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# INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS



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## Welcome to the Mulberry Bush School

The Mulberry Bush is a residential therapeutic school that works with vulnerable and severely traumatised primary aged children and their families from across the UK. The school is located in Standlake, a village 15 miles west of Oxford city centre, part of rural Oxfordshire. This location provides a safe environment in which the children staying at the school can explore a wide range of learning and leisure opportunities.

At The Mulberry Bush we believe that to effectively understand, educate and treat children who display challenging and disturbing behaviours, we need to be reflective practitioners who are highly attuned to the communication and needs of our young people. Through our understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication staff can adapt their work and the environment to better meet the children's needs.

We hope that your child will feel safe and settled at our school. We know that if we create the right environment for the children who are staying with us, one where they feel safe and understood, they will be able to develop socially, emotionally and academically. However, we also know that due to the nature of the trauma these young people have experienced the work can at times be very challenging for all the adults concerned. Despite this, our experience tells us that the best work happens when all of the adults work together as a team to support the child.

The aim of this booklet is therefore to provide all the important information that is needed by you, as a carer or a parent, to help your child settle at the school. It also aims to help you understand how the school functions; as well as enabling everyone to work together so that we can ensure that the children, placed at The Mulberry Bush School, are able to develop and progress over the time they are here.

It is also worth pointing out that this booklet is not exhaustive and if it is missing something or does not contain any information you want or need to know, please feel free to call us on 01865 300202 or email [lwright@mulberrybush.org.uk](mailto:lwright@mulberrybush.org.uk) or [aburnett@mulberrybush.org.uk](mailto:aburnett@mulberrybush.org.uk)

We look forward to working closely with you in the year ahead.

**Lee Wright**  
**Director**



**New Admissions**

When children start at the Mulberry Bush the focus is on bringing children into the school in as nurturing and safe way as possible, supporting them through a period of adjustment to Mulberry Bush routines, expectations and ways of working. For a minimum of twelve school weeks, our experiences of living and working alongside new children are gathered along with some formal assessments being carried out. At the end of this period an Assessment Placement Report is completed and shared with families and professional networks. A number of Placement Objectives are set at this point and are included in the report - these identify the areas of work we believe are the most significant for us to focus on throughout a child's placement at the Mulberry Bush.

During the first two weeks, new children are gradually introduced to more of the adults who will be working with them, and to children from other houses. This includes a staggered introduction into class, with a reduced timetable and with house adults alongside them. By the end of two weeks, it is hoped that new children will be able to manage the full school day alongside their peers, although support is available for those who need a bit longer.



## Dates for Academic Year 2024 - 2025

### AUTUMN TERM 2024

**Children return to school:** Monday 2nd September 2024

**Weekend home** Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 – Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024

**25<sup>th</sup> October 2024 - Education Open Day**

**Half Term Children return home:** Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024

**Children return to school:** Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024

**Weekend home** Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2024 – Monday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2024

**Christmas Holidays Children return home:** Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024

### SPRING TERM 2025

**Children return to school:** Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**Weekend home** Friday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2025 - Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**Half Term Children return home:** Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025

**Children return to school:** Monday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2025

**Weekend home** Friday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025 – Monday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2025

**Easter Holidays Children return home:** Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2025

### SUMMER TERM 2025

**Children return to school:** Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2025

**Weekend home** Friday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2025 – Monday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2025

**Half Term Children return home:** Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2025

**Children return to school:** Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2025

**27<sup>th</sup> June 2025 - Summer Open Day**

**Weekend home** Friday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2025 – Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025

**Summer Break Children return home:** Friday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2025

Children should be picked up between 9.30am and 11.00am on days going home.  
Children should be returned to the school between 2.30pm and 5.00pm.

## Keeping in touch with your child and the school

Maintaining regular contact with the school is an important element of ensuring that the child's network is functioning appropriately. It is therefore really important to not only keep in touch with your child but also with the staff at the school.

### PHONING THE SCHOOL

As mentioned already, ensuring that everyone is working together is a really important way of supporting your child's development whilst they are at school. At times the challenging nature of your child's behaviour will place a strain on the relationship between all the adults in the network. There may be times when you hear messages from your child or school staff that do not seem right or make sense. At these times it is really important to check these messages with the staff at the school. The best people to contact at these times are those within the network team. Each child and their family are allocated a Family Network Practitioner and this is the person to contact when discussing any issues or concerns about your child that you want clarifying. The contact details are as follows:

Stuart Harragan	-	07786 965496
Diana Nixon	-	07584 620854
Rebecca Lutman	-	07584 734809

### PHONING YOUR CHILD

We also encourage phone contact with your child. To try and ensure regular conversations we set certain phoning nights and times for each child. You are welcome to call at other times but please remember the school phones can be busy during the early evening period. If you have consistent difficulties contacting the households during the evenings please do let us know during office hours so that we can resolve the problem. The main school phone number during office hours is 01865 300202. Children are contactable out of office hours on their house's direct line phone number:

Pegasus: 01865 303082	Jigsaw: 01865 303032	Sunset: 01865 303016
Burrow: 01865 301118	Bramble House: 01865 300 407	

Children also make regular telephone calls from their households. These are an important way for them to stay in touch with people at home. If for any reason the calls don't happen, it is important that parents and carers let the Family Network Practitioner know as soon as possible.

### WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY

Outside office hours the school runs an On Call system. In an emergency, two senior members of staff are contactable on the following numbers: 07788 254086 or 07788 254420.

## CONTACT

We encourage parents and carers to visit their children at the school. We prefer visits to take place during the week if possible and to be planned in advance so that we have enough staff to welcome you. There is a visitor's flat to enable these visits to be private. On the other hand, if parents or carers wish to take their child out at the weekend, this is also welcomed, when planned well in advance.

## E-MAIL

School staff e-mail address is: [firstinitialsurname@mulberrybush.org.uk](mailto:firstname.lastname@mulberrybush.org.uk). (i.e. [asmith@mulberrybush.org.uk](mailto:asmith@mulberrybush.org.uk)). All children have an email address of their own using [firstnamesurnameinitial@mulberrybush.org.uk](mailto:firstname.lastname@mulberrybush.org.uk) (i.e. Jane Bloggs would be [janeb@mulberrybush.org.uk](mailto:janeb@mulberrybush.org.uk))

## OPEN DAYS

We run three Open Days each year. The Education Open Day provides an opportunity for you (parents and carers) to talk to your child's teacher and look at their class work. We do ask on this open day that other family members do not come so that the sole focus can be on your child's work.

The Summer Open Day is an opportunity for the whole family to come to the school to enjoy a fete-like atmosphere and have some fun together. It is a great opportunity to get to know all of the staff and see some of the things that the children at the school enjoy doing. The dates of these open days are set at the beginning of each school year and are available on the calendar on the school website.

The ex-pupils open day is typically run in August or September. Children receive an invite to this event once they have been away from the school for at least one year. We really hope that ex-pupils and their families will stay in touch with us once they have left and come back to visit on this day.



## What to do if you have a complaint about the school

John Turberville and Lee Wright are the Complaints Officers. We would like to encourage anyone with a complaint about the school to let Lee know or if it is about the wider charity organisation then please inform John. They will need to know the detail of the complaint, and the outcome you would like from the complaint. For further details please read our Complaints Policy on our Website; [www.mulberrybush.org.uk](http://www.mulberrybush.org.uk).

If we know what others are not happy with, we can try to improve our practice in these areas. A 'Comments Box' can be found in the School Reception and we welcome your comments and feedback. The children have their own comments / complaints form to fill in (or have filled in on their behalf) so please ask for one of these if your child has a complaint.

The children also have a phone line in their school house to our independent advocacy service at VOICE. If you wish you can also contact Ofsted on 0300 123 1231.

## What to do if my child is unwell? (Medical)

From time to time it is possible that your child may not be very well when they are at school. In most cases this will be managed by trained school staff through the administration of homely remedies (non-prescription medicine that is available over the counter in community pharmacies) such as paracetamol based medication. If there are any more complicated health matters then your child would be taken to the Bampton Medical Practice to see a doctor or in some cases the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. In the event of this happening you would be contacted by school staff to inform you and keep you up to date with any developments.

### DOCTORS

All children at the school are registered with the school's doctors surgery in Bampton. We have a very good working relationship with the practice and the children can either be taken to the surgery or, if necessary, doctors will come to the school. If a child needs to see a doctor whilst at home, **the child should not be registered with the home practice but taken as a temporary patient.** This stops the child's notes being posted back and forth.

### DENTIST

The children at the school can be registered with the school dentist in Witney. Some parents and carers choose for their child to continue to see their family dentist at home instead.

### HEALTH

Every child's keyworker is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are made for routine health checks. Regular dental checks can be arranged at six monthly intervals. The children will have an annual appointment with the optician. However, you do have the opportunity to take care of dental and optical care if you wish. Please let us know if you would like to arrange to take your child to these check-ups near to your home.



## Education

### **ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

Jessica Hooper, Head Teacher, has responsibility for ensuring that children's additional educational needs, such as Speech and Language support, or Dyslexia are provided for. All children have a Speech and Language assessment and Educational Psychology assessment in their first term. Those who would benefit can be referred to an Occupational Therapist. We use the findings of these assessments to identify how to address particular difficulties children may be having with their learning.

### **CURRICULUM**

The Education team has developed its own curriculum, which was launched in September 2020. The curriculum starts with **curiosity**, where children's learning is predominantly sensory and exploratory; the skills covered in the curiosity level are the foundations of learning in all subjects. The next step is **confidence**, with a focus on taught skills essential for children's successful futures. The final step is **independence**, where children are encouraged to identify and develop their own areas of interest, and to pursue these to the best of their abilities. The children at the Mulberry Bush tend to learn best when they feel that what they are learning is relevant to them, and is presented in practical, interesting ways. If you would like to know how to best support your child's learning, please ask one of the Education team.

### **SATS TESTS**

At the school we do not run national end of primary school Standard Assessments Tests (SATs). In exceptional circumstances, we can enter children in discussion with their network.

### **HOMEWORK**

During the week we do set homework for the children to complete in their house at the end of the day or occasionally at weekends. This homework will generally be a topic-based activity such as researching information or completing artwork. However we would strongly recommend that whilst at home for the holidays some regular time is set aside for sharing stories together and any other particular area that your child shows an interest or strength in.

### **MUSIC LESSONS**

At the school children regularly take part in music lessons with their class. We also provide opportunities for children to play a range of instruments including: drums, keyboard, recorder, violin and guitar.

### **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Religious Education is taught as part of the school curriculum. We celebrate festivals from all of the world's major religions. Parents have the right to ask for their child not to take part in any collective worship at the school. If you wish to exercise this right, please contact Jessica Hooper, Head Teacher, at [jhooper@mulberrybush.org.uk](mailto:jhooper@mulberrybush.org.uk)

### **PERSONAL, SOCIAL & HEALTH EDUCATION (PSHE)**

We run a Growing Up Course annually for all children. The course is delivered termly in small groups. We inform parents, carers and local authorities that we run this course but make it clear that children can be withdrawn. The school Sex Education Policy, and the video used in the Growing Up Course, are available for parents and carers to see. A discrete drugs and alcohol awareness course is also run throughout the year. The curriculum also covers e-safety lessons and these are delivered across the academic year.

### **SCHOOL COUNCIL**

Children are elected to our School Council, which meets once a week, to discuss any topics they wish. The School Council is also regularly consulted about planned developments so that they can contribute to these.

### **SPORT**

All children take part in weekly PE lessons and have the choice to join in with clubs and activities that are run after the learning day. Houses also organise regular sporting activities for the evenings and weekends. We have an annual Sports Day, which all of the children are encouraged to participate in. We also have links with local sports teams, which children can join when they are able to.

### **PAWS and FOREST SCHOOLS**

All children at The Mulberry Bush School have an opportunity to take part in outdoor learning. Initially this will happen at the school; however, as your child progresses through the school these will become lessons off site during Forest School sessions. These visits usually last an hour and involve the children gaining confidence in an outdoor environment whilst learning through activities such as treasure trails or building simple tarpaulin shelters. PAWS (Play Adventure Wilderness Skills) is the natural progression from Forest Schools and is aimed at the children who have made significant social and emotional progress whilst at the Mulberry Bush. Learning is connected to the outdoors through walks and activities; also subjects such as geography, science and maths can be taught whilst on these sessions.



## **Trips and clubs**

### **OUTWARD BOUND ACTIVITIES**

We take our children out on camping and other outside activity trips on at least two occasions a year. These trips are intended to be positive social experiences that combine appropriate challenge alongside shared fun experiences. Each year the School runs an outward-bound trip. The children will take part in activities such as canoeing, rock climbing, and mountain walking. All of these pursuits are led by qualified instructors. These activities can be quite demanding for the children but it is highly rewarding for them when they are able to overcome these challenges - it is fantastic to observe the delight and pride when they experience this success. During this time children are not contactable, except in the case of emergency.

### **CLUBS**

The School offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs. These take place across the week, during evenings and weekends. A wide range of activities are also available to our children during choosing time on a Wednesday afternoon. Examples of the different types of clubs and activities that are on offer include; cycling, cooking club, leavers club, football club and swimming. We also make sure that when the children are ready that they are able to make use of clubs and societies in the wider community. Over the years children have attended clubs such as the Cubs, the Brownies, football teams, horse riding centres, gymnastics centres and disco swim.

### **TRIPS AND VISITS**

The School organises regular opportunities for the children to go on trips and visits. These range from walks from the school, visits to local shops or swimming pool, to educational visits to the Roman Baths in Bath or the Black Country Museum in Dudley.



### **Clothing**

#### **CLOTHING**

There is a clothing list below that is a guide of what your child may need at the school. If you can name your child's clothing we would be really grateful, however, if you are not able to, please keep these items separately and let us know so that they can be named before going through the laundry, this way they can be easily identified. On travel days we do put any unidentified laundry out in the dining room for families to reclaim. Clothing can be an area of



## CLOTHING LIST

8 pairs pants

8 pairs socks

2 pairs dark school trousers (not jeans) /  
dark skirts

2 pairs dark school shorts

1 dressing gown

1 pair slippers

1 coat (warm in the winter)

2 pairs trainers

## **SCHOOL UNIFORM**

The purpose of this co  
mind to fully engage in

### Uniform

School fleece or swea  
School polo shirt

Dark long or short school style trousers (not jeans or combat style) or skirt (skirt needs to touch the floor when kneeling down)

Black school trainers

Black socks, tights or leggings by choice

Coats to be worn to class but not in class



the best possible frame of



## Other information

### **CHILD PROTECTION**

Claire McCarthy and Angus Burnett are the Designated Safeguarding Leads at the school. They are informed of any potential child protection incidents that have happened at the school, and are in regular contact with Oxfordshire Child Protection Team in Banbury, Oxon. They<sup>13</sup> work closely with all the staff to promote the safety and welfare of the children.

### **INTERNAL CASE CONFERENCES (ICCs) - ASSESSING PROGRESS - REVIEWS**

## **INTERNET USE**

Children and their parents/carers have to sign an agreement before children are able to use the Internet. The children have supervised access to the Internet in their classrooms and households. The school uses a company to screen what comes into the school via the Internet. Children are able to play on-line computer games whilst at the school. These games are monitored and children are not allowed to play those where they can have on-line conversations with other people. Currently some of these games enable people to spend money on-line through the use of vouchers that can be purchased at retail outlets with pocket money or bought as gifts. The school does not encourage children to buy these vouchers but it is acknowledged that there may be an appropriate time when they can be purchased. This will be discussed within the school by staff and a decision taken with the child and parents

### **POSSESSIONS**

It is really important that the children are able to bring their own possessions to school, to help them link between home and school. We would request that valuable items (emotional or monetary) are kept at home, as we cannot guarantee that they will be safe at school. Any unsuitable items brought back to school will be removed and returned to parents and carers.

### **MOBILE PHONES**

Children are not permitted to have mobile phones at school.

### **THERAPY**

All children have a Psychotherapy and Story Stem assessment in their first six weeks at the school. This is to help staff at the school get a picture of the child's emotional world when they first arrive at the school. Most of our children will benefit most from the therapeutic



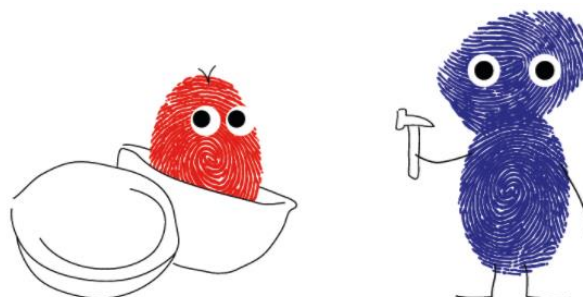
## How do we work with challenging behaviour?

At the Mulberry Bush we use a variety of ways of communicating with children. We expect staff to use a range of strategies and if these are not effective, we may need to use physical intervention.

### PHYSICAL INTERVENTION

Staff are all trained in the use of physical intervention where possible and safe ways of intervening physically where necessary. Where staff have responsibility for the teaching, care and management of the children they are trained to Intermediate Level with Dedicated Advanced Modules. Where they do not have any responsibility in their job descriptions for the children they are trained at Foundation Level.

Authorisation is given to staff to use the techniques included in their training as indicated in



appropriate  
ever we do  
then alternative

## **Why does my child behave differently at home and at school?**

### **1. My child behaves much worse at school than at home and it makes me wonder if he/she should be at the school. Why is there this difference in behaviour?**

This is a common experience for many of our parents and carers who may begin to feel that the school is 'bad' for their child. Children usually come to the Mulberry Bush having had a long history of difficulties at home or in foster placements and in school. Therefore, although it is great news that they are behaving well at home, it is likely that it is the combination of the stability of home and the school placement that are coming together to make the difference for your child.

Children with broken attachment histories tend to test out relationships and push them to their limits. Our children often do the testing out at school, where there are a large number of people to work with them and care for them. This can give a greater opportunity for the child to experiment with rejecting/ accepting the relationship to see if it is going to last and survive,



**3. At home, my child stops his/her difficult behaviour when I say no to him/her. I worry that my child behaves badly at school because he/she is allowed. Could this be true?**

We understand that it's hard to make sense of the fact that your child seems to listen to you at home but not to us! We want to reassure you that we are firm and clear about acceptable behaviour and that we know how to say no. From our point of view, being therapeutic starts with firm and clear boundaries, after which we can move on to exploring and understanding feelings. However, in the safe environment of a large staff group, and in an environment when children are challenged by school and social demands, strong feelings can rise up in children that may not in other environments. These are the feelings that they need to learn to contend with if they are going to be able to function in their wider communities and in society.

We do not condone or permit anti-social behaviour and we are firm and clear about it. But we do expect to see it, as children do not come to the Mulberry Bush unless they have been displaying this kind of behaviour beforehand.

**4. I worry that my child behaves badly at school because he/she is copying other**

**6. My child is much more difficult at home than at school. I'm worried that the school won't believe me when I describe how difficult things can get. Is that a possibility?**

We will always listen to you when you describe the struggles that you are having with your child. We know that children don't come to the Mulberry Bush unless the difficulties have become very serious and so we will always believe you. Although your child might not show some of their most difficult behaviours right from the start, it is more than likely that they will do so at some point and is always helpful for us to know what we might expect to see.

We may also feel that we can help you and your child with some of the difficulties. We would like to feel that we can work collaboratively with you so that we can help and support you where possible and that we can call on your knowledge of your child at times when we may need to.

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**7. Sometimes I disagree with how the school is dealing with my child's behaviour. What should I do and who should I talk to?**



## Managing phone calls

### **1. My child is very tearful on the phone and does not want to hang up. He/she tells me how homesick he/she is. What should I do?**

You are not alone with this concern and many parents find this difficult and painful. However, it is very normal for your child to miss you and the things that are familiar to them. Missing you is a sign that you are important to him/her. Some parents worry that they should not be letting their child know about their own feelings. It is OK and helpful to let your child know that you miss them too. Here are some ideas you can try:

You could say that you understand how hard it is for them but you know that when they are busy doing something that they enjoy, they will feel better.

You could talk about the next phone call or time you will see them – e.g. “when we speak on Thursday, will you tell me about ... “ This can help them hold on to the fact that they are in contact with you and that you are thinking about them and the next time you will talk or see them. When it is time to say goodbye, you could try to end the conversation with affection but confidently, rather than prolonging it.

Please know that adults at the school will be sensitive to your child when they get off the phone from you and will help them to feel better. Feel free to contact us later to find out how

If you need to say no, we will always support your decisions in a non-judgmental way and we don't mind if your child gets off the phone from you in an angry state of mind. We will help them with this and support your decisions. We will also help you both to come back together on the phone in a better way when the time is right. Arguments are a normal part of family life, and although they can feel extra hard when your child is not at home with you, they are still part of ordinary relationships. It might be easiest to think of these difficult conversations as part of your child's way of learning how to deal with disappointment, tensions and differences of opinion.

Similarly, your child is not likely to find it helpful if you offer big incentives for huge behavioural improvements. Most of the children that come to The Mulberry Bush can't just be 'good' for long periods of time even if they have been promised something really big. You and they are more likely to feel disappointed if you enter an agreement like that with them and they fail. Instead, you could try:

Praising the small achievements that you see at home or that we report to you.

Making sure that they know that you have enjoyed nice times that you have spent with them or nice phone conversations

Letting them know that you are looking forward to seeing them or speaking to them again

Finding small and simple ways of letting them know that you think about them when you are not with them or on the phone to them.

**4. Sometimes staff members at the school have told me about things that my child has done that he/she should not have done. How should I manage this on the phone?**

## Further information

If you would like any further information on school policies, important dates or the school itself then please have a look at our website:

[www.mulberrybush.org.uk](http://www.mulberrybush.org.uk)

On this website you will find useful information on;



Showing the way in therapeutic care  
Registered Charity Number 309565  
A not-for-profit charity

- the school calendar
- important dates (including travel days and holiday dates).

