



**Attachment Aware  
Schools Award**

# **AfC Virtual School Attachment Aware Schools Award Evaluation 2021-22**

# Contents

Overview .....	1
Participants .....	1
Structure of the Attachment Aware Schools Award.....	1
Scope and breadth of topics and projects .....	1
Policy and school systems.....	2
Transforming the environment.....	4
Staff and pedagogical development .....	7
Pupils.....	8
Parents and carers .....	10
Impact of the whole school training .....	11
Impact: Pre and post quantitative data .....	12
Designated teachers knowledge, understanding and confidence .....	12
Whole school change .....	14
Views of educational psychologist coaches.....	20

# Overview

## Participants

The Attachment Aware Schools Award (AASA) welcomed 38 schools from across Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead for its second cohort. These included schools spanning all key stages from early years to post 16.

## Structure of the Attachment Aware Schools Award

AfC Virtual School's Attachment Aware Schools Award Programme is a yearlong period of study that includes regular designated teacher training sessions; termly coaching sessions and whole school training in emotion coaching, attachment and trauma. Schools are asked to conduct an attachment audit and from this identify a whole school change project. Schools are supported with their projects throughout the year by AfC Virtual School and Educational Psychology Services. These projects are shared at a graduation celebration at the end of the year where schools were awarded Attachment Aware schools plaques.

In the year following the programme schools are provided termly coaching to support their ongoing attachment aware developments.

## Scope and breadth of topics and projects

Research nationally indicates that AASA projects often fall across five main areas:

- Policy and school systems
- Transforming the environment
- Staff and pedagogical development
- Pupils
- Parents and carers

AfC Virtual Schools' 2021-22 cohort was no exception. The majority of projects were multi-faceted with whole school change and impact spanning multiple areas. The following section provides a snapshot of a range of whole school change projects in each area.

## Policy and school systems

A large proportion of schools had at least one element of their AASA project that 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 to a relational model. Additional training to all designated teachers on this topic was provided through a designated teacher forum. There follows quotes regarding the impact of projects focusing in this area.

“We are proud of the significant change that has taken place in our school. We have a shared language, a staff who are more confident and feel more equipped to support and listen and pupils who are clearly at the heart of all we offer. We have managed to exceed our own project expectations.”

**Designated teacher, Kingston primary school**

“Staff have a greater understanding about a child presenting with challenging behaviour and what might be causing this and therefore have more nurturing and curious conversations with them rather than approaching things from a behaviourist, authoritarian perspective. This is improving relationships between staff and pupils and creating a more trusting environment where children feel able to open up and share their concerns.”

**Designated teacher**

A Richmond secondary school reviewed and updated their behaviour policy in view of attachment aware principles. The designated teacher noted the following impact.

- The value and significance of building strong relationships is now embedded within everything that they are doing.
- Behaviour incidents are now being dealt with differently, with staff actively thinking about what the children are trying to communicate through their behaviour.
- Children’s behavioural incidents in class seem to have decreased.
- Incidents are de-escalated more quickly, with better outcomes for staff and students.

A Windsor and Maidenhead primary school and nursery developed and launched a new attachment aware behaviour regulation policy. The designated teacher noted the following impact.

- Suspensions have reduced.
- Children with SEMH are more settled.
- Less children are leaving their classrooms.
- Emotion coaching is being used - staff have modified their language when talking about children who are dysregulated.
- Staff have stopped asking for consequences.

A Kingston junior school noted that by developing an attachment aware behaviour policy, based on a restorative approach to behaviour management, less children were being sent to the senior leadership team for behaviour issues as they were being supported at a lower level within their year groups.

A designated teacher also noted following the development of new approaches (emotion coaching) in school...

“We are logging far less behaviour reflections as emotion coaching is helping to de-escalate situations. The children are learning how to recognise their emotions, and to self-regulate, with the help of attachment and trauma aware trained staff, and the resources available to them.

# Transforming the environment

A number of schools transformed elements of their school environment as part of their AASA project with core aims including to:

- enhance and develop the spaces used for supporting children with emotional difficulties
- develop therapeutic spaces within school to support children managing emotions
- identify safe spaces within school where children can go to regulate

Further training and research was provided by AfC Virtual School in developing therapeutic spaces for care experienced children. There follows a selection of quotes highlighting the impact of creating safe, therapeutic spaces in schools.

A Kingston primary school developed indoor and outdoor therapeutic spaces.

***Our Garden***

***Therapeutic***

***Space***



***Our Community  
Room Therapeutic  
Space***

“We have always needed spaces like this in the school and I can’t imagine the school without them - they are a lifeline for our community.”

**Member of staff, Kingston primary school**

A Richmond primary school designated teacher highlighted that following the creation of a new space there are...

“fewer issues on the playground and when there is conflict pupils, we have a space where it can be resolved meaning that it does not impact on learning in the classroom”. As a result, the school has begun to reconsider other spaces within the school and how they can be used to best support their pupils and their wider community particularly our most disadvantaged pupils.

A Richmond secondary school created a dedicated therapeutic space for students to use regularly, receiving the following feedback.

“I like being in the calm room, it helps me to feel better.”

**Year 7 student**

“Knowing that I have somewhere safe to take an upset student makes a huge difference.”

**Staff, Richmond secondary school**

“The new room is conducive to improving student’s mood and general wellbeing.g”

**Staff, Richmond secondary school**

A Richmond primary school identified positive impact from including a sensory tent in the SENDCo’s office to ensure children had a safe space to regulate and calm.



“The tent has had such a positive impact on our vulnerable children, I shared it as best practice at my SMHL training”

**Deputy headteacher, Richmond primary school**

“It’s all black and helps clear your mind.”

**Year 3 pupil**

“The lights make me feel calm.”

**Year 1 pupil who is a looked after child**

As well as spaces outside of the classroom, schools also focused on making their classrooms attachment and trauma aware. For example, an infant school created 'regulation stations' and gathered feedback from pupils on using the regulation stations.



Children using the regulation stations shared that...

"When I am in the red zone, I come here to touch the furry wall - it's like my teddies at home"

"I use the ball to help me breathe more deeply and get less angry and then I can stay in class."

"I put my worry about home in the monster then my teacher did help me."

"My rocket is my safe place, I don't run away."



## Staff and pedagogical development

The majority of the school's whole school change projects included elements of staff and pedagogical development. Examples of core aims underpinning these projects included to:

- develop shared language around an approach which creates a sense of emotional safety, connection and regulation for all children
- ensure there is a consistent approach across all areas of the school in the way adults communicate with children
- develop a culture of emotion coaching with staff and other stakeholders
- develop a deep whole school understanding of attachment and trauma
- develop the key adult role

Examples of impact include:

“This [attachment aware] approach has really begun to shift the way staff approach conversations regarding behaviour”

**Headteacher, Richmond primary school**

“Staff have a greater awareness of when children are dysregulated and how to de-escalate a situation (language and body language).”

**Designated teacher, Richmond primary school**

“This course has helped me understand that children with attachment problems are always communicating something with their behaviour. My approach has changed and I’m dealing with them in a calmer manner, validating their feelings first and trying to understand their reasons for certain behaviour before we move on to restoration”.

**Learning support practitioner, Richmond primary school**

“Our staff are training in attachment and trauma awareness and it has become part of our school language when discussing a child’s behaviour.”

**Designated teacher, Kingston primary school**

## **Pupils**

The impact on pupils was a focus for all schools, with evidence of impact including increases in positive outcomes such as emotional regulation skills, self-esteem and confidence and positive behaviour choices.

“The response from the children has been truly inspirational and quite moving at times. By changing our language and them also reflecting on their own, we are having more meaningful conversations that are solution focused and that allow the children to develop lifelong tools to support their wellbeing and academic achievements.”

**Designated teacher, Kingston primary school**

“We have noticed new friendships forming, better use of the zones vocabulary as we use it frequently within the group and children expressing their needs more effectively.”

**Designated teacher, Kingston primary school**

“The children are much more confident explaining their feelings and emotions and can use the correct strategies when they are feeling dysregulated.”

**Year 5 teacher, Richmond primary school**

“Behaviour analysis has shown an increase in house points for positive choices and behaviour.”

**Designated teacher, Richmond primary school**

A decrease in challenging or dysregulated behaviour was also identified.

“[There are] less behaviour incidents at lunchtime due to a greater understanding of how to manage needs and use of emotion coaching.”

**Designated teacher, Richmond infant school**

“Lunchtimes are calmer and there are fewer issues being directed to teaching staff after lunchtimes.”

**Headteacher, Kingston primary school**

“There has been a demonstrable impact on students’ behaviour, with fewer incidents of confrontational and emotionally dysregulated behaviours than in previous years.”

**Assistant headteacher, Richmond secondary school**

“[There has been] a reduction in outbursts from key students.”

**Designated teacher, Windsor and Maidenhead secondary school**

There follows a selection of feedback from pupils who have directly benefited from their school's whole school change project.

"Now, I've got somewhere to go and talk about my feelings and what worries me. If something bad has happened I can talk about it and the teachers help to make a change and make it better. They really listen to me and understand."

**Year 5 boy, Kingston primary school**

"When my teacher helps to label my emotion, it really helps."

**Year 9 boy, Windsor and Maidenhead secondary school**

A child at a Richmond primary school that had embedded zones of regulation across the school shared that "[zones of regulation] are helpful to describe my feelings. It reminds me of strategies I can use, especially these days. My life is quite hard."

"I feel that staff understand me and know how to help me."

**Year 8 pupil, Windsor and Maidenhead secondary school**

"I feel like my teacher takes more time to understand how I am feeling."

**Year 3 pupil, Richmond primary school**

## **Parents and carers**

Some schools' change projects included a focus on directly supporting parents, for example, through parent drop in sessions or workshops on relevant topics.

“Parent workshops on anxiety, emotion coaching and transition have been well received by parents, which in a recent survey contributed to 93% of our parents agreeing that we support children’s wellbeing at our school.”

**Headteacher Kingston primary school**

There follows a selection of feedback from parents and carers on their schools attachment aware approaches.

“I just wanted to express my thanks and how much it (the development of a nurture group) has helped him over the past year. X has definitely increased his resilience and is very positive about school in general. He seems to have developed inner confidence that he can deal with situations that may arise, which I know was one of his worries prior to joining the sessions.”

**Parent of a child who attended a new nurture club at a Kingston primary school**

‘Knowing the strategies that the teachers use in class has helped me to manage her behaviour at home. The ideas are so simple. I realised I was complicating things. Life is calmer, not all the time but it is good to know things are getting better.’

**Parent of a child attending a Richmond nursery**

“Following the (zones of regulation, ZOR) training for parents, we are using ZOR at home. It is helping the whole family.”

**Parent of three children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 3, attending a Kingston primary school**

“This project has helped my adopted child to feel settled and comfortable in their first year.”

**Parent of child attending a Kingston junior school**

## Impact of the whole school training

Each participating school received two x one and a half hour training sessions delivered in collaboration with their AASA coach. The focus of these whole school trainings were:

- an introduction to attachment and developmental trauma
- an introduction to emotion coaching

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

There follows quotes that provide an overview of the impact of the training across the wider school.

“It’s completely overhauled the way I interact with students - for the positive.”

“Interactions between staff and students are less volatile, calm voices and labelling of emotions is common.”

“The language of emotion coaching has led to more powerful restorative conversations.”

“Staff are thinking more about the reasons for children’s behaviour and understanding that all behaviour is a communication.”

“Wow - this makes sense. I now understand why I am being asked to try certain strategies and why I have been told that change will take time.”

“We need to connect to correct. I understand the importance of this now!”

“The training I have been part of this year has helped me to understand that a child’s behaviour is trying to communicate something to me.”

An Windsor and Maidenhead secondary school designated teacher noted that “In a questionnaire about the 18 teaching and learning presentations delivered this year, the Attachment Aware session was rated the highest for enjoyment and the one that led staff to make changes to their practice.”

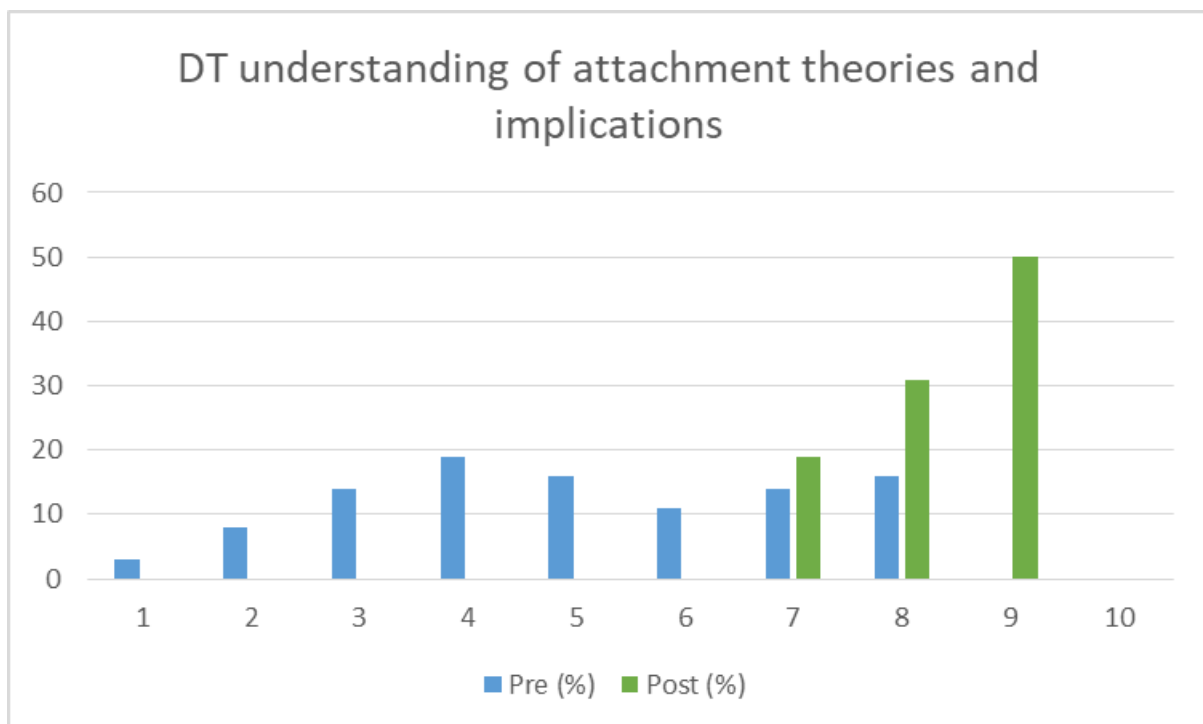
# Impact: Pre and post quantitative data

## Designated teachers knowledge, understanding and confidence

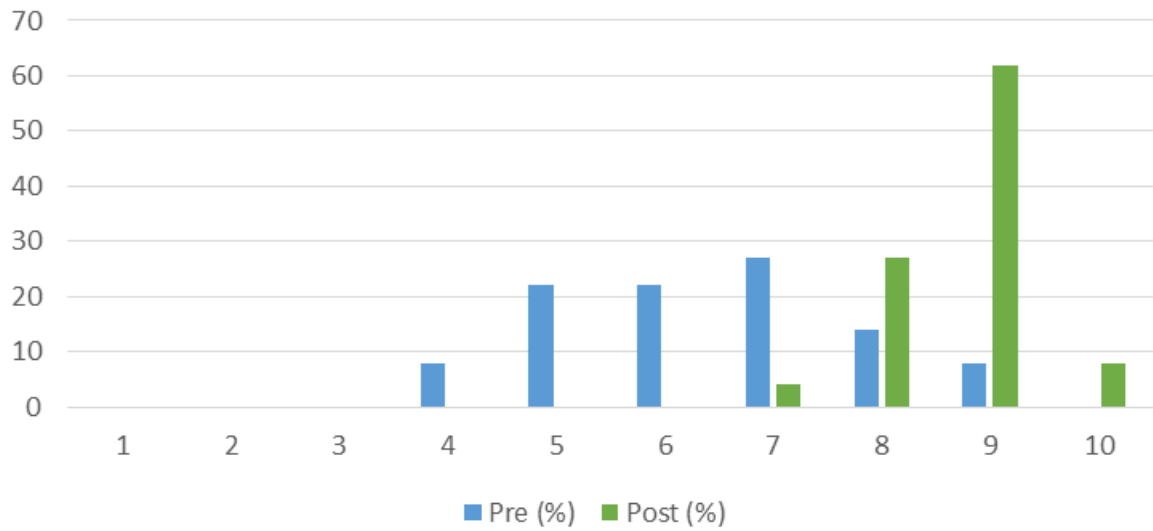
There has been a measurable impact on designated teacher self-reported confidence, knowledge and understanding in relation to a range of relevant areas to their practice supporting care experienced children and young people. For all of the below graphs, as a general guide, designated teachers were asked to rate between 1 and 4 if these theories, approaches and ideas were quite new to them. Rate between 5 and 7 if they have a reasonable level of knowledge or are putting into practice strategies as a result. Rate between 8 and 10 if they are actively and confidently applying this to their practice.

A significant shift in designated teacher knowledge and understanding towards 'actively and confidently applying to practice' was identified between pre and post evaluation measures. This related to a range of relevant areas of their practice supporting care experienced children and young people and those with a social worker (including understanding attachment, trauma and emotion coaching and applying evidence based strategies to support).

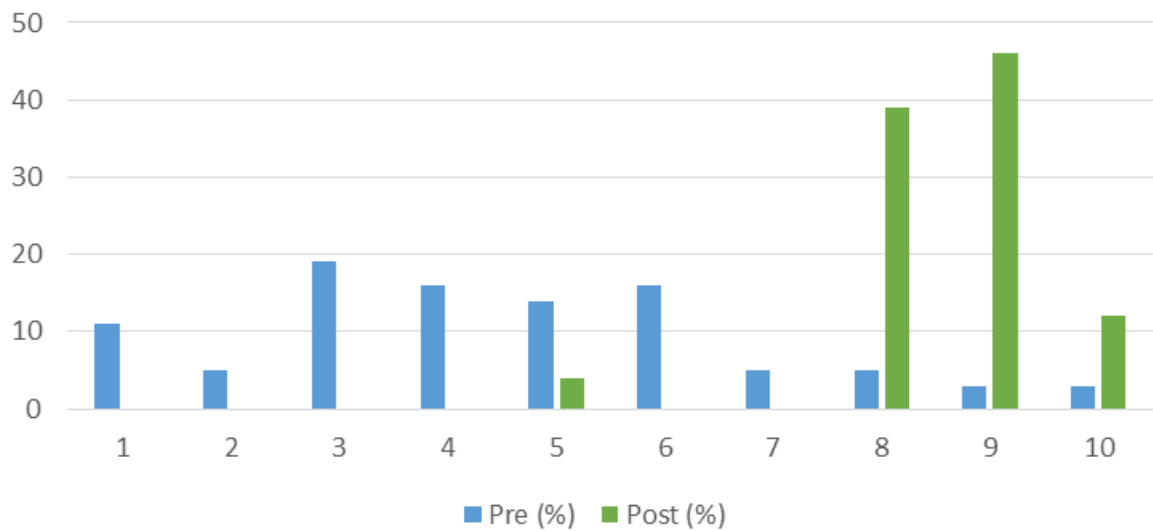
Due to the different number of respondents, pre (37) and post (26), data is presented in percentages of respondents.



### DT understanding of developmental trauma and implications



### DT understanding of Emotion Coaching and how and when to use it



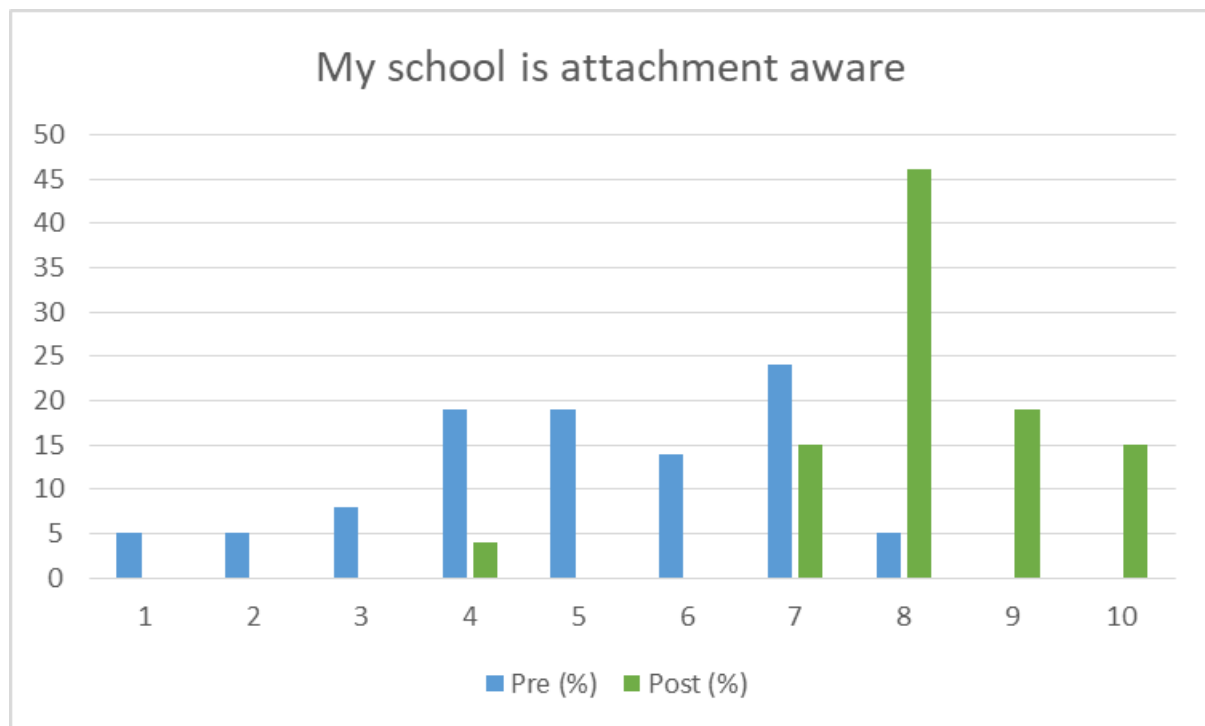
## Whole school change

Comparison of pre and post project evaluation indicated a significant positive response in relation to designated teachers' perception of their whole schools' practice in a range of areas.

This included that:

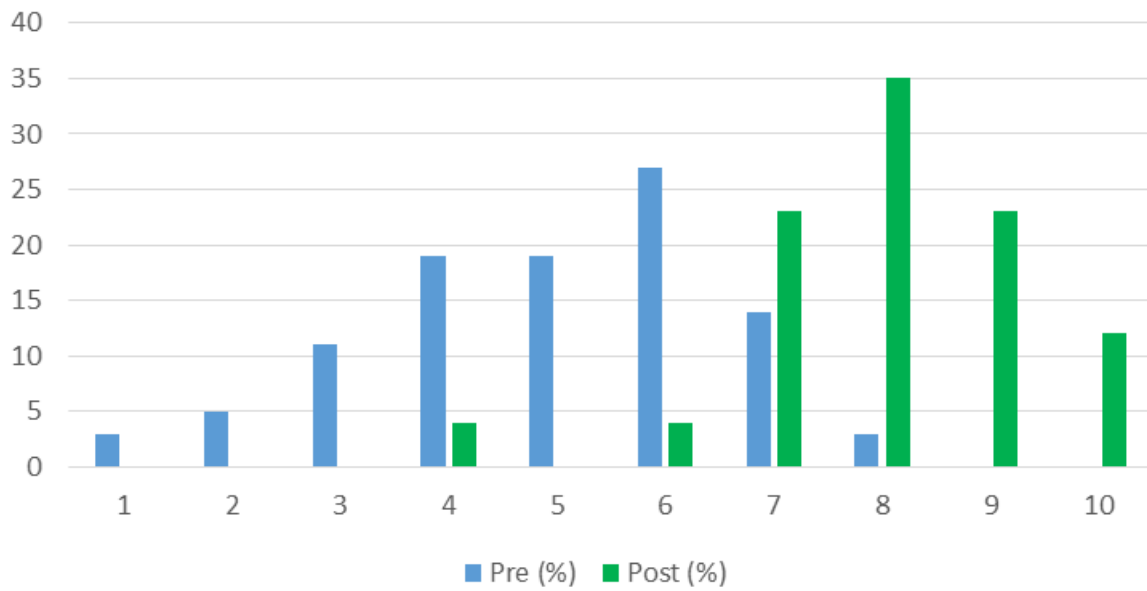
- they were an attachment aware and trauma informed school
- that children felt safe at school
- that there is a common language to talk about attachment and trauma in school), where one represents strongly disagree and 10 represents strongly agree

This shows a positive shift in designated teacher perceptions regarding attachment and trauma informed practice in their schools.

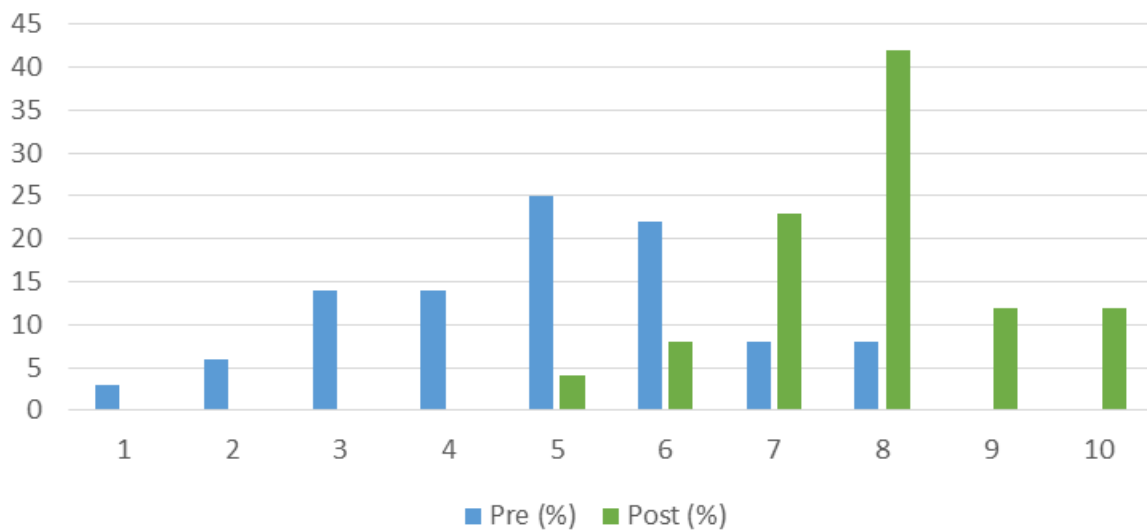




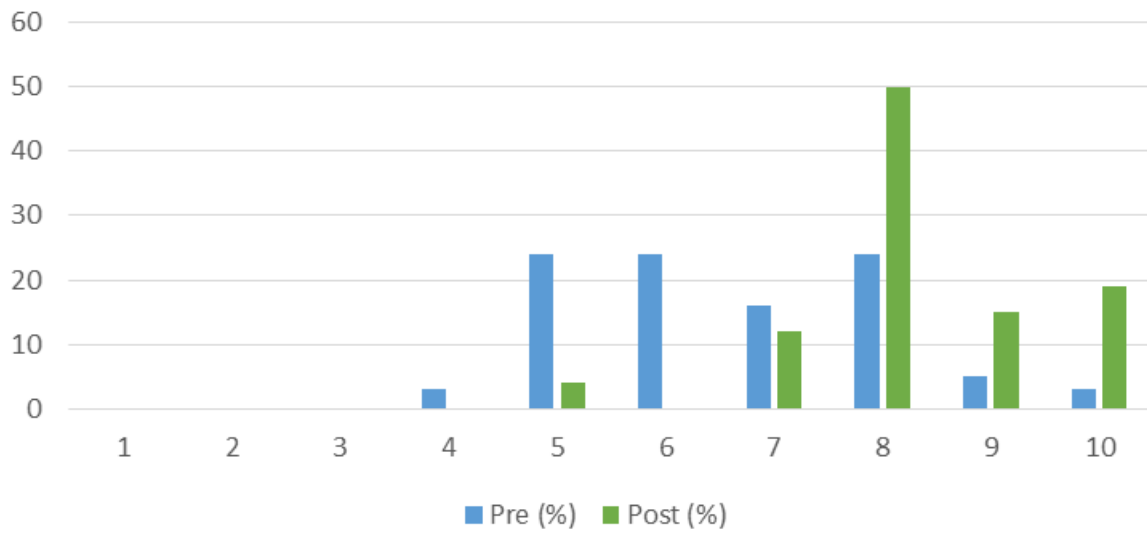
### My school is trauma informed



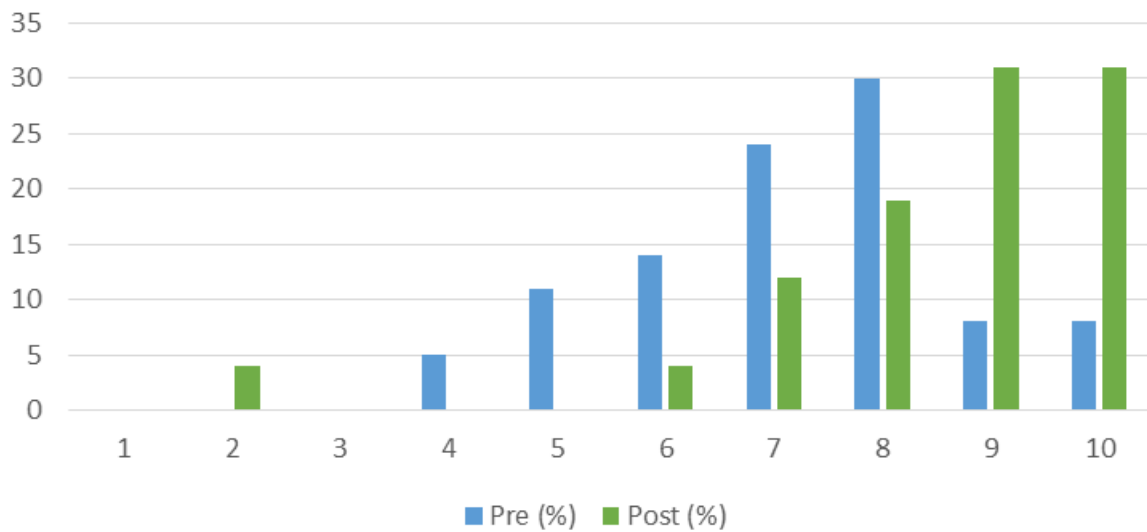
### Staff use effective strategies to support children with attachment and trauma based needs



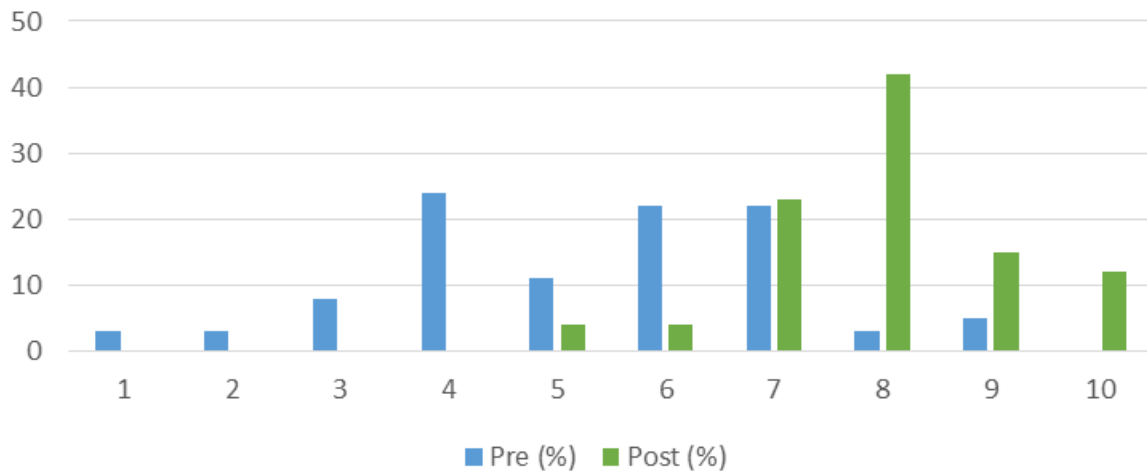
### Children with attachment and trauma based needs feel safe at school



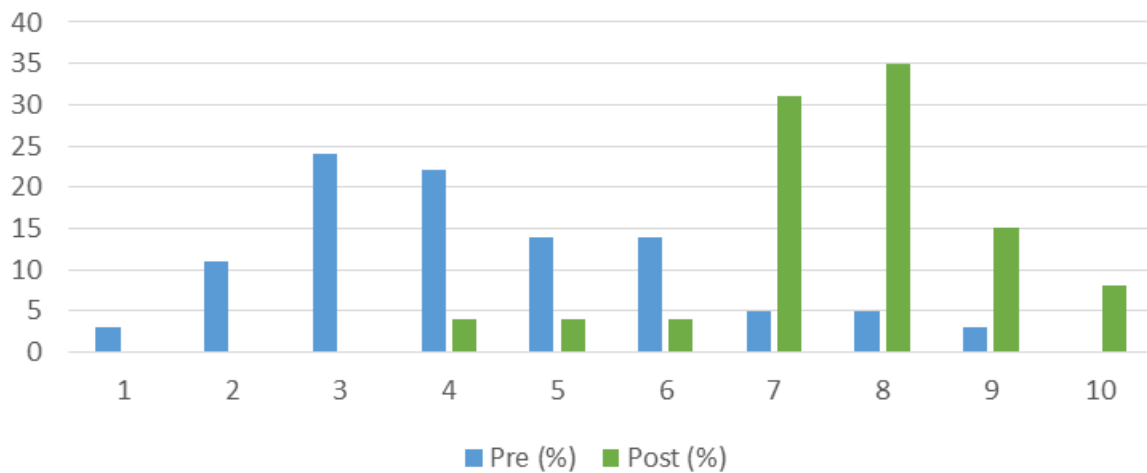
### Children with attachment and trauma needs have access to a Key Adult in school

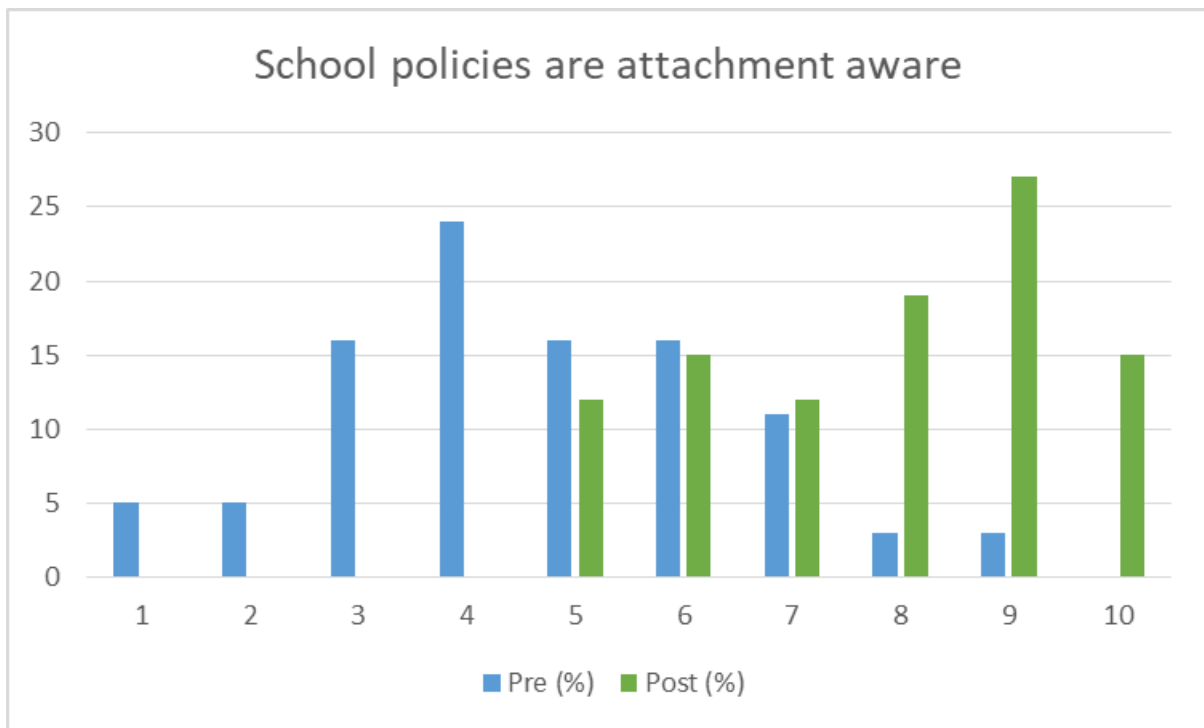


### Staff know how to identify children who may need additional support as a result of attachment and trauma needs



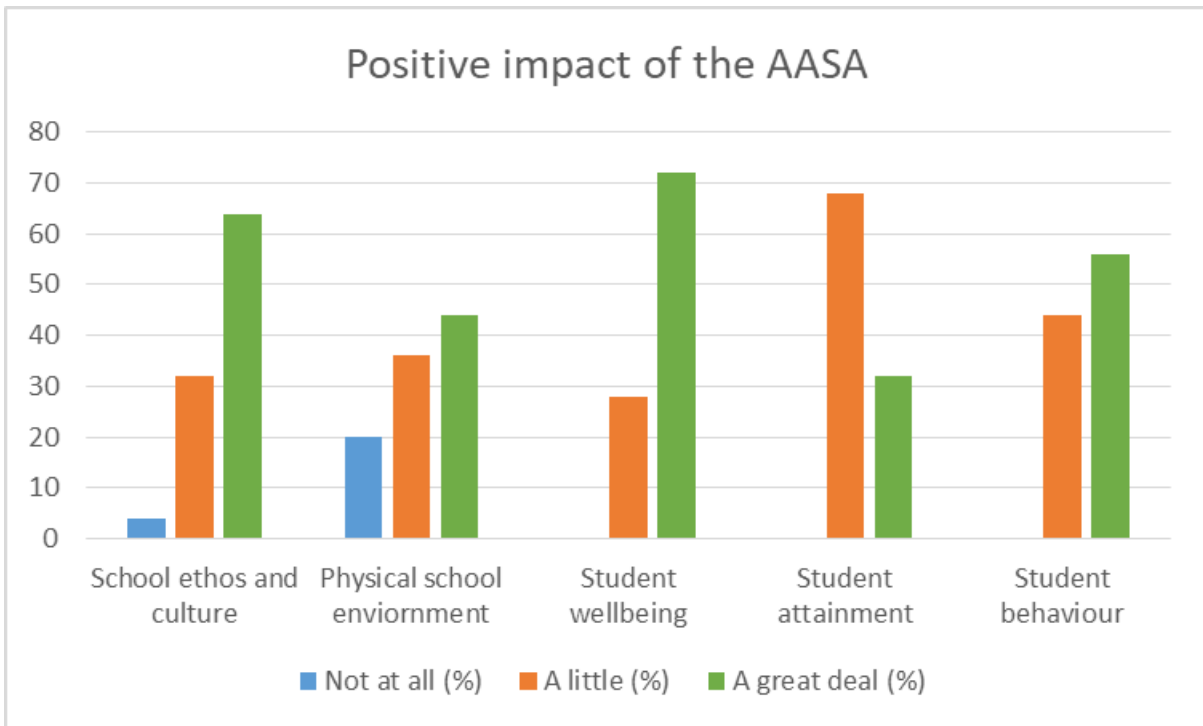
### There is a common language in school that helps staff to talk about attachment and trauma based needs





Designated teachers were asked whether the project had had a positive impact on a variety of stakeholders. 80% of designated teachers who responded indicated that the AASA had ‘a great deal’ of positive impact on teaching staff and senior leaders and support staff, with the remaining 20% reporting at least ‘a little’ positive impact on these groups.

Designated teachers were also asked whether there was a positive impact on a variety of aspects of school life and student outcomes as a result of engaging in the Attachment Aware Schools Award. All designated teachers who responded to the evaluation noted a positive impact on students wellbeing, behaviour and attainment. The significant majority also noted a positive impact on the schools’ ethos and culture as well as the schools’ physical environment.



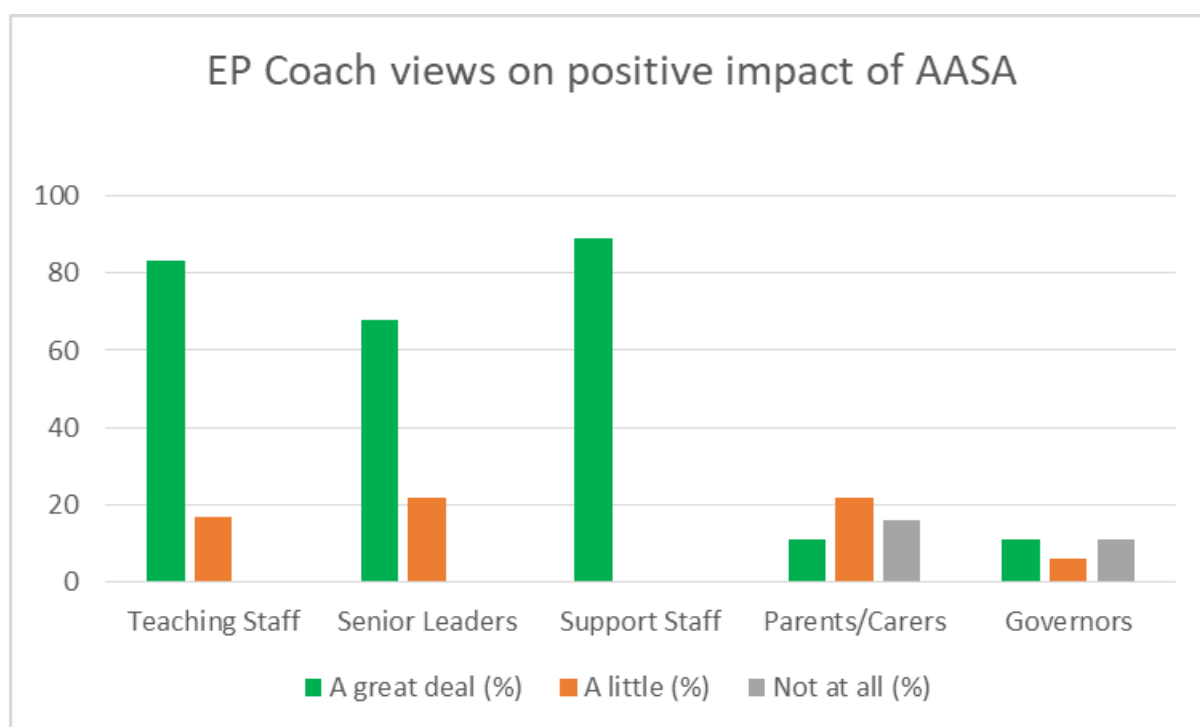
96% of designated teachers who completed the evaluation planned to further embed or develop their project or attachment aware practice in their schools in future years as a result of being part of the Attachment Aware Schools Award with the remaining 4% responding 'maybe'.

100% of designated teachers who completed the evaluation enjoyed being part of the award, felt supported by AfC Virtual School throughout the award and would recommend AfC Virtual Schools' Attachment Aware Schools Award to other schools.

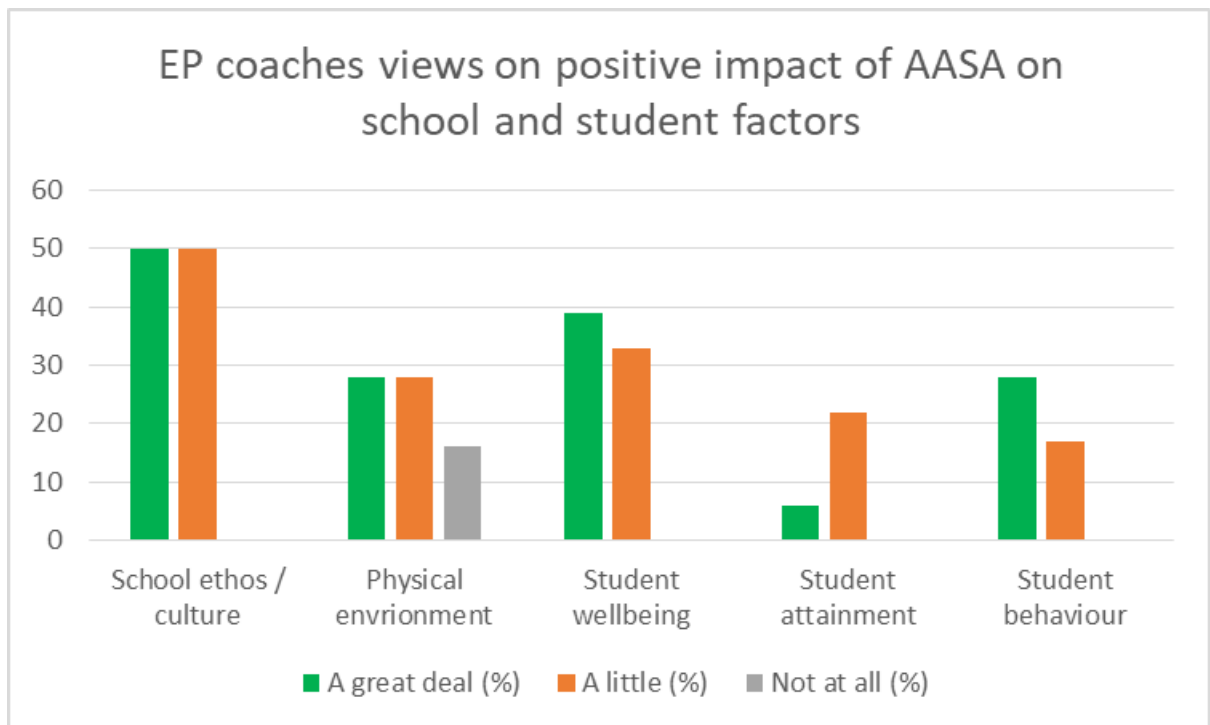
## Views of educational psychologist coaches

AfC Virtual School Attachment Aware Schools Award was a collaboration between AfC Virtual School and AfC Educational Psychology Services. Fourteen educational psychology coaches responded to the evaluation, who were coaches to 18 schools on the project. An experienced member of the Virtual School team was also coach to four schools.

- 100% of coaches who completed the evaluation indicated that they either agreed (56%) or strongly agreed (44%) that the AASA had had a positive impact on the school involved.
- The educational psychologist coaches identified a greater impact on teaching staff, senior leadership and support staff than parents, carers and governors as can be seen in the graph below. However, it should be noted that some educational psychologists highlighted that due to the nature of their role on the project, they had less interactions with non-school based staff such as governors and parents, impacting their ability to make a judgement on the impact of the project on these groups.



The educational psychology coaches were asked whether the project had had a positive impact on a variety of aspects of school life and student outcomes. The greatest identified impact was on school ethos and culture and student wellbeing as can be seen in the following graph.



100% of coaches indicated that their role as coach on the AASA had improved their understanding of the school context and their relationship with the school, either a little (22%) or a great deal (78%). It should be noted that of those who responded, 78% were coaches in a school they were the link educational psychologist for, whilst 22% were coach in a school they were not the link educational psychologist for. This includes settings that don't currently receive a buy back service from the Educational Psychology Service.