

Evaluation of The Attachment Aware Schools Programme Final Report

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... they now know more about how to help and not just the basics so they know more of the like severe ways of ... I wouldn't say severe, I would say more comfortable ways of talking to you. (Pupil, post Programme interview)

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Acknowledgements

We want to thank the local authorities, schools and in particular the Virtual School Headteacher and Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist for Looked After Children who participated. Most of all, we are particularly grateful to the young people and school staff who were interviewed and who contributed their views on how we can improve the educational experiences of young people in care in the future.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council has funded this evaluation, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the local authority or schools.

June 2018

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Executive Summary

Background

Research suggests that teachers report being insufficiently prepared in attachment and social learning theories to work effectively with young people who experience trauma and may have unmet attachment needs. The failure to adequately meet these needs is likely to contribute to the high school exclusion rates, poor educational outcomes and subsequent high rates of mental health issues experienced by these young people. In Stoke-on-Trent, a programme has been developed through a partnership between the local authority and Kate Cairns Associates. Stoke-on-Trent invited Kate Cairns Associates to run an Attachment Awareness whole staff development day followed by a two hour session with staff on Emotion Coaching. The Emotion Coaching was followed by activities and training on attachment, trauma and nurturing strategies run by the 'Attachment Lead Teacher' at senior level in each school.

The Rees Centre was invited to evaluate the Programme. The Programme is based on the assumption that all children in school need to be ready to learn and achieve, and that children who have experienced trauma or neglect are often not so. Schools need to be 'attachment aware' to enable this to happen.

Aims

The evaluation addressed the following questions:

- Do participants develop knowledge and understanding of attachment aware theory and practice including the use of emotion coaching?
- Is this reflected in changes in a) their attitudes and practices; and b) the attitudes and practices of their colleagues?
- Has the participants' confidence in addressing the needs of children and young people increased?
- What improvement has there been, if any, in the children's a) educational progress; b) well-being; c) attendance and d) reduction in exclusions?
- Are schools demonstrating a better understanding of their relationship to other services?

Methodology

A mixed method approach was taken which included:

- A pre-Programme survey of staff, which 40 members of staff completed from 5 of the 13 schools targeted;
- A post-Programme survey of the staff, which 28 members of staff completed from 5 of the 13 schools targeted;
- Analysis of school attendance and attainment data;
- Pre- and post-Programme school visits to interview staff, head, governor and pupils – 4 schools at the start and 3 at the end (one declined to be further involved).

Key Findings

Overall, there is some compelling evidence from schools that the Attachment Aware Schools Programme in Stoke-on-Trent in 2016-17 had an impact on some staff's understanding of attachment, on the meaning behind behaviour and on emotional well-being. Specifically, evidence suggested the following impact:

- The participants who were fully involved in the evaluation all commented positively on the impact that the Programme had had on their own attitudes and practice. They reported feeling much more confident, having greater knowledge and understanding of attachment and emotion coaching.
- Participants noted that they had better understanding of why pupils might behave in particular ways and referred to the theory and evidence that they had discovered through the Programme.
- Participants described changes in their practice, in particular recognising emotions before managing behaviours, changing communication styles and language used with pupils and other staff, and for nearly all the participants, use of emotion coaching.
- School staff and pupils described the school environment as having become calmer and more nurturing.
- Overall attendance improved in eight of the twelve schools across the four years, with all but one of the primaries reducing their overall absence in the year since the Programme ended. While caution is needed in attributing this to the Programme, it does buck national trends; and staff comments linked these improvements to changes in staff attitudes, behaviour and practice.
- Five of the seven primary schools improved their attainment in the year since the Programme ended, all but one showing much greater increases than the 8% national increase. However, two of the three secondary schools saw a drop in attainment far greater than the small national decrease.
- Impact on pupils' well-being was evidenced by staff in the survey and by staff and pupils in the interviews. One factor contributing to this seemed to be providing 'safe' spaces in which children can calm down and self-regulate; another was having a significant adult in school that the pupil trusted.
- Senior leader commitment, support and resource allocation was crucial to effective engagement in the Programme and to it having an impact on the school.

Recommendations for future Programmes

- Future Programmes should include both 'centrally-held' sessions, which give staff responsible in school the opportunity to learn from one another across schools, as well as whole staff development, which is critical for ensuring consistent responses to pupils.
- Schools choosing to participate should be required to have a minimum of two staff, preferably more, actively engaged in a team leading the Programme in order to ensure long-term sustainability of the action plan. The requirement for one of these to be a senior manager should be continued.
- Future Programmes should continue to emphasise emotion coaching and ensure that support is provided to train key groups of staff (e.g. school meal supervisors, teaching assistants, etc.) in this.

- Future Programmes should also cover the importance of designated ‘safe spaces’ in schools and the role of significant adults identified by the pupils who might not be a teacher.
- The role of the local authority in data collection related to the Programme should be reviewed. The question of which data related to which pupils should be reviewed. A realistic timescale and means of collecting the data are also needed.
- Schools participating in the Programme should have the expectation of fully participating in the evaluation on the basis that an independent assessment of progress will help pupils, teachers and schools.

Recommendations for policy and practice

There is extensive interest in developing Attachment Awareness across schools in England to better address the needs of vulnerable pupils. There seems to be four areas that this evaluation suggests need to be targeted:

- Initial teacher training – many of those in this evaluation expressed a severe lack of confidence in addressing attachment needs in schools and felt unprepared for this. Attachment and the effects of trauma are addressed in very few teacher training Programmes currently despite knowledge and understanding of this now being a requirement in the teaching standards.
- Professional development of school staff – all staff in schools, not just teachers, are involved in responding to behaviour and this evaluation demonstrates clearly the importance and potential changes that can be brought about by the wider school staff receiving development on attachment and trauma.
- Governors – one teacher governor participated in the evaluation and due to their role was very aware of the issues. All governors should be involved and aware of the issues and be engaged in the developments in school. This needs to be addressed through governor training.
- Adults outside school with whom vulnerable pupils are in contact – parents, foster carers and social workers need to adopt a consistent approach to that being implemented in the schools.

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

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

Main Report

Background

The needs of children and young people in care and on the edge of care are a particular challenge to teachers and schools. Teachers report being insufficiently prepared in attachment and social learning theories to work effectively with young people who experience trauma and unmet attachment needs (e.g. Damody et al. 2013; Sebba et al. 2015¹). The failure to adequately meet these needs is likely to contribute further to the high school exclusion rates, poor educational outcomes and subsequent high rates of mental health issues experienced by these young people.

The Attachment Aware Schools Programme in Stoke-on-Trent has been developed to address this. It is aimed mainly at teachers, senior managers and governors in schools, developed through a partnership between the local authority and Kate Cairns Associates. The materials and training are informed by research and evidence from classroom practice. The Programme is based on the assumption that all children in school need to be ready to learn and achieve and that children who have experienced trauma or neglect are often not so. Schools need to be ‘attachment aware’ to enable this to happen.

The core training covers an understanding of attachment theory and the evidence base to support it, the impact of trauma on the developing brain, and subsequent behaviour. There is a strong emphasis on emotion coaching (developed by Gottman and colleagues, and further translated into the Attachment Aware Schools Programme by Dr Janet Rose²) based on recognising that behaviour is driven by feelings. Teaching course participants about emotion coaching aims to increase the amount of appropriate responses made by adults to the behaviour of pupils affected by trauma and/or abuse. Emotion coaching helps school staff to distinguish between behaviour and the feelings that underlie that behaviour, using empathy to validate and communicate about 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 problems.

The Stoke-on-Trent Attachment Aware Schools Programme 2016-17

The Stoke-on-Trent local authority together with Kate Cairns Associates ran an Attachment Aware Schools Programme in 2016-17. The head and governors were required to commit to the school becoming attachment aware through embedding the practices at every level. The schools were required to designate an ‘Attachment Lead Teacher’ at senior level to coordinate activities and training on attachment, trauma and nurturing strategies. These activities were expected to be run regularly for all staff and partner agencies. Parents and carers must be given support to learn about these strategies as well. The schools involved in the Programme received an Attachment Awareness whole school staff development day followed by a two hour session with staff on Emotion Coaching from Kate Cairns

¹Darmody, 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

Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., Thomas, S., Sinclair, I. and O’Higgins, A. (to be published Nov 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

²Gottman, J., Katz, L. & Hooven, C. (1997) *Meta- Emotion –how families communicate emotionally*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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.

Associates. The emotion coaching was followed by activities and training on attachment, trauma and nurturing strategies run by the 'Attachment Lead Teacher' at senior level in each school.

Participants

This evaluation took place during the academic year 2016-2017. Seven primary schools, three secondary schools and two special schools participated. Staff from five schools who participated completed the survey pre- and post-training. Four schools (one college, two secondary, one primary and one special school) participated in the case studies in the evaluation but one of these did not participate in the end of year evaluation. From these schools, 29 staff and 19 students were interviewed at the start. At the end of the year, there were 15 staff members and 13 students interviewed from three schools. The staff members included class teachers, teaching assistants, technicians and support staff. Their experience in education ranged from 2 to 35 years amongst those 40 staff who responded to the pre programme online survey.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation

The proposed evaluation aimed to:

- provide an independent evaluation of the outcomes of the Programme in developing attachment aware attitudes and practice in schools;
- inform the future development and improvement of the Programme;
- make recommendations regarding future sustainability, capacity-building and roll out.

Specifically, the evaluation addressed the following questions:

- Do participants develop knowledge and understanding of attachment aware theory and practice including the use of emotion coaching?
- Is this reflected in changes in a) their attitudes and practices; and b) the attitudes and practices of their colleagues?
- Has the participants' confidence in addressing the needs of children and young people increased?
- What improvement has there been, if any, in the children's a) educational progress; b) well-being; and c) attendance and d) reduction in exclusions?
- Are schools demonstrating a better understanding of their relationship to other services?

Methodology

The data collected for this evaluation are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of data collected

Method	Aspect targeted	No. targeted	No. achieved
1. Pre-Programme on-line survey of all participants	Current knowledge, understanding & practice of AA and EC. Expectations of the Programme	Pre-training: 13 schools	Pre-training: 40 staff from 5 schools
2. Post-Programme on-line survey of all participants	Progress achieved, on-going implementation, future plans	Post-training: 13 schools	Post-training: 28 staff from 5 schools
3. Analysis of schools' data on attendance and attainment	Any possible changes in patterns that might be attributed to changing culture	13 schools	12 schools (excluded College as only one, so anonymity not protected if included)
4. Pre-Programme Interviews with pupils both those who are looked after and others	Current practice in school, experiences of how behaviour is managed	4 schools: 16-24 pupils	19 pupils from 3 schools
5. Pre-Programme Interviews with governors, head teachers, designated teacher(s) for LAC/inclusion if not participants	In-depth exploration of current knowledge, understanding and practice of AA & EC. Expectations of the Programme	4 schools: 4 head teachers 4 governors 4 SENCO's/ designated teacher	2 head teachers* 1 Staff Governor 1 designated staff (one also head teacher) 1 SENCO
6. Pre-Programme Interviews with a range of staff across four schools	In-depth exploration of current knowledge, understanding and practice of AA & EC. Expectations of the Programme	16-30 staff members across 4 schools	29 members of staff from 4 schools
7. Post-Programme interviews with students both those who are looked after and others.	Observations on any changes in ways that school practices and ethos have changed e.g. how behaviour is addressed and support provided	4 schools: 16-24 pupils	13 pupils from 3 schools
8. Post Programme interviews with governors, head teachers, designated teacher(s) for LAC/inclusion	Progress achieved, on-going implementation, future plans	4 head teachers 4 governors 4 SENCO's/ designated teachers	1 head teacher** 1 Staff Governor 1 SENCO/designated teacher
9. Post-Programme interviews with a range of staff from four schools	Progress achieved, on-going implementation, future plans	16-30 staff members across 4 schools	15 members of staff from 3 schools

* One head teacher was the designated member of staff for LAC

** Of the 2 head teachers interviewed pre-programme, one head teacher left the school during the academic year.

Key Findings

Knowledge and understanding of attachment theory and practice at the start

All participants were aware of children in their classes who were in care in their school currently or in the past. Participants who were not teachers were aware of the children in the school who were in care. Of those interviewed three of the 29 participants had no knowledge of attachment theory. In response to the pre-programme survey question on knowledge of attachment aware theory, 30 responses indicated they had knowledge, 10 members of staff did not complete this question and only three indicated they had no knowledge of attachment theory.

There was a general acknowledgement that staff are aware of the children in school who were looked after partly because this knowledge was crucial to their role in school. A wide range of support for children in care in schools was identified by the participants. Staff with designated responsibility for children in care, those with special educational needs and staff with pastoral roles were all mentioned. Alternative provision for students was also identified. One participant reported there was a safe area in the school to which pupils could go:

... have set areas where they can go to at break times and lunches but that's just there for them should they need it (Student Development Officer, pre-Programme interview).

One mentioned the school's safeguarding policy, one mentioned 'plans' that are reviewed regularly, one mentioned safeguarding meetings and another mentioned a breakfast club. Eight noted the use of the Education, Health and Care Plan. It was indicated that outside agencies would attend these meetings. Seventeen mentioned the home-school link worker. Interestingly one teacher stated:

...There's nothing specific, we don't have any attachment things per se in place (Year 4 class teacher, pre-Programme interview).

Another teacher was unaware of how the school met the needs of children:

... I honestly don't know (Secondary Teacher, pre-Programme interview).

Staff described how the Programme had provided an understanding that lack of early attachment had a detrimental impact on learning for students and that this had not been clear to them at the beginning of the training. Furthermore, this knowledge was secured by a scientific understanding of the neuroscience which provided evidence of a direct link between the impact of early trauma or neglect on brain development and emotional development:

... If children fail to make attachment bonds from when they were babies, it will have a knock-on effect during their life because they might struggle to form relationships with numerous people, and obviously that will affect confidence, emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing (Teaching Assistant, pre-Programme interview).

Knowledge and understanding of emotion coaching

Only one participant from the pre surveys had no knowledge of emotion coaching. Out of the thirty-five who responded to the question regarding emotion coaching, five had no training in it. All others had been involved in emotion coaching training, however minimal previously, showing a high level of pre-training

experience. Of those interviewed, seventeen had knowledge and understanding of emotion coaching. Some stated that they expected emotion coaching to provide a key strategy for staff to interact more appropriately with young people who have attachment issues.

Expectations of the Programme

Twenty seven participants specifically stated a wish to improve their knowledge of attachment and to develop a set of skills and strategies to address the needs of children with attachment issues:

...to improve the outcomes for children in care, and to continue to develop staffs therapeutic rapport with children (Support staff, pre-Programme survey).

One participant stated the need to have 'new' emotion coaching strategies, to increase the repertoire of skills they could draw on. Others wanted to share good practice and one wanted to become more confident to address the needs of students. Two specifically mentioned they wanted to learn more about diagnosing a child with unmet attachment.

Others commented that they hoped a whole school approach would be developed and applied when dealing with children with behaviour issues with unmet attachment. This resonates with one participant who wanted to see an improvement in behaviour that would result in happier, more confident children.

In terms of the perceived benefits to the pupils of school staff participating in the Programme, there were a variety of responses, some participants again mentioned the pupils' behaviour being better understood and this would lead to a consistent whole school approach:

I think the school will gain because I think behaviour will improve if we get a better understanding of attachment. I think we all need to have the same message... (SENCO, pre-Programme interview).

Improvement in behaviour was considered the key to improving the achievement for children both academically and socially:

For the staff to implement it I guess. I would hope so. But for them to implement it and for these children to function independently and to recognise their emotions and their strengths and for them as students to know how to move forward with whatever issues they have and not be weighed down by them (Teaching assistant, pre-Programme interview).

Challenges that interviewees identified in participating in the Programme included time and buy in. There was awareness of the time it takes in a school to commit to, and see the benefits of, change and the participants anticipated that progress might be slow. Secondly, it was noted the barriers to change encountered with some staff who had 'a fixed mindset' and were therefore sceptical of the programme's message.

Impact of the Attachment Awareness Training

The impact of the Programme on pupils, staff and schools was evidenced through the post-Programme survey of participants, interviews in three schools and analysis of pupil data.

Changes in the attitudes and practices of staff in school

It was widely recognised that attachment was vital in supporting the development of children. Crucial to this development for pupils is having a trusting relationship with a key adult in school. It was generally accepted that staff had developed a better understanding of why pupils might behave in particular ways and this has changed practice in particular, changing communication styles and language used with pupils:

It has made all staff aware of the possibility that behaviours could be due to attachment and has helped them realise that it is OK to make reasonable adjustments for these children (Deputy Head Teacher, post-Programme survey).

And

So I've probably changed a little bit as well, because I am more ...way more mindful of the impact of attachment issues on their little lives ...I feel that I have modified my behaviour as a result of the training and certainly since our last conversation, I've been much more mindful of it (Head teacher, post-Programme interview).

Using emotion coaching strategies was considered to have gone beyond the 'pastoral' aspects of their work in managing behaviour, into their approach working with each other and with parents:

...using emotion coaching with the children, we use this a lot with the parents and we're starting to use it more and more with the staff (Deputy Head Teacher, post-Programme interview).

A change in language used by staff in the school was commented upon frequently which lead to a calmer atmosphere:

You can hear people, adults speaking to certain children when you're going round the school and they will say 'I can see you're upset', not, 'why are you doing it', you know. 'I can see you're upset tell me why, what's troubling you' (SENCO, post-Programme interview).

A greater understanding of emotion coaching has developed as a result of the training; the knowledge has deepened. There is now the knowledge that there are symptoms behind the behaviour and by acknowledging the emotions, staff can help students to manage these feelings and ensure students feel supported. For example:

We would talk to the child about the issues they are struggling with but never probe. Let [sic] them tell us at their pace and with as much detail as they wish to share (Primary Teacher, post-Programme survey)

And

We now use emotional coaching to understand their actions (Year Four Teacher, post-Programme survey)

And

I've realised that they've been doing a lot of training because the ways that they've changed and like the ways that they know how to help you more and they don't like, just say, 'Oh, it'll be fine and everything'. They actually have, like, a good, 10, 15, 20 minute conversation about it (Pupil, post-Programme interview)

Increased confidence in addressing the needs of children and young people

Nineteen participants interviewed expressed confidence at the outset but along with others, felt their confidence would develop as they were exposed to more training in order to improve their knowledge and skills in this area. From the pre- Programme survey, 30 participants indicated they were confident in addressing the needs of children due to their pre-existing teaching experience and with working with children with unmet attachment.

Twenty-four participants from the post-Programme survey indicated their confidence had increased, reasons given for this included a more comprehensive understanding of the children's needs and knowing which interventions were likely to be suitable for particular children:

I've grown in confidence and I think the college has actually in the time that we've been ...well, particularly since we started working more closely with Jason [pseudonym] (role not identified to maintain anonymity, post-Programme interview).

Four participants indicated that they were more confident in addressing the needs of, and identifying children's unmet attachment needs:

I don't think I would have been comfortable in letting them talk before about issues that they would have. I would wonder about whether they should be talking to me about certain things and I would be tempted to stop them, whereas that's not particularly an issue anymore and I'd be worried about what I would say to them when they came to me with issues that were difficult but I think some of the training that we've had has helped, maybe ... some of those issues. (Head of Faculty, post-Programme interview).

It was noted by one head teacher that staff varied in their confidence. Those who lacked confidence tended to realise the importance of the theory later than the other staff and for some it was because of the many years that they had been teaching and they found it difficult to change their perceptions. Four participants felt a lack of experience in working with looked after children and their individual complexities made it difficult for them to feel entirely confident.

Improvements in the children's educational progress, well-being, attendance and exclusions

The impact on pupils' well-being since completion of the Programme was evidenced by staff in both the survey and the interviews. Pupils acknowledged that they couldn't learn if they are upset:

Like if you got like problems with people outside of school then that can also affect you (Pupil, post-Programme interview).

Specific examples of impact on pupils were provided, for example:

Working with a certain young lady it had a really big impact for us as a class in a really positive way. Before she would run off, be quite disruptive in lessons and we've almost seen a complete turnaround (Year 4 teacher, post-Programme interview)

The attendance in the schools engaged in the Programme is given in Table 3 for years 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16 (the year of the Programme) and 2016-17.

Table 2: % overall absence (authorised and unauthorised) for the academic year.
% of pupils who are persistent absentees - missing 10% or more of possible sessions across the academic year

School	Overall/Persistent Absence 2013-14	Overall/Persistent Absence 2014-15	Overall/Persistence Absence 2015-16*	Overall/Persistence Absence 2016-17
P1	4.9/2.9	4.8/3.1	4.2/8.7	4.1/7.3
P2	4.8/3.2	4.2/1	4.2/8.9	3.8/7.3
P3	5.1/3.1	5.1/4.5	5/13.5	4.6/13.9
P4	4.5/4.9	4.6/2.4	4.3/7.9	4.2/10.2
P5	6.6/7.6	6.1/7.2	5.3/14.6	5.1/13
P6	4.7/3.9	5.5/6.4	6.3/18.1	6.4/20.5
P7	2.5/NA	4.7/3	4.8/14.2	4.3/11.1
S1	8.2/11.6	8.6/13.5	8.2/23.5	6.7/20.8
S2	4.3/2.7	4.5/2.9	4.9/13.1	5.6/15.3
S3	6.2/7.4	6/5.9	5.5/15.5	5.7/14.5
Sp1	13.1/26	10.8/16.7	10.9/36.4	10.4/36.6
Sp2	9.3/15.3	9.5/19.6	9.1/32.6	9.6/34.5
National average primary	3.9/1.9	4/2.1	4/8.2	4/8.3
National average secondary	5.2/5.3	5.3/5.4	5.2/13.1	5.4/13.5
National average special	9/14.6	9.4/15.4	9.1/26.9	9.7/28.5

*From 2015-16, persistent absence was defined as missing 10% or more of their own total sessions whereas in 2011-15 it was defined as 15% or more of the national threshold figures which explains the consistent increase.

In the schools involved in the Programme, overall attendance improved in eight of the twelve schools across the four years, with all but one of the primaries reducing their overall absence in the year since the Programme ended and that one increasing absence by 0.1. This bucks the national trend since both absence and persistence absence have increased from 2013 to 2017 in primary, secondary and special schools (though only minimally in overall absence in primary schools).

Persistence absence increased in all schools in the Programme across the four years similarly to the national increase, partly reflecting changes in the methodology used to measure it³ but decreased in half of them over the year since the Programme ended. The lack of a control group in this evaluation suggests caution is needed in attributing these improvements to the Programme, but the data from the surveys and interviews provide some corroborating evidence with many participants reporting that attendance had improved.

Exclusion data was not obtained despite repeated requests from the research team. Staff responses in the survey and interviews reported that exclusions were down, which they attributed to changes in the

³ Recent further [guidance](#) on persistent absence

approach to excluding children, through staff looking at the reasons for the behaviour rather than just responding to it.

I think from the exclusions point of view, it has helped things (Inclusion Worker, post-Programme interview).

Table 3: Attainment and progress for all pupils in the participating schools
Primary - % reaching expected standard (level 4+) reading, writing and maths
Secondary - % achieving grades A*-C in both English and mathematics

School	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16*	2016-17
P1	84%	81%	31%	65%
P2	76%	55%	33%	43%
P3	43%	72%	28%	49%
P4	82%	78%	38%	38%
P5	62%	47%	25%	46%
P6	89%	89%	61%	48%
P7	63%	73%	37%	39%
S1	44%	40%	44%	52%
S2	82%	62%	75%	63%
S3	61%	55%	58%	51%
Sp1	SUPP**	SUPP	0%	0%
Sp2	0%	0%	0%	0%
National prim	78%	80%	53%	61%
National sec	55.5%	55.8%	59.3%	59.1%

* Tests and measurement of % reaching expected standards changed in 2016 making comparison to earlier scores meaningless.

**Suppressed as <10 pupils to protect identity

Changes to the reporting requirements in primary schools make comparisons of attainment with years earlier than 2015-16 impossible but looking at the last two years' data, five of the seven primary schools improved their attainment, all but one showing much greater increases than the 8% national increase in scores. While nationally, secondary schools decreased their attainment by 0.2% from 2016-17, two of the secondary schools in the sample experienced much greater decreases and the third improved by 8%.

Staff reported in the survey and interviews that the attainment of students had improved, some commenting on improvements in attainment and progress of the targeted pupils:

... I'm just thinking about my class actually, there's a high achiever, and obviously it's English, reading, writing and maths, and two out of the three he achieved greater depth in them (Year 1 Teacher, post-Programme interview)

Schools' understanding of their relationship to others

There was some evidence that schools realised the need to work with outside agencies in order to ensure children were supported during possible unstable times such as school holidays:

...there's been lots of meetings around different children with social workers and different agencies really, to try and ensure that their six week holiday is as happy as it can be. So, I think we're always trying to look forward as to possible problems and working with others to try and alleviate those (Assistant Head, post-Programme interview).

The way in which schools work with families has also changed with increased support beyond the traditional school concerns. One school explained that by providing early support a school can reduce the effects of unmet attachment issues unravelling in school:

So, we are doing more and more really for the families as in, you know, helping them with their housing problems and things that we would never have done years ago. So, one of the teachers went to the opticians because the optician wouldn't see the child without anybody who spoke English, so one of the teachers took them (Deputy Head, post-Programme interview).

Facilitators and Barriers to progress

Role of the senior leadership team

As in so many other 'school improvement' Programmes, the commitment and support of the senior leadership team and in particular the Head, did emerge as important in facilitating change. In some cases, a member of the senior leadership staff was driving the Attachment Aware Programme, in other cases there was a working party taking on this role. It was important that at least one member of any working group should be senior enough to lever change. There was evidence from the schools that embraced the Attachment Aware practices and emotion coaching, that senior leaders were committed to the approach and supported staff at every level including SMSAs and TAs to implement the principles and practices.

It mattered to all schools that those who were driving the Attachment Aware Programme remained in position within their school and led the staff development. In one school, the departure of the co-ordinator and the Head led to a lack of progress. This reinforces the importance of responsibility for the implementation in schools being carried by a small team rather than one individual.

The role of a significant adult

The role of a significant adult with whom the pupil could develop a trusting relationship was mentioned time and time again. This was sometimes in the context of designated staff in 'drop in' rooms but often could be an adult with whom the child felt safe in the wider context of the school:

They look after us. They make you settled in school. They make you ... they say, like, 'There's nothing to worry about'. They comfort you. They just make things better, basically. (Pupil, post-Programme interview)

Whenever we're like angry or sad, and we're upset but we still want to do the work, they'll take us to SEN or separate room. (Pupil, post-Programme interview)

And

You can go to the dinner ladies. (Pupil, post-Programme interview)

This was acknowledged by the participants as well as the young people interviewed:

It's giving them those one-to-one opportunities outside of their classroom with somebody they trust to kind of, you know, unpick all of those and understand them (Senior Teacher, post-Programme interview).

Through the training, the Programme was trying to establish responses to pupils from staff throughout the school that are more supportive and address feelings rather than only behaviour. However, it is important to accept that for each individual pupil there might remain only one or two adults in the school whom they really trust and these may not be teachers.

It was also mentioned that all staff need more than to attend just the training if the school is to adopt a consistent whole school approach:

... I think the lunchtime staff, they came to the training but I think they are the ones who need more work and I think it's that challenge for them to be doing what everybody else is doing because they're only in for such a short time and they don't have the staff meetings or ...so they're a bit sort of on the edge. (Deputy Head Teacher, post-Programme interview).

Creating safe spaces in schools

One factor contributing to progress seemed to be providing spaces in which children can calm down and self-regulate and to ensure the school environment as a whole is a safe space. One student commented there is a safe space to go when they feel stressed:

The podyeah it's like a reading area or a stress out area, (Pupil, post-Programme interview).

Staff interviewed in one secondary school described separating the staff deployed in the student development office based on their roles in order to create a safe haven for students:

they've got a designated school welfare office now ...called Oasis so it's a safe haven for them to go and they've all been made aware that the school welfare officer is there for them if they need (English Teacher, post-Programme interview)

In some schools the structure of the day has changed to allow students to have a safe base, in one school the lunchtime has been organised to offer students calming activities such as yoga. In another, form time has been moved to an earlier time of the day:

...it's that kind of comfort of knowing that they're ready, then, for the rest of the day and they've got somebody they can go back to if they've got a problem in another lesson so ...and it's now called "Rock" because of that, it's like the foundation (Teacher, post-Programme interview)

Several staff gave examples of pupils who had calmed down and were coping much better since the school had created such a space.

Some limitations of the evaluation

The challenges of busy schools agreeing to participate in research are experienced in most projects. The priorities in schools are, understandably, to ensure that pupils are taught, Ofsted inspection requirements are met, staffing shortages are addressed and the safety of pupils is guaranteed. Schools undertaking this Programme had agreed to participate in the evaluation but, in the eventuality, seven did not complete the post-Programme survey (and those that did so did not all answer all the questions), one school facilitated the post-Programme visit but the interviewees did not attend. In other schools visited, not all who had been interviewed pre-Programme were interviewed as they were absent on the day or had left and those replacing them knew little about the Programme.

Access to data on attendance, attainment and exclusions has been challenging and exclusion data were not obtained. The timing of its availability is often delayed beyond the completion of planned evaluations. In addition, there is 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 has limited the capacity to look at primary school attainment trends over more than two years in particular.

Attribution of improvements in attendance and attainment specifically to this Programme is challenging given the number of other Programmes that were running alongside the Attachment Aware Programme, such as SEAL and mindfulness. However, the triangulation of evidence from the survey of all participants, interviews with different stakeholders and documentary evidence, provide some confidence that the changes reported here are linked to the Attachment Aware Programme.

Conclusions

Overall, there is some compelling evidence from schools that the Attachment Aware Schools Programme in Stoke-on-Trent in 2016-17 had an impact on whole staff understanding of attachment, the meaning behind behaviour and emotional well-being. The Programme seems to have had the following impact:

- The participants who were fully involved in the evaluation all commented positively on the impact that the Programme had had on their own attitudes and practice. They reported feeling much more confident, having greater knowledge and understanding of attachment and emotion coaching.
- 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.
- Participants described changes in their practice, in particular recognising emotions before managing behaviours, changing communication styles and language used with pupils and other staff and, for nearly all the participants, use of emotion coaching.
- School staff and pupils described the school environment as having become calmer and more nurturing.
- Overall attendance improved in eight of the twelve schools across the four years, with all but one of the primaries reducing their overall absence in the year since the Programme ended. While

caution is needed in attributing this to the Programme it does buck national trends and staff comments linked these improvements to changes in staff attitudes, behaviour and practice.

- Five of the seven primary schools improved their attainment in the year since the Programme ended, all but one showing much greater increases than the 8% national increase. However, two of the three secondary schools saw a drop in attainment far greater than the small national decrease.
- Impact on pupils' well-being was evidenced by staff in both the survey and by staff and pupils in the interviews. One factor contributing to this seemed to be providing 'safe' spaces in which children can calm down and self-regulate, another was having a significant adult in school that the pupil trusted.
- Senior leader and head commitment, support and resource allocation was crucial to effective engagement in the Programme and it having an impact on the school.

Recommendations for future Programmes

- Future Programmes should include both 'centrally-held' sessions which give staff opportunities to learn from one another across schools, and whole staff development which is critical for ensuring consistent responses to pupils.
- Schools choosing to participate should be required to have a minimum of two staff, preferably more, actively engaged in a team leading the Programme in order to ensure long-term sustainability of the action plan. The requirement for one of these to be a senior manager should be continued.
- Future Programmes should continue to emphasise emotion coaching and ensure that support is provided to train key groups of staff (e.g. school meal supervisors, teaching assistants etc.).
- Future Programmes should also cover the importance of designated 'safe spaces' in school and the role of significant adults who might not be a teacher, identified by the pupils.
- The role of the local authority in data collection related to the Programme should be reviewed to consider which data related to which pupils are needed and to establish a realistic timescale and means of collecting that data.
- Schools participating in the Programme should have the expectation of fully participating in the evaluation on the basis that an independent assessment of progress will help them.

Recommendations for policy and practice

There is extensive interest in developing Attachment Awareness across schools in England to better address the needs of vulnerable pupils. There seems to be four areas that this evaluation suggests need to be targeted:

- Initial teacher training – many of those in this evaluation expressed a severe lack of confidence in addressing attachment needs in schools and felt unprepared for this. Attachment and the effects of trauma are addressed in very few teacher training Programmes currently despite knowledge and understanding of this now being a requirement in the teaching standards.
- Professional development of school staff – all staff in schools, not just teachers, are involved in responding to behaviour and this evaluation demonstrates clearly the importance and potential changes that can be brought about by the wider school staff receiving development on attachment and trauma.
- Governors – one teacher governor participated in the evaluation and due to their role was very aware of the issues. All governors should be involved and aware of the issues and be engaged in the developments in school. This needs to be addressed through governor training.
- Adults outside school with whom vulnerable pupils are in contact – parents, foster carers and social workers need to be adopting a consistent approach to that being implemented in the schools.

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

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