

### **Case Study 3: St Katharine's Church of England Primary School, Bournemouth**

#### **Context**

St Katharine's Church of England Primary School in Bournemouth is a one-form entry primary school serving pupils aged 4–11. Rooted in a Christian ethos, the school places a strong emphasis on inclusion, care and respect, with a focus on ensuring that every child is known and supported as an individual.

The school serves a mixed community and has developed a reputation for its nurturing approach, particularly in supporting pupils with additional needs and those who may be at risk of disengagement. Relationships are central to the school's practice, with staff placing a strong emphasis on creating a safe, consistent and supportive environment for learning.

This commitment to inclusion and wellbeing underpins the school's approach to supporting pupils who require additional help to access learning, including through the use of internal provision and targeted interventions.

#### **What challenge was the school trying to address?**

St Katharine's Church of England Primary School serves a diverse pupil population and, like many schools, has seen increasing challenges relating to self-regulation, school readiness and sustained engagement in the curriculum. For some pupils, these challenges present as difficulty managing emotions, maintaining focus and participating consistently in learning throughout the school day.

The school has a long-standing commitment to including physical activity as part of daily practice. Building on this strong foundation, leaders identified an opportunity to further develop their approach for pupils with additional needs or those at risk of disengagement. There was a particular focus on strengthening how pupils are supported to understand and manage their own emotional responses.

The challenge was therefore to refine and extend existing practice, developing a more bespoke offer that equips pupils with practical strategies to recognise, regulate and respond to their emotions, in order to improve their readiness for learning and overall engagement in school life.

## **What did the school deliver and why?**

The school's approach is rooted in a whole-school commitment to trauma-informed practice, which underpins both universal provision and more targeted support.

At a universal level, all pupils have regular opportunities for movement throughout the school day. This includes planned movement breaks, as well as an extensive and fully inclusive offer of physical activity before school, during lunchtimes and after school. The school environment itself has been deliberately designed to facilitate increased physical activity and movement.

Building on this universal offer, the school developed a more targeted approach for pupils with additional needs through the use of "Sport Sanctuary" resources. These include boxes of carefully selected equipment and personalised sets of activity cards, enabling pupils to choose between organising, calming and energising activities based on their needs.

The approach is structured as a graduated model. Pupils with the highest level of need are supported by adults during these sessions. Others work alongside trained peer mentors, while some pupils are able to self-select and self-administer their movement breaks independently.

This layered approach is designed to develop both regulation and independence, ensuring that support is responsive to individual need while promoting long-term self-management.

## **What changed for young people?**

Chloe, a Key Stage 2 pupil with significant additional needs, had previously been unable to access the mainstream curriculum at all. Her attendance was poor, and she was frequently highly dysregulated. Given the opportunity to have her own Sport Sanctuary, where she can spend periods of 5–15 minutes when feeling overwhelmed, she is now far more engaged in lessons and is able to spend most of the school day learning alongside her peers. *(Self-regulation, Engagement and behaviour, Readiness for learning)*

Jim, a Year 2 pupil on the autistic spectrum, participates daily in sensory circuits with a trained adult mentor. He was able to talk very confidently about the benefits of these activities and how they helped him move into the "green zone", where he was ready to learn. *(Self-regulation, Emotional wellbeing and confidence, Readiness for learning)*

Steven, a Year 3 pupil, had found self-regulation extremely challenging, particularly after break and lunchtime. He now works with a Year 6 mentor, Walker, and uses a dedicated sanctuary space. They meet every day after break and lunch for 5–10 minutes, during which Steven selects from a menu of calming activities using his own set of equipment. Teachers spoke of the significant difference in Steven's ability to regulate following these sessions,

and Steven himself was able to articulate how the sessions helped prepare him for learning. *(Self-regulation, Engagement and behaviour, Relationships)*

Walker, his mentor, had also struggled with self-regulation in previous years and spoke about how taking on the mentoring role had helped him to manage his own emotions more effectively. *(Emotional wellbeing and confidence, Relationships)*

This theme of pupils being confident to talk about their emotions and readiness to learn was prevalent throughout the school. Hinaya, Simon and Richard, pupils in Key Stage 2 who accessed the Sport Sanctuary provision, all spoke positively about how it had supported them.

Mollie, a Year 6 mentor and ambassador, reflected: “Sometimes I don’t feel like coming to school, but that’s okay, because I know other people feel like that too and I feel less alone.” *(Emotional wellbeing and confidence, Relationships)*

Across the school, staff reported improved regulation, fewer behavioural incidents and increased time in class, with pupils more able to recognise and respond to their own emotional needs.

### **What made this work in practice?**

Several features of the approach appear to have been critical to its success.

First, the school established a consistent, whole-school approach to self-regulation, underpinned by the use of Zones of Regulation. This was supported through staff training and extended to pupils and parents. As a result, pupils across all year groups were able to use a shared language to describe how they were feeling and what they needed to regulate.

Second, there was strong staff buy-in, supported by a clear understanding of the impact on learning. One teacher described how a short, ten-minute movement break could lead to sustained, high-quality engagement, compared to longer periods of low-level disengagement. This helped staff to see movement not as lost learning time, but as an investment in it.

Staff confidence also extended to trusting pupils to make decisions about their own regulation. While this was not always perfect, a consistent and patient approach enabled pupils to develop greater independence over time.

Leadership played a critical role. The headteacher consistently modelled and reinforced a physically active school culture, drawing on research and evidence to support decision-making. Following its Ofsted Outstanding judgement in 2024, the school adopted the

philosophy of “Keep on Moving”, reflecting both a commitment to physical activity and a wider culture of ongoing innovation and creativity.

Finally, the school developed strong links with external partners, including sports clubs, occupational therapists and art therapists, ensuring that practice was informed by a wide range of expertise and remained responsive to pupil need.

This approach was most effective because it aligned language, practice and expectation across the whole school.

### **What can other settings learn?**

This case highlights the importance of developing a whole-school approach to self-regulation, where practice is applied with consistency and fidelity. The adoption of a shared framework, such as Zones of Regulation, was effective because it was embedded across the school through staff training, consistent application from early years to Year 6, and ongoing reinforcement with pupils and parents.

It also demonstrates the value of a graduated model of support. Starting with adult-led provision and progressing through peer support to independent self-selection allowed pupils to develop increasing ownership of their regulation in a structured and supported way.

Strong staff buy-in was critical. Where staff understand the link between movement and learning, and see the impact on engagement, they are more likely to embed these approaches consistently.

Leadership and culture also matter. A clear, values-driven approach, supported by senior leaders and reinforced through ongoing professional development, creates the conditions for sustained change.

This case shows that the greatest impact comes when movement is embedded as part of learning, supported by consistent implementation and shared expectations, rather than used as a standalone intervention.