

SEAL in Devon

A quick guide to the Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) materials being used in Devon's Primary schools.

As many of us know both inside and outside the world of education our ability to learn and our behaviour is heavily influenced by our emotional state or our happiness. We are all also aware of the differences between children in terms of their capacity to understand and work with their internal emotions, behaviour and understanding of the emotions of others. It is part of growing up and being an individual.

In order to help schools support children with their development in these areas the SEAL materials have been developed by the DfES. These materials are now being offered to every school across the country. Not only that but in Devon all schools are being offered support in the implementation and delivery of these materials.

The resource aims to provide schools and settings with an explicit, structured whole-curriculum framework for developing all children's social, emotional and behavioural skills. Such an approach can make a significant contribution to whole-school/setting provision for personal, social and emotional development in the Foundation Stage, and personal, social and health education in the primary phase.

The resource is intended for the whole school community. Its use is likely to be coordinated by the head teacher together with the PSHE and Citizenship or healthy schools coordinator, or the school's lead behaviour professional. It will be delivered mainly by class teachers in primary schools. In all settings, all the adults who have contact with children – teachers and teaching assistants, lunchtime staff and support staff – need to be aware of the vocabulary used and the key ideas, for example about solving problems, that are introduced to the children.

What are the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) and why should we focus on them?

Various terms are used nationally and internationally to describe social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) including personal and social development, emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, and social and emotional competence and social, emotional and behavioural skills.

Within the materials there are five broad social and emotional aspects of learning: self-awareness; managing feelings; motivation; empathy; social skills. These aspects are often considered to fall into two categories – the personal (e.g. self-awareness) and the interpersonal (e.g. social skills).

Within each of the social and emotional aspects of learning there are a number of individual skills. An early skill within the aspect of 'empathy', for example, would be to see something from someone else's point of view – perhaps being able to see the ugly sisters' point of view in *Cinderella*. In the 'managing feelings' aspect of learning, an early skill would be to be able to recognise and label a feeling and to be able to share it with another person, and a later skill would be to be able to use self-distraction or self-calming strategies in order to reduce its intensity. Social, emotional and behavioural skills underlie almost every aspect of school, home and community life, including effective learning and getting on with other people. They are fundamental to school improvement. Where children have good skills in these areas, and are educated within an environment supportive to emotional health and well-being, they will be motivated to, and equipped to:

- be effective and successful learners;
- make and sustain friendships;
- deal with and resolve conflict effectively and fairly;
- solve problems with others or by themselves;
- manage strong feelings such as frustration, anger and anxiety;
- be able to promote calm and optimistic states that promote the achievement of goals;
- recover from setbacks and persist in the face of difficulties;
- work and play cooperatively;
- compete fairly and win and lose with dignity and respect for competitors;
- recognise and stand up for their rights and the rights of others;
- understand and value the differences and commonalities between people, respecting the right of others to have beliefs and values different from their own.

Most social, emotional and behavioural skills are developmental and change over time. For example, if we think about the experience of loss, we know that children's capacity to manage the feelings involved, and the range of strategies at their disposal, will be very different in the early years than, for example, their experience at the age of 11. We cannot therefore 'teach' these skills as a one-off. There is a need to revisit and develop the concepts, understanding and skills over time, building on what has been learned previously.

The materials in this SEAL resource aim to support schools and settings in this process.

A broad range of evidence is now available to support claims for the effectiveness of work to develop children's social, emotional and behavioural skills, in a number of areas:

- greater educational and work success;
- improvements in behaviour;
- increased inclusion;

- improved learning;
- greater social cohesion.

Recently, research has focused in particular on the beneficial effects of focusing on social and emotional aspects of learning (within a supportive setting or whole-school environment) not just in terms of children having better goal-setting skills, social interactions and conflict resolution skills, but in terms of improved academic performance.

As Daniel Goleman (who many credit with bringing awareness of the importance of 'emotional intelligence' to popular attention) says,

Students who are anxious, angry or depressed don't learn; people who are in these states do not take in information efficiently or deal with it well... when emotions overwhelm concentration, what is being swamped is the mental capacity cognitive scientists call 'working memory', the ability to hold in mind all information relevant to the task at hand.

Goleman, D. *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995)

This, of course, comes as no surprise. We only have to imagine trying to learn a new skill when our brain's processing capacity is fighting for space against strong emotion – for example, rage with the driver who just cut us up at the traffic lights or raw excitement following the news that we have just won the lottery.

This relates to what is already going on!

Most primary schools and settings are clearly doing much to promote social and emotional learning already as a key aspect of their school or setting culture. They may do this through the whole-school environment, the Foundation Stage personal, social and emotional area of learning and the Key Stages 1 and 2 PSHE/Citizenship curriculum,¹ their approach to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, the framework of the National Healthy School Standard (NHSS), or through the opportunities they provide for art, music and drama. Or they may be promoting children's development through other initiatives such as circle time, self-esteem approaches, peer mediation, and commercially available schemes that specifically teach social, emotional and behavioural skills. In addition many schools and settings provide extra support for children whose behavioural, social or emotional development is of concern.

What do the materials look like?

There are 7 themes that span across the school year each addressing key social and emotional aspects of learning. They are planned to coincide with different times of the school year however there is considerable flexibility in their use depending upon the needs of the school.

Theme number and time of year	Theme title	Key social and emotional aspects of learning
1. September/October	<i>New beginnings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Self-awareness • Motivation • Social skills
2. November/December	<i>Getting on and falling out</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing feelings • Empathy • Social skills
3. One to two weeks in the autumn term (to coincide with national anti-bullying week in November)	<i>Say no to bullying</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Self-awareness • Social skills
4. January/February	<i>Going for goals!</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation • Self-awareness
5. February/March	<i>Good to be me</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Managing feelings • Empathy
6. March/April	<i>Relationships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Managing feelings • Empathy
7. June/July	<i>Changes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation • Social skills • Managing feelings

What's going on in Devon to support the implementation of the materials?

All Devon schools are offered the opportunity to implement these materials with support from the Primary Behaviour Network, the Educational Psychology Service, the Healthy Schools Team and a number of other agencies including schools who are a little further down the implementation path.

Support and guidance will offered through networks and clusters of schools coming together for training and support with planning. Schools will also be offered individual support.

We are developing a website where visitors can access information and examples of good practice from within Devon and further a field. It also gives access to the materials themselves as well as contacts names and numbers. This can be found at:

<http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/learning/supporting-children/devonseal.htm>