

**PEARS
FAMILY SCHOOL**
FOUNDED BY ANNA FREUD CENTRE

**PARENT & CARER
HANDBOOK 2023**

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Practicalities

- **Where do you sit/position yourself at school?** This is a frequent question and starts to make more sense the more time you spend in school! Often you will sit alongside your child in their classroom or whilst involved in an activity, supporting their learning and development. Other times you may sit outside of the classroom in the kitchen/hub area with other parents. This is where you will find lots of expertise and experience being shared between parents at different stages of their journey through the education system and in particular PFS. Some parents use the parent learning room to have some space or work as needed. All of this will evolve and be decided in collaboration with your child, their teacher and yourself and using the feedback of how your child is managing and responding and what will be in their best interests.
- **Safeguarding and Parent/carer access in school** - parents can complete a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check and a List 99 disclosure with Linda Hooper (business manager). (These ensure that adults in school do not have any criminal convictions that would prevent them from being safely with children.) Once complete you will be given an access card to the main areas in school and to your child's floor. You will be given a lanyard with your access card which is colour coded to identify your role in school.
- **Signing in and out** – parents should sign in and out as they arrive at school and leave school. If you are taking your children out for lunch or leaving early for an appointment, please also sign your child out and back in upon return.
- **Parent Learning room** – on floor 3 there is the parent learning room. This is an area which can be used by parents whilst in school and where parent learning takes place on Wednesday mornings.

- **Internet access** – Parents can be provided with the WiFi code on request. Appropriate internet use is essential.
- **Lunch** – parents/carers are encouraged to eat with their children if they are in school. Menus can be found around the school and on the school website. Food is provided by outside caterers and is delivered to school at 12pm. Children can bring packed lunches if they prefer. Sometimes parents chose to take their children off-site for lunch.
- **Playground**
Our outdoor space and playground is off-site at a public park directly opposite the school. There are a number of safety measures we take to ensure your child’s safety including: risk assessments; sufficient staff presence; children aware of protocols for crossing the road and aware of the boundaries of the park.

Pears Family School Values

Our values underpin everything we do at Pears Family School

WARMTH – CURIOSITY – RELIABILITY – CHALLENGE – TRUST

All of which are underpinned by **intent**.



The Recipe for The Family School 'Engendered Trust'



Ingredients

- ❖ Parents and Children
- ❖ Active Warmth
- ❖ Respectful Curiosity
- ❖ Hopeful Motivation
- ❖ Supportive Challenge

1. Marinade your Parents and Children in the **Active Warmth**, until their hearts soften and their temperatures increase.
2. Gently, take your Parents and Children and add a large dollop of **Respectful Curiosity** and ask questions to engage with and better understand them.
3. When this understanding tastes right, stir in as much **Hopeful Motivation** as you need until you see optimism rising. If optimism is stubborn, keep adding.
4. When optimism has sufficiently risen, thickly spread you **Supportive Challenge** all over your Parents and Children.
5. When they are ready, serve them with pride.

Author: Family School Parent

What is my role as a parent at PFS?

It is a unique and unusual position to be a parent or carer attending school with your child. Shouldn't school staff be the 'experts' trained to work with and educate your child? Whilst there is, of course expertise in all of our staff, our model works to use all of the resources available for each child and the most important of these is a child's parent or carer; their family system. As the person/people with the strongest attachment and connection to your child you can tell us more about your child than anyone else. Through your presence in the school they begin to develop their trust in other adults and people around them as they see that you too are doing so. When a child becomes dysregulated or distressed, being able to access their most trusted person helps to regulate them and make them feel safe. As a school first and foremost, safety is crucial for all children if they are to begin to access their learning. As staff talk with parents about their experiences and understand more about your family system, we begin to understand your child better and are able to gradually start to support you and your family to create change.

BUT, what do I actually do in the school?

This is a common question and one that most parents come to know the answer to through time and experience of the school, however some starting points may be helpful.

Usually you will position yourself on the same floor as your child's classroom. Outside of their classroom is a communal kitchen, sitting space with sofas and a large table and chairs. You will often find a few parents sitting here too. This is where a significant amount of the therapy occurs, in the connections between families on similar journeys and the sharing of experience and expertise as well as the sense of community

that comes with being a parent at the school. Reducing feelings of exclusion and isolation families have often felt through their experience of their child

being at risk of exclusion is reported to be an important part of parents' time at PFS.

At times through the school day you will join your child in their classroom to support them through a task, learn together or come to celebrate their brilliant work, you may be asked by staff or chose to be alongside them. You may sometimes be asked to support another child whilst another parent support's your child; to notice the moments your child or another has managed a task or a moment well and to energise it with positive praise.

Staff from the therapeutic team in school will talk with you together with your lead teacher to understand more about your child and family and the resources and support you have in your system and your hopes and goals for your child's time at PFS.

As a parent you will join the children when they go to the park opposite the school for break times and will be invited to take part in reflection time at the end of the day. Another important part of helping to re-wire their brains through noticing what has gone well in the day, what you are proud of and the moments they have chosen to ignore undesirable behaviours or used strategies to regulate themselves, through increasing the dosage of positive feedback for your child, helping to build new neural pathways.

Wednesdays – Parent learning and Multi-Family learning

Wednesdays are a particularly important day for parents in PFS when parents are strongly encouraged to attend. They begin with you joining your child or another child for 'Drop everything and read', a time to hear them read and support them with it.

Parent Learning then takes place, which is a well-attended session in which a warm and lively group is co-created between parents and the therapeutic team in the parent learning room at school. Neil and Brenda (Consultant family Psychotherapists and Co-founders of the school) deliver learning relevant to your experiences and your child and facilitate group discussions and an opportunity for parents and carers to share their experiences and expertise with each other. There is also an opportunity through these sessions to complete an OCN Level 2 qualification parent and carer engagement in child mental health.

After lunch Multi-Family groups run on each floor and you will join with your child and their class to engage in activities together. The session begins with thinking about targets for your child in the session and ends with each person sharing their reflections on how everyone has done in the session.

A School day at PFS:

9-9.30am – Pupils and parents arrive by taxi, school mini bus or independently. *Pupils and parents are greeted warmly at the door by staff.*

9.30am – Breakfast on their floor: toast, cereal, milk, juice.

An opportunity for staff to join with pupils and families, using curiosity and warmth to see how they are and which zone (of regulation) they are in whilst social skills (including communication, verbal and non-verbal, turn taking, patience) and fine and gross motor (physical development) skills are practised.

9.45am – Drop everything and read **** this is just on Wednesdays****

15 minutes in which an adult will sit and read with a child (it may be your adult or another adult).

10am – Maths or English in your classes

Parents/Carers will either accompany their child into the classroom and sit with them at their desk whilst they start their first learning activity or you might stay in the communal area on the floor if your child is ready and able to learn by themselves at this moment. This will be agreed with the teacher at the time and you will be guided initially as to what would be helpful.

11am – 11.15am – Break time

If it's dry we go to the public park across the road where there is: a children's playground; a hardcourt – 'the cage' to play football; or a grass area to run about on and benches to sit and chat/reflect. Adults (including parents) join pupils, taking care to cross the road safely and supporting their play by playing with them.

If it is wet, activities including games, arts and crafts, the SmartGYM in school, laptops, and musical equipment will be used in school.

11.15am – Maths or English in your classes.

12.15pm – Lunch served on in the canteen on floor 5

Another opportunity to build on social skills practising them with other pupils, staff and parents. Sometimes parents may choose to take their child out for lunch which is another opportunity for bonding.

12.45pm – Break time - as before

1.15pm - Science, Art, PSHE, or Topic lesson on Wednesdays this is Family Learning time

Family learning time is a chance for families to learn together doing an activity facilitated by staff and supporting families to use their expertise to ask questions of and guide each other with the activity.

2.15pm – Reflection on your floor

Pupils, parents and staff come together to reflect on things noticed about themselves and other people during the day for example, a child will ask, ‘is there anything that anyone would like to say or has noticed about me today?’ and children and adults will take turns as indicated by the child to comment, e.g. “I noticed X being really patient and kind earlier by explaining the rules to Y when he didn’t understand”; “ I noticed Z moving away when she was getting frustrated and starting to feel angry and she used her words rather than her hands to show her frustration” this provides an opportunity to build individuals’ portfolios of their virtues and strengthen a more positive narrative of themselves and others.

2.45pm – Pupils and parents prepare to leave for the day.

3.00pm – End of school day.

NB. On a Wednesday the day differs slightly with parents attending parent learning between 10.15am-12pm and then all children and adults engaging in multi-family group after lunch.

What will our journey with Pears Family School look like/what can we expect?

RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD AND FAMILY...NETWORK MEETING

PFS will contact you after receiving a completed referral from your child's school or the Local Authority and arrange an **initial network meeting**. The purpose of the **network meeting**, is to gather more information about your child and family, who will take responsibility for what and how we can support your child, you and each other with your journey at PFS, as well as the hoped destination school for your child when they are ready to leave PFS.

***Who attends?** This will include a member of staff from the school your child is coming from; someone from the LA (Local Authority), any external agencies you are involved with and staff from PFS senior leadership team including a member of the therapeutic team, the SENCo for your child's year group and the teacher likely to be teaching your child. You are also very welcome to bring anyone to the meeting who is a support to you, this may be family members, friends or an advocate.*

VISIT - if everyone is in agreement that PFS is a good placement for your child, you will be invited to come and **visit the school** during one of the open mornings. This can be with or without your child depending on what you think is best and will be an opportunity for you to get a feel for PFS and ask any questions.

ENGAGEMENT & PLANNING MEETING

This is a collaborative meeting during which we will start to draft a pupil passport and a personal care and learning plan. We will find out what your desired goals and outcomes for your child are and who will take responsibility for which parts of the plan. We will start to co-construct a genogram (sometimes known as a family tree) to think about who is in your child's system and some of the different patterns and influences that exist for them.

We will learn from you and think together about your commitment at PFS. We will set a start date and map a phased integration to PFS which may begin very gradually with a part-time timetable. This will be flexible and will be adapted as needed as we get begin the journey together. **A crucial part of this is establishing how much you (parent/carer) are able to and need to commit to being at school with your child. We know that our model works best when parents can commit to being with their children as much as possible.**

REVIEWS

As we get to know you and your family we will meet regularly to review the PCLP and goals for your child: academic, behaviour for learning and to think about the wellbeing of the system. We will work with you at every step of the journey tweaking and experimenting our approach as we receive feedback from you and your child through observing, getting to know and talking with everyone.

TRANSITIONING ON

Transitions can be scary and uncertain. Whilst we are a short-term provision and many children will come with a destination school, some will not, or their identified needs may change requiring a new provision. The SENCo and team for your child will work with you closer to the time your child is getting ready to move on, to identify the right provision to help your child to be successful and support you with the process. This will be done in collaboration with you and once identified the SENCo will work closely with you and the new school to ensure they have a good understanding of your child and their needs and how to best communicate with you. More often than not this is done through a gradual integration with visits from staff at the new school to see your child at PFS and with visits from PFS staff to the new school.

Parents Views

C

“When I first learnt about the family school I knew this was the school I wanted my son and my family to come to.

For my son to help him to learn to emotionally regulate in a world that hadn't always understood his needs, known what to do to help him, as well as appreciate the impact of high levels of early life trauma had on his life. Attending the Family school was a chance to take a step out that world, take stock, focus on supporting him together with the amazing staff, Brenda and Neil and the families that make up this wonderful school. Instantly it felt like we were not alone and as a family we stepped into a journey of helping our son within a supportive community. Being day to day in the school has left us feeling valued as parents, rather than side-lined by an education system that sometimes felt like it didn't have time to listen to us, to one of inclusion rather than exclusion. With staff, us by his side and other families all around us our son became stronger and stronger at managing his emotions, learning to calm, to reflect and to even start learning!

I cannot stress enough the difference the Family School has made for all of us. I shall miss all the wonderful children, parents, and staff that make up this extraordinarily precious school.”

C

“I have found Pears Family School to be a very welcoming and enlightening environment where my Grandson has had a happy and encouraging school experience. Staff and family working together has enabled him to have a more positive response to school and begin to have an impact on building his self-confidence and self-regulation. The input from Brenda and Neil help us to understand the science behind the behaviours and therapy to help our children be successful I in self-regulation. Being with other families who understand and sharing ideas and stories gives us hope and support.”

L

“During our time at PFS, I saw my son change from a boy who had struggled daily in school to a child who trusted the adults around him, positively enjoyed school and began to be able to talk about his feelings and regulate them. The staff are warm, loving and understanding, and prepared to be flexible to adapt to the needs of each child. Parents are part of the process, listened to and provided with invaluable training. There is support for parent and child every step of the way. You feel listened to and understood. You feel supported. There is a fun atmosphere, where children feel liked, accepted and wanted, regardless of what happens and what challenges they face.”

G

“My experience at PFS has been informative and helpful. The care and understanding that the teacher's and mental health support professionals have for the students is up and beyond. It just goes to show understanding is key to progress, the students are capable to do anything they put their mind too. Education is important and it's even better when the school is great too.

Thank you PFS for all your help much appreciated.”