

# ATTACHMENT AWARE & TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS PROGRAMMES

Positive Practice Examples  
from Local Authorities



Rees Centre



THE HADLEY TRUST

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# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

Children in care and those with a social worker are disproportionately likely to have undergone traumatic experiences and/or to have had difficulty building positive relationships with adults

Evidence shows adverse experiences can negatively impact on their educational pathways and outcomes (Luke & O'Higgins, 2018). This report explores the role of local authorities in developing school-wide practice designed to ameliorate these circumstances and support positive life outcomes.

There has been a growth in the use of 'attachment-aware' or 'trauma-informed' (AA/TI) practice in schools. There is no specific 'formula' for AA/TI schools, but they adopt policies and practices that emphasise emotional regulation, trust and positive relationships, drawing on academic research from educational psychology and neuroscience. Growing evidence suggests that AA/TI schools increase engagement, reduce the use of sanctions and have stronger learning outcomes.

For this project, we worked alongside three local

authorities who have well-established AA/TI school programmes; **Derbyshire County Council, Islington Council and Kirklees Council**. In each area, we explored the content of these programmes, the developmental 'journeys' of schools, and what facilitates this work.

**We worked alongside three local authorities who have well-established attachment aware and trauma-informed school programmes; Derbyshire County Council, Islington Council and Kirklees Council**



## 1.2 KEY FINDINGS

Based on our case studies, we have identified the following facilitators for the implementation of local authority attachment aware and trauma-informed programmes:

- Senior endorsement, especially where this is consistent with the broader ethos of the local authority;
- A willingness from the local authority to invest time and energy in a long-term AA/TI development journey for schools – more than one-off training sessions;
- Bespoke advice and support from the local authority to embed positive changes in the long-term, including a rolling programme of training and the creation of networks of AA/TI schools;
- The formation of sustained and creative relationships, with a named point-of-contact within the local authority for each school;
- The development of a shared 'language' around AA/TI practice to underpin cross-agency collaboration outside the school – e.g. with social work teams;
- An approach that prioritises high-visibility support from the headteacher and a 'whole school' programme of change that involves all staff;
- A recognition that well-developed AA/TI practice can improve the wellbeing and attainment of all young people, especially as many have circumstances that are not known by the school.

**In addition, we have identified other practices which show substantial promise in supporting attachment aware and trauma-informed in schools, including the use of action research projects and the provision of reflective practice supervision for teachers**



## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 RATIONALE

It is increasingly understood that traumatic experiences in childhood can have a profound and long-lasting impact on a young person's ability to engage successfully in school.



2/3

OF CHILDREN UNDERGO AT LEAST ONE **SIGNIFICANT TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE** INCLUDING THOSE RELATING TO MALTREATMENT, NEGLECT, POVERTY OR WITNESSING VIOLENCE

It is estimated that as many as two-thirds of children undergo at least one significant traumatic experience including those relating to maltreatment, neglect, poverty or witnessing violence, with the proportion varying between schools and between geographical areas (Perfect et al., 2016).

The effects are now widely understood to have both neurobiological (structure and performance

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of the brain) and psychosocial (concept of the self in relation to others) components. These exert a strong influence on, among other things, the ability of the child to build trusted relationships with adults (Baylin, 2017; Bergin & Bergin, 2009), to participate in group activities and to self-regulate their emotions in stressful situations (Crosby et al., 2017) – all key elements in successful engagement with school.

Children in care and those with a social worker are disproportionately likely to have undergone traumatic experiences – indeed, they are generally the basis for intervention through the children's social care system and it is increasingly recognised that children in care may exhibit post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or anxiety as a result (Goemans et al., 2016; Meltzer et al., 2003).

Alongside the disruption caused by placement and school moves, the influence of trauma is an important contributory factor in explaining why children in care have significantly lower educational outcomes than the general population (Luke & O'Higgins, 2018). It is likely also associated with why they are five times more likely to undergo fixed-term exclusions from school (Department for Education, 2019).

Ameliorating the effects of trauma and unmet attachment needs for children in care and other young people is therefore an important goal for policy and practice, especially given the importance of education in influencing life outcomes. There are many potential strands to this work, but an underdeveloped strand is the role of the school, its staff and the local authority in which it is situated.



## 2.2 SUPPORTING VULNERABLE PUPILS

Local authorities and schools work in partnership to meet common goals, including school improvement and educational support for vulnerable pupils (Barnes, 2017; Parish et al., 2012). The needs among pupils and their families have increased over recent years, indicated by a rise in the number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan, and the number of children in care (Department for Education, 2021a,b). The mental health and wellbeing needs of vulnerable children have also been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Skripkauskaitė et al., 2021).

The need to improve the support in this area has been recognised by the recent extension of the duties of Virtual Schools to cover children with a social worker (Department for Education, 2021c), with local authorities seeking to increase their focused work with schools as a result.

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## 2.3 ATTACHMENT AWARE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS

The last five years or so have seen the growth of a new bottom-up movement within the school sector, variously referred to as 'attachment-aware' or 'trauma-informed' – in practice, the terms are largely interchangeable.

Schools within this AA/TI movement have begun to take steps to recognise that a proportion of their pupils will be contending with a legacy of trauma or difficulties with building relationships with adults, seeding whole school innovations in ethos, policies and everyday practices (Colley & Cooper, 2017; Harlow, 2021; Parker & Levinson, 2018).

AA/TI schools tend to conceptualise themselves as being on a lengthy journey towards understanding how best to reconfigure the school to support children who have experienced trauma or attachment difficulties.

**There is no definitive list, but common elements tend to include (Tah et al., 2021):**

- **A focused training programme, often provided by educational psychologists and covering all staff (including non-teaching staff);**

- **A commitment to building trusted and respectful relationships between children and staff, including staff 'open door' policies;**
- **The adoption of 'emotion coaching' techniques for staff based on validating children's emotions, whilst supporting them to self-regulate their responses to events;**
- **The use of 'calm down' spaces and/or 'time out' cards to enable children to voluntarily and discreetly remove themselves from stressful situations;**
- **Changes to behaviour policies to remove externalised sanctions and/or introduce restorative justice approaches, or their wholesale replacement with relationship policies;**
- **The use of nurture groups, 'theraplay' and access to talking therapies.**

A review by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2015) found substantial evidence for the efficacy of AA/TI approaches in supporting young people in school and recommended, inter alia, the development of training for teachers.

A more recent systematic review (Brown et al., forthcoming) also concluded that there was mounting evidence that 'whole school' AA/TI interventions have a positive impact on young people's wellbeing and educational engagement.

Many local authorities are now working together with schools in supporting their vulnerable pupils through the provision of training, advice and other support (Trivedi, 2022). This is generally very well-regarded by headteachers, who feel that it seeds important changes within the school that are instrumental in improving experiences for young people (Harrison, 2022).

### 3. Project aims

Since examples of practice in this area are still emerging, we aimed to assemble illustrative case studies relating to how local authorities were supporting the development of attachment aware and trauma-informed schools. We worked alongside Derbyshire County Council, Islington Council and Kirklees Council, local authorities with well-established programmes.

In each area we explored what these programmes involve, factors that facilitates this work, and some of the outcomes seen so far. Details about the methods used can be found in Appendix 1.



## 4. Case studies

Here we present the details from the three local authorities with school examples of how the work has been implemented. Appendix 2 has expanded case studies for each school taking part.

### 4.1 DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Derbyshire County Council Virtual School established their Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) programme<sup>1</sup> in April 2015, with 17 schools. Since then, 87 schools across Derbyshire have graduated AAS and have implemented AA/TI practices.

#### PROGRAMME

Two school representatives, at least one of whom is from the senior leadership team, attend six full-day training sessions over a one-year programme. This taught element of the programme informs the strategic approach to school development and transformation.



For Swanwick Primary the importance of high-quality training provided by the Virtual School AAS programme was recognised as a crucial component to bring school staff on board with the AA/TI approach. They decided to have their whole staff attend school-based training in AA/TI practice. This enabled strong and clear messages of the scientific background of trauma and attachment issues to be delivered to all staff in school.





A Virtual School AAS programme lead supports the school to develop a plan for school change. Each school uses the knowledge developed through the training to instigate an action research project (Kelly et al., 2020) to develop AA/TI practice across the school. **Ormiston Ilkeston's action research project developed a new staff recruitment and induction strategy, in order to ensure the school-wide approach is sustainably maintained in their workforce. During the recruitment process candidates are introduced to the AA/TI approach, and as part of the induction are given training in how the school implements those values.**

Local networks of schools on, or graduated from the programme are established and these provide a sustained community of practice beyond the initial implementation year.

The Virtual School AAS programme lead has seen how the network meetings, bring focus and momentum to the AAS programme. **Schools said that the network is now inspiring schools outside the AAS programme to develop effective relational school-wide approaches**

**Swanwick Primary, as part of their action research, created the Pea Pod, a room designed to be a comfortable space for meetings with pupils or families to identify ways to support pupils with their individual, academic, and social development**

## APPROACH

Schools are made aware that they are beginning an ongoing journey of change that will take time to fully embed. Schools invest time and considerable effort during and after the programme to reflect upon the ethos and culture of their school. The Virtual School AAS lead talked about how the changes to culture may result in schools that look, sound or feel different to when they began the journey. **Ormiston Ilkeston's action research project developed a new staff recruitment and induction strategy, in order to ensure the school-wide approach is sustainably maintained in their workforce. During the recruitment process candidates are introduced to the AA/TI approach, and as part of the induction are given training in how the school implements those values.**

The Virtual School AAS lead and schools both talked about the importance of their working relationship. A relationship characterised by two things; to bring support and challenge. The support helps schools keep driving the implementation work for the action research project. Using the evaluation framework, the Virtual School AAS lead can help retain a focus on the project, and review progress and challenge schools to extend their vision about what could be achieved in the future.



**Schools explained how this programme, with the support of the Virtual School AAS lead, made them think about the 'why' of what they do rather than only focusing on 'how' to do attachment aware and trauma-informed approaches**



## 4.2 ISLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Islington developed iTIPS (Islington Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools) in September 2017 and launched with a pilot group of five primary schools and one alternative provision site. Since then 29 schools have taken part in the programme, and it has been extended to TinyTIPS (early years and children's centres) and Community iTIPS (voluntary sector and partner agencies) to enable trauma-informed practice to reach a range of services.

### PROGRAMME

Various services work together to implement these programmes, including CAMHS<sup>2</sup>, the Council Health and Wellbeing Team, School Improvement Service,

Educational Psychology Service, the Virtual School, and an alternative provision's outreach service. This work is supported by the Safeguarding Children Board where all partners involved have agreed to underpin their work by trauma-informed practice. This multidisciplinary shared value base enables services to work cohesively together with a common language.

The iTIPS<sup>3</sup> is a two-year school programme designed to embed trauma-informed practice via a school-wide approach to increase skillsets and capacity of staff to support pupils. It involves two days of training for all staff in the principles of the ARC (Attachment, Regulation, Competency) approach<sup>4</sup> in the first year, and regular contact, weekly or

fortnightly, with an iTIPS practitioner (a CAMHS clinician or educational psychologist) throughout the programmes two years. Together the iTIPS practitioner and school lead develop a school action plan, which includes individual goals for the school, and a staff working group with the aim of embedding the learning from the training.

The development plan at Beacon High involved including AA/TI in the continuing professional development of staff, and also placing an importance on

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supporting staff well-being. These two ongoing school practices demonstrate to the wider staff body the commitment of the senior leadership to the trauma-informed approach, and ensures a consistent and sustainable implementation of trauma-informed practice.

A key facilitator to the development journey, for Prior Weston Primary, is the relationship and regular contact with the iTIPS practitioner. They have used this time to meet with the staff working group to identify the key areas for development, co-develop a script for staff when supporting pupils, and provide staff group and individual consultation and reflective practice sessions.

The iTIPS practitioner also offers consultations for staff to discuss their practice and reflect on the impact of the work on them. Termly network meetings are established between the schools on or graduated from the programme. The aim is to use this network to facilitate sustainable school change in the longer term, through supportive peer relationships and growing a practice sharing environment.

## APPROACH

Schools embark on a two-year development journey. Developing an internal working group in each school works to spread practice across teams or departments in school, and supports the practice to embed as a new school ethos.

**Senior leaders at Beacon High understand that long lasting school-wide practice change does not happen quickly. Having weekly contacts with the iTIPS practitioner over the two years of the programme has been a vital aspect of the work done in school. Staff said that this programme provided effective training that balances theory in understanding child development, and practice to apply in schools.**

The iTIPS practitioners recognise that working with trauma-affected children can be challenging for school staff. Part of the support

offered involves promoting staff wellbeing to ensure staff feel supported – not judged – by colleagues through the development of AA/TI practice. Many of the schools utilise the iTIPS practitioner to deliver staff group consultation and reflective practice sessions where aspects of the training, elements of good practice, or issues staff have in their classrooms can be discussed.

At Prior Weston the staff consultation and reflective practice sessions have been highly valued in supporting the development of trauma-informed practices. Reflective practice sessions, like that made available through iTIPS, are not typical practice in schools, however at Prior Weston there are hopes to develop internal structures to sustain this into the future.



ISLINGTON

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## 4.3 KIRKLEES COUNCIL

Kirklees Council, with the vision and support of senior leaders across Kirklees Children's Services, actively promotes two programmes designed to support attachment aware and trauma-informed practice in schools.

Senior local authority leaders recognise their responsibility to create an environment where services, like the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and Virtual School, can confidently use their expertise to pioneer projects with schools, particularly when the work is strongly connected to the wider local authority strategy. Kirklees Virtual School and the EPS have worked closely together

since 2014 to provide services to looked after children and the schools they attend. Kirklees are able to provide their schools with a comprehensive core offer of support for all pupils who are looked after, previously looked after, or at risk of permanent exclusion.

### PROGRAMME

The Kirklees EPS support two whole-school development programmes, the Alex Timpson Programme and the whole-school offer of the Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) programme. Alex Timpson Programme has been running since 2018, and 19 schools have been involved in the programme. The MHST programme has seen 100 schools involved through 6 waves of intervention since 2018.

**The Alex Timpson Programme has three phases: training; implementation; and sustainability:**

**1 The initial training** of 1.5 days is delivered at INSET<sup>5</sup> days or twilight sessions to whole school staff. This covers attachment theory, trauma, resilience, outcomes for looked after children, loss and separation and emotion coaching.

**2 The implementation** phase offers schools additional training for selected members of staff to become ELSAs<sup>6</sup>, advanced emotion coaching, and therapeutic story writing, while also introducing peer supervision for staff who support pupils with complex needs.

**3 The sustainability** phase is designed to support schools to maintain the practice changes and to rely less directly on the EPS. This involves completing a School Evaluation Framework (SEF) which focuses on how the programme is embedded across the school, and identifies areas where further support might be useful. Sustainability is also supported by ensuring school policies for behaviour management and practice align with the principles of an AA/TI approach. To further support the sustainable implementation staff can attend network meetings to share impact and practice with other schools.

**The MHST programme** seeks to support schools to use AA/TI approaches to support pupil wellbeing. There is also an enhanced training offer related to children and young people's mental health to support understanding around specific areas such as selective mutism, self-harm, suicide and training in mindfulness interventions.

**Birstall Primary describe the training available as part of the MHST programme as “a wish list that’s really just come to life” (Headteacher). The impact of MHST’s whole-school approach has meant fewer referrals are made to CAMHS, and pupils are being supported directly by the school staff or by the education mental health practitioner.**

The EPS and the school's senior management complete the SEF to highlight strengths, and areas for development regarding support for pupils' social, emotional and mental health. Then the EPS completes a needs analysis and presents the school with a tailored training offer – which may also include reflective supervision for school staff. **For Golcar School “supervision is key without a doubt”, supporting staff through reflective supervision led by the MHST programme staff allows school staff to discuss their practice and reflect on the impact of the work on them.**

Within the wider MHST offer there are also education

mental health practitioners and community mental health workers assigned to each school who provide interventions for pupils and families.

## **APPROACH**

A key part of these programmes is the relationship between the local authority and the school, seeing them working together to create school-wide change. School leaders commitment and time investment into the development journey is key. They must be open to refine existing practices and bring change to other areas.

**Staff at Spen Valley identified that “courageous” senior leaders who role model the approach facilitate progress in making school-wide change. the headteacher also said: “It can’t just be that you ... do the training and then you become a trauma-informed school. You have to look at a lot of other things as well”. This illustrates how this programme requires staff commitment to review and change school-wide practices.**

The local authority takes a committed, yet flexible approach with their support and training. By tailoring the details of the programme in a plan agreed with the school, it is possible to meet the individual aims of each school. Both programmes seek to up-skill staff and emphasises that a school-wide ethos supporting positive, ongoing school-based relationships is often the best place to start to support pupils with attachment and trauma issues or mental health needs.



**School leaders commitment and time investment into the development journey is key**



## 5. Learning from case studies

### 5.1 SUPPORT ACROSS THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Particularly in two of the local authorities, having a shared local authority approach to AA/TI practice was key to the success of their school programmes. This was especially true where the Director of Children's Services and Director of Safeguarding (or similar) advocate and endorse AA/TI ways of working. For these local authorities, the AA/TI approach aligned with the broader ethos and philosophy of the local authority. This shared vision creates an environment that underpins the effective delivery of programmes in schools.

### 5.2 DEVELOPMENTAL 'JOURNEY' FOR SCHOOLS

All three programmes last between one and three years, reflecting a substantial journey for schools. Local authorities told us that impactful changes in culture and practice require an investment of time, a commitment of energy and willingness to make it a priority across the school. Training in the three case study areas has developed well beyond a one-off training session. The programmes all involve an initial training offer, then follow-up support to assist the individual transformation plans of the school. Eventually schools are encouraged to think about the next steps and how they will maintain the momentum after the programme ends.

### 5.3 ROBUST PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Supporting ongoing development through programmes like those described requires a meaningful investment of local authority resources; primarily staff time to support schools through their individual journeys. Having a named person at the local authority responsible for each school is useful to develop sustained and creative relationships. Local authority and school staff told us positive trusting relationships support effective systemic change in schools. Staff in schools feel able to discuss challenges and the strengths they wish to build upon, while local authority staff are better able to offer targeted support when they understand the reality faced by schools.

Similarly, schools and local authorities believe having a named school contact responsible for implementing the programme was important. This enabled the effective communication, planning and coordination of initiatives introduced to school.



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### 5.4 STRATEGIC COMMITMENT FROM SCHOOLS

Local authority programme teams need to secure full engagement and commitment to a long-term process of change from schools. Visible support from the headteacher or another senior leader helps to drive a transformational journey, providing strategic vision and implementing the policy needed to embed school-wide practice changes. The senior leadership team can also role-model practice change and ensure the implementation of the vision within the school development plan.

Local authorities assessed whether schools were ready to join the programme based on previous relationships or by introducing an application process which requires schools to reflect on their motivation to participate. Schools then articulate their understanding and current promising practice, while illustrating their future commitment to the programme. Many schools expressed the view that for school-wide practice to be adopted then the change process needs to involve all school staff.



## 5.5 SUSTAINING CHANGE FOR SCHOOLS

Local authorities and schools stressed that the changes made as a result must be sustained for the approach to have long-lasting impact on staff and young people. To support this sustainability, schools adapted staff recruitment and induction processes, rewrote behaviour policies, and developed skills to maintain supervision structures for their staff.

The local authorities we spoke to describe providing ongoing bespoke support to schools, hosting network meetings or providing a rolling programme of training. The networking events enabled schools to learn from their peers, celebrate successes and refresh ideas for supporting young people and their families.

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## 5.6 SHARED LANGUAGE

Local authorities and schools noted the advantages brought by sharing a 'language' in the context of AA/TI practice. This seeded easier and more focused conversations about the needs and experiences of young people within the school, but it also made cross-agency collaboration with professionals outside the school (e.g. in CAMHS, and children's social care) clearer and more effective. Some schools also used this language within policy documents and in discussion with young people, parents and carers.

## 5.7 IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONAL PRACTICE

Relational practice underpins the approach of all three programmes. All local authorities believed relational practice in schools was beneficial to all pupils, and particularly for those with identified attachment and trauma needs. Well-developed relational practice can aid staff to support pupils in the school environment and ameliorate, rather than exacerbate, the impact of trauma. It was widely noted that there are more young people with attachment and trauma needs than schools initially know and that the value of the work extends beyond those formally identified as vulnerable.

## 6. Distinctive features of individual case studies

In addition to the shared features outlined above, this section highlights particular distinctive features that represent good practice:

In **Derbyshire**, each school completes an action research project of their choice focused on AA/TI practice, with support from the Virtual School AAS lead. Some of the projects completed so far include, **(a)** enhancing primary to secondary school transition, **(b)** targeted mentoring sessions for vulnerable pupils, and **(c)** creating physical rooms designated for supporting the emotional and wellbeing needs of pupils. The individual nature of the project creates a sense of ownership and commitment within the school, which aids the process of introducing systemic change. In many schools this has had a 'ripple effect', with practice in other areas moving towards an AA/TI ethos.

# Derbyshire

In **Islington** the programme is strengthened by the way trauma-informed approaches are adopted by multiple agencies across the local authority. In particular, the Safeguarding Children Board partners have agreed to underpin their work by trauma-informed practice. This is in addition to the multiple partners who actively deliver the iTIPS programme (e.g. the Virtual School, CAMHS, EPS, and Council Health and Wellbeing Team). This coordinated approach and shared understanding ensures AA/TI practice is prioritised in different teams across the local authority.

# Islington

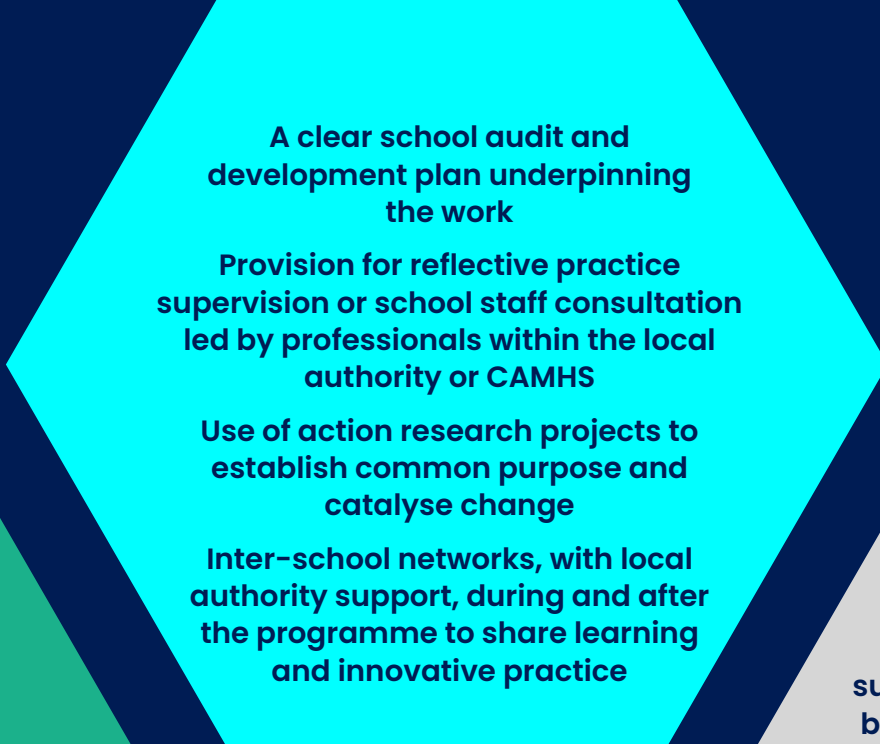
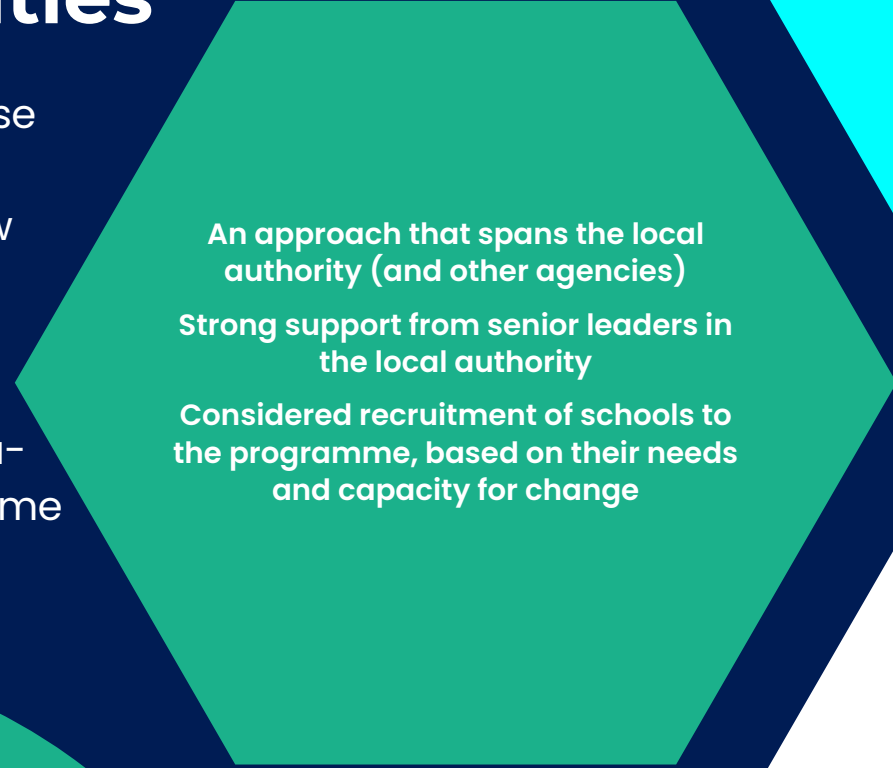
**Kirklees** make an extensive training offer to their schools, which is delivered through an AA/TI lens. From tailored sessions for governors or parents to specific skill-set development for school staff (e.g., therapeutic story writing or ELSA training). The expertise in the programme team means they can assist schools to identify what training would be most useful and how to schedule the sessions for optimal impact.

This results in a customised and individualised offer for each school in the programme to support them to focus on context-specific school development.

# Kirklees

# 7. Components of good practice for local authorities

Drawing on the case studies, the key components below can be used to create a strong attachment aware and trauma-informed programme for schools:



## KEY COMPONENTS



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2 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

3 <https://www.islingtoncs.org/itips>

4 For more information, see <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/publications/2020/february/developing-trauma-informed-practices-in-inner-london-schools-the-itips-pilot-2020/>

5 In-Service Training

6 Emotional literacy support assistants

# 9. Appendices

## APPENDIX 1

### METHOD

Each local authority identified between two and nine members of staff who could offer a range of perspectives about the AA/TI programmes in their area. Participation involved semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes that were individual, paired or in small groups and held online (due to the Covid-19 pandemic). A diverse range of local authority job roles were included from school/education advisors and educational psychologists to Virtual School heads and senior

local authority leaders (e.g. Director of Safeguarding and Director of Children's Services).

Each local authority was asked to identify at least two schools that would provide an illustrative example of the schools programme and give examples of practice changes and impact since being involved in the AA/TI programme. Interviews with schools included senior leaders (e.g. headteachers, deputy headteachers), administrative, pastoral and teaching staff. Over 40 staff from local authorities and schools were spoken to about the work they do in the area of promoting or working in AA/TI ways.

Ethical procedures and consent forms were verbally completed before all interviews were recorded. This project received approval from the Department for Education Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford with reference number CIA-21-230.



## APPENDIX 2

# DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS

## Ormiston Ilkeston Enterprise Academy

Staff described the positive impact the AAS work has had on both staff and pupils, improving the culture and ethos in school. Staff also explained how language and ways of talking about pupils had become more constructive and positive, with peer support and empathy among the staff body growing as a result of the AAS programme.

Ormiston Ilkeston recognised that a blanket school-wide rewards and sanctions policy did not correspond well with the diversity of need among their pupils. They developed an approach that allows flexibility in how the policies are applied; where the first step is to show understanding so that situations are handled fairly.

**Action research project:** Ormiston Ilkeston have developed a new staff recruitment and induction strategy, in order to ensure the school-wide approach is sustainably maintained in their workforce.

During the recruitment process candidates are introduced to the AA/TI approach, and as part of the induction are given training in how the school implements those values. Staff are also taken on a tour around the catchment area so they can appreciate the diverse backgrounds of the pupils that attend the school.

Staff explained how language and ways of talking about pupils had become more constructive and positive

## Swanwick Primary School

Identifying that more pupils had increasing levels of need, it became necessary for the school to increase their capacity to support earlier intervention for pupils, therefore they decided to join the AAS programme.

The importance of high-quality training provided by the Virtual School AAS programme was recognised as a crucial component to bring school staff on board with the AA/TI approach. Swanwick decided to have their whole staff attend school-based training in AA/TI practice. This enabled strong and clear messages of the scientific background of trauma and attachment issues to be delivered to all staff in school.

**Action research project:** Swanwick Primary School created a physical space in school to support pupils and their families with pastoral needs. Called the Pea Pod, the room was intended to be a comfortable space for meetings with pupils or families to identify ways to support the pupil with their individual, academic, and social development. Since the school graduated from the AAS programme, they have enhanced the Pea Pod to include a sensory room for pupils to support emotional self-regulation.

# ISLINGTON SCHOOLS

## Beacon High School

Beacon High School embarked on the iTIPS journey in 2019. The programme of whole school staff training and ongoing support from iTIPS helped the school to tie together previous training, in a structured and tangible way.

Relationships between pupils and staff have become a priority in this school, and the value of investing in time to foster positive relationships is recognised. Senior staff at school have a role in developing the confidence of staff to nurture, and at times repair, relationships with pupils. One impact is a reduction in time out of lessons from exclusion or internal isolation for the pupils, meaning they remain in school when they might otherwise have been excluded or moved to alternative provision.

Senior leaders at Beacon High understand that long lasting school-wide practice change does not happen quickly. Having weekly contacts with the iTIPS practitioner over the two years of the programme has been a vital aspect of the work done in school. Staff said that this programme provided effective training that balances theory in

## Development plans include CPD on attachment aware and trauma-informed practice, and the importance of staff well-being

understanding child development, and practice to apply in schools. This helped to develop staff knowledge and skills, while also convincing those staff who might be harder to win over to a trauma-informed approach.

The development plan at Beacon High involved including AA/TI in the continuing professional development of staff, and also placing an importance on supporting staff wellbeing. These two ongoing school practices demonstrate to the wider staff body the commitment of the senior leadership to the trauma-informed approach, and ensures a consistent and sustainable implementation of trauma-informed practice.





## Prior Weston Primary School

Prior Weston Primary School started their two-year journey in 2020. The focus in the first year has been on setting up the working group with school staff, and identifying four key areas of development: the use of calming spaces in classrooms; scripts for staff to support pupil emotional regulation; supporting staff to deal with challenging behaviour; and sharing child level information and useful strategies.

A key facilitator to the development journey for this school is the relationship and regular contact with the iTIPS practitioner. They have used this time to meet with the staff working group to identify the key areas for development, co-develop a script for staff when supporting pupils, and provide staff group and individual consultation and reflective practice sessions.

In particular, the staff consultation and reflective practice sessions have been highly valued in supporting the development of trauma-informed practices. Reflective practice sessions, like that made available through iTIPS, are not typical practice in schools, however at Prior Weston there are hopes to develop internal structures to sustain this into the future.

### **In particular, staff consultation and reflective practice sessions have been highly valued in supporting the development of trauma-informed practices**

The main impact has been on staff practice, with the senior leadership team supporting staff to spend time as required to emotionally support pupils whenever necessary. They have worked hard to keep the school-wide message of trauma-informed practice on the agenda, by supporting emotional literacy lessons as part of the PSHE curriculum, and also through online assemblies. These are used to role model emotional literacy and normalise the communication of emotions to pupils. Staff have practised supporting pupils with their emotional regulation using semi-scripted conversations, and, with younger pupils, colours associated with feelings are used to facilitate regulation. Looking forward, Prior Weston anticipates that future networking opportunities will be useful to learn from other schools and share the work they are doing.



# KIRKLEES SCHOOLS

## Spen Valley High School

Spen Valley started the Alex Timpson Programme in 2019. The school-wide approach was important to staff at this school, with the senior leaders, teachers and administrative staff valued as part of the team to support pupils. It was recognised that by including all staff in the training and the development journey it sends a consistent message about the importance of the AA/TI approach to all.

Staff identified that *“courageous”* senior leaders who role model the approach facilitate progress in making school-wide change.

Key to the ongoing journey for Spen Valley was the high quality training provided by Kirklees and the supportive relationship between the EPS and the school. The headteacher emphasised that: *“It can’t just be that you ... do the training and then you become a trauma-informed school. You have to look at a lot of other things as well”*. This illustrates how this programme is more than a standalone training session, but that staff commit to review and change school-wide practices. Examples

were given of how new in-school centres to provide pupil support had been established, staff recruitment and induction processes had changed, and curriculum had been reviewed to align with AA/TI practice. The impact of these changes has seen fewer pupils removed from lessons, and a reduction in fixed term exclusions. Pupils have also reported to an external leadership review that they believe the behaviour in school is better than it used to be. There is also a focus on supporting staff wellbeing so they are in a position to support pupils.

The sustainability of their school-wide approach stems from the new staff recruitment strategies which explore AA/TI principles with applicants. Spen Valley are also considering how to contribute to other schools embarking on a similar journey, to help Kirklees promote AA/TI practice.



## Golcar Junior, Infants and Nursery

Golcar wanted pupils to experience school as a safe place, the whole-school approach to the MHST programme was beneficial to achieve that goal. Senior staff said that bringing whole-school change in this way ensured all staff had the same consistent message about the development journey of the school. Impact from the training has been seen in the development of a common language and shared approach within school and with partners at multi-agency meetings. This school feels they are better able to present how they support pupils and find ways to collaborate with external professionals in their joint effort to support children and families.

For Golcar *“supervision is key without a doubt”*, supporting staff through reflective supervision led by the MHST programme staff allows school staff to discuss their practice and reflect on the impact of the work on them. Going forward Golcar want to upskill senior leaders to lead reflective supervision themselves to ensure this support for staff is sustainable. To embark on school-wide work they have found that senior leaders need to be open-minded, enable reflective practice among staff, and have high aspirations for all children in school.

## Birstall Primary School

Staff at Birstall describe AA/TI approaches as underpinning all aspects of schooling, from curriculum delivery and classroom environment, to the direct support for individual pupils. The school view the training available as part of the MHST programme as *“a wish list that’s really just come to life”*. Teachers at Birstall benefitted from having time between the training sessions so they could put into practice what was delivered, reflect, then use the next session to feedback and develop greater understanding. The Principal described how the programme has developed the capacity of staff to support pupils through their daily practice: *“So what we’re able to do is put some of those strategies in place, as I said, really quite early on and it’s about doing little but often”*.

**The impact of this whole-school approach has meant fewer referrals are made to CAMHS, and pupils are being supported directly by the school staff or by the education mental health practitioner**

The impact of this whole-school approach has meant fewer referrals are made to CAMHS, and pupils are being supported directly by the school staff or by the education mental health practitioner.

Birstall have developed a relationship policy using the principles of emotion coaching which should be implemented before the behaviour policy. They believe that through the training from the MHST programme they came to appreciate how pupils interact with school policies differently, so changing the structure of the policy helped adapt to pupils’ needs. They have also seen relationships with parents and carers improve, and have provided training for them in conjunction with the MHST staff.

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