

## **Evidence Submitted by Attachment Aware Schools to Education Committee inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of looked after children December 2015.**

Summary of written evidence submitted by Tony Clifford – Virtual School Stoke-on-Trent and Dr Janet Rose and Richard Parker on behalf of Virtual Schools action research group and the Institute for Education, Bath Spa University

### **Executive Summary**

- Early attachment difficulties and developmental trauma affects many children, particularly children who are Looked After – up to 40 % of children may have an unmet attachment need which affects their learning and behaviour (Bergin and Bergin, 2009).
- The 2015 NICE guideline on attachment, jointly commissioned by DoH and DfE has as its first key education recommendation for implementation:  
*'Schools and other education providers should ensure that all staff who may come into contact with children and young people with attachment difficulties receive appropriate training on attachment difficulties'*
- Teachers will be more effective in managing behaviour and helping children with learning difficulties arising from these issues if they understand their causes. Such an understanding will enable teachers to match their responses and strategies more precisely to the needs of children, leading to better outcomes.
- Whole school approaches such as Attachment Aware Schools benefit all children and remove the stigma for children in care of being seen or treated as 'different'
- Some pilot studies from the Attachment Aware Schools projects in Stoke and Bath and North East Somerset and intervention studies suggest attachment-based strategies, whole school approaches and targeted interventions can significantly improve the behaviour, academic attainment and mental health of children, including children who are Looked After – all helping to close the attainment gap.
- An example of the effectiveness of an approach based on an understanding of causes, as opposed to an approach based simply dealing with the 'symptoms', is demonstrated in research on Emotion Coaching.
- Further research (with RCTs) is needed to identify whole school attachment-based strategies and tailored interventions to support children's well-being, behaviour and academic achievement, particularly those with unmet attachment needs.
- Initial Teacher Training should include content on attachment theory and the impact of trauma and subsequent impact on learning and behaviour.
- Initial Teacher Training should include training in attachment-based strategies and trauma-informed practice.

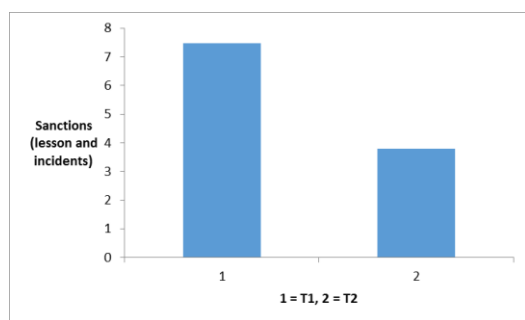
### **Summary of Attachment Aware Schools Evidence**

1. An Attachment Aware School benefits everyone in the school. Whole school approaches as well as targeted support can ensure all children's needs are met including children who are Looked After. By becoming attachment aware and adopting attachment-based strategies and trauma informed practice, a school can be much more responsive to specific needs but also be able to draw on a range of evidence based tools to support all children's behaviour and mental health. Children and young people in care have told us that one of their greatest barriers to success in school is being seen and treated as 'different'; if everyone is seen as special and potentially in need of support, this barrier is removed.
2. Interventions informed by research on attachment needs and trauma are increasingly being recognised as significant in helping to support children with SEMH, including Looked After children (Parker et al, 2016). Attachment issues and trauma affect children's relationships with peers, teachers and support staff. Securely attached children are more likely to attain higher academic grades, have greater emotional regulation, social competence, willingness to take on challenges and have lower levels of ADHD and delinquency (Bergin and Bergin, 2009). It has been suggested that 'schools may be the optimum sites for buffering the impact of stress, building resilience and enhancing individual capacities for learning' (Nagel, 2009). There has been increasing recognition of the need to address such issues on a national level from a range of major national organisations such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). However, funding is required to create a robust evidence base of attachment-based strategies in schools and their impact which needs to include RCTs.

3. In England, we have a growing evidence base of pilot studies undertaken in collaboration with Virtual Heads around the country, particularly in Stoke and Bath and North East Somerset. Preliminary findings from small-scale pilot studies suggest that attachment-based strategies can produce significant positive outcomes in terms of reduction of behavioural incidents, improved well-being in children and staff, increased academic attainment and attendance.
4. Examples of pilot findings include (Rose et al, 2014; Gus et al, 2015, Rose et al, forthcoming):
  - Across 10 schools in Stoke and B&NES who adopted attachment aware strategies such as Emotion Coaching, there were statistically significant improvements in academic achievement (including reading, writing, math and English), a decrease in sanctions, a decrease in exclusions (inside and outside of classroom) and a decrease in hyperactivity and overall difficulties. All this is helping to close the attainment gap.
  - In 4 Stoke schools, practitioners found that being an AAS school was a very positive experience, stating that they had developed better skills in understanding the difficulties faced by vulnerable pupils and were better prepared to meet their emotional and social needs through the use of Emotion Coaching. The increased awareness regarding the importance of attachment and its effects on child development encouraged staff to explore what drives behaviour rather than focusing solely on the behaviour itself. Emotion Coaching led to more empathic and calmer staff and better understanding of how to diffuse potentially highly charged situations. Pupils showed improvements in understanding their own emotions and could identify positive strategies to manage them more effectively. This led to an increase in pupil empathy. Staff consistency in use of this approach was intrinsic to its successful implementation. As one teacher said - *'It gives the tools to enable a swift disengagement of a situation without the response of a more heightened one.'*
  - One special school in Leicestershire reduced their physical interventions by 50 % by changing their behaviour management policy to focus on Emotion Coaching. Other data from this school includes a child who improved from Level 2a to Level 4a in one year. Staff absence was reduced by one third and two parents were able to return to full-time employment as their child's behaviour no longer prevented them from missing work.
  - One school in B&NES reported a reduction in serious classroom behaviour incidents in the classroom and elsewhere in the school. School staff reported the school being a different place with a focus on learning rather than behaviour management which was confirmed by their Ofsted report.
  - Another headteacher who has adopted the Attachment Aware model commented: *'If a child comes to a school with a wheelchair, a school has to put in a ramp. These children have a different need. We need to make sure the environment is good for them. It's basically inclusion...It's had an influence on the whole school, making us more sensitive to particular needs. We have much more empathy now.'*
  - The value of whole school approaches is echoed by another primary headteacher: *'There's a more unified approach to how we respond to children's behaviour. It's changed people's mind-set about understanding the emotions behind behaviour and how they see children, especially the support staff and the lunch-time supervisors'*
  - A secondary school cascaded training to all their staff, and offered training to the parents of a group of children identified as being at risk of permanent exclusion - behaviour incidents among this group reduced by 57 %, and short term exclusions by 37%.
  - Another secondary saw an 80% reduction in negative school behaviour and fixed term exclusion in its high risk target group.
5. Further evidence to support this approach comes from other collaborative work with a social enterprise company, Brighter Futures, who utilised attachment-based strategies, including emotion coaching, to support vulnerable children. In one sample, the targeted children included Looked After children and children in need such as children whose parent have experienced complex diagnosed mental health needs, complex substance use issues, incarceration/police involvement. All progress data demonstrates a significant difference pre and post intervention with improvements in attendance, behaviour, academic attainment and social/emotional progress. Case study and questionnaire data reveal schools have increased capacity to support children with complex needs, staff have increased skills and confidence in working with children with challenging behaviour, there is increased parental engagement and children have improved their behaviour, confidence and self-esteem, social and emotional skills, peer and adult relationships and are more able to focus on academic progress (Rose and McGuire-Snieckus, 2014; 2015).

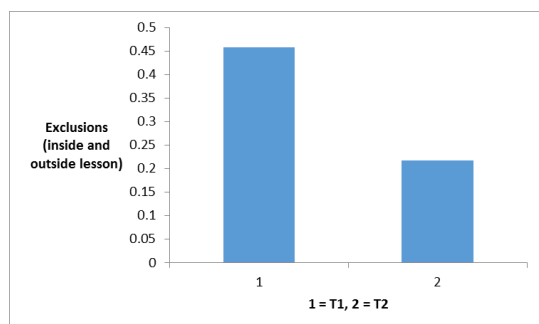
## AAS DATA FROM STOKE AND BANES (INCLUDES CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER)

### Decrease in sanctions



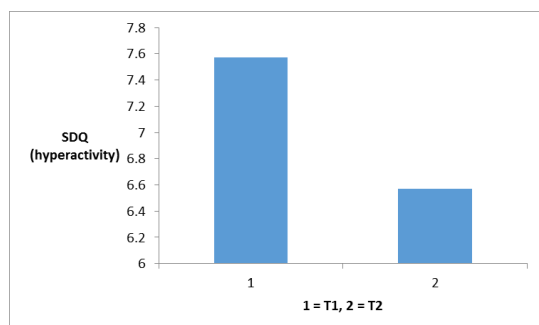
N = 65

### Decrease in exclusions (inside and outside of lessons)



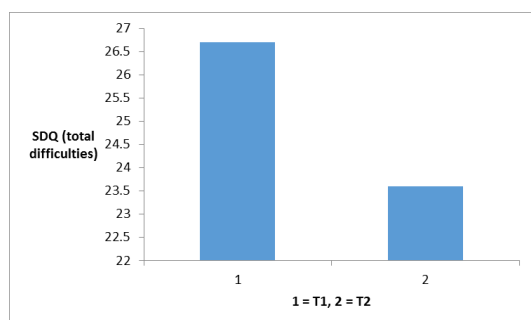
N = 83

### Decrease in hyperactivity



N = 14

### Decrease in overall difficulties



N = 88

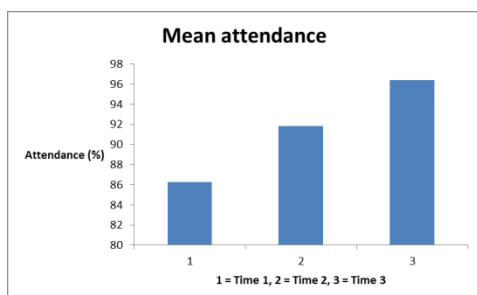
## **BRIGHTER FUTURES DATA – TARGETED INTERVENTIONS INCLUDING CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER**

### **Decrease in behavioural incidents**



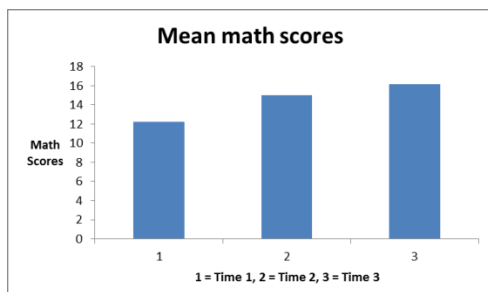
N = 30

### **Increase in Attendance**



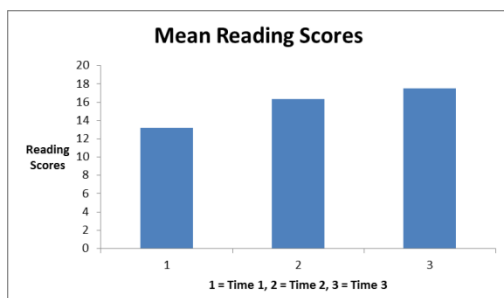
N = 30

### **Improved maths scores exceeding expected levels**



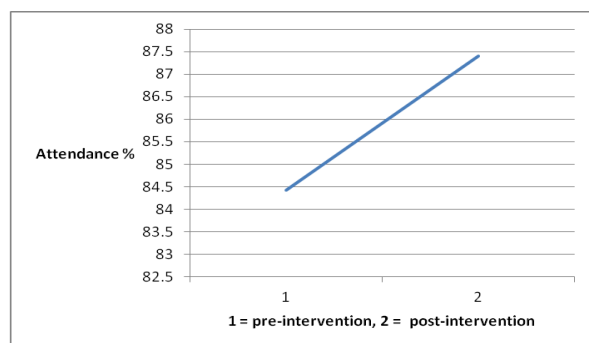
N = 30

### **Improved reading scores exceeding expected levels**



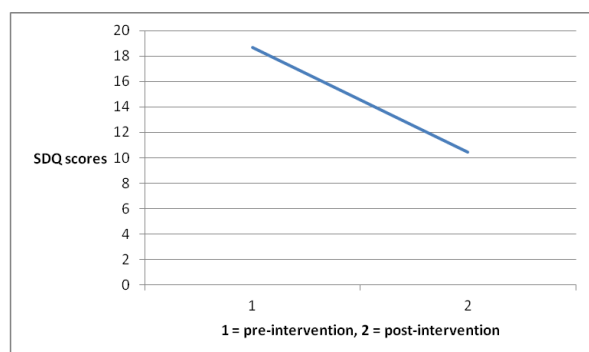
Note: N = 30

## Improved attendance



N=20

## Reduction in difficulties - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)



N=20

## Improvements in attainment and SEMH

	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Reading	0%	55%
Writing	0%	50%
Actual math	5%	55%
Making relationships	0%	50%
Self-confidence	0%	60%
Managing feelings	0%	45%
Listening and attention	0%	50%
Understanding	0%	65%

N=20

The recent evaluation of some of the work by Brighter Futures (reviewed earlier) has revealed significant savings in terms of projected costs, indicating that the costs involved in providing more specialist support for children with unmet attachment needs lie far below the costs that might be entailed in providing more specialist provision should such needs continue to go unmet. The table below shows how these intervention costs fall far below all other costs such as 1:1 provision or placement in a special school (Rose and McGuire-Snieckus, 2014) (see table below). One headteacher expressed the cost-benefit ratio well:

*'Even if we were to express it in terms of crude economics, (and it is about far more than that), there is no way a school can afford not to be doing this work. These children place demands on the school system which, if not properly addressed, far outweigh the demands of learning to manage and work with them properly'* (Rose et al, 2014).