

Deanery Digests are short, plain language summaries of the Department of Education's research outputs. This Deanery Digest is based on a series of research reports published as part of the Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme: [Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme – Department of Education \(ox.ac.uk\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/alex-timpson-attachment-and-trauma-awareness-in-schools-programme)

The Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme

What is this research about and why is it important?

Existing research shows that attachment and trauma issues can greatly affect how children learn and interact with others, which in turn, can lead to poorer educational outcomes. For example, Looked After Children who are likely to have experienced trauma and/or neglect are more prone to have poorer educational outcomes than their peers. To support pupils, a growing number of schools are providing training in attachment awareness and trauma informed practice either for all their staff, selected individuals, or specific staff groups (e.g., the senior leadership team or SENCOs).

The Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme, known as the *Timpson Programme* for short, focused on exploring the impact of 'whole-school' attachment and trauma awareness training. The focus on whole-school training assumes that delivering training to *every* staff member will support long-term change with attachment awareness and trauma informed practice becoming embedded in a school's ethos. The Timpson Programme was intended to explore how whole-school training changed practice in schools and its impact on children and staff.

What did we do?

Between 2017 and 2022, 305 schools from 26 local authorities across England received 'whole school' attachment and trauma awareness training, including primary, secondary and special schools. The content and format of the training were not delivered, prescribed or validated by the research team, but were chosen by local authorities or schools to meet local need. This meant there was no single training package delivered to all Timpson Programme schools. Training was delivered by external training providers or through the local authority's educational psychology service.

We gathered data before schools received their training and about one year later to see what, if anything, staff and children thought had changed. We collected over 7000 survey responses from school staff (e.g., from teachers and teaching assistants, administrative staff, kitchen staff and caretakers) and collected responses from 112 headteachers to a separate headteacher survey. We completed in-depth interviews with 214 school staff and 33 focus groups with primary and secondary children across 39 'case study' schools.

We had planned to analyse national data submitted by schools to the Department for Education to look for any changes in attendance, attainment and exclusions across Timpson Programme schools. Unfortunately, because of lockdown procedures during the Covid-19 pandemic when most children were learning remotely for a time, the national schools' data for this period was not reliable enough to analyse. This means that the findings described below are about the impact of whole-school attachment and trauma awareness training as perceived by school staff and children.

What did we find?

- Overall, we found that school staff valued the training and thought that it had increased their awareness of attachment and trauma-informed practice.
- Staff reported that training had a positive impact on both children's and staff wellbeing.
- Children were able to identify who they could talk to in school if they were upset or something was wrong, and they also had a clear expectation of the response they would receive from staff. Children described less shouting and fighting, which may indicate a calmer and happier school environment.
- Staff reported changes to everyday practice (e.g., greeting pupils at the door each day, using strategies to help children better regulate their emotions); changes to behaviour and classroom management (e.g., using restorative approaches, seeing behaviour as communication); and changes to the physical environment (e.g., creating spaces where children could take some time away from the classroom, wall displays about emotions). Staff also reported changes in the language they used both with, and when talking about children.
- Ninety-seven percent of respondents to our headteacher survey reported that the training had a positive impact on vulnerable children's engagement and 92% perceived that training had a positive impact on learning. These findings are supported by our interviews with staff in case study schools, where staff described attachment and trauma awareness training helping to address children's needs and creating the right environment for learning.
- Seventy-eight percent of headteachers surveyed thought that training had a positive impact on vulnerable children's attainment and 81% of headteachers surveyed thought there had been a decline in use of sanctions (including exclusions) with vulnerable children since receiving the training.
- Staff interviewed in case study schools described challenges for schools introducing attachment and trauma informed practice. They talked about the logistical challenge of training all members of staff; the challenge of engaging staff members who were resistant or hesitant about trying a new approach; and the challenge of introducing attachment and trauma-informed practice alongside other competing priorities and demands. However, overall staff still thought the approach was worth doing.

What does it all mean anyway?

From our analysis, we are able to conclude that:

- Introducing whole-school attachment and trauma awareness training is not a quick fix, but is the first step in a long-term process to change a school's ethos.
- All schools experienced some challenges but overall, staff considered the approach worth pursuing.
- As well as being seen to have a positive impact on vulnerable children, the approach is perceived to have a positive impact on the whole school population, including members of staff.

Overall, the Timpson Programme highlights three elements underpinning the adoption of a sustainable, whole-school approach to attachment and trauma aware working:

- The project suggests that whole-school training increases or reinforces staff members understanding of attachment and trauma aware working, helping to promote consistency and build attachment and trauma awareness into a school's ethos.
- Effective leadership provides a sense of direction and the strategic decision-making power to facilitate change.
- Doing follow-up activities (e.g., additional training or discussion in staff meetings) helps to reinforce and expand practice amongst existing and new staff.

In future, it would be beneficial to explore a single model of attachment and trauma awareness training incorporating components that school staff perceive as being important. This could include analysis of national schools' data to explore what impact the training has on attendance, attainment and exclusions, something that was not possible in this study due to restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Material, data, open access article: A series of working papers presenting project findings, together with webinars produced throughout the project are available at <https://www.aati-reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/>

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