



### Attachment and Trauma Sensitive Schools Award (ATSSA)

*A framework of support and understanding for schools and other educational establishments within which children and young people who have experienced adversity, can heal, thrive, play, and learn.*

Jennifer Nock Training and Consultancy  
43 Clark St  
Stourbridge  
DY8 3UF

Lauren O'Hagan and Lisa McGroarty,  
Newark Primary School  
Bridgend Avenue  
Port Glasgow  
PA14 5SU

30<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Dear Lauren and Lisa,

Thank you for registering for the Attachment and Trauma Sensitive Schools Award (ATSSA) at Silver Level, and for providing comprehensive evidence in support of your application. Thanks also for inviting me to conduct the verification for the Award today. I should like to extend my thanks to you and your team and other staff for making the virtual visit so purposeful and enjoyable.

I should like to warmly congratulate you and the rest of the staff on achieving the Award, which is an external sign of recognition of your commitment to the steps you have taken at Newark Primary School to develop a culture of compassion and nurture. This, as you well know, plays a pivotal role in getting your children into a state of 'learning readiness'. The Award is valid for two years and will run from November 20223 to November 2025.

All the criteria have been evidenced adequately, and in most cases, more than adequately. The evidence you have submitted comes from a broad variety of sources: case studies; extracts and examples of key documents and policies provided by you; from your website; and from interviews with a range of staff, including you and other members of the team. You provided me with much evidence to further support my own data gathered today, and this has added depth and context to the completed evidence folders.

There are a number of significant points that are worthy of special mention:

- Staff are skilled in monitoring excitement and anxiety, and they have a deep understanding of survival behaviours. They make appropriate interventions to provide co-regulation, using a 'connection before correction' approach. There are a number of spaces and resources, throughout the school, which are used sensitively and effectively to support and maintain regulation. Children are protected from, and given significant support with potentially explosive situations. Staff shared lots of examples about triggers and recognising when a child is becoming dysregulated. Staff gave a wide range of examples of grounding strategies and spoke of the importance of having a deep knowledge of each child as an individual. The school provides a safe space for those particularly vulnerable pupils, and supporting the development of healthier self-esteem and secure relationships with adults is a priority. Children spend regular time one-to-one with highly skilled staff, developing self-regulation and social skills through informal and pleasurable activities. This is a particular strength of the school.
- Your playtime provision is excellent, meeting the needs of all. Playtimes are such a difficult time for so many children to manage, and you have minimised and protected children against potentially explosive situations. You demonstrated awareness that children need choices that can appeal to them on different days and times. They don't want the same thing all the time any more than we adults do. There is a range of opportunities to suit varied and changing needs. Adults on duty during break times are not passive observers of play, but active participants, providing, supporting and modelling play as necessary and providing multiple opportunities for children to gain maximum benefit from their break time.
- A broad range of strategies to support executive function is being used consistently throughout the school. Staff who were interviewed demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the challenges faced by children who have difficulties with organisational and regulation skills, and clearly make links between the developmental vulnerabilities of developmental delay, self-regulation and executive function. All classrooms use a visual timetable and some children have personalised visual timetables and schedules. Staff use minimal speech, consistent terminology and scripts, chunking, sensory snacks, and many other strategies to support executive function. Classrooms are calming and uncluttered. The classroom environment is a focus for Quality Assurance processes, promoting equity and quality for all children, including those from less

advantaged backgrounds, by striving to overcome barriers to learning. Adults at Newark Primary School also understand that it is vitally important to have appropriate expectations of children to ensure success and are skilled at scaffolding both academic performance and behaviour. Support for executive function is a particular strength of the school.

- There is an emphasis on children's past experiences as a tool for understanding the child in the present. Throughout all the interviews, staff demonstrated sensitivity to children's histories and experiences. They were able to share comprehensive details about the background and adverse experiences of pupils in the school, explain how these experiences have impacted development and describe how they are working with these children to support regulation and develop pro-social behaviour.

What really shone through in today's verification is that an attachment- and trauma-sensitive approach is becoming increasingly interwoven into strategy, policy and practice. It is no longer a 'tick box' of things to do, but a rich tapestry which is organic and dynamic, responding to children's needs in each developmental area.

I hope that you will celebrate your achievement with pupils, staff, parents and other stakeholders to celebrate the school's commitment to its children, successfully removing barriers to learning and participation in the life of the school. I am delighted that you intend to register for the Gold Award – Attachment and Trauma Committed. I already look forward to continuing to support you through the next steps!

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jennifer A Nock, CPsychol, AFBPsS, PhD, BSc (Hons)

Bridie White LLB MA