

A graduated approach to supporting around Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) in Derby City schools

Introduction and Terminology

This document provides information for those working with children and young people, when there are concerns about difficulties attending school due to reasons relating to emotional wellbeing. Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) is the term used to describe these needs by Derby City Local Authority and is used throughout this document. The term takes the emphasis away from a 'within child' problem and helps to promote an approach that takes into account many factors that may be contributing to the child or young person feeling that they cannot attend regularly. The situation leading to EBSNA is often complex and many of the factors that create and maintain the non-attendance are family, community or school based and not merely 'within child' issues.

Recent research has helped to highlight many of the reasons that children and young people experience anxiety about attending school. Sensory sensitivities, friendship difficulties and unmet special educational needs have been cited as key factors (Not Fine in School, 2020). Pressure to achieve, with school work and exams, may also contribute to high levels of anxiety. Students with caring responsibilities have been highlighted as more likely to experience EBSNA. Many children and young people who experience EBSNA, also have a diagnosis of Autism.

Statistics referencing children eligible for Free School Meals show that EBSNA disproportionately affects those at a financial disadvantage. There is a relationship between those identified as having a special educational need and EBSNA.

Often, anxiety about attending school begins at primary school. It is important to provide support at the earliest stages, as longer periods of absence can contribute to greater anxiety about returning to school.

This document provides a graduated response to support, for those working with the children and young people. Additional resources are signposted.



Legal Duties and Guidance

- The DfE states, “In very exceptional circumstances, where it is in a pupil’s best interests, there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs”. However, the guidance is clear that the timetable should be in place for the shortest time necessary and there must be formal arrangements in place for regularly reviewing the arrangement with the pupil and their parent.
- Where absence escalates and pupils miss 10% or more of school (equivalent to one day or more a fortnight across a full school year), schools and local authorities are expected to work together to put additional targeted support into place to remove any barriers to attendance and re-engage these pupils. In doing so, schools should sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence and understand the importance of school as a place of safety and support for children who might be facing difficulties, rather than reaching for punitive approaches. (DfE, 2022)
- Schools and settings must keep daily registers and inform the LA of any pupils who is regularly absent for ten or more days without explanation.
- LAs have duties to trace and monitor those who are electively home educated and not on a school register.
- Settings have a duty to explore individual cases and make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers to attendance.

Phase 1 – Universal

All front-line staff/practitioners should have a basic awareness of EBSNA and how to support children and young people who are presenting with needs in this area. It is the SENCo’s responsibility to provide or arrange training for staff in the school/setting.

When initial concerns arise, school or setting staff should work closely with the child/young person and their parents/carers to identify factors that are contributing to difficulties attending.

Some basic changes to the school day or the environment may be required to support the wellbeing of particular pupils, to ensure that they attend school consistently.

Unmet additional educational needs can be a factor in school non-attendance. Therefore, a holistic approach to identifying need will be part of the EBSNA approach.

The SENCo or suitably experienced practitioner will:

- Ensure that all school staff have an awareness of EBSNA and support that can be put into place to support children who are feeling anxious about attending school.
- Offer time for parents/carers to raise any concerns with a member of school staff and for discussion regarding first steps of support.
- Begin to gather pupil voice about worries relating to school.
- Be aware that some children will face particular challenges, in the school environment, with regard to their emotional wellbeing.
- Be able to identify when pupils are experiencing challenges to their emotional wellbeing or learning and when this is leading to missing time at school.
- Work with school/setting staff to make changes that will support individual pupils.
- Co-ordinate support with relevant staff in school, including the lead for Mental Health.

Key Actions at Phase 1:

1. Training
2. Identification of additional need
3. Providing time for families to share concerns and agree support
4. Communication with staff team, including Mental Health Lead and key adults working with the child/young person

Resources and Useful Information

Derby Direction EBSNA Training [register-for-event - The Derby Direction](#)

Local Offer [Health and wellbeing - Derby City Council](#)

Derby and Derbyshire Emotional Health and Wellbeing Website [Mental health and wellbeing support - Derby City Council](#)

Family Hubs [Family Hub parents - Derby City Council](#)

Training for Senior Mental Health Leads [Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Phase 2 – Targeted SEND Support

If a comprehensive, universal approach has been implemented, but the pupil is still experiencing difficulties relating to emotional wellbeing, which are affecting their attendance, further assessment and support should be implemented.

Early intervention is an important factor in supporting children and young people to maintain good levels of attendance when the cause is related to emotional wellbeing. Concerns should be acted upon at an early stage, involving the pupil and their family.

The SENCo/suitably experienced practitioner will:

- Begin a relevant assess-plan-do-review process relevant to needs.
- Clarify that absence is due to reasons relating to emotional well-being.
- Take steps to assess and understand the extent of the absence and the anxiety.
- Gather information from the pupil and their family, regarding factors that are barriers to school attendance and emotional wellbeing. The ATTEND Toolkit can be used to collect and analyse this information. It also provides suggested strategies of support, relating to highlighted areas of need. Where appropriate, questions should be adapted to make them relevant and accessible.
- Arrange a meeting between SENCo (and/or member of SLT), a member of staff who knows the pupil well, parents/carers and the pupil (if appropriate). At the meeting, a plan of action should be agreed to address the barriers highlighted. The plan should be put into place and a date arranged for review. This should be no longer than 6 weeks after the initial meeting. Arrangements to check in on progress, during the intervening time, should be agreed at the meeting.
- Communicate with the Education Welfare Service, regarding the concerns and support put into place.
- Provide a 'key adult' for the pupil, who they can share concerns with. It should be someone who they are likely to be able to build a positive relationship with.
- Consider resources within school (e.g. ELSA or Mental Health Lead) and external sources of advice and guidance that may be relevant.
- Ensure that all staff working with the pupil are aware of their needs and have received appropriate guidance and training.
- Consider whether an Individual Health Care Plan would be appropriate.
- Where necessary, learning resources and tasks should be provided for the pupil to access at home. It should be made clear that this is a temporary arrangement.
- Where the pupil has missed significant amounts of time at school, a reintegration plan may be required.

Key Actions at Phase 2:

1. Begin assess- plan-do-review processes
2. Gather information using resources such as the Attend Toolkit
3. Arrange a meeting between family and school to agree a plan of action
4. Review progress and update plan after no longer than 6 weeks
5. Maintain communication with wider school staff
6. Maintain communication with the pupil, parents and relevant agencies

Resources and Useful Information:

- Attend Framework (Produced by Adele Tobias, Brighton and Hove) [ATTEND Framework | BEEM](#)
[ATTEND Meeting Information document.pdf](#)
- School wellbeing Cards (Jerricah Holder) [School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Card Set \(schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk\)](#)
- Anna Freud Centre Guidance [Addressing emotionally-based school avoidance | Anna Freud](#)
- West Sussex EBSA Guidance Document [EBSA Good Practice Guidance.pdf \(westsussex-local-offer.s3.amazonaws.com\)](#)
- Leeds Beckett University EBSA guidance document [Emotionally Based School Avoidance.pdf](#)
- Derby City Education Welfare Service [Education Welfare Service \(EWS\) - Derby City Council](#)
- CAMHS [Children's mental health services \(CAMHS\) - Derby and southern Derbyshire :: Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust \(derbyshirehealthcareft.nhs.uk\)](#)
- Compass Changing Lives [Compass Changing Lives - Compass \(compass-uk.org\)](#)

Phase 3 – Specialist Support

Specialist practitioners (for example Specialist Teachers/ Education Practitioners, Educational Psychologists, SENCOs with experience and CPD commensurate to a specialist teacher) can support schools when the outcomes of children/ young people with significant EBSNA need have not been adequately improved through the support of Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Specialist practitioners can be employed or commissioned by the school or provided by the Local Authority.

The SENCO/suitably experienced practitioner will:

- Arrange a meeting between SENCO (and/or member of SLT), a member of staff who knows the pupil well, parents/carers, specialist practitioners and the pupil (if appropriate). Share assessment, actions and impact to date. Plan next steps, incorporating views of all attending the meeting.
- Implement agreed support, within the educational setting.
- Maintain regular contact with relevant agencies.
- Monitor/ record evidence progress and impact by the school/setting.

Key Actions at Phase 3:

1. Make contact with specialist practitioners to request support
2. Continue assess- plan-do-review processes
3. Share information gathered using resources such as the Attend Toolkit
4. Arrange meeting between family and school to agree a plan of action
5. Work collaboratively with external agencies/practitioners to implement support
6. Maintain communication with wider school staff
7. Maintain communication with the pupil, parents and relevant agencies

References:

Department for Education (2022), *Working Together to Improve School Attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities*. [Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

Leeds Beckett University Carnegie School of Education, *Emotionally Based School Avoidance: How To Get Persistently Absent Children Back Into School*. [emotionally-based-school-avoidance.pdf \(leedsbeckett.ac.uk\)](https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/emotionally-based-school-avoidance.pdf)