

# **Evaluation of Leicestershire Virtual School's Attachment Aware Schools Programme 2016-17**

## **About the Attachment Aware Schools Programme**

Teachers report being insufficiently prepared in attachment and social learning theories to work effectively with young people who experience trauma and attachment issues. The failure to adequately meet these needs is likely to contribute further to the high school exclusion rates, poor educational outcomes and subsequent high rates of mental health issues experienced by these young people. Leicestershire Virtual School has implemented a programme to tackle this, and asked the Rees Centre at the Department of Education, University of Oxford to evaluate it.

The Attachment Aware Schools Programme was developed through a partnership between Leicestershire Virtual School and Kate Cairns Associates Ltd (KCA). The Programme is based on the premise that all children in school need to be ready to learn and achieve and that children who have experienced trauma or neglect are often not able to do so. Schools therefore need to be 'attachment aware' to enable this to happen. The core training provided by Leicestershire to 24 schools in 2016-17 covered understanding of attachment theory and the evidence base to support it, the impact of trauma on the developing brain, and subsequent behaviours and strategies for addressing these.

## **Key Findings**

Overall, there was rich evidence from schools to show that the Leicestershire Virtual School Attachment Aware Schools Programme had an impact on whole staff understanding of attachment theory and emotion coaching. In particular:

- Participants commented positively on the impact of the Programme on their confidence.
- The quality of the training was reported to be a major factor in its success.
- Participants noted their better understanding of both attachment theory and emotion coaching.
- Participants described changes in their own and their colleagues' practice.
- Impact on pupils' outcomes was hard to quantify, but qualitative findings suggest that improved well-being was evidenced by staff in both the survey and by staff and pupils in the interviews.
- Senior leader commitment, support and resource allocation were crucial to effective engagement in the Programme and to it having an impact on the school.

# Implications and Recommendations

There is extensive interest in developing Attachment Awareness across schools in England to better address the needs of vulnerable pupils. This evaluation suggests:

- This school-based approach to training was successful in the schools that signed up for it. However, further thought could be given as to how this integrates with the other forms of more centralised attachment training provided.
- The commitment of senior leadership in schools, notably at the training, seemed to be significant for successful implementation, and this needs to be highlighted when schools become involved.
- A specific programme focusing on the leadership issues would be valuable within the portfolio of programmes, to address systemic issues such as behaviour management policies.
- The developing expertise of some schools could be recognised and drawn on in further iterations of the programme, to explain and exemplify good practice and outline challenges.
- There could be greater discussion across Leicestershire's education and children's services about the benefits and drawbacks of different types of provision for special educational needs, such as autism, or attachment.
- Nationally, in a time of changes to schools' reporting systems to central government, the progress of looked-after children should neither be overlooked nor occluded by these reporting systems, and Leicestershire's education and children's services are urged to raise this point more widely.

## About the Evaluation

A mixed method approach was taken which included: a pre-programme survey of participants; a post-programme survey of participants; documentary analysis of programme materials; analysis of school attendance and attainment data; pre- and post-programme school visits to four schools to interview staff, head, and pupils.

## Evaluation Report

The full report can be read and downloaded for free as a pdf:

[Leicestershire Attachment Aware Schools Programme Evaluation Report](#)

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