

# What can behaviour tell us about children's development?

We learn about a pioneering approach to supporting pupils' social and emotional development that's made a big difference at one school in Windsor...

**S**ocial and emotional difficulties are often linked to adverse childhood experiences, such as developmental trauma. These difficulties present at school in a range of ways, including acting out or extremely withdrawn behaviour, oppositional and controlling responses, and heightened vigilance. Children's self-concept is adversely affected and their academic progress held back.

I have worked as an educational psychologist with the team at Beech Lodge School in Berkshire for several years. The school offers a nurturing environment to

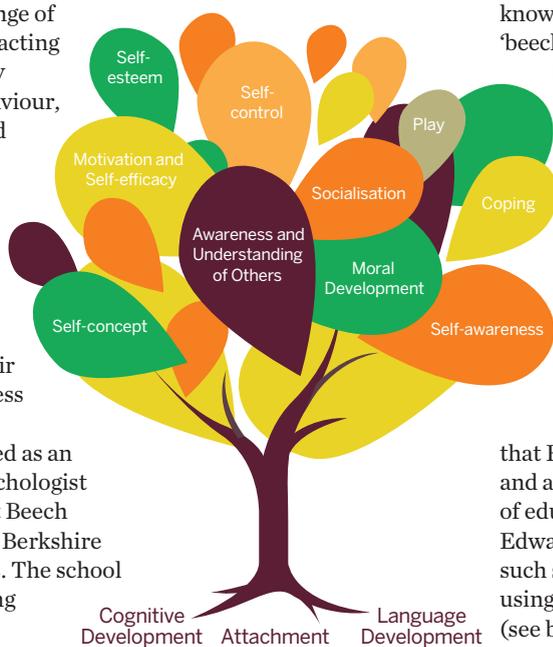
develop both academic and social/emotional competence. We created a framework to support our work, because we wanted to get more information to understand the pupils' social and

emotional development and progress, but there's an additional benefit in that the materials also help staff understand child development more generally.

This framework became known as Fagus – Latin for 'beech tree', AKA the tree of learning. It describes children's typical development in 13 separate areas (see illustration) and includes online tools to efficiently identify a child's progress in the form of Developmental Checklists and Developmental Profiles.

We soon discovered that Fagus had a wider appeal and application in a range of educational settings. St Edward's First School is one such school, and has been using Fagus for over a year (see below).

At Beech Lodge, we find it helpful to understand behaviour as communication. Children's behaviour tells us about their mood, level of understanding and experiences, as well as informing us about their development. Education practitioners can use the Fagus toolkit to help them understand the children they work with in relation to typical social and emotional development, and in turn use this to help them achieve the aspirations we have for all children.



**Alastair Lidster is an educational psychologist**

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## HOW FAGUS IS USED

Fagus was initially used on a group of children who were already receiving emotional literacy support for behaviours associated with emotional and social development challenges. The classroom teacher assessed each child's current level of social and emotional functioning using the online checklist tool.

The completed Developmental Checklists enabled the teaching team to generate an individual Developmental Profile for each pupil's emotional and social functioning, on which areas are marked in red or yellow to indicate a degree of developmental delay. Those marked in green show that a child is functioning emotionally and socially as expected, given their chronological age.

These combined results enable the team to drill down to the 'nitty-gritty' of what might be causing a particular behaviour in a child. For example, they had felt 'coping' was probably the biggest challenge for one child, but the

Developmental Profile showed that their 'self-awareness' was also a concern.

As well as checking the Developmental Profile, the team also looked at accompanying Developmental Checklist responses and Developmental Guides in those domains where the child was experiencing their biggest delays. They then used the output to set three goals to enable the child to move towards appropriate social and emotional functioning matching their chronological age.

Fagus was able to generate hard data that could be used to deliver clear evidence of what was happening with each child, explain some underlying aspects of the pupils' behaviour, inform next steps and evidence the impact of interventions.

As well as offering a method of monitoring social and emotional progress, Fagus enables data sharing with stakeholders and can examine whether an intervention has been value for money.

**Emma Turver is deputy headteacher at St Edward's First School, Windsor**