

Neurodivergent-Affirmative Co-Regulation and Positive Behaviour Support Policy



Version: September 2026

Ratified by the Governing Body

Chair of Governors - Natasha Harris

To be reviewed Annually

(September 2027 or sooner if legislation or best practice changes)

This policy has been reviewed and updated with consideration given to the principles and the ethos outlined in the UN Convention for the rights of the child - Article 28.

The Governing Body is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff, volunteers and visitors to share this commitment.

Lead Responsible

Mr. W Tulloch – Head Teacher

Version 1.0

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1. Introduction

The Pines is an autism specialist school committed to creating a safe, inclusive and neurodivergent-affirmative environment. This policy replaces a traditional behaviourmanagement approach with a relationship-based approach centred on co-regulation, communication, Positive Behaviour Support and emotional wellbeing.

We recognise that behaviour is communication, and that pupils learn best when they feel safe, understood and connected. This policy sets out how every adult in our community works to reduce barriers, understand need, and support pupils to develop the regulation, communication and independence they will carry into adulthood.

2. Vision

Our vision is that every pupil:

- Feels safe, respected and valued.
- Develops trusting relationships.
- Communicates in ways that work for them.
- Builds emotional regulation and independence.
- Achieves success in learning and in life.

3. Our Values

Our values spell the name of our school and guide every decision we make.

Value	What it means at The Pines
Protect	We create physically, emotionally and psychologically safe environments.
Inspire	We believe every pupil can learn, and we celebrate progress in all its forms.
Nurture	Relationships are the foundation of learning and wellbeing.
Embrace	We celebrate neurodiversity and make reasonable adjustments to enable success.
Succeed	Success includes communication, wellbeing, independence and academic achievement.

4. Policy Statement

This policy applies to every member of the school community. Our aim is not to control behaviour but to understand it, reduce barriers to learning, and help pupils develop lifelong regulation skills through consistent, compassionate and evidence-informed practice.

5. The Pines Philosophy

Our practice rests on a shared set of beliefs. These are not slogans; they are commitments that shape how adults respond in every interaction.

- › **Behaviour is communication.**
- › **Regulation comes before learning.**
- › **Connection comes before correction.**
- › **Every child does well when they can.**
- › **Fairness means giving every pupil the support they need.**
- › **Relationships create lasting change.**
- › **Repair is more powerful than punishment.**

Adults respond with curiosity rather than judgement, seeking to understand what a pupil is communicating before deciding how to help.

6. The Pines Adult Charter

Co-regulation begins with the adult. Every adult at The Pines makes the following commitments to the children in our care.

- I will see the child before the behaviour.
- I will regulate myself before trying to regulate others.
- I will assume positive intent.
- I will protect dignity.
- I will choose curiosity over judgement.
- I will adapt the environment before expecting the child to adapt.
- I will repair relationships.
- I will celebrate strengths and progress.
- I will never stop believing that every child can succeed.

7. The Pines Co-Regulation Framework

The Pines follows a simple co-regulation cycle. Every interaction should move a pupil towards regulation rather than simply compliance.

Protect → Connect → Co-Regulate → Understand → Support → Learn → Repair

Stage	What adults do
Protect	Create physical, emotional and sensory safety.
Connect	Build trusting relationships and reduce anxiety.
Co-Regulate	Adults model calm and help pupils regulate.
Understand	Ask: 'What is this behaviour communicating?'
Support	Adapt communication, environment and expectations.
Learn	Develop regulation, communication and independence.
Repair	Restore relationships following difficult moments.

8. Understanding Behaviour Through a Neurodivergent Lens

Autistic pupils may experience the world differently. Behaviour may reflect anxiety, sensory processing differences, communication needs, executive-functioning differences, uncertainty, interoception or physical discomfort rather than deliberate non-compliance.

Area	How we respond
Communication	Allow processing time, use Total Communication, and never assume refusal without checking understanding.
Sensory processing	Consider noise, lighting, touch, movement, temperature and personal space.
Anxiety	Reduce uncertainty through predictable routines, visuals and preparation.
Executive functioning	Break tasks down, give one instruction at a time, and support organisation.
Emotional regulation	Notice early signs of dysregulation and co-regulate before teaching.

Adult reflection

Before responding, adults ask themselves three questions:

- What is the pupil communicating?
- What support do they need?
- What can I adapt?

Key messages

- Behaviour is communication.
- Connection comes before correction.

- Regulation comes before learning.
- Curiosity comes before judgement.
- Every interaction builds or weakens trust.

9. Everyday Practice: The Pines Way

Every interaction should help a pupil feel safer, more understood and better able to engage in learning. Adults aim to regulate first, then teach.

The Pines Way

- Stay calm and be emotionally available.
- Build relationships before addressing behaviour.
- Assume positive intent.
- Use simple, respectful language and allow processing time.
- Notice early signs of dysregulation.
- Adapt the environment before increasing expectations.
- Maintain predictable routines.
- Repair relationships after difficult moments.

Communication

Adults use clear language, visuals, Total Communication and AAC where appropriate. Processing time is respected, and unnecessary language is reduced during periods of anxiety.

Language we use

The words we choose shape how a pupil feels and how we understand them. Small changes in language make a large difference.

Instead of...	We say...
Calm down.	I'm here to help.
You're refusing.	Something is making this difficult right now.
What's wrong with you?	How can I help?
Stop that!	Let's try this together.
Bad behaviour.	Behaviour communicating a need or distress.

During dysregulation

- Reduce demands and unnecessary language.
- Lower your voice and slow your pace.
- Reduce the audience where possible.
- Offer regulation strategies and choices.

- Do not argue, threaten or shame.
- Follow the pupil's Regulation Support Plan where appropriate.

After dysregulation

Recovery comes before reflection. When a pupil is calm, adults rebuild the relationship, explore what happened with curiosity, and identify what may help next time.

10. Regulation and Individualised Support

Some pupils require additional personalised support to regulate successfully. Support is based on understanding needs rather than controlling behaviour.

Graduated approach

Universal	Targeted	Specialist
Predictable routines, relationships, visuals, sensory-aware environments and coregulation.	Regulation Support Plans, sensory strategies, communication passports and additional adult support.	Positive Behaviour Support, Functional Behaviour Assessment, multi-agency planning and therapeutic advice.

Positive Behaviour Support

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) aims to improve quality of life by understanding the purpose of behaviour, adapting environments, teaching new skills and increasing participation, independence and communication.

Regulation Support Plans

Where a pupil needs personalised support, a Regulation Support Plan is developed with the pupil, their family and relevant professionals. Each plan captures:

- Strengths and interests.
- Communication preferences.
- Sensory needs.
- Early signs of dysregulation.
- Effective co-regulation strategies.
- Recovery and repair approaches.

Restrictive practice

Restrictive practice is always a last resort. The school seeks to minimise restrictive interventions through proactive planning, co-regulation, environmental adaptation and Positive Behaviour Support.

Physical intervention

Where there is an immediate risk of harm, trained staff may use reasonable, proportionate and necessary physical intervention in accordance with Team Teach principles and current legislation. Physical intervention is never used as a punishment or to secure compliance. Every intervention is recorded, reviewed, and followed by repair and reflection.

11. Roles and Responsibilities

Who	Responsibilities
All staff	Create safe environments, build relationships, recognise behaviour as communication, follow this policy, and seek support when required.
Teachers	Plan inclusive learning, oversee Regulation Support Plans, and work collaboratively with families and professionals.
Teaching assistants	Support communication, recognise early signs of dysregulation, and implement agreed strategies consistently.
Senior leaders	Provide training, monitor implementation, support staff wellbeing, and review significant incidents.
Governors	Monitor the effectiveness of the policy and ensure statutory responsibilities are met.
Parents and carers	Work in partnership with the school and contribute to shared regulation strategies.
Pupils	Where appropriate, contribute to identifying helpful regulation strategies and developing independence.

In summary

- Protect relationships.
- Respond with curiosity.
- Support regulation before learning.
- Adapt before expecting.
- Repair after every difficult moment.

12. Expectations for Pupils

Our expectations are written for and with pupils, in the spirit of support rather than compliance.

- Communicate in ways that work for you.
- Respect everyone's right to feel safe.
- Ask for help when you need it.

- Use regulation strategies with support.
- Care for our environment.
- Repair relationships when things go wrong.
- Celebrate differences and support one another.

13. Recording, Monitoring and Learning

The purpose of recording incidents is to improve understanding, strengthen support and reduce future incidents. Recording is never used to apportion blame.

- Record significant dysregulation, restrictive practice, injuries and safeguarding concerns.
- Identify triggers, successful strategies and environmental factors.
- Review patterns regularly to inform training and provision.
- Use post-incident reflection to improve future support.

Post-incident review questions

- What was the pupil communicating?
- Were there early signs we could have recognised?
- What worked well?
- What should we change next time?
- Does the Regulation Support Plan need updating?

14. Safeguarding, Restrictive Practice and Suspension

Safeguarding always takes priority. Behaviour may indicate unmet needs, abuse, trauma, illness or changes in wellbeing. Concerns are always followed up in line with our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Restrictive practice

The Pines is committed to reducing restrictive practice. Any restrictive intervention must be lawful, necessary, reasonable, proportionate, the least restrictive option, and for the shortest possible time.

Physical intervention

Physical intervention is never used as punishment or to secure compliance. It is only used to prevent immediate harm and in accordance with Team Teach principles and statutory guidance.

Suspension

Suspension is a last resort and never a behaviour-management strategy. Following any suspension, leaders will review risk, support, reasonable adjustments and reintegration arrangements with families.

15. Working in Partnership with Families

We believe parents and carers are experts on their child. We work collaboratively to develop Regulation Support Plans, share successful strategies, celebrate progress, and review support following significant incidents. Consistency between home and school helps pupils feel safe and secure.

16. Supporting Staff Wellbeing

Adults cannot effectively co-regulate if they are themselves dysregulated. The Pines is committed to supporting staff wellbeing through supervision, reflective practice, coaching, appropriate training, and access to wellbeing support. Looking after ourselves enables us to look after our pupils.

17. What Makes The Pines Different

This policy reflects the unique practice at The Pines. Alongside co-regulation, our approach is informed by SCERTS principles, Total Communication, AAC, Positive Behaviour Support, Team Teach, and therapeutic practice, including Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Play Therapy, Music Therapy and Educational Psychology — together with Evidence for Learning and our curriculum pathways. We prepare pupils for adulthood by developing communication, independence, emotional regulation and self-advocacy.

18. Implementation

To embed this policy, the school will:

- Deliver whole-school training – Team Teach.
- Provide coaching and modelling.
- Use learning walks to monitor consistency – SLT and Pastoral Team.
- Review regulation support plans regularly.
- Engage parents through workshops and communication.
- Report implementation and impact to governors annually.

19. Evidence Base

This policy is informed by current guidance and research, including:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education.
- SEND Code of Practice.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Dfe Behaviour in Schools guidance.
- NICE guidance on autism and attachment.
- Positive Behaviour Support.
- SCERTS.
- Autism Education Trust.
- National Autistic Society.
- Team Teach.
- Attachment- and trauma-informed practice.

20. Policy Review and Linked Policies

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Headteacher and Governing Body, or sooner if legislation or best practice changes. Feedback from pupils, families and staff will inform future revisions.

Linked policies

This policy should be read alongside: Safeguarding and Child Protection; SEND; Equality; Health and Safety; Positive Behaviour Support; Attendance; Anti-Bullying; Intimate Care and Complaints Policy.

Appendices

The following appendices are practical tools for everyday use. Appendices D and E are photocopiable templates.

Appendix A — The Pines Adult Promise

A quick daily checklist for every adult.

- ☐ Stay calm.
- ☐ Protect dignity.
- ☐ Assume positive intent.
- ☐ Be curious before judgement.

- ☐ Adapt before expecting.
- ☐ Support regulation before learning.
- ☐ Repair relationships.
- ☐ Celebrate progress.

Appendix B Co-Regulation Prompt Card

Keep this in mind in the moment. When behaviour escalates, STOP.

STOP

- S** — Stay calm
- T** — Think about what the pupil is communicating
- O** — Offer regulation and support
- P** — Plan together for what comes next

Appendix C Staff Language Guide

Reframing our language helps us see need rather than defiance.

Avoid	Use
Attention seeking	Seeking connection
Refusing	Finding this difficult right now
Non-compliant	Needing additional support
Challenging behaviour	Behaviour communicating distress
Calm down	I'm here to help

Appendix D One-Page Regulation Support Plan

Pupil:

Strengths and interests:

Communication preferences:

Sensory needs:

Early signs of dysregulation:

Helpful strategies:

Strategies to avoid:

Recovery support:

Review date:

Appendix E Post-Incident Reflection Template

Date and time:

What happened?

Possible triggers:

What was the pupil communicating?

What worked well?

—

What could we do differently?

Actions agreed:

Completed by:

Appendix F Classroom Co-Regulation Checklist

A quick environmental check to support regulation before difficulties arise.

- ☐ Predictable routines in place
- ☐ Visual supports available
- ☐ Calm communication used
- ☐ Sensory needs considered
- ☐ Regulation resources accessible
- ☐ Recovery space identified
- ☐ Relationships repaired following incidents

Protect • Inspire • Nurture • Embrace • Succeed