

Making Connections

Attachment and Trauma Aware Schools Programme

Developed by Milton Keynes Virtual School - 2026



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Programme Aims

Making Connections aims to increase understanding and use of attachment aware and trauma responsive practice in Milton Keynes schools. By providing a quality framework tool and research-backed training and individual school-focussed support from Educational Psychologists and the Virtual School, Making Connections is designed to equip schools to support the educational progress of all children who have had adverse childhood experiences including looked-after and previously looked-after children and children with a social worker.

Making Connections supports schools and settings development of innovative and excellent pedagogy around vulnerable learners, improving the teaching and learning conditions for all vulnerable learners and your aspirations to provide the best possible learning, development, mental health and wellbeing for all members of your community. During 2024-25, Making Connections operated as a pilot project, supporting a network of 19 Milton Keynes City schools. A further 20 schools joined the programme in 2025-26. Read more about their experiences on page 6.

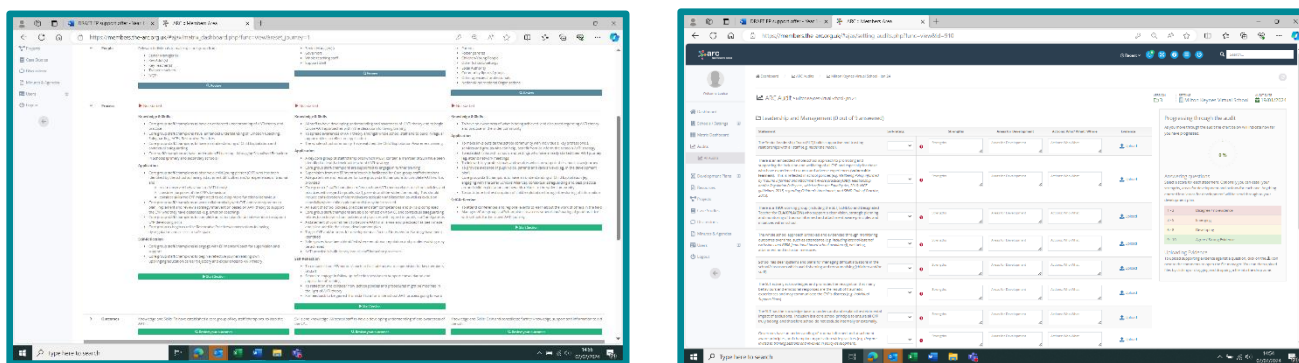
What you can expect

The programme provides schools with four pillars of support:



1. Membership of the ARC Community which includes:

- access to the ARC Audit and Matrix, online self-evaluation and organisational development tools, aligned to Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework, which supports schools and settings to reflect on core areas of knowledge, understanding, applied practice and systems, which support development of Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed practice
- a clear structured pathway through ARC's Bronze, Silver, Gold and Learning Hub programme with the opportunity to gain national recognition for your school's journey and be nominated for The Alex Timpson ARC awards for excellent practice (verifications and nominations by the Virtual School Head)
- Local, regional and national events and annual conference
- Support from a charity committed to change at a national level through a growing professional network.



Screen shots of the ARC Matrix and Audit tools. To find out more about the benefits of membership to the ARC community, take a look [ARC's digital members pack](#).

2. **A taught, research-backed core attachment and trauma awareness training session** for school leads, with optional additional training modules in emotion coaching; restorative approaches; understanding and managing harmful sexual behaviour; child exploitation and contextual safeguarding. These will be accompanied by a training resource suite (accessed through the ARC subscription) ensuring all participating schools are equipped with the skills to develop, implement, and cascade an attachment and trauma informed approach in their setting.
3. **1.5 days per year support from MKCC Educational Psychologists who will work closely with your school on the priorities identified in your SEF/ARC audit – this includes:**
 - 0.5 days initial planning meeting during the summer term 2026 - utilising the PATH tool to begin the project. The core group and at least one member of SLT will be present for this planning meeting, although wider members of the school community might be invited. The PATH will be facilitated by an Educational Psychologist, with graphic facilitation support from an Educational Psychologist Assistant (EPA).
 - Choose how you would like to utilise your remaining 1 day of Educational Psychologist support. This could include the half-day sessions outlined below:
 - Educational Psychologist facilitated peer supervision groups through the year. Groups of 4 - 6 schools. (Host schools to be identified for the supervision groups to take place)
 - Whole school trauma and attachment awareness training delivered face-to-face
 - Skills lab for collecting children and young people's voice
 - Skills lab for promoting staff wellbeing
 - Facilitation of reflective problem-solving spaces, working with the school's key themes arising .e.g. encouraging parent involvement, community reach, staff wellbeing (3 x 1hr sessions)
 - Facilitation of reflective problem-solving spaces focusing on anonymous children discussions (3 x 1hr sessions)
 - Supporting with reviewing and writing relational/behavioural policies
4. **Access to Milton Keynes City Making Connections Network** for group discussion and reflective practice to embed understanding, explore how to bring theory into practice, share successes and challenges, provide peer support to those leading on this operationally and link in with other professionals to effect change across the community.

What we expect from participating schools

During the first year of the programme, schools on the Making Connections Programme will be expected to:

- 1. Appoint a Making Connections Lead who must be a member of the senior leadership team**
The Making Connections Lead will drive the approach within your setting. They will need to attend the core training session in order to be able to play a key role in the roll-out of training to the whole staff team and co-ordinate your approach to the whole school audit.
- 2. Complete the ARC Audit or similar process**
The ARC audit evaluates your current attachment, trauma, mental health and well-being practice, guides your development plan and gives a baseline to measure the impact of your work. This audit needs to be undertaken with the senior leadership in your setting but can also be part of a collaborative process with the whole staff team.
- 3. Provide Trauma and Attachment Awareness training to the whole staff team**
Schools can utilise the online training webinars and training resources provided through Making Connections or utilise part of your settings Educational Psychologists time to develop, deliver or support setting specific training. The ARC membership also includes advice on commissioning training and links to members and trainers for further support. Getting the right training and support for staff is vital and it is important you are clear about what works for your context and builds on existing knowledge.
- 4. ARC Bronze Award**
On completion of the Bronze phase (steps 1 and 2 above) provide access to the Virtual School Head to verify that staff have been trained.
- 5. Participate in ongoing evaluation and share your journey with the wider Making Connections network and other MK Schools**, to facilitate the sharing of best practice across the city.
- 6. Indicate whether the setting wishes to continue to year 2 of the programme***
Year 2 will include continuation of the ARC membership and further access to EP facilitated support sessions. Schools wishing to continue will need to have identified an action research/development project and completed elements 1-5.

**Continuation of the programme will be dependent on the feedback from participating schools, evaluation by the Principal Educational Psychologist and Virtual School Head Teacher as well as the continuation of funding from the DfE.*

The Making Connections Programme is **not** designed to:

- ✗ **Create more work for school leaders** – the ARC Audit and Matrix tools integrate into your SEF and Development Plan and provide an easy way to evidence your journey.
- ✗ **Add to school staff workload** – being attachment aware and trauma informed is about building knowledge and adopting an appropriate approach in a supportive and safe environment with systems and policies that ensure people and relationships are prioritised.

- ✖ **Be prescriptive** – the programme is designed to recognise each school will be on its own unique journey and will require context specific approaches, insights and reflections.
- ✖ **Focus on addressing issues with individual children and young people** – although there will be opportunities to learn new approaches to child-centred problem solving and share with a network of like-minded professionals.

Schools participating in the Making Connections pilot programme say:

“I feel very lucky to be involved and it has directly impacted all stakeholders within our school. We have changed policies, strategies and approaches - which are working well because everyone has a better understanding of the 'why' we are doing it.”

“I would encourage any school leaders to join the Making Connections project. The training is easily accessible and in a format that means it can then be disseminated to all school staff. The links with the EPs has been very helpful and the network meetings have been very useful to have a variety of professional conversations.”

“It is very worthwhile and provides good training and support opportunities that can only benefit your school. You may well already have this approach at the heart of your provision, but probably not as consciously or as universally as is required to really make it effective, and the programme encourages and supports this comprehensive focus.”

Interested?

Milton Keynes schools and other education settings wishing to express an interest in becoming part of the Making Connections programme, which will run from April 2026 to March 2027, should complete the [Expression of Interest form](#) by **5pm on Monday 9 March 2026**.

If more than 20 schools request a place on the programme, the following criteria will be used to determine places:

1. Settings with the highest ratios of CLA/PLAC/CIN/CP to number on roll
2. Settings with the highest ratios of SEN in SEMH category
3. Settings with the largest number on roll and staff numbers.

Rationale

The profound effect of Adverse Childhood Experiences was first documented in a long-term research study published in 1998 – it showed that Adverse Childhood experiences are common; and a correlation with health risk behaviours and physical and mental health difficulties (Burke-Harris 2018). The impact of ACEs on children and young people's readiness to learn is also significant:

- Children in the key social care groups (CIN, CP and CLA) are roughly half as likely to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 2 compared to the overall pupil population.
- Children in the key social care groups perform less well than their peers across all Key Stage 4 measures (with their overall average Attainment 8 score being broadly less than half of that of the overall pupil population).
- 46.4% of the MK CIN were persistently absent for the 2023/24 academic year. And the scale of those affected is huge - nearly one in 10 pupils have been a child in need in the last 6 years.
- The suspension rate among the CIN cohort in MK for the 2023/24 academic year was 26.9% (over 10% higher than the national suspension rate for this cohort).

The 2015 NICE guidelines oblige schools to be appropriately trained to meet the requirements of children with attachment needs (NICE, 2015). Research has demonstrated that investing time and resources into improving relationships in schools leads to positive outcomes around inclusion, engagement, attainment and achievement in the short term and community safety and cohesion in the longer-term. (Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research BISSR).

In addition, the impact of school closures due to the Covid Pandemic have been far reaching. A systematic review prepared for Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies found evidence that the impact of school closures on mental health and wellbeing was substantial and consistent across the range of emotional, behavioural, and restlessness/inattention problems.

The paper highlighted the need for children and young people with physical disabilities, mental health issues, or who are neurodiverse to have more support to access school, and a trauma-informed approach is often valuable.

It should also be noted that positive teacher-student relationships have been shown to be central to the well-being not only of students but of their teachers too (Sue Roffey, University of Exeter).

For any queries relating to Making Connections please email louise.cooper@milton-keynes.gov.uk or call the Virtual School Duty Line on **01908 254779** – 9am to 3pm weekdays

Our website is always available
www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/virtualschool