently demonstrate a willingness to *go the distance* — reaching out, listening without judgement, and finding creative, relational ways to hold families through moments of difficulty. Whether responding to complex trauma, fluctuating attendance, or emotional crisis, the approach remains the same: presence first, problem-solving second.

Overall Assessment:

Stopsley Primary School stands as a true sanctuary within a complex community - a place of safety, belonging and hope for children, families and staff alike. In a world where many schools talk about inclusion, Stopsley lives it with extraordinary authenticity. Every space, every conversation and every adult-child interaction carries the unmistakable signature of compassion, curiosity and connection.

Through the visionary leadership of the safeguarding lead, the school has built an ecosystem where wellbeing is woven into the fabric of daily life. It is a place where challenge is met with understanding, where behaviour is met with belonging, and where families are met with steadfast commitment. Stopsley gives hope to those who may have lost faith in education as a safe place — proving that schools can be both academically ambitious and emotionally healing.

Stopsley Primary is a sanctuary that restores trust, rebuilds confidence and rekindles hope. It is with genuine admiration and heartfelt respect that we are delighted to present Stopsley Primary School with the *TISUK Award of Excellence* — in recognition of its outstanding trauma-informed practice and its unwavering belief in the power of relationships to heal and transform lives.

✓	Trauma Informed School Award:
✓	Recommended
	Deferred pending further evidence

✓	Copies sent to:
✓	Headteacher
✓	Rachel Toller (TISUK)
✓	Suzie Franklin

Reported completed by:	Siobhán Garrett
Date:	21/10/25