

Trauma and Mental Health Informed Schools and Organisations Visit Report

School/Organisation (name and address):	Ysgol Cynefin, 96 Station Road, Llanishen. Cardiff CF14 5UX						
Primary:	Y	Secondary:		Special:	Y	PRU:	
Headteacher/CEO:	Jamyn Beesley						
Date:	4.2.26						
Consultant:	Lindsay Winterbourne						

Documents received prior to the visit included:

✓	Document
✓	Exclusions data
✓	Newsletters/website links
✓	Ofsted/Estyn report
✓	Behaviour policy
✓	Completed implementation checklist (self-assessment)
✓	School agreed timetable for the day
✓	Evidence and self/assessment implementation checklist for Protect, Relate, Regulate, Reflect (used by the consultants during the visit)

Protect		
	Criteria	Evidence
1	Ensuring children feel psychologically safe in school due to an established culture of warmth and social engagement in staff-pupil interactions.	At the time of the visit, Ysgol Cynefin (formerly The Court School) are at an exciting yet challenging time for everyone as they prepare to move to a brand-new purpose-built school set on two sites in different parts of Cardiff in just two weeks' time! As such, it might be expected to find the school in a bit of disarray with only another four days on this site but I found this to be far from the truth. The staff are fully aware of how the current situation and move will be difficult for some of the pupils as well as for families and everything is being carefully managed to ensure everyone is supported.
2	The environment supports and promotes the psychological safety of children and young people.	It needs to be stated that the current school buildings have, over time, become more and more unfit for purpose and, due primarily to the move, many repairs and elements of upkeep have not been maintained however, the staff have ensured they use what is available to them to the best of their ability within the means available to them.
3	Key interventions implemented to support a culture of warmth and social engagement in staff-pupil interactions.	Each day starts with a short staff briefing in the hall so all staff can be updated with any updates from the previous day, plans for that day, notices and staffing duties for the day.
4	Staff trained in empathic and playful modes of interaction (attending specifically to use of their language and voice).	There is an established and embedded culture of warmth and social engagement which permeates interactions between staff and pupils, contributing to psychological safety for all. This was evident throughout the visit from the moment children arrive at school to when they leave and beyond. All children are met and warmly greeted from their taxi in the mornings by a member of staff and taken into class; each adult using smiles, supportive chatter and appropriate positive touch. Individual's needs are known, understood and catered for – there are strategies in place to support those children who might need a slightly different start; for example, using a different entrance or starting the day in an alternative safe space with an EAA. Staff know the pupils really well and adapt appropriately in the moment to ensure needs can be met. Children are happy to come to school and engage with the adults around them, interactions are playful and reciprocated by many of the children.
5	Staff using empathic and playful modes of interaction (attending specifically to the use of their language and voice) PACEFUL approaches are used effectively.	
6	Vulnerable children knowing when and where to find at least one specific and emotionally available adult.	
7	Vulnerable children having daily, easy access to at least one specific and emotionally available adult.	

8	The school community actively promotes equality and acceptance. It addresses discrimination in terms of race, culture, religion, sexuality and all forms of difference with rigour and compassion	The environment is used to support psychological safety – for example, small storage rooms and spaces have been repurposed to provide a range of safe spaces to support individual's needs – be that a space to cwtch down with cushions & blankets, a breakout space or a quiet area away from the noise and busyness of a classroom. Displays around the buildings are designed to support psychological safety with a range of well-being messages, prompts, pictures & language that can be used to help children identify what their needs might be in the moment.
9	Promote and value the development of the whole child to ensure that children understand that their self-worth and the self-worth of others cannot be measured simply by tests/exams. 'Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all' Aristotle	Once in class children follow familiar daily routines which are important in supporting their psychological safety and general well-being. The atmosphere in all the classes was one of calm productivity with children engaged and being supported by trusted adults. All staff observed are aware of how to use their language and voice appropriately. The high adult to child ratios and well-established positive relationships that exist between staff and the children ensure every child is supported and has access to emotionally available adults.
10	Continually provide experiences for the children that promote and foster a child's love of learning, protect their innate joie de vivre and desire to explore the world around them and engender a sense of purpose in life	The staff are skilled at recognising when a child may need extra support, this in part is also because they know the children well and understand particular triggers or times when a child might be experiencing difficulties out of school. Positive relationships are a particular strength and the senior leadership team know how important it is to have adults in school that have the appropriate skills to respond to children calmly and with compassion. The headteacher understands how important it is to recruit staff who will be a good fit, bring new skills and will complement the special and diverse team.
11	School staff adjusting expectations and practices around vulnerable children to correspond with those children's developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress and loss	All staff have had a range or whole school TIS training, with the aim of incorporating and embedding it with consistency in all interactions and interventions across the school. Staff have recently had some TIS INSET training on play and as a result, sessions of play are now built into the weekly timetable with every class planning 2 sessions a week focussing on play. During the visit I observed adults sharing in a wide range of play activities with the children, this included chess, board games, team games, ball games outside and sand play. Staff are also allocated 'play' roles at break times – adults are part of the children's playtime, interacting, joining in, modelling, laughing and sharing in the joy of play. It was a pleasure to see this in action at morning break with staff playing tag, football and role-play amongst other things thereby enriching the children's break-time and giving them positive play experience with shared joy.
12	The emotional wellbeing of staff is a high priority that is reflected in policy and practice across the school. The school demonstrates proactive and high-quality interventions in discharging its duty of care	The school's experienced psychotherapist works in a trauma informed way with staff, families and children with sessions developed to suit individual's needs – these may be a one-off
13	Ensuring that school staff feel valued and highly respected by Senior Leads, with frequent feedback from Senior Leads on what they are doing well with specific reference to how they are enhancing the children's wellbeing	

		<p>session as needed or planned work possibly after a member of a child's class team has become aware of a need. During the visit I was also able to observe part of a session with a therapy dog – a regular and popular visitor to school!</p> <p>Staff have appropriate and realistic expectations and practices around the children that correspond with their developmental capabilities and experiences. The school ensures all pupils have access to a range of experiences and opportunities that will help foster a love of learning and finding out and, importantly, ensure that they are empowered and supported to be the very best they can be.</p> <p>The senior leadership team place significant importance on the well-being of their staff recognising the particular difficulties and stresses that can come about from working in such an environment. Adults have access to an adult only staffroom space; leaders have an open-door policy and are visible in and around school throughout the day; they provide regular and positive feedback to staff which can take a range of forms. The positive and supportive working relationships between the staff were clearly evident during the visit.</p>
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Relate		
	Criteria	Evidence
14	A Relationship Policy or protocol (for staff) alongside Behaviour Policy (for pupils) is in place	The school has a 'Trauma Informed Approaches and Relationships Policy' in place with the aim of supporting both staff and pupils - this is reviewed bi-annually and appears to be well-embedded across the school.
15	Staff trained in interventions that help them get to know children better on an individual basis	One of the school's strengths is its commitment to ensuring staff have ongoing TIS training and the TIS practitioners deliver further training and offer support to staff. The school continue to offer staff the diploma and other whole school trainings.
16	Staff using interventions that help them get to know children better on an individual basis	Staff are skilled at getting to know the pupils quickly and have strategies in place to support this process; this is particularly pertinent as pupils can join the school at different points in their school career as well as at different points in the school year.
17	A whole-school approach to supporting vulnerable children to see themselves, their relationships and the world more positively	An example of commitment to this notion is one of the school's new Admin Support Assistants who has taken the time to read all the pupil's files so she can get to know them and their stories, thereby helping her to have a deeper understanding of the children and what they have or might be experiencing.
18	Helping vulnerable children shift from 'blocked trust' to trust, and from self-help to help-seeking	The use of a range of arts-based activities such as sand tray, have proved to be very effective with the children. The school's

19	Provision of repeated positive experiences for children with key emotionally available adults	<p>psychotherapists' room, for example, has a variety of accessible materials for interventions with evidence of art displayed on the walls! Staff also support children at non-teaching times such as during breaktimes and lunch times, offering a range of activities and clubs like forest school and quiet spaces. During the visit it was evident that relationships between children and adults are strong and purposeful with adults taking an interest in every child - supporting them to see themselves, their relationships and the world in a positive light. I observed meaningful interactions that support positive experiences and improved self-esteem and well-being – during forest school it was clear the children were trusted to use the fire pit and were preparing, cooking and eating food in a way that demonstrated they had learned how to be safe and to follow rules to ensure everyone was safe and could enjoy the activity. At the end of the session the children took turns to reflect on what had been their favourite forest school memories - this was their last session before moving. A joyous experience to observe and be a small part of.</p> <p>As part of the transition to the new sites, staff have considered the needs of each child and ensured those who are most anxious have the opportunity to visit the site with a trusted adult – to look around and take time to talk about worries and anxieties. This has also been offered to some parents who are also concerned and anxious about the move – possibly because previous moves and experiences have not been positive, the staff are doing their utmost to ensure the move is seen as a positive one.</p> <p>The senior leadership team are visible and accessible to both children and staff during the school day and they work hard to ensure all staff have repeated positive relational experiences. There are clear routines and structures in place and communication is clear; for example, there is a short morning briefing for all staff each day before the children arrive - this happens in a relaxed and supportive way where notices are shared and updates given on individuals as needed. The staff team is supportive of one another and look out for each other and those spoken to during the visit spoke of positive relational experiences.</p>
20	Senior Leads ensuring staff have daily repeated positive relational experiences	

Regulate

	Criteria	Evidence
21	A variety of evidence-based interventions designed to bring down stress levels in vulnerable children from toxic to tolerable.	Throughout the school, staff employ a range of appropriate and evidence-based interventions to bring down stress levels. These include using WINE and other TIS strategies, provision of safe spaces including the grounds, charts with pictures that children

22	Evidence-based interventions that may go some way to repair brain damage caused by painful life experience where there was no social buffering.	can point to should they find it hard to express themselves in the moment, emotionally available adults, use of key adults and the use of change of face.
23	Whole-school training has been undertaken in the evidence-based research on emotional regulation.	One child, observed during the visit, who is currently experiencing extremely difficult home circumstances with multiple placement breakdowns, was having a difficult time during morning break - he was being supported by emotionally available adults who were helping to regulate him; they were calm, knowledgeable, caring and clearly had the skills to support this pupil in an effective and non-shaming way.
24	School Staff apply knowledge gained in training to ensure that there is a whole school approach to regulation using PACE (play, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) PRRR, Key Relational Skills and cues of safety including when working with distressed/ stressed parents, staff and other adults so the whole community feels calmed, heard, connected with and valued.	<p>The value and understanding of using animals to support regulation was observed during the visit with the therapy dog doing his job with a couple of boys. His time in school is utilised to good effect and it was clear how he is adored and used to support the boys – he also clearly appreciated the loving attention he was receiving!</p> <p>Staff are aware of what support mechanisms work for the children in their care and these include using sand play, Lego, the use of sensory or quiet spaces, the arts, music, as well as the use of outdoor spaces. Staff are supportive of each other and the use of walkie talkies across the site means specific adults can be called quickly which can mean tricky situations don't escalate.</p>
25	Senior Leaders to be aware of high stress states in staff	
26	Senior Leaders to provide stressed staff with sufficient emotional regulation e.g. 'Reflect and Restore' staff-only spaces and evidence-based stress reducing interventions, e.g. clinical supervision, timetabled time in a protected calm environment e.g. sensory zone, or for mindfulness	The school work hard to be accessible and available to all parents and carers with regular contact and newsletters helping with this – this is especially important as there is no opportunity for 'school gate chats' as the vast majority of children travel to and from school on taxis. The school's psychotherapist works closely with families and carers and she is available to support individuals and groups. During the visit I was able to meet and speak with the parent governor I met on my previous visit and she was able to share how she believes the school have further embedded trauma

	<p>informed principles to good effect. The governors are very supportive and have been involved in TIS training and receive regular feedback from the headteacher via his reports to governors. She also spoke of how as a family they have felt supported and her son's transition to secondary school was managed effectively. The relationships built with parents and carers helps them feel heard, supported and valued.</p> <p>The high adult to child ratios allows for a good level of mutual support. And the use of 'change of face' is recognised and used across the school as a supportive mechanism with staff expressing that this is important and works well.</p> <p>The senior leadership team operate an open-door policy for staff and recognise that they may need space and time for reflection and restoration. The new site has been designed to provide a range of adult only spaces for staff – these include a central courtyard area, a garden space with table and benches, workspaces, and staff room.</p>
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Reflect

	Criteria	Evidence
27	All staff trained in the art of active listening and have 'the words to say it' for empathic response to pupils, staff and parents	Staff were observed responding to pupils positively and taking time to listen to them. One delightful observation took place at morning break when a TA was walking and talking with a pupil; they were deep in conversation, listening to one another and making positive eye contact – totally connected! The school have received a range of whole staff Trauma Informed Schools training including some with a focus on developing listening skills, PACE and play.
28	Key staff trained in reflective conversations to enable vulnerable children to edit the inaccurate narratives they have told themselves and move towards trauma recovery	Conversations with staff illustrated how they use reflective conversations to support and enable vulnerable children to edit inaccurate narratives. Children spoken to during the visit were happy and able to tell me how the adults help them, how accessible they are and that they can speak to any adult if they need or want to. They were open, spoke with maturity and honesty and felt supported.
29	No child left without help to process, talk through and make sense of major painful life events when they want to, with someone trained to provide empathic response.	Staff have received training in how to support children using a range of creative medium to symbolise their painful life experiences and understand the need to provide a range of supportive means including art and music, sand-play, Big Empathy Drawings and emotion cards. The TIS practitioners are an asset to the school and support other staff in their day-to-day practice – the school continue to offer opportunities for staff to
30	Children provided with the means (e.g. through poetry/music/art/sandplay/drama) to symbolise painful life experiences through images not just words	

<p>31</p>	<p>Through the teaching of PSHE (Personal, social, and health education) the wider curriculum and other opportunities children and young people are well informed by the latest research on the neuroscience and psychology of emotion and mental health and ill health (causes as well as symptoms)</p>	<p>undertake diploma training thereby ensuring there is depth, sustainability and new topics introduced into the training can be disseminated amongst the team.</p> <p>PHSE is covered daily; be that discreetly, incidentally, as well as when needed. The school's PHSE curriculum is designed to suit the particular needs and understanding of the pupils, delivered at appropriate levels which provide supportive development opportunities as well as allowing for progress. PHSE is taught and experienced both inside the classroom and outside, it is woven into all aspects of school life and is the responsibility of every adult. Extra-curricular activities and weekly school outings go some way to supporting the delivery of PHSE and provide a wide range of opportunities and experiences that they might otherwise not have.</p>
<p>32</p>	<p>Through the teaching of PSHE (Personal, social, and health education) the wider curriculum and other opportunities children and young people are well informed by the latest research on the neuroscience and psychology of relationships that harm and relationships that heal and on how to use life well</p>	<p>Staff work hard to capture and exploit opportunities to promote well-being and self-esteem. Children are supported to be the best they can be and are well-prepared for their move to secondary school.</p> <p>Senior leaders are supportive and provide staff with opportunities to talk in confidence about their feelings – recognising and understanding the stresses working in such an environment can bring about. The head teacher offers an open-door policy for staff and the TIS practitioners receive supervision from the school's psychotherapist and she also offers drop-in sessions to staff should they want to see her. The new site has a range of spaces for staff to use and will provide private spaces including showers, office and workspaces that are adult only areas.</p>
<p>33</p>	<p>Senior Leaders to provide staff with a forum to talk in confidence about their feelings and particular stress triggers from their work</p>	<p>Senior leaders are supportive and provide staff with opportunities to talk in confidence about their feelings – recognising and understanding the stresses working in such an environment can bring about. The head teacher offers an open-door policy for staff and the TIS practitioners receive supervision from the school's psychotherapist and she also offers drop-in sessions to staff should they want to see her. The new site has a range of spaces for staff to use and will provide private spaces including showers, office and workspaces that are adult only areas.</p>

The following strengths were evident:

The staff team are experienced, knowledgeable, caring and committed to doing their very best for the children and each other. The senior-leadership team value the staff team; paying attention to their well-being. The school's TIS practitioners are excellent role models; supporting other staff with their practice – they also have regular quality supervision. The adults in school have a sound knowledge of pupils' individuality, personal stories and what makes them tick. The caring nature of every member of the staff team is an obvious asset to the enhancement of relationships throughout the school and this goes a long way to enriching the lives and well-being of the children in their care.

Areas to consider developing:

Protect	
Relate	
Regulate	
Reflect	

Evidence of Impact (e.g. attendance/exclusions/learner engagement/learner outcomes/ staff absence/retention etc)

The school has invested heavily in Trauma Informed Schools training and continues to do so, since practice has become widespread and embedded throughout the school, the rate of fixed term exclusions has continuously and significantly gone down year on year.

Best practise/case study requests: (if applicable)

I was fortunate and privileged to be taken and shown around one of the new school sites at Fairwater, Cardiff. During the previous award visit, the plans for the new school were shared with me so, to see this project come together and spend time in the new building just a couple of weeks away from when the pupils and staff will be moving in was an absolute delight. It was evident that the headteacher has taken his extensive and expert knowledge and understanding of supporting young children in this sector along with his trauma informed principles and practice to ensure the new school environment was designed to maximise every opportunity to create a potentially pioneering example in this field. The needs of both staff and children have clearly been placed at the fore and include safety, the inclusion of a wide range of internal and external spaces, natural materials, natural light, access to a range of outdoor spaces, courtyards, sensory and breakout spaces, community and accessibility. A truly inspirational project - I look forward to visiting the school again once pupils and staff are in and settled.

A potential case-study and opportunity to inspire others working in this sector in how to incorporate TI principles in to a school.

Overall Assessment:

Ysgol Cynefin, a special primary school for pupils with additional learning needs arising from behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), a statement of Special Educational Needs and many with other additional learning needs, provides a safe, caring and nurturing environment in which all children are supported to feel happy, safe and experience success. The pupils are happy because they are supported by a team of enthusiastic knowledgeable and dedicated staff team during their time in school. Positive relationships exist between the adults and children, that are consistent and embody PACE. The school is led by a passionate, caring and knowledgeable headteacher who firmly believes in a trauma informed approach – he is supported by experienced and effective senior leaders and a supportive willing staff team. The school’s TIS practitioners support other staff to ensure the PRRRs and PACE is embedded to support all learners where their well-being is paramount. The school uses a wide-range of evidence-based interventions and learning experiences to ensure pupils have access to appropriate and supportive mechanisms that reflect the PRRRs, helping them to flourish as individuals.

The children are a delight and a credit to themselves. One of the highlights of the visit was talking to a group of pupils from the school council – their enthusiasm and confidence was wonderful to see; they were positive about their school and the adults that help them. After being asked, what is the best thing about your school, one boy told me that if you are having a difficult time or not feeling great, your friends and the staff help you. Another precious moment witnessed during the visit was when one of the newer younger children looked up into the eyes of one of his TAs and said, ‘I love you!’ Absolute magic!

✓	Trauma Informed School Award:
✓	Recommended
	Deferred pending further evidence

✓	Copies sent to:
✓	Headteacher
✓	Rachel Toller (TISCUK)
✓	Suzie Franklin (TISCUK)

Reported completed by:	Lindsay Winterbourne
Date:	4.2.26