

Enhancing the emotional security of pupils in the classroom: a case study of a therapeutic residential special school

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In this mixed methods case study, ten primary aged children attending a residential special school were monitored over a two year period to determine the possibility of improving their levels of emotional security in the classroom. All ten children had experienced very high levels of adverse childhood experiences prior to their referral to the school. For the purposes of the project, 'emotional security' was defined in terms of a child's observed confidence in the classroom, trust in adults, self-esteem, behavioural regulation and engagement with learning.

The school recognised the power of the learning curriculum to improve the emotional security of each child and to raise the self-esteem of learners. Over the course of the project, staff training was undertaken in the three new curriculum developments (phonics, maths, writing) and the impact of these changes on the observed emotional security of the children was assessed over time using a range of quantitative measures and qualitative insights. Qualitative data were also collected from teaching staff who reflected on the curriculum changes and the impact on the emotional security of the children.

Findings suggested that the majority of child participants maintained or improved emotional security in the classroom after adaptations had been made to the school curriculum and curriculum delivery.

Key recommendations from the research include the acknowledgement that, for children who are trauma experienced, their progress may not be linear but rather reflecting the tide's ebb and flow. For staff working in this area, you are part of a developing story and your positive input will not be forgotten by the child or their family, despite the recurring crises. To maintain staff wellbeing in school, staff support and professional supervision were found to be vital components of support while the curriculum was found to underpin the quality pupil engagement.

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