

'They will soar on wings like eagles ...'
Isaiah 40:31

collaborate | enrich | trust | innovate | aspire | nurture

Multi Academy Trust Policy

Common Trust Policy, Use as Published

Relational Policy

Date of Review: December 2025

Date of next Review: December 2026

Version	Date	Author	Change Description
1	15.05.2024	Chris Clarke	Initial release
2	29.12.2025	Michelle McCaffrey	Reviewed

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Contents

Introduction	3
Values and beliefs	3
Theory and research	3
Applying this policy	4
Assessing and planning	4
Identifying the key adult(s) and team around the child(ren)	5
Individual children.....	5
Groups of children	5
Supporting the key adult(s).....	6
The Relational Approach.....	6
Developing relationships	6
Responding and calming.....	6
Repairing and restoring.....	7
Transitioning back to the school's Behaviour Policy.....	7
Training and support from Aquila	7
Supervision.....	7
Circle of Adults	8
Judicium DSL supervision	8
Appendices.....	9
Appendix 1 – Information gathering.....	9
Appendix 2 – Identifying and supporting key adult(s)	13
Appendix 3 – Supporting and Developing Relationships	14
Appendix 4a – Responsive Co-regulation Plan	19
Appendix 4b – A Guide to Support Co-regulation (source Devon County Council).....	21
Appendix 5 – Relational practices review meetings	22
Appendix 6 – Evidence accessed to support the development of the Relational Policy	23
Appendix 7 – Flow chart for implementing the Relational Policy	25

Introduction

Aquila is committed to helping schools create an environment where excellent behaviour is at the heart of learning, and while the school's behaviour policy helps many children to develop their learning behaviours, there are others who may find this harder. Children who have experienced trauma, adverse childhood experiences, or those with an identified or unidentified special educational need may have additional difficulties that mean the school's current behaviour policy is not having the desired impact on successful behaviours in the classroom and school. These children may benefit from an approach where adults support co-regulation of emotions through relational practices. Relational approaches are those where positive relationships act as a way to support a child's behaviour, with behaviour seen as a form of communication.

When using relational practices there needs to be a whole-school approach to their ethos and intended purpose. Relational practices should not be seen as a way to reward poor behaviour, instead it should be seen as a way to help children develop their self-regulation skills. As their behaviour improves, so does their access to the school's community, curriculum, social opportunities and to the school's Behaviour Policy.

This policy focuses on helping schools to draw on evidence-informed practices to support children with developing their self-regulation skills through co-regulation, where supportive and empathetic adults understand the child's development and their behaviours. Our aim is to remove the ideas of shame for poor behaviours.

This policy recognises that each school is unique, made up of a distinct community and who have different approaches to supporting and managing behaviours. To reflect these differences, this policy does not offer specific and detailed guidance and instead provides schools with a framework in how relational practices can be applied in their unique context within a research-informed framework.

Values and beliefs

The Aquila vision is 'Through inclusive and innovative practice we nurture the Aquila family to provide exceptional learning experiences, enriching the lives of all in our unique communities'.

All Aquila schools are places where children feel safe to learn, to know that they have the support to help them overcome any challenges, and where ever-lasting friendships are formed creating a basis for their development into adulthood.

This policy is within Aquila's values of Nurture, Aspire, Trust, Enrich, Collaborate.

Theory and research

There is strong evidence that children with SEN, those who have experienced trauma and adverse childhood events are more likely to find school more challenging than their peers, leading to higher levels of fixed-term or permanent exclusions. For example, the most recent data from the Timpson Review of School Exclusion in 2019 found that children with SEN accounted for 46.7% of permanent, and 44.9% of fixed term exclusions. This is also true for children from some ethnic groups, looked after children, and those who have left care, with those who have free school meals four times more likely to experience exclusions of some sort.

The impact of exclusion can be profound for the individual and society in general (Daniels & Cole, 2010; Gross, 2006). Of those who have experienced school exclusion, high levels of psychological distress have also been identified (Ford et al., 2007). School exclusion can act as a specific form of

rejection, and has been associated with teenage pregnancy, unemployment, criminal convictions and continued negative experiences in later life (Gordon, 2001).

Relational approaches, such as those that are evidenced in attachment and trauma, can be key in preventing further escalation of behaviours (Bergin, 2009; Riley, 2010 & Cozolino, 2013). Positive pupil-teacher/adult relationships can foster a positive emotional climate and secure attachments to teachers and parents and lead to higher academic attainment and cognitive abilities, and develop protective factors, through a sense of belonging and connection, for future success (Munn & Lloyd, 2005; Gottman, et al., 2007).

Appendix 6 provides an overview of the evidence that has been considered in developing this policy.

Applying this policy

Using relational approaches with children should not be a reactive approach to one-off behaviours, instead they should be used within the school's graduated response using the assess, plan, do, review as detailed in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice 2014. Relational approaches are best applied when there is a need for consistency in adults, routines and expectations to support children's feelings, emotions and wellbeing.

This policy is aimed at children who:

- Are at risk of or have experienced repeated fixed-term or permanent exclusions.
- Children who have not experienced a stable family to support emotional development, such as post-adoptive children, children in care, or children whose parents are experiencing mental health difficulties.
- Children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences.
- Where the current Behaviour Policy is not having an impact on a child's or a group of children's ability to regulate effectively.

Where possible this policy needs to be applied within a preventative framework so that behaviours are supported before they escalate further.

Behaviour is a core responsibility for the Headteacher, and this role cannot be delegated. It is the Headteacher, or their equivalent, who is responsible for deciding when the Relational Policy needs to be applied as they retain a core responsibility for its outcomes. While the Headteacher does not have to be a part of the team around the child they must have an overview of its actions and outcomes.

There is no time limit for how long children's behaviour will be supported through the Relational Policy, however the focus should always be on the child coming under the school's Behaviour Policy as quickly as possible.

Appendix 7 (Flow Chart for Implementing the Relational Policy) provides an overview of the different stages of using this policy in schools.

Assessing and planning

Relational approaches need to be based on evidence and child-centred approaches, involving a process of information gathering of the young person's developmental history, previous experiences and learning. While the school will have the majority of this information, every opportunity needs to be explored for gathering a more in-depth understanding of the child, with an emphasis on child-centred approaches. Appendix 1 (Information Gathering) provides a framework for information gathering that schools should consider before proceeding with the Relational Policy.

Identifying the key adult(s) and team around the child(ren)

The key adult is the person who will be delivering consistency, routines and predictability to the child. They will be responsible for forming the relationship with the child and supporting co-regulation of their emotions. This person will not necessarily be a one-to-one support staff and could be the class teacher or class teaching assistant depending on the resources available to the school and the level of support that is required. This role can be split between different adults so long as it is something the child can cope with and where there is a good relationship to support joint problem solving and consistency. The key adult is not someone who has to be with the child at all times of the school day. The child's class teacher will retain full responsibility for the child's learning while on the Relational Policy.

No adult should be left alone to support a child's behaviours; not only will this contribute to the child's isolation from the school's community but also that of the supporting adults. When the Relational Policy is applied the school will consider who will form the team around the child, consisting of members who can provide strategic oversight as well as offering general advice and guidance, such as referrals to other professionals, as and when needed, as well as a supportive environment to the key adult(s). Team around the child meetings are not a replacement for informal and incidental discussions about a child, or for debriefs when behaviours have been particularly challenging.

Decisions about key adult(s) should not be based on those who are available, instead focussing on those who have the capacity, ability, training and experience to form and develop the necessary relationships. The school need to consider the type of relationship the child needs and who best can deliver on this. The adult(s) identified may have already developed a relationship with the child, but this may not always be the case. When considering the adult(s) the school should seek the child's views. This should not be a case of just asking them, instead focusing on ways that the young person can communicate their thoughts to the school in a friendly way. The school's ELSA has had training in gaining children's views.

At the very least the team around the child(ren) will consist of:

- A member of the senior leadership team to offer support about decisions that may impact on the whole school, or to answer general queries.
- The SENCO who can offer specialist advice and if required referrals to other professionals.
- The class teacher who will have oversight of ensuring inclusion in class routines and expectations and who can support social inclusion with the class.
- Any other adults the school feels are necessary such as well-being staff, ELSAs, etc.
- The parents, carers, guardians or social worker

The team around child(ren) will meet at least termly but could be weekly depending on the severity of the behaviours and the support that needs to be put in place for the child(ren) and adults.

Individual children

Appendix 2 (Identifying the Supporting Key Adult(s)) provides a framework that school will use to consider the adult and the level of support required.

Groups of children

As well as with individual children, the Relational Policy can be used with groups of children, such as those that might be accessing a nurture provision, or who are accessing a specific group to support social and emotional skills. When deciding on whether to implement a relational policy with a group, key questions will have to be considered:

- Do the adults working with the group have the training and skills to be able to apply the approach with the group?
- What changes need to happen with the team around the child so that the children and adults are all supported?
- How will the Relational Policy be applied consistently when the children are in their normal classrooms?
- How will transitions be managed so that the children are successfully accessing their normal classroom?
- How will the adults in the children's normal classroom be updated with current practices and approaches to maintain a level of consistency?
- How will the children be supported to maintain previous relationships with their peers or develop new ones?

Supporting the key adult(s)

The demands of supporting a child with SEMH needs has the potential to overwhelm any adult and impact on their wellbeing, potentially leading to their isolation from the school's community. It is important that any adult continues to feel a part of the school and its ethos, vision and culture. The school will plan how the adult will be supported and could include regular supervision sessions (by the Trust's Educational Psychologist or by appropriate member of staff in their school or an external professional), Circle of Adults or regular sessions with members of the senior leadership team. Designated Safeguarding Leads can access regular supervision through the Trust's package with Judicium. The school will also regularly monitor the adult(s)'s wellbeing and their involvement with the whole school community. As well as the child, the adult must always feel there is a team around them who they can access for support. Appendix 2 (Identifying and Supporting Key Adults) provides key questions the team around the child should consider for supporting the key adult(s).

The Relational Approach

When the Relational Policy is applied to a child or group of children, we will consider three different stages to developing, responding and repairing relationships. This will involve:

Developing relationships

Most children will develop meaningful relationships in school with other children and adults. For some, and in particular those who fall within this policy, these relationships need to be clearly seen and observed in school, made explicit and meaningful, especially to those who have insecure attachments or who have low wellbeing and will require an adult or group of adults around them. It is through these adults that the young person will develop their sense of belonging, sense of safety and sense of connection with others, and through this develop their ability to regulate their behaviours more effectively. Developing relationships should consider six areas: Protection, Connection, Understanding, Care, Supporting Inclusion and Setting Boundaries.

Appendix 3 (Supporting and Developing Relationships) provides key questions the team around the child need to consider when developing relationships with the child. Each section focuses on key questions for the team to reflect on, what actions they will take and how this will be applied with the young person.

Responding and calming

The SEA approach is a useful acronym to help adults maintain a calm and safe environment for the child:

- Safety cues: Maintain consistency with facial expressions, tone of voice and body language
- Empathy: Maintain a curious and understanding approach to the child's behaviours and respond in an empathetic way
- Agreements: Remind about the agreements that have been made and re-set if necessary

When behaviours are at risk of escalating, de-escalation strategies, based on co-regulation, should be used involving a process on attunement, accepting and validating, containment of feelings and soothing. Appendix 5 provides a plan that schools can develop to help support co-regulation strategies.

Making the situation safe is a primary responsibility for everyone. The plan to make the situation safe for the child should be agreed by all the adults and the child themselves so that they are aware of the support that is being put in place. Not all situations can be planned for, and some strategies need to be general so that everyone knows the actions they need to take. Physical intervention should be used as a last resort and only used if not to do so would result in harm. Staff should have training in de-escalation and physical intervention strategies if there is a foreseeable risk of harm to the child, children or adults.

Repairing and restoring

Restorative approaches are those that help children to understand their behaviours focussing on the core concepts of:

- Exploring what happened
- Exploring what the child was thinking at the time
- Exploring what the child was feeling
- Exploring who else has been affected by the behaviour
- What the child needs now and what needs to happen so that the harm can be repaired

The key adult working with the child needs to be a good restorative listener and communicator and is someone who:

- Knows that the child is someone who is worthwhile, who has a right to be listened to and taken seriously.
- Knows that there are multiple truths to a situation, is curious in exploring those and acknowledges their right to have this different view.
- Acknowledges and accepts feelings and does not judge them as right or wrong.
- Can help reflect on how thoughts, feelings, needs and behaviours influence each other in terms of themselves and others.
- Has a way of listening that builds relationships to help participants find mutually acceptable outcomes.

Transitioning back to the school's Behaviour Policy

During the review process the team around the child should focus on the impact of the relational practices at supporting the child's emotional regulation skills and their return to the school's behaviour policy. The Relational Policy should not be discontinued too soon, with the child having time to embed what they have learnt and their behaviours with others. Any approaches should be removed gradually, at a time that suits the child, with a 'frictionless transition' from the Relational Policy back to the school's Behaviour Policy.

Training and support from Aquila

To help schools deliver on this policy, Aquila will offer the following training to schools (please note that training and facilitated sessions are offered based on demand and capacity. Contact the Trust's Educational Psychologist to register an interest in any of the groups listed below):

Supervision

Supervision is a reflective process that supports a person's professional learning and development. It enables individuals to reflect on and develop their knowledge, skills and competence. Supervision is

a safe and non-judgemental approach that helps a person to interpret what they have experienced and use this to help guide and build their existing professional knowledge.

Circle of Adults

The Circle of Adults approach addresses the need for a problem-solving process that is able to take an in-depth look at meeting the emotional needs that commonly underlie challenging behaviour in schools. The approach is co-facilitated and is designed to enable the participation of teacher teams to reach a deeper understanding of a young person and to evolve a set of hypotheses and emerging strategies that better accommodate to unmet emotional and learning needs. The approach is a time consuming one and intended for use with those who display the most challenging behaviour, those at high risk of being permanently excluded. The Circle of Adults is an EP facilitated session, delivered to individual schools, and involves the team around the child.

Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) and Video Enhanced Reflective Practice (VERP)

Video Interaction Guidance is a strengths-based, brief intervention that promotes attunement, sensitivity, and mentalisation in relationships and the practice can be used to work within any relationship.

Video Enhanced Reflective Practice is based upon the principles of VIG and carried out with professionals who take the lead in what they film and share their skills in a small, facilitated group.

VIG and VERP needs to be carried out by appropriately trained and supervised practitioners.

Judicium DSL supervision

Designated safeguarding leads can access Judicium's supervision sessions.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Information gathering

Child's Name _____

School/Class _____

Date of
discussion _____

Early developmental history

Key Question Prompts: What is known about the birth history? Has the child had extended hospital stays? Does the child have a medical diagnosis or a neurodivergent condition? What is known about their speech and language development? Did they meet their early learning goals?

Family situation and composition

Key Question Prompts: Who lives in the family home? Does any family member have medical needs or neurodivergent conditions? Who else supports the family? Is the child a young carer? What is the family's housing situation like?

Professional involvement

What professionals are currently involved with the family and why?

Social skills

Key Question Prompts: What is the child's social network like? Do any children seek the child so that they can play with them? How do they cope in co-operative or turn-taking play? How good are they at sharing? How do they cope with disagreements? Do they seek out friendships with others? How do they cope in large groups?

Academic skills

Key Question Prompts: Is the child at age related expectations? Can the child access their learning? Can they take part in discussions and group tasks? What are their learning strengths? Do they experience success with their learning? When they are learning when do they like to have adults around them? Do they seek help and support from others when they are learning? Do they learn in a group?

Current support in school

Key Question Prompts: How do they engage with the current support in place? Is the support in place having an impact on their social, emotional and academic skills? Does the support impact on their time in the classroom? How many adults are involved with supporting the child's learning day to day?

Childhood experiences

Key Question Prompts: Has the child experienced any abuse (sexual, physical or emotional)? Has the child been exposed to domestic abuse? Do they live with someone who has gone to prison? Is anyone in the family suffering from serious mental health conditions? Has the child experienced bereavement? Is the child's housing stable?

Do we need to gather any further information?

Using the above, does any further information need to be gathered to help make informed decisions about the child's support?

What do we need to change?

Based on the above information, is there anything that we need to change about the child's support – the conversation should consider any support that can be removed or additional support that can be put in place?

Appendix 2 – Identifying and supporting key adult(s)

Child's

Name

School

Date of

discussion

Who does the child see as safe?

Key Question Prompts: This does not have to be one person but could be multiple adults for different reasons. When distressed or upset, who is the child most likely to go to or who do they seek out? Who has the child built a relationship with, and how is this relationship helpful? Who does the child seem to avoid? How does the child react with new adults? How have relationships in the past been built? Is the child focused on maintaining one relationship or multiple relationships with adults? What does the child's voice reflect in terms of safety cues?

What skills do or will the key adult need?

Key Question Prompts: This could be related to: sensory processing difficulties, neurodivergent conditions (autism, ADHD, etc.), de-escalation training, co-regulation training, therapeutic approaches, handling training; and could relate to soft skills such as openness to ideas and new methods, transparency, awareness of strengths and areas for development, working cooperatively with others.

Actions:

Who will be the identified adult(s)

Used to fill in Supporting and Developing Relationships document

Supporting the key adult(s)

Key Question Prompts: What training needs to be in place for the key adult(s)? Who will support the adult(s) day to day? Is supervision in place and is it needed? How are the adults engaging with the wider school community? How will we know and what we can do if the adult(s) become overwhelmed or worried?

Actions:

Appendix 3 – Supporting and Developing Relationships

Child's Name _____

School _____

Date plan written _____

Who are the significant adults – the team around the child

Who are the best placed adults, who are significant to the child, to offer support:

Who will be part of the wider team of adults supporting the child? (This could include significant others and parents, for example. Adults also need to consider who is supporting the main team through offering supervision.)

Strengths/Qualities/Interests/Resources

What are the young person's strengths, skills and qualities? How are these supported in the school community?

What are the child's coping strategies? When are they at their most resilient?

What are the child's interests and what do they enjoy the most?

When are they at their best? What helps them be at their best?

When are they successful and what helps them to be successful?

Protection

This section explores the young person's sense of safety and security. Not all children will feel automatically safe, finding some contexts and environments in school threatening, requiring relationships, support and structure to be developed.

Key Question Prompts: How will the child be helped to feel safe by the significant adults? What safety cues will be helpful? How will other adults in the team help the child to feel safe? How will you support the child to develop trust? How will predictable and reliable support be provided? Are there times in the day when the child feels particularly unsafe: beginnings, endings, transitions? How can these times be managed? How can the environment be adapted to help the child feel safe? How can the day be structured to help the child feel safe? What does the child need to know in order to feel safe? How will this be communicated so that the child understands?

Actions:

Connection

Meaningful connections with others promote feelings of safety, trust and belonging. Experiences of connection are important in developing thinking skills. For some, high levels of connection, other than those already provided, are required.

Key Question Prompts: How will the significant adults provide meaningful connection with the child? What needs to happen to ensure that the child experiences attuned and responsive connection? How will other adults in the team connect with the child? How will the development of positive peer relationships be promoted? What activities may help the child to develop their sense of belonging in school?

Actions:

Understanding

Children require adults who understand them and communicate this in an empathetic way, whilst maintaining clear rules, boundaries and expectations. Understanding and co-regulation from an adult will support children to develop their ability to regulate themselves.

Key Question Prompts: What does the child's behaviour tell us about how they are feeling? What is our understanding of the child's feelings? If the student is finding something hard or displaying challenging behaviour, how will adults respond and show understanding? How will the child be co-regulated and calmed? What empathic responses might be helpful? How will the understanding of other adults in school be supported / developed? How will they respond to incidents? Does the child need a responsive co-regulation plan? What will happen to ensure that relationships are repaired?

Actions:

Care

Some children will need adults in school to be particularly mindful of providing a high level of care. This includes meeting the child's basic needs, enabling them to experience comfort and joy and showing them that they are liked.

Key Question prompts: Does the child have unmet needs in terms of basic care - if so, how can these be addressed? How will adults communicate care to the child/young person? How will the child know that they are liked? What activities may foster shared enjoyment? How can we ensure the child knows they are being held in mind? How will the child be soothed?

Actions:

Supporting inclusion

What is impacting on the young person's inclusion. Inclusion and belonging are linked with each other, and to have one, the other must be present.

Key Question Prompts: What behaviours for learning skills need to be in place? What are the child's literacy skills like – reading, writing, comprehending? What are the child's language skills like and how do they impact on their access to learning? How can we build on the child's strengths in class? How or when can the child self-soothe? What social skills need to be in place to help the child take part in class learning?

Actions:

Appendix 4a – Responsive Co-regulation Plan

State of Regulation	Potential Displayed Behaviour	Agreed Response for Regulation
Calm: Safe and Socially engaged		
Mild stress: Alert/Aroused Agitated		
Dysregulated: Mobilised/Immobilised		

Crisis: Unsafe		

Appendix 4b – A Guide to Support Co-regulation (source Devon County Council)

State of Regulation	Potential displayed behaviours	Responsive co-regulation
Calm Safe/socially engaged	Steady heart/breathing rate. Calm state of arousal. Open to social engagement. Expressive facial expression and voice prosody. Able to listen, process language and engage in thinking to learn.	Maximise expressive social engagement. Fully engage and connect using the face, voice, movement. Encourage listening and expressive responses. Engage thinking skills to reflect and make connections. Introduce gentle challenge through play/activity.
Mild Stress Alert/Agitated/ Withdrawn	Slightly raised heart/breathing rate. Signs of agitation, frustration, anxiety. Raised hypervigilance. Lack of focus, easily distracted. Increased mobilisation. Early signs of needing to take control or helplessness.	Connect through eye contact, movement and facial expression. Express calmness through storytelling prosody and open facial expression. Attune to mood, intensity and energy of the child. Respond by being more animated to attune to agitation, increase intensity to attune to anger, be gentle and delicate to attune to sadness. Respond empathically and validate feelings. Use calming, soothing and regulatory activities.
Dysregulated Mobilised	High levels of arousal/distress. Hyper vigilant. Difficulty listening and focusing. Mobilised – fidgeting, jumping, running, climbing etc. Raised voice with lack of prosody. Decreased expressivity. Threatening behaviour. Oppositional behaviour.	Reduce social demands whilst remaining present. Provide individual attention. Convey adult containment. Let them know you are able to 'hold' their dysregulation by remaining regulated. Convey your calm and regulated state by being confident and contained. Use quiet, calm sounds and tones which are expressive and confident. Reduce language, give short clear directions. Avoid questions and choices. Use predictable routine. Reduce sensory input, lights, noise. Use sensory soothing.
Dysregulated Immobilised	Lowered heart/breathing rate. Reduced energy. Shuts off from surroundings/dissociates. Depressed state. Immobile/frozen. May feel faint.	Gentle, soft and delicate manner of coming close, making them aware of your presence and support. Use comforting and predictable voice. Use invited touch to soothe. Singing, humming, music. Use sensory soothing. Calm and gentle reassurance.
Crisis	The child's behaviour means that they or other people are not safe.	An individualised plan of action which outlines action to be taken in the event of unsafe behaviour. This may include advice from outside agencies. The plan should be shared with the child and include their views as to what helps and with all staff working with the child. Roles and responsibilities should be clear. If the plan includes physical intervention staff should have had the appropriate training. Devon LA recommend PIPS training. Adults need to provide high levels of containment through their way of being – having a plan can help.

Appendix 5 – Relational practices review meetings

Child's Name _____

School/Class _____

Date of discussion _____

Attendees

What has been going well?

Key Question Prompts: What progress has been made: developing relationships, participating in activities, co-regulating emotions, involvement with others and their learning?

What areas are we still working on?

Key Question Prompts: Is the child able to self-regulate – if not what else needs to be done? Is the child accessing the school's community? Is the child developing the right relationships with the right adult(s)?

Do we need to involve others (professionals/members of staff) in this meeting?

What are our next steps?

Key Prompt Questions: How close are we to returning the child to the behaviour policy? Can we remove any of the strategies in place? Is the child embedding what they have learnt so far – repairing relationships, self-regulating, access to the classroom and playground?

Appendix 6 – Evidence accessed to support the development of the Relational Policy

Bergin, C., & Bergin, D. (2009). Attachment in the classroom. *Educational Psychology Review*, 21(2), 141–170.

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Timpson Review of School Exclusion (2019) Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London

Flowchart for applying the Relational Policy

