ALMA EDUCATION

Behaviour Policy

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Approved by:	Maxine Wellsbury, Advisory Board

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Statement of Intent

Alma Education works with young people whose previous education has often been disrupted, and who may have experienced significant trauma and adversity. Every young person, whatever their history, is capable of growth, connection and progress. Alma staff treat behaviour as a communication of need and respond with curiosity to understand what a young person is telling them.

This policy sets out how Alma supports young people to feel safe, build trusting relationships and develop the skills and confidence to engage in learning. Trauma-informed and restorative approaches are embedded across Alma's practice through training and supervision delivered by Cathryn Williams, Alma's Safeguarding and Trauma-Informed Consultant.

Behaviour at Alma is addressed through relationship, understanding and repair. Every response is grounded in dignity, connection and the belief that each young person can move forward.

This policy has due regard to the following legislation and statutory guidance:

Legislation and Statutory Guidance
Education Act 1996
Children Act 1989 and 2004
Equality Act 2010
Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice 2015
Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (KCSIE)
Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026
National Standards for Alternative Provision of Education 2025 (NSAPVS)
Alternative Provision: Statutory Guidance (DfE, February 2025)
Reasonable Force, Restraint and Restrictive Practices in Alternative Provision and Special Schools (DfE, March 2024)
Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools (DfE, 2018)
Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026
Human Rights Act 1998

1. Introduction and Context

Alma Education provides 1:1 and small group education for young people aged 5 to 18 who cannot access mainstream school. It operates as an Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provider

and as commissioned alternative provision, working with families directly and with schools and local authorities.

Sessions take place in a range of settings including family homes, community venues and Alma hubs. All young people are referred to Alma by a commissioning body, which retains accountability for their education and welfare throughout the placement.

Every young person at Alma has special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), whether or not these needs have been formally identified. Many have experienced adverse childhood experiences, trauma, attachment disruption, or significant gaps in their educational history. Many arrive having experienced exclusion, placement breakdown, or a long period out of education. Understanding this context is the foundation for responding to behaviour effectively.

This policy applies to all Alma Education sessions, regardless of setting or location.

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- SEND Policy
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct

2. Definitions

This policy uses the following terms. They are defined here so that staff, families and commissioning bodies share a common understanding. Alma keeps its language focused on understanding and support: these definitions describe types of situation and the level of response required, so that everyone can respond consistently and with care.

- Distressed behaviour: behaviour that communicates an unmet need, a response to a perceived threat, or a sign that a young person is overwhelmed. Alma treats behaviour that presents as challenging as distressed behaviour.
- Low-level dysregulation: everyday moments when a young person becomes unsettled, restless, over-excited, withdrawn or unfocused. This is managed within the normal course of a session through relationship, reassurance and adjustment.
- Significant incident: an incident serious enough to require same-day recording and notification to the Director of Education, and where relevant to the parent or carer and the commissioning body.
- Serious incident: an incident involving risk of harm to the young person or others, physical aggression, a young person leaving a session without warning or agreement, a possible safeguarding concern, or suspected possession of a weapon, alcohol or controlled substances. Serious incidents are defined further in Section 12.

3. Our Approach to Behaviour

Alma's approach to behaviour is relational, trauma-informed and restorative. They are embedded across practice through training and supervision delivered by Cathryn Williams, Alma's Safeguarding and Trauma-Informed Consultant.

3.1 Core principles

Alma's approach is grounded in five principles:

- Relationships, safety and trust come first. A young person cannot learn, regulate or grow without a safe, consistent relationship with a trusted adult. Building that relationship is always the first priority.
- Connection before correction. Before any response to behaviour, staff seek to connect with the young person. A young person who feels judged or shamed will not be able to reflect or change.
- The young person is always separate from their behaviour. Alma staff respond to the behaviour while continuing to value the young person, whatever has happened.
- Behaviour communicates need. Our first question is always: what is this young person telling us? Behaviour that presents as challenging is almost always a communication of an unmet need, a response to a perceived threat, or a sign that a young person is overwhelmed.
- Predictability and routine support regulation. Young people who have experienced chaos and unpredictability find safety in knowing what to expect. Session routines are clear and consistent. Where a young person needs these adapted to their individual needs, that adaptation is planned and reviewed.

3.2 Trauma-informed practice

Trauma-informed approaches are embedded across Alma's practice through training delivered by Cathryn Williams, Alma's Safeguarding and Trauma-Informed Consultant. All learning mentors complete this training before beginning work with young people.

Through their training, Alma staff:

- Understand the impact of adverse childhood experiences on the developing brain and nervous system
- Recognise distress as a communication of need
- Understand how trauma affects a young person's ability to trust, to regulate and to learn
- Respond in ways that help a young person feel safe and settled
- Understand their own responses and potential triggers
- Apply Bruce Perry's 3 R's (Regulate, Relate and Reason) as the sequence for responding to a learner in difficulty (see Section 9.1)

Cathryn Williams also provides reflective supervision for learning mentors following significant incidents. This is not a disciplinary process. It is a structured opportunity to process what happened, understand it and identify what might be done differently.

3.3 Restorative practice

Restorative approaches are embedded across Alma's practice through workshops delivered by Cathryn Williams. Restorative practice is a process of reflection, repair and restoration that takes place when a young person is calm and ready.

Restorative practice at Alma focuses on three questions: what happened and why; who was affected and how; and what needs to happen now. It supports young people to develop empathy, accountability and the skills to repair relationships, without shame.

3.4 PACE

PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) is the relational stance of every Alma learning mentor. Developed by Dan Hughes, PACE describes how a trusted adult is with a young person, not what they do.

- Playfulness: keeping interactions light and warm where appropriate, reducing threat and building connection
- Acceptance: accepting the young person's inner world, their feelings, thoughts and needs, without judgement
- Curiosity: being genuinely curious about what the young person is experiencing, rather than assuming or judging
- Empathy: communicating genuine understanding of the young person's emotional experience

PACE is the way Alma staff approach every interaction with every young person, including and especially during difficult moments.

3.5 Zones of Regulation

Zones of Regulation is a practical self-regulation framework used within Alma sessions. It gives young people a shared, non-judgemental language for identifying and communicating their emotional state, using four colour-coded zones:

- Blue zone: low energy, feeling sad, tired, bored or shut down
- Green zone: calm, focused and ready to engage
- Yellow zone: heightened emotions such as worry, excitement, silliness or frustration, still in control but heading upward
- Red zone: intense emotions such as anger or panic that feel overwhelming or out of control

Young people are supported to identify which zone they are in at the start of and during sessions, and to build a personal toolkit of strategies that help them move toward and stay in the green zone. A key goal of this approach is self-monitoring: with the support of their learning mentor, young people develop the ability to recognise their own emotional state, giving them greater awareness and agency over their own regulation. This shared language also helps learning mentors and young people communicate about emotional states without judgement, and supports the Regulate step of Alma's Regulate, Relate, Reason approach (see Section 9.1).

4. Aims

This policy aims to:

- Ensure every young person at Alma feels safe, valued and understood in every session
- Support young people to develop emotional regulation, positive relationships and the confidence to engage in learning
- Equip all Alma staff with a consistent, trauma-informed approach to behaviour
- Protect the wellbeing of young people, staff, families and the public
- Ensure behaviour is always understood in the context of each young person's individual needs, history and circumstances
- Meet the expectations of commissioning bodies and the requirements of the National Standards for Alternative Provision of Education 2025

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Director of Education

The Director of Education is responsible for:

- Overall ownership and implementation of this policy
- Ensuring all learning mentors complete trauma-informed training and restorative practice workshops before working with young people
- Acting as Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and responding to any safeguarding concern raised through behaviour
- Reviewing behaviour incidents and patterns as part of commissioner reporting
- Making decisions about placement review in consultation with the commissioning body
- Providing support and oversight to learning mentors, including facilitating access to reflective supervision with Cathryn Williams

5.2 Learning mentors

Learning mentors are responsible for:

- Implementing this policy consistently in every session

- Applying a trauma-informed, restorative approach in all interactions
- Building and maintaining a safe, trusting relationship with each young person in their care
- Recording all significant behaviour incidents on the young person's session record on the day they occur
- Notifying the Director of Education on the same day as any significant incident
- Seeking reflective supervision following any significant incident
- Never using physical restraint under any circumstances

5.3 Parents and carers

Parents and carers:

- Are kept informed of any significant behaviour incidents on the day they occur
- Are partners in understanding the young person's needs and what supports regulation
- Are encouraged to share relevant information about the young person's wellbeing or circumstances before sessions begin
- Are involved in any placement review process

5.4 Commissioning body

The commissioning body:

- Retains accountability for the young person's overall education and welfare throughout the placement
- Is notified of any significant incident and any pattern of concern
- Is involved in decisions about placement review or continuation
- Reviews behaviour data as part of the six-weekly commissioner review

6. Our Expectations

Rather than a uniform set of rules, Alma's expectations are agreed individually with each young person and their family at the start of their placement, as part of the induction process. They are revisited regularly and are always framed positively. Young people are involved in shaping what these look like for them.

Across all placements, three principles apply:

- Every person in the session is treated with respect
- Everyone has the right to feel safe
- Honesty between the young person and their learning mentor

Alma staff expect the following of themselves in every session:

- Greet every young person warmly at the start of every session

- Remain calm and regulated, modelling the behaviour they expect
- Protect every young person's dignity at all times
- Separate the young person from their behaviour at all times
- Start every session fresh, giving each young person a clean slate
- Be curious before being corrective

7. Behaviour Across Alma Settings

Alma sessions take place in family homes, community venues and Alma hubs. The expectations and approaches in this policy apply in full in every setting.

Before working in a new setting, the learning mentor plans for it with the young person and their family. This includes agreeing how the session will run in that environment, noting anything in the setting that may affect the young person, and agreeing what will happen if the young person needs a break or needs to leave the session.

In community settings, learning mentors are mindful of the young person's dignity and privacy and of members of the public. Responses to behaviour are kept calm and discreet, and always protect the young person's dignity in front of others.

Where behaviour in any setting creates a risk to the young person, the learning mentor or others, the learning mentor follows the serious incident procedures in Section 12, including the procedure for a young person leaving a session in Section 12.2.

Where Alma is told about a young person's conduct outside a session, for example online or in another setting, this is passed to the Director of Education. Where it raises a safeguarding concern it is handled under Alma's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

8. Promoting Positive Behaviour

Alma promotes positive behaviour through relationship, success and genuine recognition. This relational approach is what helps the young people Alma works with to feel safe, valued and ready to engage.

Alma promotes positive behaviour through:

- Relationship first. Every young person has a named learning mentor. That relationship is the most powerful tool we have. Everything else in this policy depends on it.
- Predictability and routine. Sessions follow a consistent structure so that young people know what to expect. Uncertainty and unpredictability are triggers; routine is regulatory.
- Individually tailored sessions. All session plans are matched to the young person's interests, strengths and current capacity. A session the young person can succeed in is a session where positive behaviour is most likely.

- Genuine recognition. Staff notice and name effort, progress and character, not just outcomes. A young person who has stayed regulated through a difficult task has achieved something significant, and that is named.
- Positive communication with families. Learning mentors make regular positive contact with parents and carers, sharing what has gone well, not only concerns. This helps families feel part of the process and reinforces positive experiences at home.

9. When Behaviour is Difficult

All young people at Alma have additional needs. Many have experienced trauma, attachment disruption or significant adverse childhood experiences, which staff keep in mind when responding to behaviour.

9.1 Regulate, Relate, Reason

When responding to a learner in difficulty, Alma staff follow Bruce Perry's 3 R's: Regulate, Relate, Reason. This sequence is a core part of Alma's trauma-informed practice. A young person who is overwhelmed cannot access reason. Before any conversation, reflection or problem-solving can take place, they must first feel safe.

- Regulate: The learning mentor stays calm and regulated. They lower their voice, slow their movements, create space and keep the situation calm. Regulation is contagious. The adult's calm is the young person's anchor. Where a young person is familiar with Zones of Regulation, the learning mentor may use this shared language to support them in identifying their current state and choosing a strategy.
- Relate: The learning mentor makes and maintains connection. They name what they see ("I can see this is really hard right now"). They use PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) and stay warmly alongside the young person.
- Reason: Only once the young person is regulated and connected does the learning mentor move to problem-solving, reflection or discussion. Reasoning before regulation is wasted at best and escalating at worst.

9.2 Emotion Coaching

When a young person is struggling, Alma staff use an Emotion Coaching approach. This is a four-step process:

- Step 1. Notice and empathise: "I can see you're feeling really frustrated right now."
- Step 2. Label, validate and attune: "It makes sense you're feeling that way, that was a really difficult moment."
- Step 3. Set limits if needed: "I need us both to be safe right now. I'm going to stay with you."
- Step 4. Problem-solve together: "When you're ready, let's think about what might help."

Emotion Coaching is a relational approach where what matters most is the warmth, consistency and genuineness with which the words are delivered.

9.3 How staff conduct themselves

In every interaction, Alma staff:

- Keep their voice calm and steady, even under pressure
- Use warm, respectful language, free of sarcasm, threats or ultimatums
- Speak about the behaviour rather than the young person's character
- Maintain care and attention throughout, especially in difficult moments
- Talk about a young person only where it is appropriate and private
- Describe what they see rather than labelling the young person
- Protect the young person's dignity and sense of worth at all times

10. Protective and Educational Responses

Where a young person's behaviour has caused harm, disruption or risk, staff respond with protective and educational responses. These focus on keeping everyone safe and on helping the young person understand the impact of their actions and develop the skills to do things differently.

Protective and educational responses may include:

- A calm conversation about what happened and its impact
- Adjusting the session plan to reduce demand or change activity
- Contacting the parent or carer on the same day
- Notifying the Director of Education
- A restorative conversation (see Section 11)
- A review of the young person's Individual Learning Plan and any associated risk documentation
- Involvement of the commissioning body

Alma's responses are always protective and educational, keeping a young person's learning time and individual attention going wherever possible. Any decision about a change of placement is made with the commissioning body (see Section 18).

11. Restorative Approaches after an Incident

A restorative conversation is a structured conversation that helps repair the relationship and restore trust. It takes place when the young person is calm and regulated, sometimes in the same session, sometimes at the start of the next.

A restorative conversation at Alma follows three stages:

- Reflect: What happened? What was the young person thinking and feeling? What were they trying to communicate? What was the learning mentor's experience?
- Repair: What was the impact? Who was affected? What needs to happen to acknowledge that impact?
- Restore: What does the young person need going forward? What can the learning mentor do differently? What can we put in place to prevent this happening again?

A record of the restorative conversation is made on the young person's session record. Where the incident was significant, Cathryn Williams may be asked to facilitate or support the restorative process. See Appendix B for a Restorative Conversation Guide.

12. Serious Incidents

A serious incident is one that involves:

- Risk of harm to the young person or to others
- Physical aggression directed at the learning mentor or damage to property
- A young person leaving a session without warning or agreement
- Behaviour that may indicate a safeguarding concern
- Suspected possession of a weapon, alcohol or controlled substances

12.1 Immediate response

The learning mentor:

- Prioritises the physical safety of everyone present
- If there is immediate risk of serious harm to life: calls 999 immediately
- Notifies the Director of Education on the same day
- Notifies the parent or carer on the same day
- Notifies the commissioning body on the same day
- Records the incident on the young person's session record before the end of the working day

12.2 If a young person leaves a session without warning

Alma sessions take place in community settings and home environments. Where a young person leaves or disengages from a session unexpectedly, the learning mentor:

- Attempts to maintain sight of the young person if it is safe to do so
- Contacts the Director of Education immediately by phone
- Contacts the parent or carer immediately
- If the young person cannot be located, or if there is immediate risk of harm: calls 999
- Notifies the commissioning body on the same day

- Records the incident on the young person's session record on the same day, including the time the young person was last seen and what action was taken

13. Physical Intervention

Alma keeps young people safe through relationship, de-escalation and the approaches set out in this policy. Learning mentors are not trained in physical restraint and do not restrain young people.

If a young person presents an immediate risk of serious harm to themselves or others, and this cannot be managed through the de-escalation approaches set out in this policy, the learning mentor calls 999 immediately and notifies the Director of Education as soon as possible.

All instances where emergency services have been called are recorded on the young person's session record and reported to the commissioning body on the same day.

14. Searching

Statutory powers to search a young person or their belongings sit with registered schools, which hold them under the Education Act. At Alma, where there is a safeguarding concern, a learning mentor may ask a young person to voluntarily show the contents of their pockets or bag, and the young person is free to decline.

If a weapon is suspected to be in the young person's possession, the learning mentor calls 999 immediately and keeps everyone at a safe distance.

Suspected possession of alcohol or controlled substances is treated as a safeguarding concern and referred to the Director of Education (DSL) on the same day (see Section 16).

15. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

All young people at Alma have special educational needs and/or disabilities, whether or not these needs have been formally identified. SEND is central to this policy and provides the context for every section of it.

Where a young person's SEND directly affects their behaviour, learning mentors:

- Consider SEND before responding to any behaviour
- Refer to the young person's Individual Learning Plan and any associated risk documentation for guidance on known triggers and effective strategies
- Make reasonable adjustments to expectations, session structure and their own communication
- Always consider whether a behaviour has a SEND explanation before responding
- Seek guidance from the Director of Education where they are unsure

Where behaviour raises new questions about a young person's needs that are not captured in the current Individual Learning Plan, this is raised with the Director of Education and the commissioning body.

16. Safeguarding

Behaviour can be an indicator of safeguarding concern. Learning mentors are alert to unexplained changes in a young person's behaviour or presentation, behaviour that may indicate abuse, neglect or exploitation, and disclosures made during or after a difficult behavioural incident.

Any safeguarding concern identified through behaviour is recorded and referred to the Director of Education (DSL) on the same day, in accordance with Alma's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

16.1 Substance misuse, smoking and vaping

If a young person presents under the influence of alcohol or controlled substances, or makes a disclosure about misuse, this is treated as a safeguarding concern. The learning mentor:

- Pauses the session
- Ensures the young person is safe
- Contacts the parent or carer
- Refers immediately to the Director of Education (DSL)
- Records the incident on the young person's session record on the same day

Alma sessions are smoke-free and vape-free. Where a young person smokes or vapes during a session, the learning mentor responds calmly and with care, and raises it with the parent or carer and the Director of Education. Where smoking or vaping raises a safeguarding concern, for example where a young person is very young or where a vape is suspected to contain controlled substances, it is treated as a safeguarding concern and referred to the Director of Education (DSL) on the same day.

17. Child-on-Child Abuse and Sexual Harassment

Alma recognises that child-on-child abuse, including sexual harassment, sexual violence, bullying, physical abuse and the sharing of nude or semi-nude images, can occur even where sessions are delivered one to one. Alma takes all such concerns seriously, responds to every report, and treats each one as a genuine safeguarding matter.

Where a young person may have experienced or displayed abusive behaviour towards another child, whether in an Alma session, at a hub where more than one young person is present, or reported to Alma from another setting, the learning mentor:

- Takes the concern seriously and responds without judgement

- Ensures the immediate safety of any young person affected
- Records the concern on the same day
- Refers to the Director of Education (DSL) on the same day

The concern is then managed under Alma's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and, where relevant, with the commissioning body. Alma's response supports both the young person who has been harmed and the young person who has caused harm, consistent with its trauma-informed and restorative approach. Sexual harassment, sexual violence and online sexual abuse are treated as safeguarding matters and are never tolerated.

18. Placement Review

Alma is committed to keeping young people engaged and supported in their sessions. Where concerns about a young person's behaviour or welfare mean a placement may need to change, this is managed with the commissioning body, which retains accountability for the young person's education and welfare throughout the placement.

A placement review may be triggered where:

- A young person's behaviour presents a consistent risk to their own safety or the safety of others that cannot be managed within the approaches set out in this policy
- A serious or repeated significant incident has occurred that suggests the current support approach is not sufficient
- A pattern of concern has been identified and has not responded to the support measures taken

Any decision to suspend or end a placement is made by the Director of Education in consultation with the commissioning body. The young person's parent or carer is informed and involved. The young person's needs and views are taken into account in this process.

19. Recording and Reporting

Significant behaviour incidents are recorded on the young person's session record on the day they occur. Records include:

- The date, time and setting of the incident
- A factual description of what happened
- The response taken by the learning mentor
- Whether the Director of Education, parent or carer, or commissioning body was notified
- Any follow-up actions agreed

Significant incidents are reported to the commissioning body on the same day they occur.

Behaviour patterns are reviewed at the six-weekly commissioner review meeting. Where patterns indicate a need for additional support or a placement review, this is raised at that meeting.

20. Staff Training and Support

All Alma learning mentors receive the following before they begin working with young people:

- Trauma-informed training delivered by Cathryn Williams, Alma's Safeguarding and Trauma-Informed Consultant
- Restorative practice workshops delivered by Cathryn Williams

Following any significant incident, learning mentors receive:

- Reflective supervision facilitated by the Director of Education or Cathryn Williams

The Director of Education is responsible for ensuring that all staff are appropriately trained and supported. No learning mentor works with young people at Alma without having completed the required training.

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns about their own wellbeing following difficult incidents and to seek support proactively. Reflective supervision is not a disciplinary process. It is a structured opportunity to process, understand and improve.

21. Monitoring and Review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Director of Education and the Advisory Board, or sooner if required by changes in legislation or statutory guidance. Any necessary amendments will be communicated to all staff. This policy was approved by Melanie Steel, Director of Education, in August 2026 and is due for review in August 2027.

Appendix A: Escalation Response Guide

Stage	Signs	Staff response
Calm	Engaged, regulated, responsive to the learning mentor	Continue the session as planned. Build relationship. Notice and name positive engagement.
Mild stress	Quieter or more restless than usual; less focused; slightly withdrawn or irritable	Name what you see gently: "I can see something's on your mind." Adjust activity if needed. Maintain warmth and connection. Do not push.
Overwhelmed, mobilised (fight or flight)	Raised voice; agitation; aggression; pacing; moving towards the door	Stay calm. Lower your voice. Create physical space. Do not confront or reason. Name what you see: "I can see you're really struggling right now." Wait. Do not follow if the young person moves away aggressively.
Overwhelmed, immobilised (freeze or shutdown)	Withdrawal; silence; unable to engage; fixed or glazed expression	Sit nearby without demanding. Be present without pressure. Reduce noise and stimulation. Speak softly if at all. Do not force interaction. Wait.
Crisis	Immediate risk of harm to themselves or others; the situation cannot be managed through de-escalation	Call 999. Notify the Director of Education immediately by phone. Do not attempt restraint. Keep yourself safe.

Appendix B: Restorative Conversation Guide

Use this guide when the young person is calm and regulated, not at the point of crisis. This is a conversation, not an interview. Let the young person lead where possible. There is no requirement to work through every question.

Part 1: Reflect. What happened?

- "Can you tell me what happened from your point of view?"
- "What were you thinking when [x] happened?"
- "What were you feeling?"
- "What were you needing at that moment?"

Part 2: Repair. What was the impact?

- "What do you think I was feeling?"
- "What do you think the effect was?"
- "Was anyone else affected by what happened?"

Part 3: Restore. What next?

- "What would you like to happen now?"
- "What would help you feel better about this?"
- "What can I do differently to support you?"
- "What might we put in place for next time?"

After the conversation, record a brief summary on the young person's session record including any actions agreed. Where appropriate, share the outcome with the parent or carer and the commissioning body.