



Parents' Handbook

2023-2024



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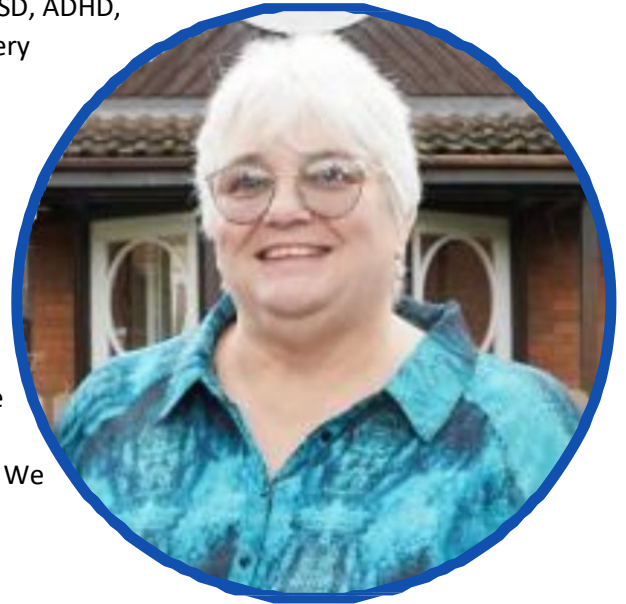
Welcome

We are an independent co-educational school which provides meaningful, bespoke education within a supportive learning environment.

Our school caters for students from Key Stage 2, 3 & 4 with ASD, ADHD, anxiety, trauma and related diagnoses. We recognise that every student is different, yet equal, and all staff are committed to treating each young person inclusively, with compassion and understanding.

We respect that every student will have a different set of needs. This is why we pride ourselves on offering a safe and encouraging learning environment, where students can feel supported and encouraged to reach their full potential.

We believe that all young people should be provided with the opportunity to achieve their individual potential through building resilience, self-regulation and trusting relationships. We support our students to flourish; this promotes improved outcomes, attainment, and self-esteem.



Debra Thomas, CEO and Founder

Our Vision and Mission Statement

Our Vision:

To create an environment that encourages all students to harness their skills and develop the tools they need to succeed, whatever their past experiences.

Our Mission:

At GEM we celebrate the uniqueness of our students and make certain our learning environment is safe, secure, and positive. Our aim is to provide access to the best possible academic outcomes by equipping students with the skills necessary to achieve personal success, in addition to preparing them for a transition to their next steps.

We strive to provide a learning environment which is both calm and structured. For us, positive behaviour management is about developing the right atmosphere in which incidents are averted, or at worst quickly defused. This approach is underpinned by the principles of PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy).

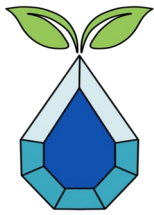
Our approach includes helping our students to reflect upon, grow and learn from even very difficult experiences. This means being prepared to give students another chance for a fresh start.

We believe that our students will make the most progress when those around them can work as one.



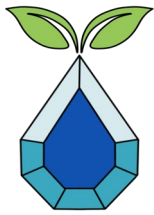
Our School Values

We chose the name GEM Hereford carefully as it stands for our 3 core values:



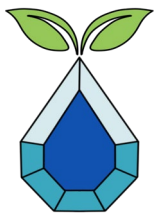
Growth

- Strive to increase the self-esteem, self-regulation and independence of our students.
- Help our students develop positive relationships with others.



Empowerment

- Provide a space where young people have a voice.
- Encourage students to take responsibility for themselves, their words and their actions.
- Equip students with the skills to keep themselves safe both physically and mentally.



Motivation

- Show students how to acknowledge their progress in all areas of school life.
- Instil a vibrant, stimulating and enthusiastic environment that focuses on individual needs.



The Ethos of GEM Hereford

At GEM we do things differently:

Many of our students have had difficult experiences at school and we aim to show them that learning can be fun, and they can have a large input into their life at school.

- To reduce barriers, all staff are known by their first names. We believe that mutual respect is built by actions and behaviours, not by what someone expects to be called.
- Generally, students will not be expected to do homework. If a student is very involved in a project and wants to put some of their own time into it, that's fine, but it is not a requirement. The only exception may be for Year 11 students who are working towards GCSEs. If extra time is needed to complete work, we will support them to either do it at home or to stay on at school to do it there, whichever suits them best.
- We are accepting of some behaviours that would be frowned upon in a mainstream school. For example, if a student needs to 'stim' by tapping a pen, we will work with them by providing a surface that reduces the noise, rather than stopping them from doing it.
- We will work with our students to be tolerant and accepting of the behaviours of other students, by explaining the need and encouraging them to empathise with that young person.
- At all times all staff will follow the PACE therapeutic model – for more information on PACE see the next page.
- Students at our school are not given sanctions or detentions. They do not work and they can cause more harm than good. Instead, we only use natural, or at the most, logical consequences of any actions. For example, if a student deliberately breaks their headphones, the natural consequence is that they no longer have headphones. The logical consequence that leads on from this is that they cannot use the sound on their IT equipment as it will disturb other members of the class, and therefore their experience is diminished. No other consequence is necessary.
- We recognise that there are times when a student will become overwhelmed and unable to participate in their usual way. The young person can then choose to remove themselves from the situation using a variety of options from sitting alone at the back of the classroom to going outside and letting off steam! Once they feel regulated again and able to do so, they will be welcomed back into the classroom without fuss to carry on with their work.



The PACE Therapeutic Model

PACE underpins all our interactions with our students. If a young person is dysregulated or in distress it is particularly important. We think it is important that you as Parents and Carers understand how we work and what to expect from us.

Playfulness

This is about creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. It means learning how to use a light tone with your voice, like you might use when storytelling, rather than an irritated or lecturing tone. It's about having fun and expressing a sense of joy.

Having a playful stance is not about being funny all the time or making jokes when a young person is sad. It's about helping young people be more open to and experience what is positive in their life, one step at a time.

A playful stance adds elements of fun and enjoyment in day-to-day life and can also diffuse a difficult or tense situation. The young person is less likely to respond with anger and defensiveness when the parent has a touch of playfulness in his or her discipline. While such a response would not be appropriate at the time of major misbehaviour, when applied to minor behaviours, playfulness can help keep it all in perspective.

Acceptance

Unconditional acceptance is at the core of the child's sense of safety.

Acceptance is about actively communicating to the young person that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour. It is about accepting, without judgment or evaluation, their inner life. The young person's inner life simply *is*; it is not *right* or *wrong*.

Accepting the young person's intentions does not imply accepting behaviour, which may be hurtful or harmful to another person or to self. You may be very firm in limiting behaviour while at the same time accepting the motives for the behaviour.

One hopes that the young person learns that while behaviour may be criticised and limited, this is not the same as criticising the young person's *self*. The young person then becomes more confident that conflict and discipline involves behaviour, not the relationship with parents nor her self-worth.

Curiosity

Curiosity, without judgment, is how we help students become aware of their inner life, reflect upon the reasons for their behaviour, and then communicate it to their parents or therapist. Curiosity is wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour for the child. Curiosity lets the young person know that the adults understand.

Students often know that their behaviour was not appropriate. They often do not know why they did it or are reluctant to tell adults why.



With curiosity the adults are conveying their intention to simply understand *why* and to help the young person with understanding. The adult's intentions are to truly understand and help the child, not to lecture or convey that the child's inner life is *wrong* in some way.

Curiosity must be communicated without annoyance about the behaviour. Being curious can, for example, include an attitude of being sad rather than angry when the young person makes a mistake. A light curious tone and stance can get through to a young person in a way that anger cannot.

Empathy

Empathy lets the young person feel *the adult's* compassion for them. Being empathic means the adult actively showing the young person that the child's inner life is important to the adult and he or she wants to be with the young person in their hard times.

With empathy, when the young person is sad or in distress the adult is feeling the sadness and distress with them and lets the young person know that.

The adult is demonstrating that he or she knows how difficult an experience is for the child. The adult is telling the young person that she will not have to deal with the distress alone.

The adult will stay with the young person emotionally, providing comfort and support, and will not abandon them when she needs the adult the most.

The adult is also communicating strength, love and commitment, with confidence that sharing the child's distress will not be too much. Together they will get through it.



Our Team

Senior Management Team

Director	Debra Thomas	debra.thomas@gemhereford.org
Headteacher	Rachel Ballance	rachel.ballance@gemhereford.org
Business Manager	Justin Haines	justin.haines@gemhereford.org
Pastoral Manager	Caroline Phillips	caroline.phillips@gemhereford.org

School staff

Lead Teacher	Beth Rogers	beth.rogers@gemhereford.org
Teachers	Kate Bishop	kate.bishop@gemhereford.org
	Kerry Dallow	kerry.dallow@gemhereford.org
HLTA	Tori Trautman	tori.trautman@gemhereford.org
Teaching Assistant	Gemma Jones	gemma.jones@gemhereford.org
Teaching Assistant	Hayley Beddoes	Hayley.beddoes@gemhereford.org
Pastoral Support Assistant	Michelle Jones	michelle.jones@gemhereford.org

School Governors

governors@gemhereford.org

Chair of Governors	Debra Thomas CEO and Founder of GEM Hereford
Safeguarding	Melissa Portman-Lewis
Finance	Sharon Sutherland
SMT	Debra Thomas; Rachel Ballance; Justin Haines; Caroline Phillips
Staff Governor	Nominations currently being received
LA Governor	Vacant
Parent Governor	Nominations currently being received

And last but not least:

The School Dog Squirrel

Squirrel is a trained school therapy dog, and she will be visiting classrooms and supporting the students as needed. She will have the run of the school and could turn up at any time to help out.



Contact Us

Our telephone number is **01432 80 1000**.

If you need to ring to report an absence, you should ring this number and press 1, then follow the instructions to leave a message explaining your child's absence. We ask that you inform us of all absences as soon as possible each day, and no later than 9.30 am. We may contact you later in the day to check everything is okay after we receive your message.

For anything else, you should press 2, and then you will be either connected to a member of the team or be asked to leave a message if no one is available. We will get back to you as soon as possible.

All individual staff have their own email address, but if you have a more general query, or don't know who to contact there are also the following email addresses:

For general enquiries about the school, please email admin@gemhereford.org

To discuss a young person with the head, please email headteacher@gemhereford.org

To make a complaint or speak to the governing body please email governors@gemhereford.org

Term Dates 2023 – 2024

Dates for Students

Autum Term

Starts:	5 th September 2023
Half Term:	30 th October 2023 – 3 rd November 2023
Ends:	20 th December 2023

Spring Term

Starts:	9 th January 2024
Half Term:	12 th February 2024 – 16 th February 2024
Ends:	22 nd March 2024

Summer Term

Starts:	9 th April 2024
Half Term:	27 th May 2024 – 31 st May 2024
Ends:	21 st July 2024

INSET Days

The school will be closed for Staff Training on:

- 4th September 2023
- 25th September 2023
- 8th January 2024
- 8th April 2024
- 22nd July 2024



Our School Day

Our school day starts at 9.15 am for all students. The doors open at 9.10 and all students will be welcomed by staff and start the day in the Hub, where we will have Breakfast Club for all students.

They will have the opportunity to eat a nourishing healthy breakfast if they and chat to their friends and their teachers, ask questions, and prepare for their day.

The timetable for the core part of the day is as shown in the table below. Students are put into groups according to their abilities and interests.

Day	9:40-10:20		10:30-11:10		11:20-12:00		13:00-14:45	Key of Initials			
Monday	Group 1 - KB	B R E A K B R E A K	Group 3 - KB	B R E A K B R E A K	Group 2 - KB	W A L K L U N C H L U N C H	Hub fitness Topic ICT	KB – Kate, Maths			
	Group 2 - BR		Group 1 - BR		Group 3 - BR		BR – Beth, Literacy				
	Group 3 - KD		Group 2 - KD		Group 1 - KD		KD – Kerry, timetable, reading or topic				
Tuesday	Group 1 - KB		Group 3 - KB		Group 2 - KB		C O O K I N G C L U B	Group 2 & 3 – KB / BR	Cooking club Hub fitness Art / Craft	C – Caroline, Food Technology	
	Group 2 - C		Group 1 - C		Group 3 - TBC			Group 1 - MJ /KD	PE - offsite ICT Art/ Craft	ML – Michelle, Food Technology	
	Group 3 - KD		Group 2 - KD		Group 1 - KD			Group 1 – MJ /KD	Science club Hub fitness Music	ML – Michelle, Food Technology	
Wednesday	Group 1 - KB		Group 2 - KB		Group 1 - BR		S C I E N C E C L U B	Group 2 - S	S C I E N C E C L U B	Hub fitness Golden time	S – Sandie, Science
	Group 2 - BR		Group 3 – MJ /KD		Group 3 – MJ /KD			Group 3 - BR		Hub fitness Golden time	
	Group 3 – MJ /KD		Group 1 - BR		Group 2 - KD			Group 1 - KD		Hub fitness Golden time	
Thursday	Group 1 - S		Group 3 - S		Group 1 - BR		S T U D E N T L E D A C T I V I T Y	Group 2 - S	S T U D E N T L E D A C T I V I T Y	Hub fitness Golden time	S – Sandie, Science
	Group 2 - BR		Group 1 - BR		Group 2 - KD			Group 3 - BR		Hub fitness Golden time	
	Group 3 - KD		Group 2 - KD		Group 1 - KD			Group 1 - KD		Hub fitness Golden time	
Friday	Student Lead Activities – time for developing topic based interests		Student Lead Activities – time for developing topic based interests		Student Lead Activities – time for developing topic based interests		Hub fitness Golden time				

Fridays are SLAD – student led activity day. This gives each student a chance to continue some work that they particularly enjoyed or wanted to extend, or they may choose to work on their own projects. We will develop this day around the students’ interests and motivation, and this could include visits offsite if this helps their work projects.

At 14.45 everyone comes together for Refresh and Reflect. This is a short session where students can have a drink or snack before their journey home, and talk about their day.



Teaching and Learning

We offer a holistic, therapeutic, and individualised approach to learning that is oriented towards the specific needs of the students. It is our belief that how we teach is fundamental to the success of our students and therefore we use a range of strategies to enable our students to feel safe enough to learn.

We focus on building positive and trusting relationships and a sense of belonging to allow our students to develop the skills and knowledge they need to access the broad and balanced adapted school curriculum.

We celebrate all successes, however small, so that students know what they are achieving and can recognise their own positive contributions to school life.

We offer a calm and friendly learning environment where students can grow in confidence and flourish. Class sizes are small, and all students have access to autism friendly environments, attachment aware staff and calming spaces where they can be free of pressure and take some time to unwind, if needed.

Initial assessments highlight the developmental needs of our students and allow us to build a package that will help them to make progress socially and emotionally, as well as academically.

We work closely with parents and carers to help support young people to reach their potential. We work with each young person according to their own individual plan, and they have 1-1 support as required.

We teach to the National Curriculum as much as possible, whilst ensuring that the best possible outcomes for our students are achieved, by tailoring our approach as needed. All students will experience:

English, including phonics
Mathematics
Science
Humanities
Art and Craft
IT
DT
PE
PSHE

Students will be given the opportunity to study a modern foreign language.

Much of our curriculum will be covered by topic lessons, where students will investigate topics of interest, and learning will be embedded into the sessions.

Our PE sessions will take place in the Hub or school grounds, but we also have links with organisations so students can experience other activities such as trampolining, swimming, or gymnastics, amongst others.

We will also be using the grounds to grow vegetables, which we will then cook in the kitchen, and we want the students to design and plant a garden to attract wildlife.



We will have regular lessons in Life Skills, which can be as varied as managing money, to how to access public transport or use the library.

Each student will also have regular 'Community' lessons, where they will learn how to access their local community for their own support and to support other vulnerable members of the community.

Students will study for appropriate qualifications including GCSEs, Functional Skills and AQA Unit Awards

At the appropriate time, all students will also have access to regular careers teaching to help them choose their next steps once they leave us.

School Meals

Breakfast

All students will come to Breakfast Club in the Hub at 9.15, which will be run by Michelle, our Pastoral Support Assistant. Students will be able to have toast, crumpets or cereal and a drink. This is free for all students.

Lunch

We do not have the facilities to provide hot school lunches, but we will provide sandwiches, fruit and a drink at lunchtime for a small fee, which will be invoiced to the parents and carers on a half termly basis. Students on free school meals will receive this free of charge. The options for this lunch will be made available at the end of each week, to choose for the following week.

Alternatively, students are welcome to bring their own healthy packed lunch to school.

Snacks

Water and squash are available at breaktimes, and students can have water or squash in the classroom in a beaker with a tightly fitting lid. During Refresh and Reflect, at the end of the day, all students will be offered a snack and a drink before they go home.



Pastoral Care

Pathway Plan

Each student at GEM will be on an individual pathway. This pathway will acknowledge and take note of both their academic and pastoral needs. It may identify aims such as returning to mainstream, achieving GCSEs, or acquiring key life skills.

When they are first enrolled in the school, Caroline Phillips, the Pastoral Manager, and Rachel Ballance, the Headteacher, will agree this plan with the student and their parents/carers. It will identify their aims and aspirations and have short, medium, and long term goals, as well as identifying how best to achieve these.

This plan is a live, working document that will be regularly updated with information gained from teaching staff, from home, and from the students themselves.

We will send home termly reports which will refer to the plan and identify successes and challenges.

There will be annual formal reviews of the plan in addition to this where the aims and aspirations will be reviewed, checked that they are still current and updated.

Pastoral Support Assistant

Michelle Jones is our Pastoral Support Assistant. She will be available for all students as an extra support when needed. She will run the morning Breakfast Club and get to know all the students well. She will offer nurturing care as required if a student feels unable to participate in normal activities and will be able to work as part of the wider school team to encourage them back into their class when they are ready.

Individual Counselling

We are very lucky to be working with an experienced, trauma informed counsellor, Emma Largesse. Emma has her own counselling service <https://emmalargessecounselling.co.uk/> and can offer a variety of approaches including Play Therapy and Creative Therapy, to suit each student who meets with her.

Students who have counselling identified on their EHCP will be timetabled in to see Emma on a weekly basis.

Medical Needs

If a student has any medical needs please inform the Headteacher as soon as possible.

All medication that needs to be taken during school hours, must be administered by a member of staff. An 'Administration of Medicines in Schools' form must be completed for each request for medication to be administered. Where the request is for a non-prescribed medication, a new form must be completed after 2 weeks.



School Uniform

We have made our school uniform as simple as possible and all of it can be purchased at local shops and supermarkets, to keep costs as low as possible. Our uniform is non-gender specific, and all students can choose which items they want to wear from the list below. Our only stipulation is that students will not wear branded clothing to school, and all clothes should be clean and tidy – e.g., no ripped jeans. Hooded items can be worn as outerwear, but when inside the school they must be removed.

All students can wear:

- A white top, which can be a shirt, a t-shirt or a polo shirt.
- Black bottoms, which can be a skirt, trousers, jeans, shorts or jogging bottoms.
- Black shoes or trainers.
- A sweatshirt or jumper – these can either be green or blue, according to student choice. For the actual colour see the pictures below which are from ASDA, but they can be purchased from anywhere appropriate.



We will provide all students with iron on or sew on logos as shown to attach to their tops, rather than expecting parents or carers to purchase expensive tops which are ready branded.

Students will not have to change into a PE kit, all our uniform can be used in PE sessions.



The School Community

We are not a school that believes we should have rules just to impose discipline, or make teachers' lives easier, but for all people in the school to feel safe and welcome, we must have some boundaries.

Smoking and Vaping

Smoking and vaping are not allowed anywhere on the school premises. This includes inside the building, in the grounds and in the car park in front of the school. This rule applies to students, staff and visitors.

Personal IT equipment

Personal IT equipment including mobile phones, tablets, smartwatches and other handheld devices are not to be used during lesson times. They must be turned off and put away out of sight. This is so everyone can concentrate on the lesson and not be distracted. We will not remove them from students unless they find it too difficult to stick to this rule. If that is the case, we will support the student to achieve this by taking the equipment and giving it back during breaks or when they go home. We will explain that the item is not being removed to punish them, but to help them to achieve this goal.

We would ask parents and carers to support this by being aware of the school timetable and not contacting their child during lesson times. If it is an emergency, please contact the school instead.

Tolerance and Acceptance

Students in the school may sometimes feel overwhelmed and display behaviour that in a mainstream school would not be tolerated and may have resulted in detentions or exclusions. At GEM, we understand that sometimes a student will not be able to regulate their emotions and behaviour and we accept that this may impact upon other students and staff.

We want to build a safe, supportive school community and we will work with all students to help them accept that occasionally this might happen, and to be understanding and kind to the student who is feeling very upset.

We will work with all students to reduce these instances to the absolute minimum, and we will model tolerance, understanding and acceptance. This means that we will ask the other students in the class to ignore what is happening and empathise with the student who is feeling very upset. We will work to reduce the number and length of these occurrences, but we must be aware that they will sometimes happen.

Conversely, if your child is the one feeling very dysregulated, we will ensure that the atmosphere from the other people present is one of tolerance and support.