

ELSA – Emotional Literacy Support

What is an ELSA?

An ELSA is an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant. ELSAs are trained and supervised by educational psychologists. We have three ELSAs at Holy Trinity C of E Primary School: Mrs Thandi, Mrs Sewell-Hatch and Ms George; ELSAs aim to help a child they might be working with feel happy in school.

The ELSA intervention is part of our holistic approach to meeting the needs of our pupils at all levels. We consider emotional literacy support to be very similar to delivering a Maths or English intervention; it helps to support a child in an area where they need assistance. Being emotionally supported will also help a child to reach their potential educationally by reducing any barriers to learning. We know that a happier child will always be more ready and open to learn.

ELSAs help children to understand their emotions and respect the feelings of those around them. They provide a consistent private space, time, and an opportunity for children to think about their personal circumstances and how they manage them.

The majority of ELSA work is delivered on an individual basis, but sometimes small group work is more appropriate especially when addressing social skills and friendships. Sessions are fun and ELSAs are trained to use a range of activities including games, role-play with puppets, or arts and craft to support the child. ELSA sessions can take place in our ELSA room or outside, relaxing areas which help the children feel safe and nurtured.

How does ELSA work?

Children are usually referred for ELSA support by their class teacher, senior leaders or the Special Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo). The ELSAs and SENDCo meet regularly to discuss the referral forms and to identify and prioritise which children require the weekly sessions. They then plan support sessions to facilitate the pupil in developing new skills and coping strategies that allow them to manage social and emotional situations more effectively. The sessions initially last six weeks, followed by a review to reflect on whether the support needs to continue. There is sometimes a waiting list for ELSA support, but this is regularly reviewed, and we try to keep wait times as short as possible.

Supporting - not 'fixing'

An ELSA's role is to provide emotional support rather than to 'fix' problems or take them away. The ELSAs aim to establish a warm, respectful relationship with a pupil and to provide a reflective space where they are able to openly share their thoughts and feelings.

It is important to recognise that change cannot necessarily be achieved rapidly and is dependent upon the context and complexity of the issues presented. For children with complex or long-term needs, support will be designed to target a specific aspect. Training and development of ELSAs is an on-going process and wisdom is required to recognise when issues are beyond the level of expertise that could reasonably be expected of an ELSA. In this case, it may be appropriate for school to sign-post to other avenues of support.

What next?

The ELSA will liaise with teachers, and parents if they would like, to discuss progress. Once the sessions finish, the child will hopefully be able to implement the guidance they have been given and transfer any new skills taught, into their regular routine. It may be that further support is required in the future with a similar or different focus, in which case the child can be re-referred back to an ELSA.