

 THE UNIVERSITY OF OPPORTUNITY

West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership Evaluation

Barnardo's Trauma Informed Education Pilot Phase Two: Feasibility of Impact Study Summary Report

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Executive Summary

This report presents a feasibility of impact study¹ of the Barnardo's Trauma Informed Education Pilot commissioned by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership (WMVRP). This pilot consisted of Barnardo's delivering bespoke trauma-informed training for school and college staff to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to better identify, understand and respond effectively to trauma-related behaviours in students and within themselves.

This study aimed to evaluate the feasibility, efficacy, and sustainability of the trauma informed training within three education establishments in Birmingham: a primary and secondary school, both belonging to the same academy trust; and a large college. All three sites received the pilot intervention and all data surrounding implementation and training was collected from December 2023 to February 2025.

What we did

The study took a mixed-methods approach to investigate the feasibility of impact of the education pilot. Two streams of quantitative data were collected:

1. quantitative data from an attitudinal survey, developed by Barnardo's, to measure attitudes and behaviours before and after trauma informed training with a 6-9 month follow up (to read about the reliability of the Barnardo's attitudinal survey please see Wilkinson, 2025²).
2. existing quantitative data collected by each education establishments, mapped against the intended outcomes of the pilot, that might indicate a more trauma informed environment (student attendance, student exclusions, behaviour monitoring, student grades or attainment, staff absence and wellbeing). Data were also received from two control schools (matched on year groups and key demographics of the pilot schools). The control schools (which did not receive the intervention) were located in the same area as the pilot schools and were managed by the same academy. There was no control data for the college that received intervention.

In terms of the qualitative data, six focus groups were carried out to evaluate the experiences of the training, and perspectives on its impact, with three distinct groups: education practitioners; parents/carers; and the Barnardo's delivery team.

What we found

KEY FINDINGS

¹ Note that this Feasibility of Impact Study is Phase Two of a wider evaluation of the programme, with an initial Process Evaluation report submitted to the WMVRP in 2024 - See Chopra et al. (2024).

² Wilkinson, D.J. (2025). Barnardo's Trauma Informed Schools Pilot Data – Reliability and Factor Analysis (CFA and EFA) Outputs (supplementary report). West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership.

- **Immediate Positive Impact:** Educators showed significant immediate improvements in understanding trauma, responding to pupil behaviours effectively, professional confidence, and feeling organisational support for trauma-informed practice.
- **Medium to Longer-term Sustainability:** Positive changes in educator's improvements in the above areas were mostly retained at follow-up periods, though with slightly reduced strength over time due to low retention numbers, suggesting a need for ongoing reinforcement.
- **Educational Outcomes:** Promising improvements in academic outcomes were observed at primary and secondary schools, highlighting potential broader educational benefits of trauma-informed approaches. However, further data and analysis would be required to attribute this directly to TI training.
- **Data Limitations:** Significant reduction in participation rates at follow-up surveys limits the reliability and generalisability of longer-term findings.

The qualitative findings brought to the fore the complexity of needs for children and young people in the UK education system today, with the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental wellbeing, combined with challenges such as poverty, knife crime, and the impacts of social media. As highlighted by the parent/carer group, all of whom were from Global Majority backgrounds, these issues often sit within a wider complex context of cultural and community stigma, particularly around mental health. The study showed evidence of the culturally sensitive and anti-racist nature of the training, and how it had opened up a safe space for diverse groups to productively address some of these complexities. The Qualitative findings support the continuation and expansion of Barnardo's trauma-informed work to support staff and leaders to help children and young people to achieve and access further life opportunities despite such barriers.

The focus group data highlighted:

- **Increased Staff Awareness and Skills:** Staff consistently reported improved awareness, knowledge, and ability to respond sensitively to pupil trauma and emotional needs.
- **Organisational and Leadership Challenges:** Implementation varied considerably depending on school leadership commitment and organisational culture. Effective trauma-informed practice required strong, consistent leadership and institutional backing.
- **Contextual and Cultural Barriers:** Qualitative findings highlighted specific barriers, such as cultural stigma around mental health and mistrust toward safeguarding processes, emphasising the importance of culturally sensitive approaches.
- **Positive Impact on Staff Well-being:** Staff described improvements in their own emotional resilience and well-being, indicating broader benefits of the trauma-informed approach beyond classroom interactions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Continue Trauma-Informed (TI) Steering Groups Post-Training**
Establishments are already participating in TI steering groups, which provide a valuable forum for discussion and reflection on trauma-informed practices. It is recommended that these groups continue post-training, with a focus on sharing ideas and strategies from

schools demonstrating good practice. Regularly rotating leadership within these groups could also encourage shared ownership and bring fresh perspectives.

- **Monitor Attainment Data Beyond Training**

Schools should systematically track student attainment data following the completion of trauma-informed training. This longitudinal monitoring would help identify trends and evaluate the long-term impact of trauma-informed practices on academic outcomes. Schools can use this data to inform targeted interventions and demonstrate the effectiveness of their approaches.

- **Implement Termly Staff Surveys**

Short staff surveys should be introduced each term and integrated into existing structures, such as form time or staff meetings. These surveys could monitor staff perceptions of trauma-informed practices and provide ongoing feedback. By making the surveys a regular feature, schools can ensure a continuous evaluation of how staff attitudes and practices evolve over time.

- **Seek Additional Funding for Sustainability**

Barnardo's should actively pursue further funding opportunities to expand and sustain trauma-informed education initiatives. This funding could support additional training sessions, resource development, and more comprehensive evaluation of programme effectiveness.

- **Enhance Data Collection Processes for Staff Wellbeing**

Data collection processes for staff wellbeing should be improved to support more robust evaluation. For example, wellbeing surveys could be administered termly rather than annually, capturing individual-level data to enable granular analysis. Such an approach would provide more accurate insights into staff wellbeing trends and allow schools to implement timely interventions as needed. This practice would also ensure that future evaluations have high-quality, actionable data.

- **Improving Participant Retention**

To strengthen feasibility, future evaluations should implement a section in the commissioning contract where schools take a more active role in holding staff accountable for filling out follow-up surveys. Embedding this into the commissioning contract explicitly would distribute the responsibility in a more equitable manner between the provider and the participating schools to enhance data completeness and ultimately, the reliability of impact evaluation.

- **Commissioners should allow the service provider more autonomy when selecting the sites to receive the intervention**

The pilot demonstrates that the schools 'readiness' for receiving intervention is a key factor in fully implementing the TI training. The provider should be able to provide the training to schools who approach the commissioner (the WMVRP in this instance) for assistance to ensure there is no duplication in previous training and that the school is stable enough to receive the intervention.

- **Assess the impact of 'Train the Trainer' approach:** conduct follow-up focus groups to assess whether the 'Train the Trainer' intervention has worked, e.g. with the parent/carers group in the primary school.

- **Increase visibility across trauma-informed settings:** Barnardo's could share physical items with individuals that have participated in the training, such as badges, leaflets, or lanyards to enhance visibility of the trauma informed approach across the whole setting.

- **Trauma-informed could become a mandatory part of teacher training provision:** The Department for Education should prioritise the inclusion of trauma informed training as a key component of teacher education provision.
- **Invite specialist trauma-informed guests to contribute input to teacher training:** Considering that trauma-informed approaches are not yet a mandatory component of teacher training provision, Higher Education teacher education providers should include guest sessions from specialist providers such as Barnardo's to input sessions on trauma informed approaches in educational settings.

Findings in More Detail³

Quantitative survey data

Analysis of the quantitative survey data indicates initial positive impacts on educators' attitudes, knowledge, and self-confidence regarding trauma-informed practice. Participants reported meaningful improvements immediately after training across all key areas measured, including understanding pupil behaviour, feeling equipped to respond effectively, and recognising both personal and organisational support for trauma-informed approaches. Importantly, many of these improvements were still evident at 6-9 months follow-ups, though the strength of effects slightly decreased over time, highlighting a need for ongoing reinforcement and support beyond initial training. It is important to note that the follow-up attitudinal survey had significantly reduced participation rates, limiting the reliability and generalisability of longer-term findings. Future evaluations must address this challenge by implementing strategies to improve retention and ensure robust evidence of sustained impact.

The survey findings must be interpreted with caution, due to the nature, type and amount of data (see technical report discussion for more details). However, the following trends were noted:

- **Immediately post-training:** All factors⁴ and the total score showed significant and meaningful increases, confirmed by both parametric t-tests and non-parametric Wilcoxon tests.
- **Short-Term Follow-Up** (December 2023-July 2024): Gains were largely maintained, particularly for Factors 1 and 7
- **Medium-Term Follow-Up** (March 2024- October 2024): Factors 1 and 7 continued to demonstrate large, statistically significant improvements
- **Medium-Term-Term Follow-Up** (March 2024-December 2024): Attitudinal gains were successfully maintained, with no evidence of significant regression. Several factors, particularly Factors 1, 4, 6, and 7, still showed significant improvements

Quantitative school data

School data has been used to consider school environmental factors that are indicators of a trauma informed environment. On average, the intervention schools performed slightly better than the control schools across key academic measures, particularly in English outcomes. Academic

³ Interested readers may wish to read the more detailed findings below. Full technical details of the methods, analysis, and detailed statistical output and qualitative themes can be found in the full report.

⁴ The factors of the survey were as follows: F1 Underlying causes of problem behaviour, F2 Responses to problem behaviour, F3 On-the-job behaviour, F4 Self-efficacy at work, F5 Reactions to the work, F6 Personal support of TIC, F7 System-wide support for TIC

performance in intervention schools also showed promising improvements, particularly at primary and secondary levels, suggesting potential wider educational benefits of the training. However, significant challenges remained, such as persistently high suspension rates at secondary schools, indicating that there may be other factors for consideration and support in a whole systems approach. Across the control schools, some improvements were seen in English subjects, but there was little to no progress in maths or overall attainment.

School attendance trends show that:

- **Control vs. Intervention:** Control groups, especially in the secondary through school, generally display higher attendance. Intervention groups show improvements, but they have not yet reached the attendance levels of the control groups.
- **Primary School vs. Secondary School Trends:** Primary schools receiving intervention show less variability and maintain higher attendance rates compared to secondary schools receiving interventions, suggesting that interventions might be more effective or easier to implement at the primary level.
- **Seasonal and Yearly Fluctuations:** There are notable improvements and declines corresponding potentially to seasonal changes or the start of the academic year

Suspension rates for interventions schools (A and B) and control schools (C and D):

- **Intervention School A (primary)** shows minimal suspension rates, with small peaks in Year 4 and Year 6
- **Intervention School B (secondary)** exhibits the highest suspension rates, especially from Year 8 onwards.
- **Control School C (secondary and sixth form)** has a peak in Year 7 but shows improvement or in later years.
- **Control School D (primary and secondary)** shows varied trends, with a significant peak in Year 6 and relatively high rates in later years

Exclusion rates for interventions schools (B) and control schools (C and D):

Intervention School B (secondary)

- The highest rates of exclusions appear in Year 10. This suggests a critical period where students might face challenges that lead to exclusion, warranting focused interventions.
- Years 8 and 9 also show some exclusions, indicating the beginning of challenging periods as students' progress through secondary school.

Control School C (secondary and sixth form)

- Year 11 shows a moderate rise in exclusions, indicating issues that culminate at the end of secondary education, possibly linked to stress or challenges related to transitioning out of compulsory education.

Control School D (primary and secondary)

- Notably, Year 9 shows a peak in exclusions, similar to School B
- Year 3 in the primary phase also shows exclusion activity, which is unusual and might indicate specific issues or incidents that could benefit from further investigation.

Staff absence rates and staff turnover rates:

- **Intervention Schools A & B** show higher and more rapidly increasing rates of both absences and turnover
- **Control schools**, especially Control School D, demonstrate better stability in both absence and turnover rates,
- The data reflects the need for targeted strategies to improve staff retention and attendance in intervention settings, learning from the effective practices observed in control schools.

Mock exam grades data demonstrate the following trends. However, these should be interpreted with caution, as progress in grades would be expected throughout the academic year, and therefore further data and analysis would be required to fully consider the impact that TI training has had on grades and marks achieved.

- **Primary Intervention School:** Significant improvement in **Writing**; significant declines in Reading, Maths, and overall RWM APS.
- **Primary Control School:** Improved Writing; Maths declined; no change in Reading and RWM APS.
- **Secondary Intervention School:** Significant improvements across **all core subjects** (English Language, Literature, Maths).
- **Secondary Control Schools:** Improved in English Language (both controls), English Literature (control 1 only), no improvement in Maths.

Qualitative focus group data

- Educational practitioners

Four focus groups were carried out with ten education practitioners across the three education settings. Overall, the education practitioners in the focus groups were highly positive about the training, referring to the ways it had given them a deeper understanding of the complexity of trauma and how this had had a positive influence on their overall empathy and everyday interactions with students; a key form of support given the complexity of needs their students presented with.

For the primary school, specific changes had started to happen in terms of school policy on behaviour. Practitioners also referred to the practical tools the training had equipped them with to deal with challenging situations and to changes they and wider staff had made since the training, such as adaptations to language use, questioning formats, and environmental changes. There was an overall sense that this was still very much the beginning of their school or college's trauma informed journey, and that more needed to be done at an institutional and leadership level to support a joined-up approach to the work, to make the work more publicly visible and to embed it with the culture of the school or college. Practitioners also gave suggestions to ways in which the training could be further developed, such as changes to the discussion group format, giving teachers takeaways to apply in their classrooms, and ideas regarding shorter refresher sessions.

- Parents/carers

A focus group was carried out with seven members of the Parents, Teachers and Friends Association (PTFA) group at the primary school. This explored whether the training is anti-racist and culturally sensitive to meet the needs of the diverse students, parents/carers, and community population. Evidence was reported of positive changes individual parents/carers had made as a result of the

training, such as having a more empathic approach in their daily interactions with other family members or other parents/carers and having an understanding of where personal trauma comes from and how it can manifest. Parents/carers shared examples of cultural stigma around mental health issues within their communities. A general sense of lack of trust amongst cultural communities was another key theme that stemmed from feelings of fear, such as in relation to safeguarding policies and social service regulations, that sometimes clashed with cultural traditions: an aspect that mirrors evidence in wider research. Parents/carers also shared examples of positive changes they had seen in the school, such as around behaviour policy, while also sharing that they thought that more changes were happening on an everyday basis that they were not aware of. Overall, there was evidence that pointed towards the culturally sensitive and anti-racist nature of the training, with parents/carers feeling it had provided a safe space to discuss issues that were culturally sensitive in their communities, and to find practical ways to sensitively challenge these aspects and to signpost people to support. Moreover, the training opened up a safe space for the parents/carers and trainer to critique systemic injustices, such as institutional racism and how to navigate trauma informed parenting approaches within these contexts.

- Barnardo's delivery team

A focus group was carried out with the Barnardo's delivery team to document reflections on what the team saw as the predominant successes and challenges of the implementation. Key findings included differences between educational settings, with primary settings more engaged, while secondary and further education settings required more effort to gain buy-in. Timing and staff workload were key barriers. Another key difference between settings was that trauma-informed principles aligned naturally with primary education, while secondary and further education required adaptations in language, framing, and practical application. In terms of the engagement of senior leadership, schools where leaders were visibly involved saw stronger engagement, while in others, disengagement from leadership led to reduced staff uptake. In terms of sustainability of this work, staff workload and a lack of structured follow-up mechanisms made long-term sustainability a challenge. Future iterations should integrate shorter refresher sessions and formal policy embedding.