

Motional

Rationale 2026/27

Motional Rationale



Why use Motional?

In Alternative Provision (AP) settings, progress is not always best understood through traditional measures of academic attainment. While academic outcomes remain important, they are often secondary to the development of social, emotional and relational competencies that enable pupils to re-engage with learning in a sustainable way. As research into social and emotional learning highlights, *“the most meaningful gains are not always recorded in grades, but in how a young person learns to relate, regulate and recover”* (Durlak et al., 2011).

Success in AP is therefore more accurately reflected through improvements in emotional regulation, behaviour, engagement, relationships and self-awareness—areas closely linked to executive functioning and long-term educational outcomes (Diamond, 2013). These foundations are especially important for pupils who have experienced disrupted education, trauma or attachment-related difficulties affecting access to learning (Bowlby, 1988; Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Shonkoff et al., 2012).

AP provision places greater emphasis on social development as a valid and essential measure of progress, with improvements in self-regulation, attention, emotional control and relationships seen as key indicators of advancement. This aligns with evidence that relational and preventative approaches are more effective than reactive models of support (Weare & Nind, 2011).

The SEND Code of Practice reinforces the importance of structured assessment and evidence-informed monitoring of holistic progress (DfE & DoH, 2015). Tools such as Motional support Compass in identifying SEMH needs and tracking change over time, ensuring progress is captured socially and emotionally as well as academically.

Ultimately, in AP settings, progress is best understood as transformation rather than examination—*“success is not just what a learner achieves, but who they become in the process of learning again.”*

Emotional Wellbeing and Learning

Research consistently shows that emotional wellbeing is fundamental to academic success. Pupils who can recognise, understand and regulate their emotions are more likely to:

- Engage positively in learning
- Build healthy relationships
- Demonstrate positive behaviour
- Achieve better educational outcomes

A landmark meta-analysis involving over 270,000 pupils found that participation in SEL programmes led to significant improvements in social-emotional skills, behaviour, attitudes towards school and academic achievement, with an average gain of 11 percentile points academically (Durlak et al., 2011).

Motional supports this by enabling schools to identify emotional strengths and areas of need, allowing targeted interventions to be implemented before difficulties impact learning.

Early Identification and Intervention

Effective SEMH provision relies on identifying needs early and providing support before challenges become more complex. Research highlights that preventative approaches are more effective than reactive responses and can improve both educational and wellbeing outcomes (Weare & Nind, 2011).

Motional supports schools by:

- Identifying emerging SEMH needs
- Providing structured assessment data
- Monitoring progress over time
- Supporting the Assess–Plan–Do–Review cycle (DfE & DoH, 2015)

This enables schools to intervene earlier and provide support before difficulties escalate.

Executive Functioning and Educational Success

Executive functioning refers to the cognitive skills that enable pupils to regulate behaviour, manage emotions, sustain attention and solve problems. These skills are recognised as strong predictors of educational success and school readiness (Diamond, 2013).

Motional assesses areas linked to executive functioning, including:

- Self-regulation
- Emotional control
- Concentration
- Flexible thinking
- Problem solving

By identifying difficulties in these areas, schools can provide targeted support that removes barriers to learning and promotes greater independence and engagement.

Attachment and Relationships

Attachment theory emphasises the importance of secure relationships in supporting emotional development, resilience and social competence (Bowlby, 1988). Children who have experienced insecure attachment are more likely to experience:

- Emotional regulation difficulties
- Behavioural challenges
- Poorer peer relationships
- Reduced engagement in learning

(Bergin & Bergin, 2009)

Motional's focus on relationships, emotional wellbeing and sense of self supports an attachment-informed approach and helps schools identify pupils who may require additional relational support.

Trauma-Informed Practice

Research demonstrates that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma can have a significant impact on brain development, emotional regulation, attention, memory and behaviour (Shonkoff et al., 2012).

Trauma may affect:

- Emotional regulation
- Concentration and attention
- Memory and information processing
- Behaviour in school
- Academic achievement

Motional supports trauma-informed practice by helping staff identify underlying emotional needs and understand behaviour as communication rather than simply a behavioural issue. (Maynard et al., 2019)

A Whole-School approach to Wellbeing

Evidence suggests that the greatest improvements in pupil wellbeing occur when emotional health is embedded throughout the whole school rather than delivered through isolated interventions (Goldberg et al., 2019).

Motional supports a whole-school approach by:

- Providing a consistent assessment framework
- Creating a shared language around wellbeing
- Enabling analysis of wellbeing data across cohorts
- Informing strategic planning and resource allocation

This helps ensure emotional wellbeing becomes everyone's responsibility rather than the role of a few specialist staff.

Data-Informed Decision Making

The SEND Code of Practice highlights the importance of using evidence to inform support and evaluate impact (DfE & DoH, 2015).

Motional provides measurable wellbeing data that can be used to:

- Identify SEMH needs
- Inform intervention planning
- Monitor progress
- Demonstrate impact
- Support EHCP applications and reviews
- Provide evidence for external agencies

This enables schools to make informed decisions and demonstrate the effectiveness of their SEMH provision.

Principles of Motional

Social Engagement

The Social Engagement Domain includes the Subdomains of CARE, SEEKING and PLAY:

CARE

measures the child's capacity for compassion toward self and others and pro-social skills in general

SEEKING

measures the child's energised engagement in life and learning, level of enthusiasm, curiosity and desire to seek knowledge

PLAY

measures the child's capacity to be able to play with ideas (creativity) and to be playful in relationships, meeting others in joy as appropriate

Social Defence

The Social Defence Domain (also called the 'blocks' because when overactive are blocks to quality of life and, in particular, blocks to learning) includes the Subdomains of RAGE, FEAR and PANIC/GRIEF:

RAGE

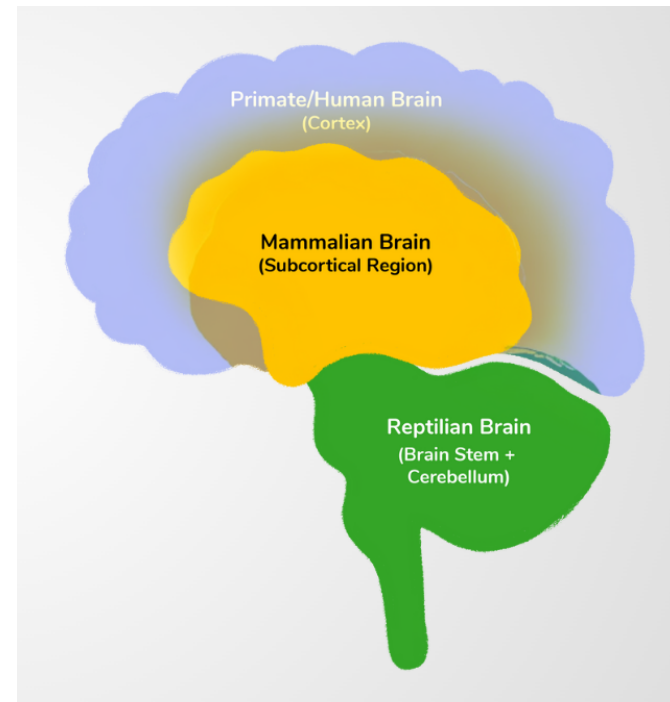
(when overactive are 'seen' as problems with anger which block learning)

FEAR

(when overactive are 'seen' as problems with anxiety which block learning)

PANIC/GRIEF

(when overactive are 'seen' as problems with depression or experience of traumatic loss which block learning)



Executive Functioning

The Executive Functions Domain includes a set of cognitive processes activated in the pre-frontal cortex. They are key to learning and to being able to handle everyday life and stresses well. They include:

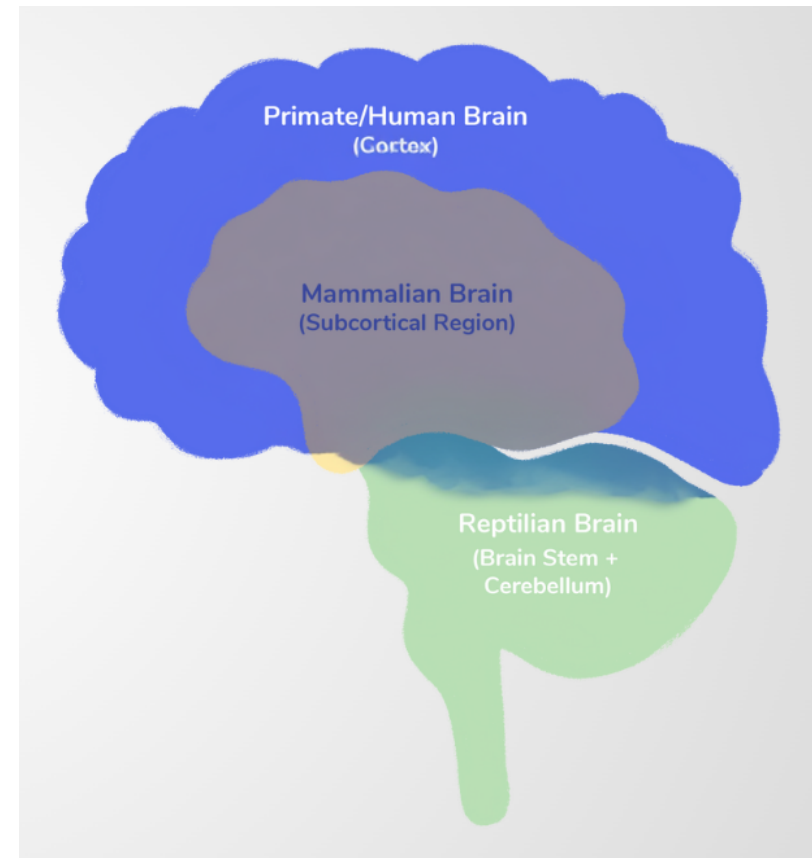
Emotional Regulation The ability to recognise, understand and manage emotions, enabling appropriate responses in different situations.

Thinking and Concentration The cognitive skills needed to focus, remember information, adapt thinking and understand the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of others.

Sense of Self An individual's understanding of who they are, including their beliefs, values and identity, shaped by their experiences and ability to interpret the world around them.

Relationships with Others The ability to build and maintain positive connections with others, forming the foundation of social and emotional development throughout life.

Emotional Literacy The ability to identify, understand, express and manage emotions, while recognising and responding to the emotions of others.



Showing progress over time

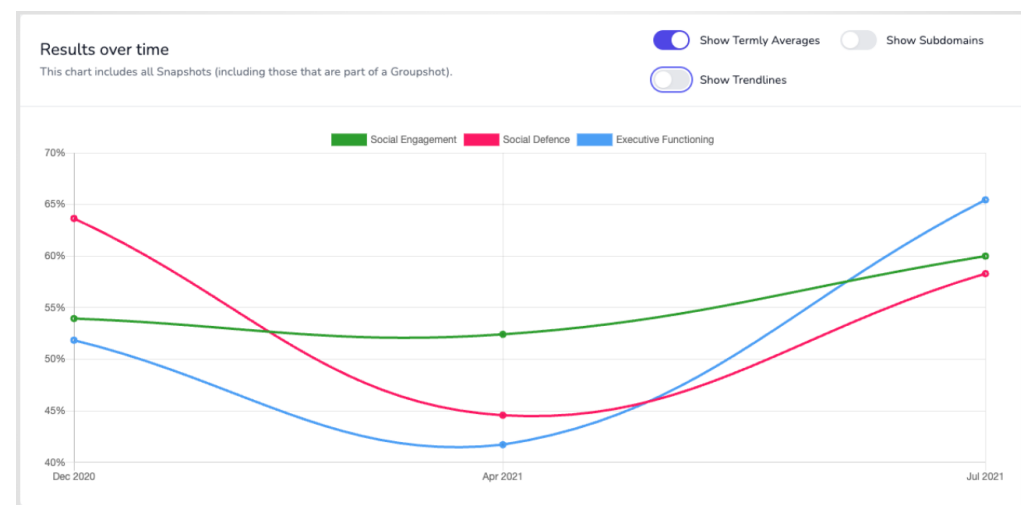
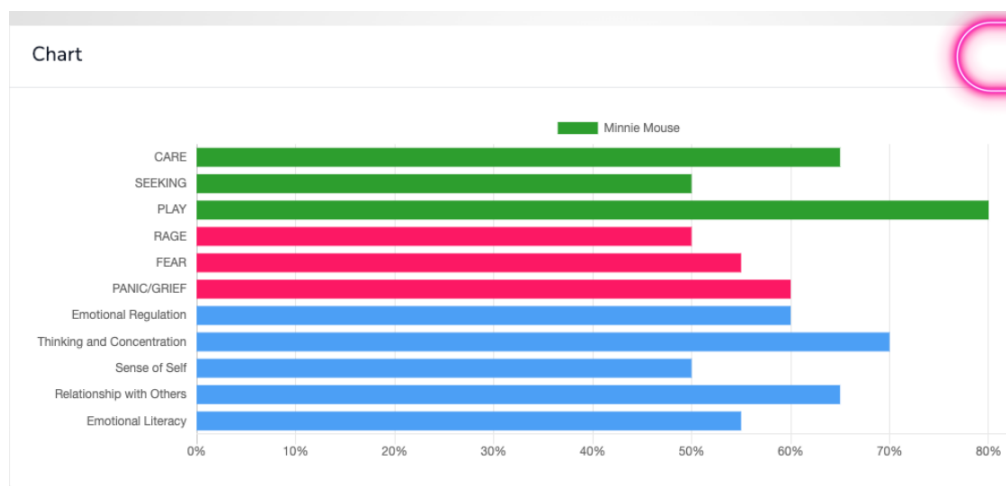
Motional demonstrates progress over time by providing structured, repeatable assessments of pupils' social, emotional and cognitive development, enabling change to be tracked rather than assumed.

A baseline profile identifies SEMH strengths and needs across key domains such as emotional regulation, attention, relationships and self-control. This creates a clear starting point against which future progress can be measured. Reassessment allows schools to compare change over time and evidence whether interventions are having impact.

Progress is shown through trend data rather than single observations, capturing sustained improvements such as increased emotional regulation, improved engagement, reduced behavioural incidents and greater readiness to learn. This is particularly important in Alternative Provision, where progress is often gradual and non-linear.

The programme supports the Assess–Plan–Do–Review cycle (DfE & DoH, 2015), enabling staff to evaluate interventions and adapt provision accordingly. Over time, this builds a clear narrative of development, showing movement towards greater stability, independence and engagement.

This provides clear Ofsted-style evidence of impact over time, demonstrating that interventions improve social, emotional and behavioural outcomes linked to long-term educational progress (Weare & Nind, 2011; Diamond, 2013).



Pupil Assessment/Impact

The impact of the Motional programme on students is seen primarily in improved social, emotional and behavioural outcomes that support access to learning over time. By identifying SEMH needs early and providing a clear profile of strengths and areas for development, Motional enables more precise and timely intervention, reducing barriers to engagement.

For students, this typically results in improved emotional regulation, increased self-awareness, and greater ability to manage behaviour in a learning environment. Over time, pupils are better able to sustain attention, respond more appropriately to challenges, and engage more positively with staff and peers. This reflects strengthened executive functioning skills linked to educational success (Diamond, 2013).

Motional also supports the development of more secure relationships and a stronger sense of belonging within school, particularly for learners with attachment-related or trauma-informed needs. As staff respond more consistently to underlying need rather than surface behaviour, students experience increased trust, safety and relational stability (Bowlby, 1988; Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Shonkoff et al., 2012).

In Alternative Provision contexts, this impact is often evidenced through increased readiness to learn, reduced behavioural escalation, improved engagement, and greater resilience, rather than purely academic measures. This aligns with evidence that social and emotional learning contributes significantly to both wellbeing and long-term educational progress (Durlak et al., 2011; Weare & Nind, 2011).

Overall, Motional supports students in moving from reactive patterns of behaviour towards greater emotional control, engagement and independence, enabling them to re-engage more successfully with learning.

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