



Summary Report

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Staffordshire's Virtual School for Looked After Children and
Previously Looked After Children

STAFFORDSHIRE TRAUMA INFORMED AND ATTACHMENT AWARE (S.T.I.A.A.) SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK (S.E.F.) FOR EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

IMPLEMENTATION AND PILOT

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JULY 2018

INTRODUCTION

During 2018, Staffordshire's virtual school for looked after and previously looked after children sought to explore the competencies and development priorities for educational settings and the education workforce to improve outcomes for vulnerable, looked after and previously looked after children and young people. The research undertaken at that time was a modified e-Delphi study which was utilised to elicit and quantify a consensus on the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes required by educational professionals to meet the needs of children and young people in schools who have experienced trauma and who may have relational attachment needs. The e-Delphi study was a national study for implementation regionally in the county of Staffordshire and was conducted in collaboration with professionals from the Staffordshire Virtual School, school leaders, designated teachers, Educational Psychologists, foster carers and social workers.

A total of 43 competency statements were generated from the e-Delphi study and the strength of these competency statements was high (>85%, mean value >4.5). The competency statements rated as most important (100% consensus for strongly agree and agree) were concerned with the super-ordinate themes of realising, recognising, and responding to adversity. Given the high degree of consensus, the list of competency statements is included within the Staffordshire Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware (S.T.I.A.A.) Self-Evaluation Framework (S.E.F.) for educational settings and are grouped into the domains of knowledge, leadership, systems, applied practice and policy.

The S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. is an evidence base for supporting educational settings to review relational care practices and offers the provision of a co-ordinated approach for the future knowledge and skill development of entire settings, leading to optimal outcomes for children and young people who are looked after. It provides a coherent framework that educational settings can use to evaluate strengths, areas for development, and areas requiring further querying for improving outcomes in five different domains.

The areas of competency required by schools to be trauma informed and attachment aware indicated the need for high levels of training for whole school communities, and specialist training for personnel holding specific roles directly supporting looked after children. What was also evident was that in order to be competent practitioners who could effectively apply knowledge and skills within their settings, the leadership team had to explicitly give their support to the implementation of relational care practices, allow adaptations to the environment, curriculum and learning, strive for inclusion, work in partnerships with foster carers, parents, and other supporting agencies, and if needed, to allocate finances to supporting children and young people who have experienced adversity. The allocation of finances also included devolving funds to appointing highly experienced and knowledgeable teams who have the personal attributes and skills to work with those that have repeatedly suffered adversity in childhood.

Competencies also include the need for educational settings to review their policies and the systems policies support. Similarly, the importance of equitable and inclusive policy and practices that are anti-discriminatory and that do not marginalise further an already highly vulnerable population of children and young people are also included as competencies. Settings need to acknowledge that unnecessary sanctions and disciplinary processes have the potential to re-traumatise children and young people and further add to their experiences of adversity through exclusory practices. Further to this, the S.E.F. also demonstrates the importance of educational settings paying due regard to UK standards for children’s attachment in the form of NICE guidelines and relevant acts.

This pilot study was a form of Collaborative Action Research (C.A.R.) which sought to further develop the S.E.F. and through a bottom up approach, it emerged that there was a need to create a document that schools could refer to whilst engaging in a process of change within their own settings and which is now complete and available to educational settings to use.

Pilot schools and collaborating researchers simultaneously undertook their own evaluations utilising the online S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. in their own settings and from the S.E.F. data wrote their own actions and/or began their own cycles of change.

PARTICIPATION

A total of 25 educational professionals volunteered to collaborate in the pilot, representing a total of 15 schools as detailed in Table 1. Table 2 shows how many collaborating researchers attended the pilot sessions at each stage of development.

Table 1: Number and type of school participating in the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. Pilot

Type of School	Total Number of Schools Volunteering to Collaborate in the Pilot Study	Total Number of Schools Completing the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. in their own settings
Primary Phase	8	6
Secondary Phase	5	3
PRU	0	0
Special School	2	2

Table 2: Number of people participating in each stage of the pilot

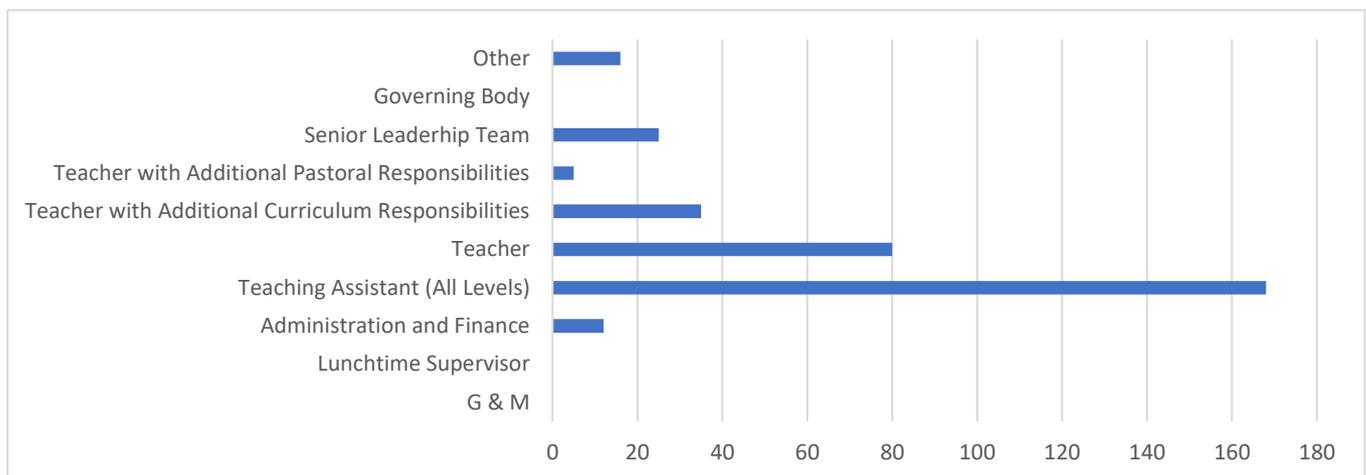
Type of School	Session One: Introduction to the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F	Session 2: Exploration of Findings and Action Planning	Session 3: Review of Action Plans	Session 4: Sharing Ideas and Developments
Primary Phase	10 People	9 People	6 People	4 People
Secondary Phase	6 People	5 People	2 People	1 Person
Special School	3 people	3 People	2 People	1 Person

Table 3 as below shows the total numbers of staff completing the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. in their own settings by school phase.

Table 3: Total Percentage of response rates by school phase

Type of School	Total number of staff requested to complete the online S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F.	Total number of staff who completed the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F.	Total percentage of S.T.I.A.A. S.E.Fs completed
Primary Phase	288	172	60%
Secondary Phase	283	103	36%
Special School	137	66	48%
TOTAL	708	341	48%

As can be seen in the graph below, the highest number of people completing the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. across all phases of education were teaching assistants (n=168), followed by teachers (n=120).



FEEDBACK FROM COLLABOARTING RESEARCHERS/ PILOT SETTINGS

All participating schools initially discussed hopes arising from completing the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. All schools identified that they hoped that pupil outcomes would change following completion of the framework and that pupils would be happier, engaged, communicating their needs, enjoying school, and experiencing safety and security. Further to this it was hoped that schools would be able to champion a nurturing ethos which placed student well-being at the heart of their educational community.

It was also highlighted that schools would be able to raise staff awareness in terms of pupil needs at an individual level but also at a more holistic level. Within this it was recognised that staff well-being was also a central concern to educational settings and who were looking to explore this further and to implement this in action plans in the form of supervision/ well-being activities for staff.

The language of attachment and trauma was discussed at length and it was felt that the language of attachment and trauma was alien to most teaching teams and members of the school community. It was hoped that in completing the framework that the language would become more familiar, normalised, and embedded within school communities. It was suggested that a larger glossary be provided in the supporting ST.I.A.A. document. The retention of the glossary with additional sections was discussed as an action item and this has been included in the final document with multiple links to resources and examples embedded within.

Settings also discussed the fact that they felt that the statements within the framework were lengthy and wordy. Consequently, it was explored that in order to change the language this would need to go back through research process in order to re-evaluate the statements. The compromise was that the statements were reviewed to ensure clarity of meaning, as opposed to altering the content of the item.

Knowledge of staff was a key concern and priority for all pilot schools. Collaborating researchers felt that staff members who had completed the S.E.F. within their own settings were underestimating their own knowledge and their own skill sets. It was hoped that by completing the framework that teaching teams would be better informed and their own awareness raised to what they currently are able to do in practice. It was also hoped that the framework highlight areas where training was needed in order to up skill teaching teams.

Central to this was the identification that teaching teams need to be secure in the knowledge that relational care is at the heart of what settings are trying to achieve in becoming trauma informed and attachment aware. It was an item discussed many times that offering attuned and connected ways of relating to children, through relationships that are child centred and based on unconditional positive regard is how settings want their staff to be. Collaborators in the pilot sought a coherent approach with the identification of an almost standardised set of personal skills which they hoped could be identified from completing the S.E.F.

Physical environments of educational settings and what they could provide were also discussed with pilot settings highlighting that it was recognised that specific environmental adaptations were needed for some looked after children. Some settings discussed this a requirement of the school to be able to provide safe spaces, whereas others wanted to be able to offer such spaces whether they were specified as a requirement to meet an identified SEND or not. It was desired that completing the framework would raise staff awareness to the importance of organising the physical environment of their classrooms, and that as a whole setting, schools would endeavour to provide safe places that made children and young people feel secure.

Collaborating researchers also discussed the need for cultural change and an ethos that underpins the need to support and meet the emotional needs of children and young people. It was discussed at length that these changes could occur only when led by senior leadership teams, who are flexible in their approaches, who can underpin values and practices within policy and that the whole setting is supported in implementing new policies and new ways of working.

Participating educational settings recognised that they were Pathfinders and that being part of the pilot was for them, a unique and privileged position to be in. SLT found this empowering and as a unique selling point were taking back thoughts, findings and S.E.F. data to governing bodies and executives within multi-Academy trusts in order to ensure that the setting was being supported by senior managers and leaders who are integral to ensuring the success of both completing the framework and also implementing changes as identified from S.E.F. data for action planning.

Barriers to successful completion of the framework were discussed and it was highlighted that the methods of emailing the framework to staff was potentially problematic. The GDPR regulations were also discussed and it was acknowledged that some staff felt uncomfortable completing the framework without knowing what would happen to their personal data. Specific concerns were raised regarding engaging lunchtime supervisors who were not obliged to complete the framework. Some schools suggested that they may gather all the lunchtime supervisors together and to pay for their time to complete the framework. In relation to GDPR and ethics, participant information was provided to schools and the online version of the S.T.I.A.A. has a clear statement explaining how data would be processed and managed. Settings were also directed to the Summit Privacy Policy online.

Time was an added factor as it was recognised that not all teaching teams and other colleagues within the school community would willingly give their time to complete the framework. Leadership teams were also concerned about finding the time to bring the school community together in order to explain the framework and to lead people through the process of completing it.

How the framework was to be presented to school communities was also discussed with suggestions including during staff briefing, direct communication from the senior leadership team and more indirect communications by email. Each of these conversations led to the creation of a clear change process cycle of 'plan, do, study, act' being written and included in the supporting S.T.I.A.A. document for settings to follow and work through.

In querying data, educational settings requested that data be presented in a way which allowed them to query the percentage of people who held a particular role by response, the response percentage by each individual domain, for example, knowledge, and length of time in role as a further data query. Educational settings also asked for an overall score within each domain, which provided a different set of data by response. A rank order was also requested by settings to allow schools to ascertain where strengths lay as well as areas that could be considered for improvement. This was agreed as an action point and has since been developed and is operational.

QUALITATIVE OUTCOMES

All collaborating schools were keen to pilot the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. in their settings. It became clear that there is an appetite to learn more about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which present for many children and young people as trauma and relational attachment needs and which is particularly true of children and young people who have been taken into care to protect them from harm and adversity.

One primary educational setting who did not participate in the pilot but completed the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. identified urgent training needs from the data gathered in the domain of knowledge. SLT felt this needed addressing quickly to keep the momentum going, and training was provided to the entire team, including lunch time supervisors, on a Saturday in January 2019.

All collaborating schools identified that their behaviour policies were outdated and operated according to behaviourist principles. As part of the action planning, all schools identified the need to review their policies and embed relational approaches. At the end of the pilot, two schools had almost completed this action and were hoping to introduce the new policy for September 2019.

All schools recognised that there were not enough 'alternative / key attachment adults' in their settings that could be the 'safe base' for children and young people. It was also identified that many therapeutic approaches or support offered through specific interventions were unknown to the schools. Settings then chose to review roles in schools as part of their action planning and collaborating SLT researchers wanted to review whether finances could be made available to provide more in-depth training for 'attachment adults' in their settings.

All schools who completed the pilot have written an action plan based on their S.E.F. data. Three have begun implementation of their plans and the remaining settings will begin the process this academic year.

QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES: S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. DATA

This section reports on the lowest and highest scores collated from the S.E.F. data for all pilot schools across all phases of education (n=341)

KNOWLEDGE

Overall, only 14% of individuals completing the S.E.F. indicated that knowledge is applied in practice in their settings in a fully implementable way and that generally they do not feel confident in applying trauma informed approaches in practice.

The highest scoring statements of 50%+ indicated that respondents know that relational and developmental trauma can impact on social relationships, emotional development, cognitive development, language development and physical development.

In the domain of knowledge, the lowest scores obtained were for knowing what vicarious and secondary trauma is, knowing about how personal identity develops and the importance of internal working models.

POLICY

51% of responses showed that their settings behaviour policies give due regard to the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the Equality Act (2010) and 45% reference NICE guidelines for attachment.

22% of educational settings feel they are fully implementing policies to support looked after children in a positive way. It was identified that more needs to be done to change behaviour policies which are punitive and based on sanctions and disciplinary proceedings.

SYSTEMS

17% of all people completing the S.E.F. indicated that systems currently operating to support looked after children and young people in school are fully implemented, effective and in place.

The highest score obtained in the domain of systems was 54%, relating to the setting's ethos which offered and advocated an open-door policy for carers of children with trauma and relational attachment needs.

For systems, 33% indicated that individuals had access to psychological supervision and that it was mandatory in their settings for key / attachment adults directly supporting vulnerable children and young people.

LEADERSHIP

15% of staff felt that leadership was fully implemented to support staff, children and young people with relational attachment and trauma needs.

48% of individuals stated that their Senior Leadership Teams provide key and attachment adults supporting children and young people with relational attachment and trauma needs with the material means required to establish a purposeful, safe, and nurturing environment in the setting.

The lowest score of 38% was recorded against the whole school explicitly agreeing what the safe space/ safe studio/ regulation station was for before it became operational.

APPLIED PRACTICE

The highest score obtained from all statements in the S.T.I.A.A. S.E.F. was for applied practice in which 58% of individuals agreed that their setting explicitly explains the ways in which the emotional and social safety of children and young people are protected, by highlighting policies and practices at a developmentally appropriate level and which explain how their setting offers protection e.g. anti-bullying, well-being, school council.

In terms of specific support and intervention to support vulnerable children and young people with attachment and relational needs, including approaches such as Emotion Coaching, ELSA, ACT etc, there was very limited knowledge of what is available with scores ranging from 33% down to 27% in terms of what could be applied in practice.

FURTHER ACTIONS

- For an entire setting to be trauma informed and attachment aware, it should aim for all staff to complete the S.E.F. or set a minimum return rate of at least 80%. Decisions and action planning for the entire setting needs to be based on a valid and reliable data set.
- Overall, no percentage scores for statements in the S.E.F. were recorded any higher than 58% and which was identified in the domain of applied practice. Most responses recorded were less than 50% against each statement. This indicates at present that settings completing the S.E.F. have no specific strengths in any one domain, yet this also means that there is ample opportunity for settings to improve.
- Most work needs to be directed towards improving knowledge and the application of knowledge in practice.
- Leadership needs to focus more on environmental factors and provide regulation stations/safe spaces for children and young people.
- Leadership also needs to facilitate upskilling staff in specific approaches/ interventions, who support looked after children and that can be applied in practice for positive gains.
- Settings need to provide support for staff well-being.
- Settings need to be more robust in developing systems which monitor and respond to emotionally based school refusal.