

Developing a Climate to Promote Positive Relationships at Fraccis Street CBS

Organisations are built on relationships and we in Francis Street believe positive relationships are essential for organisation of effective teaching and learning. We genuinely care for our school community and this is evident in all our interactions throughout the day. Staff speak to the children and each other in a respectful manner. The role of every staff member is also crucial in setting and maintaining the standards. At the basis of all of this is good people. To quote a staff member "some of the kindest people I have ever met work here..." We try to focus on the holistic development of our pupils.

In Francis Street, we are aware that everyone has their own unique story and are unquestionably shaped by that. There is a reason for every behaviour and interaction. We do everything we can to create a safe and happy environment for our pupils, staff and entire school community through our culture of care and understanding.

In order to effectively implement an empathy based approach that fosters a positive climate we need to know where everyone is coming from. Awareness of people's individual situations gives others a greater sense of understanding and compassion. We try to do this in a number of ways.

Mentoring: All new staff are paired with an experienced staff member and check in with them and learn from them about the culture of the school. These formal mentoring arrangements are often quickly augmented by less formal and more personal and collegial arrangements.

Child & Staff Welfare: is at the forefront of every staff meeting. Teachers highlight children they may have concerns about or who may need a boost in self-esteem. Staff make it their purpose to engage with said children on the yard, corridor etc. In certain situations the principal or the HSCL may alert all staff to a child that is really struggling at home etc. This allows people to pre-empt behaviour and to engage with the child before they act out. Alternatively, if they act out, to approach the situation from a place of compassion.

MGC (moment of genuine connection): Staff encouraged to choose a child each week and spend some quality time developing the relationship. Conversations around the child's interests etc. This allows us to build up a picture of a child's family situation, their interests etc. It is our experience that when children understand that our care is genuine, they will move mountains with us.

Peacebuilder program: This program is rolled out in 5th class every year. In circle time format, this program explores core values such as respect, empathy, compassion and inclusivity. This format creates a safe space for children to learn how these values can enhance their lives. The approach is based on fairness where everybody's voice is welcome.

Care Team meets weekly, children who need support are identified, and a plan is put in place to assist them.

Restorative Justice; Staff adopt this approach to resolve conflict and repair relationships. We provide a non-judgemental framework of questions to help children to analyse their feelings when an incident occurred. Furthermore we explore how our actions impacted on others and look at ways in which we can manage situations differently in the future.

Restorative Circle: this method is used if there is an underlying issue affecting a whole class group. It is a very effective process as it allows all the children that are involved to have their say and children that are impacting the group negatively can clearly see and hear the effects of their actions on others.

Mindfulness:

Every day a **Tibetan bell** rings over the intercom and the whole school takes a mindful pause and takes three deep breaths before returning to their tasks

We begin every day as a **whole school community on the yard and we practise mindful breathing approaches** such as bearded dragon/ rollercoaster etc. Many of the children are coming from hectic environments including their journey to school and this helps to calm the children down before they enter the building.

Each class has a block of 6 **yoga** sessions per year.

Mind Up program

Staff are trained in this program where we teach children about neuroscience and effectively explain to them what is happening in their brain when they "flip their lid"!

We are a telling school. This concept took time to become embedded but through our focus on empathy and compassion towards others children realise the importance of this.

Assemblies continued virtually during school lockdown and via Conor cam upon return to face to face learning. It is a hugely important part of our school life. Every week each member of staff picks a pupil of the week and they are awarded a certificate in front of their peers. The principal awards a gold certificate to the most impressive children in the school that week. The importance of these certificates cannot be underestimated and allows staff the chance to reinforce the standards that we expect from our pupils by highlighting positive behaviour.

Assembly is also an opportunity to recognise the successes of the children in sport, music, the arts etc. We shout from the rooftops for our children. Any opportunity to build them up, we grasp it.

Student Voice:

Francis Street was the first primary school in Ireland to establish a Student Council. Since this first council, further formal student voice opportunities have been established as listed below. Francis Street is in the process of making a joint research funding application through the Teaching Council's John Coolahan Research Support Framework. This research proposes to undertake a critical exploration of the Department of Family and Youth Affairs' 'Our Voices, Our Schools Programme' to promote professional collaboration and learning with two DCU Changemaker Schools to uncover hidden student voices in our schools. This project would see Francis Street collaborating through communities of practice with Dalkey School Project,

Changemaker Schools Coordinator Fiona Collins and Doctors John White and Benjamin Mallon from DCU.

Our committees which promote Student Voice and student participation are:

Student Council

Well Being Warriors

Green Team

Fit Squad

Gaeilge Coiste

Teams meet regularly and look at ways in which they can enhance the school experience for everyone in their given area.

Student Council- We have a full democratic election process where children are nominated, create manifestos, appoint campaign managers and give speeches. We teach children to vote for peers that are positive role models and that set an example for the rest of their class.

Our **Well Being** Warriors are our newest team and the main remit of this team is the promotion of positive mental health for everyone in our building. The children have come up with amazing ideas such as 100 acts of kindness, positive affirmation week, Gratitude assemblies.

Our 6th classes are currently working with Fuse in DCU on the Fuse Primary Anti-Bullying and Online Safety program.

Barnardo's workshop on **cyber bullying** was delivered via Zoom to all classes.

We have also had internet safety awareness sessions for families.

Shannon's Hopeline: Pupils chose a local charity Shannon's Hopeline as their fundraiser for Christmas. The children raised €1000

Our school has close links with the charity, which was set up to; promote positive mental health within Dublin 8. Francis Street children can be referred for counselling to Shannon's Hopeline.

Elklan Program: We were involved with a pilot program with the NCSE where S&L therapists worked closely with our mainstream teachers to help them to assess children for S&L needs. Our training in Elklan was delivered by 2 staff members. This had a huge impact on the way we communicate with children. As a result we all have a greater understanding of a child's receptive language and expressive language. Sometimes a **child's response or a behaviour may simply result from a lack of understanding of an instruction.**

Alert program: This program was piloted in our school and several teachers are trained in the process. It teaches children strategies to help them to regulate their emotions. This links in really well with Restorative Justice. The issues identified by a child in Res J (i.e anger management) can be supported by the regulation strategies learned in the Alert Program.

Originally designed as a small-group, targeted programme, the ALERT, self-regulation programme is now rolled-out as a whole class programme in our school. This ensured a school-wide understanding of what self-regulation is as well as providing the practical tools and activities to regulate the self.

Solas Project: is a community based organisation that runs a tag rugby life skills program in our school.

ASD Classes:

Children from the ASD classes are integrated into their mainstream classes depending on their individual level of need. Pre-COVID, reverse integration has been a successfully beneficial programme for students and staff alike. We celebrate Autism Awareness month and we teach all children about autism.

ASD parents support network was set up and has had a significant impact on both the staff and the families. It has allowed the families to share their stories with each other and to learn from each other.

Show Racism the Red Card is run by our FAI coach in our school each year. This coach integrates sport and positive sport role-modelling to discuss racism in sport and in our society in a fun and engaging way.

Staff

We also have a staff **well being** team which organises events to boost everyone's morale. We firmly believe in a strong supportive environment and everyone is encouraged to look out for each other. Through professional conversations we share ideas and good practise. The management team is very conscious of staff members who are maybe having a difficult time personally and do everything they can to support them.

We try to adopt a team teaching approach as opposed to the more traditional withdrawal format. This allows for children to feel included thereby boosting their sense of self worth. It also allows them to learn from their peers and to work at their own pace but within the mainstream group.

HSCL ; the role of HSCL is crucial as a link between home and the community. The HSCL also links in with the SCP, children with specific needs are identified, and a project worker supports them. We believe in fostering positive relationships because that is the culture that exists in Francis Street but also because this builds trust between home and schools which allows for true cooperation and collaboration in the education of our young people. The collective impacts of these approaches over time cannot be overstated. The student population now adopts, through practice, an empathetic approach to the school day. This is especially evident in how challenging behaviours and disagreements are handled by the school community. We celebrate and enjoy the good times together and we work through the harder times together.