

Attachment and trauma awareness training: analysis of staff interviews and pupil focus groups in 26 case study schools

May 2022

Key findings:

- Schools working within an attachment and trauma aware ethos reported positive impacts for pupils and staff
- Receiving attachment and trauma awareness training does not provide a 'quick fix' for schools, but is one step in an ongoing 'journey'
- Staff felt they had benefitted from training, either by acquiring new knowledge or reinforcing existing knowledge
- This knowledge catalysed changes in staff confidence, everyday practices and school policies – these led to improvements in pupils' engagement and learning
- Schools experienced distinct 'journeys' to becoming attachment and trauma aware, which we labelled as *transformational*, *positive* or *mixed*
- *Transformational* schools had three features: (a) initial training, (b) effective leadership, and (c) opportunities for follow-up sessions, including inducting new staff
- The Covid-19 pandemic was a major challenge for schools seeking to become attachment and trauma aware

Report overview:

This is the sixth report in a series of working papers from the Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme, hosted by 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 and paused our fieldwork between March and September 2020 and January and March 2021.

We therefore adapted our research strategy and publication plan to acknowledge the pandemic as a watershed moment. Working Paper 2 focused on five case studies completed before the pandemic. This working paper focuses on data from an additional 26 case study schools where the second sweep of data collection occurred after the first national Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. We have focused in depth on eight of these, selected to represent a range of different journeys towards becoming attachment and trauma aware.

Changes to our research and reporting strategy have been a necessary and pragmatic response to the emergence of Covid-19. Although implementation of the approach in schools was interrupted by the pandemic, our findings on impact and implementation can still inform schools introducing the approach in less turbulent times. However, the reader should view our findings through a 'Covid-19 lens', aware of the extraordinary circumstances in which schools were functioning.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on schools, 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. The timing of our data collection has enabled us to explore the role of attachment and trauma awareness as school staff have supported pupils through the pandemic, including virtual learning and post-lockdown return to the classroom.

The Programme's final report will be published in October 2022.

Executive summary:

1. This report summarises analysis of staff interviews and pupil focus group data from 26 case study schools where data were collected either side of the national Covid-19 lockdown. We completed in-depth analysis on eight of these schools, selected to help exemplify ‘journeys’ taken by schools to becoming attachment and trauma aware.
2. Data were collected at two timepoints: shortly after schools received training (Sweep 1) and approximately one year later (Sweep 2), although this timetable was unavoidably disrupted by Covid-19. Nearly all Sweep 2 data were collected online due to the pandemic.
3. Analysis suggested that schools were on three distinct ‘journeys’: *transformational*, *positive* and *mixed*. We developed a typology incorporating criteria for each of these journeys and allocated each of the 26 schools to a journey type. This refined our understanding of the journeys taken and the common features shared by schools on similar journeys.
4. We found that *transformational* schools had often started their journeys to becoming attachment and trauma aware prior to receiving training. Senior leadership teams were driving the agenda forward and providing clear messaging to staff about how the approach would be implemented school-wide. *Transformational* schools had managed to integrate attachment and trauma awareness fully into their practice and policy (e.g. behaviour policy) and staff were described as being receptive to the changes. These schools had clear plans to embed and sustain the approach including refresher sessions for existing staff and training for new staff members.
5. Schools on *positive* journeys had made significant progress, but were travelling more slowly, or still had some work to do before they reached the point of the *transformational*. Many *positive* schools were only starting their journeys when they received training, meaning that they had further to travel than *transformational* schools to become attachment and trauma aware.
6. Schools on *mixed* journeys had begun to implement attachment and trauma aware approaches, but faced significant challenges that hindered or stalled progress. Challenges identified by staff included a need for strategic leadership to drive the agenda forward and clearer messaging to staff about how the approach would be implemented school-wide. Covid-19 was also identified by staff as a particular challenge hindering progress.
7. Overall, staff described training leading to a range of positive impacts, including changes in practice and the physical school environment; increased staff confidence; a positive impact on staff wellbeing; and strengthened relationships with pupils and colleagues.
8. Becoming attachment and trauma aware was not considered a ‘quick fix’, instead requiring ongoing work by to embed the approach into a school’s ethos, policy and everyday practices.
9. Staff reported that changes made in the school following the attachment and trauma awareness training had resulted in improved engagement in learning for pupils. Pupils generally felt that the environment in their school was calm and that there were strong relationships in place.
10. Although lockdown and the impact of Covid-19 made it difficult for some schools to implement and embed attachment and trauma aware working as planned, the pandemic increased the focus on the mental health and wellbeing of pupils and staff. As such, staff were able to draw upon their attachment and trauma awareness to support pupils.

1. Background

The Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme was 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 - we do not deliver, prescribe or validate training for the Programme. We have observed and/or reviewed training materials in each local authority, and Working Paper 3 presents our overview of the training.

The purpose of the Programme is to explore the impact of the training in schools, from the perspectives of school leadership, staff and pupils. More information about the Programme can be found on the website¹.

2. Covid-19 pandemic

The original research plan for the Programme involved dividing schools into three data collection 'waves' based on the date they received training and then publishing findings from each distinct wave. The Covid-19 pandemic then necessitated a change of approach and a decision to publish findings earlier and more frequently. Working Paper 2 was therefore published to report analysis of the data collected prior to Covid-19 from five case study schools.

The current working paper reports analysis of data from a further 26 case study schools where data were collected either side of the national Covid-19 lockdown. Of these, we have chosen to focus in particular on eight schools that help to exemplify the 'journeys' taken by schools following their training in attachment and trauma awareness. Face-to-face interviews were planned to take place in

two sweeps, with Sweep 1 (S1) undertaken shortly after the training and Sweep 2 (S2) one year later. The Covid-19 pandemic had two impacts on this data collection plan. Firstly, nearly all of the S2 interviews were conducted online. Secondly, the time period between S1 and S2 varied considerably due to school closures and other pressures – in some instances, the interviews were held up to twenty months apart.

3. Methodology

3.1 Selection of case study schools

Out of the 305 schools to receive training as part of the Programme, 39 were initially identified to become case studies, involving a range of staff interviews and pupil focus groups.

Local authorities were asked to nominate potential case study schools incorporating, as far as possible, a spread of types (e.g. primary, secondary). This was broadly based on their assessment of which schools were likely to be in a position to participate in a research study spanning several years - in some instances, the schools actively volunteered.

The case study schools were selected following discussions with the headteacher or other senior staff where the research design was explained in detail and gatekeeper permissions sought. They nominated which staff and pupils would participate, subject to securing their consent or assent. They were asked to identify five staff across a range of roles (e.g. senior leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, support staff and others) and a mixture of around six pupils, including a subset who were in care or otherwise considered by the school to be likely to benefit from an attachment and trauma aware approach.

¹ <http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/the-alex-timpson-attachment-and-trauma-programme-in-schools>

As such, it is important to note that neither the case study schools nor the individual participants within each school were randomly selected. Rather, they represent those chosen for their likely willingness to engage with a research study and – to a greater or lesser extent – probably represent those schools and individuals that felt most likely to be positively disposed to attachment and trauma awareness (although this is not the brief that we provided). We therefore acknowledge the scope for selection bias in these data - a wider selection of voices was sought through the staff and pupil surveys². We have also included case studies from schools whose experiences were less positive.

Of the initial 39 case study schools, one withdrew, five were reported in Working Paper 2 and five were recruited after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and will be reported in a future report. Of the remaining 28, two were excluded due to insufficient data for analysis, having fewer than three interviews with school staff at each data collection point³.

This left a sample of 26 schools from which eight were selected for in-depth analysis of their interview and focus group data. The eight case study schools were selected to represent both a spread of school type and different ‘journeys’ to becoming attachment and trauma aware. The data from the eighteen case studies not selected for in-depth analysis were still used to shape the findings and are referred to and used in quotes throughout this report.

3.2 Selecting schools by type of ‘journey’

Over the course of this study, we have increasingly drawn on the analogy of a

‘journey’ to understand how schools have moved towards being attachment and trauma aware – this is a word that school staff, particularly headteachers, have used in interviews and responses to surveys.

Table 1: Typology of case studies ‘journeys’

Journey type	Description
Transformational	School talks about root and branch changes and full integration of attachment and trauma principles across policy and practice, with high confidence of positive impact on pupils and a desire to maintain focus in the future.
Positive	School is very positive about attachment and trauma and has made clear steps around policy and/or practice – perhaps piecemeal, lacking 100% staff support or not yet completely embedded, so impact has not (yet) been transformational and needs further work.
Mixed	School has had mixed experiences of trying to adopt attachment and trauma approaches, with some sceptical/negative voices or a lack of senior support – individual staff talk about changes to their practice, but little overall progress on the journey. The school may have moved backwards to some extent or be at risk of moving backwards in future.

From analysis of the data, we identified three broad types of journey experienced by schools, which we described as *transformational*, *positive* and *mixed* (Table 1). Schools that had a *transformational* journey were those which the data suggested had managed to fully integrate attachment

² Working Paper 1 focused on the pre-Covid survey responses from 24 primary schools and Working Paper 5 focused on survey responses from 112 headteachers.

³ It was not possible to complete data collection for the two schools in time for analysis for this working paper. However, data from these schools will, where possible, be included in future working papers.

and trauma awareness into policy and practice and where school staff reported that this had yielded notable improvements in outcomes and wellbeing for vulnerable pupils. Schools on a *positive* journey had made significant progress, but felt they still had a little way to travel before being fully attachment and trauma aware and to embed it across all the school’s work. Schools on *mixed* journeys had taken steps to become attachment and trauma aware, but reported that they had faced challenges hindering their progress.

A typology was developed to allocate schools to one of these three types of ‘journey’ to becoming attachment and trauma aware. We developed a set of initial criteria for each journey type informed by the analysis of data for earlier working papers and initial reading of the interview and focus group transcripts for the 26 case study schools. The criteria were intended to provide guidance to aid classification rather than forming a prescriptive list.

We used the typology to review the staff interview and pupil focus group transcripts for the 26 case study schools. Four members of the research team divided responsibility for reviewing transcripts for the schools. Classifications of a sub-sample of four case study schools were then blind-cross checked by another researcher to ensure consistency and any disagreements in classification (e.g. schools on the borderline between journey types) were resolved by discussion between the research team. Table 2 provides a breakdown of how the 26 case study schools were classified by journey and type of school. The majority of schools were classified as either *transformational* or *positive*.

Applying the typology to data from the 26 case study schools further refined our understanding of the different journeys taken by schools and in particular, the common features that schools in the same journey ‘type’ often shared. This process resulted in

the creation of a more detailed profile of each journey type – see Section 4.

Table 2: Classification by journey type of 26 case study schools

Journey type	Primary	Special	Secondary	All-through
Transformational	4	3	1	-
Positive	11	-	2	1
Mixed	3	-	-	1

3.3 Selection for in-depth analysis

We selected eight case study schools to provide the widest spread of school and journey type. Where there were multiple schools of the same type and journey type, the research team selected those schools with particularly rich data or those considered to best illustrate a journey type. Table 3 shows the sub-sample of eight case study schools selected by journey and school type.

Table 3: Eight case study schools selected for in-depth analysis

Journey type	Primary	Special	Secondary	All-through
Transformational	1	1	1	-
Positive	1	-	1	-
Mixed	2	-	-	1

3.4 Data overview

Staff interview and pupil focus group data were collected at two timepoints, referred to throughout this report as S1 and S2. In most

cases, the first round of data collection occurred two to three months after staff received attachment and trauma training. In one school, S1 data collection occurred six months after training and in another school, one year after training due to delays in accessing schools. The second round occurred approximately one year after S1 (although unavoidable disruption to the second phase of data collection was caused by the second national Covid-19 lockdown in early 2021).

Interviews were completed with a range of staff including senior leadership, teaching, pastoral and ancillary staff. A parent governor was also interviewed at two schools forming part of the wider sample of 26 case study schools. Although S1 interviews and focus groups were completed face to face, following the emergence of Covid-19 they were completed virtually using Microsoft Teams. Table 4 provides an overview of the number of interviews and focus groups completed in the eight case study schools.

Table 4: Overview of staff interviews and pupil focus groups

Type	Staff interviews at S1	Staff interviews at S2	Pupil focus groups
Primary	4	4	2
Primary	5	5	2
Primary	5	5	2
Primary	5	4	1 (S1)
Secondary	5	7	2
Secondary	5	5	0
Special	6	5	0
All through	6	5	2
TOTAL	41	40	11

We used framework analysis to analyse the case study data⁴. A deductive approach allowed data to be organised thematically,

⁴ See Ritchie, J and L. Spencer (1994) Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research, in B. Bryman and R.

building on the analysis completed for previous working papers, whilst also coding and integrating any emerging new themes.

In order to maintain participant anonymity, we have referred to broad staff roles throughout this report rather than specific job titles. We have used ‘teaching staff’ to mean class teachers, teaching assistants or other roles supporting classroom teaching, ‘pastoral staff’ for roles focused on pupil wellbeing and support, and ‘ancillary staff’ for other roles within the schools such as lunchtime and office staff.

3.5 Limitations

Rich data has been collected and analysed from eight of the schools involved in the Programme, although where appropriate we have also drawn on data from the wider sample of 26 case study schools to illustrate issues. Due to the nature and volume of data collected from each school, it was preferable to complete in-depth analysis on a carefully selected sub-sample. This, not least, reduces duplication in a dataset which showed significant saturation; in other words, staff in schools with similar journeys told us similar stories about these journeys.

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly created challenges requiring changes to the research plan and timetable. However, the availability of virtual data collection methods for this part of the project and the fact that school staff had to familiarise themselves with virtual methods of teaching meant that it was still possible to secure interview data, albeit with some delays and challenges. It was undoubtedly more difficult to conduct online focus groups with pupils, which may have somewhat reduced the amount and quality of pupil data obtained at S2.

Burgess (eds.) Analyzing qualitative data, Routledge: London and New York, pp. 173-194.

4. Findings

4.1 Different journeys experienced by schools

Through the initial classification of all 26 case study schools followed by in-depth analysis of data from eight of those schools, we were able to further explore the elements involved in the different ‘types’ of journey experienced by schools. This allowed us to further develop our three journey profiles.

Transformational journeys: Schools classified as *transformational* had often already started on their journey to becoming attachment and trauma aware prior to receiving training as part of the Timpson Programme. One headteacher reflected how it had been part of the school’s ethos for a few years in response to the high level of need amongst pupils:

“We always say to our staff that, ‘You know, for some of our children, coming to school each day is a real achievement.’ So, it’s something that I personally feel and you know, and it’s reflected within the senior leadership, that it’s something that we always have to revisit and we always have to have a big awareness on attachment and the importance of relationships and belonging ... is a big kind of tool we use in school.” (Headteacher/Primary/Transformational/S1)

In *transformational* schools, the senior leadership teams were very much involved in driving the attachment and trauma awareness agenda forward. They had successfully shared their vision for an attachment and trauma aware school with staff and communicated how this would be achieved in practice. Staff at these schools appeared to be receptive to attachment and trauma aware working: *“I think everyone was like, blown away really by the information that we were given and just how relevant it was to us”* (Teacher/Primary/Transformational/S1).

Whilst there may have been initial reluctance from a minority of staff, the interviews describe *transformational* schools employing a variety of ways to encourage individuals to engage in attachment and trauma aware working. For example, in one school, senior staff modelled techniques to demonstrate an attachment and trauma aware approach working successfully, and the senior leadership team were described as promoting a sense of ownership amongst staff of the changes being made. Staff in two schools described the training and subsequent changes increasing the sense that the staff body were a team and working towards a common goal: *“So I think that rubs off on everybody then”* (Support staff/Primary/Transformational/S2).

Schools on *transformational* journeys had incorporated attachment and trauma awareness into both policy and practice. This included providing staff with opportunities for follow-up sessions and further training to reinforce the approach. Staff in *transformational* schools described revising their behaviour policies, in some cases renaming them ‘relationship’ or ‘relational’ policies to indicate the school’s changed ethos. Some schools also incorporated attachment and trauma awareness into their school development plans:

“We’ve only got five targets in our school development plan, this is one of them. So, it’s a key thread. We’re giving more time to it next year, moving forward.” (Headteacher/Secondary/Transformational/S2)

There was a sense of momentum in the way that staff in *transformational* schools described the changes being made to promote attachment and trauma awareness – there were a number of changes to practice and policy already in progress, in addition to having clear plans to further develop and embed the approach in the longer term. A key

element of this was establishing a process to train new members of staff in the approach:

“That’s really what my intention is, to almost ... repeat the [training] process again every two to three years, so that we pick up our new staff and go back to the beginning.” (Headteacher/Special school/Transformational/S2)

Other approaches described by staff as helping to develop and embed the changes in *transformational* schools included introducing a specific model of attachment and trauma awareness referred to in training, and using attachment and trauma as a lens in all staff training.

Positive journeys: Schools on a *positive* journey had made significant steps towards becoming attachment and trauma aware. However, compared with schools on *transformational* journeys, they were progressing more gradually, or still had some key work to do before they might be considered *transformational*.

Schools classified as *positive*, tended not to have progressed as far as *transformational* schools in exploring attachment and trauma aware working prior to receiving their training. This meant that *positive* schools tended to start their journey in a different place to *transformational* schools and so had further to travel, which would take more time. The interview data suggest that having a different starting point is the main explanation for why *positive* schools still had work to do before their journey could be considered *transformational*.

Other challenges referred to by staff as hindering their progress included, having a vacant senior leadership post, the national Covid-19 lockdown, and the workloads of staff in key roles (e.g. pastoral or senior roles). Examples of areas where *positive* schools required further work to embed and sustain attachment and trauma awareness include: incorporating the approach into

policy (e.g. behaviour policy); providing refresher training to staff; senior leadership providing a clearly articulated vision for the school; and ensuring training was cascaded to members of staff across the whole school. A staff member in one school acknowledged that more work was needed to bring all staff on board and to ensure a consistent approach to working with pupils:

“Ultimately, everybody wants to say what’s the best for the children, but not everybody does it in the same way. And I think that’s been quite difficult in getting every member of staff to do the same, so we have a consistent approach. And that’s really hard. And especially, I think, the lunchtime supervisors and some of our [teaching assistants], it’s taken a while to get there.” (Pastoral staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

Mixed journeys: Schools on a *mixed* journey had taken steps to implement the approach, but had encountered one or more challenges that appeared to significantly hinder or stall progress. Examples of challenges described by staff include a need for both increased efforts to drive the attachment and trauma awareness agenda across the whole school, and greater clarity of messaging to staff on how to incorporate the approach into everyday practice. The emergence of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdown was described as a particular factor stalling plans to implement an attachment and trauma aware approach in some *mixed* schools:

“I think it’s been quite difficult to focus on it with all that’s happening in the world and remote learning, so I would say [the training] has not been at the forefront of my mind at the moment.” (Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S2)

Two case study schools classified as *mixed*, included in the in-depth data analysis, described being affected by Covid-19 as they had not been able to start embedding their

training school-wide before lockdown began. However, these schools did not receive their training any closer to the start of the national Covid-19 lockdown than other schools. This suggests that Covid-19 may not have been the sole reason for a stalled journey, but that other issues - such as those mentioned above – combined with the Covid-19 restrictions may have diverted these schools. A third *mixed* school was progressing well on its journey to becoming attachment and trauma aware when the first round of staff interviews was completed, but their journey changed direction as a result of strategic decision taken within the multi-academy trust of which they were part.

4.2 Staff awareness and understanding of attachment and trauma

Staff interviews across all eight case study schools suggest that staff felt that their awareness and understanding of attachment and trauma had increased following training. Individual staff members had different starting points in terms of their awareness and understanding of attachment and trauma, yet still described training as beneficial at some level - reinforcing existing knowledge, confirming approaches used intuitively until that point, or introducing a new way of thinking and working. Training gave meaning to practices that were already in place and helped to change perspectives of these practices within the schools:

"The training has given a narrative to us, to help change people's perspectives, it's given us another voice and a structure and the scientific information." (Headteacher/Special school/Transformational/S2)

Overall, staff in *transformational* schools had a good understanding of attachment and trauma prior to the training sessions but the training helped to cement that knowledge. Staff in *positive* schools also reported a good

understanding of attachment and trauma, with some staff having prior knowledge. All staff interviewed in the *positive* schools felt that the training was useful and added to knowledge they might have already had.

The majority of staff interviewed had a positive overall view of the training. Teachers and teaching assistants responded well to new knowledge about attachment and trauma, especially when it was linked to the neurobiological evidence:

"To understand when you see a child lose control or become upset or angry about something, exactly what's going on, and somehow understanding the science of it helps you to rationalise things a bit more, and make it less emotional." (Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S1)

There were a small number of staff who were not entirely resistant to the approach, but expressed reservations following the training. A teacher in one *mixed* school found the training sessions a little repetitive. Another in one of the wider 26 case study schools on a *mixed* journey was concerned that the approach was being presented as a 'silver bullet' in training by linking every behaviour to attachment, although still found the training useful. Concentrating during 'twilight' sessions at the end of the school day could be challenging. Where the training did not include time for discussion with colleagues about how the learning could be applied in their own schools, staff reported wanting this opportunity. Staff also thought that being given case study examples of approaches in practice would have been beneficial:

"It would have been more useful to see case studies. Like, 'This child has this background. This is what we put in place for them.' So, we didn't see much of that. We saw a lot of the science." (Teaching staff/All through/Mixed/S1)

Following training, almost all staff interviewed reflected on the reasons behind pupils' behaviours and also on their relationships with pupils. Staff often felt that pupils were communicating their needs through their behaviour and there was acknowledgement that every child is different. There was a readiness to be more understanding and a realisation, as described by a member of pastoral staff from one of the *transformational* schools in S2, that rather than "attention seeking behaviour" it is more "attachment seeking behaviour". Even very experienced staff reported learning something new:

"It's amazing, isn't it, that it's after twenty years of teaching. And I've always thought of myself as one who always thinks of the child and thinks of the antecedents of why they've come to school. But I think that specific training has enlightened me in a whole different way." (Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S2)

Staff viewed learning about attachment and trauma awareness as an ongoing journey reinforced through practice, rather than as a single learning experience. Similarly, staff acknowledged that the approach would not bring an immediate impact:

"I think the biggest thing for me is not expecting change just like that. They're not just going to turn around tomorrow and be stand-up citizens and never make a mistake, but I feel like each time something happens with some children we're making progress each time. But it's about not expecting too much too soon, definitely." (Teaching staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

4.3 Introduction of new everyday practices

Following training, all schools either adapted existing routines and practices, or implemented new ones, grounded in

attachment and trauma awareness. The changes made were dependent on where schools were in their attachment and trauma journeys at the time of training. For schools in the *transformational* or *positive* typologies, training tended to be a catalyst for further developing existing pockets of good practice. For *mixed* schools, training provided the impetus to introduce new strategies.

The main changes to routines concerned the beginning of the school day, starting with the very first point of contact with pupils. Some changes were simple, yet effective such as teachers greeting each pupil at the door in the mornings. Staff reported changes to practice that specifically incorporated training content, for example, using strategies to assist pupils to better regulate their emotions. School staff were mindful of building good relationships through positive interaction and also helping pupils to recognise and regulate emotions in preparation for the school day:

"We do emotional zones in the morning, so they tell us every morning how they're feeling, why they're feeling like that, is there anything that we can do and so we have a 'zone regulation board' which has really helped, and just for them to open up a little bit more and they all say how they're feeling. And some mornings it is, they're in the red and they do feel anxious or they're tired, and we talk through it and I think that helps an awful lot as well having that." (Teaching staff/Primary/Transformational/S2)

Examples of new provision developed by schools following training included a *transformational* secondary school that created a new learning support advisory teacher role within their federation with specific responsibility to promote attachment and trauma awareness. Other new strategies included a weekly wellbeing group for vulnerable pupils led by a headteacher and

intended to boost confidence and self-esteem, and extended provision for families.

Development of new practice and strategies in the schools classified as *mixed* tended to be the result of individual staff members making changes, as opposed to a school-wide strategy. In one *mixed* primary school, a class teacher described subtle ways of supporting vulnerable pupils without singling them out, for example by having spare PE kit, washing uniform, offering fruit at snack time to all. This reflects *mixed* schools being at a less advanced stage in their journey to becoming attachment and trauma aware when S2 data were collected.

Rather than the transition to becoming attachment and trauma aware involving entirely new ways of working, staff described taking stock of what they were already doing and building on existing good practice. They often reported expanding or amalgamating existing approaches following training to consolidate a whole-school approach to attachment and trauma awareness:

“We’re doing lots more in terms of exploring more physical activity, outdoors learning and kind of linking up what we’ve learnt about attachment and trauma with what we’re still learning about mental health and wellbeing. So we’re kind of just pulling all those threads together.” (Headteacher/ Special school/Transformational/S2)

4.4 Changes to behaviour and classroom management processes

A key change to practice centred on supporting pupils in moments of challenging behaviour, reflecting the training which re-framed how challenging behaviour was viewed. Following training, multiple staff from schools across all journey types referred to seeing behaviour as a form of communication and took time to consider its antecedents.

This helped staff feel more confident and led to a reduction in punitive reactions:

“No more of the naming and shaming in terms of names on the board for children who’ve missed playtime, or minutes that they’ve lost due to whatever issues.” (Headteacher/ Primary/Positive/S2)

To further develop a relational approach to managing challenging behaviour, two of the case study secondary schools (one transformational and one *positive*) began using restorative approaches to resolve conflict between pupils. Staff perceived a restorative approach as helping pupils understand the impact of their behaviours and helping to rebuild relationships:

“We’ve been using ... co-agreed behaviour contracts, which are basically the two students coming together that have had a particular falling out ... and they decide on a blueprint for moving forward ... And I’ve got to be honest, they’ve been really, really successful in, so far, difficult cases because there’s been ownership and empowerment on the student.” (Assistant Headteacher/ Secondary/Transformational/S2)

4.5 Changes to the school environment

Changes to the environment involved changes to the physical space and its use, and changes to the overall atmosphere in schools. In the S1 interviews following training, schools referred to existing spaces outside of the classroom that were used to support pupils. These spaces varied from small snugs and niches around the school to staffed rooms set aside for pupils needing some time out of the classroom environment.

By S2, most schools had developed the set-up and use of the rooms considerably. The intention for these rooms was to facilitate de-escalation and to enable pupils to regulate

their emotions. Often this was through ‘sensory’ decoration and furniture, but also involved trained staff in the rooms who could receive and support pupils to regulate their emotions. Some schools provided smaller, tent-like spaces for individual use that were set up to aid pupils. Importantly, the various calming spaces were not used as a ‘punishment’ where pupils were ‘sent’, but were provided as an option for them to use:

“It’s an enclosed space that they can go and sit in. There’s lighting in there. It’s on an individual use, so there are some children that will just go and sit in there for a couple of minutes, gather their thoughts, and then they’ll come back out and feel ready to carry on.”

(Headteacher/Primary/Positive/S2)

Staff in schools on *mixed* journeys tended to describe changes to the physical environment that were classroom based, whereas staff in *positive* and *transformational* schools described introducing spaces for the whole school requiring greater resource (e.g. staffed rooms or areas where pupils could take some time away from the classroom). Despite positive views of pupils being able to take time out of the classroom, a staff member at a *mixed* school felt there was a need to balance this type of relational approach with a focus on attainment:

“If they’re not in lessons they’re not going to be learning, they’re not going to be making progress, which is what we, at the end of the day, are being assessed on.” (Teaching staff/All through/Mixed/S1)

In parallel to the use of physical spaces to aid emotional regulation, schools provided more subtle methods of keeping the management of emotions at the forefront of pupils’ (and staff members’) minds such as wall displays to help pupils understand emotions. Schools also provided individualised resources and strategies to support children with day-to-day engagement in school:

“We’ve tried to keep very much set routines in the classroom with things like visual timetables, either whole class or for individuals. Just so that, they’re aware of any changes, they know what’s going to happen; they’re not worried about what’s coming next, or what’s later in the day.” (Pastoral staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

School staff applied what they learnt from the training by responding to pupils and situations in a more considered way, resulting in a calmer atmosphere:

“Actually, it was almost like [teachers] took a step back and thought about it and then approached the child ... more calmly, you know, as per the training that we’ve all been given.” (Ancillary staff/Secondary/Transformational/S2)

“When I came back [after a period of leave], walking through a corridor, I wouldn’t be able to walk through a corridor without somebody out being upset or some kind of commotion going on in the corridor. But actually, it’s really calm and quiet. A lot of children I’ve noticed have changed, and I think it’s they’re enjoying being back at school.” (Pastoral staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

4.6 Language used with and about pupils

Data from the S1 interviews revealed an emerging understanding of the practical application of the training especially in relation to language used. By adapting language to reflect a respectfully reciprocal relationship, staff often saw rapid results. This may have helped to develop staff confidence in the approach, to try other strategies and also ‘spread the word’ among more resistant colleagues.

By S2, about a year after the initial interviews, most references to language change focused on a change of general approach, likely as a

direct result of the training, that was grounded in a relational perspective. Emphasis was on empathy, patience and understanding: a sense of working *with* the pupils to better communicate their feelings and ultimately understand their immediate needs. There was some indication at S2, that better use of language was becoming embedded in staff thinking, as well as doing:

“I feel as a culture in school, it’s developed that the vast majority of staff understand the importance of the way in which we speak to children and manage children positively.”

(Headteacher/Primary/Positive/S2)

However, at S2 there was a further reminder that although change was occurring, it would be gradual, particularly with the disruption of Covid-19:

“So, I think there’s less child deficit comments, however, there are still pockets, and there will be because our impact of the programme has been massively interrupted and it takes time, and it’s not – so it’s definitely not an overnight thing and the culture – to change culture takes a long time.”

(Pastoral staff/Primary/Mixed/S2)

Following attachment and trauma awareness training, better understanding of behaviour as communication led to staff adapting their use of language and approach to help unlock underlying messages that pupils were struggling to convey. Practical strategies ranged from using less confrontational question stems to initiate conversation, to physical resources aimed at facilitating an emotional/relational approach. This approach also permeated how staff talked about pupils when discussing strategies in staff and planning meetings – ultimately leading to a more respectful ethos in the school.

4.7 Staff confidence

Unsurprisingly, confidence among staff varied across schools and depending where schools were on their journeys. Staff in *mixed* schools, for example, reported some confidence in working with pupils with attachment and trauma issues. They were aware that they needed to build up their knowledge, but felt supported by colleagues on this journey:

“I’d say I don’t feel particularly confident at the moment, because obviously with the training just having happened, I’d like to have a bit more guidance, probably, about exactly what to do.”

(Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S1)

Those who already had some experience of working with pupils in a relational way (e.g. in *transformational schools*) reported that they already felt confident working with pupils with attachment and trauma issues. Staff felt supported and the training contributed to this confidence. Having a shared and consistent school-wide approach helped staff to feel more confident and able to try new approaches to support pupils.

“So, a teacher at [transformational school], she’s been struggling with this child with challenging behaviours. We put in, for that afternoon, an intervention with Lego Express, and some nurture time on a one to one and we decided what would be good is for the HLTA to cover the class. The class teacher could have that nurture time with this child to actually build up that relationship because she’s there in the class all the time ... That didn’t come from me. She said, ‘I’ve been thinking, I think, you know, linked to the attachment and where he’s at, at the moment, it would be good for me to...’ and I said, ‘Fab, yeah.’”

(Pastoral staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

The training gave staff the confidence to ask for help if they needed it, both on a professional and personal level. However, increased confidence empowered some staff to deal with difficult situations with less reliance on senior or specialist colleagues, (e.g. SENCOs), which in turn boosted morale. One headteacher described how senior staff were also actively supporting colleagues to increase their confidence in challenging situations:

“[Senior leadership] decided to take a different tack. And so, if we were being called to support with behaviour, we wouldn’t remove the child necessarily; we would support the adult in supporting the behaviour.”
(Headteacher/Primary/Positive/S2)

“Staff are more confident now in having conversations with children and are more positive with me. Like calling up to me and saying, ‘Oh, I had a conversation with this child,’ rather than, ‘Can you take this child?’ Then, they’re getting more confident in doing that bit first.” (Pastoral staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

Despite the majority of staff interviewed describing an increased sense of confidence in working in an attachment and trauma aware way, many staff still wanted to revisit training so that things did not ‘slip’ and the majority felt there was still a lot to learn: *“I would see that as a recognition of how big the issue is, and the time it takes”* (Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/Positive/S2). Also, acknowledging that staff might not always get it right, and were not expected to implement attachment and trauma aware working perfectly all of the time, allowed them to feel confident in their approach:

“We only have to do it 60% of the time, that’s what the [attachment and trauma training provider] said, so we’re allowed

to have those times when you’re just like, I can’t right now. ‘You just need to put your shoes on and we’re not going to discuss how we feel about putting our shoes on’, or whatever it is.”
(Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S1)

4.8 Impact on staff wellbeing

Staff interviews suggest that the training had a positive impact on staff wellbeing. Awareness of attachment and trauma increased staff awareness of their own emotions and allowed them to reflect on their own history and past experiences. Staff acknowledged that working with vulnerable pupils could be draining and impacted staff emotionally, but changes in the way that teachers and teaching assistants worked together, including creating opportunities for debriefs were noted as helping staff to manage the emotional load:

“And, we do debriefs as well afterwards [...] When you’re talking about children who are in care and on the verge of care, the things that you hear sometimes can be difficult to even comprehend that a child has been in those sorts of situations and circumstances.” (Headteacher/Primary/Transformational/S1)

A calmer school environment resulting from a more nurturing and consistent approach with pupils was also thought to improve staff wellbeing. One positive school reported using the techniques learnt in training to support staff as well as pupils:

“Amongst all the SEMH⁵ stuff we’re doing, we’re also looking at staff wellbeing and again, as I said, this sort of approach of... ‘Yeah, that child’s not doing what everyone else is doing but it’s not your fault’, works to help

⁵ Social emotional and mental health (SEMH)

towards that staff wellbeing.”
(Pastoral staff/Primary/Positive/S1)

4.9 Changes to relationships (with pupils, colleagues and parents)

Changes to relationships with pupils, colleagues and parents did not differ noticeably according to the journey that a school was on, with changes reported across all school types. Following attachment and trauma awareness training, staff emphasised the importance of developing relationships with pupils based on consistency and trust. Staff spoke about the impact that these relationships had on practices within the school: *“It allows [pupils] to make mistakes in a safe and supportive way. And we’re accepting of that, rather than just punishing”* (Teaching staff/Primary/Positive/S2). Some schools provided vulnerable pupils with a specific member of staff to act as their trusted adult:

“...and they can come to you when they feel uncomfortable. They can come and say, and they know that you’re going to do your best to help them in that tricky situation.” (Support staff/Special school/Transformational/S2)

Schools also recognised that children choose who they want to trust and confide in and allowed these relationships to develop. Providing all staff with attachment and trauma awareness training supported this and also opened up the possibility of being a pupil’s trusted adult to staff members who had not previously seen themselves in that role.

“This week I’ve got a cuddle out of her, because she doesn’t like to be touched. But she has cuddled me, so I know I’m getting there with her, and if she has a problem at lunchtime now, the teachers will come and get me. And I will just drop whatever I’m doing, get

someone to cover and come and find her. Some days I can’t, I know my limits with her, like yesterday she wouldn’t eat at all, but she spoke to me and we worked out the problem.”
(Support staff/Primary/Transformational/S1)

In terms of changing relationships between school staff, communication appeared to be improved across the majority of schools and staff felt supported by colleagues: *“So, the conversations are more open, and people are sharing good practice between each other, which I think is positive”* (Assistant Headteacher/Primary/Mixed/S2). It appeared that staff were sharing more pupil information where they worked with the same pupil, whilst maintaining appropriate levels of confidentiality. In addition, teaching staff at schools on all journey types felt there were more opportunities for discussion with specialist staff (e.g. SENCO) and most importantly, that the discussions formed an ongoing conversation driven by pupil need rather than attainment data. Discussions and transfer of knowledge has also been applied beyond the immediate school setting, in this example to feeder nurseries:

“[We are] making links with early years settings that feed into school to better understand children moving up earlier - focused questions on attachment and trauma awareness in contact with early years staff.” (Pastoral staff/Primary/Mixed/S1)

However, not everyone found that introducing attachment and trauma aware working created a more supportive environment for staff. Senior leadership in one *transformational* school acknowledged that the changes had not suited everyone and had resulted in some staff members who felt that too much pressure was being placed on them, leaving.

Staff across several schools identified engaging parents in attachment and trauma aware working as a future goal. Some schools had already begun this process, for example, at one primary school a SENCO held a weekly drop-in session for any parent to discuss their child's needs or raise queries. In the same school, strategies were developed to improve the opportunity for home-school communication including home-school diaries completed by parents and staff. Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns had also helped to begin strengthening relationships with parents:

“I think over lockdown it's funny, I felt I got closer to the parents because we had a lot of interaction via email and it was much more interaction than we might normally have. So, they were sort of, the parents got to know you and you got to know them.” (Teaching staff /Primary/Mixed/S2)

A minority of staff saw building relationships with parents as less of a priority, preferring instead to focus on supporting their pupils. In one case, a member of teaching staff referred to the possibility of parents being the cause of a pupil's difficulties and feeling conflicted:

“But I find it really hard when someone's being so hard on their child but causing their child to be in that level of distress. I'm always going to be on Team Kid, aren't I?” (Teaching staff /Primary/Mixed/S2)

4.10 Pupil experience

Pupil focus groups were carried out in person prior to the pandemic and online via Teams following lockdown. In all cases, a familiar teacher or support assistant was present alongside the researcher. Just as staff referred to a change in the atmosphere of schools following training, pupils noticed that schools felt calmer. Pupils also noticed

changes made to the physical environment designed to support their emotional understanding and regulation:

[Explaining 'regulation stations']

“They're, like, all over the school, and there are different colour zones for the feelings you have.” (Pupil/Primary/Positive/S2)

“There's different places, because I think there're all those signs around the school, where it tells you if you're sad or happy or angry or, like, maybe really mad, I think I've seen somewhere, I think I've seen some of them maybe on the wall in school. I saw one in the box thingy...and I think I saw one behind the lockers.” (Pupil/Primary/Positive/S2)

Importantly, pupils noticed how staff were calm when working with them in situations that could feel overwhelming:

Interviewer: “How do the staff help when you are angry or upset?”

Child: “They'll talk to you calmly. They won't talk to you, like, with aggression, or like a high voice. They'll just talk to you calmly.” (Pupil/Primary/Positive/S2)

“She [member of staff] basically just sits you down and she talks about the problem and what we could do to improve, take away the issue.” (Pupil/All through/Mixed/S2)

At both S1 and S2, pupils were able to identify who they could talk to in school if they were upset or something was wrong and also had a clear expectation of the response they would receive:

“If someone's mean to me, I just go and tell the teacher then the teacher comes and gets the people that have been mean to me, and then we talk about what they've done and said to me and

then we just make friends again."
(Pupil/Primary/Mixed/S1)

Section 4.4 referred to some schools that had adopted a restorative approach to resolving conflicts. Pupils viewed the staff using this approach as being understanding, evident in the following excerpts:

"Whenever you tell them [teachers] what's wrong, like, they get, like, the other person who is involved and, like, have a conversation to sort it out, and they're really understanding, like, they're not like, 'Oh, because of this you're in the wrong, you need to do this, as a punishment'. And so they're really understanding and help you resolve your situation." (Pupil/Primary/Mixed/S1)

"If they carry on being mean, then the teacher can ask them why, what they're doing again, and then the teachers can figure out how to stop it." (Pupil/Primary/Positive/S2)

Pupils across schools were also able to describe the various systems in place in the event of behaviour issues, including a staff member speaking to them, going to a calm area, taking time out of the classroom, going to work somewhere else in school. A constant theme, however, was the first step of staff talking with pupils to help them calm down.

4.11 Impact on behaviour, engagement and attendance

Although it was not possible to analyse data on attendance, progress, attainment and exclusions as planned due to Covid-19 disruption, staff in various roles across all eight case study schools gave their views on the impact of attachment and trauma awareness training on these issues.

Staff at three schools spanning all journey types described a decrease in behaviour incidents, which they linked to new attachment and trauma aware practice. A pastoral staff member in one school did note that behaviour incidents had increased for a small number of children due to Covid-19 lockdown and pupils' home circumstances, although the number of children involved in incidents across the whole school had decreased. Staff comments suggest that the decrease in incidents was down to a combination of staff using de-escalation techniques and also not reacting immediately to the behaviour:

"Because people are more aware that it's a communication. And they're more willing to listen rather than just to punish the behaviour that they're seeing. They're more willing to listen and understand why." (Teaching staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

Staff at all eight case study schools referred to improved levels of pupil engagement. One staff member in a *positive* school described a pupil who had gone from working full-time out of class to being in class over 50% of the time with one to one support. The staff member linked this to the class teacher greeting the pupil every day and spending time in class building up their relationship. A member of teaching staff at a *mixed* school described increased engagement after using the training to work jointly with parents in supporting a pupil who had previously experienced trauma:

"And he's now blossoming – I'm not saying he's fixed, we still have moments, but he has really shifted. And his approach to school and learning – like I wrote with him the other day and we were writing, and he was keen."
(Teaching staff/Primary/ Mixed/S2)

Staff identified a number of reasons for improved engagement, which they linked to working in an attachment and trauma

informed way. Staff suggested they were better able to address pupils' needs because the training had increased their awareness of attachment and trauma. Changes to the physical school environment and the way that staff interacted with pupils were viewed as helping pupils see classrooms as safe places with supportive staff. A school-wide focus on attachment and trauma awareness was thought to give pupils confidence that staff would be consistent in their approach. One member of pastoral staff described colleagues being more aware of the importance of creating 'optimal learning conditions':

“Staff are more aware now that those interventions need to take as much a priority as the Maths and English interventions. For that reason, if they're not calm, if they're not emotionally regulated, it doesn't matter how much you teach them Maths and English. They're not going to remember it, they're not going to be interested, it's not going to go in.” (Pastoral staff /Primary/Positive/S2)

Although staff talked about improved pupil engagement, they did not refer explicitly to changes in levels of attainment. It may have been too soon to see evidence of this, especially given the impact of Covid-19 on pupil progress and testing. Similarly, staff in only one of the eight case study schools described seeing an increase in attendance. This is also likely to have been obscured by Covid-19 and the need for remote learning. Staff in two primary schools (one *positive* and one *transformational*) could not recall the last time an exclusion occurred. There was no indication from the case study data of whether exclusion rates had changed specifically as a result of the focus on attachment and trauma aware practice.

5. Factors supporting or hindering schools' journeys

This section considers factors that the data suggest support or hinder schools on their journey to becoming attachment and trauma aware. Exploring these factors also helps us understand the different journeys taken by the case study schools towards attachment and trauma awareness – it helps to explain why these journeys are neither uniform nor linear, but are based on a complex interplay of decisions and contextual factors.

5.1 Taking a whole-school approach

One of the core aims of the Timpson Programme was that training should benefit staff across the whole school, rather than focusing on a nucleus of staff in particular job roles, or with particular responsibilities. This was achieved to different degrees and in different ways across the schools. For many this involved having whole-school staff attend the initial training, with staff reflecting how this was important to support the approach becoming introduced in all areas of the school. A number of schools in the Programme set up core working groups with the intention that staff in various roles would 'champion' the approach day to day through their practice. One case study school established a group with a mix of senior leaders, teachers and support staff. This included staff who felt strongly aligned to the relational approach, and those who felt less so. Occasionally this champions group received additional external training then re-delivered it to groups of 12-15 members of the remaining staff body. This upskilled a core group of staff, and by having them deliver training to colleagues, it was hoped would enhance its credibility and encourage other staff across the school to engage:

“[The purpose of the champions group was to] try and make them more aware, and give them some empowerment

following their initial training. And I have to say, following their initial training they were all very enthusiastic about it. ...

So, it proved quite powerful for them to then become the trainers and cascade that knowledge to the rest of the staff.”

(Teaching staff/Secondary/
Transformational/S2)

One of the schools focused on emotion coaching, as one particular application of the attachment and trauma aware approach. Through regular staff meetings and additional in-house twilight training, the principles and application of emotion coaching were shared. Staff felt that having a clear consistent message about a single practical approach helped promote whole-school uptake:

“I just think the training made a lot explicit and built the toolkit to have the language to talk about the things to others, and to children, that would’ve been a gap otherwise.”

(Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/
Positive/S2)

5.2 Staff buy-in or receptiveness

Creating change in schools can be complex due to their structures and the number of staff members who need to be brought along on the development journey. Levels of staff receptiveness or “buy-in” affected the extent to which an attachment and trauma aware approach was adopted across schools.

Almost all case study schools, regardless of journey type, identified increasing staff buy-in as a priority. Even schools whose journey towards attachment and trauma awareness had been *transformational* reported a need for ongoing work to develop staff openness, understanding and support for the approach. It was certainly not the case that all staff in *transformational* or *positive* schools were on board with the approach:

“[Attachment and trauma awareness] is now far better embedded with most staff, and you know, I’m not going to put rose tinted glasses on and say it’s everybody, because you’ve always got those few that are harder to reach and we’ve got to keep working hard and getting the right messages across.”

(Headteacher/Primary/Transformational
/S2)

Several staff perceived longer-serving colleagues as being more resistant to changing their practice to become more attachment and trauma aware, compared with staff who were newer to schools or new to their roles. A lack of alignment between existing school policies and changing practice was also seen as a potential barrier to staff buy in:

“Just a couple of our more experienced teaching assistants – not all of our most experienced ones – but some of them that are still slightly caught in the, ‘Well, there needs to be a consequence.’”

(Pastoral staff/Special school/
Transformational/S2)

“For the last three or four years we’ve been [focused on] behaviour systems, and then since the last year or two with the relational approach coming in, it has created the conflict [between approach and policy] I mentioned earlier. And, I don’t think we’re there yet in terms of sorting it out. There’s some work to do still.” (Teaching staff/All through/Mixed/
S1)

Early adopters of the approach in schools were important in raising levels of buy-in, as their positive early experiences encouraged them to continue working in an attachment and trauma aware way. These early adopters were present in all types of school, not only those on *transformational* or *positive* journeys, and became role models for their less convinced colleagues:

“I think once you’ve tried something and it’s worked then you then use it more, and you build on that.” (Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S2)

“Those [staff] that took it and ran with it straight away have made those relationships, and now other staff can see those [relationships] are blossoming.” (Teaching staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

5.3 Providing effective leadership

Multiple staff from case study schools acknowledged the role of effective leadership in implementing an attachment and trauma aware approach. Analysis of data across the eight case study schools suggests that those schools classified as *transformational* or *positive* had particularly strong and decisive leadership in relation to attachment and trauma awareness. Senior leadership in these schools recognised that it was their strategic and financial decision making that would incorporate the approach into school life. It signalled to staff, pupils and the wider school community that attachment and trauma awareness was a strategic priority for the school:

“Maybe I’m being naïve, but no, I can’t see anything that’s going to deter [implementation], because of the exec leadership team lead, and so that filters down to lead teachers, to staff, to teaching assistants, etc. So, no, because we’ve got a strong team at the top.” (Pastoral staff/Primary/Transformational/S1)

“It only works because you’ve got to be 100% behind it and you’ve got to build it structurally into your school.” (Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/Positive/S1)

Senior leadership promoted attachment and trauma awareness at a strategic level in

different ways. Staff in two case study schools (*transformational/positive*) described attachment and trauma awareness being incorporated into their school development plan. One of these schools included attachment and trauma as one of a limited number of professional learning topics for the year, with the majority of staff opting for an individual attachment and trauma awareness linked performance target.

The data show effective communication between senior leadership teams and the wider staff to be critical. In addition to providing clear messaging to staff about the role of attachment and trauma awareness in schools, it was important to establish systems for sharing information about individual pupils, to enable staff to provide appropriate support. Staff, particularly in schools classified as *transformational* or *positive*, spoke of senior leadership providing constant messaging to reinforce the approach and provide support:

“I think that keeping reminding people about the importance and the principles behind emotion coaching, and remind of the concrete things they should be saying and doing, I think that is, it’s being drummed in and reinforced.” (Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/Positive/S2)

One headteacher of a *transformational* school described their senior leadership team as feeling able to approach staff who were not working in an attachment and trauma informed way:

“You know, where they’re reverting back to old ways of doing things, we haven’t been afraid to actually sit them down and say, ‘How are you feeling? Why is it that you’re doing X, Y, Z? Because you know that’s not our policy anymore, that’s how we used to do things. What can we do to support you?’” (Headteacher/Primary/Transformational/S2)

Effective leadership involved setting an example by being approachable and supportive of staff: *“We were able to go and say honestly how we felt, how it was going”* (Teaching staff/Special school/Transformational/S2). Emotion coaching⁶ and modelling by senior leadership were also viewed as effective approaches:

“Staff then felt empowered that ‘I’ve got a fall back if I need it. I have got an SLT⁷ by my side, but actually, I’ve got this” (Headteacher/Primary/Positive/S2)

There were examples of positive leadership in schools on *mixed* journeys. For example, the senior leadership at one school resolved logistical challenges preventing an attachment and trauma awareness working group from meeting:

“When I took it back to SLT, they decided to cover people within school hours so that we could meet and that’s what needs to happen to make sure that we can meet and discuss things, and move it forward.” (Pastoral staff/Primary/Mixed/S2)

However, compared to the schools on *transformational* or *positive* journeys, staff in schools on *mixed* journeys identified significant challenges around leadership of the Programme. Several staff at one *mixed* school wanted their senior leadership to work more cohesively as a team to lead the Programme:

“I think our senior management team need to put in place a plan of action. So, we have to have a plan, we have to have expectations, it has to be disseminated to everyone, and we need to have regular check-ins and feedback

sessions. That would be my hope.”
(Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S1)

There was relatively little disagreement between staff based in the same school about their experience of introducing attachment and trauma aware practice – the views of different staff groups within schools tended to align. One area where some disagreement did exist between different staff groups linked back to effective leadership, namely, where senior leaders described proactive steps being taken to implement the approach, but other members of staff thought that less was happening. During S1 interviews at a *mixed* school, senior leadership talked about a ‘continuous exchange’ of ideas with staff about how to support pupils following training, whereas teaching staff felt this had not happened.

5.4 Changes to policy

There appeared to be some alignment between how far schools had progressed in their journeys to becoming attachment and trauma aware and the extent to which they had incorporated attachment and trauma awareness into school policies. This supports an assumption that aligning school policy and practice helps staff to understand the approach they are expected to take. Aligning policy and practice legitimised the new approach and also stimulated new practice.

New behaviour policies had been introduced in two *transformational* schools, and staff in one of these schools talked about how the approach influenced homework policy as well, which they described as having had a positive effect on pupils’ attendance. As mentioned earlier, some *transformational* schools renamed their behaviour policies as ‘relationship’ or ‘relational’ policies to reflect

⁶ A set of linguistic tools that focus on helping the young person to recognise, understand and regulate their emotions, without endorsing the negative behaviours that may derive from them – e.g. see Gus, L. *et al.* (2017) The introduction of

emotion coaching as a whole school approach in a primary specialist social emotional and mental health setting: positive outcomes for all, *Open Family Studies Journal*, 9(1): 95-110.

⁷ Senior leadership team.

the ethos of the school. At S1, another *transformational* school described adding a cover statement to their behaviour policy explaining the attachment and trauma aware approach being introduced. Staff suggested that this helped create a school-wide approach to attachment and trauma:

"[Attachment and trauma awareness has been] put into our behaviour policy now as well, there [is] lots about attachment, so everybody is on the same board, it's working across the school ... it is really good that we're all working to one objective really."

(Teaching staff/Primary/
Transformational/S2)

At the time of S2 interviews, the two schools classified as *positive* were completing a final review of a new behaviour policy, or had started to implement a new policy. One of these schools described involving parents and carers in the review and revisions of the new policy, before it was shared with the wider school community.

In the *mixed* schools, revisions to behaviour policies varied. One school had amended the wording of its policy to better reflect the nurturing approach being adopted. Another *mixed* school was planning how they might amend their existing policy, initially through 'light touch' changes to be followed by the creation of a staff working party to continue the work.

5.5 Competing priorities and demands

Key to implementing an attachment and trauma aware approach was being able to successfully reconcile competing demands and priorities. This challenge was not limited to staff in schools on *mixed* journeys, but was experienced to some extent by staff across all types of school. Several staff in both primary and secondary schools referred to the challenge of finding a balance in practice

between their focus on attainment and wellbeing:

"Certain people have got different agendas, so, for example, Year 6 teachers, rightly or wrongly, their primary agenda most of the time is wrapped around producing positive SATs results, and that can quite often push out, for me, other important factors about looking after children holistically." (Pastoral staff/Primary/
Mixed/S1)

However, one assistant headteacher in a secondary school on a *positive* journey saw a positive relationship between attachment and trauma awareness and attainment - a view echoed by staff in some of the wider case study sample of 26 schools:

"In this day and age, there's so many school priorities, but I feel, well, if you get attachment and trauma right, or meeting the needs of these students right, and you're doing that in a way that will benefit all students, and the impact that will have on behaviour, engagement and motivation is so huge, that why wouldn't you?" (Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/Positive/S1)

"I remember somebody training me when I was [newly-qualified], talking about throwing paint at something and the paint just washing off. If they're not ready, they won't soak it in. And yeah, I think they've got to feel welcomed, understood, known, before they can begin to take on anything." (Teaching staff/
Primary/Mixed/S1)

Interviews with staff also revealed the challenge felt by some teaching staff in simultaneously supporting individual children in an attachment and trauma aware way and teaching the whole class, or dealing with other elements of their workload:

“Obviously we want to cater to every child, but when you’ve got a class of 30 sat in front of you, it is very difficult to manage that, to give that attention to that student who needs that positive reinforcement all the time, and to make sure that you check on the child that’s so quiet at the back.” (Teaching staff/Secondary/Positive/S1)

Again, the school leadership team has a central role in resolving the competing priorities and demands identified by staff. This will involve clearly communicating the role of attachment and trauma aware practice to staff and helping staff to manage the expectations they may place on themselves. As mentioned earlier, one staff member recalled a message from the training that not always managing to work in an attachment and trauma informed way was not a failure.

In terms of prioritising attachment and trauma awareness, a senior leader suggested that ultimately, schools needed there to be a greater impetus to create change:

“I think that until, for example, Ofsted include a measure to do with [attachment and trauma awareness] very specifically in the inspection framework, I think most schools wouldn’t do much differently. Which is really sad, and it sounds quite cynical, but I think unfortunately that is what drives change in school, and that’s what drives the timetabling and the curriculum and the emotional curriculum.” (Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/Positive/S2)

5.6 Revisiting and reinforcing the training

In the eight case study schools, the pattern of follow-up training again broadly aligned with where schools were on their journey. Staff in schools categorised as *transformational* were

receiving ongoing refresher sessions and a *positive* school reported that a core group received follow-up training sessions. These follow-up sessions included auditing changes made as a result of the training. Staff in the three *mixed* schools had not received follow-up training at S2, although for at least one of these schools, this was most likely due to Covid-19 creating new challenges and changing immediate priorities.

Staff in all schools had an appetite for and expected an opportunity to revisit and reinforce their initial training, although there was acknowledgement that finding time could be a challenge. Two distinct benefits of revisiting and reinforcing the training emerged from the data. Firstly, informing staff how attachment and trauma awareness was to be incorporated into practice school-wide and, secondly, helping staff retain what they learnt during training and encouraging them to incorporate it into practice:

“So, what I want to do is, in the future, embed it into our INSET⁸ days that we have, ensuring that all staff are present for the training, not just the teachers ... [What] I definitely want to ensure, is that we have INSET training with the whole staff, so everyone’s singing from the same hymn sheet.” (Assistant Headteacher/Primary/Mixed/S1)

“Asking staff maybe to [provide] feedback on how things are going, so that you’ve got that sense of accountability, rather than just going to the training, and then you can have it in mind for a few weeks, but then you can at times forget. And so some sense of accountability or reporting back could help in that way to maintain that focus.” (Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S1)

Three schools on *transformational* and *positive* journeys had also taken steps to ensure that new members of staff received

⁸ In-service training days.

training and understood where attachment and trauma awareness sat within the school ethos. One *transformational* school had developed an induction package for new staff, while senior leaders in one of the *positive* schools planned to flag up the school's approach as part of the staff recruitment process:

"I've wanted to be clear from the off before I appoint anyone that this is what we do, this is what we're about and as part of the next steps, in addition to what I've already said, I can see myself making it explicit at any interview process that if you come into our school, into our federation, 'This is our approach, this is how we work.'"
(Headteacher/Primary/Positive/S1)

5.7 Embedding attachment and trauma awareness in the long-term

Becoming attachment and trauma aware was recognised as a long-term development for schools, requiring a structured approach to planning and reviewing progress: *"[a] strategic plan of future training, and monitoring and evaluation, observations, children's feedback would be part of that"*
(Pastoral staff/Primary/Mixed/S1).

Schools on *transformational* journeys tended to be most advanced in their progress, although staff in *positive* and *mixed* schools also described plans to embed attachment and trauma awareness. School staff identified a range of planned approaches to incorporate attachment and trauma awareness into school life including three schools (two *transformational* and one *mixed*) incorporating a specific focus on emotional wellbeing into their school development plans. A *mixed* school planned to incorporate learning from the training into a review of its behaviour policy.

For staff across multiple schools, educating parents and families about attachment and trauma awareness formed a natural next step in embedding the approach. Some schools were beginning to think about specific ways of achieving this, for example, through parent workshops. However, there was recognition that this could be a potentially sensitive subject for parents, requiring appropriate training for staff:

"The one thing that a couple of us did comment on at the time was: 'We're learning all this, but parents aren't.'"
(Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S1)

In addition to planning how to embed the approach within schools, staff also acknowledged the potential impact of an attachment and trauma aware approach on pupils:

"I think it's recognising our impact is beyond just the GCSE, and that something we do now might only be appreciated ten, fifteen years down the line, but it doesn't mean we're not having impact. And I think that's quite important for staff to explicitly hear sometimes." (Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/Positive/S2)

"Sometimes I refer to it as magic. I can do magic. I can transform things, I can ... And I know that I'm not just transforming things in that moment, I'm transforming things for those children. They might not remember me in six months' time, in five years' time, in twenty years' time, that doesn't matter. But I know that those relationships will leave imprints on them that will change the way that they are in the world, and that it really is – I mean, we all come into teaching to make a difference, and teaching children to read and write makes a really big difference, but I think that that relational work is equally as important, and ... that"

care is equally as important."
(Teaching staff/All through/Mixed/S2)

6. Impact of Covid-19

The effect of the national Covid-19 lockdown on the impact and implementation of learning from the training was explored with schools in the S2 interviews. We have purposefully chosen to separately report the impact of Covid-19; how it has affected schools' plans and how schools used an attachment and trauma aware approach to support pupils, families and colleagues during this time.

6.1 A barrier to planned implementation

Staff described lockdown as challenging, but accepted the necessary shift in ways of working to protect the health of pupils and staff. At S2, all but one of the case study schools (except the one *mixed* school that had by that time stepped back from an attachment and trauma aware approach) reported similar changes and barriers to practice and implementation of attachment and trauma aware working. The national lockdown made it more difficult for schools to undertake further formal or in-house attachment and trauma awareness training, either to build on previous learning or as refresher training. Only staff in a small number of the wider sample of 26 case study schools reported completing further independent learning around attachment, mental health and wellbeing during lockdown (e.g. through online training providers such as Open University or Future Learn).

In addition to hindering ongoing training, areas previously designated as calm spaces in schools were no longer available due to the need for social distancing and 'bubbles' within classrooms. Instead, staff had to work creatively to give children space within the

classroom to manage difficult situations rather than moving them to a separate area.

Both of the *positive* schools reported that Covid-19 had an impact on the relationships between staff:

"We used to be able to sit in the staffroom together ... and it's really hard as a teacher to not have that, to not have – to feel quite isolated at times in your classroom." (Teaching staff/Secondary/Positive/S2)

One senior leader acknowledged the impact of the lack of informal and face-to-face support between colleagues: *"We now have stressed adults trying to support vulnerable pupils, and that is hard"* (Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/Positive/S2).

Overall, it was difficult for schools to embrace an attachment and trauma aware approach and to have the time and space to embed it into everyday practice during the pandemic:

"I would say, in honesty, as a school, we haven't progressed at the teacher and class level. There hasn't been that whole school moving forwards."
(Teaching staff/Primary/Mixed/S2)

Initiatives such as nurture groups, which had begun to show positive results for pupils, were paused until schools could return to some normality. Nevertheless, there were attempts to continue using techniques adopted earlier in the journey:

"Our ... support worker, she's doing emotional coaching with children and that's continued. We keep a two-metre distance, and we would be wearing a mask. But we are still seeing children that need to, because with everything that's gone on this year even more so, they need it more than ever." (Pastoral staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

As discussed in section 4.1 above, staff at some schools on *mixed* journeys described

Covid-19 as a particular barrier to becoming attachment and trauma aware. However, as all schools had to adjust to new ways of working in response to Covid-19, this suggests that it was the combination with other challenges (e.g. a need for clearer strategic leadership) that resulted in their journeys stalling or slowing down.

6.2 Focus on mental health and wellbeing

Despite the challenges caused by Covid-19 and the associated lockdown, staff acknowledged there had been unexpected consequences for some pupils resulting from the changes to schooling. For those who continued to come into school:

"We meet them every morning. There was about 40-odd, probably, this morning, and they've been spoilt, to some extent, for the first time in their lives. They've had adults' attention. It's been there every day, it's been consistent, it's been reliable all the way through, and you've seen them flourish." (Headteacher/Secondary/Transformational/S2)

Pupils who were home-schooled (and their parents) were supported by school staff, which helped to strengthen relationships with parents too. There was a specific reference to building bonds with looked after children and foster carers:

"I think a lot of the looked after children, during lockdown actually managed quite well, and their carers were quite good at keeping in touch with us. And I think the relationships with them probably strengthened because there was more time and more contact from school." (Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/Positive/S2)

Staff were more aware of mental health and wellbeing as a result of the pandemic and could link this back to their attachment and

trauma awareness training. They were able to focus more on their individual classes, due to limits on mixing groups:

"Actually, staff are getting more time with the children. Because they're in certain bubbles and not being able to mix and things, staff were getting those relationships with children and the [teaching assistants] are a bit more hands-on and stuff with taking more groups out of their bubble together." (Pastoral staff/Primary/Positive/S2)

However, it was difficult for school staff to focus on their own mental health and wellbeing during this period. Unable to take a proper break, they were left exhausted:

"When you're struggling with your own mental health, it's very difficult to deal with children who are relentless in their own mental health issues too. And so, I just feel school's a bit of a pressure cooker at the minute, and you never know which one's going to explode first." (Headteacher/Primary/Positive/S2)

6.3 Return to the classroom after lockdown

Staff described witnessing varying levels of pupil anxiety about returning to school after the lockdown periods. Schools recognised that some pupils were left feeling very anxious about returning and about Covid-19 itself, whilst others appeared more resilient than their peers. In light of this, teachers from *mixed*, *positive* and *transformational* schools reflected on how the training had helped them to support pupils on their return to the classroom.

The headteacher of a *transformational* school described staff applying principles of attachment and trauma awareness with returning pupils to promote a sense of safety, security and normality. One *mixed* primary school described spreading out assessments

to reduce pupils' stress and anxiety levels: *"We were trying to make it as much of a therapeutic and nurturing return to school as possible"* (Assistant Headteacher/Primary/Mixed/S2).

A school on a *positive* journey considered the impact of the language used with pupils returning to the classroom:

"And so, my language with the staff was, I said, 'We must not use the word "catch-up".' And that, I felt, was relevant for all students – students who are suffering with anxiety or mental health issues, or just worried." (Assistant Headteacher/Secondary/Positive/S2)

However, this was in contrast to one of the *mixed* schools, where the focus was described as being on attainment and less on the challenges to pupils' emotional well-being caused by Covid-19:

"But on the whole we haven't done anything to address the impact of the coronavirus because we're kind of focused on catching them up on all the work they've missed at the moment." (Teaching staff/All through/Mixed/S2)

7. Conclusion

7.1 Impact of the training on the school

The analysis of data from the eight case study schools shows that overall, staff receiving training and adopting an attachment and trauma aware approach felt this had a positive impact on schools. These findings support and build on those reported in our previous working papers.

Staff from case study schools felt they had benefitted from the training, either by acquiring new knowledge and understanding, or by reinforcing existing knowledge. Staff described a range of impacts following on from the training, including changes in

practice and the physical school environment; increased confidence with staff feeling empowered to implement attachment and trauma aware approaches, rather than their previous practice of deferring to senior or pastoral colleagues; a positive impact on staff wellbeing; and strengthening relationships with pupils and colleagues.

Importantly, staff – especially senior leaders – believed that these changes were leading to improvements for pupils. They were attending more, engaging more and learning more in a calmer and more supportive environment built on stronger relationships.

It is equally important to acknowledge the challenges experienced by schools adopting an attachment and trauma aware approach, although overall, staff acknowledged that it was worth pursuing:

"So, I feel that this, it's not an easy way, it's a hard way because it involves patience, [staff] hours, creative thinking, innovation, teamwork, rather than perhaps the more traditional route. Which is how these children would have been treated as 'naughty boys or girls' and they'd perhaps have been scared into submission and actually, all then you're doing is bottling up the problems for either the weekend, or later life." (Headteacher/Primary/Transformational/S1)

7.2 Factors in the journey to becoming attachment and trauma aware

A key tenet for inclusion in the Timpson Programme was a whole-school approach to promote consistency of practice and seed a school-wide ethos around attachment and trauma awareness. Ensuring all staff, including ancillary staff, received training, either directly or cascaded from colleagues, was a logistical challenge for senior

leadership teams faced with limited resources and staff time.

Staff identified effective leadership as the key to avoiding or resolving several obstacles to working in an attachment and trauma aware way. Effective leadership provided direction and momentum. Without leadership, staff had little sense of whether attachment and trauma awareness was a strategic priority for their school, how it aligned with school policies, or how staff were expected to implement it in practice. Without effective leadership, schools were reliant on individual staff incorporating parts of the training into practice – this led to a less consistent and joined-up approach across the school.

Other studies have suggested that key elements in effective school leadership include organisational confidence and a receptiveness to change⁹, as well as the school's capacity as a 'learning organisation' that can systematically assimilate and reproduce new thinking and approaches to support pupils' learning and outcomes¹⁰. While we did not explore these directly, we saw definite parallels in the journeys that we identified.

A lack of staff receptiveness or 'buy-in' could be a challenge and it was an ongoing process for senior leadership teams to foster and develop support for the approach. Even in *transformational* schools, there were pockets of staff, often described as longer-serving staff, who were resistant or hesitant about the approach. Of particular interest are the strategies employed by senior leadership teams to bring these staff on board, including using early adopters to model successful strategies with pupils and inviting reluctant

staff to sit on attachment and trauma staff working groups.

A small number of staff felt that the approach was difficult to reconcile with competing priorities and demands, for instance, reconciling the approach in practice with a focus on attainment. However, the approach was seen by other staff across the 26 case study schools as providing a foundation that better enabled pupils to regulate behaviours and engage in learning – both key precursors for attainment¹¹.

Follow-up sessions were identified by staff across all job roles as key to implementing and sustaining an attachment and trauma aware approach. These sessions provided an opportunity for senior leadership teams to set out their vision for this way of working, enabled staff to discuss strategies for use with individual children, and allowed for reflection on practice.

Overall, data from the 26 case study schools suggest three core elements underpinning the adoption of an attachment and trauma aware approach (see Figure 1 below) – initial training, effective leadership, and the opportunity for staff follow-up sessions, which includes inducting new staff in the approach:

- **Initial training** serves to increase or reinforce staff understanding of attachment and trauma aware working, equipping staff with the skills and confidence to use the approach.
- **Effective leadership** provides staff with a sense of direction and ensures that the necessary strategic decisions, plans and formal policies are in place to support the adoption of new practice. This new practice includes *micro-practice*, everyday practice internalised by individual staff

⁹ For example, Braun, A., M. Maguire and S. Ball (2010) Policy enactments in the UK secondary school: examining policy, practice and school positioning, *Journal of Education Policy*, 25(4): 547-560.

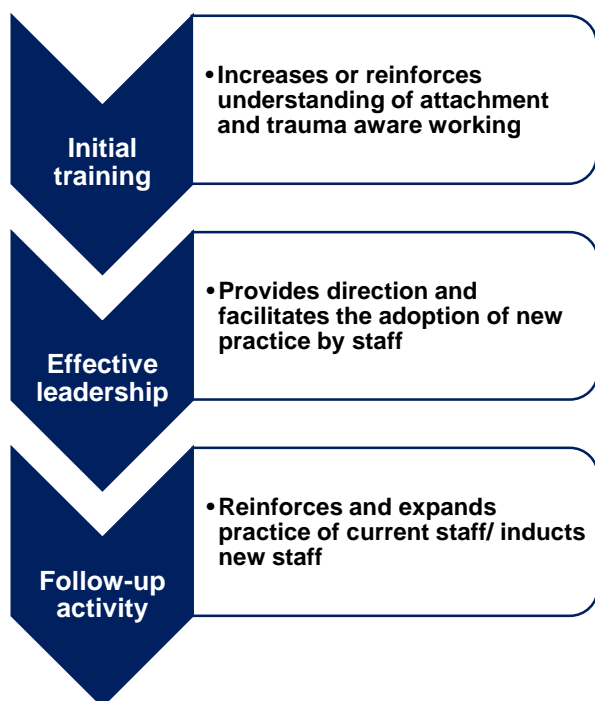
¹⁰ For example, Kools, M. and L. Stoll (2016) *What makes a school a learning organisation?* OECD Education Working Paper 137, Paris: OECD.

¹¹ For example, Graziano *et al.* (2007) The role of emotion regulation in children's early academic success, *Journal of School Psychology*, 45(1), 3-19 and Pekrun, R. (2017) Emotion and achievement during adolescence, *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(3): 215-221.

members (e.g. language, empathy); *macro-practices* agreed more widely by staff (e.g. the use of emotion coaching and welcoming each pupil at the door); and *school-wide policy*, practice formally embedded into school policy (e.g. use of restorative approaches).

- **Follow-up activity** (e.g. additional training, time in staff meetings or INSET days) provides dedicated time to reinforce training, audit progress, induct new staff and help staff develop new practices and implement new school-wide policies.

Figure 1: Core elements underpinning the adoption of attachment and trauma aware approach



7.3 Impact of Covid-19

Although lockdown and the impact of Covid-19 made it difficult for some schools to implement and embed existing plans for attachment and trauma aware working, the pandemic increased the focus on the mental health and wellbeing of both pupils and staff. As such, staff were able to draw upon their

attachment and trauma awareness training to support pupils. The use of ‘bubbles’ and restrictions on movement within schools also had unexpected consequences in terms of strengthened relationships between staff and pupils. However, the wider impact and strain on the schools’ workforce through the height of the pandemic and beyond is acknowledged.

7.4 The importance of the ‘journey’

Throughout the Programme, we have increasingly used the analogy of a journey to understand how schools have become attachment and trauma aware – this concept originally arose from informal conversations with school staff. Classifying the 26 case study schools by ‘type’ of journey (*transformational*, *positive* and *mixed*) has furthered our understanding of factors relating to each journey type. This has helped to identify elements that are likely to support a school in making a *transformational* journey to attachment and trauma awareness.

It is important to acknowledge that every school is different and therefore every school’s journey to becoming attachment and trauma aware will be different. Some schools started their journey prior to joining the Timpson Programme, whereas for other schools, the journey began with the Programme. The findings, particularly in respect of *mixed* schools, highlight how journeys to becoming attachment and trauma aware are not linear: schools encountered different challenges and facilitators along the way, not least the Covid-19 pandemic. Our classification of the schools also captures a moment in time on this journey – schools on journeys classified as *mixed* or *positive* may subsequently become *transformational*. In this working paper, we are not judging whether schools have succeeded in becoming attachment and trauma aware, but have focused on understanding what elements need to be in place to get there.

Where schools had *transformational* journeys, they had often begun their journey prior to receiving training as part of the Timpson Programme. *Transformational* schools had clear and decisive leadership driving the Programme forward – members of staff understood their senior leadership team’s vision for their school in terms of attachment and trauma aware working and how they would achieve this in practice. *Transformational* schools provided staff with ongoing opportunities for further training, and opportunities to discuss and reflect on changes to practice. Schools had incorporated attachment and trauma aware working into both policy and practice, meaning staff were not left to reconcile conflicts between the two. Staff appeared receptive to changes to practice, which may in part be linked to schools having already begun to focus on this area prior to the training. However, senior leadership teams were not complacent and had ongoing plans to continue promoting staff buy-in amongst existing staff and to share the approach with new members of staff.

Our data also show how school staff are on their own individual journeys, but that creating a supportive and safe environment to try new things, receiving clear leadership, and having the opportunity to reflect on, revisit or further develop an understanding of attachment and trauma awareness all support progress.

Finally, the fact that *transformational* schools often started their journey before receiving training, and had plans to continue developing the approach, shows how becoming attachment and trauma aware is not a ‘quick fix’, something that our case study schools recognised:

“I would say realistically it would be like a five-year plan, at least. And that’s without any interruptions.” (Pastoral staff/Primary/Mixed/S2)

“It has to be evolution rather than revolution. Just as we’ve got to try and

bring these kids along slowly, you have to bring members of staff along very slowly.” (Teaching staff/Secondary/Transformational/S2)

