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# Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Programme in Schools

**Research team lead by Dr Neil Harrison**

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# Why attachment?

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Video courtesy of the  
Attachment Research  
Community (ARC) -  
<https://the-arc.org.uk>

# Emerging understanding

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- Broad, and still developing, field of academic enquiry – key contributions from psychology and neuroscience
- Focus on how young people form and maintain **attachment** relationships, particularly with key adults
- Also concerned with how **trauma** impacts children's lives and its impact on the structure and performance of the brain
- Relationship with **emotion coaching** and other strategies for helping young people to self-regulate their behaviour
- In this context – no fixed theoretical approach

# NICE guidelines (2015)

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- “Educational psychologists and health and social care provider organisations should work with **local authority virtual school heads and designated teachers** to develop and provide training courses for teachers of all levels on:
  - how attachment difficulties begin and how they can present in children and young people
  - how attachment difficulties affect learning, education and social development
  - understanding the consequences of maltreatment, including trauma
  - how they can support children and young people with attachment difficulties.”

*National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2015): Recommendation 1.2*

# Early work (1)

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- ‘Pilot’ programmes with 52 schools across three local authorities (2016 to 2018) – **Leicestershire, Stoke-on-Trent** and **Bath & North East Somerset**
- Training in attachment and trauma provided to teaching staff across a sample of schools (primary, secondary and special)
- Varying content and modes of delivery
- Measurable outcomes tracked for three years – before, during and after intervention
- Qualitative data collected from staff and young people

# Early work (2)

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## Summary of findings

Majority of schools in two LAs recorded lower persistent absence rates – rates rose in third LA in line with national picture. Difficulties getting exclusion data.

Attainment improved in 24 out of 33 primaries and six out of 13 secondaries. Only seven schools saw attainment fall – national picture mixed.

Staff more aware of the reasons behind young people's behaviour. Staff and pupils reported improvements in wellbeing and calmer environment.

# Timpson Programme

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- Five year programme, started in late 2017
- Based in the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford
- Funded through the Alex Timpson Trust
- Target to work with **300 schools across England** – mixture of schools types and local authority settings
- Involvement of schools negotiated through virtual school
- Training approach decided by local authority – commercial trainers, educational psychology service or other providers
- Training funded through Pupil Premium Plus – different models

# Programme aims

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- Raise awareness and **understanding of the impact** attachment and trauma issues have on children's education
- Develop **knowledge and skills** of teachers and other staff in strategies to better support needs of children
- Identify and disseminate **effective whole-school approaches** to address attachment and trauma
- Improve **educational progress** through improving attendance, reducing exclusions, and enhancing the wellbeing of children
- Build an **evidence base** for schools and others to draw upon in decision-making and resource allocation



# Research outline

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Online surveys with staff and pupils, repeated over two year period to identify changes

Case studies of a sample of 50 schools – focus groups with pupils and interviews with staff

Observation of training sessions and interviews with training providers, virtual school heads etc.

Analysis of school and local authority data on school attendance, progress, attainment and exclusions

# Key questions

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- 1** How do staff adapt their practices as a result of attachment and trauma awareness training?
- 2** Do staff and children report changes to the school climate as a result of attachment and trauma awareness?
- 3** How do schools change their policies and practices with increased understanding of attachment and trauma?
- 4** Do children attend better and make more progress in attachment and trauma aware schools?

# Programme update

- Currently working with **14 local authorities**, with seven more joining soon and others in discussion
- **140 schools** recruited so far – 75 trained, with 65 coming up in the rest of 2018/19
- 78 primary schools, 38 secondary schools and various through-schools, special schools and pupil referral units
- Survey data collected so far from **3,947 staff and 6,724 pupils**
- 10 case study visits completed



# Very early findings (1)

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- Still on first sweep of baseline data collection
  - Young people's positive feelings towards school decline with age
  - Most positive feelings, on average, towards their teacher – evidences importance of trusted adult relationships
  - Strong differences between schools in terms of young people's feelings and responses to difficulty – future analysis around demographics, OfSTED ratings etc.
  - Strong contrast between confidence (high) and knowledge (low) among staff with respect to handling attachment and trauma issues
  - Knowledge and confidence about attachment and trauma highest among senior leaders (especially in primary schools), but lower among class teachers, TAs and non-teaching staff

# Very early findings (2)

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- Emerging picture of case study schools
  - Some knowledge of attachment theory and importance of home life, but trauma is less well understood among staff
  - Some already using attachment-informed practices like ‘chill out’ areas, open door policies, time-out cards and learning mentors
  - Attachment theory training has seeded new initiatives in schools, including ‘stop and think’ time from staff and more use of mentoring and ‘theraplay’

*“So it’s not intervention for half a dozen children, it’s actually how we can be inclusive in how we support all of our children” (Headteacher, Primary)*

*“I’d just ask, like ask for a tutor or a TA who have been with you, ‘Can I talk to you for five minutes, I’ve got something on my mind?’” (Pupil, Secondary)*

# Very early findings (3)

Enablers	Inhibitors
Whole school approach – non-teaching staff	Lack of visible senior leader support
Regular reinforcement through staff meetings and follow-up sessions	Single one-off training session
Consistent adoption of attachment/trauma-aware vocabulary and concepts	Stubbornness or scepticism from some staff
Integrated with physical, procedural and policy changes within school	Difficulties for teachers engaging after their own traumatic experiences
Process of trust-building with adults in the school	External pressures on school and overlap with other initiatives
Cascading knowledge to pupils – e.g. PSHE	No training of new staff



# Find out more

- Timpson Programme webinar series
  - **Sir John Timpson:** *Why is understanding attachment and trauma so important?*
  - **Duncan Roberts, Headteacher, Maple Cross School (primary):** *How do schools address attachment and trauma?*
  - **Richard Glenny, Deputy Headteacher, Priestlands School (secondary):** *What benefits and challenges do secondary schools face in implementing whole school approaches to attachment and trauma?*



# A turning tide...?

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“**Based on academic research** you have developed a school that is sensitive to supporting pupils with attachment and complex trauma histories. This new approach **removed reliance on external sanctions** and rewards to control behaviour. The emphasis changed to understanding the internal reasons for behaviour. [...] The impact of this new approach has been the creation of a school focused on **understanding why pupils struggle** to control their behaviour. [...] Behaviour in school is exemplary and pupils make **outstanding progress** in their learning.”

*Extract from OfSTED inspection of Hope School, Liverpool, April 2019*





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