



Merstone School

Proactive Pathways (PP), Initiatives, Therapies and Services that support pupil regulation and wellbeing.

**Handbook Overview
September 2025**



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***If you have any questions around this handbook please contact:
Georgia Travers (Senior Mental Health Lead)***



1. Introduction

At Merstone School, we provide regular regulation and wellbeing support for our pupils, a breakdown of this is found in our 'Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing' Policy and our 'Regulation Support' Policy. We have a bespoke offer of initiatives that underpin and support our values and ethos. We offer both therapeutic interventions ran by external professionals and internal interventions that both work towards set outcomes to support pupils social, emotional, mental health and communication development.

2. SMILE

In 2014, Forest Oak carried out a project with Solihull advisory team regarding mental and emotional health and wellbeing. The outcome was the development of an approach to supporting the school community and their mental health and wellbeing. The SMILE initiative is based on the NHS five ways to wellbeing and these were adapted for the context of Forest Oak School. Merstone now share this initiative with Forest Oak and it underpins our mental health and wellbeing provision at both schools. SMILE standards for Social, Move, Interest, Learn and Engage. The principle of SMILE is that it is 'for all' meaning pupils, staff and the whole school community. It is about having care, concern, respect, kindness and gratitude for everyone. SMILE's overall aim and drive is to empower our school communities to become architects of their own emotional health and well-being, within an enabling environment. You will see SMILE embedded at school through SMILE Fridays, where pupils have focused sessions across departments that explore activities that are specific to the five areas, in classes through the language used and the focuses being explored, through posters and displays and through special events days such as within Mental Health Awareness Week.



3. Sensory diet






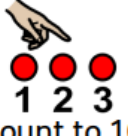
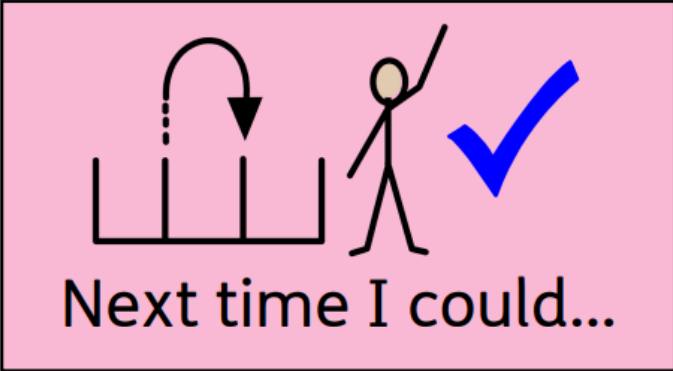








A sensory diet is a set of activities that make up a sensory strategy and are appropriate for an individual's needs. These are specific and individualised activities that are scheduled into a child's day and are used to assist with regulation of activity levels, attention, and adaptive responses. Sensory diet activities are prescribed based on the individual's specific sensory needs and typically include alerting, organising and calming activities.

4. Restorative Practice

Merstone School is a restorative practice school. This means that our whole school teaching and learning approach encourages safe behaviour that is supportive and respectful of pupils and staff. It facilitates individuals to be truly accountable for their behaviour and to repair any harm caused. Restorative practice at Merstone involves reflection of events that have happened and focuses on the five questions: What happened? What were you thinking at the time? What have you thought about since? Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way? What do you think you need to do to make things right? Our cohort at Merstone means that restorative practice looks different department to department, class to class and pupil to pupil. Some pupils will engage with a facilitated restorative conversation together, some pupils will engage with a written script of reflection, while others will have in the moment reflection or action that shows restoration has taken place.



Example taken from one question used within individual reflection:

 talk to a trusted adult	 ask to go outside	 go to my calm space	 go to the regulation station	 get a fiddle toy
 count to 10	 Next time I could...			 use an ALD
 walk away				 tell someone how I feel
 play with someone else	 ask for help	 make a change	 take deep breaths	 something different

5. Protective Behaviours

Merstone is aligned with the principles of protective behaviours. Protective behaviours have two themes: 'We all have the right to feel safe at all times' and 'We can talk with someone about anything, no matter if it feels awful or small'. Within our school, this focuses on safe and unsafe behaviour, in order to contextualise what pupils are doing and outline what behaviour is safe and which is unsafe, in a host of settings and environments. This means you will hear staff reflect on behaviour as being either 'safe' or 'unsafe' and highlight wanted behaviours as 'safe'. This makes language concise and simple for our pupils to understand. It is a process that encourages self-empowerment and brings with it the skills to raise self-esteem. This is achieved by helping individuals to recognise and trust their intuitive feelings (Early Warning Signs) and to develop strategies for self-protection. We explore protective behaviour themes within PSHE sessions; such as 'Early Warning Signs' or 'Network Hands' but you will see protective behaviour principles embedded in everything our staff do.



6. Team Teach

Merstone is proactive in its approach to regulation support and incorporates Team Teach's de-escalation strategies to ensure that staff are always considering how to prevent, support and manage behaviour which may be seen as unsafe.

Although we do have details on Team Teach in our 'Regulation Support Policy' under 6. Restrictive physical intervention and the use of reasonable force, this document is focusing on how Team Teach as an ethos facilitates a high level of pupil regulation, due to staff having an in-depth knowledge on proactive, de-escalation strategies.

7. Trauma Informed Practice

Merstone follows 'Trauma Informed Schools UK' practice guidance. Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as harmful or life threatening. While unique to the individual, generally the experience of trauma can cause lasting adverse effects, limiting the ability to function and achieve mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being. Trauma-informed practice is an approach to health, care and education which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological and social development. There are 6 principles of trauma-informed practice: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration. In our school, our practice focuses on understanding trauma's impact and supporting affected students by creating an inclusive and safe environment for all.



8. Proactive Pathways Programme

Our 'Proactive Pathways Programme' has been curated by our SMHL lead to offer 'Whole-Child Support, One Step Ahead'. The programme's aim is for each pupil to be engaged with an offer of additional support, each year that they are at Merstone, this may be the same offer of support or change due to developing strengths or needs. This support is in place with trained professionals, in order to improve, support and nurture pupil social and emotional wellbeing. Pupils are matched to a programme of support through their boxall profile and individual referrals that are made by parents or class teachers to the SMHL. These programmes are listed below.

8.1 Nurturing Schools Programme

Part of our proactive pathways programme

Merstone is part of the Nurture UK 'Nurturing school's programme'. This programme focuses on pupils' emotional needs and development alongside their academic learning. It helps staff develop and embed a nurturing culture and ethos throughout our education setting, alongside explicit small group nurture sessions to support social and emotional needs.

Merstone do not have a separate 'Nurture School provision' but are a nurturing school. We currently also provide a group nurture session. This consists of a smaller group size, utilising our Merstone SMILE room to focus on work around their feelings, emotions and wellbeing. Our nurture session is run by a teaching member of staff, who has been trained in nurture. Pupils are wait listed and then chosen for the session based on self-referral, parent/teacher referral or Nurture UK's Boxall profiling identification.



8.2 Books Beyond Words

Part of our proactive pathways programme

Our Books Beyond Words session is ran off the 'Feelings Groups' model. 'Feelings Groups' use Beyond Words pictures. The books tell a story. How children or young people interpret the images depends upon their own life experience. As pictures are used and not words, the children talk about the characters and wonder about how they might be feeling. These groups have a structured approach to well-being, guided by the experience of the child or young person. They provide peer-group or 1:1 support to give children and young people a safe place to talk about their feelings, helping emotional healing to take place.

Our books beyond words sessions are run by our Senior Mental Health Lead, Georgia Travers, who has been trained in Books Beyond Words. Pupils are wait listed and then chosen for the session based on self-referral, parent/teacher referral or Nurture UK's Boxall profiling identification.

8.3 Mental Health First Aid

Part of our proactive pathways programme

Across school we have a number of both youth and adult first aiders that are available for drop-in sessions and day-to-day support. As part of this we currently run a 'Mental Health First Aid' session that has been specially designed by the Senior Mental Health lead along with an adult mental health first aider, for our diamonds department pupils. This session consists of a blend of MHFA strategies and protective behaviour strategies to equip pupils to be 'architects of their own emotional mental health and wellbeing' as detailed in our SMILE approach.



Our MHFA session is run by a trained adult MHFA lead. Pupils are wait listed and then chosen for the intervention based on self-referral, parent/teacher referral or Nurture UK's Boxall profiling identification.

8.4 Emotional Literacy Support Assistant

Part of our proactive pathways programme

Merstone school currently has two trained ELSAs- emotional literacy support assistants. They are learning support assistants who have had training from educational psychologists to support the emotional development of children and young people in school. ELSAs have regular professional supervision from educational psychologists to help them in their work. ELSAs help children and young people learn to understand their emotions and respect the feelings of those around them. They provide the time and space for pupils to think about their personal circumstances and how they manage them.

For these sessions, pupils are wait listed and then chosen for the intervention based on self-referral, parent/teacher referral or Nurture UK's Boxall profiling identification.

8.5 Learning Mentor

Part of our proactive pathways programme

Merstone Schools Senior Family Support Worker is also our school's Learning Mentor. Mentoring is a weekly 30 minute one to one session. The sessions help students to develop coping strategies and offers a sympathetic ear to our students, often liaises with parents, staff and carers on their behalf. The sessions develop plans of action with our students to overcome barriers to achieving their full potential.



For these sessions, pupils are wait listed and then chosen for the session based on self-referral, parent/teacher referral or Nurture UK's Boxall profiling identification.

8.6 Music Therapy

Part of our proactive pathways programme

Merstone school employ an external music therapist to deliver music therapy on a group and 1:1 basis. Music therapy is a state registered profession and is governed by the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC). Music therapy involves the use of sounds and music to support and develop an individual's physical, social, mental and emotional well-being. The aims of music therapy are not musical; instead, the music is used to promote general development.

For these sessions, pupils are wait listed and then chosen for the intervention based on self-referral, parent/teacher referral or Nurture UK's Boxall profiling identification.

8.7 Speech and Language

Lego Therapy within SALT is part of our proactive pathways programme

Merstone School have a full time Speech and Language Assistant and a part time Speech and Language Assistant. Merstone School also employ an external Speech and Language Therapist one day bi-weekly. We also work together with Speech and Language Therapists from the Solihull NHS. Our assistants work 1:1 and in small groups with pupils to aid their communication skills. As a whole school we are a TOTAL communication environment to ensure pupil voice through a variety of means; objects of reference, AAC devices, PECS, Communication boards, Makaton signing, Eye gaze and other strategies.



Lego Therapy is a play-based activity that helps students to develop social skills. This also encourages turn taking and friendships. Students can experience developing their fine motor skills through the use of building bricks. There are 3 job roles in this activity. These are the engineer, builder and supplier. It gives students the chance to have some responsibility for giving instructions, supplying the resources, and building the model required. This also encourages problem solving and team building. It is a relaxing therapeutic activity which is mainly aimed at students with Autism and ADHD. It is an activity for all ages.

8.8 Rebound Therapy

Part of our proactive pathways programme

Merstone school currently has two trained learning support assistants that are trained in rebound therapy. Rebound Therapy is used to facilitate movement, promote balance, promote an increase or decrease in muscle tone, promote relaxation, promote sensory integration, improve fitness and exercise tolerance, and to improve communication skills.

These sessions are currently running in our Topaz and Ruby department due to pupil need and access to other interventions.

8.9 Liquid Logic Musical Hydrotherapy

Part of our proactive pathways programme

This innovative therapy combines the act of listening to sound inside the water with aquatic body therapy techniques to develop an application for sound and music. The vibrations from underwater speakers stimulate the inner ear directly, creating a detailed and personal perception of sound. This practice can improve communication, emotional development and motor and sensory skills.



9. Hydrotherapy pool

Merstone School has a hydrotherapy pool. This is a purpose-built pool used for a range of therapeutic purposes. It is equipped with features that maximise the benefits of water-based therapy. Our hydrotherapy pool is used to support specific pupils through out the school that have this as a requirement to support them holistically.

10. Halliwick

Merstone School follows the Halliwick concept for some of our swimmers. The International Halliwick Association defines the Halliwick Concept as “an approach to teaching all people, in particular, focussing on those with physical and/or learning difficulties, to participate in water activities, to move independently in water, and to swim.

11. Tacpac

Classes in specific departments in Merstone School have Tacpac sessions. TACPAC draws together touch and music to create a structured half hour of sensory communication between two people. TACPAC creates sensory alignment and helps people of any age who have sensory impairment, developmental delay, complex learning difficulties, tactile defensiveness, and limited or pre-verbal levels of communication.

12. Story Massage

Classes in specific departments in Merstone School have Story Massage sessions. The Story Massage Programme combines the benefits of positive touch with the fun and creativity of words – whether as story, rhyme or song. Ten simple massage strokes form the basis of the programme. These strokes have a name, such as The Circle or The Sprinkle, and an easy to recognise symbol making it fully accessible for all ages and abilities.



13. Occupational Therapy / Physiotherapy

Merstone School have an Occupational Therapy/ Physiotherapy assistant within school. Merstone school also employ an external Occupational Therapist, to deliver occupational therapy assessments and advice based on pupil needs. The therapist observes pupils in class and liaises with the class team, following up their visit with a report detailing different ideas or strategies that are tailored to each child. This includes but is not limited to sensory needs, behaviour presentation, sensory diet or input on seating.

The aim of the Occupation Therapist is to provide strategies, recommendation of equipment and advice on how to best prepare pupils for learning, transitioning and to support their sensory behaviours.

For this assessment, pupils are referred to the Occupational Therapist through teacher referral and are then placed on a wait list.

Physiotherapy at Merstone is linked with NHS physiotherapy and means that we will follow physiotherapy guidance within school when advised and can accommodate this.

14. Educational Psychologist

Merstone School are linked with Solihull Educational Psychology Service Solihull educational psychology service (SEPS) provides professional psychological services for children, young people and families in a wide range of educational and community settings. Within our school this may involve; observations of pupils along with professional and family discussions to provide advice and support on a range of areas.



15. SOLAR / MHST

Solar is a partnership between Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (BSMHFT), Barnardo's and Autism West Midlands. We provide Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services to Children, Young People and Families in Solihull. This type of service is often referred to as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team). Solar supports young people (0-19 years old with some aspects going up to 25 years old) who are experiencing emotional wellbeing and/or mental health concerns. Young people with emotional wellbeing needs and less complex mental health needs are often supported by the Barnardo's aspect of the service, often referred to as Tier 2 or MHST or Primary care. The more complex mental health needs and young people with higher risk are usually supported within the NHS aspect of the service, often referred to as Tier 3 or CORE CAMHS.

At Merstone School, our Senior Mental Health Lead communicates with our link Senior SOLAR practitioner has had half termly meetings to discuss referrals, assessments or existing packages of support. Within these meetings, workshops for pupils, training for staff and schemes such as the 'Peer Listener' scheme are arranged and SOLAR then come into school and provide Merstone with this service, working together towards mental health and wellbeing.

16. SISS

SISS stands for specialist inclusive support service. SISS includes educational psychologists, primary mental health workers and specialist teachers and practitioners that work to support sensory and physical impairment, speech, language and communication disorders, autism, communication and learning difficulties and social, emotional and mental health. The service provide support to children, families, schools and



settings through training, consultation and advice, assessments and direct teaching. Merstone work closely with SISS across the academic year.

17. Family Support Services

Merstone School have a Senior Family Support Worker (Beverley Sharpe) and Family Support Worker (Rebecca Jennings) who work across school to offer a variety of support to parents and carers. This includes transitions into and out of Merstone School, parenting advice, support with paperwork such as EHCPs/ DLA forms, referrals to external services for support needed external to school such as SOLAR/MASH, signposting to local clubs, support networks, professional services and agencies such as community nurse referrals or occupational therapy. Family Support also work alongside other DSLs to support safeguarding across school.

18. Learning Disability Nurses

Merstone School can send referrals to the learning disability nurses to support students and parents with behavioural, toileting or sleep related queries or concerns. The service then provides a telephone consultation to parents and will then signpost to either workshops, that are at local family hubs or may come into the family home to assess and assist further. If you feel a referral would benefit your child or young person, you can contact Beverley Sharpe or Rebecca Jennings.

19. Solihull Family Hubs

Solihull Family Hubs are Solihull Council, NHS and voluntary partners, all working in partnership with parents. There are diverse services such as Midwives, Health Visitors, Community Nursing, support for children with additional needs, information and advice services such as Citizen's Advice Bureau, music services, activities for children and young people, mental health and welfare support services. Solihull Family Hubs can connect you



to various local community services as needed. Family Hubs are open to everyone. You may need to book an appointment to access some services. There are four hubs in Solihull; Elmwood Family Hub (elmwoodfh@solihull.gov.uk / 01217791700), Hatchford Brook Family Hub (hatchfordbrookfh@solihull.gov.uk / 01217796943), Riverside Family Hub (riversidefh@solihull.gov.uk / 01217791970) and Evergreen Family Hub (evergreen@colebridge.org / 01217791724).

20. Policies

For more information around Initiatives, Interventions, Programmes, Therapies and Services that support pupil regulation, wellbeing and Mental Health at Merstone School including procedures and signposting please see the following policies and documents:

- Merstone Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Merstone PSHE Policy
- Merstone RSE Policy