

Intent statement - Relational Approach 2025

Link Multi Academy Trust has invested in a programme of CPD in Relational Approach, to further develop strong relationships and good behaviour in all our schools. Trust wide CPD was delivered in September 2023, following a successful trial in some schools. However, our schools may be in different places on this journey as we have new schools and staff joining the Trust and schools are able to dedicate varying amounts of time to ongoing training, as prioritised in their Academy Improvement Plans. This is a long term change of culture, not a quick fix. The aim is that in the 3rd year of this cycle in 2025-26 the approach will be embedded across all schools with an anchor document in place.

This statement of intent sets out our approach to supporting the development of behaviour in Link Academies through a Relational Approach. It sits closely alongside our:

- **Safeguarding Policy**
- **Anti-bullying policy**
- **Online safety**
- **Teaching & learning policy**
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy**

'Relationships aren't built in a day; they are built daily' (Mark Finnis)

Values and Beliefs

The Link Academy community of trustees, local boards, staff, parents and pupils adhere to an established routine and code of conduct. Relationships are at the core of helping children to feel cared for, protected, understood and connected and therefore ready to learn.

We see education as a partnership. All of us need to feel safe and cared for and enjoy a sense of belonging. Schools play a vital part in developing both relationships and a sense of belonging for all children. All our schools need to manage behaviour well so they can provide calm, safe and supportive environments which pupils want to attend and where they can learn and thrive. Senior leaders across the Trust and within each individual school create a culture where pupils and staff can flourish together. Some behaviours can mean pupils miss vital learning time and it can negatively affect the wellbeing of staff. Pupils should be clear on school expectations and values and all staff should model and promote these. Boundaries and limits need to be clear so that we have calm and successful learning environments.

Our schools have high expectations of conduct and behaviour, this is applied consistently and fairly to create a safe and calm environment where everyone is respected. Trust and School values are reflected in the way we encourage positive behaviour and share respect for others. Headteachers are responsible for ensuring that staff at all levels have induction and support with managing behaviour and building a relational approach.

Staff are committed to excellence, aiming to achieve a spirit of trust and cooperation. We expect the highest values and standards of behaviour inside and outside the classroom, as well as outside the school and in any written or electronic communication concerning the school. We recognise that underlying needs can be communicated through our way of being and behaviour, and these vary in individual children.

We have high expectations of pupil behaviour, and we believe that the most effective learning takes place when children feel:

- Protected, safe and secure
- Experience a sense of belonging - they feel connected to themselves, their family and their community, including school.
- Feel listened to, cared for and understood

We aim to support children to be in the best social and emotional place for learning and create intrinsically motivated learners who achieve to the best of their ability.

The Relational Approach works best when all staff are invested. It needs to be delivered through 'every person, every interaction and every moment' and must be an integrated part of daily school practice. It does not mean we are 'soft' on behaviour as children need clear boundaries that come from a place of care, predictable routines, expectations and regulated responses to behaviour; we can still be authoritative but in a non-threatening way where we are in control of our own emotions.

The child's voice is central. Staff recognise that children communicate underlying needs in different ways: verbally, through their behaviour and their body language. High levels of nurture and empathy, with containment and structure, support children to feel safe.

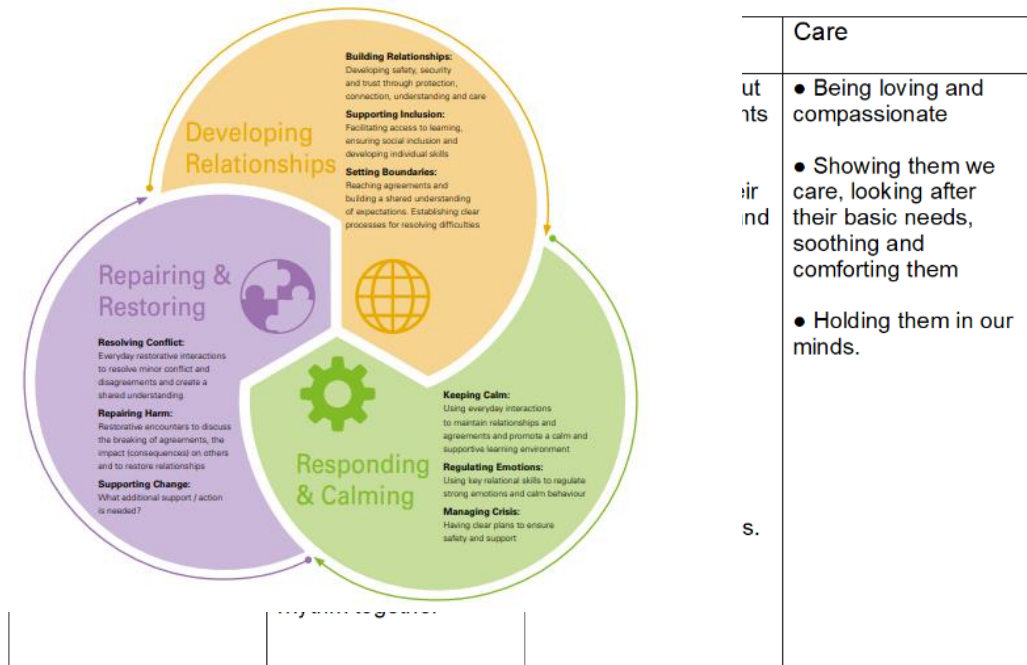
Theory and Research

This approach is firmly grounded in theory and research from the fields of Neuroscience, Attachment, Trauma, Adverse Childhood Experience, Intersubjectivity and Restorative Approaches which advocate the use of relational and restorative approaches rather than those that are behaviourist and punitive. Research informs us that punitive approaches and exclusion may re-traumatise children and further embed the behaviours causing concern.

There are also a range of evidence-based approaches that have been shown to prevent the need for exclusion. These approaches are based around the principle that all behaviour is a form of communication. Please refer to appendix A for further reading.

Research also highlights the importance of leadership in prioritising, establishing and modelling relational principles, beliefs and values in order to develop a whole school culture and to empower others. In addition, links with partner agencies and supporting parental engagement is an important factor in meeting student needs and enhancing well-being.

The Relational Approach



our staff providing protection, connection, understanding and care:

Children who are showing signs of insecure attachments and a lack of well-being need a significant adult or small team of adults in school who can provide them with a secure relationship within which they feel a sense of safety, trust, belonging and being listened to. This can be supported through a Relational Support Plan. Being aware of the ‘safety cues’ staff are giving is very important, particularly through facial expression and frequency and modulation of the voice. Consider other cues such as movements which could make children feel safe or not. Take care to ensure open and friendly body language. It can be useful to help pupils to organise their thinking and emotions by listening and then feeding their thoughts back to them in bite-size, manageable chunks.

Responding and Calming

Every child will face challenges and at times experience strong emotions which block their access to learning and good social interaction. Catching these emotions and regulating the child so that these emotions do not become overwhelming is integral to keeping the child and classroom calm.

Children who experience strong emotions that lead to harmful or challenging behaviour will need skilful co-regulation to enable them to be calm and develop their capacity for regulation. How we respond in a crisis should be coordinated, clear and communicated to ensure the safety of all students.

De-escalation and calming through co-regulation:

Attunement – matching and meeting the child’s emotional intensity (positive / negative) on an energetic level, so as to connect with the child in their pain or their joy.

Accepting and validating - Validating how the child is experiencing the event, even if it is very different to how you are experiencing it. Affirming, understanding and recognising that the child is feeling what they are feeling. Not just empathy but finding the right words/ language and feeling/tone of voice to convey that empathy.

Containment of feelings - Being able to stay thinking about a child’s intense feelings (e.g. rage, power plays, anxiety, distress) without deflecting into your emotional response or action. At times this will mean being able to bear their unbearable pain – being a container for it. Containment is also achieved through clear structures, boundaries and clear and understandable consequences, which are explained and understood.

Soothing and calming the child’s emotionally dysregulated states - Some children spend the majority of their time in a stressed state. We need to soothe them in order to calm their defence pathways. This will make it less likely that their defence pathway will trigger and also more likely that they will be able to self soothe when they are feeling stressed.

These aspects can be supported through a co-regulation plan or relational support plan.

Repairing and Restoring

Relational, regulatory and restorative approaches are more effective in supporting the development of internal control and regulation. Not all behaviours are a matter of choice and therefore external control will not be effective in changing behaviour.

Applying a restorative framework following conflict or when incidents have taken place can be far more successful in promoting understanding and learning, than a punitive approach. The approach supports children to develop greater understanding, empathy and responsibility.

Restorative conversations will include questions such as:

What happened?

Why did it happen?

What were you thinking and feeling at the time?

What have you thought about since?

Why is it a problem?

How can we prevent it from happening again?

Who has been affected and in what way?

What do you think needs to happen next?

Is there anything you need to do to make things right?

Relational Approaches in the Classroom

Children need bespoke responses to support their personal development and well-being. Consistency does not mean always responding in the same way to each child or behaviour, it means

responding in a way which is consistent to our values and beliefs. Whilst each individual child benefits from a consistent approach, being consistent and fair is not about everyone getting the same, but everyone getting what they need.

Natural consequences that can follow certain behaviours should be made explicit, without the need to enforce sanctions that can shame and ostracise children from their peers, school community and family, leading to potentially more negative behaviour. Responses to behaviour should ensure that children feel safe and that all needs are met.

Working in Relationship Together

Listening to the child

Children and young people should feel respected and valued within the school community and regarded as an equal part of it. Time and care should be taken to facilitate the child's voice and listen with curiosity and empathy.

We aim to offer support by creating a team around the child. Through respectful listening and observation of the child, working with parents and carers and external professionals and agencies we hope to empower the family to find their own next steps.

Working with parents and carers

Parents will be given time to tell theirs and the child's story. Parents are the expert on their child and their knowledge, views and concerns will lead to greater understanding of unmet needs as well as supporting future planning. Parents will also be able to provide valuable support at the implementation stage.

Working with external agencies

When children have significant needs or if the child is struggling to make progress despite several assess-plan-do-review cycles then external professionals will be consulted to support with the process. Schools can seek support from the Inclusion and Improvement Team (IiH) and Executive Improvement Team (EIT) as well as the Local Authority.

Supporting Staff Well-being and Professional Development

As staff, the Relational Approach is most effective when we are curious about how we are in professional relationships ourselves. The Relational Approach is most powerful when we bring into awareness and utilise our own 'Way of Being'. We understand that for staff to be open and curious about their own way of being they need to be held in a compassionate and non-judgemental space.

All staff will be supported, valued and respected. The Link Academy Trust will ensure:

- Staff well-being is supported
- Continued professional development is delivered

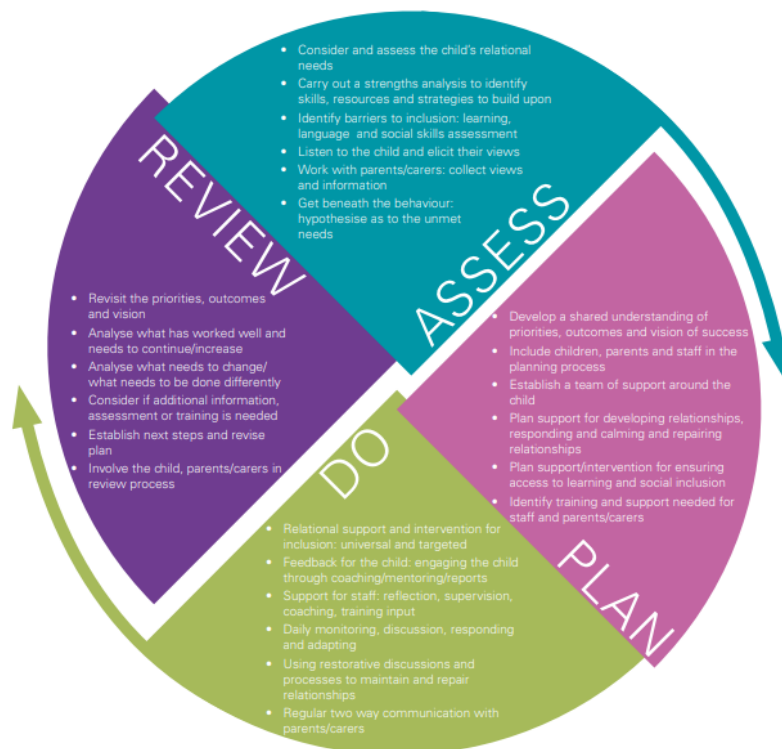
- Individual reflection opportunities will be part of staff inset
- Staff will have their voices heard

All adults in school will be trained to enable them to have a good understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the relational approach and what this approach means in practical terms. All staff need to understand how they need to be in their relationships with children and why. They need to be able to read children’s behaviour in terms of their relational needs and understand the needs of children who have attachment needs or who have experienced trauma. It is important that all adults in school receive training, not just teaching staff and teaching assistants. Other adults in school such as administrators and meal-time assistants make a significant contribution to the school ethos and often make a difference to the lives of children. There will be regular opportunities for continued professional development. As well as ongoing training opportunities, there will be a standing item at staff meetings/Inset to ensure that there is always space and time for regular professional dialogue about the approach. Schools will introduce a for describing children’s behaviour and needs as well as strategies for support. As part of the induction of new staff, they will be adequately trained to understand and adopt the approach. Adults in school who are providing support for the well-being of children through providing secure relationships, need to be supported in their own wellbeing and relationships in school also.

A Graduated Response

Working in Relationship Together: The Graduated Response

The diagram below shows Relational Approaches to the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle.



All schools need to develop key habits and routines in their school and Academy Heads have autonomy in this, as long as it sits within the Relational Approach and is not unduly authoritarian. These are likely to include:

- To walk calmly within the school building for everyone's safety
- To respect property of others and the school
- To be respectful of all adults and other pupils around the school
- To use self-calming tools when feeling stressed or angry and not to physically hurt others
- To engage in the use of restorative approaches, interventions and provision as set out in RA policy

Where a consequence is needed, it should not humiliate a child or add to their stress, or this may escalate dysregulation. This could include:

- Consider children's seating position to ensure they are in a position which means that they can focus their attention without distraction.
- Consider if the child would benefit from a movement/sensory/calming break away from the class with a TA. An option to complete learning in a calm place could be used.
- Feedback from a trusted adult which is clear about what they are doing well and what they need to do next
- Intervention to support the child to learn how to regulate themselves and communicate when they need support. This may include using visuals and social stories/comic strips if appropriate.
- If a child has had an issue on the playground, consider 'time-in' to discuss with an adult what they could do differently, ensuring the pupil voice is heard.

Any consequence should be 'logical; for example, a child should not miss their playtime as a punishment, but they may stay inside with an adult and have a later playtime for their own and other's safety.

Adjustments may need to be made for pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, for example a pupil with ADHD may need frequent movement breaks to manage their regulation or a child with communication needs may benefit from visuals to help them understand expectations. Every pupil should feel valued in the school community and a calm environment will benefit all pupils, including those with SEND. Additional support or amendments may be set out in a Provision Map or co-regulation plan. Responses to incidents will therefore need to be specific to the needs of the children involved.

Parents are crucial in helping schools develop and maintain good behaviour. Parents are informed about our Relational Approach; they are updated about their child's behaviour in school and they will be involved with the writing of a co-regulation or relational support plan.

Special and Exceptional Circumstances

In rare cases where a child is persistently unable to self-regulate, further action may be needed. We work hard together across the Trust to avoid suspensions and exclusions, details on how we would manage these are set out in the suspension and permanent exclusions policy. We work hard to use

logical consequences rather than sanctions. Academy Heads, with support from the Executive Improvement Team and the Improvement and Inclusion Hub, have the autonomy to make decisions in the best interests of all children where behaviour of an individual pupil is causing concern.

In a small number of cases, the Team Around the Family may need to work more flexibly and creatively to meet the needs of the child. Utilising personalised curriculum, part time timetables, attending an alternative provision and accessing more specialist support may be required to meet the underlying needs of the child.

A suspension or exclusion should only be used as a last resort. The cost of exclusion in terms of well-being, attainment and later offending behaviour is well documented. There is also the recognition that the negative impact of exclusion is cumulative. Children and young people can often become involved in a negative cycle of exclusion and non-attendance which are very likely to have a devastating effect on relationships and belonging and significantly impact on later life chances. A suspension or exclusion should be a proportionate response where there is no alternative, and it is important that the views of the child or young person and those of their parent or carer are taken into account.

The fixed period of a suspension should enable further planning and assessment and provide an opportunity for reflection for both the child or young person and staff involved. Relationship-based approaches, such as solution focused or restorative approaches, should be used to guide and support a child or young person's return to school.

For further information, please see the Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Policy.

Risk Assessments

All schools have a duty of care to all young people attending school in respect of the health, safety, well-being and welfare of the children and young people in their care. Risk and health and safety assessment processes should be applied to situations where unpredictable, challenging and distressed behaviour has arisen. Risk assessments should identify any steps deemed necessary to support the child or young person in preventing harm to themselves or others.

Reviewed by Standards and Curriculum: 14th October 2025

Approved by Board of Trustees: 20th October 2025

Next Review: Summer 2026

Appendix A:

Positive Approaches = Positive Outcomes

In the areas of Developing Relationships and Responding and Calming we are particularly grateful to the work of Stephen Porges, Dan Hughes, Bruce Berry, Colwyn Trevarthan, Margot Sunderland, Heather Geddes, Louise Bomber and Bill Rogers. In the area of Repairing and Restoring we are particularly grateful to Belinda Hopkins, Luke Roberts and Saar Yaniv.

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We have also used evidence and guidance from a number of published publications, with particular reference to:

- Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools (DfE, 2018)
- Timpson Exclusion Review (2019)
- Improving Behaviour in Schools (EEF, 2019)