



# THE STONE SOUP RECIPE



*What we do and how we do it!  
"Creating Unimagined Futures"*

# CREATING UNIMAGINED FUTURES

## THE STONE SOUP VISION An Alternative Education





**“Creating Unimagined Futures”** is the vision of Stone Soup Academy. It is present in everything that we do, and it is alive in the Academy. We don’t see barriers, we see opportunities, and we all love what we do.

The question is: How do we do it? How do we ensure that our learners are successful, and transition effectively into life?

This is our recipe and we would like to share it with you so that you too can turn lives around and make a difference to your young people.

We have identified 7 important ingredients for our ‘Stone Soup’.

These can be represented as a pledge that we make to our students when they become part of our Stone Soup family.

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## *What Does Quality Of Education Mean To Us?*

Stone Soup Academy provides an ambitious, transformational quality of education designed to give all our young people the knowledge and cultural capital to succeed and be safe in life. Our curriculum is rooted in the knowledge and skills that students need in order to take advantage of opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

*“ You have made me do better in life and put me where I needed to be. I thank every one of you at Stone Soup for every last thing you all did for me. I wouldn’t be where I am now without my Stone Soup family. ”*

*Year 10 student*



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## INGREDIENTS

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We will always try to show relentless positivity.

We will always be unfailingly ambitious for you.

We will always try to respect and understand you.

We will always try to be kind and caring in our approach to you.

We will always find creative ways to engage you in your learning through what we teach and how we teach it.

We will always celebrate your successes.

We will always be here for you, even after you have left.



# STONE SOUP METHOD No.1

## WE WILL ALWAYS TRY TO SHOW RELENTLESS POSITIVITY.

Relationships are the core of our work; without positive relationships we are building a house with no foundation.

Our first step is to focus upon creating positive relationships between staff and students, this quickly widens to include parents/carers and the wider community.

The secret to forming these strong relationships is to approach every situation with an open mind and heart. No matter what challenge a young person's attitude or behaviour poses, the team will always try to find a positive response - one that demonstrates Stone Soup is a family, where individuals are encouraged to approach everyone in a non-judgmental way.

We train our staff in the use of 'refrains' to ensure staff approach all situations in a similar way.

5 of the most commonly used are;

- "You have done so well today, try to keep this up"
- "How can we resolve this quickly for the best outcome?"
- "It's really important that we all show each other respect, how could you rephrase that in a respectful way?"
- "What is wrong? What would you say to yourself right now?"
- "What are we both doing here? How can we move forward?"



## *How do we do it?*

We never respond to aggression or anger from a student with those same emotions. Instead, we will use humour, positivity and calmness to help them regulate themselves. We find many of our young people arrive with us used to a cycle of anger; from them being met by anger from their school - the cycle frequently amplifying at a rapid speed.

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## *The impact of this can be seen in:-*

- The development of positive relationships
- A consistent approach to all stakeholders
- Students feel safe, parents/carers feel confident that their children are safe
- Self esteem is increased
- Parents answer the phone
- Communication is improved
- Attendance improves to above national averages for AP
- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Resilience improves in students

Our positivity may be the first time in a while that a student or their parents have felt 'positivity in abundance' coming from a school. Rather than be contacted to report just the negative things, they are contacted to celebrate the wins of the day or difficult days are reframed to move on from them positively and start the next day afresh.





## STONE SOUP METHOD No.2

### **WE WILL ALWAYS BE UNFAILINGLY AMBITIOUS FOR YOU.**

Many of our students arrive with a very pessimistic view of their future. For many, their experience in education has been centred around failure.

We work with our students (and staff) to help them see a new horizon.

We will not accept an easy route for our students, we show that we care about their hopes and dreams. If we all care and aspire for our young people, they will start to do so as well. We raise the bar high then scaffold their journey to help them to achieve and succeed.

We try to remove any negative association with exams by encouraging students to take useful qualifications and by sitting regular mock exams. We build resilience by demonstrating that tomorrow is another day and we do not judge tomorrow upon today's mistakes.



We help students expand their horizons by offering vocational qualifications (e.g. multi-skills, beauty, mechanics alongside traditional GCSEs and BTEC qualifications).

Through our approach, exams feel like a useful tool to help them have a positive life. We talk about qualifications being keys to open doors to the future for our young people. Expectations for positive student behaviour are always high but achievable. We know they can learn, no matter what barriers they encounter along the way.

We believe in our students, and in time they start to believe in themselves.

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## *How do we do it?*

- Real work experience opportunities in local businesses, leading to part time and full time work
  - Strong links with local businesses to give our students positive experiences and possible funding for future projects
  - Investment in careers and the employment of a level 6 careers trained professional sited in the academy - 100% of our students go onto work, education or training
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## *The impact of this can be seen in:-*

- Improvement in wellbeing and mental health
- Students go onto positive destinations
- Academic achievements are positive
- Students achieve the targets that we set for them across all areas
- Our commitment to ensure they all succeed
- Students willingness to positively contribute and engage in the school community

The ambition that we have for our students enables students and parents to believe in a positive future and for students and parents to have the tools and attitudes to succeed in that future.



## STONE SOUP METHOD No.3

### **WE WILL ALWAYS TRY TO RESPECT AND UNDERSTAND YOU.**

Many of our young people have experienced challenges in their lives and some students live in environments and situations that are not conducive to learning. We will always try to intervene, to support both them and their families to negotiate the expectations of education.

A common theme for all of our students is that they will have found working in mainstream schools problematic, many just do not thrive in a mainstream environment. However, the last thing any of them need is to feel judged or labelled as a failure, so we will always try to give them a second chance!

We ensure the staff are aware of the particular barriers faced by every student through sharing their situation and triggers. This knowledge is not used to label, or to pity, but to provide an insight into strategies for engagement.

We will always try and find innovative ways to support our students, we always go above and beyond what a young person has experienced to date.

Our students feel safe as we provide a secure community for them with simple expectations of behaviour for everyone within our school community.

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## *How do we do it?*

- We have a dedicated engagement team
- There is a personal coach for every student
- We provide 1:1 intervention as needed
- A school counsellor is available
- All staff known by first name
- We welcome all students with a handshake and a smile at the front door every day and we are there at the front door in the evening to say goodbye
- Suits Day - All year 11 students are bought a suit to celebrate the end of their journey with us and to prepare them for their next step

*SSA has done wonders for my son and I'm so proud of what he has achieved*

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## *The impact of this can be seen in:-*

- Reciprocal respect which leads to constructive conversations
- Students are more open with their problems, which means that we are better placed to support them and keep them safe
- Young people feel heard, valued and empowered to make a difference to their lives
- Self esteem rises

# STONE SOUP METHOD No.4

## WE WILL ALWAYS TRY TO BE KIND AND CARING IN OUR APPROACH TO YOU.

We all want to be cared for and that's why kindness and care are key attributes of Stone Soup Academy. They are an expectation of our staff who are passionate about the role that they play in the journey of each young person.

Our staff enjoy working at Stone Soup, and they care about what the academy does and of their role in it!

This is not just a job for our staff – it is an opportunity to change lives for the better.

Many students share this enthusiasm for the academy and will come alive when talking about how it has helped them. Many students demonstrated real upset when they were not able to come into the academy during the pandemic lockdown. We understand that every child demonstrates their happiness and their feelings of belonging in many different ways. It is our job as the 'adult in the room' to unpick their emotions, to understand and care no matter what.

Every week, staff contribute to a video praising individual students for their work in the past days. This kindness is shared between staff members, as every week they also share Thank- you notes with each other – ensuring everyone feels appreciated.

Every student, every day is greeted with a handshake (virus permitting) and a positive word. Regardless of the challenges of any day, there is always a friendly word to be found. Students report being 'listened to for the first time at school'

Some students respond with anger, we respond with humour. Humour is an essential part of the academy, with laughter an important tool between staff and students.

We do not eliminate poor behaviour but we do disarm it by ensuring that any behaviour exhibited by a student will be met in a calm and caring manner.

*I know some of the students and families that Stone Soup works with. Many of them have real and complex difficulties. Despite this, SSA excites and engages them. I've seen young people visibly grow and change. It is a professional organisation, highly rated by Ofsted. Throughout the pandemic the Academy has kept going. Both the students and their families are supported and this has been vital over recent months.*

*The Academy is highly rated locally. It should be nationally too.*

*Paddy Tipping*

*Police and Crime Commissioner Nottingham (2012-2021)*

## *How do we do it?*

- Weekly meeting where every student is discussed and action agreed on - We share information to increase our depth of understanding
  - Regular updates to referring schools so that everyone joins us on the journey for every student
  - Daily follow up for any absentees
  - A communications spreadsheet is used by all involved with students to ensure consistency
  - Staff & engagement team work as one large student team
  - Student success is celebrated at every opportunity, by email, in meetings and in publications
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## *The impact of this can be seen in:-*

- Students being willing to share sometimes painful information about themselves, which once we are aware, we can intervene and better support the students to deal with the challenges that face them both in and out of school
- Positive behaviours displayed between staff and students, and also students and students
- Kindness and care for each other, effectively modelled by all staff so students, over time develop empathy and understanding for each other
- More effective safeguarding
- Achievement of Optimus well being award

# STONE SOUP METHOD No.5

## WE WILL ALWAYS FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO ENGAGE YOU IN YOUR LEARNING THROUGH WHAT WE TEACH AND HOW WE TEACH IT.

The core purpose of any education establishment must be learning, and alternative education is no different. Many students who arrive at Stone Soup are used to a model of learning which just does not work for them.

The underlying cause of many of our students' disaffection is their disconnect with whole class learning. Individuals who do not see the relevance of their education are unlikely to feel positive about it.

We design an individualised timetable for each student, with the mix of subjects and methods of delivery suitable for them. For example, some students benefit from intensive 1:1 in some subjects whilst others will be accompanied to attend vocational college courses.

The timetable of a student may be changed quickly in response to a particular need or issue.

Staff undergo weekly CPD and monitor their development against national teacher standards using the Standards Tracker system.

Staff carry out action research and use principles founded in the neuroscience of learning. Without engaging learning techniques, the progress of the individual is limited.

We get to know the students, to know what works and what does not and then to devise the most personalised approach possible. Where support is needed we try to ensure it is made available.



## *How do we do it?*

- Weekly CPD sessions delivered in house and by 'experts'
  - Regular teaching & learning briefings where good practice is shared
  - Use of technologies such as Google Classroom to ensure e-learning is available when needed
  - We strive to be at the forefront of emerging classroom technologies such as virtual reality
  - Teachers are keen to explain the curriculum in as varied and interesting ways as possible
  - We work with families and students by supporting them to choose a suitable curriculum that matches their interests and opens future doors
  - By putting SEND at the heart of our school community we ensure that no learner is left behind
  - The curriculum incorporates blocks of work placement
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## *The impact of this can be seen in:-*

- Outstanding progress of students
- 100% against Gadsby benchmarking
- Broad, balanced and creative, engaging curriculum
- Improving attendance to school and to lessons
- Improvement in self believe from entry
- Increase in cultural capital on entry
- Students feel pride in what they do and in being part of our academy

*“The school has a sense of community which creates a feeling of belonging”*



# STONE SOUP METHOD No.6

## WE WILL ALWAYS CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESSSES.

The celebration of success for our Stone Soup family is essential, and it is well-known that rewards are far more effective in changing behaviours than using punitive measures.

Stone Soup has a culture of rewards embedded in all that it does.

One immediate indication of this is the effective use of Class Dojo across all secondary year groups.

Every lesson, students can gain dojos. Not only do these build towards attractive rewards, but they are also a way of sharing positives every hour. All members of staff can immediately see the positives achieved by the students, and the engagement team are able to respond instantly to support students. These electronic points equate to real money, forcing students to realise that their own actions affect their success.

Students of the day / week are also used to identify success.

We hold celebration evenings in place of parents evenings with the focus being on the achievements of the individuals. We use every opportunity to share success.

As well as regular calls home to relay any success throughout the day, our learners often get excited and ask that we make a positive call home for them.



Students are 'earning' money in their academy account by attending and behaving well. This builds up over time and at the end of the student's time at the academy it is paid into the students personal bank account which we can help them to set up. We also celebrate the end of year 11 with 'suits day' when we buy every year 11 a formal attire to support them in interviews for the future.

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## *How do we do it?*

- Students and staff are regularly entered for regional / national awards with an impressive success rate! (We are TES Alternative Provision of the year 2020)
  - The student lockers are updated every week to chart positive behaviours and successes
  - The academy walls hold many photos of student success. We also have a 'Wall of Pride' for our alumni to demonstrate that it is all about your future regardless of the challenges of your past
  - A termly newspaper is widely circulated to our community and beyond. Our website contains many examples of student success
  - Daily phone calls and daily rewards, weekly postcards and weekly rewards, half termly rewards
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## *The impact of this can be seen in:-*

- Positive transformation of home life
- Students feel pride in being part of our Stone Soup family
- Students and families are happy and positive
- Wellbeing and mental health improves
- Students motivated to achieve
- Sharing of 'Sunshine moments' celebrates our positive moments from the week, shared with all staff and this is often passed on to the students by their personal coaches, to show their successes, no matter how big or small, are noted and valued
- Staff focus allows staff to show through recorded videos their stand out moments and give thanks to those students for their efforts for the previous week. Shared with students in form at the start of the week to celebrate their previous week and start the week positively
- Positive feedback from surveys from staff, parents and students

# STONE SOUP METHOD No.7

## WE WILL ALWAYS BE HERE FOR YOU EVEN AFTER YOU HAVE LEFT.

Engagement is the core of all we do, and without engagement there would be no Stone Soup. Engagement and relationships with our young people is at the heart of what we do.

It is such a key part of our work that we have an 'Engagement Hub' and a large group of staff identified as an 'Engagement Team', this team work alongside the teaching team to form the student support team.

Akin to a medical support team, the Engagement staff try to respond quickly to any issue, diagnose the problem and then put into place a plan to diminish it.

Many of our students form intensely strong positive relationships with their engagement team, often citing this as the single most important motivation for them to reconnect with education and employment.

It would be nonsensical for this relationship to be limited to term time only for the duration of a student's placement in the Academy. Therefore not only do we keep electronic contact at weekends and holidays, we hold drop in events in school holidays and encourage past-students to drop in and see us at any time.

As with any family, we are there for our young people even after they have left. We have regular drop-in facilities for ex-students who need support in the next stage of their life, to help them focus on where they want to be and to help them also break these goals down into small steps. We have a trust fund which makes bursaries available to support students into employment if they are still struggling a year after leaving us.

For some of our students our academy is a place of refuge, a safe place and it provides care and kindness for them. The transition to their next phase can take some students longer to adjust to, we understand this.

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## *How do we do it?*

- Student - staff relationships are at the centre (and every part) of academy life
- The strength of the staff team ensures that any individual links are effectively shared amongst the whole academy
- We are always there for our students because that's what families do
- Stone Soup Award: to support our alumni after they have left
- The creation and attendance of ex students at our Pastoral Sixth Form created to support our young people as they take their next step past 16
- Creation of a Stone Soup Award which gives financial assistance post 16 to students to support them into employment
- Past personal coaches will call their "Year 12s" twice over 2 terms to make sure they are still in work, training or education



### *The impact of this can be seen in:-*

- A positive alumni of students who still want to be part of the Academy even after they have left
- Students feel secure and use this security as a base from which to build their independent life
- Our approach builds trust in us which permeates all aspects of a student's life
- A high number of students have applied for the Stone Soup Award a year after they have left the academy
- A high number of our post 16 students have joined our pastoral sixth form as we continue to support them on their road to success



*Stone Soup Academy is an award winning, outstanding, 11-18 Alternative Provision delivering an alternative education for the students of Nottingham.*

*We were established in 2012 and achieved our first Ofsted outstanding in 2014 and then again in 2019. We won the TES Alternative Provision school of the year in 2020.*

*Situated in a grade II listed building in the centre of the historic lace market in Nottingham, we meet the needs of over 90 young people who have been excluded from mainstream education. Our mission is to 'create unimagined futures' for all of them.'*


*If you are interested in our story and you would like to hear more then please contact:*

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