



**REES CENTRE**  
Research in Fostering and Education  
University of Oxford Department of Education



## Evaluation of Stoke-on-Trent Attachment Aware Schools Programme October 2016-July 2017

### About the Attachment Aware Schools Programme

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

The Attachment Aware Schools Programme was developed through a partnership between Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Kate Cairns Associates Ltd (KCA). The Programme is based on the premise that all children in school need to be ready to learn and achieve and that children who have experienced trauma or neglect are often not able to do so. Schools therefore need to be 'attachment aware' to enable this to happen. The Programme covered ways of understanding behaviour and emotion coaching.

### Key Findings

Overall, there was some compelling evidence from schools that the Attachment Aware Schools Programme in Stoke-on-Trent had an impact on some staff's understanding of attachment, on the meaning behind behaviour and on the emotional well-being of pupils. Two thirds of the schools improved their attendance while the majority of primary schools improved their attainment though this cannot confidently be attributed to the Programme. In particular:

- Participants commented positively on the impact of the Programme on their own attitudes and practice.
- Participants noted that they had a better understanding of the reason for pupils' behaviour and commented positively on the content of the Programme which helped them to do so.
- School staff and pupils described the school environment as having become calmer and more nurturing.
- Staff and pupils suggested that the provision of 'safe' spaces where children can calm down and self-regulate had had a positive impact on pupils' well-being. Having a significant adult in school that pupils trusted was also highly praised.
- Participants described changes in their own and their colleagues' practice.
- Overall attendance improved in eight of the twelve schools across the four years. Five of the seven primary schools improved their attainment in the year since the Programme ended, all but one showing much greater increase than the 8% national increase. However, two of the three secondary schools saw a drop in attainment far greater than the small national decrease.
- Senior leader commitment, support and resource allocation was crucial to effective engagement in the Programme and to it having an impact on the school.

## Implications and Recommendations

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

- Future Programmes should include 'centrally-held sessions' and whole staff development. The former gives key school staff the opportunity to learn from one another; the latter is critical for ensuring consistent responses to pupils.
- In order to ensure long-term sustainability of improvements, participating schools should have a minimum of two staff, one of which should be a senior manager.
- The role of the local authority in data collection should be reviewed to consider which data is needed, and to establish a realistic timescale as well as the means of collecting the data.
- Attachment and the effects of trauma are addressed in very few teacher training Programmes currently despite knowledge and understanding of this now being in the teaching standards. Consequently, staff feel underprepared and lack confidence.
- A whole school approach is key, where all staff have received training; this includes governors and non-teaching staff. Similarly, adults outside school with whom vulnerable people are in contact need to adopt a consistent approach to that being implemented in the schools.

## About the Evaluation

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

## Evaluation Report

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

[Evaluation of Stoke on Trent Attachment Aware Schools Programme \(pdf\)](#)

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## Contact

Professor Judy Sebba, University of Oxford: [judy.sebba@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:judy.sebba@education.ox.ac.uk)

### **Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education**

University of Oxford, Department of Education

**Email:** [rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk)

**Web:** <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk>

Twitter @ReesCentre

[www.facebook.com/reescentreoxford](http://www.facebook.com/reescentreoxford)