

Friday 19 January 2024

Executive Headteacher Update 2

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you are keeping warm and well during this cold spell. Apologies for the long letter!

In today's update I want to provide you with important information in relation to sickness levels, attendance, pastoral and other initiatives we are running at the moment.

Since the new year started, we have been plagued by staff illness. Some of our teachers have succumbed to the latest COVID variant – including myself this week! This has a debilitating impact on teachers personally – with symptoms that mirror diarrhoea and vomiting as well as the cold/flu issues we expect seasonally. A few staff members are also suffering with childcare related illness too.

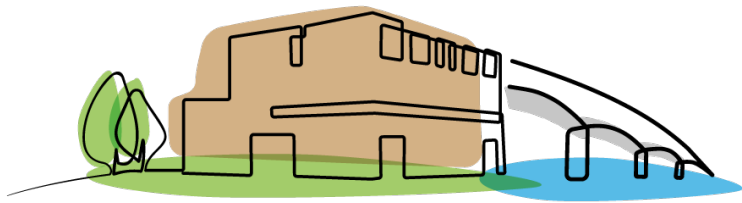
Where we can, we have attempted to support the class cover in-house. But this has meant some classes have disproportionately had less 'teacher time' than they should. To remedy this – we have been working to place teachers across our group of schools as short-term cover at Valentine. From Monday, we have a few teachers joining us in the short-term until teachers such as Mr Purchase, Mr Bolt and Ms Snelling are better and can return. Recently, the leadership team have been taking more classes to support the drive to improve standards. I taught Mr Purchase's classes on Monday in Y5 and thoroughly enjoyed it.

Our drive for on-going recruitment continues. We have an advertisement out currently for Early Career Teachers and have been taking some on tours of Valentine, with a view to new staff starting with us in the Summer Term.

Pupil Absence

Pupil absence has dipped, which is always anticipated during cold spells and adverse weather. The level of persistent absenteeism (which means the number of children regularly not attending school) is alarming. Currently 120 pupils have sporadic absence – which means a few days off over the week or month. 120 out of 537 on roll means our percentage is currently at 22%.

Our figures, although comparatively similar to national, are higher than we would like. It is so important that we are able to see your child(ren) daily. If you are struggling with getting your child into school – either because of weather, anxiety or issues related to school – please let us know and let the school help. If you email info@valentineprimary.co.uk and put into the subject: 'Absence Help', Ms Smith (our Attendance Officer) will be in contact with measures to support.



VALENTINE

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Staff are currently receiving training on ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) and attachment. This is supplied through Southampton City Council and the Educational Psychology team.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are “highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. They can be a single event, or prolonged threats to, and breaches of, the young person’s safety, security, trust or bodily integrity.” (Young Minds, 2018).

The types of adverse childhood experience (ACE) include:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Living with someone who abused drugs
- Living with someone who abused alcohol
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Living with someone who has gone to prison
- Living with someone with serious mental illness
- Losing a parent through divorce, death or abandonment

It is estimated that nearly 47% of the population have experienced at least one ACE, with a further 9% of the population having experienced at least 4 ACEs.

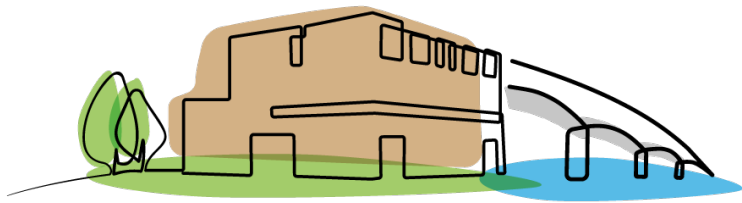
Why are ACEs important to your child’s schooling at Valentine?

We know that your child’s life outside of school shapes how they behave, think and feel inside of school. The events of the previous evening can have a lasting impact on their ability to think, understand and learn. An ACE could prevent your son or daughter from engaging in their learning – which could impact their longer-term progress.

ACEs contribute to children’s inability to manage their emotions; they can lead to mental health deterioration and developmental regression. Worryingly, if they are not identified they can lead to a risk of health problems in adulthood – such as heart disease and cancer.

We want to work with parents and carers to identify and support children who we think may have experienced (ACES) Adverse Childhood Experiences and to consider interventions to help improve life-chances. Therapeutic support includes working with our Educational Psychologist, referrals to CAMHS and counselling/talking therapies.

Parents who feel this is something they want to discuss with school should contact: info@valentineprimary.co.uk . **If you label the email as ACEs** – it will go to the right leader.



VALENTINE

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mental Health and Wellbeing

As stated in my last letter, we are focusing on every child's wellbeing throughout this term. Over the next few weeks, we are working with children on identifying positive mental health and supporting the drive for children to self-manage their emotions. Since COVID, it is a national issue – pupils feel and describe being unhappy. Lower mood and self-esteem can lead to pupils losing interest in their learning and struggling to cope with the demands of a heavy curriculum.

Valentine Initiatives for wellbeing and mental health:

CALM app for schools



We have invested in the CALM app, which provides: meditation, calm minutes, music, stories, mindfulness activities and 5 minute movement breaks.

Staff will also have a paid subscription to the CALM app for them, and their wider families.

A text-line for alerting staff to your child's wellbeing on entry to school.



As stated earlier in the letter – the events of the previous evening at home, have a bearing on your child's day with us at Valentine. From next week, parents can send a text **'Handle with Care + Name'** to **07396824375**. This will be picked up by our pastoral team who will support them as they enter school.

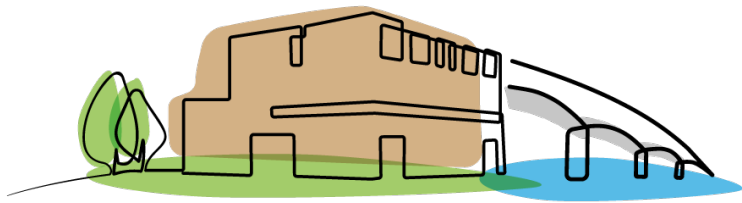
There is no need to add further details to the text message. It simply enables us to be more mindful and to endeavour to meet their needs more quickly before it could become an issue in class for your child. ****Note this is not a telephone number that somebody will answer – text only**

Precious Time – Parent and Child



We know that demands on time are huge – busy family life or life in a smaller household (one parent families) mean that you are constantly on the go. Some parents tell us that the ability to spend quality time with your child is limited – especially where there may be younger siblings or conflict at home that you are trying to manage. Time is precious, and children who are currently struggling behaviourally or with managing emotion need that reassurance and connection to experience stability, safety and calm.

We want to provide some of our children with more ME AND YOU time. A 45 minute weekly session where you can come to Valentine, use a space in school and enjoy a boardgame, read a book or play with your child. We will provide the time and space. And – where possible – will offer a stay-and-play session if you have a younger child who might need a bit of babysitting whilst you're away.



Update on SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

Throughout the week, Mr Benfield, his Assistant SENCOs (Ms Skinner and Ms Harris) as well as our new Deputy Mrs Ashbolt-Smith, have visited classes to check on the in-class provision of children on the special needs register. This includes providing feedback to the class teacher, about your child, and suggesting amendments to the provision in order to better meet their needs.

A SEND surgery for staff to bring worries or concerns has started. Which enables teachers to bring books or observations of children they know may be struggling and to troubleshoot to find ways to improve the provision.

Teachers of all classes are currently updating the 'Graduated Response' – which looks at the types of provision children need and how this helps us to understand the level of need across the school.

Ms Downes (Behaviour Systems Lead) is also looking at a similar response for mapping behavioural need. Specifically, she is focused on the needs of those children who are brilliant every single day – and how we can notice and reward these children better.

Behaviour rewards include:

- Certificates (Silver, Gold and Platinum) for those leading the way with good behaviour
- Top Table celebrations with a senior leader. Cake, hot chocolate or milkshake.
- Golden book certificates given by peers or Praise Postcards.

On Wednesday we held our first New Forest Parenting Program session – which is led by SIP (Southampton Inclusion Partnership) and paid for by the NHS. This program is run to support parents of those with additional needs and looks at the psychological, parenting and behavioural training needs. We hope to offer this to more parents in the coming months.

Our decorators have moved to corridors in the older building. The school continues to look better with a fresh and modern feel. Our new Main Reception will open on 1st February. Located at the centre of the site – it will mean that safeguarding for children and staff is more robustly managed and visitors can only have access to either KS1 or KS2 when taken to those aspects of the building. In addition, it will house our admin teams, finance and a parent meeting room from the main reception. I am excited for you all to see it.

Yours sincerely,

DJ Constable-Phelps .

Daniel Constable-Phelps
Executive Headteacher