

Attachment and trauma awareness training: school staff perspectives during the Covid-19 pandemic

September 2022

Key findings:

- Online questionnaire with staff in 80 schools that received attachment and trauma awareness training – total of 4,692 responses analysed from two time points
- Training was well-regarded, with 84.6% of respondents pointing to resulting changes in school policy and practice
- Respondents valued general learning about attachment and trauma, alongside specific pupil-focused strategies
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents reported that their school had reviewed their behaviour policy after the training
- Increases in staff confidence in working with vulnerable pupils, feelings of support and calmer school environment
- Strong belief that training had improved relationships with pupils, as well as their wellbeing and enjoyment of school
- Strong belief that training had led to reduction in exclusions and the use of other sanctions
- Challenges to data collection and analysis due to Covid-19 pandemic are noted

Report overview:

This report continues the publication of findings from the Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme, hosted at the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford.

As with many other school-based research projects, the Programme has been profoundly

affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. We were actively engaged in data collection in schools when the first lockdown period started and consequently paused most fieldwork between March and September 2020. The second school closure period between January and March 2021 led to an additional pause.

As explained in more detail below, this has significantly disrupted our schedule for data collection and analysis. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on schools, bringing novel challenges in supporting vulnerable young people and placing a new emphasis on young people's wellbeing and mental health.

A key element of our original research plan was to undertake three online surveys of staff in participating schools, administered before their school received training (Sweep 1) and again one year (Sweep 2) and two years later (Sweep 3). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we abandoned Sweep 3 to reduce the burden on schools.

Working Paper 1 in this series explored results where the second data collection point took place before the Covid-19 pandemic. This report covers the data which span the pandemic period – i.e. where Sweep 1 and/or Sweep 2 came after March 2020.

Needless to say, the pandemic and associated school closures made it difficult for schools to continue to provide data for our study. Many understandably declined to participate in Sweep 2, while staff sickness and other pressures meant that response rates in some other schools were low.

The net result is that we have substantially less data than anticipated for this phase of the study. This means that our claims to knowledge are necessarily limited and we are cognisant of potential sampling bias.

The final outputs from the programme will be published in October 2022.

Executive summary:

1. This report summarises online survey data from staff in 80 schools, with 2,869 responses at Sweep 1 (before or shortly after attachment and trauma awareness training) and 1,823 responses at Sweep 2 (around one year later).
2. The schools comprised 56 primary schools, eleven secondary schools, ten special schools and/or pupil referral units (PRUs), two middle schools and one early years provider.
3. The purpose of the survey was to examine staff perceptions before and after the training, with an emphasis on exploring individual and school changes over time. Data were also collected on the usefulness of the training itself.
4. The training was well-regarded and memorable, with 73.7% of attendees recalling it 'very well' or 'quite a bit'.
5. Respondents valued learning generally about theories and recent research on attachment and trauma, as well as learning specific everyday strategies to use with pupils and having the opportunity to discuss specific cases.
6. As a result, awareness of attachment and trauma was markedly higher in Sweep 2 than in Sweep 1. Those reporting low awareness were generally those who had not been at the training. Awareness at Sweep 2 was highest among senior leaders and lowest among administrative and support staff.
7. The proportion of staff reporting that they were confident in working with vulnerable pupils rose from 74.7% at Sweep 1 to 85.4% at Sweep 2; the rise was strongest in special schools and PRUs and least strong in secondary schools.
8. For over half, this confidence was enhanced by having supportive colleagues and teamwork within the school, underpinned by the knowledge acquired through the training or wider work experience.
9. However, some respondents remained less confident about dealing with difficult incidents 'in the moment'.
10. There was also a rise in the proportion of staff reporting that they felt supported when working with vulnerable pupils, from 61.9% in Sweep 1 to 72.9% in Sweep 2. There were also increases in the proportion reporting (a) that colleagues were supportive, and (b) that the school environment was calm.
11. Changes in the school following the training were reported by 84.6% of respondents; the most common was a review of behaviour policies (71.3%). The nature of the changes made differed somewhat between school types.
12. Respondents felt that the most positive impact in the school had been on pupil's sense of support from staff (92.7%), wellbeing (90.9%) and enjoyment of school (84.0%).
13. Respondents felt that there had been a definite positive impact on relationships between staff and young people (50.0%), fixed-term exclusions (45.5%) and the use other sanctions (42.8%).
14. Assessments of the impact of the training on the school and pupils tended to be higher among senior leaders and lower among staff in secondary schools.
15. Significance testing was undertaken on a subset of 374 responses that could be reliably linked at the individual level between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2. There were significant rises in all five repeated measures covering awareness, confidence, feeling supported, having supportive colleagues and working in a calm school environment.
16. The Covid-19 pandemic provides an important context for these findings. On the one hand, there may be some self-selection bias due to the lowered response rates. On the other hand, schools would likely have made more progress on their changes in the absence of the pandemic.

1. Background

Launched in 2017, the Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme has worked with 305 schools across 26 local authorities in England. Participating schools receive training in attachment and trauma organised through their virtual school or educational psychology service – the content of the training and identity of the trainer therefore varies between areas, based on the local needs identified¹.

The purpose of the Programme is to explore the impact of the training in schools, from the perspectives of staff and young people and – as initially intended – through analysis of aggregate school-level data on attainment, progress, attendance and exclusion. More information about the Programme and links to our previous working papers can be found on the website².

2. Covid-19 pandemic

Under our original research design, the participating schools were split into three waves based on the date of their training: Wave 1 prior to July 2019, Wave 2 between September 2019 and July 2020, and Wave 3 planned for between September and December 2020. Staff were to be asked to complete online surveys prior to the training (Sweep 1), one year later (Sweep 2) and two years later (Sweep 3).

The Programme was therefore midway through collecting Sweep 2 survey data from our Wave 1 schools and Sweep 1 data from the Wave 2 schools when the Covid-19 pandemic struck in March 2020.

We took several decisions at this point. Firstly, we abandoned Sweep 3 to reduce the

burden on schools. Secondly, we decided to split our schools into pre-Covid and Covid-era cohorts (rather than the original waves), reflecting the impact of the pandemic on schools and young people. Thirdly, we paused most of our data collection until September 2020 – and then again from January to March 2021 – due to school closures.

The pre-Covid findings from the staff survey were published in October 2021 as Working Paper 1. This report therefore covers the findings from the Covid-era schools – i.e. those who had their training from March 2019 onwards. In the majority of schools, their training and Sweep 1 surveys were undertaken prior to the pandemic, but Sweep 2 occurred during the pandemic. A small number of schools had their training after March 2020 and therefore both Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 were during the pandemic period.

3. Methodology and data overview

The data reported in this report were collected through the Qualtrics survey software. The questionnaire used a mixture of tick box questions, rating scales and open text responses.

Two somewhat different approaches were used to collect the data used in this report:

- *Initial approach* (for schools being trained up to July 2019): Schools were sent a general weblink to the survey and staff were asked to use unique codes to enable their individual responses to be linked between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2. This proved ineffective due to high numbers of lost, misapplied or shared codes.
- *Revised approach* (for schools being trained from September 2019 onwards):

¹ Examples of training from each local authority have been observed and while there are some minor differences of scope, emphasis and delivery, the training is broadly comparable between areas – see Working Paper 3 for more information.

² See <http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/the-alex-timpson-attachment-and-trauma-programme-in-schools>

A unique weblink was sent by e-mail to each participating school to be distributed to all staff. Staff following the link were asked to complete a very short online registration process that enabled us to automatically and anonymously link their Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 responses. The questionnaire was also shortened slightly to reduce burden and improve clarity.

In the analysis that follows, we have initially combined the data from the two approaches and analysed the aggregated data (Section 4). We have then looked at the subset of linked data from the revised approach in more detail to explore changes in specific individuals' perceptions over time (Section 5).

In most instances, the Sweep 1 survey was distributed before the school's training to provide baseline data; in some instances, this was not possible (e.g. where the training was arranged at very short notice) and staff were then asked to complete a questionnaire with slightly different wording that asked them to think about before the training.

Schools were followed up through e-mail and telephone reminders; these were sensitively used during the pandemic period as we were very aware of the pressures on schools. Some either actively informed us that they would not be able to continue their involvement or passively declined by not passing on the weblink to their staff. Others did distribute the weblink to their staff, but we received few responses, reflecting staff absences and other challenges. Needless to say, we are exceptionally grateful to schools and their staff for participating in our study where they were able and fully understand where this was not possible.

³ There was a small number of *possible* duplicates (less than 5%) in the dataset, often where someone had started the questionnaire, but had not been able to complete it and so started afresh. However, it was also apparent that some respondents had deliberately shared or incorrectly entered codes, making it unclear which were 'genuine' duplicates. This was a particular issue in the initial approach before the

The Covid-19 pandemic also meant that there was substantial variation in the period between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 for different schools. Rather than the 12 months initially envisaged, this unavoidably varied between 9 and 18 months due to delayed training and school closures. The extent to which this has affected the findings is not known.

3.1 Sample

On concluding data collection in March 2022, we downloaded all Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 data from the Qualtrics system and prepared it for analysis. We discarded any individual responses that were less than one-third complete (i.e. only provided demographic data)³.

After cleansing, we received **7,623 responses in 239 schools** in Sweep 1 overall. This indicates that 66 schools received the training, but then declined to participate in the staff surveys, despite initially agreeing to do so. In some instances, this was due to Covid-19 (e.g. where the training took place in spring 2020) or changes in senior leadership.

Overall at Sweep 2, we received **2,770 responses in 143 schools** after cleansing; the sharp drop-off could largely be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic.

These issues with Sweep 2 participation do present a challenge for analysis and reporting. We are conscious that the schools and individuals most likely to be motivated to respond to our surveys were those who felt that the training had a positive impact on themselves or the wider school. This would have been heightened by the challenges of the pandemic and while we endeavoured to

introduction of individual registration. Due to this uncertainty, we did not seek to remove possible duplicates from the main dataset as it would have risked destroying valid data and introducing new biases. Given the low prevalence overall, this is unlikely to have meaningfully affected the results. As we will come on to explain, we did remove duplicates from the linked dataset.

increase response rates as far as possible, our approach was necessarily cautious. This phenomenon potentially creates a form of self-selection bias. We will return to reflect further on this limitation later in this report.

From the 143 schools at Sweep 2, we have previously reported the results of 24 primary schools (Working Paper 1) where all data had been collected prior to the pandemic and indirectly covered the findings from another ten schools.

A further twenty-nine schools who engaged in Sweep 2 had response rates that were too low for meaningful analysis. This report covers the remaining 80 schools where Sweep 2 (and, in some cases, Sweep 1) took place during the pandemic⁴. Of these 80 schools, 30 had response rates of 50% or higher, with several at, or approaching, 100%.

Within these 80 schools, we received 2,869 responses at Sweep 1 and 1,823 responses in Sweep 2; these form the datasets underpinning the analysis in this report. The schools comprised 56 primary schools, eleven secondary schools, ten special schools and/or pupil referral units (PRUs), two middle schools and one early years provider. For the purposes of analysis:

- The special schools and PRUs were combined;
- The two middle schools were included with secondary schools;
- The early years provider was included with primary schools.

The 80 schools spanned 22 local authorities, with between one and nine schools from each authority. The authorities represented a good

spread by geography, size and demographic profile and training programme structure.

Table 1 provides an overview of the Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 samples. As can be seen, they are broadly comparable, which suggests that the lower response rates in Sweep 2 did not introduce a systematic bias across these factors; lengths of service inevitably drifted upwards somewhat with the passage of time.

Table 1: Sample overview

School type	S1	S2
Primary school	58.6%	61.9%
Secondary school	30.3%	27.1%
Special school or PRU	11.1%	11.0%
Job role		
Senior leadership team	10.4%	12.5%
Middle manager	10.0%	10.4%
Teacher (inc. trainee)	33.1%	30.7%
Teaching assistant ⁵	33.8%	34.5%
Other staff ⁶	12.7%	11.7%
Length of service in school		
Less than 12 months	14.3%	8.3%
1 to 3 years	20.3%	19.7%
3 to 5 years	16.1%	17.9%
5 to 10 years	20.2%	23.3%
10+ years	29.0%	30.6%
Length of total service in education		
Less than 12 months	4.7%	2.8%
1 to 3 years	9.0%	7.7%
3 to 5 years	11.2%	9.7%
5 to 10 years	20.2%	20.8%
10+ years	54.7%	58.4%
Memory of training		
Remember very well	-	13.6%
Remember quite a bit	-	47.4%
Don't remember very much	-	21.7%
Was at school, but didn't attend	-	8.9%
Wasn't at school at the time	-	8.3%

NB: Some columns total less than 100% due to a small number of missing responses

⁴ Where the response rate was over 20%. This is a lower threshold than in Working Paper 1 (30%) to provide some allowance for Covid-19 absences.

⁵ This group includes learning mentors, pastoral support staff and similar roles that involve regular one-to-one contact with pupils.

⁶ This group includes managerial, administrative, technical and other support staff within the school, who generally have limited one-to-one contact with pupils.

At Sweep 2, 82.8% of respondents reported that they had attended the attachment and trauma training around a year earlier; the remainder were split roughly equally between new staff and those who missed the training (e.g. through illness). Of those who attended the training 73.7% remembered it ‘very well’ or ‘quite a bit’.

In Sweep 1, 143 respondents (5.6%) reported that they were the designated teacher for children in care within their school; this rose to 170 (9.3%) in Sweep 2. Given there were 80 schools represented, some schools may have had multiple staff in this role (potentially as a job-share or covering different age groups) or some respondents may have answered inaccurately⁷. We have therefore not used this as a basis for analysis.

Table 2 shows the level of reported experience of working with vulnerable pupils. This rose somewhat between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2, with the proportion in the top two categories rising from 36.5% to 49.7%.

Table 2: Reported experience of working with vulnerable pupils

	S1	S2
Extremely experienced	8.1%	12.0%
Good experience	28.4%	37.7%
Somewhat experienced	32.8%	31.3%
Little experience	24.1%	15.6%
No experience	5.7%	3.3%

NB: Some rows total less than 100% due to a small number of missing responses

There are several possible explanations for this. It may reflect that staff within these schools feel that they have become more experienced as a result of the training – i.e. that they are now more directly engaged in supporting these pupils. It may also represent an increase in vulnerable pupils in the schools, perhaps due to the Covid-19

⁷ Some respondents who stated they were the designated teacher also said that they were teaching assistants or non-

pandemic or a wider increase in mental health issues. Finally, it may be that more experienced staff were more inclined to respond at Sweep 2. The increase in reported experience was most marked among senior leaders, middle managers and teachers. There was no particular pattern by school type.

4. Findings: aggregated data

In this section, we look at the aggregated datasets for Sweep 1 and Sweep 2. At this stage, no attempt is made to match individuals over time – the findings represent a sample of staff from the 80 schools, many of whom will be the same individuals, but some of whom will only have completed one of the two surveys. In Section 5, we will explore the subsample where individual level data can be reliably matched between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2.

The focus in this section will therefore be to understand whether participating schools – in aggregate – felt that things had changed since the training. Subgroup analysis is also presented by school type, staff roles and length of experience.

The responses to the open questions were analysed thematically, based on the themes developed in Working Paper 1. Coding was reviewed continually; new themes or minor adjustments to existing themes were made accordingly. Note that in many cases, respondents gave multiple responses which could be coded to different themes; thus, the number of codable responses exceeds the number of respondents. Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the total respondents for each question.

teaching staff, which suggests that they may have misunderstood the question.

4.1 Usefulness of training

Respondents were asked to identify what they found most useful about the training, and responses are summarised in Table 3.

The most common response (36% of respondents) was that the training provided a general understanding of attachment and trauma theory. In particular, acknowledging the enduring impact of early trauma was flagged as an important part of trauma informed practice, and one that may not have previously been given due consideration, as one teacher noted, the training gave a *'clearer understanding of why some of our students struggle with certain things and ways to support them'* (Teacher; 5-10 years' experience). This new understanding was applied in everyday practice, as it helped to *'unpick children's behaviour to explain what they need and how to respond to them'* (Middle manager; 5-10 years' experience).

Table 3: Which part(s) of the training respondents found most useful

Themes	%
General understanding of attachment and trauma theory	36
Strategies and techniques for working with young people	26
Understanding of brain structure, chemistry and functions	16
Understanding of impact on young people's emotions and behaviour	11
Opportunity to reflect on or discuss specific young people or issues	11
General positivity – all or mostly useful or helpful refresher	10
Other (including irrelevant or unclear responses)	6
Signs to help identify young people with unmet attachment or trauma needs	6
Understanding of impact on learning or school engagement	4

Cases n=946; Responses n=1193

Particular strategies and techniques for working with children and young people were noted as a useful part of the training from 26% of the respondents; over a quarter of these responses referred to 'emotion coaching' explicitly. Other responses referred to concepts linked to the emotion coaching approach, such as, *'explaining emotions and what they are'* or *'validating feelings'*. It is not surprising to find emotion coaching featuring heavily in useful aspects of the training, given the prominence of it in the training material in some local authorities. Some school staff, however, elaborated on its usefulness: *'used a few times with students and it has had a large, positive effect on their mental wellbeing'* (Teacher; 3-5 years' experience). Another respondent reflected on the impact of the training sessions and how it was beneficial for staff across the school: *'The emotion coaching twilights were amazing! They gave staff a real insight to validating a child's feelings and shining a light on their behaviours. They gave staff a script and a way of speaking to dysregulated children'* (Behaviour support worker; 3-5 years' experience).

Aspects of communication also featured strongly, one senior leader with over ten years' experience was reminded of *'the importance of using language and phrasing of questions carefully.'* Respondents also remarked how consistency and tone of voice added to the effectiveness of positive communication, particularly when dealing with 'in-the-moment' situations.

A further group of responses focused on understanding how early trauma and unmet attachment needs may affect brain development and so influence behaviour. References to reactions under stress were common – e.g. *'Understanding flight, fight, freeze, and how individuals can be close to or within a stress state and how this impacts*

their physiology’ (Teacher; over 10 years’ experience).

As in Working Paper 1, non-technical analogies (e.g. ‘flipping the lid’) to explain neurological processes under stressful conditions, were well-received. The science-based explanations enabled respondents to apply it to their current working context. For example, a senior leader in a primary school reported how:

‘The learning about [how] the physical effects on the brain can affect the child’s ability to concentrate and function at a different rate to their peers. I also found the information about hyper and hypo children (especially hypo) very interesting and could relate it [to] certain individuals.’

Overall, school staff considered the training as useful, regardless of their role or length of experience. Reflections on the training were typically positive; those who had received similar training before (either in a previous school or through a CPD course) noted their familiarity with the content, but explained that it served as a useful refresher.

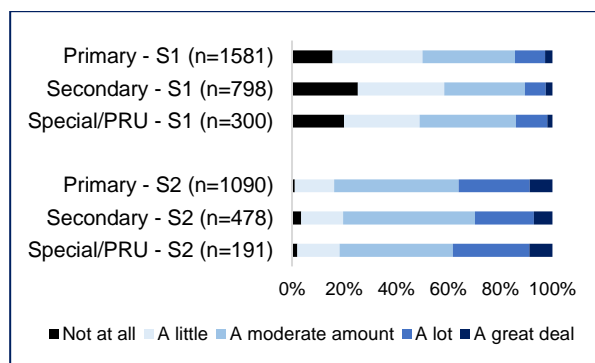
4.2 Awareness of attachment and trauma

There was a very marked increase in reported awareness of attachment and trauma issues between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2⁸. This likely reflects the positive impact of the initial training and any follow-up work within the school.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the proportion of staff reporting that they knew little or nothing about attachment and trauma issues fell markedly across all school types from around half in Sweep 1 to under one-fifth in Sweep 2. The vast majority of this latter group were those who did not receive the training,

⁸ The approach to capturing this was changed between earlier and later versions of the Sweep 1 survey – initially a single question was used for both attachment and trauma, but this was amended to use separate questions (plus a third for emotion coaching). In this analysis, an average of the

Figure 1: Change in awareness of attachment and trauma issues, by school type

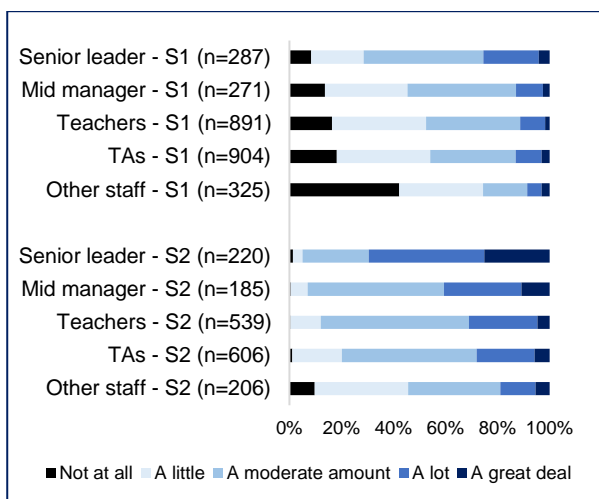


suggesting that the training was effective in its primary goal of raising awareness.

Figure 2 shows that, at Sweep 1, senior leaders reported having the highest levels of awareness, followed by middle managers, teachers and teaching assistants with similar levels; ‘other staff’ had notably lower levels of awareness, with nearly half professing none at all. Awareness rose across all job roles by Sweep 2, with the most marked changes being among senior leaders, and the ‘other staff’ group (i.e. non-teaching staff). In the former case, the proportion reporting that they knew ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ rose from 28.6% to 69.5%. In the latter, those saying that they had little or no knowledge fell from 74.5% to 45.6%; this was still considerably higher than for staff in senior or teaching roles and may reflect their more limited access to training and other opportunities to develop their awareness.

attachment and trauma questions was used, rounded upwards, in order to reconcile the data into a single measure. Other approaches were trialled, but none yielded a meaningfully different finding.

Figure 2: Change in awareness of attachment and trauma issues, by job role



Across both Sweep 1 and Sweep 2, respondents with a longer experience of working in education tended to report having higher levels of knowledge about attachment and trauma, with all groups reporting an increase between the two data collection points. Perhaps interestingly, the proportion of those working at the school for less than a year who professed no knowledge was substantially lower at Sweep 2 (8.7%) than at Sweep 1 (20.3%), while the proportion reporting that they knew ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ rose from 12.0% to 24.8%. This suggests that many schools had been able to pass on significant knowledge as part of their induction processes for new staff.

4.3 Confidence working with vulnerable pupils

At Sweep 1, 74.7% of respondents reported that they ‘somewhat’ or ‘strongly’ agreed with a statement that they felt confident working with vulnerable pupils. At Sweep 2, this had risen to 85.4%, largely through an increase in those in strong agreement (from 21.5% to 30.4%).

⁹ See Kruger, J. and D. Dunning (1999) Unskilled and unaware of it: how difficulties in recognizing one’s own incompetence

Figure 3: Change in confidence in working with vulnerable pupils, by school type

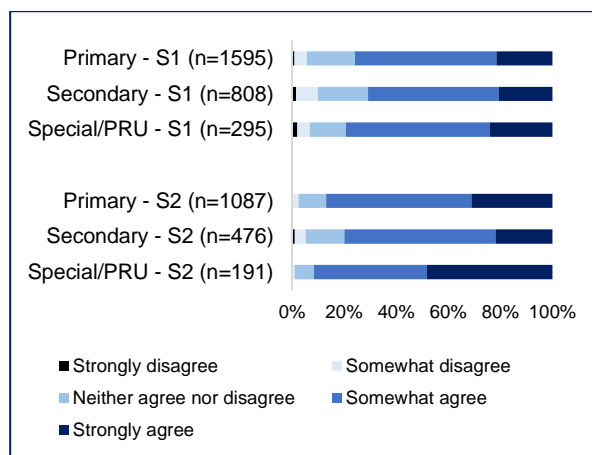


Figure 3 suggests that this improvement was particularly strong in special schools and PRUs, where the proportion of respondents strongly agreeing doubled from 24.1% at Sweep 1 to 48.2% at Sweep 2.

There were improvements in confidence across all job roles between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2. This was most strongly reflected among senior leaders. Among this group, the proportion saying that they strongly agreed with the statement rose from 35.9% to 57.8%. There were no notable patterns by length of service in education – all groups showed an increase in the proportion of respondents expressing confidence.

In Working Paper 1, we suggested that this measure might be particularly susceptible to the Dunning-Kruger effect⁹. This is a cognitive bias whereby individuals tend to over-estimate their confidence before they are knowledgeable or skilled in a particular activity – this has been attested in a wide range of human endeavours.

In this instance, the knowledge embedded in the training could cause some to reflexively re-evaluate their previous practices and thereby challenge their earlier assessment of

lead to inflated self-assessments, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77(6): 1121-1134.

confidence. If the Dunning-Kruger effect were relevant in this instance, the measure we have used in this study would be prone to underestimating the change occurring after the training.

Respondents who indicated that they felt confident about working with vulnerable children and young people were invited to explain why in a free-text question: 1,318 respondents did so. Using the themes from the analysis in Working paper 1 for the same question, Table 4 summarises the responses.

Table 4: Respondents’ reasons for reporting that they felt confident

Theme	%
Supportive colleagues and teamwork	52
Training and/or other CPD	23
Work experience	22
School ethos, policies and systems	16
Knowledge about attachment and trauma/ understanding needs	15
Knowledge of specific techniques	6
Existing positive relationships with young people and families	5
Personal skills (e.g. listening)	4
Other (including irrelevant)	3
Life experiences (e.g. parenthood)	2

Cases: n=1318; Responses: n=1924

Five main themes accounted for 87% of the total responses. These themes were often used in conjunction with one another by the respondents to explain why they feel confident, (e.g. training *and* support; knowledge about attachment and trauma *and* support). Just over half of the respondents (52%) referred to supportive colleagues as the reason for their confidence. This was often conceptually linked to ‘teamwork’, perhaps suggestive of the whole-school

approach, and so was added to the theme title; as illustrated by an outreach officer with over 10 years’ experience who noted:

‘We all work so well as a team and have a great attitude towards behaviour. Even on our bad days, someone will support us to keep going and stay positive.’

Availability of colleagues and having opportunities for discussion about specific behavioural incidents, were characteristic of the responses. Importantly the support came from senior leaders, as well as teaching colleagues:

‘A lot of support from experienced staff and support from SLT too! I feel like I could turn to anyone for support in this area’ (Teacher; 1-3 years’ experience).

Confidence appears to grow not only from knowing who to turn to, but also knowing that their concerns will be heard and support will be positive, *‘Colleagues, including senior colleagues, take it seriously when you appeal for support, regarding dealing with particular students’* (Teacher; 5-10 years’ experience).

Almost a quarter of respondents felt that their confidence, in part, came from attending training sessions concerning attachment and trauma working. The emphasis on whole-school attendance seemed to bolster this confidence because it could contribute to a consistent approach, *‘Because of the various training that the school staff have had, I feel confident that we work together as a team with a unified approach’* (Teaching assistant; 5-10 years’ experience). Training that developed understanding of attachment theory enabled school staff to have confidence in the practical strategies encountered in the sessions. Staff could see how the strategies might be successful in their day-to-day practice, and so became confident that these new and often unfamiliar techniques would most likely be effective – e.g. *‘I feel the training gave us the right tools*

to deal with any issues that arise’ (Teaching assistant; 3-5 years’ experience) and ‘Once you’ve tried the strategies, they do work and with practice, you become better at knowing which approach suits the different needs of the children in your class (Teacher; over 10 years’ experience).

Opportunities for reflection on the training material and discussion with colleagues during the training session also provided the respondents with confidence to take this approach forward: ‘I have the course resources to reflect upon in order to refresh my knowledge ... I am confident that I could react appropriately to a child who needed additional support with attachment issues’ (Teacher; over 10 years’ experience). Another teacher commented how the training served as a catalyst for building on extensive experience: ‘Training has been useful in reflecting on past experience and helped to provide a foundation for my classroom management and behaviour strategies’ (Teacher; over 10 years’ experience).

Respondents typically noted a change in the type of discussions being held as staff felt more comfortable sharing sensitive experiences: ‘The trauma aware training allows for conversations of a different nature to take place between staff (Senior leader; over 10 years’ experience).

Respondents also drew on their previous experience to explain their confidence. As noted earlier, the majority of respondents had over 10 years’ experience in an education setting and some had considerable experience with vulnerable pupils: ‘My role as DSL¹⁰ for nearly 20 years has provided me with this level of knowledge and experience.’ Many respondents also noted how working alongside a range of associated professionals added knowledge to their wealth of experience: ‘Experience of working alongside Social Care, Early Help, Play Therapists,

Education Psychologists and other professionals to support and advise’ (Senior leader; over 10 years’ experience).

The key role of supportive colleagues and teamwork in building confidence has already been noted. School level factors (such as school ethos, policies and administrative systems) also played a role in respondents’ explanations of their confidence. At the heart of this theme was communication and access to relevant information, especially as a result of receiving training, ‘[pupil] background information now communicated to teachers which is useful – TAC¹¹ meetings provide valuable insight’ (Teacher; 1-3 years’ experience).

A pervasive ethos of support and care, congruent with effective systems of communication, embedded in a whole-school approach, appear to be key in providing effective support for pupils, as these extended quotes illustrate:

‘We are a primary school with a high percentage of high need pupils. This includes pupils with SEND and children previously from care settings. Our staff are highly effective in acknowledging and calming children who find many everyday situations overwhelming. Needs are unpicked and recognised and we constantly seek ways to support individuals with an individualised approach. We have a highly trained pastoral team, [put] in additional [teaching assistants] and teachers are very competent at managing a wide variety of emotional needs’ (Senior leader; over 10 years’ experience).

‘Everyone has the same approach to supporting the children – the shared ethos means that we all understand why the children need the help and we use the same strategies, as consistency is really important. I can

¹⁰ Designated safeguarding lead.

¹¹ Team around the child – multi-agency team meetings.

see the results of working in this way as our children are calm and happy and demonstrate an ability to manage their emotions better as well as asking for help when they need it' (Special educational needs co-ordinator; over 10 years' experience).

Confidence in the respondents also came from developing knowledge about attachment and trauma theory and approaches. This new understanding seemed to provide school staff with a deeper understanding of children's needs, in terms of variety and willingness to change practice: *'I understand why children may behave in certain ways and can adapt my own behaviour to respond to them in a way which suits their needs and will get the best from them'* (Senior leader, over 10 years' experience). For others, the knowledge gained granted a sense of agency in their professional practice:

'I feel confident because I have a deeper knowledge and understanding of it. It has such an impact on their social, emotional and mental health. This gives me a greater power to develop my skills confidently with children who have suffered in this way. I can give them the space they need to express their feelings when they are ready' (Teaching assistant; 5-10 years' experience).

Participating in the training sessions may have led to school staff reflecting on their current practice and approach. Gaining awareness and understanding of issues associated with attachment and trauma enabled school staff to confidently adapt their practice to a relational approach:

'Confident in attachment awareness which has changed the way I support children in my class and throughout school. I feel confident with using this awareness to understand behaviour and what the behaviour is telling me and building relationships with children'

(Senior leader; over 10 years' experience).

Becoming attachment aware is a process of change that may take longer for some than others. Respondents were given a free-text option to identify areas where they were less confident in working with vulnerable young people, 811 did so and their responses were coded using the themes from Working Paper 1. An additional theme was created to account for a group of responses that related to 'their own experience or self-confidence.' The themes are summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Respondents' reasons for reporting that they did not feel confident

Theme	%
Other (including irrelevant or unclear responses)	19
Dealing with vulnerable pupils in whole class – lack of resources or information	17
Lack of extended support network or routes for onward referral	15
Own experience or confidence	15
Need for more training esp. specific techniques/strategies or a refresher	10
Handling situations (esp. violent or unpredictable) 'in the moment'	9
Fears about exacerbating the situation for the pupils 'getting it right'	8
Dealing with variety of challenges presented by different young people	8
Forgotten the training and/or a lack of opportunity to practice	5
Ability to provide (deeper) emotional support	3
Balance between being supportive and accepting poor behaviour	3
Handling increasing numbers of vulnerable pupils	2
Balance between being supportive and re-engaging with learning	1

Cases: n=811; Responses: n=932



Managing challenging behaviour from vulnerable pupils in a whole class situation was identified by 17% of respondents as an area of low confidence. This was often linked to a lack of resources (usually staffing levels) or incomplete or outdated information about the particular child's needs or history: *'Being made aware of students in an emotional state prior to the lesson – I would like to see more inclusion of staff so everyone is up to date [with] any recent information of students that could impact their learning'* (Teacher; 5-10 years' experience).

Background information on vulnerable pupils, especially if new to a class, is an essential component of working in an attachment and trauma informed approach and highlights the need for clear and consistent communication regarding pupil needs. Additionally, usually in a secondary school context, staff felt less confident in dealing with pupils outside of their usual class group in occasional interactions: *'Understanding each individual when only crossing their paths on occasion - not a regular event and being expected to know everything about everyone.'* (Teaching assistant; over 10 years' experience).

The circumstances of supporting pupils less familiar was most keenly felt by teaching assistants: *'We as teaching assistants are not given access to any information about any of our children, so we are unable to speak with and care for those individuals in an appropriate way, as we have no details on their home life and issues they may be having'* (Teaching assistant; 5-10 years' experience). However, simply being aware of the information may not be enough as individual needs may warrant tailored approaches that are best seen in practice to be effective:

'When I don't know a child, it is sometimes difficult to know how best to

deal with their needs as a result of their trauma. For example, even though as a school we share key information about high-needs children, until you work with them closely, it is difficult to know how best to cater for them as every child and their experience is so different' (Middle manager; over 10 years' experience).

Teachers reported a tension between giving appropriate and measured support to vulnerable pupils, whilst simultaneously managing the needs of the whole class. This was particularly the case when additional adults were unavailable to provide support: *'Sometimes at a loss as what to do when pupil is acting out and I'm on my own in the classroom and have the rest of the class to consider'* (Teacher; over 10 years' experience). Not being able to support pupils appropriately in whole class settings due to staffing issues, may lead to further dysregulation and damaging of established trusted relationships.

Where respondents identified low confidence in routes for onward referral it was mainly linked to quality of external provision. There was a perception that work carried out in school was consistent and of high quality (following the training), but this would not always be mirrored by the external agencies, *'Sometimes it is difficult to know where to go next. The outreach services are stretched, and because we work hard to support SEMH¹², they cannot always offer us additional ideas'* (Senior leader, over 10 years' experience).

Difficulties in accessing appropriate services was also a source of low confidence. Specific issues included length of time from referral to intervention, lack of continuation of attachment and trauma approach by associated professionals that may undermine the work done in school, limited availability of

¹² Social, emotional and mental health.

provision, and concern about children ‘falling through the gap’, i.e. those pupils whose needs exceed the provision that school is able to offer, but do not meet threshold for clinical intervention:

‘We have sometimes been let down by outside agencies involved with our most vulnerable pupils e.g. CAMHS¹³, social workers, statutory [special educational needs support], etc. This is because thresholds to access support are high, waiting lists are long and this means that pupils sometimes don't receive the expert support that they need that goes beyond what we can offer in school.’ (Special educational needs co-ordinator, over 10 years' experience).

One respondent highlighted concerns about pupils in need of external support but were about to age-out of children's services (i.e. 16/17 years old): *‘It is often hard to get external support for young people, particularly those in the Sixth Form who are on the verge of being adults’* (Pastoral support manager; over 10 years' experience).

Around 15% of respondents identified limitations in their own abilities, or lack of experience, as a source of low confidence. For some, this was due to career stage and not having direct experience with challenging situations:

‘I know a few strategies for how to support vulnerable children. I haven't used a range of strategies in school so I would say I am not yet confident in applying all of the strategies’ (Teacher; 1-3 years' experience).

For others, low confidence was linked with fears about inadvertently exacerbating the situation: *‘Perhaps saying the wrong thing and causing an issue to escalate [and] not dealing with an issue correctly if I feel in a heightened state too’* (Teacher; over 10

years' experience). Anxiety about applying strategies from the training ‘correctly’ may reflect an emerging understanding of the approach and limited opportunity to put the training into practice.

A small number of respondents also highlighted interacting with parents/carers and families as a source of low confidence. This was the case when the need for *‘speaking to parents about challenging or awkward conversations’* was required, including *‘talking with parents of vulnerable children about issues at home.’* Clear and consistent communication with parents/carers is a key part of supporting vulnerable pupils in school. The concerns highlighted by these respondents likely reflect general teaching experience, but they indicate the importance of support by more experienced colleagues in adopting an attachment and trauma aware approach in school.

4.4 Feeling of being supported when working with vulnerable pupils

Staff were asked how well they felt supported in school when working with vulnerable pupils. At Sweep 1, 61.9% of staff answered with either ‘extremely well’ or ‘very well’. The proportion was higher in special schools (69.1%) and among senior leaders generally (75.9%), but notably lower among classroom teachers (56.1%).

At Sweep 2, the proportion of staff answering ‘extremely well’ or ‘very well’ was markedly higher at 72.9%. This increase was found across all groups of schools and staff roles without any notable patterns.

4.5 Feeling that colleagues were supportive

Staff were also asked a separate question about the supportiveness of the environment in the school in general. At Sweep 1, 91.6%

¹³ Child and adolescent mental health services.

answered ‘strongly agree’ or ‘somewhat agree’ to the statement, with the equivalent statistic at Sweep 2 being 93.1%.

However, there was a more notable change in those answering ‘strongly agree’. This proportion rose from 45.7% to 53.2%. The increase occurred to a similar level across all groups. Strongly agreeing with the statement was somewhat more common in primary schools (56.5% at Sweep 2) and among senior leaders (71.1%) and staff with less than one year of experience in education (66.7%). Conversely, it was somewhat lower in special schools and PRUs (44.5%) and among teaching assistants and those with 5 to 10 years of experience (both 46.2%).

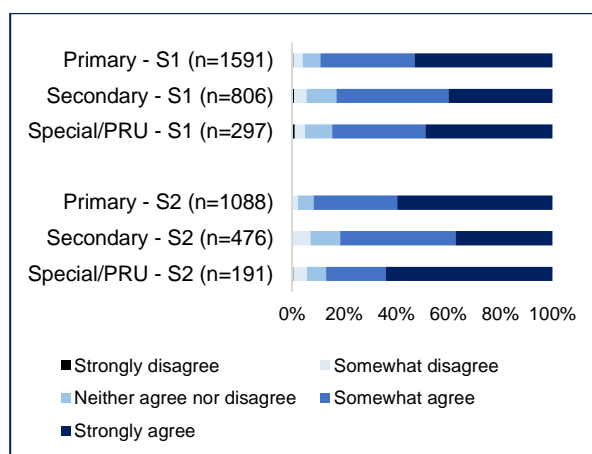
4.6 Feeling that the school was calm

Staff were asked to agree or disagree with a statement about whether they felt that the school environment was calm. This followed a similar pattern to the question about supportiveness, with a high proportion agreeing with the statement at both data collection points. At Sweep 1, the proportion answering ‘strongly agree’ or ‘somewhat agree’ was 86.8%; at Sweep 2, it was 88.4%.

Once again, there was a greater change when looking solely at those answering ‘strongly agree’. This proportion rose from 48.6% to 54.0% between the two data points. While there were increases across all job roles, this was most marked among senior leaders (60.6% to 73.4%) and lowest among the ‘other staff’ group (51.7% to 52.7%).

There was also a marked pattern by school type, as can be seen in Figure 4. The most substantial change was seen in special schools and PRUs, where the proportion of staff strongly agreeing rose from 48.8% to 63.9%. There was a smaller rise in primary schools (53.0% to 59.6%), while secondary schools had a small fall from 40.0% to 37.2%.

Figure 4: Change in feeling that the school environment is calm, by school type



4.7 Differences between local authorities

As noted above, the 80 schools were drawn from 22 local authorities, with numbers varying from one to nine schools in each. We undertook two analyses to explore whether the changes outlined above varied between local authority areas. This distinction is potentially important as there were marked differences in the training (see Working Paper 3) and support (see Working Paper 4) provided by individual local authorities, based on available resources and local needs.

Firstly, we separated out eleven local authorities that had four or more schools represented in the dataset. The remaining fourteen schools were placed in an ‘other’ group. While there was substantial variation by local authority, there was not a clear pattern – for example, those with the largest changes in awareness did not necessarily have the largest changes in confidence or feelings of support.

One local authority did show notably strong positive changes across all the measures. This was the area which trained the joint highest number of schools overall and which had nine schools included in the dataset for this report – this may speak for a particular strategic emphasis on attachment and trauma awareness.

Another local authority was notable for showing small declines in the measure, although this was the area with the most positive situation at Sweep 1 – i.e. these were schools that already had higher levels of awareness and confidence.

The ‘other’ group of schools from local authorities where few schools provided data showed smaller changes than the individual authorities with more included schools. This might suggest that a ‘critical mass’ of participating schools provides an additive effect – e.g. through interschool networking.

Secondly, we used the three-way categorisation that we introduced in Working Paper 4 to reflect the level of ongoing support provided to schools by the local authority, ranging from ‘simple’ (just training) to ‘complex’ (a structured programme, including follow-on training, networking and advice).

Schools receiving all three levels of support showed positive changes in every instance but one. These tended to be similar in scale – i.e. there was no evidence to suggest that higher levels of support led to more profound changes in the views of staff. Indeed, the change in reported staff confidence was highest in schools receiving ‘simple’ support. This partly reflected that the levels were already higher in those receiving ‘complex’ support (84.9%, compared with 73.3%). In other words, there was a degree of ‘catching up’ at work. This pattern would also be consistent with the Dunning-Kruger effect referenced earlier, with an ongoing programme of intervention leading to a deeper rethinking of practices and the associated confidence of staff.

These results were consistent with Working Paper 5, where there was no difference in headteachers’ perception of the impact of the

training relative to the level of support provided. However, there was a strong correlation between ‘complex’ support and headteachers reporting that changes resulting from the training had been robustly embedded in their school.

In summary, these two analyses did suggest that the impact of the training could be stronger or weaker in different local authority areas. However, the results were not readily interpretable and it was not possible to identify particularly (in)effective practices with any certainty. This is possibly due in part to the Covid-19 related difficulties with the data in general, as highlighted above. There was some suggestion that the changes were more marked in schools and local authorities which began the process with lower levels of awareness and confidence and in those with a ‘critical mass’ of participating schools.

4.8 Changes to policies and practices

In the Sweep 2 questionnaire, staff were asked to identify changes to school policies and practices that had occurred since the training from a tick list of eight possible options, including an ‘other’ option. In total, 1,542 individuals (84.6%) responded to this question and the results are summarised in Table 6; the columns sum to over 100% as respondents had the option to tick as many boxes as appropriate¹⁴.

The most commonly selected options were a review of the school’s behaviour policy (71.3%), additional mentoring or counselling for pupils (60.1%) and more discussion about vulnerable pupils (58.7%). There were notable differences in changes identified by staff across the three school types. Staff in primary schools were markedly more likely to

¹⁴ A limitation of this approach is that not all staff in a school would be aware of all possible changes – indeed, the variety of responses within individual schools showed that there was not consensus about what changes had happened and when. Nevertheless, these responses provide an indication of the relative frequency with which these changes were made and in

which types of schools. Restricting analysis to senior leaders only produced broadly similar results – slightly more identified additional mentoring or counselling, teaching pupils about attachment/trauma and discussions about vulnerable pupils, which would not be readily apparent to all staff.

mention behaviour policy reviews and the creation of nurture or ‘chill out’ spaces, whereas staff in secondary schools were more likely to mention the introduction of ‘time out’ cards, the increased use of mentoring or counselling and more discussion about vulnerable pupils in staff meetings. Finally, staff in special schools and PRUs were more likely to report the use of ‘open door’ policies for senior staff and the introduction of teaching about attachment, trauma and emotions for their pupils.

Table 6: Changes made in the school since training, by school type

	Primary (n=976)	Secondary (n=400)	Special/PRU (n=166)
Review of behaviour policy	74.8%	64.0%	68.7%
Creation of nurture or 'chill out' spaces	53.1%	32.5%	44.6%
Introduction of 'time out' card system	20.8%	43.3%	23.5%
Additional mentoring or counselling	57.5%	67.5%	57.2%
'Open door' policies for senior staff	23.0%	21.0%	38.0%
Teaching pupils about attachment/trauma/etc.	29.4%	22.0%	33.1%
More discussion about vulnerable pupils	55.1%	67.8%	57.8%
Other	15.1%	16.5%	24.7%

Those selecting ‘other’ had the opportunity to add more detail in a free text box. The explanations were diverse, but the majority related to additional training or the adoption of complementary initiatives, including the Thrive¹⁵ approach, emotion coaching, emotional literacy support assistants, support animals, emotional regulation zones, therapeutic storytelling, positive mental health

¹⁵ A programme that aids staff in identifying and supporting the needs of individual pupils, including those around attachment and trauma – see <https://www.thriveapproach.com>.

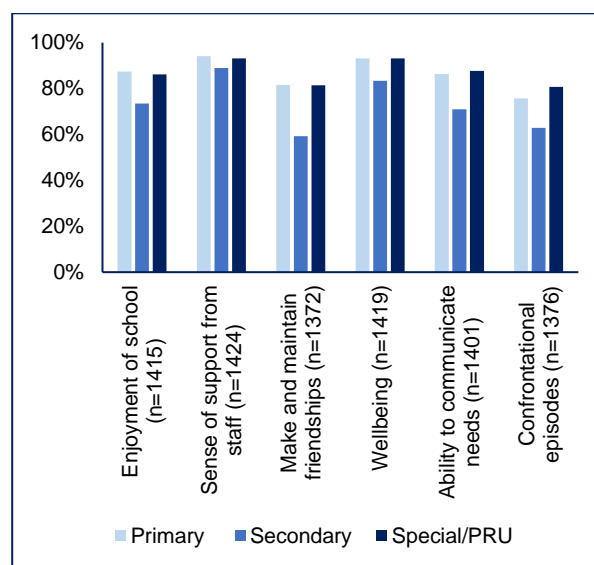
initiatives and similar. Others mentioned the use of restorative approaches to behavioural incidents and the adoption of a post-pandemic ‘recovery curriculum’ focusing on reintegrating young people into learning following school closures.

4.9 Perceived impact on young people

School staff were asked at Sweep 2 to indicate whether they felt that the training had had an impact on young people in the school across six different domains on a five-point scale from ‘extremely negative’ to ‘extremely positive’. These six questions garnered responses from between 1,372 and 1,424 individuals.

Overall, the majority of respondents felt that the impact had been positive; only 73 out of 8,407 responses across the six domains were negative (0.9%). Our analysis therefore focuses on the proportion answering ‘extremely positive’ or ‘somewhat positive’ in each instance; this is summarised in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Perceptions of positive impact on young people, by school type

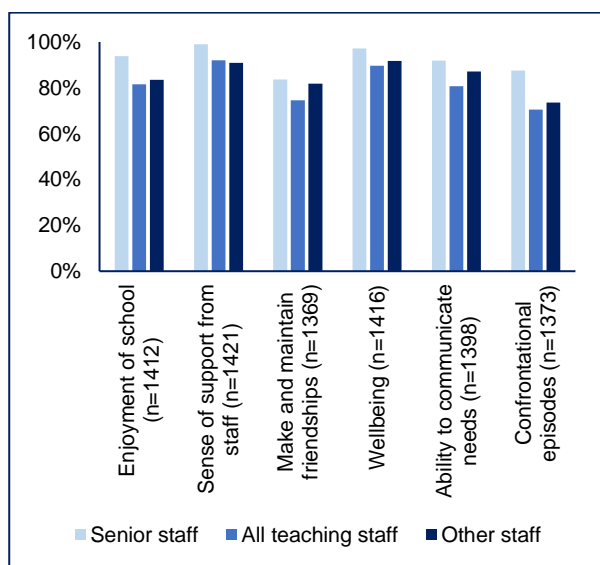


Respondents felt that the most positive impact had been on young people’s sense of support from staff (92.7%) and wellbeing (90.9%), followed by their enjoyment of school (84.0%) and ability to communicate their needs (82.8%). The lowest perceptions of positive impact were on making and maintaining friendships (76.5%) and confrontational episodes (73.2%).

The perceptions of impact were generally very similar between primary schools and special schools and PRUs. However, perceptions were lower among staff in secondary schools in all six instances. This pattern was particularly marked with respect to making and maintaining friendships, confrontational episodes and ability to communicate needs. Nevertheless, even in secondary schools the majority of staff felt that the training had resulted in positive impacts on young people.

The perceptions of senior leaders were notably more positive across all six domains, which may reflect their greater span of interest in the engagement of young people in the schools. Interestingly, in all but one instance, the ‘other’ group of non-teaching staff had the second highest perception of positive impact.

Figure 6: Perceptions of positive impact on young people, by job role



4.10 Perceived impact on the school

The Sweep 2 questionnaire concluded with a bank of seven questions about the impact of the training on key elements of the school in the round. Staff were asked to respond to statements about things that may have happened in the school with ‘yes, definitely’, ‘maybe’ or ‘no, definitely not’.

Between 1,007 and 1,389 individuals responded to these questions, which was notably lower than for the previous set. Some may have felt that they were unable to assess the impact (e.g. on the number of exclusions) and there is likely to have also been a degree of questionnaire fatigue.

As with the previous set of questions, there was generally a high degree of positivity about the impact of the training, with only a few staff saying that there had definitely been no impact on the school. This negative response was most often seen with respect to ‘fewer fixed term exclusions’ (8.4%) and ‘a reduction in the use of sanctions’ (6.9%) – in both instances, this response was markedly more common among middle managers and staff working in secondary schools.

Given the small proportion of respondents saying that there had been no impact, the following analyses focus on those perceiving that there had definitely been an impact; these are summarised in Figure 7.

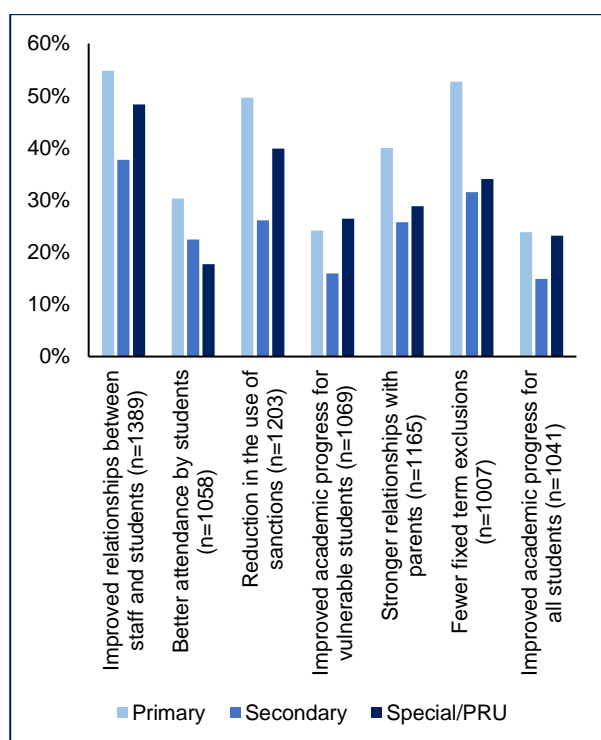
Overall, the highest proportion of respondents felt that there had been a definite positive impact on relationships between staff and young people (50.0%), fixed-term exclusions (45.5%), other sanctions (42.8%) and relationships with parents (35.5%). There was less confidence about positive impact on attendance (26.9%), progress for vulnerable pupils (22.5%) and progress for all pupils (21.6%).

There was considerable variation between school types. In all but one instance, the proportion of staff believing that there was a

positive impact was higher in primary schools than in the other two groups; the exception was progress for vulnerable pupils, where staff in special schools and PRUs were slightly more likely to believe that there had been positive impact (26.4%, compared with 24.2%).

Conversely, staff in secondary schools were generally less definite that there had been a positive impact from the training, although, in all instances, this proportion was larger than those believing that there had been no impact. The exception related to attendance, where the proportion was lowest in special schools and PRUs – this likely reflects the differing practices and expectations around attendance in these schools (e.g. with young people being in residence or provided with daily transport).

Figure 7: Proportion of staff believing the training had a definite impact, by school type



With respect to staff roles, senior leaders tended to be more certain about the positive impact of the training, especially in those domains where they would have more robust

and systematic information than other staff. For example, 53.7% believed that the training had led to a reduction in fixed-term exclusions and 59.3% believed the same for sanctions more widely. Conversely, in the domains that were more pupil-focused, it was teaching assistants who tended to have stronger beliefs about impact – e.g. attendance (34.6%), progress for vulnerable pupils (28.8%) and progress for all pupils (28.0%). This potentially reflects their closer working relationships with young people, where incremental improvements might be more readily observed – even if not reflected in formal attainment measures.

4.11 Summary

The analysis of the aggregated data in Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 provides a consistent picture of a majority of respondents feeling that the training had been successful in increasing their awareness of attachment and trauma issues, with many also reporting that it had increased their confidence of working with vulnerable pupils. They also felt more supported by the school, with the wider school environment becoming calmer and more supportive since the training.

Respondents could readily point to policies and practices that had changed in their school since the training. Particularly common were changes to behaviour policies and more attention to the learning needs of vulnerable pupils. Staff overwhelmingly believed that these changes had led to improvements in their school. These included young people’s wellbeing and relationships, as well as their enjoyment of school and their academic progress. The confrontation episodes and use of sanctions and exclusions were felt to have fallen; while there were dissenting voices in this regard, they were rare.

In general, the positive impacts attributed to the training, whether for young people, individual staff members or the school as a whole, tended to be less strongly felt in

secondary schools than in the other two school types. The strongest perceptions of positive change tended to come from senior leaders.

5. Findings: matched data

In this section, we turn to focus on the subset of the data where we have been able to link individuals between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 using the revised approach to data collection from September 2019 onwards. This enables us to explore whether their views have changed in the year since training.

Due to the timing with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic, we were able to collect substantially less data using this approach than we had initially hoped. After cleansing¹⁶, we had data from 374 individual staff members in 36 schools who had completed both Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 questionnaires.

This subsample broadly echoed the main dataset, as can be seen in Table 7. Staff from special schools and PRUs were poorly represented as most that had participated had been included in the original data collection system. Senior leaders and middle managers were somewhat more common in the matched subsample than in the full dataset; this may reflect a greater propensity to remain in the same school between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2.

Table 7: Matched sample overview

School type	
Primary school	77.5%
Secondary school	20.3%
Special school or PRU	2.1%
Job role	
Senior leadership team	17.6%
Middle manager	12.6%
Teacher (inc. trainee)	33.2%
Teaching assistant	27.8%
Other staff	8.8%

¹⁶ For this element of the analysis, we removed duplicate responses linked to the same individual registration.

¹⁷ This is the corollary to the more widely-known t-test, but for use where the data are ordinal and not necessarily normally

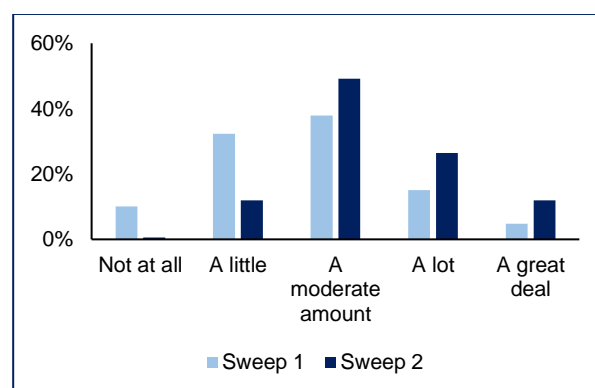
As this subsample is more robustly configured than the main dataset reported in the previous section, we have used significance testing to explore the changes between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2. We focused specifically on the measures of (a) awareness about attachment and trauma, (b) confidence in working with vulnerable pupils, (c) feelings of being supported when working with vulnerable pupils, (d) perceived supportiveness of colleagues, and (e) calmness of the school environment. These all employ a five-point ordinal scale and the changes were therefore analysed through a repeated measures Wilcoxon signed-rank test¹⁷ for a matched sample; a 5% significance level was used. Due to the relatively small subsample, no subgroup analyses have been undertaken.

5.1 Awareness of attachment and trauma

There had been a statistically significant increase in awareness of attachment and trauma issues between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 (n=345, Z=-10.935, p<.001).

The proportion saying that they had little or no awareness fell from 42.3% to 12.5%, while the proportion saying that they knew ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ rose from 19.7% to 38.3%; this change is illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Change in awareness of attachment and trauma issues



distributed – our data tended to be strongly skewed towards positive responses in this instance.

5.2 Confidence working with vulnerable pupils

The proportion of respondents agreeing with the statement that they felt confident in working with vulnerable pupils rose from 83.2% to 87.2%, with all of the change occurring among those who answered ‘strongly agree’. This was a statistically significant rise (n=350, Z=-2.179, p=.029). The change was less marked than for awareness, perhaps for the reasons discussed in Section 4.3.

5.3 Feeling of being supported when working with vulnerable pupils

Once again, there was a statistically significant rise in feelings of being supported to work with vulnerable pupils (n=348, Z=-3.112, p=.002). The proportion reporting that they were ‘very well’ or ‘extremely well’ supported rose from 68.6% to 78.3%.

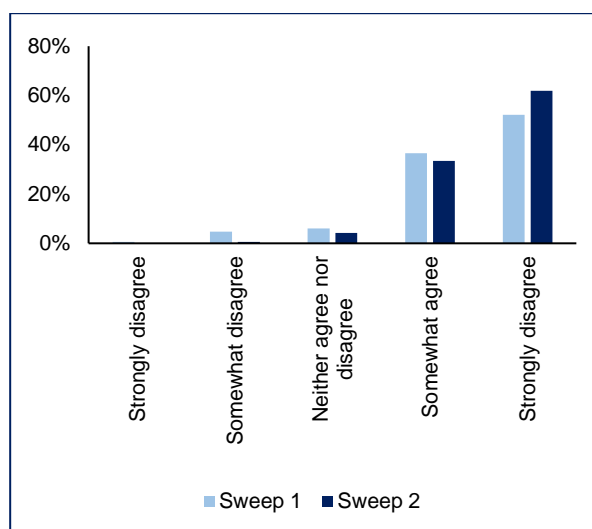
5.4 Feeling that colleagues were supportive

The proportion of respondents answering ‘strongly agree’ to a statement that they felt that their colleagues were supportive rose from 51.4% to 58.9%; overall the proportion agreeing rose from 93.4% to 95.6%. This change was statistically significant (n=350, Z=-2.163, p=.039).

5.5 Feeling that the school was calm

There had been a statistically significant increase in respondents feeling that their school environment was calm between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 (n=349, Z=-4.709, p<.001). The proportion who answered ‘strongly agree’ or ‘somewhat agree’ rose from 88.7% to 95.2%, with ‘strongly agree’ alone rising from 52.2% to 61.8%. This is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Change in feeling that the school environment is calm



5.6 Summary

Across all five measures that were repeated between Sweep 1 and Sweep 2, there had been a statistically significant change. This was most notable with respect to awareness, reflecting the general effectiveness of the training in its primary aim.

The changes across the other four measures were less marked; largely because of the strong positive skew in the data across both Sweep 1 and Sweep 2. For example, prior to the training, over three-quarters of respondents already felt (a) confident about working with vulnerable pupils, (b) that their colleagues were supportive and, (c) that the school environment was calm; this leaves relatively little room for improvement.

6. Conclusion

Analysis of the staff survey data presents a coherent picture of how training in attachment and trauma awareness seeded changes in the school that were felt directly by individual staff and were – they reported – then reflected in more positive experiences for pupils. While there were some dissenting

voices, they were very much in a minority within the data collected.

Overall, staff reported being more confident and working in an environment that was calmer and more supportive. This was associated with a belief that relationships with pupils and parents had improved, as had pupils' engagement, wellbeing and learning. Notably, it was felt that the use of exclusions and sanctions had fallen since the training, with many staff also believing that attainment had improved in their school, both for vulnerable pupils *and* their peers.

In general, the reported improvements following the training were most keenly felt by senior leaders, perhaps reflecting their greater experience and scope to view the school in its entirety. The improvements tended to be greater in primary and special schools (and PRUs), but slightly more modest – but still present – in secondary schools.

Difficulties with data collection have been noted, especially with respect to the impact of Covid-19 and its unavoidable effect on the participation of schools and response rates. This inevitably limits the claims to knowledge that can be made from these analyses. For example, it could be suggested that schools and individuals with more positive attitudes towards attachment and trauma awareness would be more likely to participate in the survey, creating a self-selection bias in the dataset. This is possibly true, but impossible to test. Nevertheless, 30 out of 80 schools in our dataset had response rates of over 50% (and, in some cases, 100%), where confidence can be higher.

Conversely, it is important to also remember the everyday challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. Around the time that the data were being collected, schools had gone through two lengthy periods of closure and other substantial disruptions. This very likely had a *negative* impact on individuals' perceptions of confidence, support and calmness.

We know from text comments in this survey and the evidence provided by headteachers (see Working Papers 5 and 6) that Covid-19 had hampered efforts to make changes, potentially limiting the impact of the training in the timeframe of this study; the school's wider attachment and trauma awareness 'journey' was delayed or halted. Planned changes to policy and practice took longer to implement and were potentially less effective as there were conflicting priorities – e.g. supporting home schooling or covering staff sickness. Without these disruptions, schools may have been able to affect change more readily, which would have seen even stronger perceptions of improvements among staff.