

# John Grant School

## Case study



John Grant School is a Foundation Special School in Norfolk serving nearly 200 pupils aged 4-19. All pupils have learning difficulties as well as other specific conditions and almost 50% have a diagnosis of autism. Joined EmpathyLab's Schools Programme in September 2024.

### Heidi Alexander, John Grant School's Empathy Lead:

*We had originally thought this would meet the needs of our more formal learners in the secondary and further education department. What we have found is that even our pupils with profound difficulties have accessed the empathy weeks. We have seen even our very young children using more emotive language in context which is great.*

*Teachers are more inclined to teach and explore more complex and sensitive topics through the use of texts. It has been really wonderful to see pupils engaged in quite difficult and complex discussion around sensitive topics. Pupils have shown maturity and knowledge which I think has pleasantly surprised many of us.*

### Other staff comments

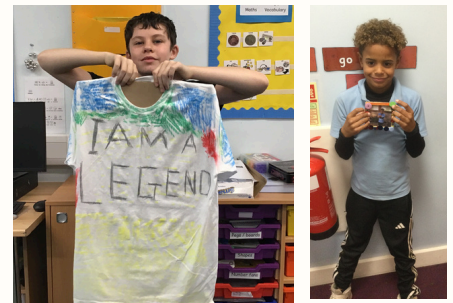
*Students are being more tolerant and understanding of each other's needs and think about how and why someone may be feeling*

*I see the children's empathy and patience with one another growing and they are more able to apply it independently.*

*There has been a move away from 'being kind' to being 'empathic'. Both pupils and staff understanding of this has greatly improved. We have seen an increase of pupils using empathic language across the school.*

### What has been the impact?

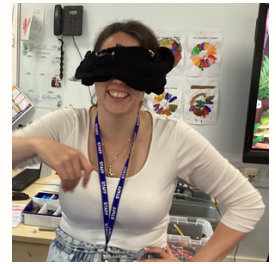
- A collective understanding of what empathy is and why it matters
- A whole school approach that supports and celebrates wellbeing
- Increased love of books and reading across the school
- Quality texts embedded in the curriculum, that better represent the school's own learner population, celebrate difference and increase multicultural resources in teaching and learning
- Deeper learning opportunities and discussions to support their understanding of themselves, others around them and the world, including sensitive topics
- Encouraged high expectations of pupils



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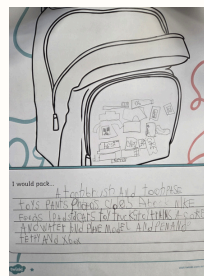
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- 100% of teachers surveyed felt that the programme had had a positive impact on the school's culture and ethos.
- The majority of teachers surveyed felt that the empathy work has had a positive impact on:
  - Relationships (pupil-teacher; pupil-pupil)
  - Pupils' ability to recognise, name, describe and understand their own and others' feelings
  - Pupils' ability to empathise with the feelings and needs of others
  - Pupils' tendency to demonstrate more pro-social attitudes and act in a way that considers others



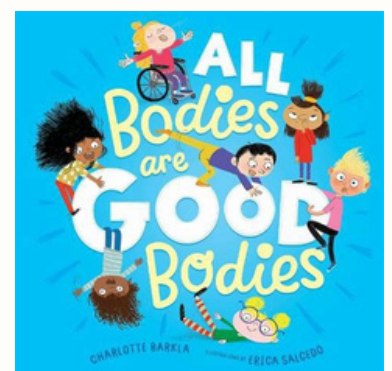
### What did you do?

- A day discovering more about what empathy actually means.
  - Baseline pupil surveys showed that around 70% of pupils did not know what empathy meant.
- 3 Empathy Weeks (see details below). It was felt this would be the most effective way to deliver empathy experiences for the young people at John Grant
  - Shared staff planning of chosen themes - diversity, ageing and refugees
  - Supported by detailed planning and organisation by Empathy Leads
  - Set of selected titles for each theme
  - Author-led workshops
  - Creative and immersive activities



Listen 100% ⚡ Wait until the speaker has finished Check that you've understood Ask good questions Don't give advice

- Introduced lots of suggested reads into curriculum/ reading time/ classroom libraries and space and time for reflection on meaningful texts
- Introduced Empathy moments- use of empathy switches
- Established a book club which meets weekly
- Introduced EmpathyLab journals for all pupils in KS3, KS4 and FE where they add pictures, wow-moments, work during empathy weeks or their own thoughts and reflections on what they read, discuss and experience



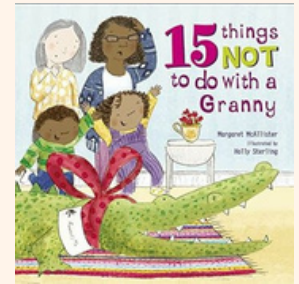
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### Empathy Weeks:

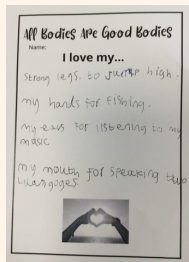
#### Ageing week

- Books shared: *15 Things Not to Do with a Granny* by Margaret McAllister and Holly Sterling, *Jo Jo and Gran Gran* by Laura Henry-Allain and *Nikil and Jay - The Star Birthday* by Chitra Soundar
- Author-led workshop - Chitra Soundar led a small group session to talk about the inspiration for her books and explored some of the content with the children. She also led an assembly talking about Empathy and her books.
- Creative and immersive activities: pupils were given the chance to experience what it might feel like to have some of the disabilities that affect people as they grow older. They were asked to push chairs across a carpet while wearing ear defenders and wearing glasses smeared with vaseline



#### Diversity Week

- Books shared: *The Smeds and the Smoos* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler; *A Bottle of Happiness* by Pippa Goodhart; *Emmanuel's Dream* by Laurie Ann Thompson; *All Bodies are Good Bodies* by Charlotte Barkla; *The Same but Different too* by Karl Newson & Kate Hindley
- Visit from female footballer and Lioness Jess Clarke to inspire
- Creative and immersive activities: pupils were given opportunities to try painting without using their hands; engage in simple activities like walking and writing while blindfolded and make t-shirts to celebrate the things they are good at along with what makes them who they are



#### Refugees Week

- Books shared: *Saving the Butterfly* by Helen Cooper and Gill Smith; *The Cheat Book* by Ramzee; *My Name is not Refugee* by Kate Milner; *Paddington Bear* by Michael Bond
- Focus on emotional vocabulary: listed words linked to refugee journeys and experiences. Looked at how Paddington may have felt and matched the emotion to symbols and zones of regulation
- Creative and immersive activities: Stitched 3D butterflies and wrote notes about their favourite memories from home to put inside; made lists of things they would pack into a backpack if they suddenly had to move to a new place. Wrote cheat codes to give someone new arriving in the school. Made Paddington faces which they used as masks so they could role play being scared on the boat over and lonely when he first arrived.

