Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

Exemplar school attendance policy for Warwickshire schools and settings.

CHILD FRIENDLY WARWICKSHIRE

Warwickshire County Council

This document provides exemplar wording for schools and settings to include in their attendance policy – or as a standalone 'Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance' (EBSNA) policy.

Throughout this document, you may choose the term that best fits your setting - such as pupil, student, child, or young person. We recommend selecting one term and using it consistently throughout your policy for clarity and professionalism.

Purpose of this policy

[School Name] recognises that regular school attendance can have a positive impact for many children and young people, academically and socially, and helps them work towards important life outcomes.

However, we understand that some pupils/students **[delete as appropriate]** may experience emotional, mental health or physical health needs that affect their wellbeing and readiness to learn or attend school. We are committed to working together with young people and their families, to value, respect and understand these lived experiences.

Main aims of this policy

- To explain the support that we provide at **[School Name]** for pupils/students **[delete as appropriate]** experiencing barriers to school attendance, often known as Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA).
- To ensure staff understand possible barriers to school attendance and encourage early identification and support.

Legal framework supporting this policy

This policy aligns with the following legislation and guidance, including but not limited to:

- Working together to improve school attendance (August 2024)
- Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance (February 2023) Support for pupils where a mental health issue is affecting attendance: Effective practice examples (February 2023)
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations (2006).
- **The Education Act** (1996).

Related school policies

This policy should be read alongside the following school policies:

- School to list and include these here.

Understanding Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance

At **[School Name]**, we understand that there are many different reasons why a child or young person might find it hard to attend school. These may include:

- Learning or curriculum challenges
- Friendship or social difficulties
- Neurodivergent support needs
- Sensory sensitivities
- Physical or mental health needs
- Stress related to exams
- And other individual factors

These challenges are sometimes described using the term **Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)**. This means that a child's difficulty with attending school is linked to their emotional wellbeing - particularly when the stress of going to school feels greater than their ability to cope.

You can imagine this like a set of weighing scales:



If the "stress" side of the scales is heavier than the "coping" side, school attendance or accessing education becomes harder.

EBSNA is something a child **experiences**, not something they **choose** or **have**. It's a sign that the systems around them - like school, home, or support - may need to change or adapt.

EBSNA is not about a child refusing school on purpose. It's an emotional response to something that feels too difficult. As Rae (2020) explains, it's "a pattern of absence where reluctance or refusal to attend school is rooted in anxiety or fear. It's not a diagnosis, but a special educational need."

At **[School Name]**, we also understand that EBSNA is not limited to anxiety. It can involve feelings such as:

- Worry
- Stress
- Overwhelm
- Low mood
- Feeling hopeless or unable to cope

This includes young people who may have previously been seen as “truanting” or at risk of exclusion. We now understand these behaviours often reflect unmet emotional needs.

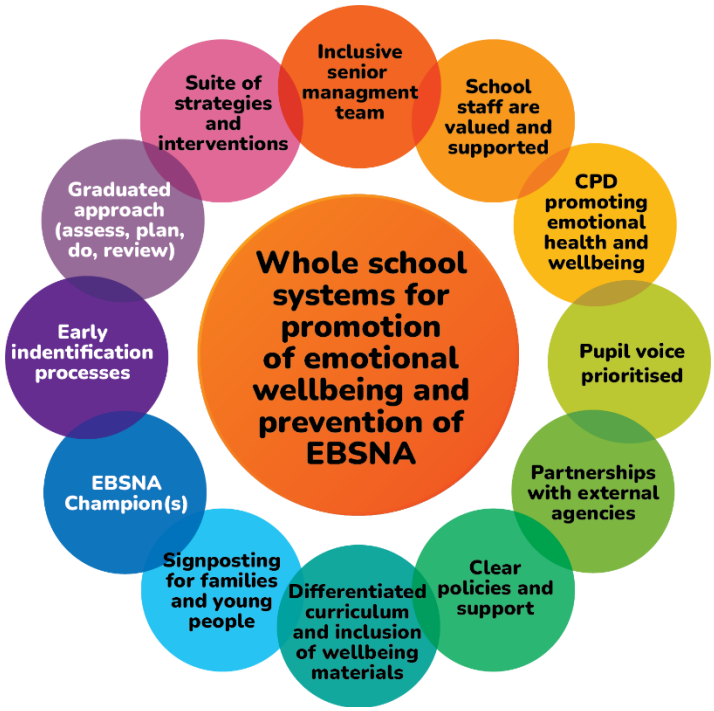
Signs to look out for

Some signs of EBSNA can be hard to spot, but things to look out for include:

- Arriving late or just in time for school
- Coming into school upset or distressed
- Speaking negatively about school
- Talking badly about themselves or showing low confidence
- Missing school for periods of time
- Taking part less in lessons or seeming less ready to learn
- Pulling away from friends or social situations
- Struggling to cope with everyday school demands
- Showing physical signs of stress or anxiety (like headaches, stomach aches, or feeling sick)
- Experiencing signs of physical overwhelm or fatigue, sometimes referred to as burnout.

Our whole-school approach

At **[School Name]**, we aim to create a school environment that promotes positive wellbeing for all, reducing the likelihood of EBSNA concerns developing. This includes:



We lead inclusively

We are committed to prioritising and supporting every child and young person (CYP). Our senior leadership team actively promotes inclusive practice and works to create a strong sense of belonging for all.

We support and value our staff

We have clear protocols in place to support the emotional wellbeing of our staff. Our systems include opportunities for supervision and peer support, recognising that a supported staff team is essential to a thriving school community and supporting CYP's wellbeing.

We invest in professional development

We offer continuous professional development (CPD) for all staff, regularly sharing messages that promote emotional and physical wellbeing. We emphasise that wellbeing is a collective responsibility. Our CPD includes regular updates and good practice around Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA), mental health, and creating safe, supportive environments.

We listen to CYP voice

We make time and space to hear the voices of our CYP. We use appropriate tools to capture their views and ensure that their voice leads our planning wherever possible.

We work in partnership with external agencies

We engage external agencies at the targeted stage of the graduated approach to review and enhance our support. Where specialist input is needed, we collaborate to develop bespoke plans and interventions tailored to individual CYP.

We develop CYP-friendly policies

We have proactive policies focused on safeguarding, bullying, and attendance. We also create CYP-friendly versions of these policies to ensure that children understand and feel reassured by the systems we have in place.

We design an inclusive curriculum

We differentiate our curriculum using adaptive teaching strategies to remove barriers to attendance. We also include direct teaching on emotional wellbeing and self-care to help CYP manage their mental health and thrive in school.

We identify needs early

We use appropriate EBSNA assessment tools to have compassionate, proactive conversations with CYP and their families. These help us gently explore circumstances and offer tailored support at the earliest opportunity.

We plan bespoke strategies and interventions

We design support strategies that are tailored to each CYP's circumstances, guided by our use of EBSNA assessment tools. CYP voice is central to all our planning.

We follow a graduated approach

We follow Warwickshire's graduated approach of assess, plan, do, review. We prioritise early intervention and preventative support and move to targeted or specialist support when needed.

We signpost support for families and CYP

We actively signpost CYP and their families to a wide range of support services to support the wellbeing of the broader family as a whole.

Roles and responsibilities

Governing body

- Ensure the school community recognises EBSNA as a significant wellbeing issue.
- Ensure appropriate support measures are in place for pupils/students experiencing barriers to attendance.
- Work with the headteacher to ensure a graduated approach to support.
- Work with the headteacher to seek appropriate professional support, as required.

Headteacher

- Establish clear processes for staff to raise concerns about a young person's wellbeing.
- Promote compassionate, understanding attitudes towards EBSNA and attendance difficulties among all staff.
- Ensure all staff treat parents' views with curiosity, respect and understanding.
- Work with the governing body to ensure a graduated approach to support.
- Work with the governing body to seek appropriate professional support, as required.
- Establish and communicate procedures for attendance monitoring.

SENCo and **School Mental Health Lead**

- Oversee the pastoral team and staff who may be the main point of contact for pupils/students **[delete as appropriate]** experiencing barriers to attendance.
- Ensure all staff are trained to recognise the early warning signs of EBSNA.
- Keep transition planning focused on reasonable adjustments for new pupils/students **[delete as appropriate]**.
- Implement interventions and programmes that teach emotional coping skills.
- Maintain a clear EBSNA baseline assessment process at SEN Support level.
- Liaise with external agencies for support as needed.

SENDco, senior leadership team and **identified staff**

- Act as a consistent point of contact for pupils/students **[delete as appropriate]** and families, maintaining regular communication.
- Capture and record young people's views on barriers to attendance and the support they need.
- Oversee the EBSNA baseline assessment process and explore and record young people's possible barriers to attendance.
- Focus on reasonable adjustments and ensure additional support is kept under close review.
- Provide direct support to pupils/students during the school day.

All staff

- Listen to and value the views of children, young people and families.
- Look beyond attendance figures - focus on understanding barriers to attendance and working with pupils/students and families to agree reasonable adjustments.

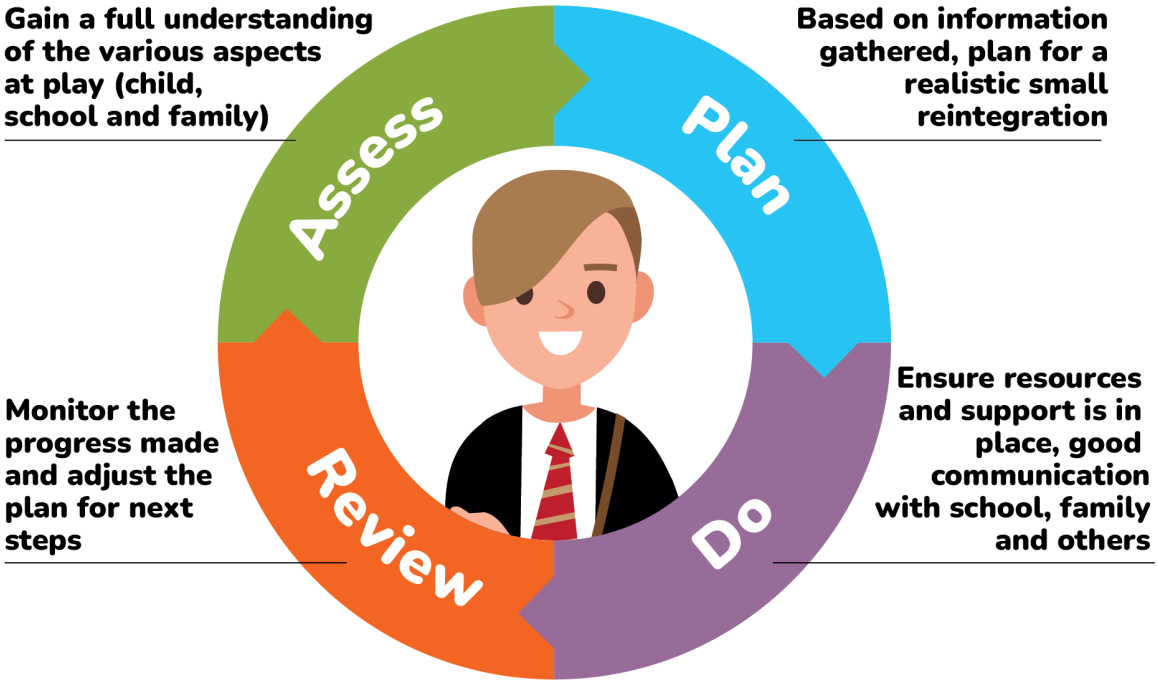
Parents, carers and families

- Work together with the school to achieve the best educational outcomes for their child.

Our graduated approach: assess, plan, do, review

Where there are early concerns about barriers to school attendance or factors affecting a young person's wellbeing, early intervention is essential. Acting quickly helps promote positive outcomes for the young person and supports the overall wellbeing of their family.

Our staff will explore concerns with young people and families in a sensitive way, ensuring their views are heard and respected. We will implement any support via a process of assess, plan, do, review.



Assess

We understand that families work hard to support their CYP's school attendance. This often involves making difficult decisions every day. and parents or carers may feel stressed, confused, frustrated, or worried about what their child is going through.

We know these feelings can be hard to share. That's why our staff use tools from Warwickshire's EBSNA (Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance) assessment framework to explore concerns with families, sensitively and without judgement. Our goal is to understand what might be making attendance difficult and work together to find solutions.

We also use tools to understand how the child or young person feels. Staff will listen carefully, take concerns seriously, and respond with empathy and understanding.

Plan

We work closely with CYP and families to agree support strategies that feel positive, practical and achievable for everyone, including the school. We are honest about what is possible from the school's perspective. It is important that children and young people feel a shared sense of belief in the plan of support.

We will identify a key person to communicate with the family, to ensure the plan remains on-track, and to capture any changes that may be needed.

Do

We will implement the agreed support plan and confirm review arrangements from the outset. All interventions and strategies will be recorded in the child's EBSNA additional support plan. Outcomes should be individual to the child, and therefore each plan will be different. Targets agreed with young people and families should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound) and feel positive and possible for everyone.

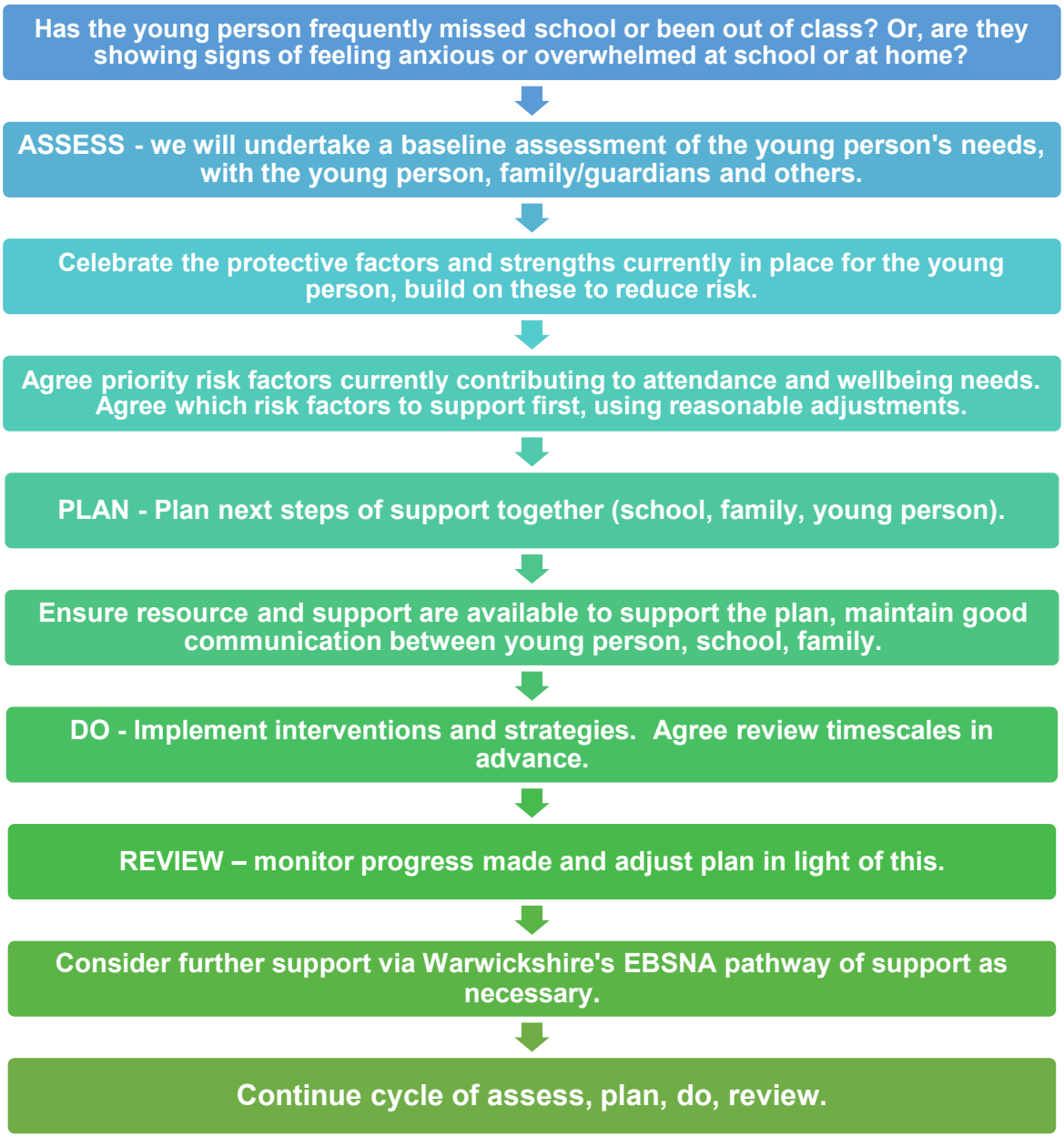
We recognise that the first steps of any support plan can be the hardest, as the child builds confidence and trust. Staff will reassure pupils/students **[delete as appropriate]** and acknowledge their efforts.

Review

The EBSNA additional support plan will be reviewed with the child/young person, family and key school staff within the agreed timescales. Any changes to strategies or provision will be recorded in the child's plan.

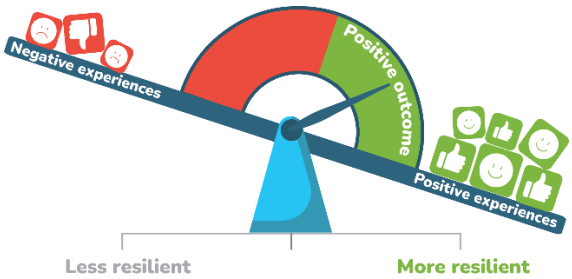
If progress remains limited despite targeted intervention, we may recommend moving to an additional layer of support in line with Warwickshire's Graduated Approach for EBSNA. For more information, please speak to **(named member of school staff)**.

In practice, this means that we will work with children, young people and families in the following way:



Summary and overview

Working in this way helps us build a shared understanding of each young person's strengths and areas for support. We consider their 'weighing scales' - balancing **risk factors** (such as stress and challenges) against **protective factors** (such as supportive strategies). Where needed, we add further protective factors and support ideas to address any imbalance.



If support strategies are introduced, this is done in line with **Warwickshire's EBSNA Matrix of Support,** which includes:

- **Universal strategies -** available for all pupils/students **[delete as appropriate]**
- **Targeted strategies -** short-term support for specific young people to aid wellbeing
- **Specialist strategies** - longer-term, individualised support

Child-centred approach

Current government guidance reinforces this child-centred approach:

- Support should apply to any pupil experiencing social, emotional or mental health issues affecting their attendance - not only those with a diagnosed mental health condition, disability, or special educational need.
- *'In developing a plan to support attendance through reasonable adjustments, school staff will need to take into account the individual circumstances of the child.'* (Support for pupils where a mental health issue is affecting attendance: Effective practice examples, pg. 5) There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each young person's needs should be explored through careful assessment.
- Focusing on reasonable adjustments to support attendance should *'ensure that the school is a calm, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn'* (Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance pg. 4).
- Any anxiety about attending should be mitigated as much as possible by creating a plan that includes reasonable adjustments. These should be agreed and regularly reviewed with the young person and parents/carers, in line with Section 20 of the Equality Act 2010.

Monitoring and review of this policy

The headteacher, together with the senior leadership team and SENDCo, will review this policy annually and make any necessary changes. The next scheduled review date is: xxxx.

All staff must familiarise themselves with this policy as part of their induction programme.