

ATTACHMENT AWARE SCHOOLS

PILOT PROJECT FINDINGS: STOKE ON TRENT AND BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET VIRTUAL SCHOOLS



"It took a series of children with needs that we just found hard to identify until we started to apply attachment theory thinking. And it just unlocked these children and made us able to understand what was going on with far greater clarity. As a result we got to make much more progress with them."

Head teacher

WHAT IS THE PROJECT ABOUT?

The Attachment Aware Schools project was commissioned by Stoke on Trent and Bath and North East Somerset's Virtual Schools in 2014-2015, working in partnership with Bath Spa University and Kate Cairns Associates, in order to improve the educational outcomes and wellbeing of Looked After Children and other vulnerable children.

The Project addresses key government policy which seeks to raise the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, improve provision for children with SEN and promote positive mental health and wellbeing. The Project provides a coherent and integrated theoretical framework, discourse and practice, along with practical, effective tools and approaches, underpinned by a programme of training and online training support.

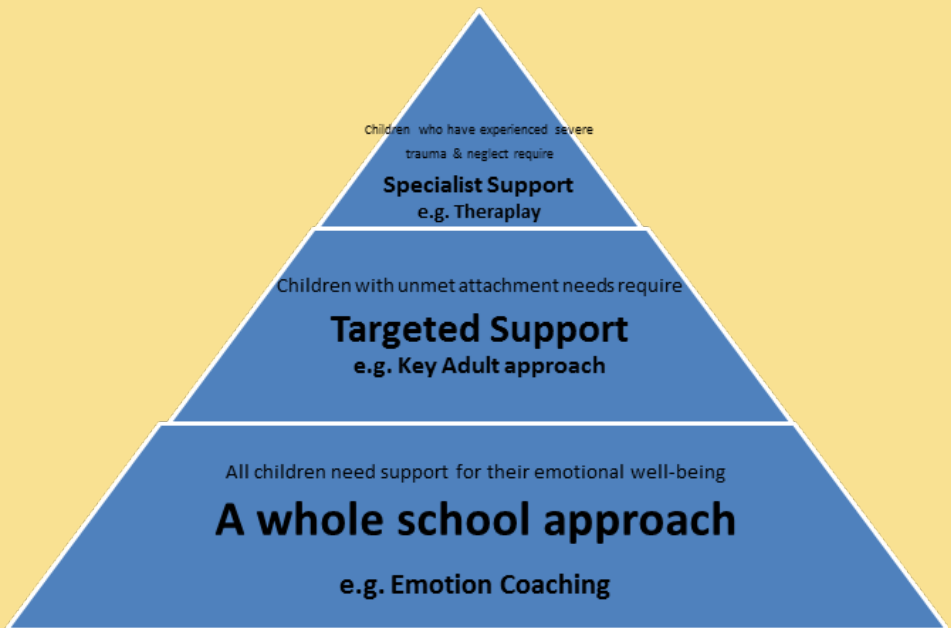
The core training incorporated an understanding and insight into attachment theory, the neuroscientific evidence which appears to support the research on the attachment process and an outline of the impact of trauma on the developing brain.

Project aims:

- To improve learning outcomes and well-being for all children, whilst supporting the needs of children with unmet attachment needs and those who have experienced trauma and neglect
- To provide schools with attachment-based strategies to support children's wellbeing, behaviour and academic attainment
- To implement whole school approaches and facilitate more targeted interventions to meet a spectrum of need
- To help build the evidence base of how understanding of attachment theory and trauma can help to inform educational practice

Key principles underlying the Project:

- To be child-centred and acknowledge children's different attachment styles and their implications
- To create nurturing relationships to improve children's learning and behaviour and satisfy children's innate need to have a secure 'sense of belonging' and feel safe
- To acknowledge adults' roles as secondary attachment figures that can help to reshape insecure attachment behaviours and support the development of more secure ones
- To create appropriate nurturing infrastructures for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties
- To utilise whole school strategies that avoid the dangers of stigmatising individuals such as Looked After Children



WHY DO WE NEED ATTACHMENT AWARE SCHOOLS?

'Even if we were to express it in terms of crude economics, (and it is about far more than that), there is no way a school can afford not to be doing this work. These children place demands on the school system which, if not properly addressed, far outweigh the demands of learning to manage and work with them properly'

Head Teacher

Extensive cross-cultural research shows how children develop either secure or insecure attachments with their main caregiver as a result of the quality of their early experiences. Secure attachments develop from nurturing relationships and enable the child to regulate emotions, develop positive social relationships and lay the foundations for learning. Insecure attachments can develop if early interactions are more negative, insensitive, unresponsive, inappropriate and/or unpredictable, and can have long-term deleterious consequences.

It is estimated that at least one third of children have an insecure attachment with at least one caregiver, which in turn will affect their school performance and behaviour (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Other research indicates that 98% of children experience one or more trauma event, and for one in four this trauma results in behavioural and/or emotional disturbance (O'Connor and Russell, 2004).

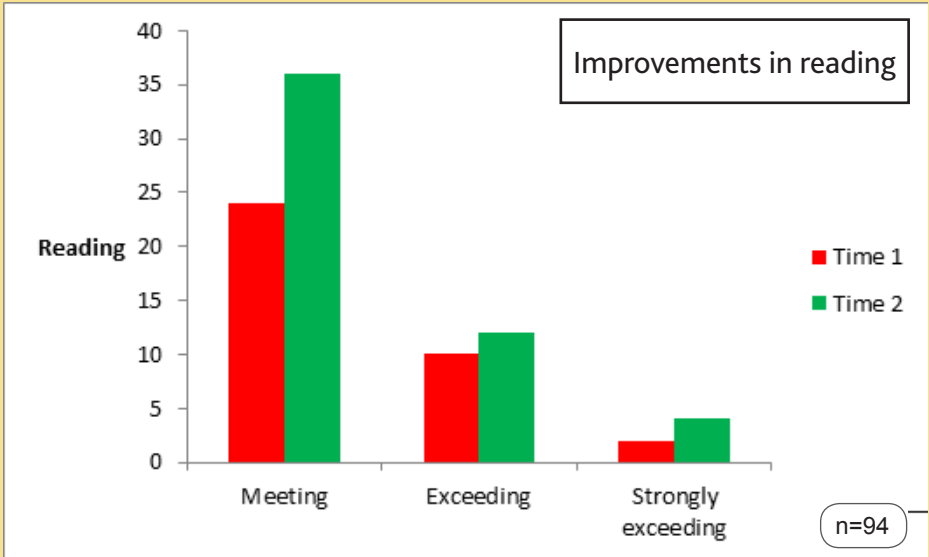
The National Institute of Clinical Excellence has recently reiterated how attachment is an important influence on school students' academic success and wellbeing at school. 'Behaviours associated with attachment difficulties such as disruptive behaviour in the classroom and difficulties forming relationships with teachers or positive peers are commonly seen in schools. For teachers it is really important to be able to 'read' these behaviours and respond appropriately' (NICE). Teachers may misinterpret insecurely attached children's behaviour as uncooperative, aggressive, demanding, impulsive, withdrawn, reactive and/or unpredictable. These judgments of behavioural manifestations of underlying inner experiences and relationship history affect teachers' attitudes and responses to behaviour.

Attachment Aware Practitioners are needed because:

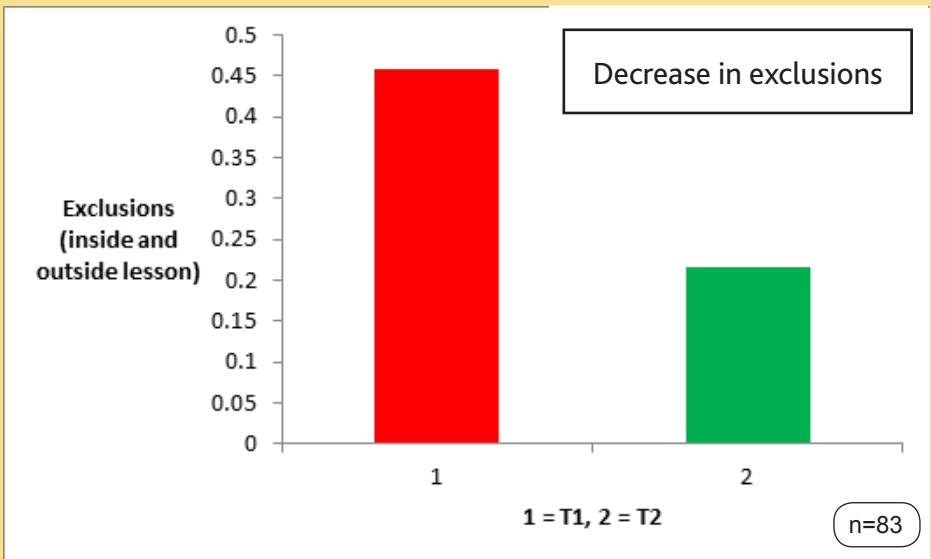
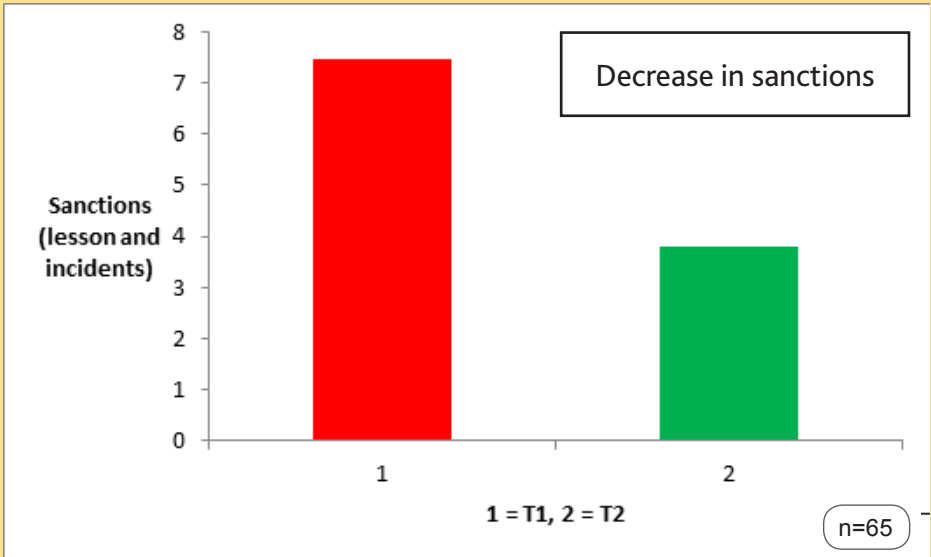
- the nature of a child's primary attachments (caregivers) lay the foundations for socio-emotional well-being and children's capacity to learn
- educators themselves can facilitate 'attachment-like' relationships with pupils (i.e., nurturing and responsive), and adopt attachment-based support strategies, particularly with challenging and vulnerable pupils, in order to enhance learning opportunities
- secure attachment relationships correlate strongly with higher academic attainment, better self-regulation, well-being and social competence

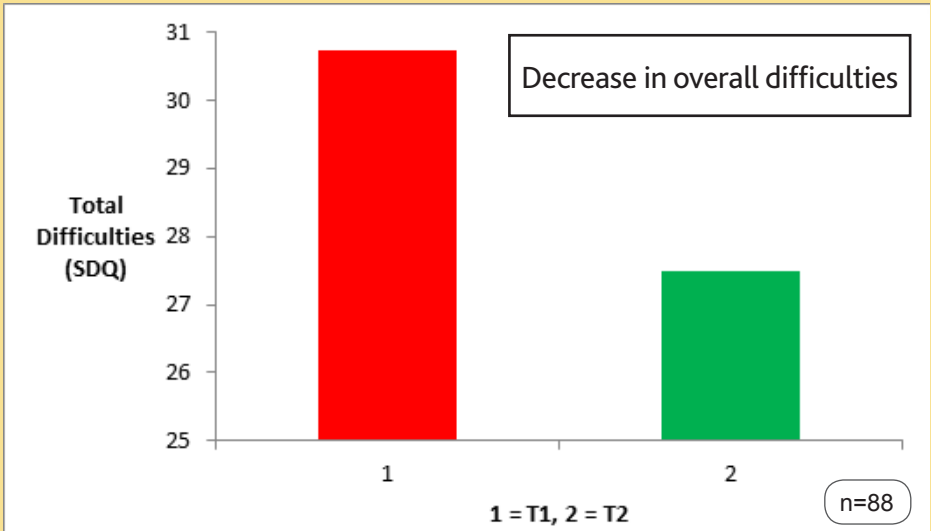


IMPACT ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT



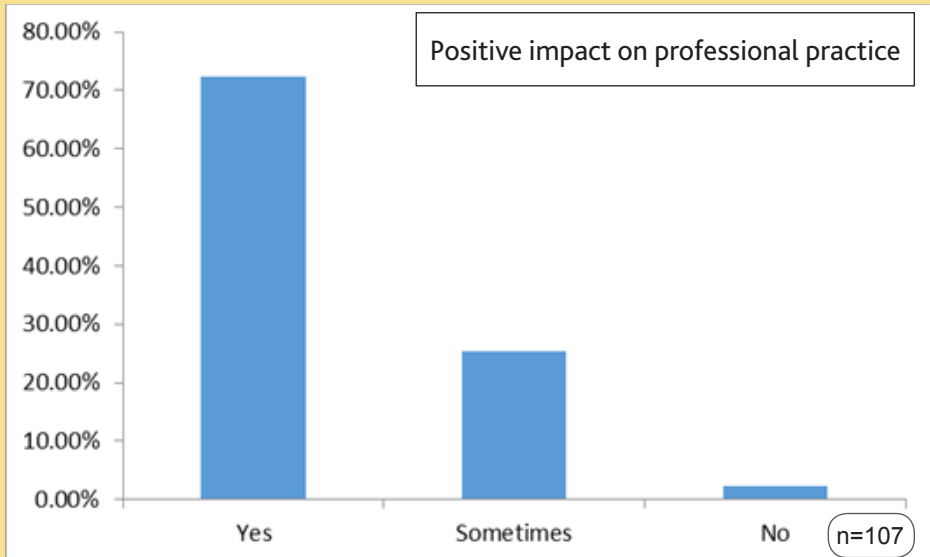
IMPACT ON BEHAVIOUR





POSITIVE IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

- Improved consistency and whole school approaches by using shared strategies such as emotion coaching
- Staff became more aware of pupils' emotions
- There was improved understanding of the reasons behind pupils' behaviour and their underlying needs
- Staff have practical behavioural strategies to support pupils
- Provides a clear structure for behaviour management



'Enables a whole school, consistent approach which meets all children's needs'

'Gives staff a consistent approach to behaviour management. Helps de-escalate situations before a crisis occurs'

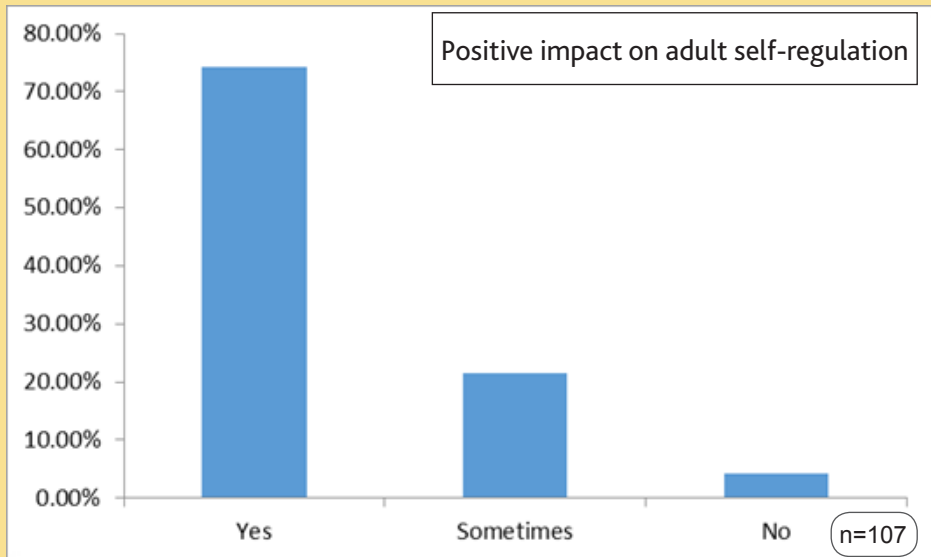
'Staff are able to help with pupil needs and support emotional well-being and learning'

'It helps to build trusting and strong relationships between pupils and adults'

'We are able to manage (behaviour) better without physical interventions'

POSITIVE IMPACT ON ADULT SELF-REGULATION

- Staff are better able to cope with challenging behaviours
- Staff have increased empathy and understanding
- Staff have more confidence in tackling difficult behaviours
- Staff feel calmer and less stressed
- Staff relationships improved with each other and with parents
- Staff relationships improved with pupils



'My practice has changed by being more patient and calm in certain situations'

'I feel more confident in dealing with challenging behaviour'

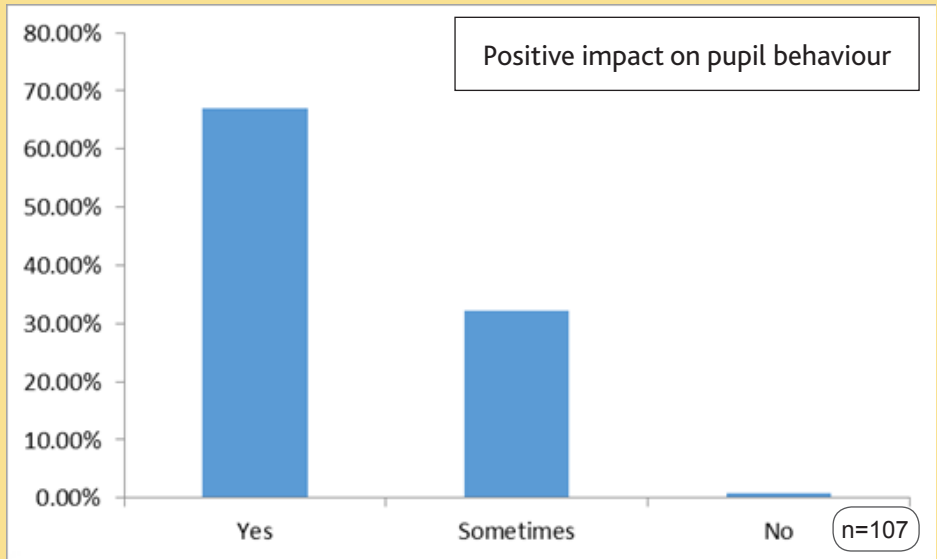
'I feel like I now look at behaviour differently and can respond in a different and better way'

'I am more empathic towards children rather than dismissive of their behaviour'

'Adults have better skills to support young people and children'

POSITIVE IMPACT ON PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

- Pupils have a better understanding of their own emotions and increased empathy
- Pupils have an improved range of strategies to control their emotions and behaviours
- Pupils have an improved ability to problem solve
- Pupils have better relationships with staff
- Pupils improve their behaviour and take more responsibility for it



'Pupils learn how to self-regulate and they are able to problem solve more independently in the future'

'It really helps them to calm and improve their behaviour'

'We've noticed it really reduces behavioural incidents'

'Allows pupils to understand their emotions, manage them, self regulate and learn'

'I feel that I can talk to my teacher, they listen and it stops the volcano in my tummy'

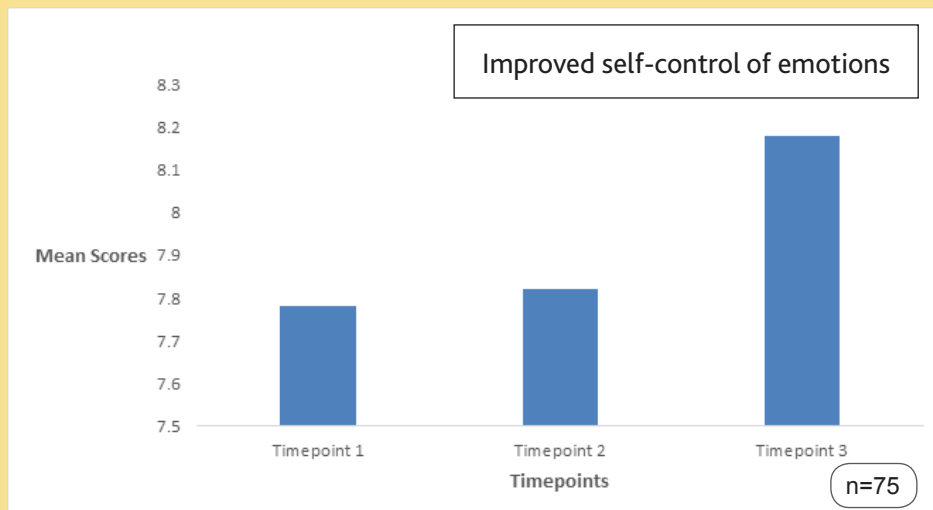
AN ATTACHMENT BASED STRATEGY – EMOTION COACHING

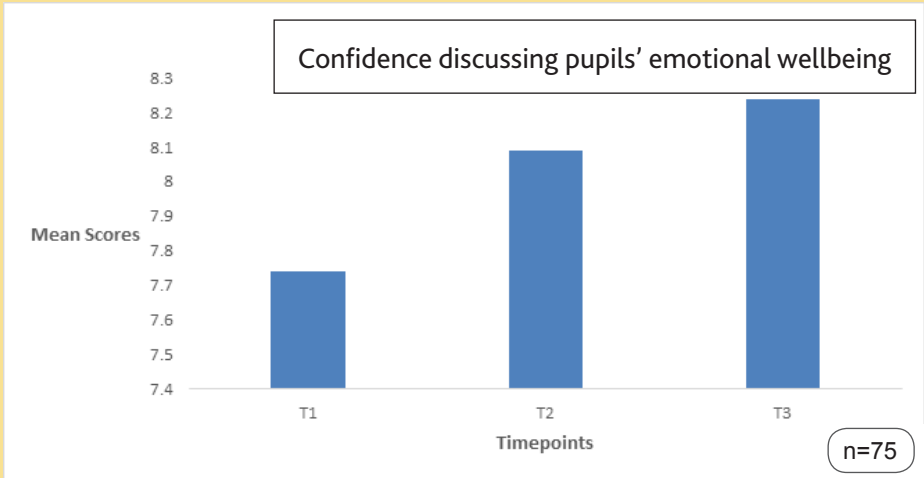
'Emotion coaching is about helping children and young people to understand the different emotions they experience, why they occur and how to handle them'

John Gottman

Emotion Coaching is a practical, evidence-based strategy that helps children and young people to become more aware of their emotions and to manage these feelings more effectively. It entails recognising and validating children's emotional experiences, setting limits where appropriate and problem-solving with the child to develop more effective behavioural strategies. Emotion Coaching views all behaviour as a form of communication. It is essentially an empathic and dialogic process which enables children to feel appreciated, to explore their feelings and relationships, to reflect with others and to regulate their core emotions, such as anger or anxiety, rather than projecting them through challenging behaviour (Matthews, 2006).

Emotion Coaching also engages with the adult's beliefs, attitudes, awareness, expression and regulation of emotion, as well as their reactions to pupils' expressions of emotions. When used in appropriate ways, Emotion Coaching enables practitioners to create an ethos of positive learning behaviour and to have the confidence to de-escalate situations when behaviour is challenging. It can operate as a stabilising factor to enable children to focus their energies on learning and to help them moderate the challenges of school life and beyond. In effect, Emotion Coaching techniques instil the tools that will aid a pupil's ability to self-regulate their emotions and behaviour (Rose et al, 2014; 2015).





FURTHER INFORMATION

If you are interested in finding out more about the project: attachmentawareschools.co.uk

Citation: Rose, J., McGuire-Snieckus, R. and Wood, F. (2016) *Impact Evaluation of the Attachment Aware Schools Project for Stoke and B&NES Virtual Schools: A Pilot Study*, Bath: IfE, Bath Spa University.