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The Leicestershire Virtual School's Attachment Aware Schools Programme: Evaluation Report

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We also thank the Head and Deputy of Leicestershire Virtual School who provided continuous and careful support to both the schools and to us. We appreciate that asking for an evaluation of one's work requires openness, trust and confidence, and have sought to respond with honesty, respect and rigour.

This evaluation was supported by and produced for Leicestershire Virtual School, but the views expressed are those of the Rees Centre and not necessarily those of this local authority or the schools or individuals involved.

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Contents

Executive Summary

Background

The educational potential of many looked after children is unfulfilled. One factor contributing to this seems to be that schools do not fully address their wider personal anxieties and insecurities. Indeed, they are seen to have high rates of school exclusion, poor educational outcomes and high rates of mental health issues. In parallel, teachers regularly report that they feel insufficiently prepared to support these pupils effectively. Some of their difficulties have been identified as being linked to issues of attachment, trauma and emotional wellbeing, and much recent psychological research has crystallised around these issues. Leicestershire Virtual School has implemented a programme to tackle this, and asked the Rees Centre[1] at the Department of Education, University of Oxford[2] to evaluate it.

Evaluation Aims

This evaluation aims to: provide an independent assessment of the outcomes of the Programme in developing knowledge and understanding of the effects of trauma and neglect on attachment and learning and attitudes towards practices for vulnerable pupils in schools; provide quality assurance of the Programme through evaluative feedback as the Programme was implemented; inform the future development and improvement of the Programme; make recommendations regarding future sustainability, capacity-building and roll out.

Methodology

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.

Key Findings

Overall, there is rich evidence from schools to show that the Attachment Aware Schools Programme implemented by Leicestershire Virtual School in 2016-17 had an impact on whole staff understanding of attachment theory and emotion coaching. In particular:

1. Participants commented positively on the impact of the Programme on their confidence.
2. The quality of the training was reported to be a major factor in its success.
3. Participants noted their better understanding of both attachment theory and emotion coaching.
4. Participants described changes in their own and their colleagues' practice.
5. 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.
6. Senior leader commitment, support and resource allocation were crucial to effective engagement in the Programme and to it having an impact on the school.

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[1] http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/
[2] http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/

Recommendations for future programmes, policy and practice

1. 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 that Leicestershire Virtual School provides.

2. 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.

3. Further, 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.

4. 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.

5. Thought should be given to ensuring greater accountability in involvement in the programme, including reporting back on the effects of the programme, or obligatory involvement in any external evaluations.

6. More broadly, 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.

7. 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.

Main Report

Background

The educational potential of many looked after children and young people is often unfulfilled. One contributing factor seems to be that schools do not fully address these pupils' wider personal anxieties and insecurities. Indeed, they are seen to have high rates of school exclusion, poor educational outcomes, and high rates of mental health issues. In parallel, teachers regularly report that they feel insufficiently prepared to support these pupils effectively (see Darmody and colleagues 2013[3]; Sebba and colleagues 2015[4]).

Some of these pupils' difficulties have been identified as being linked to issues of attachment, trauma and emotional wellbeing, and much recent psychological research (e.g. Ungar 2011[5]) has crystallised around these issues. Out of this, there has developed a strong emphasis on emotion coaching (see the work of Gottman and colleagues[6], and Rose and colleagues[7]); it is based on recognising that behaviour is driven by feelings, rather than being rationally calculated. Teaching about emotion coaching is designed to improve the appropriateness of adult's responses to the behaviour of pupils who are affected by trauma and/or abuse. Emotion coaching aims to help school staff to distinguish between behaviour and the feelings that underlie that behaviour, using empathy to validate and communicate these feelings. They should then be able to set limits to the behaviour while continuing to acknowledge the pupil's feelings and help the young person to address their own problems.

A handful of research-engaged local authorities, including Leicestershire, have spearheaded the implementation of specific targeted professional development for teachers. The Attachment Aware Schools Programme has been developed through a partnership between Leicestershire Virtual School and Kate Cairns Associates Ltd ('KCA'[8]). 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. Attachment issues are not restricted to looked after children – other pupils often have extremely unsettling relationships with their families. 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 an understanding of attachment theory and the evidence base to support it, the impact of trauma on the developing brain, and subsequent behaviours.

[3] Darmody, M., McMahon, L., Banks, J., & Gilligan, R. (2013) *Education of children in care in Ireland: An exploratory study.* Dublin: Office of the Ombudsman for Children

[4] Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., Thomas, S., Sinclair, I. and O'Higgins, A. (2015) *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England*. Oxford, Bristol and London: The Rees Centre, The University of Bristol and The Nuffield Foundation

5 Ungar, M. (2011). The social ecology of resilience: Addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 8(1)*, 1–17.

[6] Gottman, J., Katz, L. & Hooven, C. (1997) *Meta- Emotion –how families communicate emotionally*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

[7]Rose, J., Gilbert, L., & McGuire-Snieckus, R. (2015). Emotion Coaching-a strategy for promoting behavioural self-regulation in children/young people in schools: A pilot study. *The European Journal of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, *13*, 1766-1790.

[8] https://kca.training/?carousel=main

The Leicestershire Attachment Aware Schools Programme 2016-17

Leicestershire Virtual School and KCA had run an Attachment Aware Schools Programme in 2013-14 and 2014-15. In August 2016, the third cohort of participants began the Leicestershire Attachment Awareness Programme through part-time continuing professional development that included school-based CPD sessions. Schools were offered a choice or combination of Attachment Awareness and Emotion coaching. The Virtual School also provided other centralised training, e.g. for designated teachers or for key adults.

It is worth noting that this is different from the approach for whole-school training taken in other local authorities, e.g. Bath and North-East Somerset, which opted for centralised one day training events for two key staff from each school. These staff were then expected to coordinate and run activities and training on attachment, trauma and nurturing strategies regularly for all staff in their schools and the partner agencies with whom they work. Parents and carers were also required to be given support to learn about these strategies as well.

There are potential strengths and weaknesses to either approach. The school-based approach can be more specifically tailored and reach more teachers directly, but is more labour intensive and potentially more variable in the presentations. (In Leicestershire, it was also supplemented by bespoke centralised training). The centralised approach is potentially more coherent and more explicitly presents the issue of attachment as well as enabling schools from across the local authority to meet and learn from each other, but is less flexible and more labour intensive for the delegates, and it is unclear what message staff in school receive.

Twenty-three sessions were held across twenty-four schools, of which twelve were on Attachment and Trauma, nine were on Emotion coaching, and three were both. The details of the various CPD sessions held across all the schools are set out in appendix 1. Twenty-four schools were involved, including one school offering alternative provision, three secondary schools, fifteen primary schools, one infant school and two junior schools. Some schools paired up for the sessions: one pair of primary schools held a joint session on Attachment and trauma; another pair of primary schools held two joint sessions, on Attachment and Trauma and then on Emotion coaching; a linked Infant school and Junior school held separate sessions on Attachment and Trauma, and then subsequently followed up with a joint session on emotion coaching. In total, 855 staff appear to have been involved. Over and above the Programmes, participants were also given access to two KCA half-day workshops (addressing communicating with children and sexualised behaviour), which thirteen schools completed.

e-learning

Four core units of e-learning were provided by KCA, covering attachment and brain development, whole school behavioural strategies, and emotion coaching. Each unit required a notional 10-15 hours of work. These could be accessed at any time and over whatever time period the participant wished to use them.

Of the twenty-four schools involved in the Programme, on-line learning was completed by four schools, with between three and seven members of staff in each completing these modules.

Aims and Objectives of the Evaluation

This evaluation overall aims to:
- provide an independent assessment of the outcomes of the Programme in developing attachment aware attitudes and practice in schools;
- provide quality assurance through evaluative feedback as the Programme was implemented;
- inform the future development and improvement of the Programme;
- make recommendations regarding future sustainability, capacity-building and roll out.

Specifically, the evaluation addresses the following four questions:
1. How have the participants' professional repertoire and confidence changed in addressing the needs of children and young people?
2. How have schools' organisational structures and responses changed?
3. What changes have there been in pupils' outcomes, including educational progress, attendance, exclusions and well-being?
4. What improvements would participants suggest for the programme and for Leicestershire's approach to its looked-after children?

Methodology

This evaluation adopted a mixed-methods pre-post intervention design, drawing on school data, surveys and interviews; the overall elements are summarised in Appendix 2. The surveys and interviews were conducted twice: once before the training, and once at the end of the summer term. However, the school-based approach to the training meant this was difficult because the schools were doing the training at different times. Overall, extensive data were collected. Of the twenty-five schools that had one of both of the programmes, staff from ten contributed to the initial survey, and staff from seven to the follow-up survey. This represents a full return from 28% of the schools.

The evaluation complied with the University of Oxford's research ethics procedures[9], and the British Educational Research Association's current guidelines[10]. Consent processes were completed prior to data collection, and for interviews all adults gave written consent. For pupils, the school selected appropriate individuals, and then their carers or parents were offered opt-out provision; this ensured that the voices of all types of pupils were heard, not just those with more organised home lives. In this report, schools are anonymised, and neither the school's name nor status is identified, to avoid recognition; the only exception is that the type of school or age of pupils within which teachers worked

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[9] https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics
[10] https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf

is given, but this applies neither to the head teachers nor designated teachers, as the sample of interviewees was small.

Survey participants

The 102 participants in the initial survey were from a selection of primary phase schools (including both infant and junior schools), secondary schools and the special school. They had a range of years' experience, from NQTs to over thirty years. 39 were in the first five years of teaching, with 20 having 6-10 years' experience, and another 20, 11-15 years. The primary staff were from a range of Key Stages, including Early Years. The secondary teaching staff had a range of specialisms, such as technology, PE, Modern Languages and Mathematics. The designated teachers were also included within this survey.

Of 39 participants on the post-programme survey, 3 had not completed the initial survey, and 8 were unsure if they had –possibly due to confusion between the programme feedback survey and the evaluation survey. They were also from a range of types of school, though the majority were from the primary sector, with 24 in primary schools and a further 7 in infant schools; only 7 were in secondary school, and 6 of these were from one school. Overall, they had a range of years' experience, with the median being 3-5 years, 3-5 and 5-10 years being the most common.

Limitations

There are inevitably some limitations. It was not always possible to carry out the survey or the interviews prior to the training, and it also meant that some had already received input on basic awareness by the time of the first survey and the time between the initial survey or interviews and the post-programme survey or year-end interviews varied. Problems with identifying, contacting and getting consent from schools meant that the initial survey and initial interviews were sometimes several weeks after the programme delivery; about 55% of the survey respondents had already had the training, as had three of the case study schools before first interviews.

A second limitation was the delay in accessing data on attendance, attainment and exclusions, which was delayed beyond the completion of planned evaluations. In addition, there was the issue of whether it is appropriate to consider data from all pupils in the school given it is a whole school intervention, or only those targeted specifically as having 'attachment issues'. Furthermore, the changes made in the national assessment and data reporting made it almost impossible to look at attainment and attendance trends.

A third limitation was that the national methods of reporting pupils' attainment and attendance, for both primary and secondary schools, were completely altered in 2015. This makes any longitudinal analysis very difficult, especially as the figures for attendance for 2016-2017 are not yet public.

Nevertheless, we consider that the triangulation of evidence from the survey, the interviews with different stakeholders and documentary evidence provides some confidence that the changes reported

here are linked to the Attachment Aware Programme, and we have been able to explore the professional and organisational changes that have taken place across Leicestershire over the year.

Pre-programme findings

Expectations of the Programme

In the survey, some participants' stated reasons for wanting to do the programme focused on the development of professional expertise, described either as requiring better knowledge or understanding of the behaviours, or as techniques or strategies, or both:

> *The first part is actually understanding what the terms mean. That's quite key, and then the next part is about strategies for teachers, working with parents, working with students, to ensure that there are effective strategies in place to make sure that we can work with children with attachment issues. (Head teacher, interview)*

Some of these were linked to the potential benefits to pupils, which were usually described either in pastoral terms, such as emotional development and well-being, or else in more academic terms, such as accessing education. However, these two groups were not exclusive.

> *To be able to personally develop as a teacher and assist pupils to reach their full potential (Primary teacher, survey)*

Other participants, mostly head teachers and the designated teachers, highlighted the value of whole school coherence on these issues:

> *Better awareness of attachment theory across our school so that all staff have a better working understanding of how they can support these pupils to reach their full potential. (Designated teacher, survey)*

However, some participants were also aware of the limitations of attachment theory, and felt that this should also be part of the programme:

> *So, it's also helping the staff to even understand as the theories develop, understanding that firstly they are theoretical constructs to help us explain what we see, and that that theory might not be the final piece, that it's an ongoing process to helping staff understand that. (Designated teacher, interview)*

This point of view has implications for further training.

Initial understanding of attachment theory and practice

Almost all participants were aware of some looked after children in their school currently or in the past. Only seven participants had no awareness, whether because their schools had not had any looked after children or because they were simply uncertain; three of the schools had some adopted children but no other looked after children on roll. About half of the participants (51) reported that they had some prior knowledge of attachment, listing psychology degrees or psychology components of degrees or higher degrees or previous training. For some, this could be summed up as 'basic awareness from clips/snippets'. Only 29 had heard of emotion coaching and of these only 13 had had any training - either in previous schools, or SEN courses.

Staff were generally aware of support for looked after children. Staff with designated responsibility for children in care and those with special educational needs, and staff with pastoral roles were all mentioned, though this individual may or may have been part of the senior leadership team. A wide range of support for children in care in schools was identified by the course participants, and only three said they were unsure. Most specifically identified that their schools addressed the needs of children in care through Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings or reviews, extra support, technology, activities provided through Pupil Premium Plus or having a designated teacher. Liaison with social workers was mentioned in the pre-Programme survey or interviews. The list of wider support strategies included: one-to-one support, nurture groups, a psychotherapist, Lego therapy, music therapy, Emotional Literacy Support Assistants.

The majority of the participants (73%) felt confident in dealing with looked after children, highlighting their own experience and school support as the main factors in this. 21% were unsure and only 6% did not feel confident. These were attributed to: lack of experience; lack of support in the past; or the complexity of the issues, especially in dealing with them in a classroom setting with multiple demands:

> I have some knowledge of attachment issues and working with children and young people in care but realise this is a massive area and each case is individual - this combined with the special educational needs and disabilities our pupils present often means I am "trialling strategies" I know have worked in the past with other students. I sometimes feel frustrated because it is hard to offer a secure base and stability when meeting the needs of other children and the curriculum. (Designated teacher, interview)

Thus, whilst attachment awareness might help analysing one pupil's behaviour, the practical implementation of action based on this had to take into account the other demands on the teacher.

Impact of the training: attachment and emotion coaching

Overall

The impact of the programme on pupils, staff and schools was evidenced through the post-programme survey of participants, interviews in four schools and analysis of other sources of pupil data. The survey was completed by 41 staff, from seven schools, of all types. Three of these had not completed the pre-programme survey. The timing of this survey, towards the end of term may have contributed to the lower response rate than the pre-programme survey (102), however the number of schools represented (7 out of the initial 10) was not unreasonable. These data are also supplemented by the immediate feedback on the day of the programme, which was overwhelmingly positive. An important starting point for what follows is the universal praise for the quality of the sessions, in the surveys, interviews and session feedback. One SENCO commented:

> *The training was extremely well delivered and covered all of the basic information that staff should consider in order to support looked after children effectively. Trainers did their very best to ensure that their delivery reflected our pupils and staff. (Designated teacher, survey)*

One head teacher explained that he had initiated attachment training a couple of years before, which had not been delivered well, but he had been delighted with this training:

> *It was probably the single, most effective training session we have run, and loads of staff afterwards came to me and said how they'd had that kind of light-bulb moment, and all of a sudden, as they were listening to the training, and discussing things amongst themselves, there were certain students that they could see why they behaved a certain way. (Headteacher, interview)*

Thus, he highlighted how teachers were immediately able to apply the theories as an analytical tool to interpret their pupils' behaviour.

One interesting incidental comment was that staff were often particularly impressed if a teacher who was also a foster carer gave insights from their personal experiences:

> *And so just having a proper ambassador within school who can say things from a personal perspective…but also isn't afraid to stand up in a full staff meeting or in front of 20 or 30 people or 60 people, and say "Just remember that this might be the situation". (Headteacher, interview)*

This kind of addition to and validation of the programme is not easy to plan for, but was important in two of the schools that were visited.

Question 1: How have the participants' professional repertoire and confidence changed in addressing the needs of children and young people?

This question considers how individuals responded to the programme, on the one hand in terms of their professional repertoire of knowledge, understanding, strategies and practices, and on the other, their sense of confidence in deploying these.

Changes in professional repertoire

There was a range of positive responses concerning the nature of the learning from the programme. Many had some knowledge or awareness from previous CPD, whether in the current school or a previous school, and some from university, particularly in a psychology degree. However, the programme was still considered positive:

> I wasn't aware of the different types of attachment issues and it helped me to realise that children may have more barriers to learning. (Primary teacher, survey)

However, participants also felt that they learnt how to pinpoint particular pupils and deploy more appropriate strategies:

> I was able to identify children where emotional competency may be an issue and use different strategies to help them access and engage with their learning. (Primary teacher, survey)

Further, they could be quite specific about this process:

> I have realised that the start of each lesson is new and that the key language I use with these students is very important to provide reassurance and build resilience so they can succeed. Their emotional wellbeing is important and without these being supported, the student will find it very stressful in the classroom situation. (Primary teacher, survey)

This teacher linked attachment to lesson planning (i.e. starters and the use of language) and also to their pupils' sense of agency, and reflected on how these are inter-linked.

Changes in confidence

In terms of confidence, almost all survey respondents (92%) now felt confident in supporting LAC pupils, compared with 73% beforehand – essentially, a 20% increase, compared with 21% being unsure and 6% being unconfident. In the interviews, several staff commented on how the programme enabled them to review previous pupil behaviour that had troubled them. Moreover, staff - who had previously been confident anyway - commented on their improved confidence:

Having applied my training and knowledge gained from personal reading and research, I have been able to plan provision for children with significant attachment issues. This in turn has meant that my own knowledge and confidence has grown, particularly as I have seen improvements in these children. (Primary teacher, interview [emphasis added])

Here, the programme is seen as one ingredient in improved confidence.

Question 2: Changes in the school's organisational structures and responses

In the evaluation, some wider developments at a whole school level have emerged. First, in the survey, wider issues of pastoral support were identified as having improved:

Whole school development of mental health and wellbeing of all in school, staff and pupils (Infant teacher, survey)

This was often because it had been a whole-staff programme but if not then it had been cascaded outwards, e.g. sharing it with lunch supervisors. An important example was the use of attachment theory in wider school decision-making:

And certainly, when we've been changing and looking at class groups for this next academic year, we've been very careful about…where we put people. And we've looked at the progress we've made with some students with attachment disorders and being mindful where they're going to be and who they're going to be with and how that's going to impact on them (Secondary Teacher, interview)

Here the school was using insights from attachment training to inform its academic and pastoral group arrangements, rather than simply dealing with it at the classroom level.

One feature was the use of a specific 'safe' place in school that pupils knew that they could go to in order to calm down for example, which was also raised by teachers, mentioning, for example that pupils would be…

Given time and space in which to explain their feelings in a calm safe place (Secondary teacher, survey)

Another highlighted how existing space was deployed better:

The refurbishment of the withdrawal space in school (Designated teacher, survey)

In one primary school, this included having a range of books that tackled emotions expressly, e.g. Brian Moses' work, such as 'I feel Sad'[11].

Question 3: Improvements in pupil outcomes

On important indicator of the success of the programme would be a direct association between the programme and academic outcomes. This is very difficult to show because: it is difficult to exclude other contributing factors from any metrics; the numbers of pupils in any one school are statistically small; the national systems for assessment and reporting have been completely altered – both at primary and secondary - in the last two years, making longitudinal comparisons between 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 very difficult. Further, there is no attainment data for infant schools, e.g. Primary 18 and the Infant school of Primary 14.

Nevertheless, Table 3 sets out the overall picture of the levels of attainment in the participating schools.

Table 3: Attainment and progress for all pupils in the participating schools

Schools	2013-14 'SATS'[12] %	2014-15 'SATS' %	2015 – 16 RWM[13] %	2016 – 17 RWM %
Primary				
1	76	86	35	48.8
2	78	73	51	57.4
3	96	95	56	46.3
4	80	79	61	74.5
5	70	69	57	65.1
6	93	91	54	60
7	84	89	51	69.8
8	80	93	50	16.7
9	74	71	53	58.9
10	77	67	72	80.8
11	82	82	39	56.1
12	84	72	48	58.9
13	29	45	28.9	33.3
14	88	89	52	57.1
15	n/a	n/a	n/a	45.0
16	70	53	43	60.0
17	74	62	32	28.2
18	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

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[11] Moses, B. 1994. *I feel sad*. London: Wayland.
[12] Primary - % Level 4+ in Reading, Writing & Mathematics
[13] Reading – Test Result. Writing – Teacher Assessment. Mathematics – Test Result. All elements achieved at the expected standard.

Secondary	GCSEs[14]	GCSEs	Progress 8	Progress 8
1	n/a	52	Progress 8 =-0.08 Conf int ±0.19	Not released yet
2	46	61	Progress 8 =-0.63 Conf int ±0.19	Not released yet
3	54	61	Progress 8 =-0.31 Conf int ±0.18	Not released yet
4	58	65.4	Progress 8 =+0.41 Conf int ±0.15	Not released yet
Other				
1	n/a	n/a	Progress 8 =-1.45 Conf int ±1.04	Not released yet

Further, however, many of the staff reported in the survey and interviews that the attainment of students had improved, though their comments made clear that they were referring specifically to the more vulnerable pupils who they were targeting in their attachment work in school.

A second indicator of positive outcomes across the whole school would be in pupil attendance figures for the participating schools. These are given in Table 4 for years 2013-14, 2014-15 and for two terms of the year of the Programme 2015-16. However, these figures have also been recalibrated this year at a national level, and figures for 2016-2017 are unavailable.

Table 4: Persistent absence in the participating schools

Schools Primary	2013-14 % National 2.8	2014-15 % National 2.7	2015-16 % (Autumn Term and Spring Term only) National 8.8
1	6	6.5	15
2	3.6	3.9	10
3	5.8	3.4	11.6
4	1.4	1.9	7
5	3.8	1.9	4.3
6	4.3	4.5	4.1
7	1.6	2.5	5.5
8	2.4	2.5	5.4
9	10.6	10.5	13.3
10	0.6	2.4	5.4
11	2.8	2.8	4.1
12	3.2	5.1	11.6
13	7.2	6.8	12

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[14] Secondary - % 5 A*-C grades including English and Maths

14	3.9	4.3	10.10
15	4.3	1.4	9.4
16	4.3	9.3	11.7
17	3.7	3	8.5
18	0.5	2	5
Secondary	**National 5.8**	**National 5.6**	**National 12.4**
1	9.2	7	4.7
2	11.2	8.7	13.3
3	12	8.8	14.9
4	5.9	5.3	11.20
Other	**National 14.6**	**National 15.4**	**National 26.9**
1	7.2	12.8	22.7

It is difficult to quantify precisely the effects of the programme on attendance in these schools because the national methods of reporting attendance in schools have altered recently. However, Leicestershire's Virtual School's current figures show that LACs attendance rates of 92.73% for 2016-17[15], a fall of 0.04% on the same period in 2016, which was also a fall of 0.86% on the previous year. The main cause has been an increase in authorised absences in primary schools. Indeed, secondary authorised absences have fallen, as have unauthorised absences generally. The figures for persistent absence are mixed, with all persistent absences up marginally by 1.15% (i.e. those who miss over 90% of the sessions they could attend) though within this there has been a decline in those who are absent for over 19 days.

Interpreting the table in the light of these figures, it is possible to consider that the programme has the potential to make an impact in those schools with high levels of non-attendance. Among the schools, these are Primaries 1 and 12, and Secondaries 2 and 3.

On exclusions, The Virtual School's own data shows that there have yet again been no permanent exclusions across the county, and the number of fixed term exclusions has fallen from 13.85% to 13.66%, and this includes a fall at both primary and secondary stages. Figures for individual schools are not yet available.

In considering pupils' well-being, it is not easy to point to specific changes as a result of the programme; pupils might not notice the subtle changes in organisational culture. The interview data generally showed that the programme was part of a wider menu of supportive strategies in the schools.

Many pupils pointed to the support that they received in schools; it was not possible to attribute this to the programme directly, rather there was an ongoing culture of support, within which this was a further

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[15] The national rate for all pupils in mainstream schooling is 96%.

strand. The following exchange is with Joe, a primary school pupil whose mother was a drug addict, and who was being cared for by other relatives.

> *Int: Joe, anything in particular that stops you working?*
> *Joe: I always think of my Mum when she's not there…I start scribbling on my book...*
> *Int: Right. Is that when you go and see … who did you say you went to see? – Miss?*
> *Joe: Smith [the teaching assistant] …. She takes me out of class for a bit… She is a nice woman. I stay outside for a bit.*

Strikingly, the question was more broadly about barriers to learning, not about his relations with his birth mother, but this was what he identified as a major preoccupation. He could outline the school's standard process of support when his anxieties about attachment loomed up in lessons. Further, in this group interview, other pupils in the school could all describe such a process – as if it was almost self-evident.

Pupils also listed the range of types of support on offer:

> *Usually, people go to Pupil Support, if they've got a problem, if it's like at home or with their friends, but you could go to a form tutor as well. (Year 9 pupil, interview)*

> *They talk to you really and try and calm you down.*
> *Interviewer: Who is 'they'?*
> *The teaching assistants, and the form teachers, and the teachers (Year 7 pupil, interview)*

These two pupils point to a range of people and also places where they feel they will receive support. However, some pupils were also confident enough not to rely on these places continually: 'I don't come here all the time, but when I have it's because - I remember once I had this massive argument with my friends' (*secondary pupil, interview*).

Question 4: Future improvements to the programme and to Leicestershire's approach to its looked after children

As noted above, participants were almost all extremely pleased with the content and quality of the programme. However, comments and queries emerged in the interviews, and so this question can be answered at three levels: the programme; changes in schools; changes across the county.

Changes to the programme

Although participants were universally pleased with the quality of the training, it inevitably raised further questions in their minds. One concern was about the limits of attachment theory, including using other ways of addressing pupils' needs:

> *So, I'd like some more guidance on 'where's the line?' Do you do a certain model up to a certain point and then change tack? At what point does the reality of life and adulthood kick in? Does it kick in at all?... I think we are doing these kids a disservice if we love them to bits until they are eighteen because life isn't like that and the world isn't like that. (Secondary School Teacher, interview)*

Here, the wider justification of attachment theory as support and preparation for life-skills beyond school was put into question against the messy realities of life outside school.

A similar anxiety concerned the effect of differential treatment of pupils in the same class:

> *I do feel that it does become a bit more difficult, because it feels like we're running parallel rules. And I'll give you an example, for instance, one student that I know in my Maths class, I have been told has attachment disorder, and she's sworn at me, she's used bad language with me, "I don't want to get out of this class, you can't do anything"…But I can't record any more than the first instance of not following an instruction, and I do feel that then other students are looking on this and thinking 'well, she can get away with it' and they do try. And that's where I am struggling, because you're dealing with a situation. (Secondary teacher, interview)*

In this example, the teacher felt caught between the school's policy on behaviour and its approach to attachment and the need to treat pupils equitably.

Therefore, the programme could include a discussion – or even a chance for the participants to discuss - the implications of attachment theory within other school policies, such as behaviour management, and even within the school's wider aims and vision.

Changes in schools

An important issue was balancing the role of particular individuals with wider systems approaches in the institution. This overlaps with the preceding point about the place of attachment theory within the school, and rather than just addressing the issues in the programme, it begs the question as to how schools think through the implications of attachment theory for their policies and practices. First, there was the practical issue of applying the theory to particular pupils:

> *I have had basic training through guest speakers and teacher training, but would feel I would need support in identifying the needs of individual children. (Primary teacher, survey)*

This support would be difficult to provide by the Virtual School, and requires in-school analysis. Further, beyond simply identifying needs, teachers wanted ongoing guidance:

> *As a school, on issues like this, there isn't a support network…where maybe once a fortnight, may be once a month, we can get together as teachers who are dealing with [such] students on a regular basis. (Secondary teacher, survey)*

The second whole school issue was in establishing a responsive systemic approach to attachment and trauma, in which relationships with key individuals could develop, but which was simultaneously not over-reliant on these relationships. Organisationally, a designated teacher outlined the intention:

> *If we can give them some systems and be honest with kids and say, do you know what, I know you really struggle with trusting people. I know you've got a fundamental issue with that. And that's okay. I understand where that's coming from and that's okay. So how about, rather than me asking you to trust me, we trial a system and we see if that system can work for us. (Designated teacher, interview)*

However, as another teacher commented:

> *I have fallen foul of this, I will admit, where I kind of get the relationship right with the children, I think personally, but, in the past, I have not worked hard enough on the structural side of things. So, when I am not there, there is a little bit of a failure on my part to put structures in place that helps the child to cope. (Secondary teacher, interview)*

Schools therefore had to work through the organisational implications of attachment theory, in balancing the need for individual teachers to build good relationships with pupils, but without setting the pupils up for an experience of a relationship ending. Schools need to address the wider ramifications of attachment theory (especially around looked after children) in supporting staff, in informing decision-making, and in ensuring a coherent systemic approach.

Changes across the county

Participants had some comments on the Leicestershire Virtual School. The key tone here was of respect and gratitude for its work and support, as outlined above. There were however two more specific comments. The first concerned the accountability processes for the programme, and as a diligent but busy designated teacher pointed out:

> *I had to do that quite big action plan ready for this project, so I had to do a big attachment, a whole school action plan, which I've done. I'm just aware that because I'm not under any timeframe to monitor that and update it. Until I get an email saying 'tell me what you've done with your action plan', it doesn't figure very high on my list of priorities, because I've got an awful lot of people competing for my time and my focus (Designated teacher, interview)*

On this basis the county would be advised to follow through more with schools that have had the programme, and indeed to insist on deadlines for details of further actions taken.

The second concern was around the question of the potential short-sightedness of pursuing a diagnosis for particular special educational needs to which funding was attached, in particular autism:

Social workers will quite often want our children…to be assessed for autism, because they display quite controlling and repetitive behaviours and repetitive questioning and all that type of thing. They quite often convince carers, in particular, foster carers, that their child must be on the spectrum because of how they're presenting, and I'll often challenge that and say "I can clearly illustrate to you how there's a variety of aspects about the spectrum, they don't fit, and actually, all of this can be explained by attachment needs". And they'll be quite keen to get an autism diagnosis, because it comes with services, whereas attachment doesn't… I wouldn't necessarily stop them doing it, but I will put a health warning on it. (Designated teacher, interview)

This clearly raises important questions about inter-professional collaboration between different services at county level. Clearly there were material benefits to an autism diagnosis, but if actually this was inappropriate, then it might not be of benefit to the child or young person in the long run.

Conclusions

Overall, there is rich evidence from schools that the Attachment Aware Schools Programme in Leicestershire in 2016-17 had an impact on whole staff understanding of attachment theory and emotion coaching. In particular:

1. 92.3% of the participants who participated in the evaluation fully all commented positively on the impact that the Programme had had on their confidence. They reported having a greater knowledge and understanding of attachment and emotion coaching.

2. The quality of the training, including the balance of material and confidence of the presenters in addressing up to 60 staff, was a major factor in its success.

3. Participants noted their better understanding of why pupils might behave in particular ways and referred to the theory and evidence that they had discovered through the Programme, on both attachment theory and emotion coaching.

4. Participants described changes in their own and their colleagues' practice, in particular being better at identifying and recognising the behaviours and emotions before intervening to manage behaviours.

5. Impact on pupils' outcomes was hard to quantify, but qualitative findings suggest that 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 significant adults in school that the pupils trusted.

6. Senior leader commitment, support and resource allocation were crucial to effective engagement in the Programme and it having an impact on the school. This impact was best developed when it was coherently synchronised with other school practices and policies.

Recommendations for future programmes, policy and practice

1. 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 sits alongside the other forms of attachment training that Leicestershire Virtual School is currently providing, notably its designated teacher training and key adult training. The coherence and structure of this portfolio could be reviewed.

2. The commitment of senior leadership in schools, notably at the training, seemed to be significant for successful implementation, and this needs to be highlighted. The enthusiasm and commitment of head teachers was noticeable, and for example their presence throughout the training was a recurrent theme.

3. Further, 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. It would be valuable to address this as a question of change management, with institutional implications.

4. 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 any challenges.

5. Thought should be given to ensuring greater accountability in involvement in the programme, including reporting back on the effects of the programme, or obligatory involvement in any external evaluations.

6. More broadly, 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.

7. 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 various agencies across Leicestershire are urged to raise this point more widely.

Appendix 1: Attachment Aware Schools Programme: CPD Sessions August 2016-May 2017

School	Staff numbers	Date	Course
Primary			
1	15 (all)	8/2/17	Attachment & Trauma
2	25	14/11/16	Attachment & Trauma
3	21(teaching)	18/1/17	Attachment & Trauma
4 (with Primary 12)	52 (all)	28/9/16	Attachment & Trauma
	44 (selection)	5/4/17	Emotion coaching
5	24 (teaching)	15/9/16	Attachment & Trauma
6 (with Primary 8)	8 (teaching)	?/5/17	Attachment & Trauma
7	33 (all)	171/17	Attachment & Trauma
8 (with Primary 6)			
9	30 (all)	21/2/17	Attachment & Trauma; Emotion coaching
10	15 (teaching)	23/11/16	Emotion coaching
11	27 (all)	24/11/16	Attachment & Trauma; Emotion coaching
12 (with Primary 4)			
13	49 (all)	25/8/16	Attachment & Trauma
14a Junior	9 (teaching)	5/10/16	Attachment & Trauma
14b Infant	8 (teaching)	2/11/16	Attachment & Trauma

14c Infant + Junior	31 (all)	3/1/17	Emotion coaching
15	19	8/2/17	Emotion coaching
16	30 (all)	5/10/16	Emotion coaching
17	17 (teaching & support staff)	29/11/16	Attachment & Trauma
18 (Infant only)	39	3/1/17	Emotion coaching
	T = 496		
Secondary			
1	56 (all)	4/1/17	Attachment & Trauma
2	90 (all)	14/3/17	Emotion coaching
3	90	23/1/17	Emotion coaching
4	63 (all)	6/12/16	Emotion coaching
	T= 299		
Other			
1	60 (all)	7/12/16	Attachment & Trauma; Emotion coaching
	n = 855		

Appendix 2: Summary of data collected

Method	Aspect targeted	No. Targeted	No. Achieved
1. Initial survey of participants	Current knowledge, understanding & practice of AA and EC. Expectations of the Programme	Pre-training: estimate ~750 staff (from 25 schools)	Pre-training: 102 staff (from 10 schools)
2. Post-programme survey of participants	Progress achieved, on-going implementation, future plans	Post-training: 102 staff (from 10 schools)	Post-training: 41 staff from 7 schools) (41% of attendees)
3. Analysis of Programme documentation	Understanding the coverage of attachment provided	Presentations for: Primary Attachment and trauma Secondary Attachment and trauma Primary Attachment & Emotion coaching combined Secondary emotion coaching	Presentations for: Primary Attachment and trauma Secondary Attachment and trauma Primary Attachment & Emotion coaching combined Secondary emotion coaching
4. Analysis of data on attendance and attainment	Any possible changes in patterns that might be attributed to changing culture	24 schools	24 schools
5. Initial Interviews with teachers and other staff	In-depth exploration of current knowledge, understanding and practice of AA and EC. Expectations of the Programme if prior to CPD session	4 schools: 1 primary. 1 secondary. 1 FE college. 1 other provision. 12 participants	4 schools: 1 primary. 2 secondary. 1 other. 11 participants
6. Initial interviews with head teacher & LAC designated teacher	In-depth exploration of current knowledge, understanding and practice of AA & EC. Expectations of the Programme if prior to CPD session	4 schools: headteachers 4 designated staff	4 headteachers 4 designated staff

7. Initial interviews with students, non-LAC and LAC, in four schools	Reflections on current support for students and on school practices	16 students	24 students. Most schools provided a sample of 4 to 6 students. One school provided 9 students.
8. Year-end interviews with participants from four schools – July 2017	Progress achieved, on-going implementation, future plans	12 participants	11 participants
9. Year-end interviews with headteacher and LAC designated teacher	Progress achieved, on-going implementation, future plans	4 headteachers 4 SENCO's/ designated teachers	2 headteacher interviews 2 designated teacher interviews 1 joint head teacher and designated teacher interview
10. Year-end interviews with students, non-LAC and LAC, in four schools	Observations on any changes in ways that behaviour is addressed and support provided	16 students.	13 students.