

Human givens principles have been introduced to over 200 schools and adopted systemically by some. Here, four headteachers provide a vivid snapshot of their impact.

How schools are using the human givens approach

“It’s a framework for seeing things in a different way”



Dave Strudwick is headteacher of Blackawton Primary School in Devon, a small rural school. He has also worked as a headteacher in a challenging urban environment.

FOUR or five years ago, I heard Mike Beard (see box, page 29) give a presentation on emotional needs. It immediately made me think differently about the behaviour of a couple of children in the school who were on the autistic spectrum. What he explained about emotional arousal and pattern matching to fearful situations in the past also helped me understand why some children seemed to have a disproportionate response to certain situations. Although I have previously worked as

an adviser with Devon’s behaviour support team, this had definitely added to my understanding. So I invited Mike in for a day to give an overview of human givens ideas to all our staff and to others from neighbouring primary schools. What he said resonated with some staff and challenged others. We decided to work with all staff but later chose to focus on those who were enthusiastic and those who were curious to learn more. It was an approach that worked because, over time, the ideas have gradually gained currency and become part of our whole school culture.

Mike and colleague Sean Flynn spent several days working alongside staff and children. They demonstrated how to view behaviour as communication and introduced us to the idea of ‘flag waving’, a child’s means of drawing attention to unmet needs. If a need is not being noticed, children will do something to make it more noticeable – something small at first, such as avoiding eye contact, then gradually building up, if still not noticed, into something definitely attention grabbing, such as throwing a book or shouting. We now aim to identify the different flags used by different children and then to ‘name and normalise’: “I’ve noticed you are looking upset, Keith. I wonder if that is to do with your disappointment about such and such. Most people would feel like that, in your situation ...” In the process, we have all learned how vital it is to use language in a way that supports one’s purpose.

Many staff have also learned how to work therapeutically with techniques such as narrative, metaphor, lowering anxiety through creative visualisations and carrying out creative versions

of the rewind technique, to support children when needed. One child’s extreme anxiety about change could be traced back to a highly traumatic experience when a father of a friend playfully bundled him into the back of his van and the boy thought he was being kidnapped. Mike and Sean carried out the rewind as a film he was starring in and actually had him do all the speedy, jerky backwards and forward motions. This kinaesthetic approach worked wonderfully, keeping the boy focused but detached. Mike has since worked with four key staff, to help them embed all the skills. Some have also chosen to have individual supervision sessions, using the human givens perspective.

Every child now has a written profile, detailing their strengths, attributes that we want to encourage, what helps them, what gets in the way for them and how we can improve how we work with them. We have also involved parents; at an open evening Mike did a session on needs, explaining how, when these were not met, the result would be the behaviours that they found difficult to handle.

The human givens provides a framework for seeing things in a different way and fits very well with the “My School Principle”, which I am involved in working to introduce across primary schools to share the understanding that learning is all about perceiving – “I got my maths wrong; I’m no good” – and choosing to learn to perceive differently, whether that’s about oneself or about maths. We talk about “seeing myself see”, which recognises the importance of perception, experience and imagination in shaping who we are as individuals. There is always one person present when we make a mistake or do something great. If we are responsible for our world, then, by understanding our perceptions of that world not as truths but as mirrors of our past interactions, it is easier to find a way forward.

By supporting and guiding children in the idea that the same object can be perceived differently, they can be led away from a black-and-white view of the world. To that end, we work a lot with illusions, as a physical representation of the fact that there is more than one way of seeing the world (a current project is a sculpture of a glass windmill, the sails of which appear to switch directions, which will be set up in our grounds). Perception of course, also involves seeing how others see and,



therefore, behave, which we now emphasise in our teaching of teachers. (In our school behaviour policy, we now refer to behaviour leadership, rather than behaviour management.) Input from neuro-psychologist Anne Moir, an expert on understanding brain-sex differences (and also a human givens therapist), has been helpful in shifting perceptions, too. Most teachers have worked with her at least once and, as a result, are taking account of the ways that boys and girls see, hear and learn differently and develop at different rates, tailoring this to their experience – and expectations – of individual children. Thus what we have taken from the human givens approach has been, and continues to be, extremely valuable for our school. ?

“Ofsted inspectors particularly commented on the relationships in school”

WHEN I say that our school is in Gloucestershire, people imagine a rural school somewhere leafy and serene. In fact, the school is on a large council estate in Gloucester itself, and the area falls within the 10 per cent of highest deprivation in the country. Our challenge is to push educational standards up while also coping with the behavioural and emotional difficulties displayed by so many of our children.

There is a huge gap between what statutory services can offer and what we felt we needed, to keep functioning healthily as a school. We needed

to be able to prevent problems, rather than rely on a service that reacts (often ineffectively), but, as there are no systems in place for delivering that, it became clear that we would have to put something in place for ourselves. I was aware that, while we pride ourselves on the good relationships between staff and children in our school, we had good relationships only because of the special individuals we have been able to employ, not because we truly understood what it was that we were doing right. So when we came across the human givens approach and started to see behaviour in terms of needs and resources, and relationship building as something that could be learned, we were determined that this would inform the culture of our school. We attended a number of seminars, held some lengthy discussions and met Mike Beard on two separate occasions before inviting the Human Givens Institute to become a formal part of our trust. Mike is now one of our trustees.

One of our first steps was to run a training day for 78 people – every member of staff and some governors and trustees – to raise understanding of emotional, as opposed to academic, success and how to promote it throughout the school. Understanding pattern matching and the power of positive language has had an enormous impact on teaching and learning and on the effectiveness of



Martin Latham is headteacher of Robinswood Primary School in Gloucestershire, a larger than average primary school. An above average proportion of the pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities.

“Such good common sense”

“CARING and effective schools aim to develop a learning environment that helps children learn effectively and they quickly come to see that that is what happens when basic emotional needs are well met. Key staff tend to start by using human givens principles to help struggling students and then they see that the same principles can be used proactively with children who are engaging well.

My colleagues and I at REM State find it most effective to present the ideas in ways that stimulate and engage, and let people make connections with them in their own way. If they feel they have control over the process, they are more likely to take them further – into their own lives as well as into the work they do. In this way, it is easier for the ethos to permeate the school – it just becomes the way the school ‘is’, rather than a stand-alone or bolt-on strategy.

People have no difficulty comprehending and intuiting the practical importance of what we have to communicate; we’ve lost count of the number of times we’ve heard people comment how much this is good common sense. What can be problematic is today’s pressure to meet centrally set goals, which causes panic, uncertainty and stress, and which makes it a huge leap of faith to go with what feels intuitively right but doesn’t necessarily appear to tick the requisite boxes. This is made even more difficult with the uncertainty of changing curriculum structure and content. We are currently working on developing resources that make it easier for schools to translate the ideas that they understand, that make sense to them and that enable the creation of successful learning environments, into the language of the targets they have to hit.” ?



Mike Beard, a fellow of the Human Givens Institute and director of REM State, has introduced the principles of the human givens to staff from more than 750 schools across the country over the last several years. He is passionate about helping create environments where children feel safe, acknowledged, supported and eager (and therefore best able) to learn.

our teaching assistants. Recently we were rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted – the highest grading a school can achieve and a real accolade in an area like ours where, when many of our preschool join us at age three, they don't even register on the measurement scales, because they are so behind developmentally. The inspectors particularly commented on the relationships within the school and how this clearly had an impact on the children's ability to learn. When our children leave our school at age 11, their attainment is now above the national average. Over the years, we couldn't possibly have achieved that without getting the emotional aspects of learning right.

The gap between what we feel confident about managing at school and what we feel warrants outside help from statutory services has closed considerably, because our staff now understand even better and more effectively what they need to do to calm children down and engage them, plus why the methods work. We aim to prevent children failing, by working to get their needs met, or nip problems in the bud early – with the help of human givens practices.

We have always been a 'can do' school but, if 'can do' drives the school, then one risk is that, when key people move on, others who take over may go down a different track. Trust status to us is about sustainability: it gives a legal backing to what we stand for – high-quality teaching and emotional wellbeing – and how we intend to achieve it.

We offer outreach support for families through our learning mentors and our Barnardo's project worker (Barnardo's is another of our Trust partners) but getting families to look at solving their own problems



is always difficult. A parenting class, if we offered it, would be shunned, so our own staff, helped by 'partners' from Tesco or Barnardo's, may instead invite parents to sessions where they can learn how to do a variety of useful activities, such as cooking or even face painting for children's parties. Once a group of parents are sitting around together, at some point someone will mention a problem they are having with their child and this can be responded to in an informal

but highly instructive manner. At the same time, parents are learning several useful skills, which will help them when working with their children.

One of our key beliefs has always been the need for schools to promote a positive self-image and improve self-esteem. Improving self-esteem may not improve standards directly but it does improve attitude, which is the key to all learning and improvement. So we offer 26 after-school clubs – a huge range of options including circus skills, samba band, information technology, gardening, cooking, sports, keep-fit and storytelling – so that every child can find at least one thing they enjoy and are good at, experience a sense of achievement while doing it, start to feel better about themselves and bring that more positive attitude to other aspects of school life. All clubs are provided for free by committed, enthusiastic staff – except for the circus skills, which I buy in and which I would like to explore further. We have noticed, for instance, that children who perform poorly in PE classes may still be excellent jugglers. Maybe there is some quality that circus skills require – perhaps involving focus and repetition – or some aspect of motivation that it draws on that could be harnessed for more general good.

For more needy children, we have been experimenting with different ways of raising their self-esteem. For instance, we have used ideas taken from Mike and his colleague Sean Flynn in which we put 8-year-olds and 11-year-olds together, invite them to pick teams and set them a fun but challenging physical task that involves some problem solving. The first time around, the 11-year-olds picked other 11-year-olds for their team, and the younger children picked the younger children. Then they discovered that, to complete the task, sometimes it was important to have more height and sometimes to be light enough to be lifted. On the second try, the older children started to pick some younger children and vice versa. They learned that, whatever their age, size or speed, each had something valuable to contribute to tasks – and they also built supportive connections.

Many needs are met in our school fruit and vegetable project. We have a huge school field, part of which we have turned into allotments – a priceless commodity in an area where there are none. So we have invited people from the local community to use them, in return for having our children alongside and teaching them to grow vegetables and fruit. The children then sell their share of the produce to the school (effectively they are learning to run their own businesses) and we cook it and serve it in school dinners, to the growers' great pride.

The human givens approach has given us confidence in what we are doing because now we understand better how the human mind works. So many of our teachers were already behaving in 'emotionally literate' ways but knowing *how*

makes that more sustainable – and, if rapport building and empathy are not a person’s natural strengths, we straightaway do something practical about helping develop them. If you cannot form relationships, you cannot teach.

Recently we hosted a training day on the basics of the human givens approach for staff in our extended school cluster and, as expected, many of those present were immediately fired up by what they learned. I am hoping that each school will identify one person to train further and take the initiative for spreading the approach through their school. Eventually, I would love to see our extended schools become a self-sufficient group, and to see this sort of thinking spread further across the country. If groups of schools with the same drive and understandings could be formed into one trust, able to support each other and share ideas, what huge capacity and strength that would unlock. ?

“The principles inform every aspect of what we do”

WHEN, a couple of years ago, our school achieved trust status (along with Westhaven school), it was a no-brainer that the Human Givens Institute (represented by Mike Beard) would become one of our trust partners. By that time, the human givens philosophy had already permeated the ethos of our school. I had first come across the approach a few years previously, when I appointed a new counsellor for the school. The counsellor, Richard Shepherd, had begun the Human Givens Diploma and gave me one of the books to look at. It made such immediate sense that I asked the school governors to support me in taking the diploma myself; I felt strongly that this would be a key initiative to introduce to the school and I wanted to understand it properly.

Soon afterwards, I was put in touch with Mike Beard, who had already done much successful work with the approach within education, and he put on a training day for 200 people – the staff from my school and from nearby Westhaven School, whose headteacher, Jenny Moss, was also taking the diploma (see page 32). In a vivid, highly lively way, he covered how the brain works, the needs and resources we all have and what can go wrong when needs aren’t met in balance and resources aren’t used most effectively, making it highly relevant both personally as well as professionally. He ended the day with a half-hour group session of guided imagery, in which everyone had the chance to ‘rehearse success’ in ways that were individually meaningful. Even our more cynical staff were wowed; just two out of 200 were resistant to this new thinking.

This was a powerful moment for the school and led many staff to reflect quite deeply on what their behaviour was conveying to children – and what children’s behaviour might be attempting to convey to them. Over a period of time, Mike did further training with all heads of year, who have

a pastoral role, their deputies, and learning mentors. He also worked with the leadership team, to help us find methods to manage people in a way that ensured that their needs were always considered, so that, even when dealing with difficult tasks such as capability issues, we could be supportive and firm but fair.

As a result, we have a very positive set of relationships throughout the school, between the leadership team and staff, the staff and children and among the children themselves – a quality that was remarked upon by Ofsted inspectors. They also judged us outstanding in areas such as how safe our pupils feel in the school, how much they contribute to the life of the school and local community, and in the support, guidance and care they are given.

Human givens’ principles inform every aspect of what we do. They are written, in practical form, into the school development plan, are reflected in policies and are apparent in our training. All new staff receive a grounding in the human givens approach and refreshers are periodically run for everyone. In pastoral support planning, we use a version of the Emotional Needs Audit and aim to set targets that allow children to work through concerns creatively. We now have very few exclusions and very low staff turnover, as staff feel valued and supported. None of this is lip service – the leadership team does genuinely think about people’s needs and embraces human givens values in all aspects of the work. These same values have also helped me decide my priorities and act on them, regardless of the expectations of me that are set out in government targets. By abandoning what I saw as unnecessary paperwork, I chose to give more time to leading and envisioning the future than is the case for many headteachers. (Research by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services has found that headteachers spend just one per cent of their time on “shaping the future” and 22 per cent on administration.)

One of the trustees’ roles is to develop projects that will further improve the school. We plan for the University of the West of England (our third trust partner) to carry out research to find out why girls of average ability are significantly underperforming, particularly in seaside towns like ours. In our own school it appears that a number of girls in Year 9 (aged 13–14) are in relationships with older boys who are often violent – a worrying fact that emerged through our ‘no worries’ clinic, run by the school nurse. We have planned a day on assertiveness skills and saying ‘no’ (which will, of course, be informed by the human givens).

Our second ambitious project, once we can raise the funds, is to build a site which the statutory ‘locality team’ (children’s professionals such as social workers, welfare workers and educational psychologists) can share with a team of support



Trevor Bailey has just retired as headteacher of Worle Community School, a large comprehensive school on the edge of Weston-super-Mare, which has a higher proportion than the national average of pupils with behavioural, emotional, social and specific learning difficulties.

workers, trained to carry out the kind of work performed at Hartlepool Mind – ie family support and employment, housing and debt advice as well as counselling. Our hope is that, if both teams are working in close proximity, some human givens thinking may find its way into local authority practice as well.

Both Jenny Moss and I are very keen, in retirement, to carry on promoting the values of human givens in education. A presentation that we gave at a headteachers' conference – we too finished it with guided imagery – caused considerable enthusiasm, so we are setting up a consultancy to enable us to take the ideas further. I also hope to find the time to research the impact of the human givens approach on leadership in schools. Research has already shown that middle managers in schools who score highly on emotional intelligence have staff who are the most satisfied with their

jobs. It would be valuable to be able to show that satisfied staff are also more effective and have a measurable impact on outcomes for children. (At our school, academic results have improved consistently over the last six years, the length of time that human givens has been on our radar.)

We both wanted to ensure that the human givens perspective continues to be central to our schools' cultures. The new headteacher at Worle, my former deputy, is committed to the approach and we have appointed to the governing body Judith Desbonne, a local human givens counsellor with whom we often work. Meanwhile, Richard, our own school counsellor, has joined Westhaven School as a governor and the new headteacher there is already steeped in human givens thinking. We are leaving our schools in safe hands and know that they will carry on developing organically and creatively. ?



Jenny Moss has just retired as headteacher of Westhaven School in Weston-super-Mare. It caters for up to 80 young people, aged between 7 and 16 with autistic spectrum disorder and other complex barriers to learning. It was graded outstanding by Ofsted at its last inspection.

“The human givens approach is like scaffolding, solid and firm”

WHEN I first came across the human givens approach a long way into a long career in education, I felt pure relief. I had garnered all sorts of useful ideas and methods over the years that I had successfully put into practice but the human givens provided, in effect, a foundation stone for it all. It gave us a framework and made us look

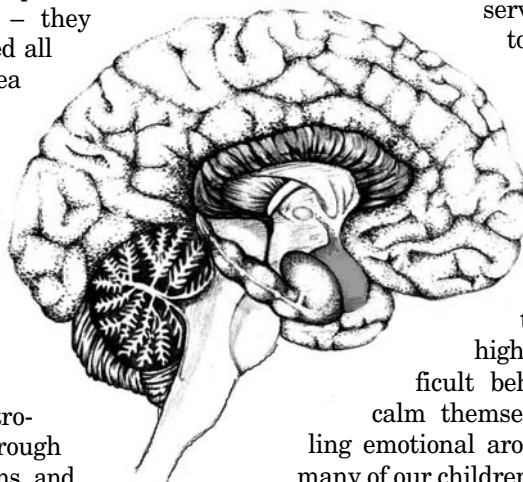
specifically at what we were doing, as staff, to meet the essential emotional needs of our particularly challenging children. We questioned if what we were already doing was sufficient and, while we could genuinely answer ‘yes’, in terms of most of the needs, we realised, for instance, that we didn’t give our young people sufficient opportunities for privacy – they have to be highly supervised all day long. So we hit on the idea of holding a ‘chill-out club’ at lunchtimes, discreetly managed by two members of staff, where children can just go and sit, if they wish, or listen to music and not have to interact with anyone.

We have also paid more attention to the need for status and control by introducing responsibilities through roles such as team captains and vice-captains and classroom monitors. Feeling a sense of connection and belonging is extremely important to our youngsters, as they so often experience themselves as outsiders. In our school, they belong in many different ways – to

the school as a whole (where they are one of about 80), to one of three ‘houses’ (where they are one of about 26), to their class (one of 12) and to their house tutor group (one of 5). We instituted the house tutor system as a result of human givens understandings, to ensure that one particular significant adult is ‘there’ for each child, throughout their time in the school.

We have also made much practical use of what we now understand about how the brain works. For instance, we now have a rule that, when a teacher asks a question, there has to be a 10-second silence before anyone is allowed to answer. It takes that time for the brain to process the question properly but our children tended either to rush out the first thought that came into their heads (and often get the answer wrong) or else didn’t get the chance to answer at all. Ten seconds may sound short but is actually a significant period of time to wait after hearing a question. It has been fascinating to observe the children’s eyes flick up to the ceiling as they engage their thinking and imaginative brains.

In Year 7, we now have a compulsory curriculum module that we call “You and your amazing brain”. Here our children learn how the brain’s alarm system, the amygdala, can cause high emotional arousal and difficult behaviour, and how they can calm themselves down. Difficulty handling emotional arousal is a key issue for very many of our children, so we also offer a yoga class on Friday afternoons, to help them learn another way to experience calmness. With some children, we use guided imagery to achieve the same effect. For instance, one highly able boy, who is on the autistic spectrum, loves to go climbing on the



tors in Dartmoor. We guided him through a visualisation, involving all his senses in which he experienced himself on one of those climbs, and he now uses this of his own accord to bring himself down from stress. This simple but powerful skill has helped make life much easier, for him and for his family.

This year, I nominated our fantastic staff for the National Teaching Awards outstanding teaching team of the year; they came third in the regional final, for an area which stretches from Gloucester to the Scilly Isles. We make no differentiation between teaching and support staff, and we all support each other at a personal and professional level. We share and we laugh a lot and all feel valued and part of a community, and we prioritise what is most important. I have always believed that families come first and will move heaven and earth to

engineer time off for staff if they have a crisis. As a result, people give back and are always willing to help out by covering for each other. Thus we keep our own needs met in balance, too.

Today's headteachers have so many bureaucratic demands made of them and their work is never done. It is important for them to learn to stop because, if they don't take time for themselves, they also stop being the people they were and then do their jobs less well. When, recently, Trevor Bailey and I gave a talk to a group of headteachers, we divided them into two

groups to do a guided visualisation with them. I got individuals in my group to imagine themselves going down to a beach with a heavy rucksack on their back, full of all the tasks which



littered their desks and seemed impossible to manage. I asked them to put the rucksack down and leave it on the beach to be washed away by the tide and then to turn back up the steep path, negotiating it comfortably once they had let go of the unnecessary load from their shoulders. It was powerful stuff and the course evaluations of the experience were excellent.

To me, the human givens approach is like scaffolding. It is solid and firm and you can hang things on it and add to it and pull down tools from it, as needed. ?

continued from page 27

Stories of inspiration

I used guided imagery in every session with these clients and told stories of inspiration that they could interpret in their own ways to help them achieve their goals. I always used the RIGAAR framework (rapport building, information gathering, goal setting, accessing resources, agreeing strategies and rehearsing success) as I found it invaluable, both at the level of helping the clients meet their concrete work goal and at helping them enrich their whole lives, through experience (in tasks set) of better fulfilling their needs and making more creative use of their resources. By the end of our sessions, all six managers had learned that they could do less but achieve more if they took care to nourish their needs. Four chose, at their own expense, to have a few extra sessions over the next few years, to further reflect on where they were going with their lives. They had come to see their demanding jobs as an integral part of their

life journey – but only a part. They had also, as their boss had wanted, ceased to be compliant passengers in a vehicle driven by someone else and were choosing their routes and modes of travel to reach the shared destination.

Crossing the boundaries

Although I knew nothing about the business world until thrown into working with these six people at a high-level end of it, that turned out not to be a concern. For the essence of the human givens approach is that it recognises that, whatever our individual life circumstances, we are all human and we all have the same needs. It is those needs, and the resources to meet them, that we work with, to help create better balance. There is also no awkward division between where coaching ends and therapy begins. Human givens therapists can cross the boundaries and seamlessly offer both. ?

All identifying details have been changed.