

AfC Virtual School Attachment Aware Schools Award 2023-2024 Cohort 4 Evaluation



AfC Virtual School
'Together we can achieve!'

Our Delegates Feedback

“We are delighted to be involved in your programme as we see the impact in school on a daily basis!”

“The course organisation is outstanding. Thank you - children's lives are being made better daily because of this approach.”

“All schools should have to become attachment aware and trauma informed!”

“ Commitment, enthusiasm, motivation, engagement, dedicated time, clear vision & team work made it happen.”

“Doing the Silver has kept the awareness of attachment and trauma difficulties very much at the forefront of everything we do”.

“The school has changed significantly in the last three years. There is a new and exciting culture that is seen throughout school life. It is commented on frequently by visitors, it is felt by our children, staff and parents and it is exciting to observe how some individuals, who would not have previously succeeded in education, are doing so now.”

“Emotion coaching really does work – we’ve seen first-hand how it helps kids open up and manage their feelings better, making our classrooms happier and more harmonious places to learn.”

“These workshops really do make you feel that you are part of a lovely school community.” (parent/carer)

Executive Summary

This report evaluates the Attachment Aware Schools Award (AASA), which spans three programmes: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. The programmes aim to create attachment-aware and trauma-informed school communities.

Key Findings:

- Participation: 61 schools across various key stages participated. 11 in Bronze, 31 in Silver, and 19 in Gold.
- Structure: Each level involves training, attachment audits, whole-school change projects, and coaching sessions. Gold level focuses on disseminating practices to the wider community.
- Feedback:
 - Schools reported positive impact, including improved school culture, staff understanding, and use of emotion coaching.
 - Parents felt more connected to the school community and equipped to support their children.
 - Children reported feeling safer, happier, and better able to manage their emotions.
- Impact on Outcomes:
 - Suspensions and Exclusions: Data from multiple schools showed a decrease in suspensions and exclusions post-AASA implementation. Specific examples included reductions in verbal abuse/threatening behavior suspensions and permanent exclusions.
 - Attendance: One school showed a narrowing attendance gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils over three years post-AASA.
- Whole School Change Projects: Projects focused on policy and systems, transforming the environment, staff development, children, and parents/carers. Gold Award projects emphasized working with the wider community.
- Bronze Award Evaluation: Training was well-received, with staff reporting increased knowledge and confidence.
- Silver and Gold Award Evaluation: Coaching sessions were highly valued. Schools reported positive impacts on school culture, pupil wellbeing, and behavior.
- Recommendations: The report includes recommendations for programme improvement, such as enhancing feedback mechanisms, providing targeted support for secondary schools, and further developing evaluation tools.

Overall, the AASA program has demonstrated positive impacts on school communities, leading to improved relationships, reduced suspensions and exclusions, and enhanced wellbeing for students, staff, and parents.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

Participants: The Attachment Aware Schools Award (AASA) welcomed 61 schools from across Richmond, Kingston, Windsor and Maidenhead in its fourth year. These included schools spanning all key stages from early years to post 16, alongside specialist provisions and schools.

Structure of the Attachment Aware Schools Award: AfC Virtual School's Attachment Aware Schools Award now spans across three years as we recognise that the culture shift to becoming an Attachment Aware school and community is gradual. The learning and embedding of strategies and practice is something that must continue to be worked on and kept high on the agenda for schools. The first year of involvement in the programme is called the Bronze Award, with the second and third years known as the Silver Award and Gold Award. This year included 11 schools embarking on their Bronze Award, with 31 schools progressing onto their Silver Award in its first year, following a pilot year in 2022-23. This was the first year that the Gold Award was introduced and 19 schools joined this final year of the programme.

There is ongoing support from the Virtual School throughout the three years of the programme and DTs/ DSLs are required to regularly attend training sessions on a range of topics, which also include time to specifically focus on their journey on the AASA and to network with other schools. In every year of the programme, participating schools are asked to conduct an Attachment Audit and from this identify a whole school change project to complete across the academic year. To support this journey, they are provided with three termly coaching sessions with either an Educational Psychologist or one of the AASA programme leads from the Virtual School.

Bronze Award schools are provided with whole school training in Attachment and Trauma, and Emotion Coaching. During the Silver Award year the focus of the programme shifts to empowering schools to shape the development of their AASA journey. During the Gold year schools are required to include a focus on 'rippling out' their attachment aware approach, whereby schools share and disseminate their practice and learnings from their AASA journey and become beacons on attachment aware practice to other settings or the wider community (including parents and carers).

"Keeping an attachment-informed approach alive in school by embedding, celebrating good practice and developing new strands."

"Developing and embedding attachment and trauma informed practice across the whole school community and environment"

Schools in their Silver and Gold years are asked to continue to make use of the Attachment Audit that formed the basis for their Bronze Award and associated whole school change project. Schools then create a whole school development project action plan in order to further extend and embed their attachment-aware and trauma-informed practice. Schools report on the outcomes of their projects, which may include evidence

of impact on attendance, academic outcomes, suspensions, behaviour incidents or parent/carer engagement.

All schools enrolled on the programme share their projects at a graduation ceremony at the end of the year where they are awarded Attachment Aware Schools Plaques.

This evaluation report contains findings from schools participating in all three years of the programme.

SECTION 2: Impact on exclusion and suspensions pre and post Attachment Aware Schools Award.

AfC Virtual School is compiling a schools brochure exploring the impact of the AASA on exclusion and suspension during the five cohorts. Below are some advance examples of impact from this report which will be circulated under separate cover.

Primary School, Richmond

2019-2020	Post Attachment Aware Award
9 fixed term exclusions	0 fixed term exclusions
Behaviour policy in place but not followed consistently Lack of consistency with rewards and sanctions Focus on consequences	Positive behaviour policy in place More positive relationships between pupils, staff and parents in place Consistent reward system across the whole school-smile tokens All staff feel empowered to use reward system Focus on restorative conversations
Behaviour incidents linked to lack of staff training and understanding of attachment and trauma	Reduction in behaviour incidents Smile charts used to support behaviour and positive choices
Lack of training and understanding of children with ACES No staff trained in emotion coaching Staff using inappropriate language to describe dysregulated children	All staff trained in emotion coaching 2020-2021 All new staff trained in emotion coaching as part of induction Staff
Behaviour incidents at playtime and lunchtime increasing	Significant decrease in behaviour incidents at playtime and lunchtime Zoning of playground and introduction of new approach to playtimes
Limited awareness of strategies to support regulation in children Lack of spaces or resources to support self-regulation	Zones of regulation introduced Regulation stations set up in every class Nurture space created in school
Parent workshops offered focused on academic progress or curriculum Prospective parents and nurseries feeding into reception using a range of approaches	Parent workshops offered around regulation and emotion coaching annually Wider community have opportunity to access workshops Consistency in approach starting to ripple out so children starting reception have experience of emotion coaching already

Primary School, Kingston

Trauma informed journey	Academic year	Total number of fixed term exclusion incidents	Total number of students	Total number of permanent exclusions
	2021 - 2022	19		0
Bronze year	2022 - 2023	15		0
'silver' year	2023 - 2024	11		0
'gold' year	2024 - 2025	2		0

Secondary School, Richmond - 2019-20 Pre AASA vs four years since AASA.

2019-20	Post Attachment Award 2020-date 4th year
4 Permanent Exclusions	0 Permanent Exclusions
Centralised Detention system Punitive sanctions	Restorative Conversations and designated room for regulation and reflection (EBASE)
76% of students repeat suspensions	41% repeat suspensions
Many suspensions linked to high level defiance	Suspensions linked to one off incidents
Lack of understanding of students with trauma/Adverse Childhood experiences Limited Emotional Coaching- key staff only	Strong staff-student relationships Embedded strategies in class. Regular Attachment updates/training

Secondary School, Richmond - 3 year trend prior to AASA & Impact Post AASA

Academic Year	Total Number of Suspension	Total Students	Total Number of Permanent Exclusions
2017-18 Pre AASA	37	22	3
2018-19 Pre AASA	51	32	1
2019-20 Pre AASA	30	22	0
2023-24 Post AASA	17	16	0
Reason for suspension 2019-20	Total Pre AASA	Reason for suspension 2024	Total Post AASA
Verbal Abuse/Threatening Behaviour against an Adult	10	Verbal Abuse Threatening Behaviour against an Adult	0
Persistent Disruptive Behaviour	6	Persistent Disruptive Behaviour	0
Racism	2	Racism	0
Assault Against a Student	5	Assault against a student	1

Primary School, Kingston - 2021-22 pre AASA vs 2023-24 Post AASA.

2021 – 2022	2023/2024 (Post-Attachment Award)
13 fixed term suspensions (8 children)	8 fixed term suspensions (4 children with complex ASD/SEMH difficulties and contexts); 1 off- incidents rather repeat offences
81 children classified as persistently absent from school (less than 90% attendance)	37 children classified as persistently absent from school (less than 90% attendance, 7 of which sitting at 89% or more)
91% average attendance for PP children, 91.1% attendance for SEN support children	92.2% attendance for PP children, 92.9% attendance for SEN support children
113 behaviour incidents logged and recorded	82 behaviour incidents recorded (year-to-date)
Minimal stakeholder understanding of Attachment Theory, Emotion Coaching and the Internal Working Model.	More empathic, relational approach to behaviour management; consistent use of emotion coachingssss

Primary School, RBWM - Attendance of disadvantaged pupils: 3 year trend of narrowing attendance gap post AASA

Attendance	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Disadvantaged	92.0%	92.7%	93.1%
Non disadvantaged	96.0%	95.8%	95.8%
Gap	4.0%	3.1%	2.7%

Persistently absent	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Disadvantaged	5.7%	4.2%	3.8%
Non disadvantaged	2.7%	3.0%	4.7%
Gap	-3.0%	-1.2%	+0.9%

SECTION 3: WHOLE SCHOOL CHANGE PROJECTS

Research nationally indicates that AASA projects often fall across five main areas; Policy and school systems; Transforming the environment; Staff and pedagogical development; Children and young people; and Parents/carers. As with previous years, we found that this 2023-24 cohort of schools delivered projects that aligned well with these five areas. It is important to highlight that the majority of the projects were multi-faceted, with whole school change and impact spanning multiple areas. A new theme for projects delivered by our Gold Award cohort was a focus on working with their wider community (for example, through training, establishing links with other settings, or activities to support successful transitions for children and young people). Gold Award schools sought to ensure that their attachment-aware principles were a fully embedded part of their practice and ethos. This report aims to provide a snapshot of the range of Bronze, Silver and Gold Award whole school change projects. Projects are grouped into the five areas described above, though as noted many schools undertook multi-strand projects across a number of areas.

Policy and school systems

Bronze Award

A large proportion of Bronze Award schools had at least one element of their AASA project which focused on developing policy and school systems, including developing whole school understanding, language and culture around attachment aware and trauma informed approaches. For many, this also involved developing behavioural policies, moving from a behaviourist model towards a relational model. Additional training to all DTs on this topic was provided through a Designated Teacher forum. Examples of the aims of these projects include:

- To embed the CALM approach of emotion coaching within a relationship-based behaviour policy, reflected in the school environment and pupil experiences.
- To ensure the admission and transition of new pupils and their families into our school community is facilitated with a trauma aware, attachment informed approach.
- Whole school use of relational approaches to behaviour management in the classroom and the playground.
- Embedding trauma informed and attachment aware approaches throughout the wider school network, including support staff.
- Creating systems (weekly team around the child meetings) to ensure targeted and holistic referrals to multi-agency partners and agencies.

Below are some quotes regarding the impact of projects focussing on this area:

"The project has enabled us to produce a behaviour regulation policy that supports the whole school community. The attachment and trauma training gave us the 'why', why our policy needed to be updated and the emotion coaching training gave us the 'how', we support our pupils. The project has had a positive impact on our school at a time when we were facing an increase in behaviours that challenge." Headteachers, Designated Teacher, Primary School

"Although it is early days in its use, our new admissions procedure enables us to have better awareness and understanding of the challenges facing our new families and the circumstances of individual children." Senior Leader, Primary School

"The referral process (to multi agency partners such as CAMHS and Social Care) has changed and is now more streamlined. Staff are having a greater involvement in the referral process. They are having more meaningful conversations with the individual student, family and staff before making a referral which has made the process more student centred." Designated Teacher, Secondary School

"We have seen an increase in our attendance figures this year (+1.9%) across the school and a significant increase in Year 7 (3.3%) based on last year's figures." Designated Teacher, Secondary School

"Attachment Aware discussions and reflection [sessions] take place regularly, e.g. a session from the Young Carers charity which enables staff to continue to reflect on the possible attachment needs for children who are young carers; sessions around bereaved children etc." -Senior Mental Health Lead, Primary School

"The school environment has become a place where emotional well-being is prioritized, and everyone feels connected and motivated to succeed." - SENCo, Primary School

Silver Award

Many Silver Award projects focused on extending attachment and trauma awareness to the wider school community to support a deep embedding of knowledge and practice. This represented a next step for many settings in terms of developing whole school understanding, language and culture around attachment-aware and trauma-informed approaches. A range of groups in school communities participated in further training (for example, on attachment and trauma awareness, or emotion coaching). These included: new members of teaching staff, teaching assistants, Heads of Year, emotional literacy support assistants (ELSAs), and nurture practitioners. Some schools adopted a wide remit, extending training to school office staff, lunch teams, caretakers, after school staff and governors. One school described how attachment awareness training is now part of their annual CPD programme for staff.

Several projects focused on re-designing the school's behaviour policy into a relational behaviour policy. This often represented a development of a school's understanding of attachment-aware and trauma-informed principles, so that these could be adapted and applied to whole school policy on interactions and behaviour. Some schools focused on embedding a policy they had already developed (for example, as their Bronze Award project). The following examples illustrate how some schools approached successfully embedding a relational policy within their community:

- Gathering feedback and involving the whole school community in reviewing the school's new relationship-based behaviour policy (this included parents, students, teachers, teaching assistants, senior leadership and governors)
- Producing a one-page child friendly version of the relational policy
- Adding material to a relational policy (such as visual appendices to support implementation; display of visual resources in the staff room).

Below are some quotes regarding the impact of projects focused on this area:

"Staff are using emotion coaching not only in everyday use in response to students having difficulties, but also in written policies as a strategy to use with students to de-escalate difficulties before they arise. This shows that it is an embedded strategy, rather than just a 'one-off' strategy." (Designated Teacher, specialist setting)

"The training for staff across the school has been the first and most important step for us, they understand the basics of attachment and the reasons why we are developing strategies and techniques to support the children. This has encouraged 'buy in' across the school." (Designated Teacher, primary school)

"Pre-audit results showed that 33% of staff felt 'competent and aware' compared to 100% post-audit" (primary school)

Gold Award

Several strands of Gold Award school projects focused on updating or embedding policies or provision within the school, which often included a relational behaviour policy. This was often done through involving the wider school community, with one school establishing a

Behaviour Working Party to support their work and others working with their parents/carers or governors. In terms of impact, schools noted that there was a reduction in students missing lessons and an improvement in attendance of some of their key groups of vulnerable students. One school noted that the introduction of a 'regulate and return' system reduced students being removed from lessons. Another school highlighted that improved staff confidence and attitude to the new relational policy meant that staff took time to get to know children and what works best to support them.

Transforming the environment

Bronze Award

A number of Bronze Award schools transformed elements of their school environment as part of their AASA project. This included 'calm down' therapeutic rooms in some cases, and/or 'regulation stations' in classrooms. Information was provided by AfC Virtual School on research that has focused on developing therapeutic spaces in schools. Below are a selection of quotes highlighting the impact of creating safe, therapeutic spaces or regulation stations in schools.

"The...Centre has become a space that supports students with a number of Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs. Students are willing to utilise the space and have identified it as a clear support for their self-regulation needs. Greater clarity has also been provided for staff and students about WHY the space is needed and this has increased the overall tolerance and understanding of SEMH needs at...School." - Deputy Head Teacher, Middle School



"I am happy to use [the space] now, I feel like I have a space to be calm and if I need help, I can ask."

- Year Six Student

"Clarity around [the space] has helped me to use it at appropriate times – for the biggest impact on my students." - Experienced Teacher, Middle School

Silver Award

A large number of schools used their Silver Award year as a chance to consider design or use of spaces within the school to create a safe space, support regulation, and promote calm. Some schools developed new trauma-informed or therapeutic spaces, such as a

sensory garden, outdoor safe space, CALM zone, regulation space, or nurture area. One school developed a lunchtime nurture space, with a member of their senior leadership team providing a family lunchtime experience 2-3 times per week (students were invited to attend or could self-refer).

Other settings considered and re-launched spaces that were already in use (such as internal isolation rooms) so that these became behaviour reflection rooms instead, with attachment-aware principles applied to the design and operation of these spaces. For example, one school created a 'CALM Centre' as a space in which social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) interventions took place, as well as offering a self-regulation space.

Some schools worked on the design of classrooms by applying principles of attachment-aware practice. For example, some projects included a focus on the displays and resources available to young people to help them to regulate, or desk document reminders for adults to help embed a shift in approach.

Below are some quotes reflecting the impact of projects focused on this area:

"Children and staff are enjoying using the new designated space for their ELSA sessions."
(Designated Teacher, primary school)

"Safe space regularly used for self/co-regulation and intervention inside." (Designated Teacher, primary school)

Feedback from children about a primary school's nurture space... *"It's a cosy room. The bubbles in the lamp make me feel happy".*

"I'm amazed. I love the carpet".



Children really enjoyed projects focused on transforming the environment, as these further quotes from primary school students show:

"When I'm frustrated and sad instead of running from my friends I can go to that place, relax and tell an adult about my feelings." (about the school's sensory garden)

"I use it in the morning when I miss my nan and mum. I turn on the fish tank (lava lamp). It makes me feel calm. I like to invite my friends to make me feel happy. Then we feel relaxed to do my learning and have fun." Year 3 girl about the school's calm corner

"This place is really good for me, before I would just run and try and climb the fence when I was upset but now I know I can go and sit there." (about the school's sensory garden)



Gold Award

Some Gold Award schools focused on the way they used spaces such as nurture rooms or sensory spaces. Projects that included a focus on the provision of different spaces within the school noted examples of positive impact such as: reduced behaviour incidents across the school; children enjoying accessing alternative spaces when they feel overwhelmed in the classroom or to help them to feel calm; and relationships established between staff and pupils enabling strategies to be modelled and children to be supported when they are dysregulated.

Playgrounds were a key focus for some Gold Award projects, to bring a focus to a more unstructured time of the day when some children struggle with the social and emotional demands of playtime interactions. Projects aimed to improve wellbeing and social interactions, supporting the emotional development of children (for example, by increasing children's collaborative play and problem-solving skills, as well as their confidence in social interactions). One school noted the transformative impact of embedding attachment-awareness into their playtime provision over the three years of the AASA. The following quotes illustrate the impact schools have seen by focusing their Gold Award on the broad range of provision available to children during their school day:

"I am proud that we support the most vulnerable children in very individual ways. I am proud that we have maintained momentum and are beginning to see results...The playgrounds are much happier places - children are using their imagination and playing freely, engaging in self-directed intrinsic play...Increased pupil responsibility with a nurturing element. Children at play is an amazing and healing environment for all." (Designated Teacher, primary school)

"The chickens calm me at break and lunch time. I really enjoy looking after them." (Year 5 child, junior school)

"Woodland Bathing really helps me to get to my centre, makes me feel peaceful & calm and I

feel that I can cope with any problems.” (Child, primary school)

“Breathing outdoors calms me and, when I have finished, I feel fresh again.” (Child, primary school)

Staff and pedagogical development

Bronze Award

The majority of the Bronze Award whole school change projects included developing elements of staff and pedagogical development. Examples of core aims underpinning these projects included:

- To improve/introduce the concepts of attachment awareness and trauma for all staff.
- To raise awareness of the need for children to feel safe and secure in school so they can achieve their best.
- For all staff to develop confidence with emotion coaching.

Examples of impact include the following:

“Emotion coaching really does work – we’ve seen first-hand how it helps kids open up and manage their feelings better, making our classrooms happier and more harmonious places to learn.” - Staff member, Primary School

“The training has given great insight into how some of our children’s brains develop and where to start from to start reconnecting them. This has enabled me to build relationships while using the correct language for these children.” - Staff member, Primary School

“I feel that the clear explanation of the three Rs of relational responses and the reasoning behind the approach will really support my practice in supporting all my pupils, particularly at times of dysregulation.” - Staff member, Primary School

“The session was a useful reminder of the importance of managing my own emotions when dealing with a child who is struggling. This alongside the CALM approach will ensure that I am able to support the children to the best of my ability whilst finding the best outcome for all involved.” - Staff member, Primary School

“I had a limited understanding of the impacts of stress on the brain, trauma and attachment difficulties- now I feel very confident – staff and children know that there are safe spaces in the school that they can come to if needed.” - Support staff, Primary School

“[We have noticed] the support that adults give each other to facilitate children with co-regulation.” - Assistant Headteacher, Primary School

“The feedback from the CPD has been very positive and staff have stated that many have changed their practice and now have increased awareness. Staff are considering these issues further when dealing with students on a day-to-day basis. Some have

reflected that they are considering the ways in which they use this knowledge with all students and that 'all interactions are an intervention'. #be-more-frontal-lobe."

- Designated Teacher, Secondary School

"It's clear that some staff are now focussing more on what is really important in school; the students." - Learning Support Assistant, Secondary School

"Staff are taking the time for restorative conversations and are relying less on 'consequences' or 'sanctions.'" - Senior Mental Health Lead, Primary School

"There is more understanding that behaviour is communication." - Senior Mental Health Lead, Primary School.

"We have developed an understanding in all our staff that a child's behaviour is a means of conveying meaning and where every interaction is seen as a teachable moment." - Assistant Headteacher, Primary School

"The training in trauma has been invaluable; it has fundamentally changed our approach, enabling us to better support and understand our students' needs, allowing for a more compassionate and effective learning environment." - Staff member, Primary School

Silver Award

A large number of schools included a focus on staff skills, competence, or pedagogical development as a key strand of their Silver Award project. For many settings, this meant evidencing embedding of attachment-aware practice in school, with emotion coaching very often a key approach mentioned in projects. There were numerous examples of actions settings took to develop or embed attachment-aware and trauma-informed practice, including:

- Staff using the CALM technique (from emotion coaching) to de-escalate tricky situations
- Establishing emotion coaching 'champions' in the staff team
- Ensuring CALM features on rolling meeting logs
- AASA on the agenda at weekly staff and teaching assistant meetings, as well as at governors' meetings
- Whole school assemblies on emotion coaching
- Designing an emotion coaching script and placing this on display for staff, as well as sending a copy home for parents/carers to use
- CALM acronym printed on lunchtime supervisor lanyards
- Providing emotion coaching scripts on lanyards and visuals to support
- Making sentence starters available to staff to support consistency in approach and language
- Organising further training for staff to increase their confidence with particular elements of emotion coaching (such as 'limit setting' and 'making a plan')
- Input in assemblies to support attachment-aware break times on the playground (such as making use of social stories to further embed positive interactions and

- input on managing emotions whilst playing games)
- Establishing reflective teams supervision for the senior leadership team

The impact of developing staff understanding and pedagogy was highlighted by many settings:

“Staff are fully engaged and are implementing the CALM Approach to deal sensitively to children’s needs and periods of dysregulation. A shared language is being adopted.”

- Designated Teacher, Primary school

“Analysis of pre-post AASA questionnaire indicates that staff feel more knowledgeable in managing behaviour through relationships.” – Designated Teacher, Primary school

“Fewer behaviour incidences in the classroom and playground due to impact of ‘making a plan’ and use of personalised, differentiated strategies to support emotional dysregulation.”

- Designated Teacher, Primary school

“Language used by staff to describe behaviours of concern has changed” - Designated Teacher, Nursery school

“Trauma informed shift on language - from attention seeking behaviour to “connection seeking behaviour” - Designated Teacher, primary school

Other Silver Award projects aimed to develop staff understanding of attachment-aware principles and competence in practice for particularly vulnerable children and young people. Settings considered young people who had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), needs related to attachment or trauma, or who presented with behaviour that particularly challenged adults. Examples of the types of projects undertaken in this area include:

- Use of individualised methods to make sense of the young person’s behaviour (such as functional assessment approaches and ABCC charts), as well as developing specific strategies for individual children
- ‘Key worker approach’ for children who need ‘a little more’ - with the school indicating a huge impact socially, emotionally and academically
- ‘Know me to teach me’ plans to support children with a variety of social and emotional needs
- Student profiles so staff can understand their needs and how to support
- All vulnerable children have a dedicated key/safe person – selected jointly with the children by eliciting their views
- A review of the schools ‘behaviour reflection room’ and sanctions for young people with attachment and trauma needs
- Staff empowering young people with skills to work through situations when they arise

Several settings commented on the positive impact of increasing staff awareness of vulnerable children and young people:

“SLT have a stronger working knowledge of the children who access the nurture space and have built stronger relationships” - Primary school

“Raising the profile of children and the challenges they face has been successful” - Teacher, secondary school

“A more individualised approach to children when they present with more challenging behaviour” - Primary school

“Nurture plans used consistently for behaviour support” - Nursery school

“Increased conversations between staff and an overall move to the most vulnerable children in the school being everyone’s responsibility” - Primary school

“Increased staff empathy and understanding for how children’s lived experiences impact their behaviour” - Primary school

A range of school staff note the positive impact the AASA programme has had on their knowledge, skills and confidence:

“AASA has opened my eyes to the power of relationships; taking the time to find out what makes a child tick” - Class teacher, infant school

“When an adult’s approach is relational, responsive and restorative towards a child’s behaviour, a child in turn will develop the trust and confidence to learn and grow” - Year 2 teaching assistant, primary school

“I have learnt that there are a host of different potential triggers for these students and have changed the way in which I respond to these to support them.” - Teacher, secondary school

“Students feel safer and calmer knowing that teachers have an awareness of what is going on for them.” - Pastoral officer, secondary school

“It avoids frustration – we know that until they have regulated they cannot engage” - Learning support assistant, infant school

“Using the positive behaviour strategies of the calm station, morning emotion check in and connection box has been so useful for me to be able to understand my class better” - Year 5 teacher, primary school

“CALM approach to deal with pupils. I have already successfully used it twice this morning! Thank you.” - teaching assistant, primary school

Gold Award: An attachment aware school community

Many Gold Award projects included a focus on ensuring their school staff remained

engaged with attachment-aware and trauma-informed practice, with training identified as the most common mechanism for this. Training included that focused on emotion coaching, as well as broad attachment-awareness. Several settings mentioned providing refresher training for all staff, as well as training for new joining members of staff. Some schools continued to expand training to different groups in their school community, including their school administration team.

Gold Award schools were clear about the impact of embedding attachment-aware practice within their settings. DTs and DSLs who took part in the project identified the following positive changes that have taken place as a result of their school's AASA journey:

- Attachment-informed practice has become more commonplace across the school, whereas in the past only a few pastoral staff may have had this understanding and approach
- Strengthened relationships across the school community
- Staff adopt a consistent restorative approach and fewer punitive sanctions are given
- Suspensions and permanent exclusions for students reduced
- Students with trauma or adverse childhood experiences are provided with an environment that enables them to thrive
- Reductions in behaviour incidents across the school, particularly for vulnerable children and those with social, emotional and mental health difficulties
- Improved attendance for the most vulnerable children
- Students appreciate reflective and restorative conversations with staff
- Parents and carers indicate in surveys that their children feel safe and happy at school, and that the school makes sure its pupils behave

Below are some quotes regarding the impact of projects focused on this area:

"We now provide students coming into our school with developmental trauma with an appropriate environment with all staff able to understand how their context might be impacting upon their behaviours and able to use effective strategies to de-escalate problems and keep them included within their classrooms" (Designated Teacher, secondary school)

"Trauma informed practice is becoming integral to our ethos and vision for the school. It is not seen as something that is in competition with other practices or structures within school. All decisions, interventions and activities are taken with a clear attachment awareness and the vast majority of students are reporting that they feel that sense of belonging that will help to ensure they thrive" (Designated Teacher, primary school)

"Through a range of initiatives...and a consistent whole school approach being used by all school staff, behaviour incidents have reduced term on term for all children" (Designated Teacher, junior school)

"The behaviour of one of the most vulnerable children in the school has improved dramatically through all our work on our whole school approach to behaviour management." (Lower KS2 phase leader, junior school)

"I feel that I can talk to key trusted adults and I'm actually heard and they really care about how I'm feeling" (Year 6 pupil, primary school)

"I feel listened to when I talk about my feelings" (Primary school student)

"So great to see the focus on wellbeing" (Governor, primary school)

A few Gold Award projects included a focus on extending their training offer to wraparound care providers (such as after-school club staff) to support these practitioners to develop an attachment-aware approach. This included a focus on the consistent use of the language of emotion coaching.

The impact of a broad focus on an attachment-aware school community was noted to include a reduction in playground behaviour incidences, as well as external staff increasing their awareness and knowledge about the needs of children with attachment difficulties or previous traumatic experiences. As a result, staff are able to adapt their interactions to better support vulnerable young people. For example, one school identified that they were starting to see a change in the language used towards pupils on the playground (such as 'I wonder...' and 'I can see...')

"The training has really helped me be more confident in dealing with pupils in the playground" (Member of after-school provision staff, primary school)

"The sharing of information on which pupils will most benefit from our support has been really useful" (Member of after-school provision staff, primary school)

"Today was really helpful and insightful." (Manager of a junior school's wraparound provision)

Children and young people

Bronze Award

Whilst the impact on children and young people was a focus for all schools, a couple of schools had a more direct focus on the experience of children and young people in their schools, through implementing interventions and programmes to support students with self-regulation skills and embedding a whole school approach to support emotional literacy. Examples of impact include:

" [There is] greater impact from SEMH interventions for students in all year groups." - Deputy Head Teacher, Middle School

"...Students feel more understood and valued, which has boosted their confidence, engagement, and academic performance..." - SENCo, Primary School

"Children are being supported with an inquisitive lens, emotion coaching and nurture." - SENCo, Primary School

“Key vulnerable children having fewer overwhelming episodes and experiencing success.” - SENCo, Primary School

Silver Award

All AASA Silver Award settings mentioned the positive impact on children and young people as a core aim of their projects. The focus across the board was on students feeling happy, safe and comfortable in school. Some settings chose to focus on the experience of their children and young people as the main aim of their project. Projects fell into two main categories: those involving young people in the design or delivery of changes to school practice/policy; and those focused on equipping students with emotion regulation strategies, skills and techniques. Schools often aimed to develop a consistent language and shared approach to support students in the area of their project's focus (for example, emotional literacy or emotion regulation).

Activities undertaken by Silver Award projects with a focus on student voice and participation included:

- A CALM (emotion coaching) poster competition
- Collating children's views to inform the design of a nurture space
- Creation of a trauma-aware mentorship programme to enable older students to support younger students
- Eliciting children's views to support the identification of a key adult for each child

Examples of projects with a focus on emotional literacy skill development for young people include:

- Embedding approaches such as Zones of Regulation
- Teaching children about the development and regulation of emotions (using a Chimp Brain approach)
- Facilitating weekly mindfulness sessions to support emotion regulation

Students have reported:

“It's fun and I like building things with the older students” – Mentee Year 6, special school

“I'm finding it interesting because I can see how students progress and become more focused” – Mentor Year 11, special school

“We have learnt not to make anyone sad about their feelings” - Year 3 child, primary school

“Having a movement break or doing a job helps me to focus more when I get back to the classroom. It stops me distracting others” - Year 2 child, primary school

“It feels better when teachers are calm and listen to me. I don't get so angry.” (primary school child)

“Miss gets it. I like that she always tells Nan what I’ve done well, even when I’ve been a bit wobbly” (Year 5 child, primary school)

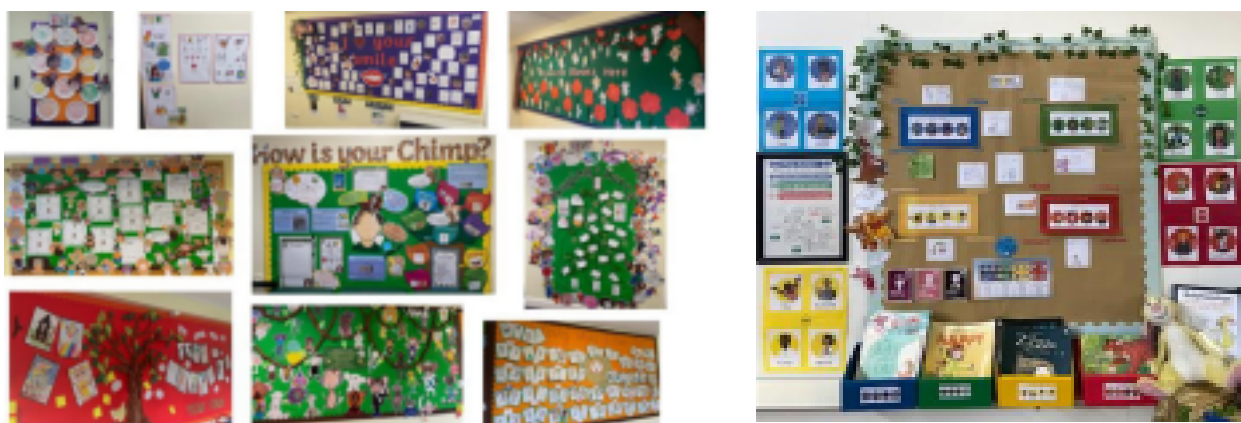
Feedback from schools participating in Silver Award projects with a focus on student voice, participation or skill development indicates the wide impact of this work:

“Analysis of pre-post AASA questionnaires indicates that children feel safer and happier and are able to articulate and reflect on their emotions.” (primary school)

“The mentors and mentees chosen for the mentorship project have responded brilliantly. They are all really engaged in the project and have fallen into their own little roles. Even those who were initially reluctant to engage are becoming increasingly involved.” (special school)

“Feedback from pupils and parents about how the key adult system has improved their school experience” (primary school)

“In a pupil survey 100% of pupils stated that they had a trusted adult they could speak to if they felt they needed to.” (special school)



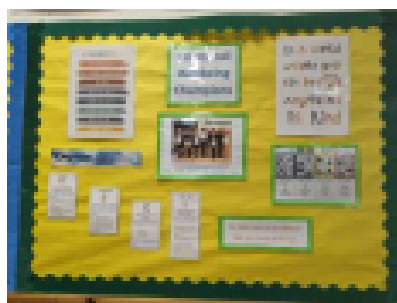
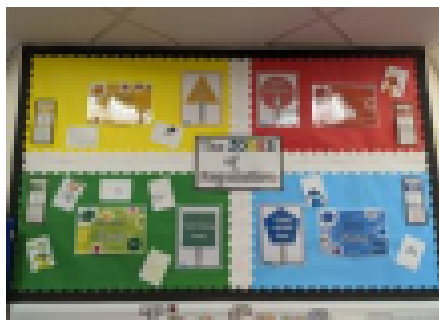
Gold Award

A strand of several Gold Award school projects focused on equipping young people with skills to support their own regulation and engagement with school. Some schools focused on approaches to teach children about emotions, as well as helping them to develop self-regulation skills and strategies (such as Zones of Regulation). One school described establishing Emotional Wellbeing Champions as a way to establish peer support to help children develop emotion regulation skills. Another setting introduced peer mediators during playtimes to help children more successfully manage unstructured times in the school day. One school noted the weekly wellbeing club hosted at lunchtime by their Year 6 children. Children were noted to find these forms of peer support helpful and enjoyable.

Visual and written resources created to extend children's understanding of provision and support available in schools were also highlighted as examples of positive impact by Gold

Award AASA settings (such as child-friendly leaflets, signs within school to remind children of safe spaces to access and the Zones of Regulation approach, and children seeing staff wearing lanyards with emotion coaching visuals).

"We have a bubble box in our classroom. We get to put our bubble in the box to talk to our teacher if we are feeling worried or really excited about something." (Child, primary school)



Parents/carers

Bronze Award

One project focused directly on parents, through providing new arrivals, refugee or asylum seeking parents with access to parent groups and a parent or staff 'buddy' who could speak their most fluent language. The impact was described as follows:

'It has been good! She [new parent from another country] now understands about 'Bank holidays', non- uniform/mufti day and so [she] was included and understood the purpose.' - Parent Buddy

Silver Award

Some Silver Award AASA projects included a focus on parents and carers, whether this was gathering views, increasing participation, sharing knowledge through workshops, or developing a greater sense of belonging for their parent/carer community. One school noted their project aim as building parent/carer wellbeing and emotional capacity so that parents/carers could support their children through co-regulation. Examples of projects undertaken in this area include:

- Delivery of emotion coaching workshops to parents
- Increasing parental and community engagement (for example, through cooking, arts, playing instruments, and cultural picnics)
- A parent/carer group to provide feedback on the school's new Relationship-Based Behaviour Policy
- A parent/carer group delivered through craft workshops

Parent and carer feedback on their school's attachment-aware approaches highlighted the following:

"These workshops really do make you feel that you are part of a lovely school community." (primary school parent/carer)

"I wish this had been around when I was bringing up my children" (primary school grandparent - following a workshop)

"The CALM emotion coaching and the importance of connecting with and tuning into my child and his feelings." (nursery school parent/carer - following a workshop)

"The nurture space is very welcoming, the adults engaged my child in meaningful conversation. She was excited to spend time in a smaller more intimate environment with the opportunity to participate in purposeful conversations. She has found being outside tricky before attending the nurture space but now finds it less daunting and knows there is a safe space to go to if she should need it." (primary school parent/carer)



Gold Award

The majority of Gold Award projects included a focus on working with the school's parent and carer community to enhance positive outcomes for all. Schools intended to share the benefits of an attachment-informed approach with families, including useful strategies to help them attune to their own children. Some schools mentioned aiming to build stronger and more purposeful relationships with those parents and carers who may need more support. There were a range of creative ways schools engaged with their parent/carer community, with some examples given below:

- A fortnightly newsletter aimed at sharing 'a book, a look and a hook' for parents/carers
- Bitesize videos created to focus on areas of parent/carer concern or curiosity

- Workshops and training sessions focused on elements of attachment-aware theory and practice (including emotion coaching as an approach)
- Family groups set up to support a school's most vulnerable children
- Various activities to support the development of a sense of belonging (such as coffee mornings held jointly with local community groups, cultural celebrations held at school and visits to culturally significant places, and increasing parent/carer representation on the PTA)
- A weekly parent/carer newsletter

A range of positive benefits were identified by schools as a result of this partnership working. These included:

- Open and supportive relationships with parents/carers, as well as a more joined up home-school approach to supporting relationships and behaviour
- Children naming their emotions with more consistency
- Parents/carers reporting feeling more equipped to have meaningful and attuned conversations with their children
- Parents/carers referring to children's emotions rather than their behaviour and using the language of attachment-aware and trauma-informed practice (for example, referring to regulating, actively listening, taking time and space, planning for transitions, and allowing for positive reflections)
- Parents/carers identifying that the school supports the whole child (rather than just the academic side) and supports their child's wellbeing and safety at school
- Support for an adoptive family as they went through the adoption process and made their transition to becoming a family.

Below are some quotes reflecting the impact of projects focused on this area:

"This has been really relevant to the situation with my son. I have come away with new strategies and ideas to support his emotions at home - thank you!" (Parent, primary school)

"At this moment in time I feel blessed that [my child] is at a school where all his difficulties are met and they just get on with what they feel works for him and if something doesn't work, they are working on what they can do, to make it work!" (Parent/carer, junior school)

"Since he joined back in September I can honestly see a big change in his behaviour at home and in himself." (Parent/carer, junior school)

"He felt supported and that he could go to school knowing he was safe and being protected as good as if it was home" (Parent/carer, primary school)

"The school has a real community feel to it...it feels like everyone is glued towards the same goals" (Parent/carer, primary school)

"The school helps us to use different strategies to deal with challenging behaviour through the wellbeing workshops" (Parent survey, primary school)

Gold Award Focus

Attachment-aware beacons - working with the wider community

As part of the Gold Award, schools were asked to include a focus on ‘rippling out’ their attachment aware practice to other settings and provisions within their community. This work often focused on supporting effective transitions for children, either by working with linked or feeder nurseries or primary schools, or through strengthening connections with students’ next education setting (such as working with secondary schools to support the Year 6 - Year 7 transition). Activities that took place as part of these projects included facilitating transition groups for students and delivering workshops on attachment-awareness and trauma-informed practice (including use of emotion coaching as an approach) for practitioners, as well as providing follow-up support. One school noted the importance of wider whole school initiatives as a way to embed trauma-informed practice into all aspects of school life, so that this is not seen as a ‘bolt-on’ to what the school does, but as integral to everything the school tries to achieve for their students, families, staff and the wider community (including their feeder primary schools).

Designated teachers identified a range of positive outcomes through delivering outreach and dissemination work such as attachment-awareness or emotion coaching workshops, including:

- Consistency in language and approach across the staff team, as well as a similar approach being used at home by parents/carers
- Children exploring more emotions and staff helping the children to express these
- Reduction in dysregulation for vulnerable children
- Practitioners identifying they have more understanding of the reasons for children’s dysregulation, as well as how to support them
- Increased confidence and skill for practitioners when supporting dysregulated children
- Children showing signs that they are soothed by the naming of emotions and are developing self-regulatory strategies
- Restorative conversations take place which support the relationships being built
- Practitioners using the emotion coaching approach to support the transition to school

Members of schools’ wider communities (including practitioners and parents/carers) noted the positive impact of activities delivered through the Gold AASA projects:

“It has given new strategies to manage difficult behaviours.”

“Absolutely loved learning about emotions. It was presented very well and I will use at home with my three year old.”

“This will help us to develop our practice and to give the youngest children to verbalise their feelings when they are unable to self-regulate. An excellent session!” (Nursery staff member)

“Love that it got me to think differently and approach things in a different way.”

“I have found this training very beneficial and now have a much better understanding”

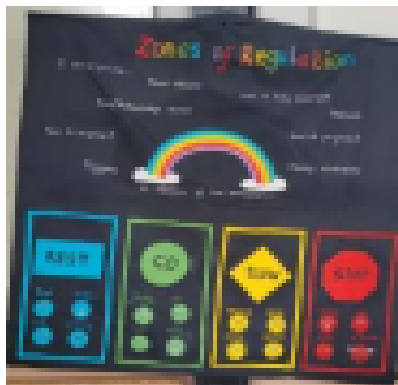
“Really enjoyed learning about this – helpful for all ages.”

Gold AASA outreach projects focused on strengthening key education transition points involved a range of activities, such as: engaging with staff at the new setting to foster working relationships; organising input from the school’s link educational psychologist around information sharing to support transition; and supporting children to start to get to know and build relationships with adults in their new setting. The impact of these projects is highlighted in the below quotes:

“I have really enjoyed meeting some of my new teachers from [secondary school]. I feel less worried about September now.” (Year 6 pupil, primary school)

“Mrs A from Y7 was really friendly. I know where to go for help and it was good to look at the All about Me sheet about some of the teachers.” (Year 6 pupil, primary school)

“I feel that A will be really vulnerable when transitioning to Y7 and I am so pleased they have had chance to talk about their worries in the transition group.” (Parent of a Year 6 child, primary school)



“Now we have completed the Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards, it is clear what an immense journey we have been on. The training and support received have become fully embedded as this is seen throughout the school and with the children themselves. Often commented on by visitors and parents, the interactions between staff and children are emotion/empathy-first and this has meant that the behaviour incident numbers are falling and the relationships across the school are deepening. Staff across the school show an awareness and understanding of behaviour being communication and are striving to support rather than discipline. Now we have created a policy together, this shows our investment in the attachment aware principles and our commitment to ensure that any child with needs is well supported.” (Designated Teacher, primary school)

“As an ‘Attachment Aware’ school, we pride ourselves on ensuring the best possible support for the most needy children throughout our school. Through consistent approaches and tackling any difficult situation with empathy, we can ensure our school community are best equipped for the wider challenges life can bring. I am proud to have been part of this project and thrilled to achieve the Gold Award.” (Chair of Governors, primary school)

SECTION 4: EVALUATION DATA FOR BRONZE AWARD SCHOOLS

Whole school training

Each participating school received two 1 hour 30-minute training sessions delivered in collaboration with their AASA coach. The focus of these whole school trainings were:

1. An introduction to attachment and developmental trauma
2. An introduction to emotion coaching.

Schools were encouraged to ensure whole school attendance, including inviting school governors, support staff and office-based staff.

For part 1 of the whole school training, a total of 61 responses were received from 7 out of the 11 participating schools. Of these 61 responses, 20 responses were from one large secondary school and 9 responses were from a middle school, with only a few respondents from the other participating schools. Therefore results will be skewed towards two school settings in particular and not necessarily representative of the full cohort.

The set out aims of this training session were as follows:

- To outline your school’s involvement in the AfC Virtual School attachment aware schools award
- To explore key features of an attachment aware and trauma informed school
- To understand what is meant by attachment and developmental trauma and how this may affect children and young people
- To understand some basic principles of brain development in the context of attachment and trauma based needs.

Out of the 61 responses received from school staff following the whole school training part 1:

- 98% (60 out of 61 responses) agreed or strongly agreed that the training met these aims.
- 92% (56 out of 61 responses) agreed or strongly agreed that it will directly impact their practice.
- 90% (55 out of 61 responses) agreed or strongly agreed that it will contribute to whole school practice and development.

For part 2 of the whole school training, a total of 55 responses were received from 7 out of the 11 participating schools. Of these 55 responses, 20 responses were from one primary school, with fewer responses from the other participating schools. Therefore, results will be skewed and not necessarily representative of the full cohort.

The set out aims of this training were as follows:

- To consider key relational approaches we can use in school to support children and young people.
- To understand what is meant by 'emotion coaching' to support emotional regulation.
- To feel confident in using emotion coaching approaches with children and young people.

Out of the 55 responses received from school staff following whole school training part 2:

- 95% (52 out of 61 responses) agreed or strongly agreed that the training met these aims.
- 95% (52 out of 61 responses) agreed or strongly agreed that it will directly impact their practice.
- 95% (52 out of 61 responses) agreed or strongly agreed that it will contribute to whole school practice and development.

"Really useful, delivered in a calm but purposeful way. Engaging and illuminating. Thank you." *"Fantastic delivery and training."*

Respondents were asked what they will do differently as a result of the training. The following key themes emerged:

Developing a relationship with children

"Give the child more time, get them to understand their behaviour. Let them know it's ok and make them feel they have someone they trust."

"I will definitely focus on building relationships, building trust and listening more, but actively showing I'm listening."

Understanding behaviour as communication

"Consider what may be triggering a student's action or reaction rather than jumping to conclusions."

"I have a better understanding of how attachment can influence behaviour and communication. This understanding can help me be more compassionate when approaching not only students but adults too."

Raising awareness

"This has raised awareness of attachment and trauma and how it impacts pupils. Staff are more reflective and thoughtful. It was useful to think about changes in our school, for example the increase in students from Hong Kong, now 10% of our population and that at the

root of this influx due to migration to the UK is trauma - changing cultures, leaving family, forced move due to the political regime. As well as cases of more obvious trauma linked to child protection, refugee status or family breakdown. Many staff have reflected on pupils they have taught and how this training would have been useful to have had."

Being more aware of and adapting their own communication and responses with children.

"Consider more the background of the student and the student's perspective when dealing with challenging behaviour."

"Be more aware of the importance of the language used to support children".

"I'll approach the children with more patience, compassion and understanding when they're feeling dysregulated."

Working in partnership

"Work with colleagues so that they are in a stronger position to address the needs of our most vulnerable students."

"Work more closely with senior management to ensure I am fully informed."

"Consider how to ask families and be inclusive to their needs in a no judgement way about trauma they may have experienced."

Using practical and evidence-based tools

"Use the script language from the emotion coaching".

"Use the CALM approach & think carefully about the 3 Rs of relational response."

"Endeavour to validate emotions and talk through to resolve outbursts."

"Ensure children can articulate what strategies support them when they are dysregulated and make a safe space in the classroom with a display to reflect strategies."

Changes in policy

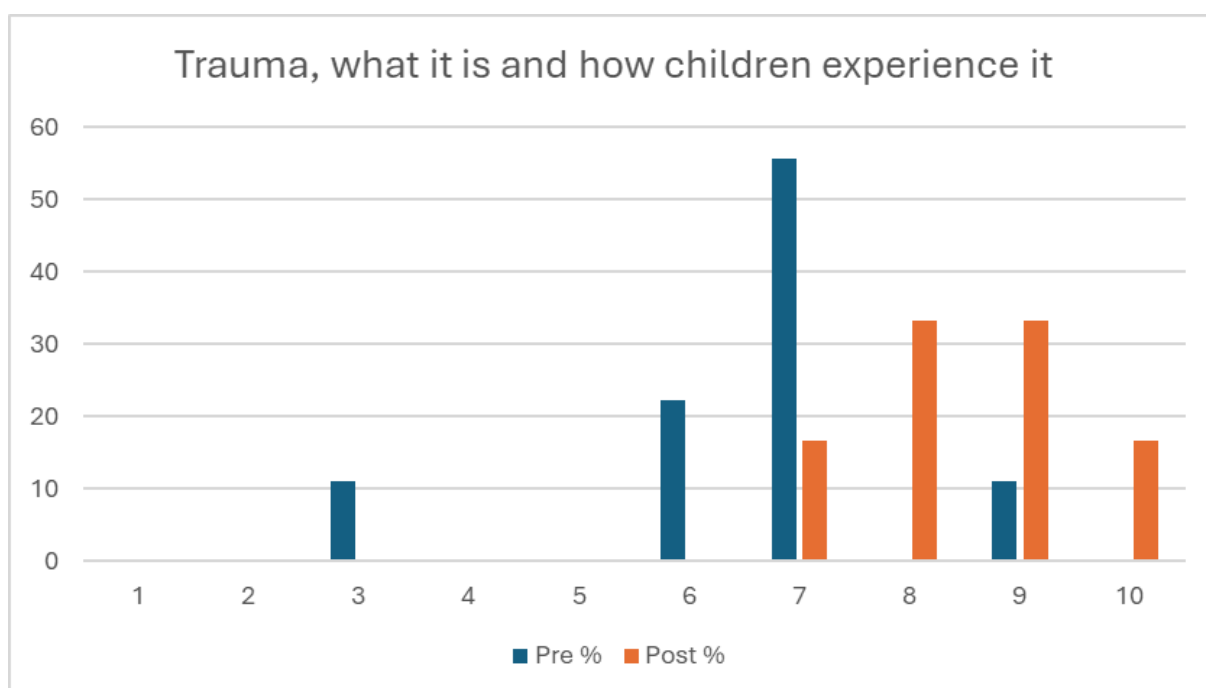
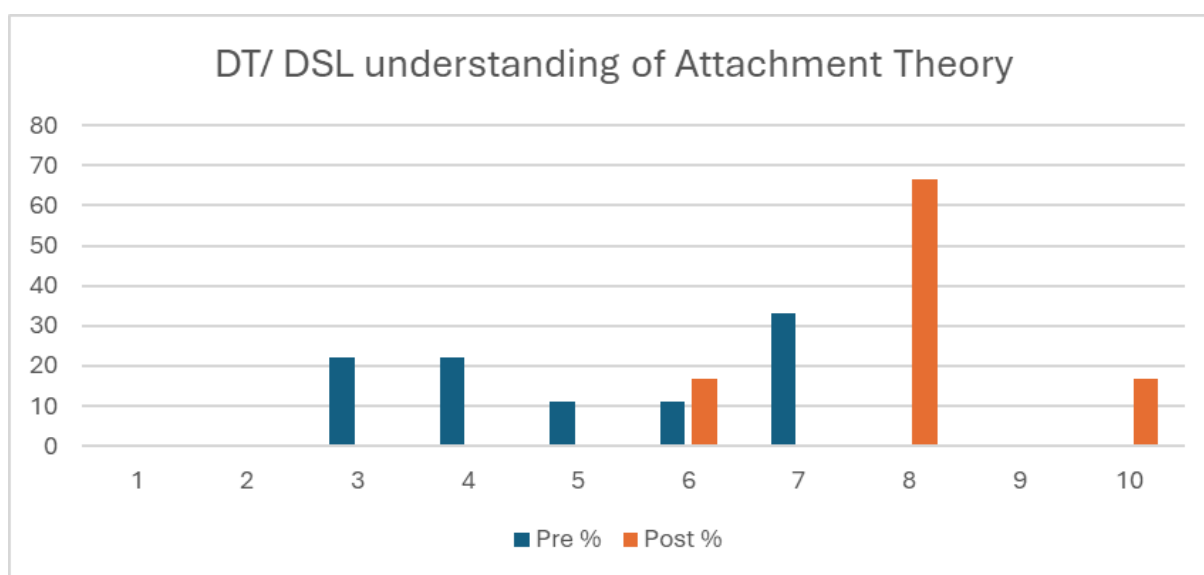
"Update the school's behaviour policy so it focuses on relationships and supporting all pupils with SEMH needs".

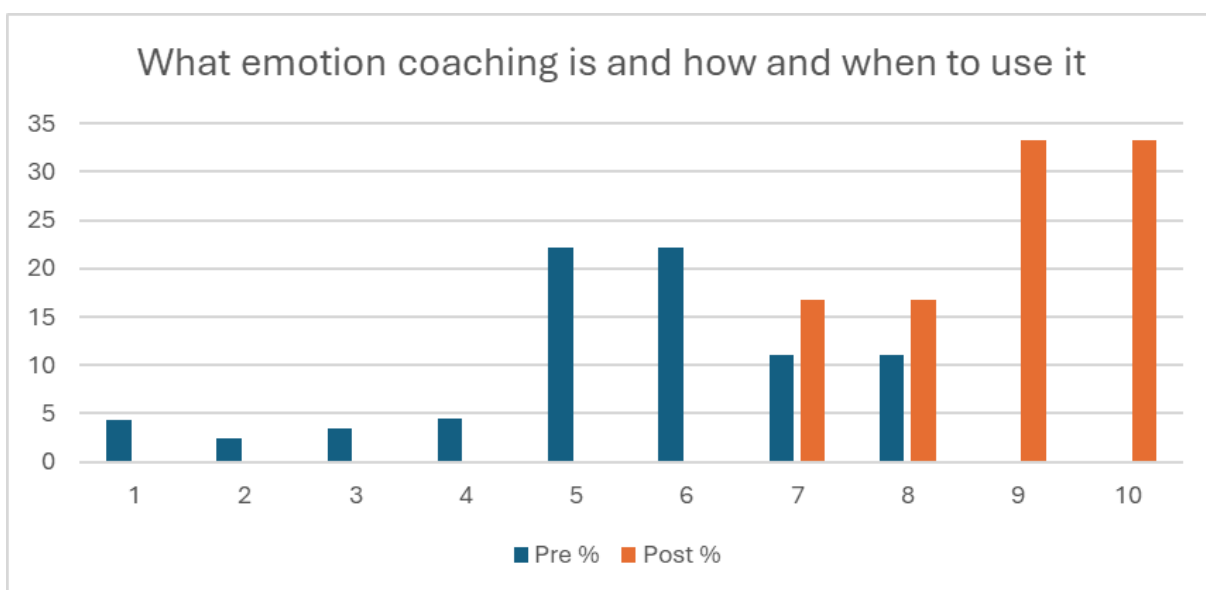
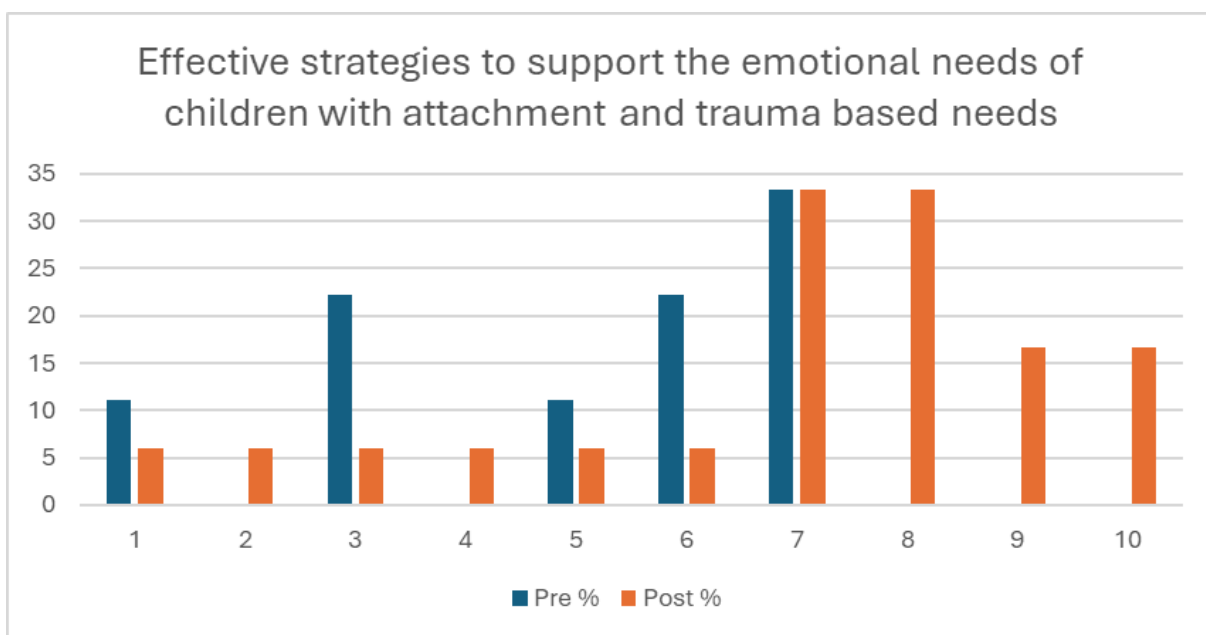
DT/ DSL Pre and Post Quantitative Data

DTs/ DSLs were asked to complete an evaluation survey at the start of the programme ('pre-programme survey') and again towards the end of the academic year ('post-programme survey').

DT/ DSL knowledge, understanding and confidence.

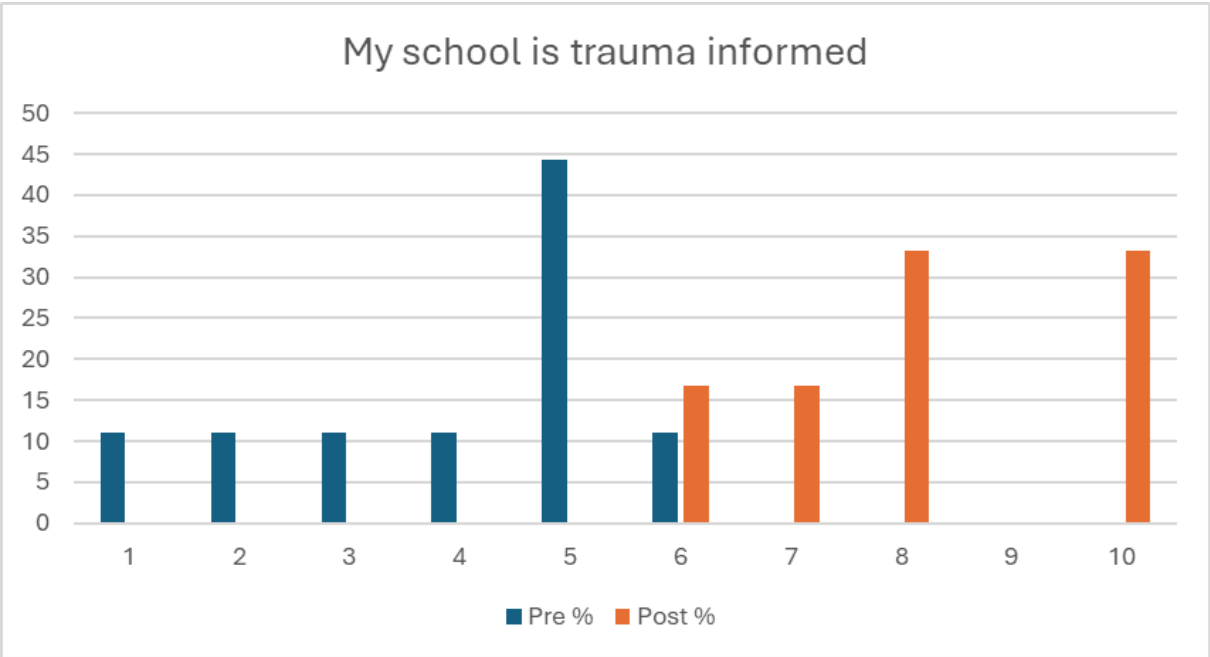
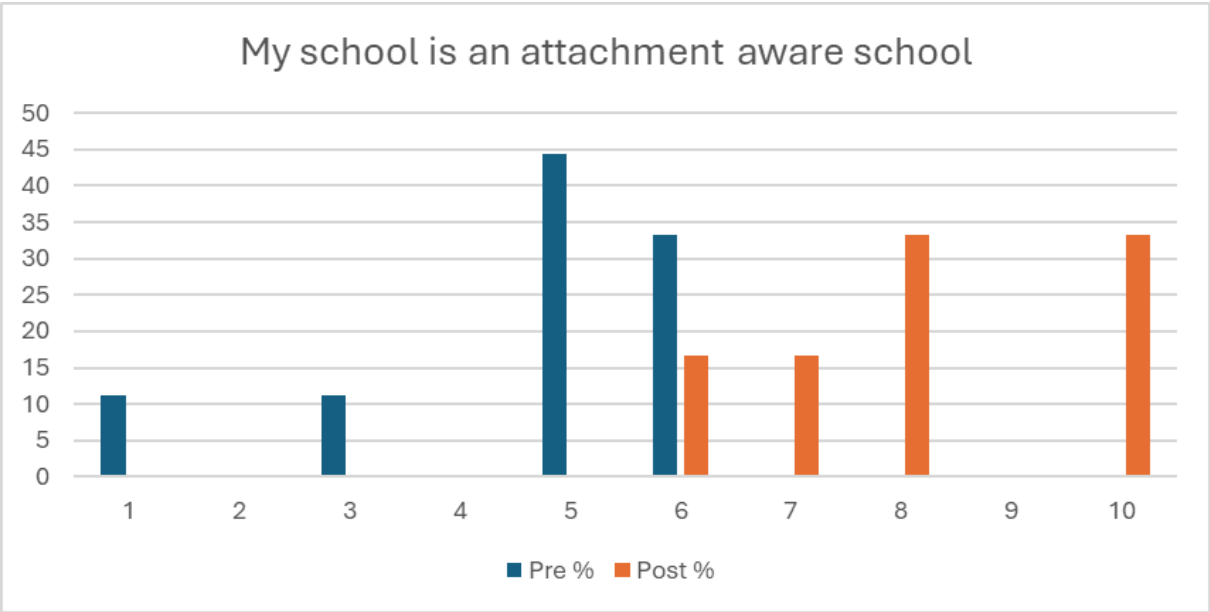
There has been a measurable impact in DT/ DSL self-reported confidence, knowledge and understanding in relation to a range of relevant areas to their practice supporting care experienced children and young people. For all of the below graphs, as a general guide, respondents were asked to rate between 1 - 4 if these theories, approaches and ideas were quite new to them; rate between 5 - 7 if they have a reasonable level of knowledge or are putting into practice strategies as a result; rate between 8 - 10 if they are actively and confidently applying this to their practice. A significant shift in knowledge and understanding, towards 'actively and confidently applying to practice' was identified between pre and post evaluation measures.



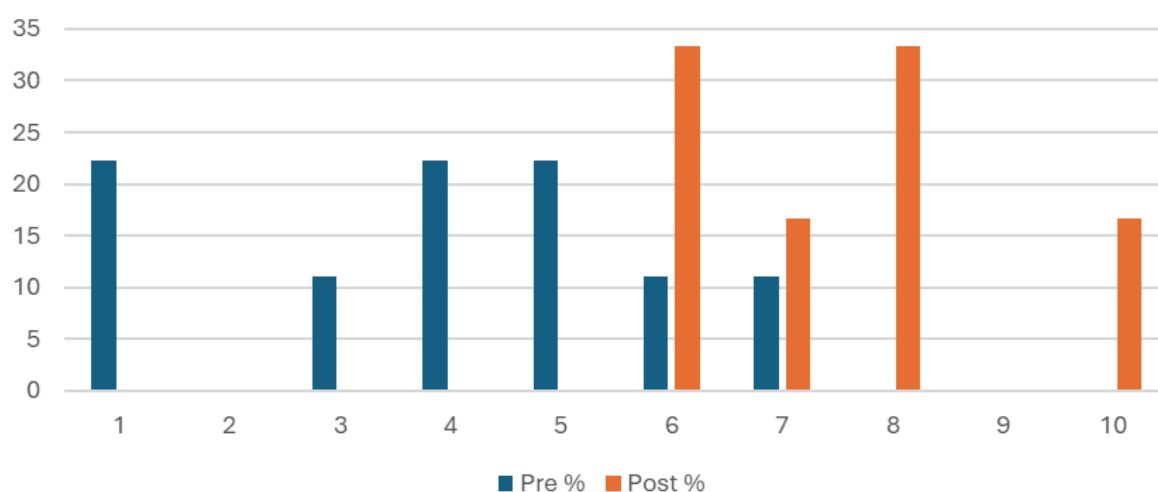


Whole school change

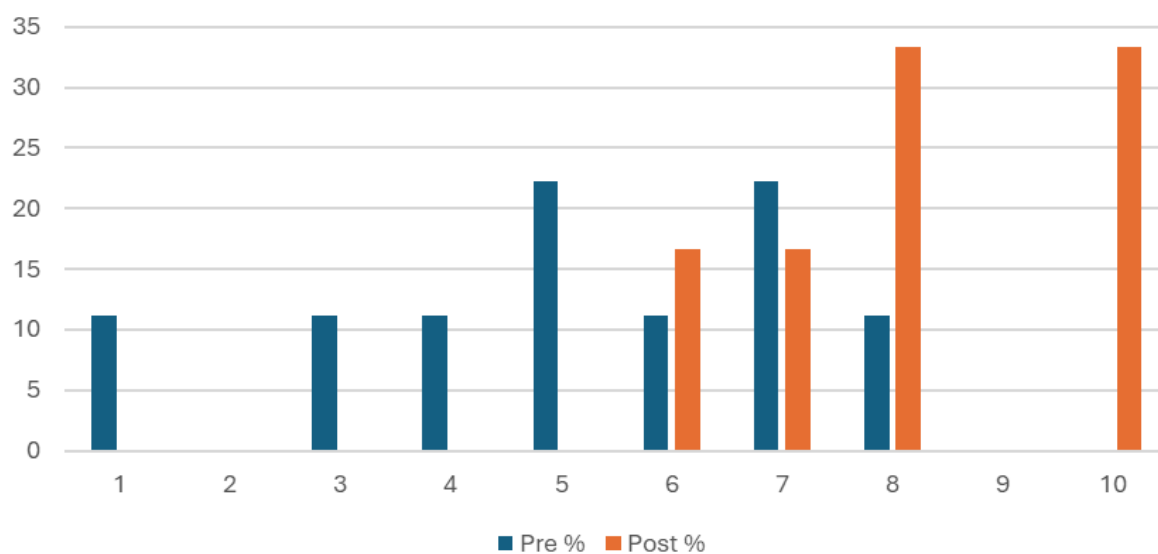
Comparison of pre and post programme survey responses indicated a significant positive response in relation to the following statements, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 10 represents strongly agree, showing a significant shift in DT and DSL perceptions regarding attachment and trauma informed practice in their schools.

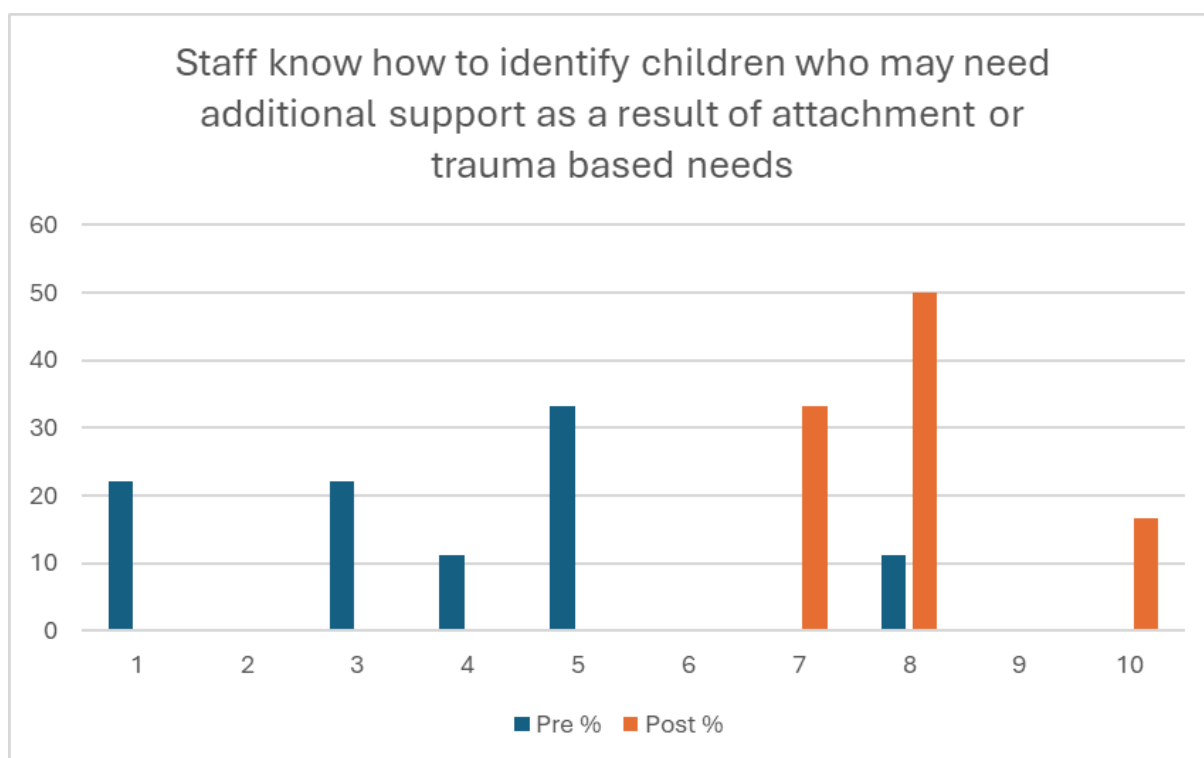
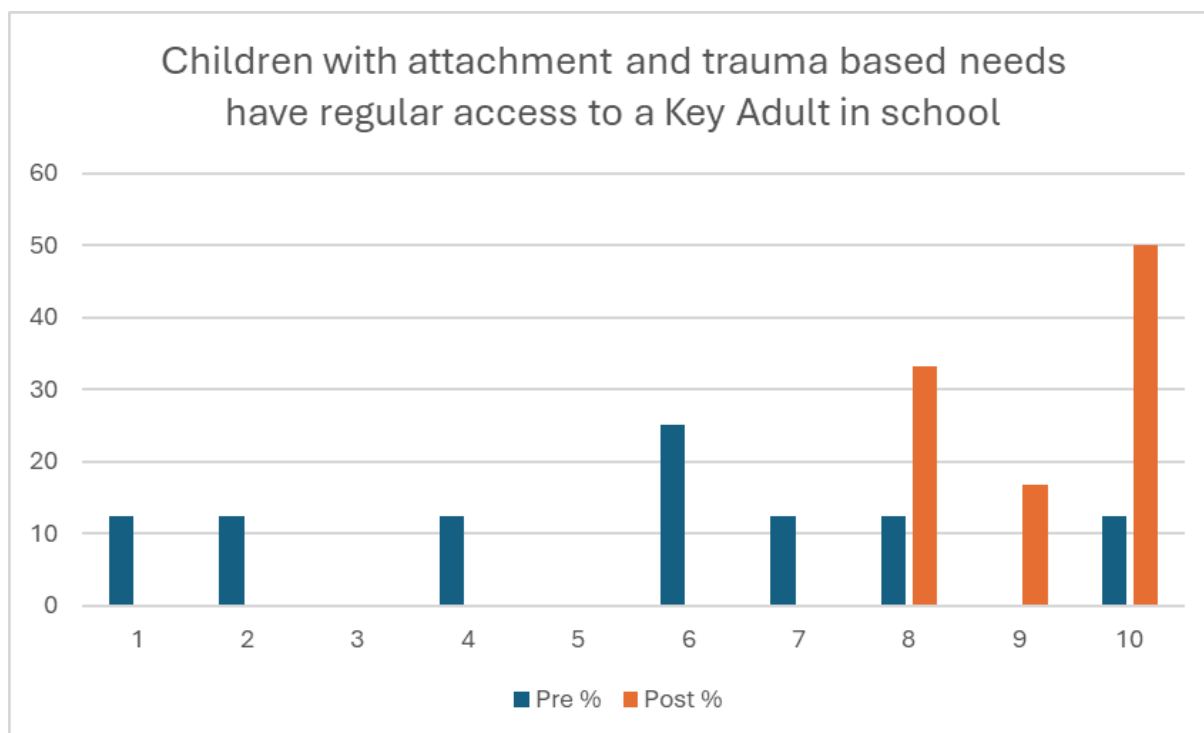


Staff use a range of effective strategies to support children with attachment and trauma based needs



Children with attachment and trauma based needs feel safe and secure at my school





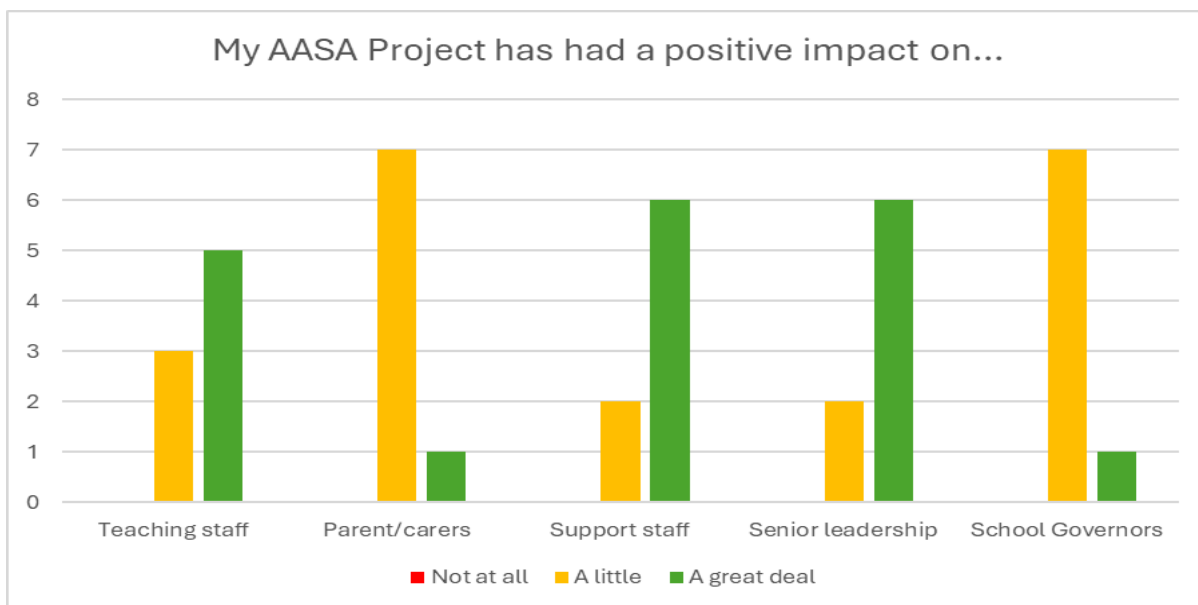
DT/ DSL Post Programme Qualitative Impact Data: Evaluation Survey

In terms of their experience of the AASA 100% of DTs/ DSLs who responded said that they:

- Enjoyed being part of the award
- Felt supported by AfC Virtual School

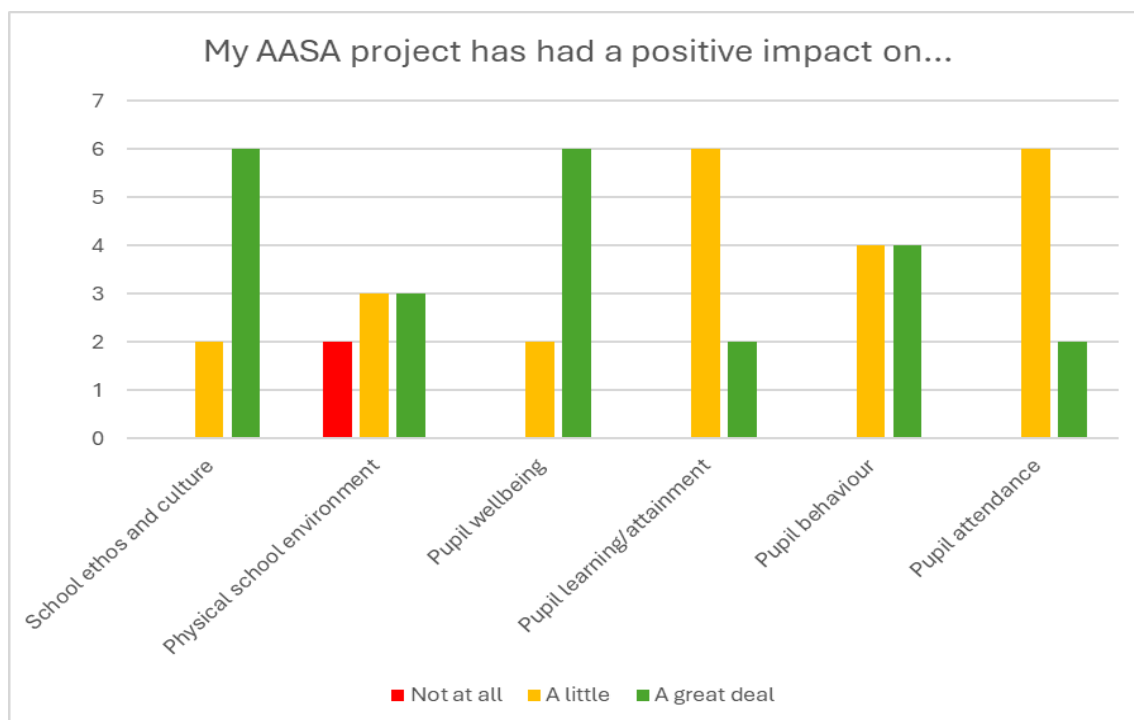
- Felt supported by their own school
- Would recommend AfC Virtual Schools' Attachment Aware Schools Award to other schools.

DTs and DSLs were asked whether the project had had a positive impact on a variety of stakeholders. 8 (out of 11) responses were received, all of whom reported either 'a great deal' or 'a little' positive impact on all of the groups listed:



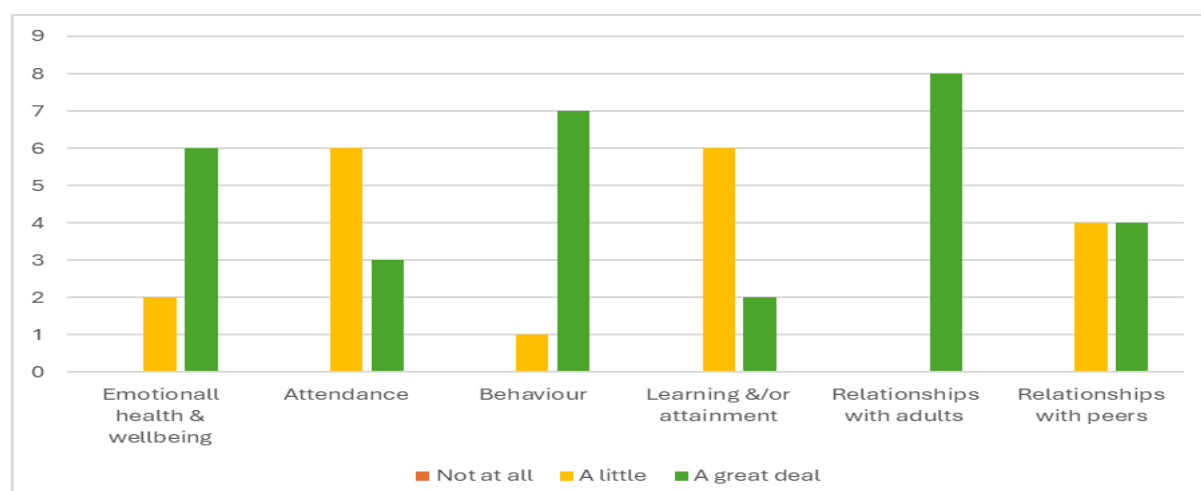
School governors and parent/carers were identified as benefitting the least, with only 1 DT/ DSL identifying 'a great deal' of positive impact on each of these groups. This could be attributed to whether DTs/ DSLs specifically targeted these groups as part of their whole school change project and/or included them within the whole school training sessions.

DT/ DSLs were asked whether the project had had a positive impact on a variety of aspects of school life and student outcomes. The significant majority noted 'a great deal' or 'a little' positive impact across all areas as can be seen in the graph below.



The areas where there has been most impact are likely to reflect the focus area of their whole school change project during the bronze year (e.g. did this involve any changes to physical school environment such as designing a therapeutic space?)

DTs/ DSLs were also asked to think more specifically about the impact of the AASA for vulnerable groups of children and young people who are more likely to have attachment and/or trauma needs (CIN, CP, CLA, PLAC, SGO). As illustrated in the graph below, all DTs/ DSLs who completed the evaluation survey have noted 'a great deal' of positive impact on relationships with adults, and 7 out of the 8 respondents also note 'a great deal' of positive impact on behaviour:



In July 2024, DTs/ DSLs were asked 'What changes have you noticed in your school community as a result of taking part in this project?' They were encouraged to gather the views of other stakeholders in their responses, such as teaching staff, parents, governors

and pupils. Three key themes emerged from these:

Language and relationships

Deepening of the thinking around behaviour as communication then informs relationships: key adults, transformation in the school community, and fostering a compassionate and supportive environment.

- *“Emotion coaching is practiced across the school. Relationships are seen as key to learning and promoting positive behaviours.”*
- *“The role of a trusted adult has been enhanced.”*
- *“The training in emotion coaching and the adoption of a relationship-based behaviour policy has significantly transformed the school community. Teachers and staff have developed skills to better understand and respond to students' emotional needs, creating a more compassionate and supportive environment.”*
- *“The school now prioritises emotional well-being, fostering a connected and motivated community.”*
- *“Language used is trauma and attachment informed. Staff approach behaviour through an inquisitive lens first and are more able to support children where they are at.”*
- *“Greater understanding of what children need to feel safe.”*

Behavioural Impact

Schools are seeing a decline in challenging behaviour:

- *“We are seeing less aggressive behaviour outbursts and fewer exclusions.”*
- *“It has had a positive impact on behaviour”.*
- *“Fewer major incidents reported on CPOMS” (behaviour log)*

Thinking ahead and taking a preventative approach

Through consideration of future transitions, vulnerable pupils arriving such as EAL and refugees.

- *“We have improved our admissions systems and support for new pupils and enhanced our offer to EAL/refugees arriving in our school.”*

“The training in emotion coaching and the adoption of a relationship-based behaviour policy has significantly transformed the school community. Teachers and staff have developed skills to better understand and respond to students' emotional needs, creating a more compassionate and supportive environment. This has led to stronger, more trusting relationships, fewer behavioural issues, and improved classroom dynamics. As a result, students feel more understood and valued, boosting their confidence, engagement, and academic performance. The school now prioritises emotional well-being, fostering a connected and motivated community”

SECTION 5: EVALUATION DATA FOR SILVER AND GOLD AWARD SCHOOLS

In 2023-24, we had 31 schools participating in Silver and 19 schools participating in Gold, with schools from all 3 of our areas, Kingston, Richmond and Windsor & Maidenhead.

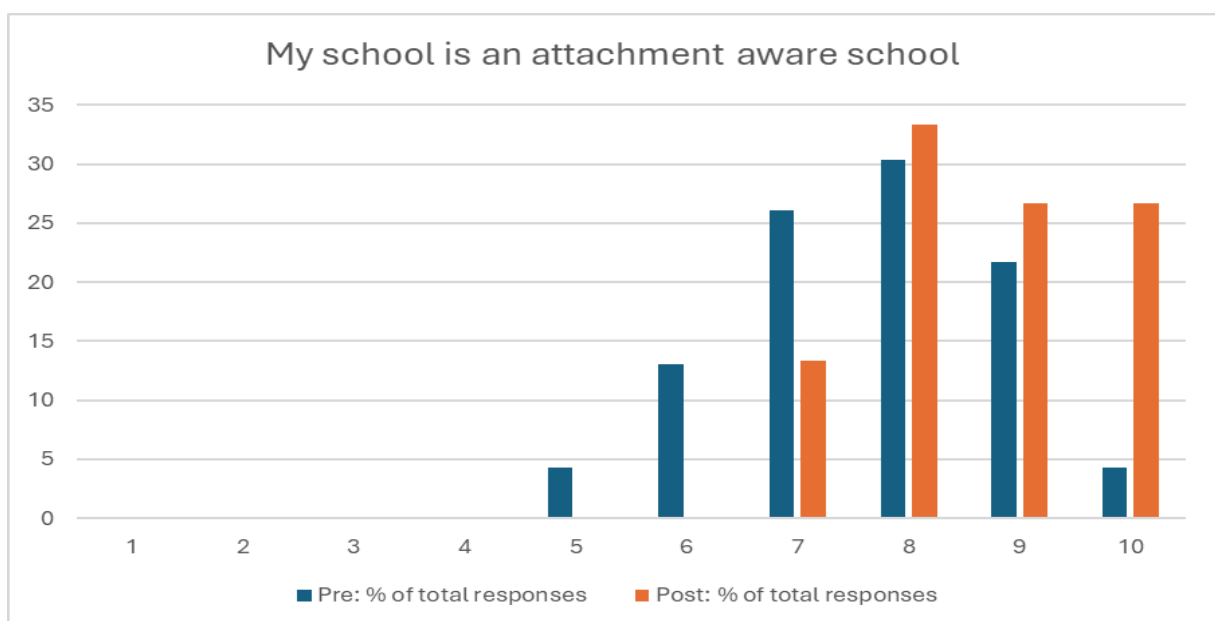
DT/ DSL Pre and Post Quantitative Data

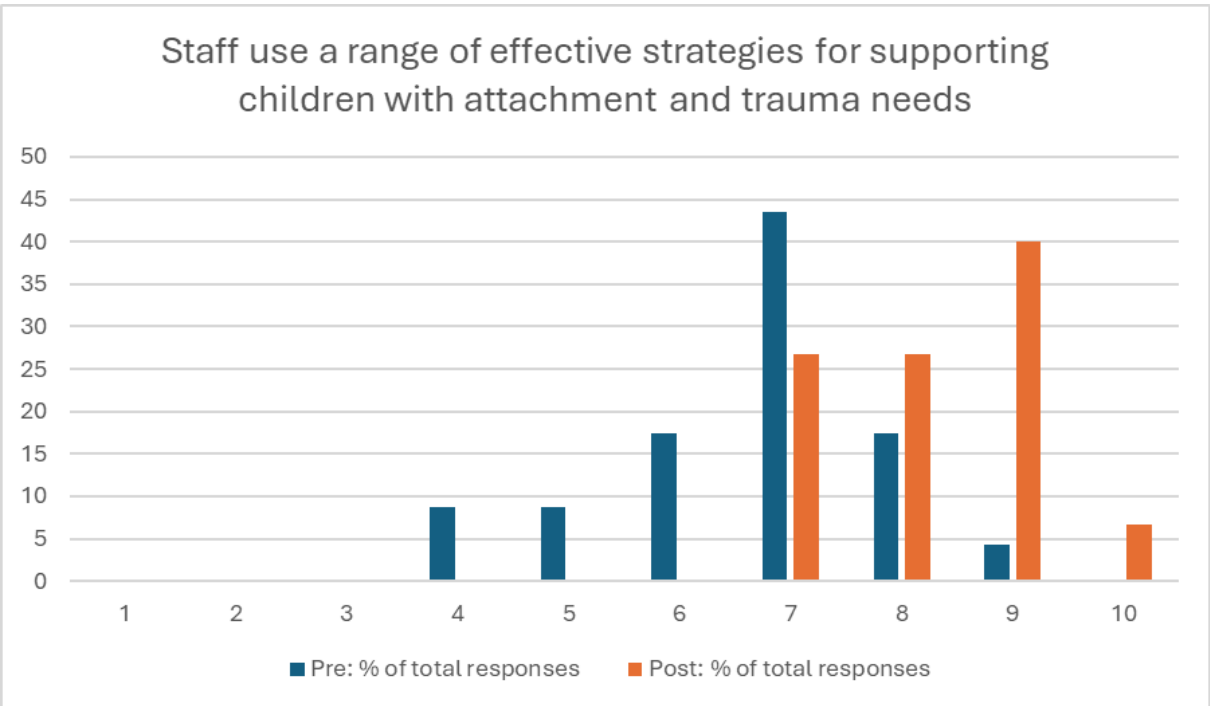
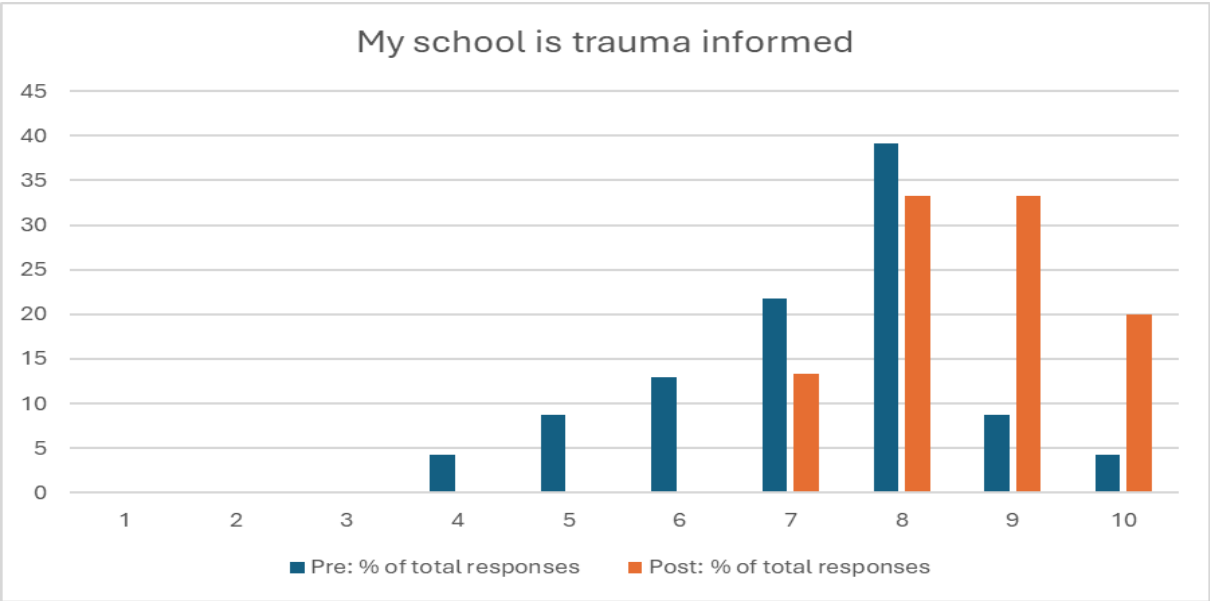
Just as in the Bronze Award year, DTs/ DSLs were asked to complete an evaluation survey at the start of the programme ('pre-programme survey') and again towards the end of the academic year ('post-programme survey').

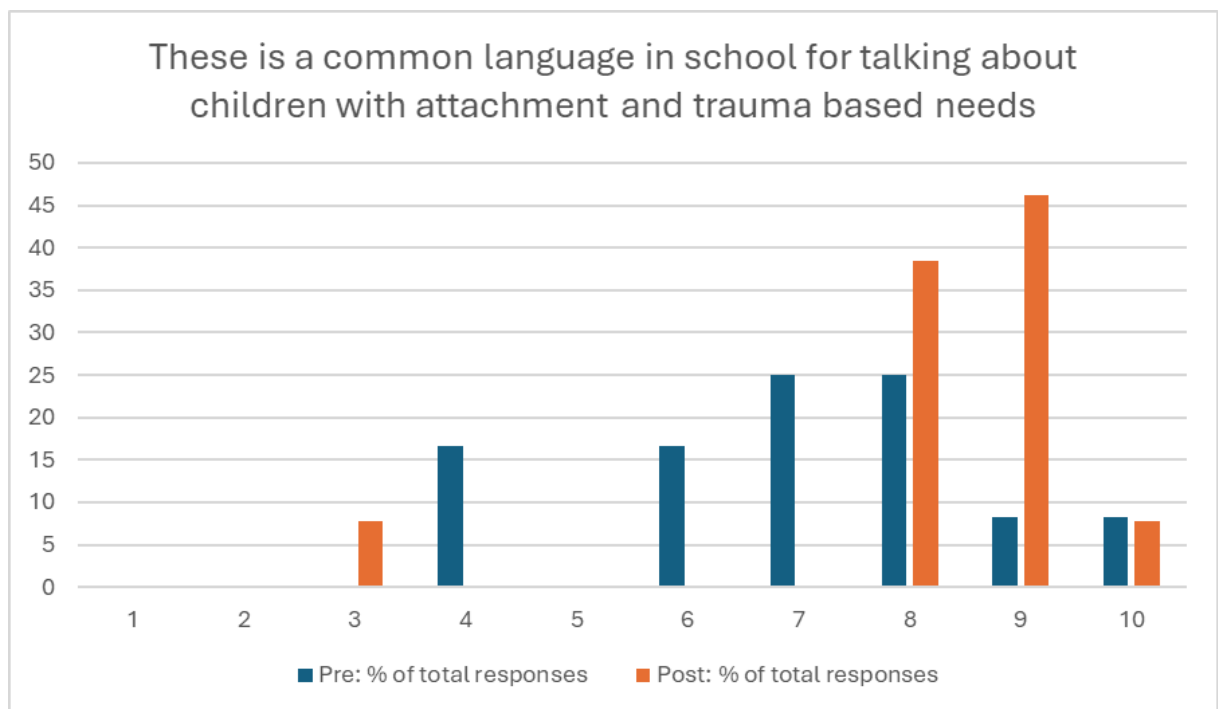
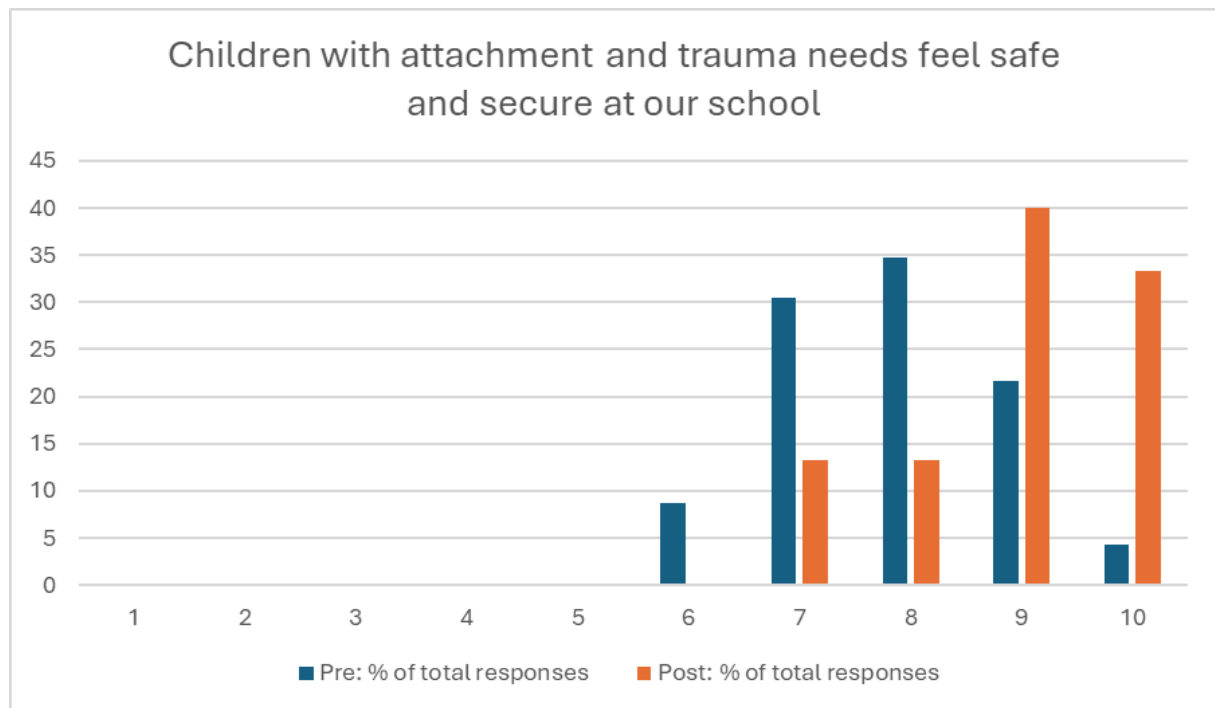
For the Silver Award, schools are expected to continue their attachment aware journey by focusing on embedding practice across the whole school and for Gold Award, schools are expected to keep attachment awareness as a high priority and become attachment aware 'beacons' within their local community. By considering the comparison of pre and post project evaluation responses for whole school change, we can get an idea as to what extent this has been achieved. For a number of statements relating to whole school attachment aware practice, DTs/ DSLs were asked to rate their school on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 10 represents strongly agree.

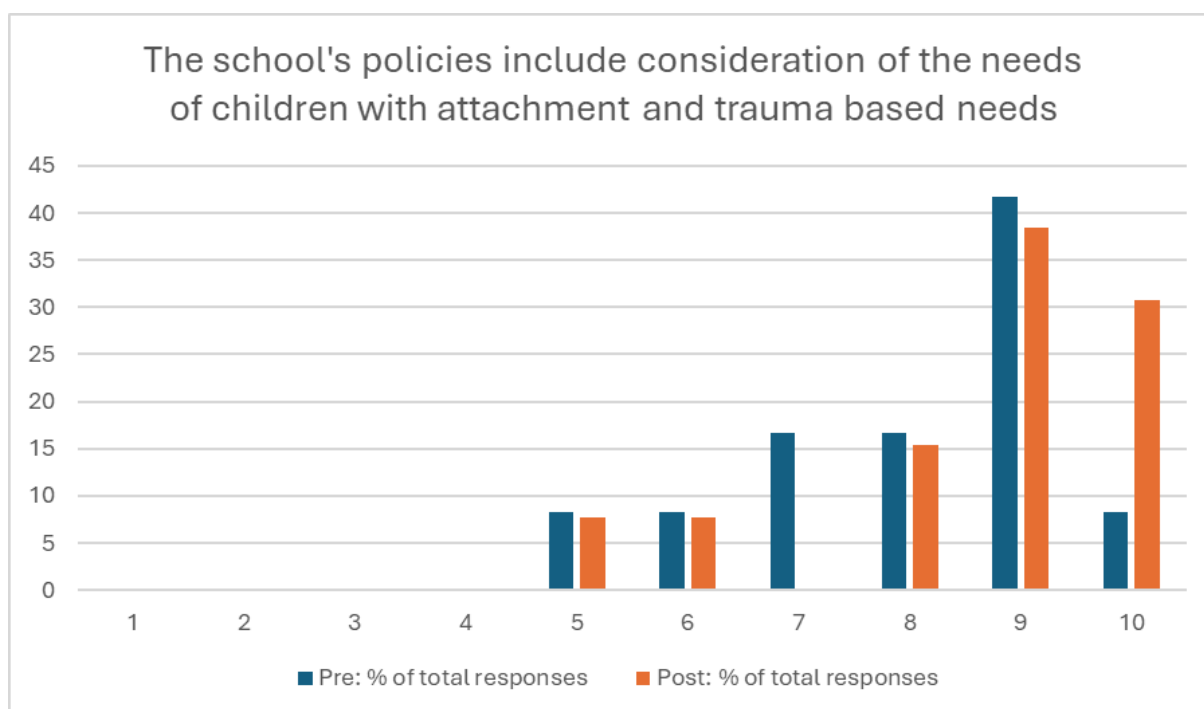
Silver Award Schools

Of the 31 schools participating in Silver, we received 23 responses for the pre-programme survey and 15 responses for the post-programme survey. Due to this discrepancy in response rate, the graphs below show the percentage of total schools who rated each statement a certain number on the 1-10 scale. In comparison with the data from the bronze cohort all delegates' starting points on whole school change were at a higher level (4-5 as opposed to 1-2). The graphs below indicate that an ongoing positive shift in DT/ DSLs perceptions regarding attachment and trauma informed practice in their schools was reported between the pre and post measures, with more schools more strongly agreeing with the statements around attachment aware practice (8-10).



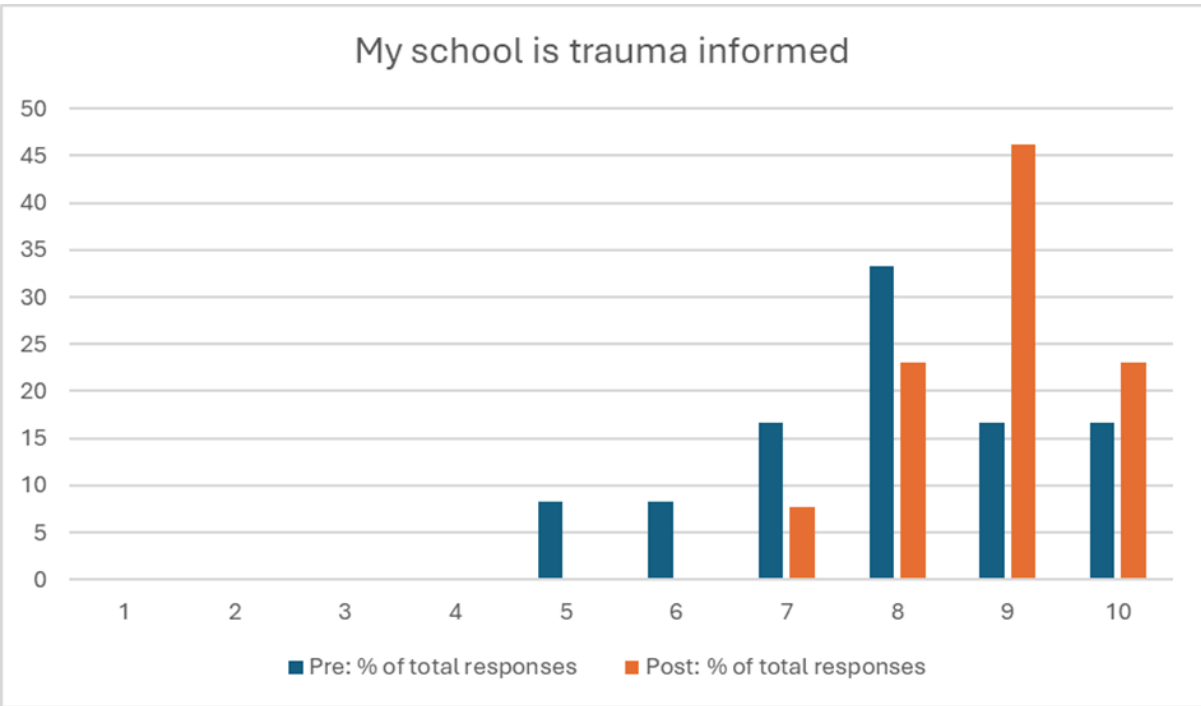
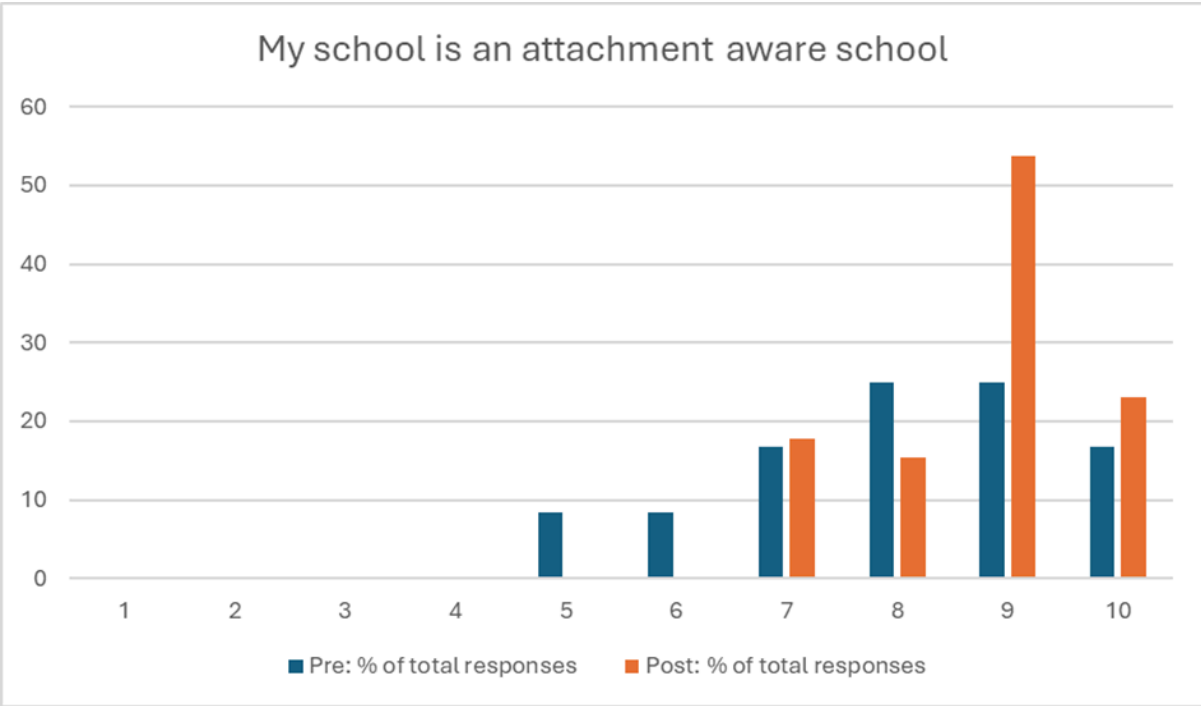




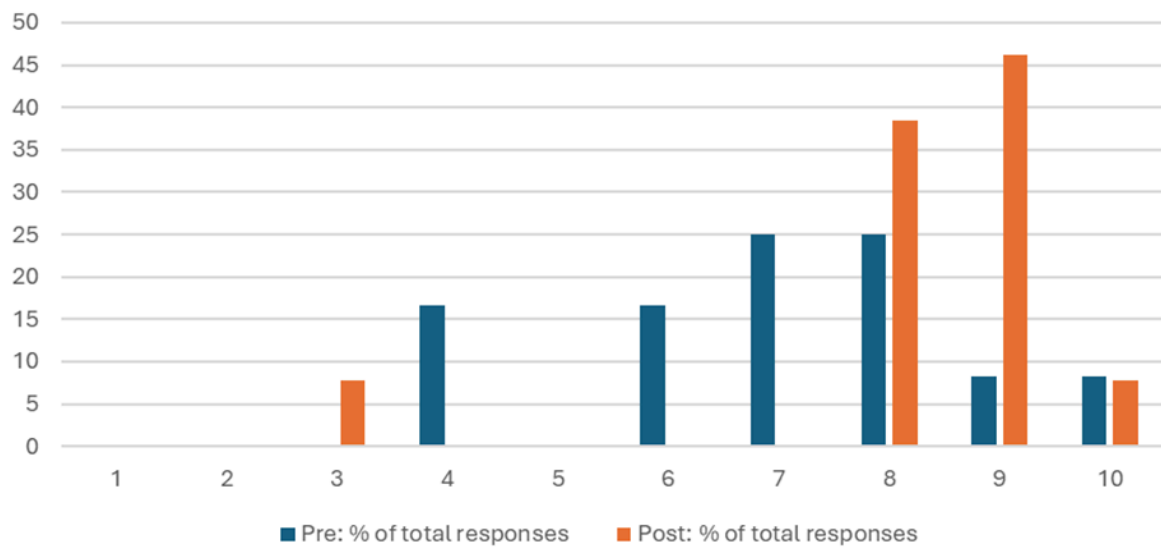


Gold Award Schools

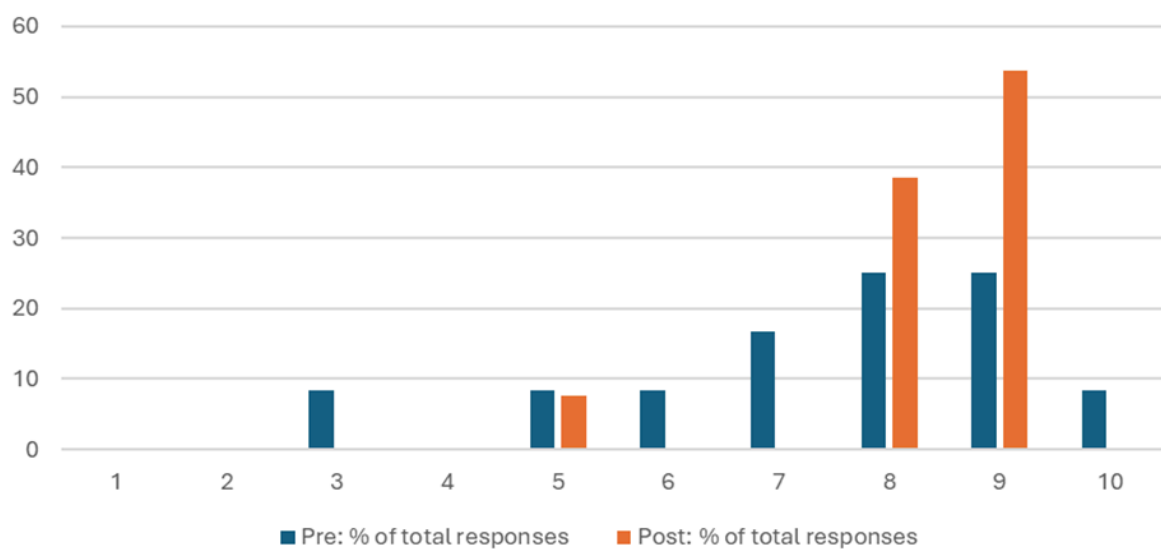
Of the 19 schools participating in Gold, we received 12 responses for the pre-programme survey and 13 responses for the post-programme survey. Due to this discrepancy in response rate, the graphs below show the percentage of total schools who rated each statement a certain number on the 1-10 scale. In comparison with the data from the silver cohort, gold delegates' starting points were generally at a slightly higher level overall (5-9 as opposed to 4-8). Although the post-programme data is overall similar to Silver Award Schools, the graphs below indicate that an ongoing positive shift in DT/ DSLs perceptions regarding attachment and trauma informed practice in their schools was reported between the pre and post measures. For most schools, most positive change on these measures is already noticed within the first two years of the programme (i.e. bronze and silver years). However, for a very small minority of schools their post-programme ratings are not consistently high across all areas. The Virtual School will need to be aware of such schools for the purposes of quality assurance of the Gold Award and so that ongoing tailored support is in place as needed.

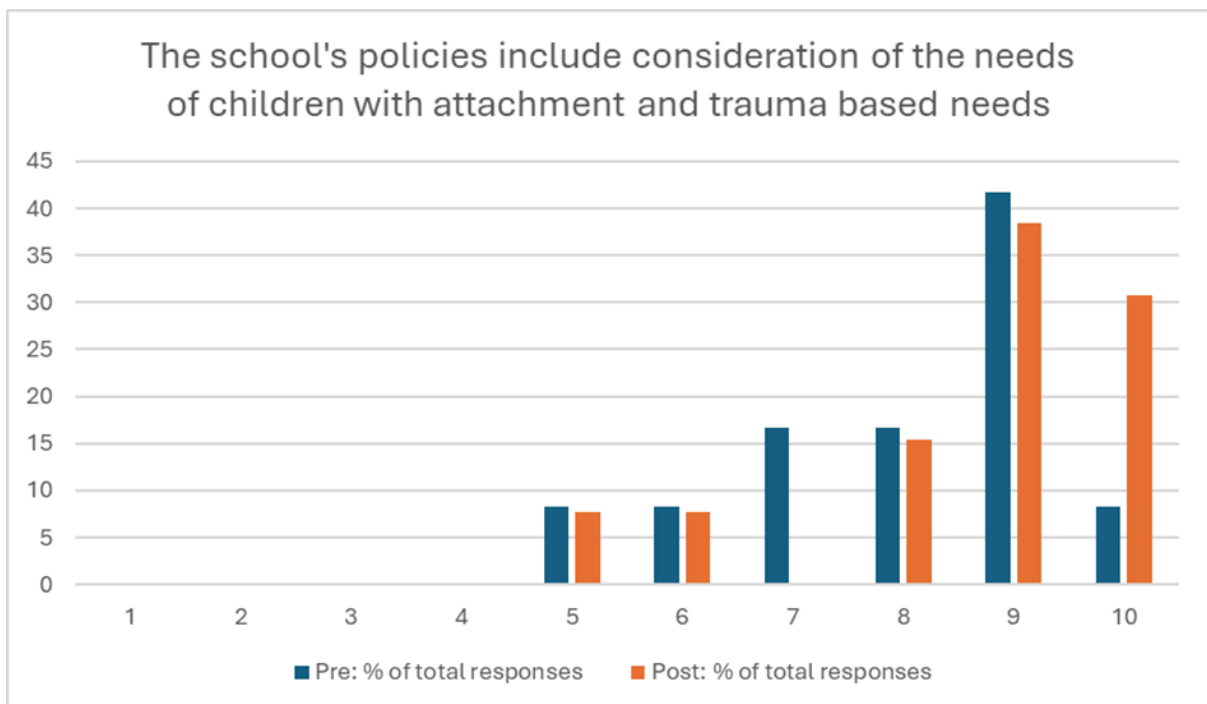
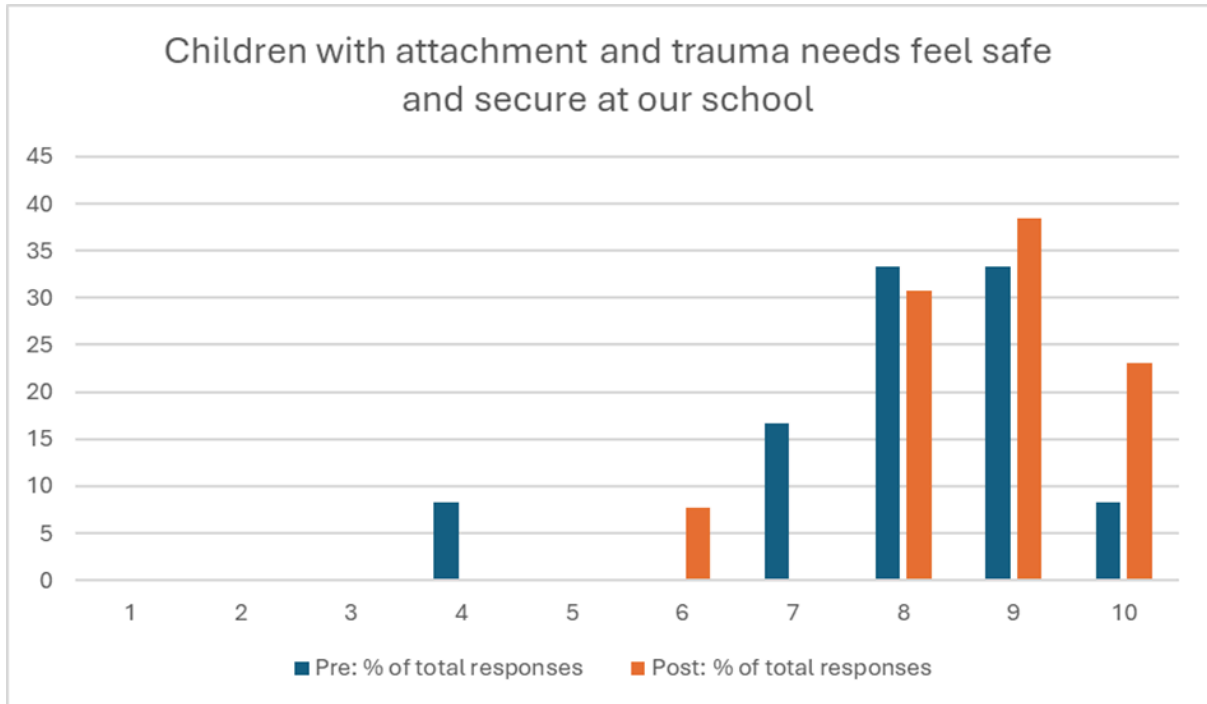


These is a common language in school for talking about children with attachment and trauma based needs



Staff use a range of effective strategies for supporting children with attachment and trauma needs





DT/ DSL Post Programme Qualitative Impact Data: Evaluation Survey

In June/ July 2024, DTs/ DSLs were asked to complete an end of programme evaluation survey. 27 (out of a possible 40) responses were received from Silver and Gold Award schools.

DTs/ DSLs were asked how useful the different aspects of the programme had been for them during their continued journey on the award:



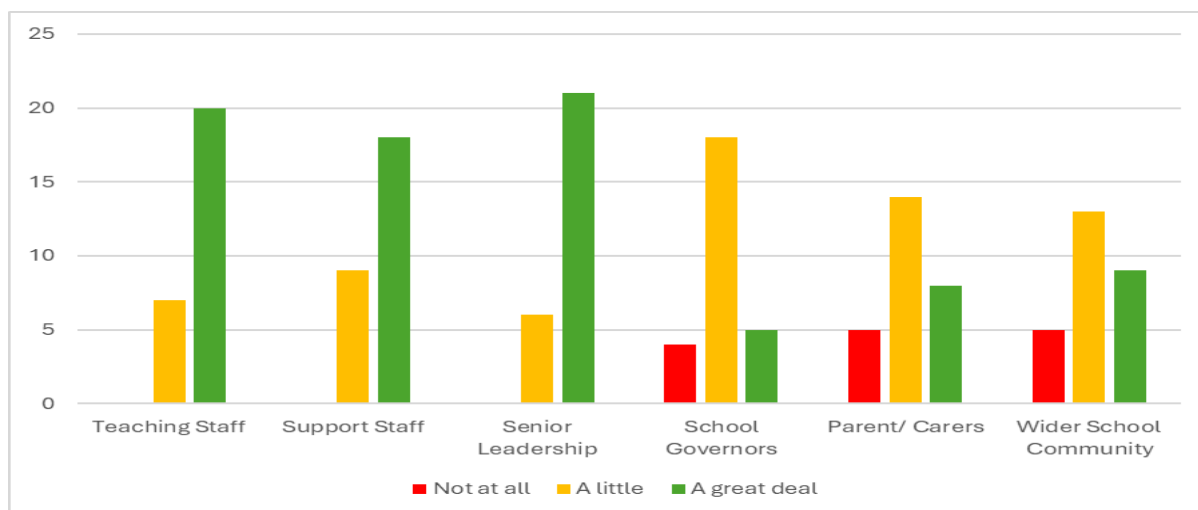
As can be seen from the graph above, coaching sessions were highlighted as being the most helpful source of support, whereas the support offered through the DT/ DSL drop-in sessions was not so helpful and low attendance at these sessions indicates they are not so well utilised. Further comments captured on the evaluation survey indicate that, where a 'not helpful' response was given for the drop-in sessions this was due to not needing to attend these (as they did not have any queries that could not be answered elsewhere) rather than having experienced these as unhelpful. It may be that drop-in sessions are more useful for DT/DSLs at earlier (i.e. bronze) stages of the programme. Whilst feedback is overall positive, there is scope to further improve the helpfulness of DT/DSL forums (both main sessions and AASA sections) for silver and gold schools. Further comments included:

"The support from the AASA team has been exceptional with lots of time available."

"Coaching sessions were a life saver."

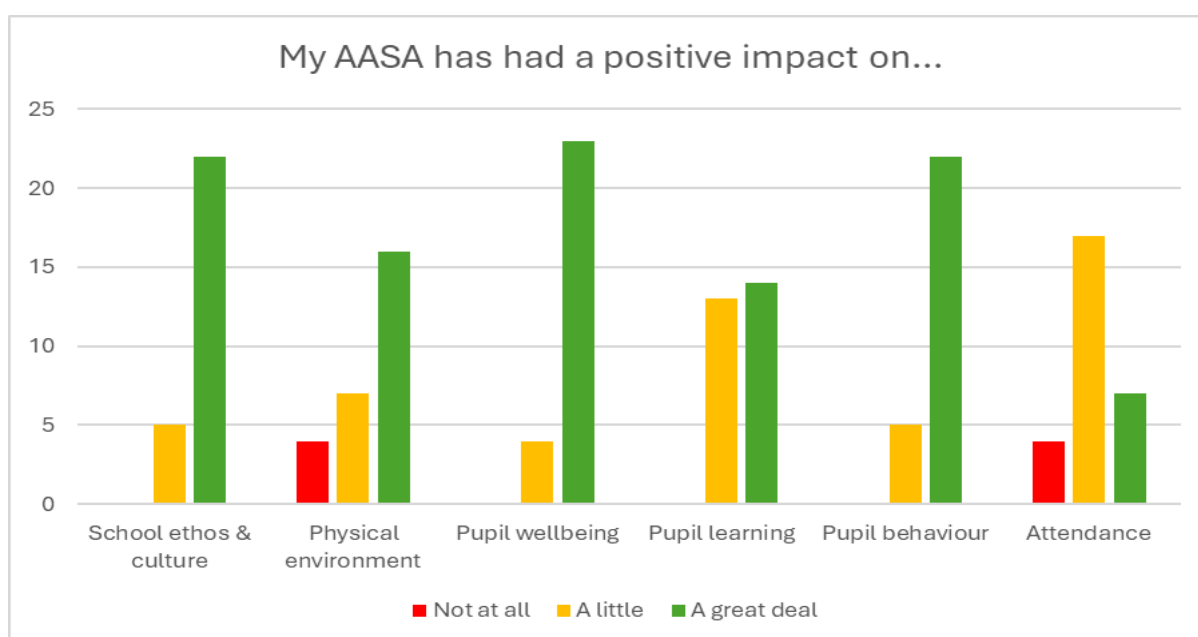
"I didn't find I needed the Q&A sessions as I could either contact my EP or ask questions on the AASA section of the DT forum".

DTs and DSLs were asked whether the project had had a positive impact on a variety of stakeholders:



As can be seen in the graph above, most positive impact has been reported for teaching staff, support staff and senior leadership. For a few schools, there has been no perceived impact for school governors, parent/ carers or the wider school community. A closer look at those responses revealed that these were all 'Silver' year schools where the programme does not have a directed focus on these groups.

DT/ DSLs were asked whether the project had had a positive impact on a variety of aspects of school life and student outcomes. As can be seen in the graph below, most schools have reported 'a great deal' of positive impact on school ethos and culture, pupil wellbeing, and pupil behaviour. Although the majority of schools have reported either 'a little' or 'a great deal' of positive impact on attendance, this is the area with the least reported impact overall.



DTs/ DSLs were asked what further changes they have noticed in their school community as a result of continuing to take part in this project. The responses have been grouped into different themes:

Relationships between staff and students

"We currently have five previously looked after children in our school...they need to feel safe and that they belong at our school and we try to ensure that we foster strong relationships with their carers and the children to help them to develop. They are thought about carefully when we allocate staff at the start of each year to ensure that the most suitable member of staff is supporting that child".

"More pupils accessing check in time with a key adult."

"Pupils are aware who they can go to if they need support."

Improved attendance

"Attendance has improved."

"Improved attendance for our SEND children."

Awareness of importance of regulation

"Our calm corners in the classrooms are used regularly, evidenced by an audit of use. Our question is what did we do before?"

"Zones of regulation is now used as a whole school approach. Children and staff regularly use the colour of the zones to describe how they are feeling, creating an emotionally rich environment."

"Our new SNUG is providing a safe, calm space for children accessing ELSA sessions or needing a space to regulate."

Emotion coaching

"Restorative discussions, using the C.A.L.M acronym, are used by staff on a daily basis."

"Pre and post questionnaire results highlight how staff knowledge on emotion coaching approaches improved significantly after the training."

"We have adopted using the CALM approach ensuring all staff are using a shared language."

Behaviour policy

"Big impact on emotional regulation in the playground, helping us to continue to develop a positive whole school approach to behaviour management that is attachment and trauma aware that fits with our ethos."

Better understanding of behaviour

"Staff are calmer with children and children are learning to make sense of their behaviour."

"Staff knowledge and confidence has increased when working with dysregulated children."

Development of emotional literacy in children

"Children are developing individual strategies for self-regulation."

"Children's emotional understanding and vocabulary has improved."

"Children are able to discuss and acknowledge their feelings. This has had a positive impact on behaviour that was recognised by Ofsted too. Children are also aware of what they need to do to support themselves with self regulation activities which is an amazing life skill to have whilst still an infant!"

Parental involvement

"Parents have reported improved communication with their children."

"Parent interest and engagement in using emotion coaching at home."

"There is a new network developing between parents who would not previously have known or spoken to each other."

"School staff have a greater empathy for the emotional and wellbeing needs of the parents when things are going wrong."

"Parents have shared that they feel safe and supported with school leadership."

Improved transition

"Better links with feeder nurseries."

"Fostering links with other schools to improve transition, particularly from Y6-7."

"Children starting school already knowing some of the strategies we are using."

"A key child has not had any further suspensions since our completely new approach to his trauma informed behaviour responses in school. Sharing this practice with his middle school through transition is planned for the summer term, as his brother is experiencing many suspensions in middle school so continuing this essential work is very important to us as educational providers supporting children in the next steps of their school journey."

Improved behaviour

"Fewer suspensions."

"A key child has not had any further suspensions since our completely new approach to his trauma informed behaviour responses in school."

"Reduction in behaviour incidents/ dysregulation for identified pupils."

SECTION 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this evaluation the following recommendations are made for programme development:

- To improve the mechanism for obtaining feedback from school staff following Bronze Award whole school training, in order to increase the response rate.
- It may be useful to have a focus on exploring programme implementation in secondary schools specifically, due to the greater complexity of systems and challenges around promoting whole school change in these settings in particular.
- Further support to develop school staff's understanding of effective strategies to support the emotional needs of children and young people with attachment needs. This could be achieved through re-looking at the current training materials used (for DT/ DSL training events as well as the AASA whole school training) and making links for theory to practice more explicit where needed.
- Supporting schools to think about how they can be more inclusive of School Governors, as well as parents and carers, from the start of their AASA journey, so that there can be a positive impact on these groups from an earlier stage. DT to invite Governors to attend the AfC Virtual School Governors Training in Attachment run annually.
- More directly supporting DT/ DSLs to think about how they can broaden the impact of their AASA project into other areas (i.e. school ethos and culture; physical environment; pupil wellbeing, learning. behaviour, attendance) as they progress through the different stages of the AASA. This could be achieved through opportunities at the Celebration Event and AASA Launch, as well as coaching sessions.
- Further understand how DT/DSLs are accessing support in between coaching sessions and forums when there is a need (particularly for Silver and Gold Award schools).
- Further develop the AASA sessions at the end of DT/ DSL forums in order to enhance usefulness for schools at different stages of the AASA programme. These could mean separating into groups to provide a more targeted focus for Bronze Silver and Gold Award schools.
- Further understand how the AASA programme can positively impact on school attendance in order to provide further support for all AASA schools in this area.
- Develop AASA programme evaluation tools in order to more effectively capture data around impact on attendance, behaviour and learning.
- Develop pre-post programme measures to capture different aspects of positive change as a result of continued involvement in the AASA over the three years.
- Quality assurance for all schools completing the Gold Award, with tailored ongoing support if it is indicated this is needed.

Next steps

In Autumn 2024 AfC Virtual School established The Platinum Board which is Chaired by the Executive Headteacher of AfC Virtual School with three Headteacher co-chairs representing Richmond, Kingston and RBWM. The Attachment Research Community and St Mary's University are guest members to support the development of the Board.

The remit of The Platinum Board is to:

- Oversee and develop the AASA across Achieving for Children
- Engage in research
- Present at local and national forum

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all partners who assisted in delivery of the Attachment Aware Schools Award for AfC Virtual School in collaboration with the Education Psychology Service.

Special thanks to all our partners in schools, including Governors, Parents/Carers and our children. In particular we appreciate the commitment to the programme shown by our DT/DSL participants and their contribution to this evaluation.

We are grateful to colleagues in the Education Psychology Services across Achieving for Children for providing dedicated coaching support and training to schools.

In addition, thanks to staff in AfC Virtual School who assisted in coaching and training sessions and colleagues providing administration to support.

Best wishes,

Suzanne Parrott (Executive Headteacher, AfC Virtual School)

This AASA programme is a bespoke approach originally co-created by Suzanne Parrott, and Dr Sara Freitag for AfC Virtual School. Training content has been further developed and overseen by Dr Jennifer Head, Dr Kim O'Connor and Dr Sylvia Rojas, in partnership with AfC Virtual School.