

28th November 2024 – Update to Families & Community

Dear Families,

The BBC News featured concerning provision at two special needs schools in London and Bury St. Edmunds. The news included alarming video footage of unacceptable treatment of pupils within padded rooms called ‘calming spaces’. It is upsetting to see this type of practice. I am writing to explain openly why this cannot happen here at our school.

We are committed to core principles as a team to promote pupil independence, engagement in learning, and ensuring every child’s civil liberties through respect. We live by our school values and embrace a positive climate for learning. We do not have a punitive model, do not punish children, do not have detentions, and do not give children time-outs. Our curriculum and teaching focuses on what your child ‘can do’ and the way we can support their progress through their interests to motivate and excite them to learn.

The Building Design: Swiss Cottage School was designed with a focus on transparent learning zones.

- There are 7 learning zones with groups of classes located together.
- The hallway wall for each classroom has visible glass window panels to see into each classroom.
- All classrooms have glass windows that open along the exterior wall.
- Classrooms that have a small group learning room: the small group learning room has glass on the door panel, and glass windows within the space.
- 29 out of 30 classrooms have glass double doors that open onto the outdoor terrace.
- Specialist spaces: the drama studio, sports hall, art room, life skills kitchen, music room, Work Related Learning general store, and EmployMent pathway supported internship student office all have glass windows along the hallway, exterior wall, and doors with glass panels. The use of these specialist spaces is within the class timetable.
- Sensory rooms and soft play intervention rooms have glass panels on the door. The use of these spaces is within the class timetable.
- Hallway intervention and therapy rooms have glass along the hallway.
- The doors across the school for offices also have a glass panel.
- There is no learning space without glass panels to view inside.
- There are no withdrawal, calm down or time out rooms.

The school staff are trained with the national behaviour management approach known as ‘Positive Behaviour Support’ and engagement in learning approach known as ‘Trauma Informed Practice’. Pupils at the school can become dysregulated because of their special educational needs profile. All classes plan their learning environments through our focus on capable environments, sensory needs audit, zones of regulation, and total communication. The school timetable ensures the curriculum provision across the school day is planned carefully.

Staff in specific classes are also trained with the national behaviour management approach ‘Team Teach’. Any use of physical intervention if necessary is through individual pupil behaviour plans that ensure that staff team are trained to use the physical intervention if required. These are shared with the family and are regularly reviewed.

The curriculum, teaching methods, behaviour management strategies, and personal development enrichment activities are recognised as best practice by external professionals that evaluate these standards. We volunteer to have this assessed every term to ensure we are doing the best for your children.

Swiss Cottage School is unique with the co-location NHS therapy teams, Caterlink catering team, and BAM Facilities Management team within the school building. This adds another layer of transparency. Please be assured we want your child to thrive through a safe and secure school environment. The weekly Parent/Carer coffee morning will include time for questions on 3rd December 2024.

We know the news about the other special schools could cause concerns, distress, and leave you feeling a range of emotions. Please let us know if we can provide any support to you. If you have any questions, please ask.

Yours Sincerely,  
Vijita Patel  
Principal