



## **Attachment aware, trauma responsive policy and practice**

### **How can The Virtual School support settings to become attachment aware and trauma responsive?**

By Carrie O'Rourke, Assistant Head of The Virtual School



There are so many myths and questions about what working in a trauma informed way means for colleagues in education, and the return of a colleague from a term's secondment to headship in a West Sussex school has given us in The Virtual School a unique opportunity.

When the Virtual School team embarked on our own learning journey to become an Attachment Aware and Trauma Responsive school, we were able to test and apply what we learned to our advisory work, but Sam Norton has been able to implement her new knowledge and skills in a school environment. Her reflections on her experiences as a headteacher for the last term has provided an insight in to the power and positive impact for the whole school community of a trauma informed approach:

*"The children really felt we were on their side; every day was a new start and we looked for the positive in every situation, no matter how hard things were."*

The concept of trauma informed education does not mean that there are no rules or boundaries, but it certainly challenges us to consider the usefulness of some of the policies and approaches used in education settings. Sam is curious about what children are carrying when they come to school, taking the time to really listen and responding to young people based on what we know about how their brains and bodies respond.

The Virtual School team spent 6 months studying towards accreditation, and understanding the neuroscience and theory behind the impact of adversity and trauma on brain development really challenged our thinking about how and why young people struggle to engage in learning. The evidence clearly shows that educational outcomes for young people who have experienced adversity are significantly poorer than their peers. In fact, the impact of the multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) of many of the children needing social care involvement is far reaching impacting on their development and future life prospects. The evidence tells us that around 12.5% of the population has more than 4 ACEs, resulting in significantly poorer physical and mental health, education, employment, and relationship outcomes in adult life than those without.

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