Item No. 12.	Classification: Open	Date: 1 March 2017	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Secure Base Implementation for the Virtual School and Designated Teachers	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director, Children and Families	

RECOMMENDATION

1.	That the report be noted.

BACKGROUND

2.	In November 2016 the corporate parenting committee requested an update report to its March 2017 meeting, including progress on the workshops planned with Southwark virtual schools on the secure base model.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Update on the workshops with Southwark virtual schools on the secure base model

3.	Following discussions between the Virtual School Head teacher and practice group lead in fostering it was considered highly beneficial for both the virtual school and Designated teachers in schools across Southwark to have training on the secure base model.

4.	The practice group Lead in fostering attended the Southwark designated teacher's forum and gave a presentation to the designated teachers on the relevance of attachment theory and secure base for schools. This is a regular and well attended network meeting. The seminar took place on the 12 January 2017 and was also attended by Heather Johnson who is the deputy head teacher in the virtual school. See Appendix 1 Handout prepared for seminar.

5.	Feedback on this seminar has been positive. There was a high level of interest from those who did attend with several requests for more information and an additional longer session. One primary school designated teacher has identified her school has a high number of looked after children and identified they would like further attachment training for teachers within the school and they will explore this with the virtual school.

6.	The fostering practice group lead has agreed to do one further morning of training on secure base which it would be hoped would include all of the virtual school team. It is then thought the virtual school could take this forward with a champions identified within the virtual school. One of the education advisors has had additional training in attachment in schools and is really interested in the application of the secure base model.

7.   Additionally the practice group lead has stayed in touch with Professor Gillian Schofield who developed the secure base model regarding the impact and implementation journey in the fostering service and Professor Schofield has shown an interest in the implementation in schools in Southwark and it will be explored if she could have any further direct input.

8.   The relationship between the virtual school and fostering service is of critical importance. The virtual school are a key part of training and ongoing support for foster carers to support them to help children to reach their full educational potential and get the emotional, social and educational support they need in school. The next training by the virtual school for foster carers is on 3 March 2017 on helping your child with education and personal education plans (PEPs).

Conclusions

9.   Secure base implementation has had been observed and based on feedback is having really positive impact on supporting foster carers and enabling them to provide greater empathy, understanding, sense of belonging, support and stability to the children they look after. For looked after children this will be even more effective if school staff work together with foster carers and other professionals to give the same messages of care and concern. The knowledge that a group of adults are together "cheering a young person on" can have a powerful effect on a young person and give him or her, perhaps for the first time, an experience of warm, positive parenting. The collaboration between the fostering service and virtual school it is hoped will have a wider impact o the experience for Southwark looked after children in school. The involvement of the designated teachers for looked after children creates the opportunity for this approach to be championed by schools within the borough and the virtual school supports all Southwark children who are looked after including those placed out of borough.

Community impact statement

10.   Where appropriate children who require fostering are best placed to remain in their borough or within a 20 miles radius of their home where they have an identity and sense of belonging, of which contributes to placement stability. The collaboration between the fostering service and virtual school is critical to ensure children are given the best opportunity to succeed and that children are supported at home and school in the best way possible with empathy and a shared framework of understanding of their needs and the impact of past loss and trauma.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Handout for Seminar for designated teachers 12 January 2017

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Alisdair Smith, Director, Children and Families
Report Author	Alisdair Smith, Director, Children and Families
Version	Final
Dated	20 February 2017
Key Decision?	No

CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	**Comments Sought**	**Comments Included**
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		20 February 2017

Looked After Children and Education

The relevance of Attachment Theory and

the Secure Base Model for schools

Seminar for designated teachers 12th January 2017

Education and Looked After Children: Attachment Theory and the Secure Base

"Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space," (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1969).

Southwark Fostering Service's choice of the Secure Base model of care giving (developed by Schofield and Beek,

University of East Anglia) reflects the importance it gives to attachment theory in understanding the needs of looked after children and young people, and the need to have a more therapeutic approach to their care.
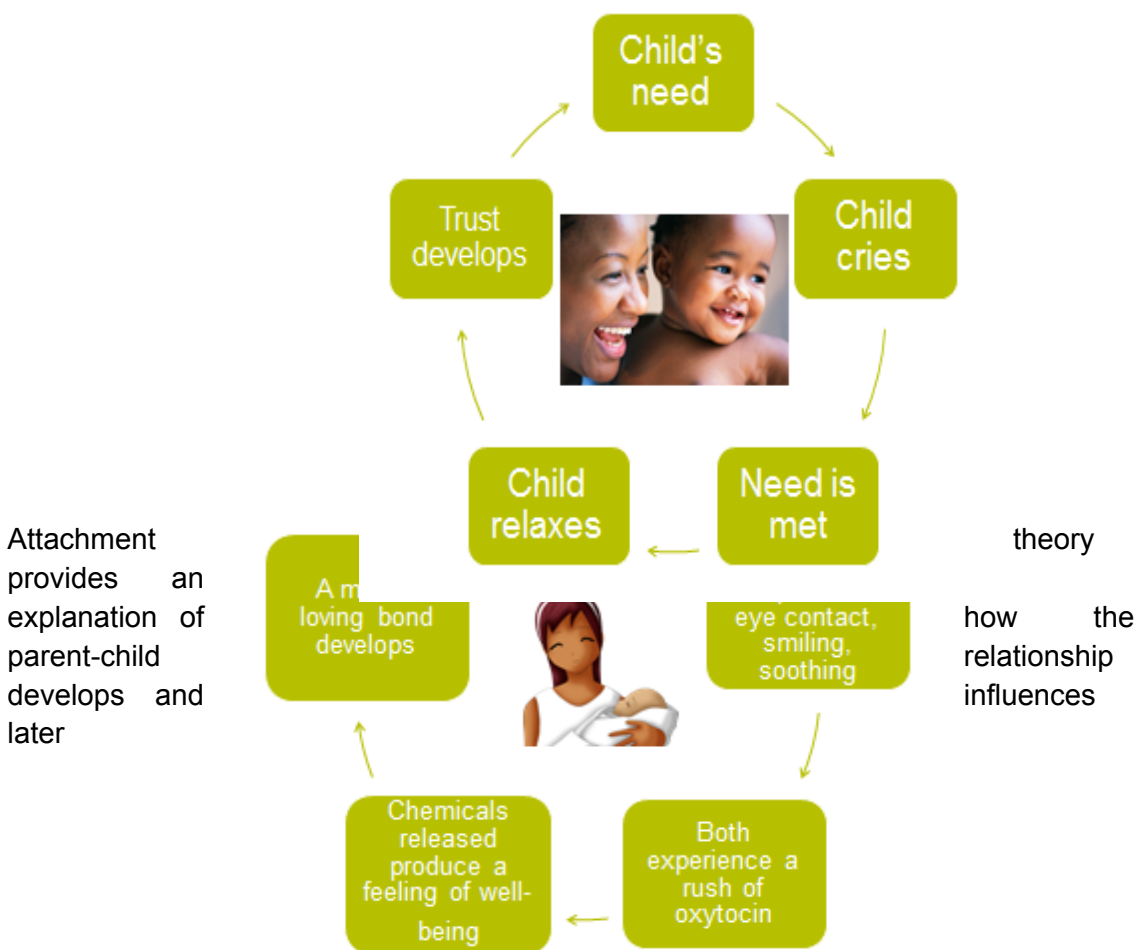
Attachment theory originated with the work of John Bowlby. In the 1930's Bowlby worked as a psychiatrist in a Child Guidance Clinic in London, where he treated many emotionally disturbed children. What these children seemed to have in common was a history of neglectful parenting and emotional deprivation.

He developed a theory that healthy childhood development depended heavily upon a child's ability to form a strong relationship with "at least one primary caregiver". Generally speaking, this is one of the parents. (Bowlby, John: Child Care and the Growth of Love, Pelican, 1953)

Attachment theory is based on the idea that it is the ability of a baby or child to form an emotional "attachment" to a reliable caregiver, which gives him or her a sense of stability and security. This is necessary to take risks, branch out, and grow and develop as a personality. Without such a relationship in place, Bowlby found that a great deal of developmental energy is expended in the search for stability and security. In general, those without such attachments are fearful, are less willing to seek out new experiences and to learn.

By contrast, a child with a strong attachment to a parent knows that they have "back-up" so to speak. This helps her or him to be more adventurous and eager to have new experiences, which are vital to learning and development.

Attachment is characterized by particular behaviours in children, such as smiling, crying, or seeking out the attachment figure when upset or threatened (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment behaviour in adults includes responding sensitively and appropriately to the child's needs. Such behaviours are thought to be universal across cultures.

Attachment provides an explanation of parent-child develops and later theory how the relationship influences

development. If the carer responds consistently and reliably over time to a baby's attachment behaviour, the baby will relax and develop a sense of trust, and both will experience the release of "feel good" chemicals (oxytocin) which helps to strengthen the bond between them. The child will also develop a positive internal working model – "I am loved, I matter, the world is a safe place." Mary Ainsworth (1963) contributed the concept of the attachment figure as a **secure base** from which the child can explore the world, knowing the caregiver will continue to be available.

Attachment theory also helps to explain why having an unreliable caregiver, or losing an attachment figure is so devastating for a child, and can lead to problems in adjustment later on. It is as if the child's very survival is under threat. John Bowlby, working in a hospital alongside James Robertson (1952) observed that children experienced intense distress when separated from their mothers. Even when such children were comforted by other caregivers, this did not reduce the child's anxiety. They identified three phases of separation response:

- protest (related to separation anxiety)
- despair (related to grief and mourning)
- denial or detachment (related to defence mechanisms, especially repression)

The Relevance of Attachment Theory and the Secure Base Model to learning

Child's need → Child cries → Need not met → Trauma → No trust

Attachment theory helps us to understand some of the difficulties that a looked after child may experience at school and in life in general. This is because insecure children are anxious children. Anxiety makes it more difficult for anyone to concentrate and learn. In addition, a lack of basic trust can make it hard to manage relationships successfully.

> **Secure attachment pattern** Children with a *secure* attachment pattern – the result of sensitive, secure parenting – may be able to trust the teachers; will be good at managing feelings and behaviour positively; and will feel confident in engaging with learning and making friends.

> **Ambivalent attachment pattern** A child with an *ambivalent* attachment pattern – the result of parenting that was insensitive, inconsistent and unreliable – will not trust in the availability of adults; will be preoccupied, needy

and angry; will lack concentration; will find it difficult to make friends; and will be anxious about taking risks or trying new things.

Avoidant attachment pattern A child with an *avoidant* attachment pattern – the result of parenting that was insensitive, emotionally distant or rejecting – will also lack trust in others; will have learned not to express feelings (especially negative feelings); and will seem to be self-reliant. Although such a child may appear independent and compliant, she or he will be repressing feelings of sadness and anger, which may lead to outbursts, especially with peers.

Disorganised attachment pattern A child with a *disorganised* attachment pattern – the result of insensitive, unreliable, frightened or frightening parenting – will have received little or no comfort from their parents; indeed, the parents may themselves have been a source of anxiety. Chaotic and at times unpredictable, such children will try to control other people (sometimes through aggression, but also through compulsive compliance) in order to feel safer. Paying attention and learning are challenging for children who feel overwhelming anxiety.

While categories such as these should be used with caution, it can be helpful to make a link between early experiences and a child's or young person's capacity to learn, to build relationships, and to enjoy life. Awareness of a difficult attachment history may help teaching staff, too, in thinking about the type of support a child or young person might need in school. Without this understanding, there is a risk that some of these behaviours might be mislabelled or misunderstood.

Reducing anxiety is critical to helping children and young people to learn, to relate to teachers and friends, and to enjoy school. It can help to realise that a child's or young person's different behaviours may be a sign of anxiety, or a means of surviving, rather than deliberate wrong-doing. This awareness can help in identifying actions that will reassure and calm the child or young person and give a positive message of caring, thereby helping her or him to relax, co-operate and be more open to learning.

A secure base in school

It may be helpful to consider adapting the Secure Base Model to the school context. When children and young people feel anxious and insecure, they may behave in ways that leave others feeling angry, anxious and stressed. The Secure Base Model helps you think about why this behaviour developed – how it may have helped the child or young person to cope in the past. As you begin to understand the *reasons* for the behaviour, it will be easier not to take it personally but to see it in the context of the child's past history and experiences. The model might help you work out how to respond in ways that will help the child or young person feel more confident and secure. As a sense of confidence and trust grows, the problematic behaviour will hopefully diminish.

Dimensions of the Secure Base
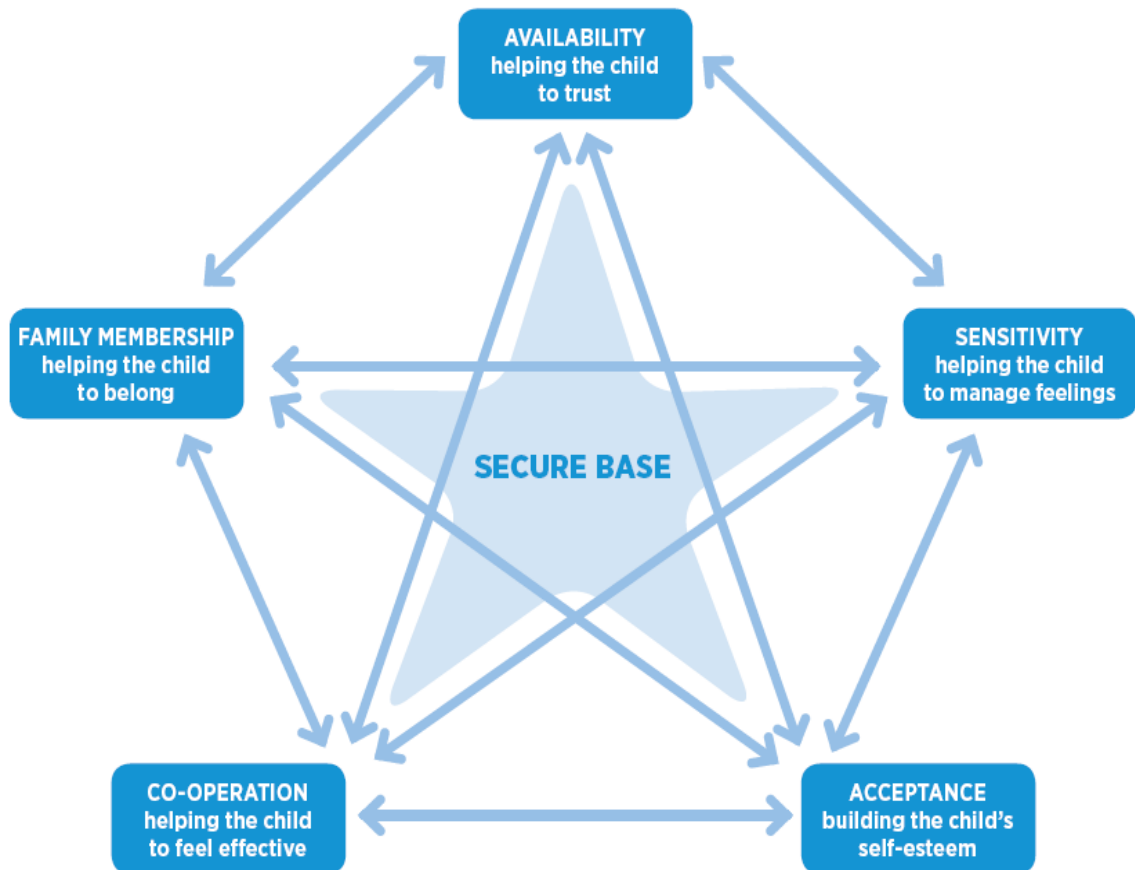
The Secure Base Model was developed, with funding from the Nuffield Foundation and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, by Professor Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek at the University of East Anglia (UEA). The authors have kindly given permission for the model to be reproduced and used in Fostering and Adoption teams for training and supporting foster carers and adopters. A practice guide is also available from CoramBAAF: Promoting Attachment and Resilience: A Guide for Foster Carers and Adopters on Using the Secure Base Model (Schofield & Beek, 2014)

There are a number of ways in which those working with, or caring for a child, could work together to provide a secure base. The aim is a) to reduce anxiety, b) to help the child manage his or her emotions more effectively, and c) to help the child become more confident and resilient. In a school context these could include:

Availability

Is there a particular adult to whom the child or young person can go for help when anxious or upset? Could he or she be linked with a buddy or mentor?

If that person also notices when the child is in difficulty and offers help, the message to him or her is that someone cares and that he or she matters. This can help to make school a less scary place for an anxious child.

Small messages of support and praise can also show you notice the child and can make an enormous difference to his or her self-esteem – "wow, you're looking good today!"

Sensitivity

What signs could the school be alert to that indicate that the child or young person is upset and needs support? Does he or she need help with getting organised and completing homework?

If the child struggles with reading and writing, perhaps use visual tools such as time lines to help him or her to feel more confident abut what is happening.

Recognise that some of the rewards often used in schools (stickers, prizes, awards for excellence) may be beyond the reach of some looked after children. They may need to be rewarded for effort and small improvements rather than results.

Helping children understand and manage their behaviour may be more effective than some sanctions used in schools, such as red cards or exclusions etc.

> Boy (10) suddenly lashed out at a girl, whom he thought was "giving him a look".
> When his key worker talked to him about why he had done it, it gradually emerged that his mother used to give him "the look" if he had misbehaved, which meant she would tell his father, who would then give him a severe beating.

Talking to the young person and knowing something about his or her story may help you understand what experiences or memories may be accidentally triggered by everyday school situations. You can also talk to the young person about what else they might do if they feel angry or upset, that does not include hurting others. Is there a place they can go to cool off instead of getting into a fight, for example?

Let the child or young person know that there is a group of people working together to support him or her. Involve him or her in meetings, "check in" regularly with the young person, and ensure that the 'Personal Education Plan' is kept regularly updated.

Talk to the child or young person about what he or she wants to share with others about his or her situation, and what should be kept private.

Acceptance

Many troubled children feel profoundly worthless, they have often experienced parenting that was negative and lacked warmth and sensitivity and tend to see the world and other people in extremes - all good or all bad. They may defend against

feelings of worthlessness by being boastful or refusing to compete. They find it difficult to try new things or take risks.

Teachers may be able to help by promoting the idea that 'Nobody's good at everything but everybody's good at something.'

Are there activities that a child or young person enjoys or is good at, which could be encouraged? Is there a particular role or position of responsibility that would increase his or her self-esteem?

Schofield and Beek suggest that it may be necessary to orchestrate achievements, but also to allow failures and setbacks to happen, and be managed. Classes can be encouraged to accept and celebrate all kinds of difference – ethnicity, personality, talents.

Co-operation

Looked after children often lack confidence in getting their needs met, have rarely experienced co-operative parenting – their parents were often either too controlling and intrusive, or too passive and ineffective, and consequently the child feels powerless or too powerful.

Could strategies be developed to help the child or young person manage her or his emotions and deal more effectively with conflict? For example, is there a quiet space where she or he can go to cool off? Is there an approach to responding that particularly suits her or him, such as a private chat, a walk, or a diversionary activity?

Allowing a child to make choices, even in small things, helping the child to achieve results - on their own and with help, and helping him or her experience the benefits of negotiation and compromise, all encourage the ability to co-operate and see things from others' point of view.

Family membership

Looked after children may feel very different from their peers, and lack a sense that they truly belong anywhere. This might be compounded if they struggle with aspects of school life – friendships, following rules, completing work etc.

As in families, it may be helpful to think about whether there is a role or special responsibility which could be given to the child or young person that would encourage acceptance by others, and strengthen his or her sense of belonging to the school.

> 'Boy (11) loves his fish pond. Now he's in charge of his own and he's totally reliable in that department. We encourage him all we can. We say 'Rob's the top pond man'. He gave his talk at school on goldfish and got top marks.' – foster carer
> (quote from Professor Gillian Schofield: Secure Base Conference, Southwark 2015.)

The Care Giving Cycle

The Secure Base model uses the care giving cycle to illustrate how the behaviour of those caring for a child can gradually change the way he or she thinks, feels and behaves.
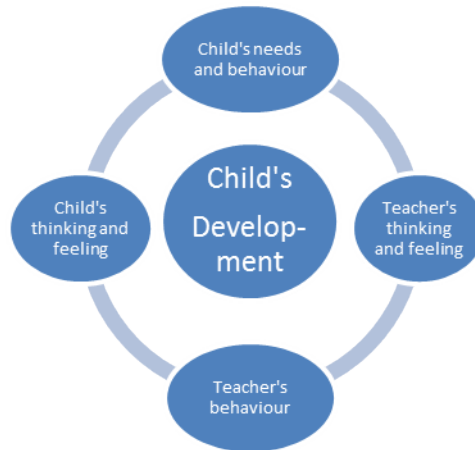
The teacher reflects- "Why this behaviour? – I want to help." By demonstrating a wish to help the child, and behaving in a supportive way, over time the child's thinking and feeling (internal model) will change. "Somebody cares about me/believes in me – perhaps I can do things differently."

It is this experience - of being seen, understood and supported, repeated over time, which contributes to an increased sense of confidence and security in a young person. Behaviours which in the past may have helped him or her deal with anxiety and difficult feelings, may reduce as they will no longer serve their original purpose.

Robbie Gilligan, in his book "Promoting Resilience" (British Association for Adoption and Fostering 2009) also highlights the value to young people of having at least one person in their lives who takes a particular interest in them, notices even small achievements and shows that they believe in them.

Working Together

All the above will be even more effective if school staff work together with foster carers and other professionals to give the same messages of care and concern. The knowledge that a group of adults are together "cheering a young person on" can have a powerful effect on a young person and give him or her, perhaps for the first time, an experience of warm, positive parenting.

Publications

- Cairns, Kate & Chris Stanway: *Learn the Child – Helping Your Looked After Child with Education* (BAAF, 2013).
- Perry, Andrea: *Attachment in the Classroom* (Worth Publishing, 2012).
- Perry, Andrea: *Teenagers and Attachment* (Worth Publishing, 2009).
- Gilligan, Robbie: Promoting Resilience (BAAF, 2009)
- Schofield and Beek: The Secure Base Handbook (BAAF 2011)

Website https://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/resources