

Riverstone Academy

Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy

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Signed: K Bowe

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Statement of intent

Riverstone Academy is an independent special primary school in which all pupils have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The school recognises that social, emotional and mental health needs can affect a pupil's ability to communicate, regulate emotions, build relationships, attend school, engage in learning and make academic and personal progress.

Riverstone Academy is committed to providing a safe, nurturing, predictable and ambitious learning environment in which pupils are understood as individuals and are supported to develop the skills they need to participate successfully in school life and the wider community. The school takes a whole-school approach to promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing, while also providing targeted and specialist support where this is required.

The school recognises that behaviour can be a form of communication and that distress, dysregulation, withdrawal, avoidance or changes in presentation may indicate an unmet need, a safeguarding concern, a mental health difficulty or a combination of factors. Staff will therefore maintain professional curiosity and will avoid making assumptions about the cause of a pupil's behaviour.

This policy sets out the school's approach to identifying, supporting and reviewing pupils' SEMH needs. It should be read alongside each pupil's EHCP and the school's safeguarding, SEND, behaviour, attendance and curriculum arrangements.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation, statutory guidance and national guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004
- Education Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- Children and Families Act 2014
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- DfE and DHSC "Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years"
- DfE "Keeping children safe in education 2026"

- DfE “Mental health and behaviour in schools”
- DfE “Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges”
- DfE “Behaviour in schools: advice for headteachers and school staff”
- DfE “Working together to improve school attendance”
- HM Government “Working Together to Safeguard Children”

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies and documents:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- SEND Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Attendance Policy
- RHE Policy
- SMSC Policy
- Risk Assessment Policy
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy
- Administering Medication Policy
- Positive Handling / Restrictive Intervention Policy, where applicable
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Online Safety Policy
- Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Individual EHCPs, pupil profiles, risk assessments and support plans

2. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy:

- “SEMH” means social, emotional and mental health needs. SEMH is one of the four broad areas of need identified in the SEND Code of Practice, although individual pupils may have needs across more than one area.
- “Mental health” refers to a person’s emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. Mental health can change over time and exists on a continuum from positive wellbeing to significant mental ill health.
- “Emotional regulation” means the ability to recognise, understand and manage emotional responses in a way that supports safety, wellbeing and participation.
- “Dysregulation” describes a state in which a pupil is temporarily less able to manage emotions, behaviour, sensory input or physiological arousal.
- “Protective factors” are strengths, relationships, routines, skills and environmental conditions that reduce vulnerability and support positive wellbeing.
- “Trauma-informed practice” means practice that recognises the possible impact of adverse experiences and seeks to create safety, predictability, trust and supportive relationships without assuming that every pupil has experienced trauma.

The school will not diagnose mental health conditions. Diagnosis is the responsibility of appropriately qualified health professionals. Staff will identify concerns, provide educational support, record and review evidence, and refer to external services where appropriate.

3. Roles and responsibilities

The directors will be responsible for:

- Ensuring the school has effective arrangements to promote pupils’ welfare, mental health and wellbeing and that these arrangements support compliance with the Independent School Standards.
- Providing strategic oversight of SEMH provision and seeking assurance that pupils’ needs identified in EHCPs are being met in practice.
- Ensuring that leaders have sufficient staffing, training, resources and systems to support pupils safely and effectively.
- Receiving appropriate reports on SEMH provision, attendance, safeguarding, behaviour, restrictive interventions, serious incidents and the impact of targeted support.

- Providing appropriate challenge where provision or outcomes require improvement.

The headteacher will be responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy.
- Ensuring a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing is embedded in leadership, curriculum, behaviour, safeguarding and staff development.
- Ensuring staff understand the relationship between SEND, SEMH, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Ensuring appropriate systems are in place to identify, assess, plan, deliver and review support.
- Ensuring referrals to external agencies are made appropriately and without unnecessary delay.
- Reporting to the directors on the effectiveness of SEMH provision.

The SLT will be responsible for:

- Coordinating the school's approach to SEMH support and ensuring it links to pupils' EHCP provision.
- Supporting staff to understand individual needs, barriers to learning and appropriate strategies.
- Using an assess-plan-do-review approach to targeted support, where appropriate.
- Coordinating information from parents, staff and external professionals.
- Monitoring the impact of interventions and recommending changes when support is not effective.
- Working closely with the DSL where mental health concerns may also indicate a safeguarding risk.

All staff will be responsible for:

- Creating calm, safe, respectful and predictable learning environments.
- Knowing the needs and agreed support strategies of pupils they teach or supervise.
- Using relational, consistent and developmentally appropriate approaches.

- Recording and reporting concerns promptly through the school's agreed systems.
- Recognising that changes in behaviour, attendance, communication, presentation or engagement may indicate unmet need or safeguarding concerns.
- Following pupils' EHCPs, support plans, risk assessments and safeguarding procedures.
- Not attempting to diagnose mental health conditions.

4. Whole-school approach to SEMH

Riverstone Academy will promote positive mental health and wellbeing through a whole-school approach. This will include:

- An ethos and environment that promotes safety, belonging, respect and inclusion through its GROW ethos.
- Visible leadership commitment to emotional wellbeing and positive relationships.
- A curriculum that develops emotional literacy, relationships, resilience, self-advocacy and personal safety.
- Consistent routines and clear expectations that reduce uncertainty and support regulation.
- Opportunities for pupil voice that are adapted to individual communication needs.
- Early identification of emerging needs and targeted support where appropriate.
- Appropriate referral to external services when needs exceed what the school can reasonably provide.
- Close partnership with parents and carers.
- Regular evaluation of the impact of interventions and wider provision.

The school will maintain high expectations for all pupils. SEMH needs will not be used to lower ambition, but appropriate reasonable adjustments and personalised support will be provided to enable pupils to access learning and school life.

5. Identifying and assessing SEMH needs

Because all pupils at Riverstone Academy have EHCPs, staff will use existing assessment information and professional advice as a starting point while remaining alert to changing or emerging needs.

Possible indicators of emerging or increasing SEMH need may include, but are not limited to:

- Significant changes in behaviour, mood, communication or presentation.
- Increased anxiety, distress, withdrawal, tearfulness, irritability or emotional dysregulation.
- A marked reduction in engagement, concentration, motivation or enjoyment of learning.
- Changes in attendance, punctuality or patterns of school avoidance.
- Difficulties with friendships, trust, relationships or social interaction.
- Increased conflict, aggression, risk-taking or self-injurious behaviour.
- Regression in previously established skills or independence.
- Changes in eating, sleeping, personal care or physical presentation reported by the pupil, family or professionals.
- Repeated somatic complaints where no clear physical cause has been identified.
- Expressions of hopelessness, worthlessness, self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

Staff will consider the context in which concerns occur and will not assume that a presentation is caused by SEND alone. Assessment will consider communication needs, sensory processing, cognition, trauma or adverse experiences, family circumstances, physical health, medication, attendance, safeguarding, relationships and environmental factors where relevant.

Where appropriate, information will be gathered from the pupil, parents or carers, teaching staff, the SENCO, DSL and external professionals. The pupil's wishes and feelings will be sought in a way that is accessible to them.

6. Supporting pupils with SEMH needs

Support will be personalised, proportionate and informed by assessment. Depending on need, support may include:

- Consistent key adults and trusted relationships.

- Visual timetables, preparation for change and predictable routines.
- Access to calm or low-arousal spaces where appropriate.
- Planned movement, sensory or regulation breaks.
- Explicit teaching of emotional literacy, regulation, social understanding and problem-solving.
- Adjusted task length, pace, level of language, presentation or method of response.
- Positive reinforcement and recognition of effort, engagement and progress.
- Targeted individual or small-group interventions.
- Pastoral support and structured check-ins.
- Individual behaviour, regulation, safety or risk management plans.
- Support from external professionals, including educational psychology, therapy, health or social care services where appropriate.

Support will be reviewed regularly. Where an intervention is not having the intended impact, the school will consider why, gather further information and adjust the plan rather than simply continuing ineffective provision.

7. Teaching, curriculum and learning environment

Teaching will be ambitious, accessible and responsive to pupils' individual needs. Staff will recognise that successful learning for pupils with SEMH needs depends on both high-quality teaching and an environment that supports regulation and emotional safety.

Staff will, where appropriate:

- Break learning into manageable steps and make expectations explicit.
- Use clear, concise and developmentally appropriate language.
- Provide visual or concrete support where this improves understanding.
- Plan for transitions between tasks, rooms, adults and activities.
- Reduce avoidable sensory or environmental triggers.

- Give pupils appropriate choices and opportunities to develop independence and self-advocacy.
- Use RHE, PSHE and wider curriculum opportunities to teach relationships, emotions, safety, healthy coping strategies and help-seeking.
- Recognise and celebrate academic, social, emotional and personal progress.

8. Behaviour, regulation and relational practice

The school recognises that behaviour may communicate need, distress, uncertainty or difficulty with regulation. This does not mean that unsafe or harmful behaviour will be ignored. Staff will maintain clear boundaries while responding in a calm, consistent and proportionate manner.

The school will:

- Use preventative and de-escalation strategies wherever possible.
- Seek to understand patterns, triggers, functions and environmental factors associated with behaviour.
- Use restorative and relational approaches where appropriate and accessible.
- Make reasonable adjustments for disability and SEND while maintaining appropriate expectations for safety and respect.
- Ensure sanctions, where used, are lawful, reasonable, proportionate and sensitive to individual need.
- Review serious or repeated incidents to identify learning and any required changes to support.
- Ensure any use of reasonable force or restrictive intervention is undertaken only in accordance with law, school policy, staff training and individual risk assessment, and is recorded and reviewed appropriately.

Restrictive intervention will never be used as punishment. Following a significant incident, pupils will be offered an appropriate opportunity to recover, communicate their experience and re-establish safety and relationships.

9. Safeguarding and mental health

Mental health concerns and safeguarding concerns can overlap. KCSIE recognises that mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or exploitation.

If a member of staff has a concern that is also a safeguarding concern, they will follow the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and report it to the DSL or deputy DSL without delay. Staff will not attempt to manage a safeguarding matter solely as a behaviour or mental health issue.

Particular attention will be given to pupils who may have increased vulnerability due to SEND, communication difficulties, social isolation, exploitation, bullying, online harms, family circumstances, domestic abuse, bereavement, trauma, or previous involvement with social care.

Where a pupil communicates distress through behaviour, AAC, symbols, gesture, drawing, changes in presentation or other non-verbal means, staff will treat this information seriously and use professional curiosity to determine whether safeguarding action is required.

10. Attendance and reduced access to education

The school recognises the close relationship between attendance, mental health, safeguarding and educational outcomes. Where a pupil's mental health or SEMH needs affect attendance, the school will work with the pupil, parents or carers, the placing local authority and relevant professionals to understand barriers and put appropriate support in place.

The school will not assume that absence is an inevitable consequence of SEMH need. Persistent or severe absence will be reviewed as both an educational and safeguarding concern, and the school will follow its Attendance Policy and current statutory attendance guidance.

Any temporary adjustment to a pupil's timetable will be exceptional, in the pupil's best interests, appropriately documented, regularly reviewed and designed to support reintegration to suitable full-time education as soon as possible.

11. Equality, reasonable adjustments and EHCPs

The school will comply with the Equality Act 2010 and will make reasonable adjustments to avoid disabled pupils being placed at a substantial disadvantage.

All pupils at Riverstone Academy have an EHCP. Staff will therefore ensure that SEMH provision is aligned with the needs, outcomes and provision specified in each pupil's plan. Individual support

may also be reflected in pupil profiles, behaviour or regulation plans, risk assessments and individual healthcare plans where relevant.

Reasonable adjustments may include changes to communication, sensory environment, routines, transitions, task presentation, staffing, supervision, access arrangements or methods of participation. Adjustments will be reviewed to ensure they are effective and do not unnecessarily restrict pupils' access to education or wider school life.

12. Working with parents and carers

Parents and carers are important partners in understanding pupils' needs. The school will seek to build respectful, constructive and transparent relationships with families and will share relevant information about concerns, support and progress unless doing so would place a pupil or another person at risk of harm.

The school will:

- Listen to parents' and carers' knowledge of their child and consider relevant information about changes at home or in the community.
- Communicate concerns at an appropriate stage and explain proposed support.
- Invite parents and carers to contribute to reviews of individual plans and EHCP outcomes.
- Signpost families to appropriate sources of advice and external support where helpful.
- Keep safeguarding considerations paramount where information sharing with a parent or carer may create risk.

13. Multi-agency working and referrals

Riverstone Academy will work in partnership with relevant education, health and social care professionals to support pupils holistically. Depending on individual need, this may include educational psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, CAMHS, mental health support teams, school nursing, GPs, paediatric services, social care and local authority SEND teams.

The school will seek consent for referrals where appropriate, but safeguarding referrals will not be delayed where consent is not required or where seeking consent could increase risk.

Recommendations from external professionals will be considered alongside the pupil's EHCP, school observations and the views of the pupil and family. The school will ensure relevant

recommendations are communicated to staff who need to know and are translated into practical classroom or pastoral strategies.

14. Risk management, crisis response and self-harm

Where a pupil presents a foreseeable risk of harm to themselves or others, the school will complete or update an appropriate risk assessment and individual support or safety plan. This will identify triggers, early warning signs, preventative strategies, de-escalation approaches, supervision requirements, emergency actions and arrangements for review.

Any disclosure, indication or evidence of self-harm or suicidal thoughts will be taken seriously. Staff will not promise confidentiality and will report the concern immediately to the DSL or deputy DSL. The school will follow safeguarding procedures, involve parents or carers where safe and appropriate, and seek urgent professional or emergency assistance where the level of risk requires it.

If there is an immediate risk to life or serious harm, staff will contact emergency services and follow the school's emergency procedures. A pupil in acute distress will not be left without appropriate supervision.

Following a serious incident or crisis, the school will review the pupil's support, risk assessment and relevant EHCP provision and will consider whether further professional advice or multi-agency support is required.

15. Staff training, supervision and wellbeing

All staff will receive appropriate training and guidance so that they understand the school's SEMH approach and can respond consistently to pupils' needs. Training will be proportionate to staff roles and the needs of the pupil cohort.

Training and professional development may include:

- Understanding SEMH and the relationship between mental health, behaviour, SEND and safeguarding.
- Emotional regulation, relational practice and de-escalation.
- Trauma-informed and attachment-aware practice as part of the staff induction programme.
- Communication and sensory needs.

- Self-harm and suicide awareness appropriate to staff roles.
- Positive handling or restrictive intervention where this forms part of the school's agreed practice.
- Professional boundaries, information sharing and safeguarding reporting.

The school recognises that supporting pupils with complex needs can affect staff wellbeing. Leaders will promote appropriate support, reflective practice and access to supervision or debriefing following significant incidents where necessary.

16. Monitoring, evaluation and review

The effectiveness of SEMH provision will be monitored throughout the year. Evidence may include:

- Progress towards EHCP outcomes and individual targets.
- Academic engagement and progress.
- Attendance and punctuality information.
- Behaviour, incident and safeguarding information.
- Use of restrictive interventions and patterns arising from incident review.
- Pupil voice and parent or carer feedback.
- Learning walks, lesson visits and review of individual support plans.
- Feedback and recommendations from external professionals.
- The impact of targeted interventions and pastoral provision.

The headteacher will report to the directors on the effectiveness of SEMH provision and any significant areas of risk or development. The directors will provide strategic challenge and ensure that identified actions are followed through.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the headteacher and directors.