

Evaluation of Bath and NE Somerset Attachment Aware Schools Programme

October 2015-July 2016

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. The Attachment Aware Schools Programme has been developed through a partnership between Bath Spa University, Bath and North East Somerset Council and the previous National College for Teaching and Leadership to address this. The Programme is based on the assumption 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 need to be 'attachment aware' to enable this to happen.

Bath and North East Somerset Council together with Bath Spa University and Kate Cairns Associates ran an Attachment Aware Schools Programme for the third year running in October 2015-July 2016 and asked the Rees Centre to evaluate it. 25 staff, mainly teachers, from 16 schools (6 secondary, 7 primary, 1 middle and two special schools), participated in professional development that included sessions at Bath Spa University, e learning, consultant support for planning and evaluation and completing a practical project of their choice in school.

Key Findings

- Two thirds of participants commented positively on the impact of the Programme on their own attitudes and practice. They reported feeling much more confident, having greater knowledge and understanding of attachment and emotion coaching.
- Participants described changes in their practice, in particular recognising emotions before managing behaviours, changing communication styles and language used with pupils and other staff and for nearly all the participants, using emotion coaching.
- In Bath and NE Somerset, attainment overall in the schools participating in the Programme has increased in the year since the Programme ended, with six primaries improving their scores in the percentage achieving expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics and the other two achieving the same results as the previous year. Three of the secondary schools have improved, one achieved the same as the previous year and two decreased their scores. While this is encouraging, without a control group it cannot be attributed with any confidence to the Programme.
- School staff and pupils described the school environment as having become calmer and more nurturing.
- Staff and pupils noted how School Meals Supervisory Assistants (SMSAs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs) had taken this on board with examples of their positive responses and effective approaches being given.
- Impact on pupils' well-being was evidenced by staff in both the survey and by staff and pupils in the interviews. One factor contributing to this seemed to be providing spaces in which children can calm down and self-regulate, another was having a significant adult in school that the pupil trusted.
- Senior leader commitment, support and resource allocation was crucial to effective engagement in the Programme and it having an impact on the school.

Implications

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

- **Initial teacher training** – many of those in this evaluation expressed a severe lack of confidence in addressing attachment needs in schools and felt unprepared for this. Very few teacher training programmes currently address attachment and the effects of trauma despite knowledge and understanding of this now being a requirement in the teaching standards.
- **Professional development of school staff** – all staff in schools, not just teachers, are involved in responding to behaviour and this evaluation demonstrates clearly the importance and potential changes that can be brought about by the wider school staff receiving development on attachment and trauma.
- **Governors** – the few who participated in the evaluation seemed relatively unaware of the issues and not engaged in the developments in school. This needs to be addressed through governor training.
- **Adults outside school with whom vulnerable pupils are in contact** – parents, foster carers and social workers need to be adopting a consistent approach to that being implemented in the schools. There were examples in which schools engaging parents/carers in the training had been beneficial.

Two further issues need to be addressed at a policy level:

- Ofsted inspections are inevitably a driver for action. If Ofsted inspectors noted improvements in pupils' well-being and perhaps progress of the more vulnerable pupils, they might usefully seek to identify the contributing factors.
- In order to build the evidence base in this area, there will need to be agreement on what acceptable measures of progress are, what data are needed and whether these should focus only on identified vulnerable pupils or all pupils in the schools involved.

About the Evaluation

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach. School staff were surveyed at the start and end of the programme. Five participating schools were visited at the start and end and senior managers, staff, parents and governors were interviewed. Focus groups of pupils were interviewed at the end of the programme to explore what differences that had observed and experienced in their schools. Documentary evidence was also used.

Evaluation Report

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

[Evaluation of the Bath and NE Somerset Attachment Aware Schools Programme Final Report](#)

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Further Information

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