



Parents' Handbook

2024-2025



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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 who want to be successful but can't be in a mainstream setting. Our students have a variety of difficulties that range from ADHD, ASD to social or anxiety-based struggles. 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 G.E.M 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).

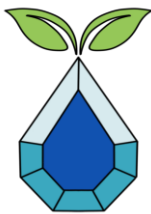


Our approach includes helping our students to reflect upon, grow and learn from even very difficult experiences. This means being prepared to give students another chance for a fresh start.

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

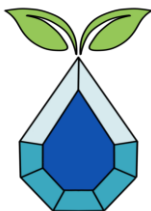
Our School Values

We chose the name G.E.M Hereford carefully as G.E.M stands for our 3 core values:



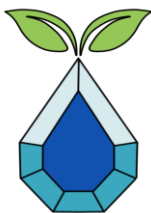
Growth

- 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 G.E.M Hereford

At G.E.M 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 don't 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 isn't 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
Deputy Headteacher	Sarah Philp	sarah.philp@gemhereford.org

School staff

Lead Teacher	Beth Rogers	beth.rogers@gemhereford.org
Teachers	Kerry Dallow	kerry.dallow@gemhereford.org
	Alex Dyson	alex.dyson@gemhereford.org
	Kate Bishop	kate.bishop@gemhereford.org
	Sadie Stephans	sandie.stephans@gemhereford.org
Administrator / TA	Gemma Jones	gemma.jones@gemhereford.org
Teaching Assistants	Tori Trautman	tori.trautman@gemhereford.org
	Hayley Beddoes	hayley.beddoes@gemhereford.org
Pastoral Support Assistant	Michelle Jones	michelle.jones@gemhereford.org

School Governors

Chair of Governors	Debra Thomas
Safeguarding	Melissa Portman-Lewis
Finance	Naomi White
Staff Governor	Vacant
LA Governor	Vacant
Parent Governor	Rebecca Brand



Gem's School Dog Squirrel:



Squirrel is a trained school therapy dog and has been working in schools for the last 7 years since she was 8 weeks old. She is a calm and positive type dog that walks around the school and is available if any student needs her for support. Squirrel is off lead while she is in school but if a student is more comfortable with her on a lead while they are in school then that's absolutely fine. The students are encouraged to take Squirrel out on a lunchtime walk, or a walk anytime that they might need and are encouraged to be an essential part of her care checking her water and comfortable bed are ready for her in school. They are encouraged to become confident holding her lead and doing some obedience skills with her when they are outside. Squirrel doesn't react when students are upset and will allow them to be close to her and use her presence to help them calm down. The students take part in dog education lessons if they wish to, so that Squirrel can also help them be safer around dogs while they are not in school. This is an important part of what Squirrel does in school as this can stop harmful or scary experience happening to our students when they are out in the community and interacting with dogs.



Contact Us

Our telephone number is **01432 801000**.

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 rachel.ballance@gemhereford.org

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

Term Dates 2024 – 2025

Dates for Students

Autum Term

Starts:	4 th September 2024
Half Term:	28 th October 2024 – 1 st November 2024
Ends:	20 th December 2024

Spring Term

Starts:	7 th January 2025
Half Term:	17 th February 2025 – 21 st February 2025
Ends:	11 th April 2025

Summer Term

Starts:	29 th April 2025
Half Term:	26 th May 2025 – 30 th May 2025
Ends:	20 th July 2025

INSET Days

The school will be closed for Staff Training on:

Monday 2nd and Tuesday 3rd September 2024
Monday 6th January 2025
Monday 28th April 2025
Monday 21st July 2025



Our School Day

Our school day starts at 9.15 am for all students. All students will be welcomed by staff and start the day their day getting some breakfast, a drink and catching up with the students and staff or taking part in a chosen activity that helps them get ready for their day.

The timetable for the core part of the day is designed on an individual basis. We feel that it is important to encourage our students to find groups that they enjoy working with, but this is not essential at GEM. We allow the students' needs and learning style lead the way and although we encourage all students to reach their full academic potential, we know that their happiness and ability to regulate comes first before they are able to drive forward with their learning. Some of our students follow a planned timetable while others follow a more project-based approach. We make sure that the learning while being challenging and progressive is at all time student lead and has the wellbeing of each individual student at the forefront.

We use Seesaw to communicate with parents and students which allows us to share timetables where appropriate. This platform also gives the students an area where they can share their work and achievements that can be seen by parents'/carers and is a vital link between school and home for our students. Parents are also able to message the teachers on this platform which has proved to be a quick and effective way to communicate in the working day as it us up and live in the classrooms.

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 14.40 every day we all have 'social time' where students can spend time with their peers, staff or Squirrel to get any questions answered, play a fun game or get something to eat or drink so that we are sure that every student is ready to get into their taxis or their family transport and make their way home at 3pm.

Staff will always communicate with parents / carers if there is any issue within the day or if there may be something that their child will need to discuss when they are home. We have found that this can help parents/carers have calm and positive times at home where messages and events can be discussed and any issues or needs of the child can be put in practice straight away in the next working day. The staff have briefing twice a day so that parents can be assured that any important information about their child is shared quickly and effectively with all staff members ensuring a consistent approach and message given to their child.



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 can 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.

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 are invited to have breakfast when they arrive at 915am. This breakfast making is supported 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

Some students choose to bring their own lunch. However, students can choose to make their own lunches on site. They can be part of ordering food that arrives on Monday from Sainsburys so that there is always the foods that they need for their lunches on site. We encourage healthy eating where possible and provide a termly menu offering students a set meal, this is shared via Seesaw for parents/carer and students to view prior to starting a new term. We also recognise that some of our students have some anxieties around food and eating and we do whatever is needed to allow our students to feel comfortable and relaxed to eat and drink while they are in school.

Snacks

Our students are encouraged to recognise when they are hungry or thirsty and can access drinks and snacks whenever they need to without any attention being brought to this. We recognise that the demand put on students to eat at specific times or in specific areas can create anxieties, so we strive to eliminate this by encouraging the students to manage this for themselves.



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 will agree this plan with the student the staff will get to know the needs of the student and agree what pathway best suits their needs and learning styles. 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.

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. Students can wear the uniform or choose not to whatever is best for them to feel comfortable attending GEM Hereford. Our uniform is non-gender specific, and all students can choose which items they want to wear from the list below.

If a student chooses to wear the uniform they 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.



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.