

Our School Story:

DARLINGHURST ACADEMY



Back in September 2022 Darlinghurst Academy had a behaviour policy and approach at odds with their direction for managing positive behaviour. There was a 'red card' system for dealing with behaviour, time out was merely being sent out, and 'help me' cards were viewed more as help needed for the teacher, rather than the child; and matters were often escalated up to SLT. This aspect of the behaviour system didn't mirror the rest of the approach that the academy took.

In 2022, as a leadership inspired by research, the SLT read; 'When The Adults Change, Everything Changes', and 'After The Adults Change, Behaviour Nirvana', which showed that another way was possible and achievable. They implemented some actions, straight from the pages, and later in 2023 fully embraced the opportunity to join the Relational Development Programme that was offered as part of Southend-on-Sea City Council's Inclusion Review, engaging in the Leadership Programme.

Darlinghurst's clear belief is that relationships with all children supports their personal development and growth. Positive relationships have been fostered between staff and children, so that trust is built and responses to behaviour are calm and deliberate. There is emphasis on narrating the positive and giving value to praise and supporting children's individual needs. The academy takes a relationships first approach, with children at the very centre. Vulnerable children are very much a part of this, with 360 assessments carried out to recognise personal needs, and personalised plans in place for key children to manage their feelings and behaviour.

Leaders also recognised the importance of building early relationships. This included the launch of a weekly toddler group for parents and carers with the Early Years lead. It has become a hub full of friendship amongst children, parents and staff.

Relationships, across the academy, have strengthened with families over the years, showing a strong sense of belonging (one of Darlinghurst's academy values). The behaviour policy has been reviewed, with a change from red cards to choices and consequence, and pupils have actively been involved in understanding the new emphasis and changes in language used.

Staff at Darlinghurst follow the Darlinghurst Direction; a mantra for teaching, learning and behaviour. It outlines the way that they do it there. Relentless keystone routines have always been prioritised and now include greetings at the start of lessons, clear transitions with fantastic walking for movement around the academy, and the use of non-verbal cues to reset and redirect. The Darlinghurst Direction has been streamlined with the 3 rules, Ready, Respect and Safe, with relational approaches known by adults and children alike.

An understanding of attachment needs and also zones of regulation is very important to the staff at Darlinghurst Academy. Adaptions of the zones have been rolled out to support children in their articulation of their feelings and supports their emotional understanding and literacy. Key spaces around the site have been set up to help with regulation: including sofas used for talk and support, quiet work spaces and self-regulation areas.

All staff are part of the approach, from SLT, to teachers, to midday assistants and admin staff. Even the site team! From the moment that the Principal and Inclusion leader shared messages from the WTAC books and delivery of skills workshops people started to get on board. There is now a team of champions spearheading the work.

Darlinghurst Academy is pleased with the relational direction it is going in. The adults at the academy strive to be calm and consistent. Taking a relational approach has not led to a loss of authority, instead it has strengthened respect. Teachers have developed their classroom strategies and use of choice providing direct support. Relationships have been at the heart of practice, managing behaviours and bringing about change.

When members of the When The Adults Change team visited Darlinghurst they commented that "The school has heart and warmth running through the very core of its culture". We are delighted to welcome Darlinghurst Academy to our Partner School network.