# Attachment and trauma awareness training: analysis of interviews with local authority programme leads

## January 2022

### Key findings:

- Nearly all local authorities described meeting the aims of their programme to raise attachment and trauma awareness in schools and improve practice with vulnerable pupils
- Local authorities reported working collaboratively with their schools to create a programme that was completed 'with' schools, rather than 'done to' schools
- Local authorities varied substantially in the scale of support offered to schools – for analysis, we have categorised this as Complex, Moderate or Simple
- Strong senior leadership engagement from schools and clear communication about the commitment required helped to ensure progress
- Some programmes were part of wider strategic attachment and trauma initiatives within the local authority – this strengthened the work in schools
- Many local authorities felt that the Covid-19 pandemic had increased the need for schools to be attachment and trauma aware
- Many local authorities adapted their programme from the initial iteration in order to embed and sustain a model for training schools in the future

### Report overview:

This report is part of the series of working papers being published from the Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme, hosted at the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford.

As with many other school-based research projects, the Programme was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. We were actively engaged in data collection with schools and local authorities when the first lockdown period started and consequently paused most fieldwork between March and September 2020. The second lockdown period between January and March 2021 led to an additional pause.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on schools and local authorities, requiring innovative solutions to the challenges of supporting vulnerable pupils, and highlighting the need for effective support of young people's wellbeing and mental health.

We have therefore adapted our research strategy and our publication plan. Rather than waiting for a final report, we are publishing a series of 'working papers' to provide access to our findings which we hope will assist local authorities and schools.

The focus of this working paper is on the individual training and support programmes established at the 26 local authorities taking part in the national Timpson Programme. These varied substantially between local authorities based on the resources available and assessments of need.

Each local authority lead was invited to take part in an online interview lasting between 30 and 40 minutes to explore their motivations for running the programme, how the programme was implemented, their perceptions of success and what models of long-term sustainability were being used in local authorities and schools. We interviewed leads for 22 local authorities.

We will be publishing additional working papers throughout early 2022. The final report will be published in October 2022.

### Executive summary:

1. This report summarises interviews with the local authority staff member responsible for leading an attachment and trauma awareness programme in their local area as part of the national Timpson Programme.

2. A total of 22 local authorities (out of the 26 participating in the Timpson Programme) were represented in the interviews, which lasted between 30 and 40 minutes and were conducted online.

3. There were substantial differences between the programmes offered by different local authorities. We have used a three-way typology of Simple, Moderate and Complex to reflect this.

4. In general, local authorities felt that their programme had achieved its aims, despite the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic. This was manifest in an increase in knowledge and confidence among school staff, as well as changes in policies and practices.

5. Several local authorities felt that their programme had led directly to improvements for young people in terms of attendance and exclusions, but that Covid made assessing and attributing this difficult.

6. Local authorities noted that the impact of the programme was variable between schools and that this was related to their commitment and capacity to pursue a 'journey' toward becoming attachment and trauma aware.

7. Several local authorities reflected on the importance of working in close collaboration with schools and, in some instances, to customise training to individual school needs.

8. Other key facilitators for the success of the local programmes were taken to include (a) the existence of wider support for attachment and trauma awareness within the local authority, (b) the identification of a clear senior lead for the work within the school, and (c) an initiation meeting between the school and the local authority to ensure shared understandings.

9. Local authorities reported that challenges included staff turnover in schools and shifting priorities within schools, sometimes attributed to senior staff changes or perceived pressure from Ofsted. This could be particularly challenging with respect to multi-academy trusts, where individual schools were subject to wider strategic pressures within the trust.

10. Several local authorities reflected on a perceived tension in schools between work on attachment and trauma awareness and the prevailing national focus on attainment. It was felt that there was a growing understanding that the former supported the latter.

11. Unsurprisingly, the Covid pandemic had a profound impact on many of the local authority programmes. It led to training being postponed and switched online, challenges in providing ongoing post-training support and schools pausing their development work on attachment and trauma awareness.

12. More broadly, local authorities reported that the Covid pandemic had exacerbated issues around attachment and trauma for young people. In some instances, this had led to a greater demand for support from schools, while other schools had focused more on the practicalities of the pandemic.

13. The local authority leads were considering what could be done to sustainably embed work in schools after the end of the Timpson Programme. Over half were intending to continue, sometimes with a revised training and support offer. This was seen as being limited by the resources available, although some were continuing to make extensive use of the Pupil Premium Plus funding for looked after children.

## 1. Background

The Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme launched in autumn 2017, and has worked with 305 schools across 26 local authorities in England. Participating schools receive training in attachment and trauma, usually organised through their virtual school or educational psychology service. This training is chosen by the local authority or the schools; the Rees Centre neither delivers nor validates training for the programme. We have observed and/or reviewed training materials in each local authority[1].

The purpose of the Programme is to explore the impact of the training in schools, from the perspectives of school leadership, staff and young people. More information about the Programme can be found on the website[2].

One consequence of the 'local needs' approach with each area choosing the structure of their programme is that there was wide variation in the nature of the training offered and experienced between local authorities and often between individual schools; the Programme included primary, secondary and special schools, as well as some alternative provision. No attempt was made to enforce 'fidelity' beyond that the training should (a) be substantial, (b) engage with attachment and trauma, and (c) benefit all school staff – i.e. not solely for senior leaders or those with particular responsibilities.

The remainder of this section provides a brief overview of the individual local authority programmes that were part of the Timpson Programme. This includes; number and type of schools involved; when the programmes were delivered; and a categorisation of the local programme structures provided to schools.

### 1.1 Programme configuration

Training occurred in local authorities between February 2018 and June 2021 (see Appendix 1 for individual local authority details). In this time, 305 schools in 26 local authorities received training as part of the programme. Each authority chose how to form their school group: (a) by either advertising the programme to all schools, (b) advertising to those with looked after children on roll, or (c) selecting schools based on previous knowledge of the schools' ethos, needs, and desire to work in an attachment and trauma informed way.

They also decided which training provider, either internal or external, would deliver the content, and the method of delivering the training – either online or in person. There were some local authorities who chose to mix the approaches used. The number of local authorities and the approaches they took to each of these is displayed in Table 1.

*Table 1: Local authority overview*

| School phase(s) included | n | Recruitment of schools | n |
|---|---|---|---|
| Primary only | 1 | Advertised to all | 17 |
| Secondary only | 3 | Selected schools | 4 |
| Mixed phases | 22 | Mixed – advertised and some selection | 2 |
| **Total** | **26** | **Total** | **23** |
| | | Unknown | 3 |
| **Training provider type** | **n** | **Training method** | **n** |
| External | 12 | Online | 3 |
| Internal | 12 | In-person | 12 |
| Mixed | 2 | Mixed | 11 |
| **Total** | **26** | **Total** | **26** |

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[1] See Working Paper 3.

## 1.2 Levels of support for schools

When the 26 local authorities joined the Programme, they provided background information about the local programme offer for their school group. This information[3] was reviewed to explore what components were included for each local authority. The amount of training, local authority staff support for the participating schools and the activities required of schools varied across the local programmes.

*Figure 1: typology of support offered*

**Simple**
- One-off training session
- Up to one day of training
- Introductory session to knowledge base
- Little or no follow up from local authority

**Moderate**
- Whole school training, or cascade 'train the trainer' approach
- Multiple training sessions
- Each session lasts half a day to whole day
- Programme of training over two terms or more
- Usually some follow-up or support from local authority staff
- Some programmes have wider local authority senior leadership support

**Complex**
- Programme lasts over one year
- Whole school staff training
- Multiple training sessions over two - three terms or more
- Each session lasts half a day to whole day
- Structured follow up from local authority to help schools embed new practice, e.g. action research, audit or school evaluation form, school network meetings
- Usually wider local authority senior leadership support

Based on this information, we grouped each local authority into one of three categories intended to describe their programme structure as 'Simple', 'Moderate' or 'Complex (see Figure 1). In total there were six Simple, sixteen Moderate, and four Complex local authority programmes offered to schools as part of the Timpson Programme. We will use this typology in the remainder of this report.

The **Simple** programme structures were generally designed to provide an introduction to the knowledge base of attachment theory and the impacts of trauma on child development. This structure included one-off sessions lasting from two hours to one day in length, with some opportunities for training tailored for individual schools. It also tended to be characterised by little specific ongoing support from the local authority staff, beyond the usual services provided to schools.

Over half of the 26 local authorities offered **Moderate** programme structures. The aim of this programme was typically to instigate school-wide practice change. This was achieved by delivering multiple training sessions lasting from half a day to a whole day, with an additional requirement on schools to create and review progress plans around the integration of attachment and trauma awareness. The training sessions tend to be delivered to the whole school staff, however four local authorities delivered training using a cascade 'train the trainer' approach. This required the school staff who attended the training to disseminate the learning back to the wider school. Although using this approach meant that the initial training was delivered to fewer staff members, there was ongoing support to schools taking part to ensure that the learning was embedded.

Finally, four local authorities delivered **Complex** programme structures that lasted more than one academic year, provided

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[3] Some additional information and revisions to the original typology were captured through the interviews reported herein.

substantial training and offered ongoing support to schools. These programmes were designed to create change and help schools embed new practices. Training occurred over multiple sessions – typically three or more sessions delivered to the whole school staff. Schools designated a lead contact to liaise with the local authority programme staff. The activities planned with school leads included: opportunities for networking with other trained schools; support integrating the approach into school development plans; additional training and resources; and assistance in revising school policies to align with an attachment and trauma informed approach.

Given the differences in the programme structures being offered across the participating local authorities we explored how each area organised the delivery of the programme they had established. The remainder of this report presents the findings from the interviews with local authority lead contacts.

## 2. Methodology

All 26 participating local authorities were invited, via the lead contact for the Timpson Programme, to take part in one online 30 to 40 minute semi-structured individual or small group interview. These interviews were designed to explore their motivations for running the programme, how the programme was implemented, their perceptions of success and what models of long-term sustainability were being used in local authorities and schools. Two local authority leads withdrew from participation due to time constraints, and two contacts did not respond to the invitation. Overall, 22 local authorities were represented in the interviews, and 22 interviews were completed in total; one authority lead represented two authorities and one authority had two different cohorts of

schools with different lead personnel, therefore two interviews were completed.

Interviewee job roles included twelve virtual school headteachers or deputy headteachers; six virtual school advisors/teachers; and eleven educational psychology service staff, including advisors and educational psychologists. Interviewees had been in post from 18 months to 30 years.

The programme structures of the 22 interviewed local authorities were representative of the overall distribution of local authorities in the Programme, with four Simple, fourteen Moderate, and four Complex sites taking part in interviews.

The interviews were completed and recorded using Microsoft Teams and then transcribed. The transcripts were analysed using a framework analysis approach[4]. This technique allows both deductive and inductive analysis, where answers to pre-defined questions are sought in the data, while also allowing for additional themes to emerge inductively.

A number of framework tables were created to allow data extraction about the programme background, facilitators and challenges, and long-term sustainability of the approach.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 Aims of taking part

There were a number of reasons for local authorities to take part in the Programme. Most interviewees talked about wanting to help schools to improve their practice in supporting and educating looked after children, and other pupils who might have experienced trauma or have attachment issues:

[4] See Ritchie, J and L. Spencer (1994) Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research, in B. Bryman and R Burgess (eds.) Analysing qualitative data, Routledge: London and New York, pp. 173-194.

*'[We aimed] to raise awareness and understanding of attachment and trauma, and how it can impact on child development and subsequently educational development, and also then interfere with educational progress. So, the focus was very much about raising awareness of those elements so that practitioners working with children who've experienced attachment and trauma challenges can do so in an evidence-informed way, and in a way that skills them up for future practice, also.'* (Simple)

*'So, the whole of the education - the whole school community, to understand that very fact… that particularly for children in care, although not exclusively for children in care, attachment and early trauma has an impact and therefore to understand the reasons behind the behaviour, it's all a form of communication.'* (Moderate)

Others went slightly further and described some of the difficulties young people might have in school to illustrate why this sort of training was important for schools:

*'And I suppose… those children that find learning difficult on this type of level [with attachment and trauma issues], are less likely to be able to be adapting themselves, where other children may say, "Oh, right, this teacher; very strict, this is the set of rules that you apply when you're in their lesson. When you move into this lesson it's a different approach, so now we can change." They're not – they can't change their, kind of, coats of emotion in the same way as another child who may be able to*

*tread those social interactions.'* (Moderate)

Two local authorities said their driver for participating included promoting the role of schools as an arena for helping young people overcome difficulties caused by attachment issues and trauma experiences:

*'[The programme aimed to] spread the message about trauma and the impact that it can have on young people, and how you can actually put out a message of recovery and hope. So, it's not about the fact that this is what's happened, isn't it sad, it's not at all. It's actually, "OK, this has happened. These are the things that we can do to support young people". I think that's really important.'* (Complex)

A small number of local authorities also talked about the additional aspiration to reduce the use of sanctions with looked after children. They hoped this would lead to an in increase in school and lesson time, and a reduction in the use of fixed-term exclusions[5] and internal isolation practices.

Most local authorities selected schools for their local programme by advertising the opportunity to access fully-funded or subsidised training in attachment and trauma informed practice. Around four sites asked schools to apply to take part, others requested schools make an expression of interest to be involved. This was an intentional approach in order to work with schools who were already disposed to develop attachment and trauma informed practice. Inevitably this meant some schools taking part were already some way along their journey to change practice and develop relational approaches[6]. For the local authorities working with schools where it was

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[5] In September 2021 The Department for Education revised its terminology for fixed-term exclusions, now referred to as

suspensions. Since the most common term used in interviews is fixed-term exclusion, we have retained this term.
[6] This will be discussed in more detail in future working papers.

felt there was good receptivity to the approach, this often made for the most pragmatic use of resources:

> *'Push on the open door. Find those schools that absolutely want to work with you and work with them.'* (Moderate)

> *'I think, first of all, talk to your schools. Don't jump in and commission things that you think will fit … And if they're not ready for it, or they don't want to do it, don't waste your money, but try to find another way in.'* (Complex)

### 3.2 Contrasting programme structures

#### 3.2.1 Simple structure

The potential strengths of the Simple structure lie in the ability to make the training offer bespoke for the different schools, and it favoured online delivery, given the relatively short duration of the session delivered. Three of the four leads who ran Simple programmes talked about some degree of customising the training for the schools involved. For example:

> *'What I try to do, because, prior to even asking schools to partake in the training session we did a brief survey just trying to tailor the training for the schools, because we know that schools have different difficulties, so, just ensuring that the training will meet their need.'* (Simple)

This structure also allowed some local authorities to focus on the reach of their programme, rather than on whole school transformations. For example, one local authority had ten schools involved in the Timpson Programme, however continued to deliver training in over 30 schools in total.

During the recent pandemic, online delivery of training became essential for local

authorities to continue training for schools and progress with the local programme. For these Simple programmes there was little interruption caused by the pandemic, aside from occasionally postponing the online training and possible technological difficulties:

> *'We put forward the virtual [training] … we had a lot of schools coming on board which was quite good because a lot of teachers were home and they were able to access the training virtually. But there were also little set-backs, in terms of some teachers not having, you know, appropriate technology to join in on the training. Or they were probably at school at the time and so we had to, like, record the sessions and then they would have to listen whenever time was convenient.'* (Simple)

#### 3.2.2 Moderate structure

Moderate programme structures were typified by ongoing engagement from local authority staff. This enabled schools to be supported in their development towards attachment and trauma informed school-wide practice:

> *'And living and breathing it with the schools not just being tokenistic. … it's about, you know, what we can offer schools to help them because we recognise their pressures and challenges. Not just expecting them to go and get on with it, that we're here to help.'* (Moderate)

> *'We've got very good working relationships with an awful lot of our schools … and you get to know the designated teacher, or the head teacher, or the SENCO, and you know that when you talk about attachment with them, they understand it, they get it, they*

*recognise the importance of it.'* (Moderate)

Having multiple training sessions alongside the follow-up support was felt to be an aspect that encouraged schools taking part to make a commitment to the programme as a long-term journey of development:

> *'And then really, to sell that, to get that into schools because obviously it's not just a one-off twilight and a half training session, it's a commitment for a whole year.'* (Moderate)

> *'And I think the fact that this was seen, right from the outset, as – I can't think what the right word is – but distributed learning over the year or more, that understanding that it's a journey and that this is about practice change and it's not something that you go on training and then you come away and everything's different. Yes, so, I think that really helped them understand that we're going to be supporting them over the course of time and that this is an ongoing conversation.'* (Moderate)

Four sites who used a cascade approach to training still offered ongoing support to schools, and found a particular strength of this approach in putting schools in a position to develop in-house skills. Having school staff lead school-based training meant their knowledge became consolidated which might enhance the development of expertise within schools:

> *'The idea is that schools can then redeliver, but you still get schools that will come to me and say, "Would you come in and just do a twilight on attachment?" They don't feel confident enough. So, a lot of the work then I do is [to] really try and empower them to be able to deliver it in their setting, because otherwise we*

would just be dropping into schools all over the county, doing a quick hour and a half introduction to attachment, and it might not go in. Whereas if you make them do it themselves, then that sort of approach is better.'* (Moderate)

### 3.2.3 Complex structure

The Complex programme structure built on the same strengths as the Moderate, however, also additionally supported schools to develop clear development plans about how they take their learning forward in their specific settings. This often involved supporting schools to revise behaviour and relationship policies, integrating specific actions into the formal school development plan and providing a format for sharing or reporting their progress with the local authority and other schools:

> *'It's about relationships, and that's it. It's having relationship policies as opposed to behaviour policies, which I know some of our schools have adapted.'* (Complex)

Also, this programme involved schools being offered the chance to complete a particular type of school evaluation process as part of the whole school staff session:

> *'I found that [evaluation process] powerful because we, kind of, do the training and then in the afternoon we think, "Okay, now let's apply that to your organisation" and think "What is it that you're already doing well?", and then the staff are doing it so we're actually coming out with great big sheets and then the [senior leadership team] have taken that, used the audit but also fed this into their planning. So, that's been quite powerful ... So, you kind of talk them through that so you're not doing it to*

*them, you're doing it with them, just like with the kids. And they've found that, I think the schools that have done that, it's been very beneficial. The problem is they don't all give you that time and again that's a barrier of trying to persuade them to do that, so that's varied.'* (Complex)

Local authorities with a Complex structure (and some with a Moderate structure) also had strengths derived from wider local authority involvement in adopting the approach and supporting the programme. One interviewee explains how other local authority departments completed training in attachment awareness and this marked a significant step to gaining wider support for the approach, which enabled subsequent work in this area:

*'We included social workers [in past training]. We offered them the opportunity to do the seven day attachment course … so, it meant that actually we'd also got social care saying to us, "This is what we want." So, it meant that it started about a wind of change, so that the local authority sees that, actually, this is the way forward.'* (Complex)

### 3.2.4 Experience of local authorities and programme development

More experience in working with schools to promote attachment and trauma awareness, tended to be associated with Complex programme structures. All four of the Complex programmes were delivered by local authorities who had four or more years of experience developing training courses and/or previously training groups of schools prior to them starting the Timpson Programme.

Those delivering the Simple structure programmes were early on their own development journey of delivering attachment and trauma training in a systematic way to schools. For most of the Simple structure local authorities the school group involved in the Timpson Programme was the first occasion that local authority delivered the training to whole school groups, rather than to specific job role groups.

For example, one of the sites who delivered a Simple structure programme spoke about plans to enhance their offer with additional training sessions, some bespoke elements, and ongoing implementation support over the course of an academic year:

*'What I'm looking at is now developing the initial training into a more in-depth project … it's going to be quite involved. So, I'm getting them to gather evidence on their practice and approaches, and it's going to be a series of [training] sessions that they have to engage with, with activities after that, lots of evaluation, lots of reflection. The idea is that those schools who've already had the basic package through the Timpson [Programme], can then have this on top of that, to boost their understanding. But a period of time would've passed to enable them to embed that initial practice.'* (Simple)

In five of the interviews the aspiration to enhance the current programme structure was discussed. Most of these where to develop a Moderate programme into a Complex one by offering more ongoing support in between the training sessions, and supporting the schools to make or implement development plans. This was anticipated to involve building on what worked well in the current programme, and see schools more fully supported to make lasting changes to adopt the approach:

*'I think that if we were going to completely redesign this project, I'd probably look at their being other things that had to happen … having champions in school, ongoing supervision, a definite commitment from senior leadership … if we're going to have schools signing up for a project, they have to have this training, but they also have to have other things in place. I think maybe we'd get more of what they learnt on the training embedded into their practice if we had those other things as well.'* (Moderate)

Another lead talked about making changes to the programme so that schools might be supported in ensure the approach embedded in school was continually maintained:

*'Sustainability is an issue and one of the things we have talked about is refreshers. Maybe just focusing in … on new staff … to get training. And also … to look at rebadging or looking at change in behavioural policies, to look at them and talk about them as relational and relation policies rather than behaviour policies. So, that's almost like another level of taking the learning to embed it within the school.'* (Moderate)

## 3.3 Facilitators and challenges

Each local authority was asked to share what they thought facilitated implementation of their programme with schools and reflect on the challenges to raising awareness and creating practice changes regarding attachment and trauma.

### 3.3.1 Facilitating leadership

It was clear from the interviews with local authorities that embedding practice change and supporting schools on the journey of development is a complex process. The most commonly mentioned facilitating factor was having the support and engagement of the schools' senior leadership team:

*'The buy-in from the schools was immense and they really then helped to drive the embedding in the whole school approach, because, as we know a lot of research says that unless senior management are behind the embedding of a concept and theme, it just dies a death. So, because the senior management were, in my opinion, behind the concept of trauma informed approaches, it then aided the supporting within the schools and the embedding in the schools.'* (Complex)

*'Having your [senior leadership team] on board is absolutely critical and without that there's no point really, I think you might as well forget it, because you're not going to get very far with it, or it's going to washout very fast.'* (Complex)

### 3.3.2 Communication

Ensuring there is clear communication between the local authority staff leading the programme and the schools taking part is also a key facilitator. This communication helps to ensure schools know exactly what the programme involves and the engagement required:

*'You must have, really, a brokering meeting early on to talk about expectations, so you've got that buy-in from the key partners.'* (Moderate)

*'But that's what I would advise is, that's really important, that you have those conversations with the schools about what the investment is, the*

*commitment from them and the commitment from us as a local authority, and have some joint views about what will be different as a result of that training.'* (Moderate)

This also ensures that there is a strong degree of shared purpose between the local authority and schools:

*'I think it's very difficult for schools with – there's a bigger inclusion agenda but I think it's sometimes really hard for schools with all the pressures they have, and competing demands, and still to get results up, to not feel that they're being done to, and we wanted to avoid the sense of them being done to. So, it was being done with.'* (Moderate)

*'They're under so much pressure, you just can't do a "done to", it's got to be "done with", hasn't it?'* (Complex)

### 3.3.3 Relationship with schools

A cooperative relationship was essential for local authorities to positively engage schools; especially since multi-academy trusts operate with less responsibility to the local authority than those under direct local authority control:

*'Well, they can pick and choose which way they want to apply it. So, therefore, it means that we would have to approach six or seven different trusts, where previously, going back into the good old days, it would be that one person would outline where [training] would be, and all the schools would join in, in that group. So, it just depends, and schools have moved in different ways, you know, with free schools, individual academies, the age groups where it's divided.'* (Moderate)

*'The relationship between the county council and schools has changed over time. They are independent and individual. Local authority schools are not wedded to the county council even now really. So, we've got a mix of academy chains … and individual schools, … so [working with schools] is about credibility. It's about consistency. It's about delivering and it's about the virtual school being a – that's what Ofsted said last time, "a force for good".'* (Moderate)

Influencing change in academies is further complicated by the regional, and sometimes national, spread of the academy network. This can make it difficult for the local authority to identify and connect with decision-makers who have authority to give direction to school development:

*'The academy chains, sometimes they go across different geographical areas, as well, and it's trying to get into the academy chains as well and making sure that you're talking to the right people. That can be an issue and they vary a lot. So, you'll have that very hard line behaviourist approach, more in some academy chains than others, and we're trying to counter that.'* (Complex)

### 3.3.4 Facilitating local authorities

There are a number of facilitating factors that lie predominantly within the local authorities themselves. These include the provision of resources, in terms of staff time and finance to pay for the training provided:

*'By having [LA staff member] actually overviewing [the programme] and having that one person there … that approach for me is quite powerful for the future because [schools] have somebody to look to. It's not just a*

*programme that they did and then it disappears, there's a human attached to it, and who they have got as a continual reference.'* (Simple)

*'[Schools] didn't have to pay for any of the training, we paid for it all. So, money would have been an object, but we were able to – we're lucky enough to have the Pupil Premium[7] so we could use it in that sense.'* (Moderate)

It also includes enlisting wider local authority support across different services, as described in the strengths of the Complex structure. One local authority that offered wider support said:

*'I think if you can, kind of, get as many key strategic leaders on board as possible before you start there's massive pay-offs for the local authority in terms of not just schools but across partners.' (Moderate)*

A different local authority lead was seeking to move towards an integrated approach with wider local authority engagement in attachment and trauma awareness said:

*'What we didn't want to do is just provide a programme that was in isolation. We wanted to try and make sure that all the other services in [the local authority] were able to be part of that, and that we could have quite a joint approach. Now, that was what we wanted [laughs]. It's not quite what we achieved. I would say now … we have other services still doing some work around attachment and trauma, but not – so, we sort of know through communication what each other are doing, but it's not as linked as our original vision would be, and I*

*think it's still something that we want to work towards.'* (Moderate)

### 3.3.5 Staff turnover

For most local authorities, who approached this programme with the view to lead schools on a development journey, the timeframe of the programmes meant that many schools would experience staff changes. This turnover resulted in new staff who had not completed the training joining the programme part way through:

*'In the meantime, I've got one school that they lost so many staff that, in terms of change, that now the school isn't the same school as it was anyway, and [the new staff] haven't had the training. So, I think – I suppose that's with any training, over a two-year period, sometimes, can be hugely changing for the school and for the community and the staff that are in it.'* (Moderate)

One local authority was clear that planning for the turnover of staff in schools was an important part of their training cycle:

*'We have an ongoing background training programme, so, it's the same programme running along, if anybody – new staff members came it meant that they didn't miss out … So, if there's any staff changes they can always slot in, which we said you needed to have.'* (Moderate)

In other local authorities, specific staff turnover of the lead contact within school, impacted how the school was able to carry on making progress in the programme:

*'Some of the schools quite naturally have got other pressing priorities*

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[7] Pupil Premium Plus funding is provided by the Government to virtual schools to support the education of looked after children in the local authority.

*whereby the project, they might be keen for the project but they've got other things that must take their priority. Or we've had one or two occasions where the lead person within the project has moved on through career progression or whatever, and you've got somebody else stepping into the role, and so that would represent a backwards step.'* (Moderate)

*'So, essentially what happened was, they had two key members of staff leave, and two more kind of – in fact, when I did the training, I don't think there was a headteacher … Another key member of staff had left. And so in terms of whether they're in the right place to take that learning forward as a school, I'm not sure if they were in the best place.'* (Moderate)

### 3.3.6 Priorities and competing demands

Another challenge to programme implementation occurred when the demands on schools caused the leadership to change the priorities for school development. This occurred in a small number of authorities where new senior leaders instigated a change of direction:

*'Now obviously, some schools really ran with [organising the training] quite quickly. Some schools, I know we've had to chase, and deferred, because sometimes – there was one school, I know, that Ofsted came and actually that became their focus at that point.'* (Complex)

*'I think there's an awful lot of pressure still on schools around performance and data, and the things that they are still inspected on don't necessarily reflect a more human*

*approach to schooling … I think it's quite hard for some schools, some schools in trusts, you know, there's so much accountability now around outcomes, that I think it's hard for some schools to be brave, and for heads to be brave, and say, "Actually, we're going to do this."'* (Simple)

This was reflected on by local authority leads, who talked about the tension in schools between the academic performance pressures and understanding that implementing attachment and trauma informed practice was a means of achieving those goals:

*'It's so easy for them to get moving into other things or other training comes along or other demands or pressures come along … It's just remembering that this will enhance and support their practice long term and it will make their job easier and we will have less exclusions, all those amazing things that we want. It's just helping them to keep on that journey.'* (Moderate)

On the other hand, one local authority suggested some external influences might be encouraging schools to become places that support pupils with unmet attachment and trauma needs:

*'In some ways, the area where we find ourselves now, in response to Covid, people are seeing wellbeing as a primary principle to actually support learning going forward … Well, Ofsted at the moment, to me, are communicating that schools have to be wellbeing places before they can be learning places.'* (Moderate)

### 3.4 Impact of Covid

In all schools, the pandemic and ensuing school lockdowns created huge challenges and extra strain on the system and people working in it. For many local authorities this instigated a pause, or even a cancellation of planned activities.

It is important to note that local authorities were at different points in their training programmes when the initial lockdown started. Of the total 26 local authorities in the Programme, fourteen had completed school training and were in the process of doing their follow-up support with schools to help embed practice change. Seven local authorities were still training schools and doing follow-up support with those already trained, while five had not yet started the training. The sites with ongoing work during and after the lockdown were required to adopt online delivery methods and work flexibly with schools to support them to continue with the programme. The impact of the pandemic did not have equal effects on each local authority.

The local authority most impacted completed their first training session with schools, using a cascade approach, just days before the first national lockdown in March 2020. Due to the demands the pandemic placed on schools the future planned training was unable to proceed for the schools. Eventually, a single school moved forward with an alternative programme of training and support:

> *'Everyone was really on board. We knew we had the right people there, because they were all – we were all singing from the same hymn sheet and it was really passionate, and a great day. And then Covid hit and everything just kind of stopped, and we were all in, kind of, crisis management, weren't we? And the schools particularly were in crisis management, and we were just completely holding back. Everything*

> *was shelved, and we just waited and waited and waited.'* (Moderate)

Other local authorities saw schools postpone training and were required to switch delivery online. However, many of the twelve sites still doing training with schools were still able to continue with their sessions, although there were disruptions to the delivery of the follow-up support:

> *'We delivered [online training] in the autumn term, and then in the spring term of course all the schools closed again, and I think it's just, basically, all those circumstances have overtaken to the point where really it just lost the momentum … It's been difficult to do any of the follow-up work, just, really I suppose because of all the difficulties around Covid etc. – it has interrupted the plans that we'd had.'* (Moderate)

In contrast, a few local authorities said that the pandemic marked an increase in schools' interest in additional training and webinars about supporting pupils with trauma experiences:

> *'And it's been pertinent with the pandemic. I mean, obviously our training's just gone from strength to strength, really, so, I think we trained over about 2,000 people last year.'* (Complex)

This was thought possible because many schools implemented a staff rota of in-school and 'from home' working during the lockdown periods. While staff were working from home they may have been more available for online training than before the pandemic. Local authority leads also mentioned how schools might have been anticipating future repercussions on the wellbeing of pupils, since a majority of pupils completed home-schooling and were less in touch with their wider social networks due to the social distancing restrictions:

*'The complexities of some of our individual pupil's needs has been really adversely affected. So, some of the behaviours that we've seen now is some of the most acute behaviour that we've ever experienced.'* (Moderate)

Where local authorities have been able to continue with the programme in some form, many reported that it was not possible to build the same rapport, or 'read the room', as one interviewee said, when training staff online. Overall many felt the training was not as impactful as it might have been if they had been able to deliver the sessions in-person:

*'It's better to do these things face-to-face, especially things like the small focus group … I have been involved in the breakout rooms and all the rest of it, and it's just not as good using a virtual medium.'* (Moderate)

*'We weren't able to meet in person, and we knew it wouldn't be as effective virtually.'* (Moderate)

Online training relies heavily on digital technology, where having reliable physical devices and internet connections are essential. Some local authorities reported occasions where internet connections in school failed to support the entire staff body attempting to access the online meeting simultaneously:

*'The first school that we delivered to, they were all accessing the training in the school, and their network just couldn't cope with it, it crashed … What we had to do in the end was we audio recorded the slides and sent them to the school … The other school, … given the experience we'd had with that [first] school, we kind of told them that if possible it would be helpful if people could access from home because we felt there was less likelihood of it crashing. And I think*

*that did work more effectively, we were able to actually deliver all the training to them. I think there was some variability in connection but we were able to do it at least.'* (Moderate)

## 3.5 Models of training delivery

While the train-the-trainer cascade approach was used by four local authorities, most programmes involved training the whole school staff at the same time. For many local authorities in the Programme this was a different training model to traditionally hosting training for specific members of staff to attend (e.g. SENCOs):

*'So, we've gone very much down the whole school approach, really. So, initially, I think, way, way back with the Virtual School, it was very much [designated teacher] days, and then we had more and more [designated teacher] days, and then we've started to develop more and more whole school, which I think partly came about around the same time as the Timpson project.'* (Complex)

*'What [the] Timpson [Programme] did is actually then allowed us to work with the whole staff for that initial training, so, that was an important thing, because you can't just base it on a small group of people in school, because actually the organisation's got to live and breathe and believe in this.'* (Complex)

This model of training was perceived as a positive way to upskill staff with the aim to influence school-wide practice change:

*'I think starting with the whole school was really important, and I think the schools really recognise that because then you've got that common language and the common*

*understanding from all members of your school community hopefully. So, I think that was a real strength.'* (Moderate)

Conversely, those using the cascade approach also identified strengths through the process of key staff developing deeper knowledge of attachment and trauma issues to enable them to redeliver the training to the wider staff body.

### 3.6 Embedding and long-term sustainability

Over half of the local authorities interviewed were planning to continue attachment and trauma awareness training in various formats. This was either through top-up training sessions for existing schools and ongoing support, usually through the educational psychology service, or continuing to bring schools on to the local programme:

> *'I am still now without the Timpson [research activity], saying, "If people want [the training], we will pay for it." … It is still something that needs to be … out there and available.'* (Simple)

Interviewees talked about making adjustments to the programme to make it more sustainable for them as a local authority in the longer term. For example, where initially external training providers might have been used, future training programmes were being developed for their in-house educational psychologists and virtual school staff to deliver:

> *'The [educational psychologists] and the virtual school lead … have been working on developing a training package similar to what we were rolling out with [external provider], to roll out to other schools in addition now … We want to now reach out to other schools using a similar approach.'* (Moderate)

Those local authorities not continuing with the programme typically reported resources being the main reason. For those with a larger staff team behind the programme or wider local authority buy-in sustainability was possible. Those with limited staff resources may move on to other projects; in one case, another opportunity for research represented a change in priorities for the local authority's use of staff time, therefore future cohorts of attachment and trauma awareness training were not possible:

> *'No, we haven't done anything as in-depth and as prolonged since. And Covid hit, and that's just disrupted everything. We were involved, or recruited schools to some other research which was more around academic … looking at maths, online maths tuition.'* (Moderate)

### 3.7 Meeting programme aims

Local authority leads were able to refer to substantial impact in individual schools in their cohort. This was mainly about meeting the general aim of raising awareness about attachment and trauma issues, but others reported schools focusing on a slightly different element of the training delivered:

> *'[School] staff were saying they did feel it increased their confidence in their current practice around working with children that might have attachment needs or experience trauma. And that they found the practical elements of the course really useful and it gave them some strategies and they felt more confident in that.'* (Moderate)

> *'One school in particular really were working hard to embed that emotion coaching strategy … And other schools kind of took a different [approach] such as the resilience tool*

*… [they] actually used that for their transition sharing [of] information.'* (Moderate)

Several leads talked about reduced exclusion rates for looked after children, although this was heavily caveated with the impact that Covid lockdowns have had on the performance data for schools:

*'It's difficult to actually pin it down … all I know is that prior to Covid – I can't say since Covid – but prior to Covid, our key indicators, like our exclusions, were going down, or attendance was increasing, and that was running alongside when we were doing the Timpson project, so, I think it's hard to divorce the two.'* (Complex)

For many, the progress across the school group was variable, with interviewees reflecting how meeting the intended aims in all schools was not straightforward. This appeared to be linked to the commitment that the schools gave to the programme:

*'Of course we've had some schools that just go, "Oh thanks we're finished now, we don't want to do anymore", but there are others, we could still be working with them two and three years down the line because the more that they have – the more that they want.'* (Moderate)

*'Some schools, in terms of this work, I think it has met those [intended] outcomes in terms of that enhanced understanding and confidence, and then just more reflections, in terms of, the needs of those children and a greater empathy in terms of what those experiences mean in terms of behaviour. I think there's been different conversations in some of the*

*schools as a result, and therefore different outcomes.'* (Moderate)

## 4. Conclusion

These interviews with local authority leads for the Timpson Programme have highlighted the variety of programmes and extensive work that was completed with schools taking part. Effective implementation was supported by the building of strong relationships with senior leaders, in both schools and the local authority. Sustaining momentum in the school development 'journey' was rooted in obtaining strong commitment to the programme. Clear communication was key to establishing that commitment and engagement.

As with all implementation projects, assessing the risk of potential barriers and mitigating for those is important – seen where local authorities anticipated staff turnover and provided top-up training. However, the challenges presented by the Covid pandemic were naturally impossible to anticipate and mitigate. Despite this, local authorities reacted flexibly and sensitively to their schools' needs and exemplified the practice of collaborating *with* their schools, rather than dictating all aspects of the programme *to* their schools.

The majority view among the local authority leads was that their programme had been successful in meeting its aims, despite the disruption of the Covid pandemic. This was manifest in increased knowledge and confidence among school staff, coupled with policy and practice changes. Several felt that this was then reflected in an increase in attendance and/or a decrease in exclusions, although the pandemic and lockdowns made this difficult to assess and attribute with certainty.

## Appendix 1: overview of local authority programmes

| LA | Training method | Training delivery timeframe | School phases | Recruitment of schools | Number of schools | Cohorts in programme | Training provider type | Typology of programme structure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Online | Nov 20 – Mar 21 | Primary | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 10 | Single | External | Moderate |
| B | Mixed | Feb 18 – Mar 21 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 20 | Multiple | External | Simple |
| C | In-person | Jul 18 – Apr 20 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 13 | Multiple | Mixed | Moderate |
| D | Online | Sep 20 – Nov 20 | Secondary | Selected based on openness to approach and others with need to improve practice for looked after children | 3 | Single | Internal | Moderate |
| E | In-person | Oct 18 – Oct 20 | Mixed | Advertised via DT network, schools then approach VS to be involved | 7 | Single | External | Complex |
| F | Mixed | Mar 20 – Mar 21 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 10 | Single | Internal | Simple |
| G | In-person | Oct 18 – Jan 19 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 5 | Single | External | Moderate |
| H | Mixed | Jun 18 – Jun 20 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 18 | Multiple | External | Moderate |
| I | Mixed | Jan 20 – Jun 20 | Mixed | Not known | 5 | Single | Internal | Simple |
| J | Mixed | Jan 20 – Mar 21 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 11 | Single | Internal | Simple |
| K | Mixed | Sep 19 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 6 | Single | Internal | Moderate |
| L | In-person | Mar 20 – Jun 21 | Mixed | Mixed; Selected based on openness to approach, number of looked after children, some schools expressed interest to be involved | 11 | Single | Internal | Moderate |
| M | Mixed | Sep 18 – Dec 19 | Mixed | Advertised via DT network, schools then approach VS to be involved | 7 | Multiple | Internal | Moderate |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | In-person | Sep 18 – Jan 20 | Mixed | Not known | 9 | Single | External | Moderate |
| O | Mixed | Mar 19 – Nov 20 | Mixed | Mixed; Selected based on knowledge of schools or schools expressed interest to be involved | 7 | Multiple | Internal | Complex |
| P | Online | Mar 21 | Secondary | Selected specific school due to need to improve practice for looked after children | 1 | Single | Internal | Simple |
| Q | Mixed | Sep 19 – Apr 21 | Mixed | Advertised via DT network, schools then approach VS to be involved | 18 | Multiple | Internal | Complex |
| R | In-person | Sep 18 – Apr 19 | Mixed | Targeted schools already expressing an interest in the approach | 4 | Single | External | Moderate |
| S | In-person | Apr 19 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 19 | Single | External | Moderate |
| T | In-person | Jan 19 – Sep 20 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 16 | Single | External | Moderate |
| U | In-person | Apr 18 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 28 | Single | External | Moderate |
| V | In-person | Jun 18 – Nov 19 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 21 | Multiple | Mixed | Complex |
| W | In-person | Oct 18 – Jan 20 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 28 | Multiple | External | Moderate |
| X | Mixed | Sep 19 – Jan 20 | Mixed | Advertise, schools express interest, then selected to take part | 7 | Multiple | Internal | Moderate |
| Y | Mixed | Jul 18 – Nov 20 | Mixed | Selected based on openness to approach and number of looked after children | 12 | Multiple | External | Moderate |
| Z | In-person | Nov 18 – Mar 19 | Secondary | Not known | 9 | Single | Internal | Simple |