Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

Toolkit for Warwickshire schools and settings

CHILD FRIENDLY WARWICKSHIRE

Warwickshire County Council

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Toolkit guidance

This toolkit has been produced by Warwickshire County Council and partners to provide guidance for schools, education settings and all professionals supporting children and young people who are, or at risk of, experiencing barriers to school attendance. This is referred to as Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA).

The toolkit has been developed in response to the outcomes of the Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Pilot study, which took place with a number of Warwickshire schools and settings from April 2024 to April 2025.

Please Note: There are some terms which we will shorten throughout this document: 'EBSNA': Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance and 'CYP': Children and Young People.

Using the toolkit

This toolkit aims to provide all Warwickshire schools and settings with information and guidance on a graduated approach to supporting EBSNA needs.

The ideas in this toolkit can be used with **ALL** children and young people (CYP), including those experiencing initial barriers to school attendance, through to those young people with more deeply entrenched attendance difficulties.

The toolkit can be read from start to finish or you can jump straight to specific sections as you need them. Links have been provided where appropriate throughout and you will find the whole suite of EBSNA resources and relevant documents on Warwickshire's SEND Local Offer webpage: www.warwickshire.gov.uk/ebsna. These documents delve a little deeper into specific topics.

Throughout the Toolkit and suite of resources you will find evidence-based strategies and ideas to support CYP experiencing barriers to their attendance. We acknowledge that every scenario is unique and there are many challenges currently facing schools. Therefore, flexibility is required when considering which strategies and methods of support to adopt.

Guiding values

Warwickshire County Council's EBSNA Toolkit is based on several guiding values which have emerged from the research and collaborative working between services. It is expected that these are held centrally by anyone supporting a young person experiencing school attendance difficulties.

The guiding values include:

Multi-agency engagement to develop information, content and key messages collaboratively.

Experience-led practice to ensure that the lived experiences and views of young people and their families are at the heart of all guidance. Resources are created by experts with experience in this field wherever possible.

Early intervention and a focus on preventative support, wherever possible, to prioritise positive outcomes for young people's wellbeing and their holistic development.

Person-centred planning ensuring that support for young people experiencing barriers to attendance will be tailored to their individual circumstances, experiences, hopes and wishes.

Capacity and capability building to support the ongoing development of the knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence of the stakeholders working with CYP affected by barriers to attendance.

Understanding and compassion to ensure that a non-judgemental, no-blame, empathic approach is maintained by those working with, and supporting, vulnerable young people and their families.

Introduction

What is EBSNA?

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) is a term used when referring to children and young people (CYP) who experience difficulties attending school regularly. EBSNA can affect any young person, of any age or background, in any educational setting. Typically, difficulties attending school are associated with underlying emotional factors such as stress, anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed. Without support, this can lead to prolonged absences from school and disengagement in education. As a result, this can negatively impact on a young person's outcomes; academically, socially and for their overall sense of wellbeing.

Definitions and the language of school non-attendance

In Warwickshire, we use the following terms and language to describe the needs of this population of CYP: **Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)**; **barriers to school attendance** and **non-attendance difficulties**. This is based on the most used and agreed wording within international guidance and research at this time.

Unlike previous terms *(truancy, school phobia, school avoidance, and school refusal)*, it is felt that the above terms highlight the emotional distress an individual faces when engaging with school and removes the implication that CYP are actively choosing to be absent from school. Often, CYP want to attend their education setting, but due to experiencing such overwhelming emotional distress this makes full time attendance not possible.

Impact of school non-attendance

Without the right understanding and support, EBSNA can have a wide-ranging negative impact for the young person and their family. Difficulties might include, but are not limited to:

- Poorer mental health, low mood and a reduction in overall levels of wellbeing
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Social difficulties and difficulties maintaining friendships
- Lower academic performance and poorer examination outcomes, impacting on future opportunities such as college places, apprenticeships, and employment

- Limited access to extra-curricular activities, resources and opportunities
- Family dynamics affected, for example relationship with parents/carers/siblings)
- Family financial impact, for example changes to parent/carer employment commitments)

(DfE, 2023)

It is therefore essential that school attendance and wellbeing are addressed together to effectively support vulnerable CYP and improve their outcomes.

EBSNA toolkit – chapter outlines

To help you navigate the toolkit this has been divided into chapters. A brief summary of each chapter is below:

Chapter 1 – Understanding EBSNA

This chapter introduces the key ideas behind EBSNA. It explores how school attendance is linked to wellbeing, especially the importance of feeling safe. You'll learn about risk and protective factors, the role of resilience, and how anxiety can affect attendance. The chapter also looks at how EBSNA may impact neurodivergent children and young people.

Chapter 2 – Universal provision and early intervention

This chapter explains the support that should be available in Warwickshire schools. It highlights the importance of universal and whole-school approaches to EBSNA and how these link to wider support for children with SEND. It also covers how schools can spot early signs of attendance difficulties and take action, with helpful resources provided to support this stage.

Chapter 3 – The graduated approach

This chapter introduces the Graduated Approach (assess, plan, do, review) and how it applies to EBSNA. It outlines clear steps for schools to follow, supported by a visual flowchart. You'll also find practical tools and resources to help you use this approach effectively.

Chapter 4 – Targeted and specialist support for longer term EBSNA

This chapter focuses on support for CYP whose attendance difficulties continue despite earlier interventions. It includes additional tools and resources, links back to the Graduated Approach, and provides case studies to show how targeted support can lead to positive outcomes.

Chapter 5 – Further considerations and signposting

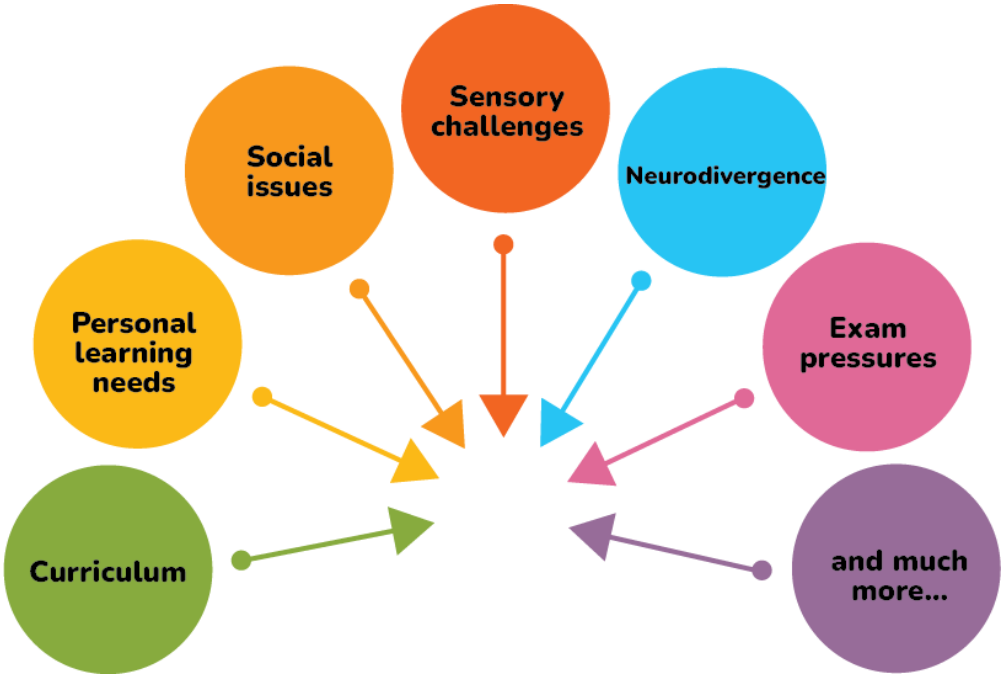
The final chapter addresses common questions and concerns, such as how EBSNA fits with government guidance and legal frameworks, when to consider an Education, Health and Care needs assessment, and how to support transitions. It also signposts further training, support, and CPD opportunities.

Chapter 1: Understanding EBSNA

Before beginning any intervention or support, it is essential to understand what is meant by EBSNA. Therefore, in this section we will briefly explore the research and theory behind school non-attendance.

EBSNA is a broad term used to describe the experiences of CYP, which if unsupported can lead to emotional wellbeing difficulties and prolonged periods of absence from school.

The 'emotionally based' aspect of EBSNA recognises that CYP may struggle to access some aspect of school due to feeling anxious, fearful, stressed or overwhelmed. This could relate to feelings of worry, low mood, disillusionment or generally feeling unable to cope. This includes CYP who may previously have been understood as *'truanting'* or at risk of school exclusion. The challenges contributing to the anxiety or overwhelm could relate to the curriculum, personal learning needs, social or friendship issues, neurodivergence, sensory challenges, exam pressures and much more.

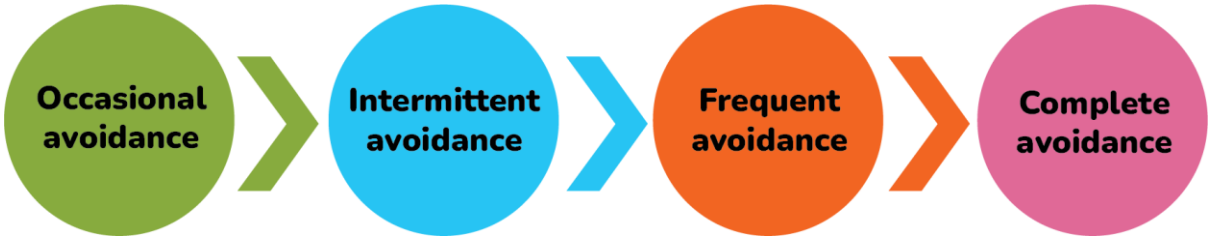


EBSNA is something CYP ***experience***, rather than something they ***have***. It happens because the systems around them – like school environments or support systems - may need to adjust or change to help reduce feelings of anxiety.

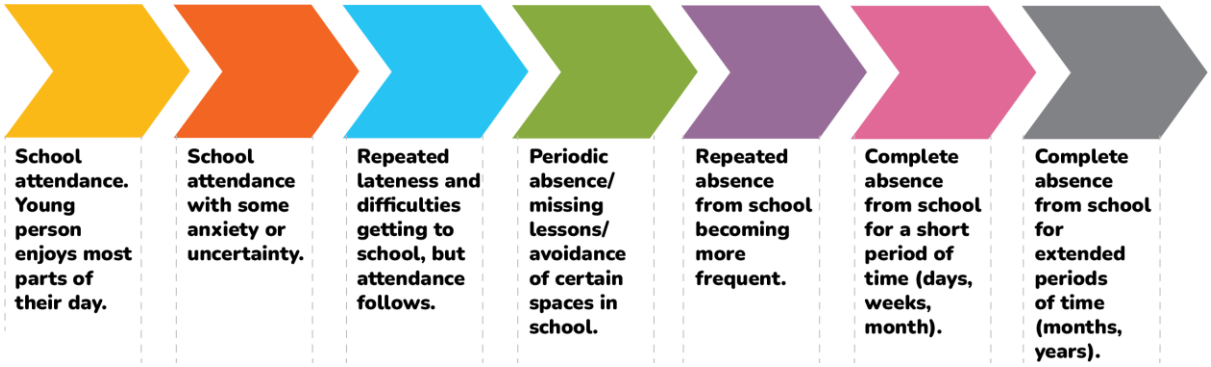
It is important to note that EBSNA is **not a diagnosis**, rather, it is a description of the difficulties experienced by a CYP. As a result, there is no set of diagnostic criteria for identifying and recognising needs. EBSNA can look very different for different people and can be associated with a range of factors, which we will explore below.

EBSNA continuum

It can be helpful to think of school attendance difficulties on a continuum, for example:



A further breakdown of this model can help to show the subtleties between stages of non-attendance and the behaviours or actions that might be demonstrated by a CYP.



For some CYP, they can be experiencing high levels of stress or overwhelm but are still able to maintain some level of school attendance. In contrast, there will be some CYP experiencing similar levels of anxiety and stress that are unable to consistently attend school and who experience more significant non-attendance difficulties.

Consider: For those CYP you are supporting at present, where do they feature on the above continuum?

Context and prevalence

EBSNA is estimated to affect around 1 to 5 out of every 100 CYP, leading to missed time at school. However, this number is likely to be much higher, as some CYP may experience significant emotional distress at school but still manage to attend, a factor often missed by absence rates alone. In the UK, absences due to mental health difficulties are not recorded separately from general absences, which prevents a full estimation of the problem's scale. Different ways of thinking about attendance issues also lead to varying estimates of how common they are.

DfE data shows that since September 2024/25, approximately more than one in four pupils (18.7%) are considered persistently absent from school (attendance of 90% or less). This represents approximately 1.49 million children and is reflective of a 93% increase since 2018/19 (*State of the Nation report: Centre for Young Lives 2025).* Additionally, for those considered to be severely absent from school (>50% non-attendance), an increase of 184% has been seen in the same period, reflecting over 170,000 children.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted EBSA?

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly exacerbated existing risks for EBSNA, creating a "perfect storm" that led to a substantial increase in school absence rates. Lockdowns disrupted social interactions, severed home-school relationships, and contributed to a rapid deterioration of mental health for both children and parents. For many, school did not feel like a place of safety upon reopening, with heightened anxiety about virus transmission, new routines, and intense pressure for academic catch-up. While some CYP found respite and improved mental health during home learning, the return to "school as normal" was particularly challenging for others. The pandemic's long-term impacts on EBSNA are still unfolding, highlighting how broader societal forces can ripple across all layers of a child's environment, making school attendance more challenging.

“Can’t, not won’t”

We must therefore rethink how we talk about and consider the needs of CYP who struggle to attend school. The term Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) helps shift the narrative from one of blame to one that is much more compassionate and reflects greater understanding and empathy. Instead of viewing children as defiant, lazy or disinterested, as previous terms such as ‘truancy, refusal, and avoidance’ have alluded to, we should instead be recognising that for many, school isn’t just hard – it is emotionally overwhelming, unbearable and distressing.

A key article from the British Psychological Society (Can't, not won't: Rethinking school avoidance | BPS) highlights how outdated labels like "school refusal" are and how, if used, they can add shame to an already painful experience for children, young people and their families.

The Barriers to Education website reframes some of those unhelpful beliefs and attitudes towards school attendance difficulties.

EBSNA isn't a diagnosis, but a way to describe the emotional distress that makes school feel impossible. Therefore, it is not that CYP won't go to school, it is that they genuinely can't. When we use language that reflects this, we open the door to more compassionate, and trauma-informed support.

Systemic and environmental stressors

The article 'Can't, not won't: Rethinking school avoidance | BPS' also explores the deeper layers behind EBSNA and those risk factors described later in this toolkit. Utilising Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory can be a complimentary framework to better understand the way in which multiple systems interact and shape experiences for a young person. We can visualise this as a series of 'nested rings' (see below) that represent the layers of a child's world and how they interact.

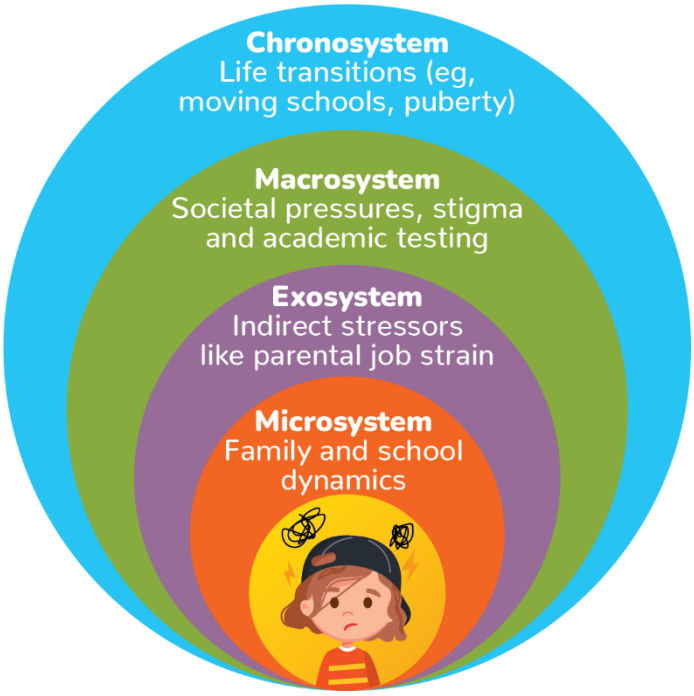
The **Microsystem** represents the immediate systems around the CYP, for example, family and school. Within the **Mesosystem** are the connections between different microsystems, therefore if there is poor communication between the family and the school, this can negatively impact on the CYP as their emotional struggles may be overlooked or missed.

Beyond this in the **Exosystem** are settings that indirectly influence the CYP, such as a parents' employment, and therefore if there are stresses within this job, this may impact on home life and indirectly affect the CYP.

The **Macrosystem** subsequently represents broader cultural and societal influences, whereby exam pressures or stigma about mental health may contribute to the experiences of a CYP.

Finally, the **Chronosystem** accounts for changes that occur over time. Big life changes, such as moving home or school, or experiencing parental separation or family structural changes can further impact and trigger greater school distress and barriers to attendance.

Understanding EBSNA through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as a Framework:



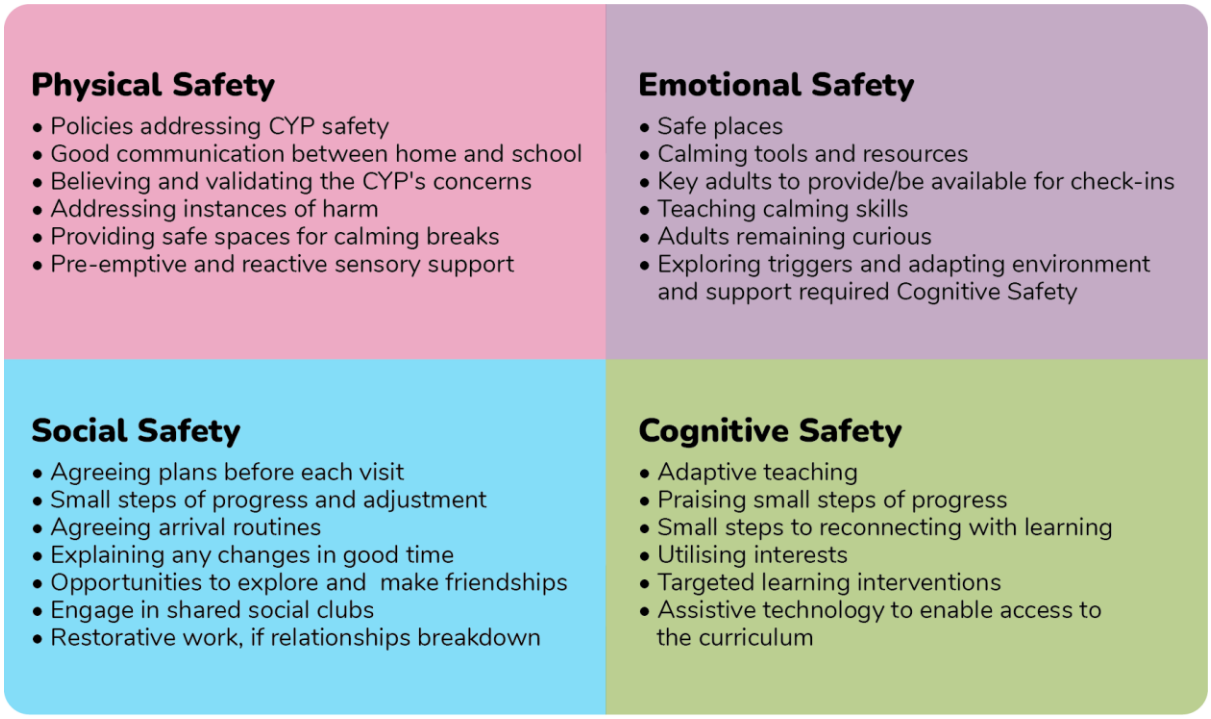
This idea helps us to then think about EBSNA as something that CYP experience because of the interacting systems in which they live. Again, this reiterates that EBSNA that CYP ***has***, nor is it a behavioural problem to ***fix***. We must work with CYP and their immediate support networks to co-create solutions and support ideas that feel safe and achievable, to facilitate their re-engagement with education.

EBSNA and wellbeing

When we talk about supporting **attendance,** what we need to focus on first and foremost is supporting a CYP's **wellbeing**. Feeling safe, supported, understood and happy is the foundation for all other forms of progress; this includes CYP feeling ready for learning, in whatever form this may take.

Safety

This is about ensuring that school feels like a safe and secure place for every CYP. There are four types of safety to think about , which are explained in more detail in the Matrix of Support). The matrix also includes examples of reasonable adjustments that can help meet each type of safety need:



Emotional safety - This involves making sure CYP have access to safe spaces and calming activities at school. It also involves support to help them understand what might trigger their anxiety, and working with them to plan ways to manage those situations.

Social safety - This involves reassuring CYP that key people in school are aware of their needs and are available to support their attendance plan. It also involves helping CYP to contribute and participate in an agreed plan of support reconnecting with staff and peers and building or rebuilding a sense of belonging.

Physical safety – This involves everyday actions that underpin the whole school environment and ethos. For example, whole school policies, procedures and systems should be designed to ensure all CYP feel safe within the education setting. This also includes planning for sensory processing needs and/or supporting CYP to avoid a sense of feeling overwhelmed (physically less safe) in school.

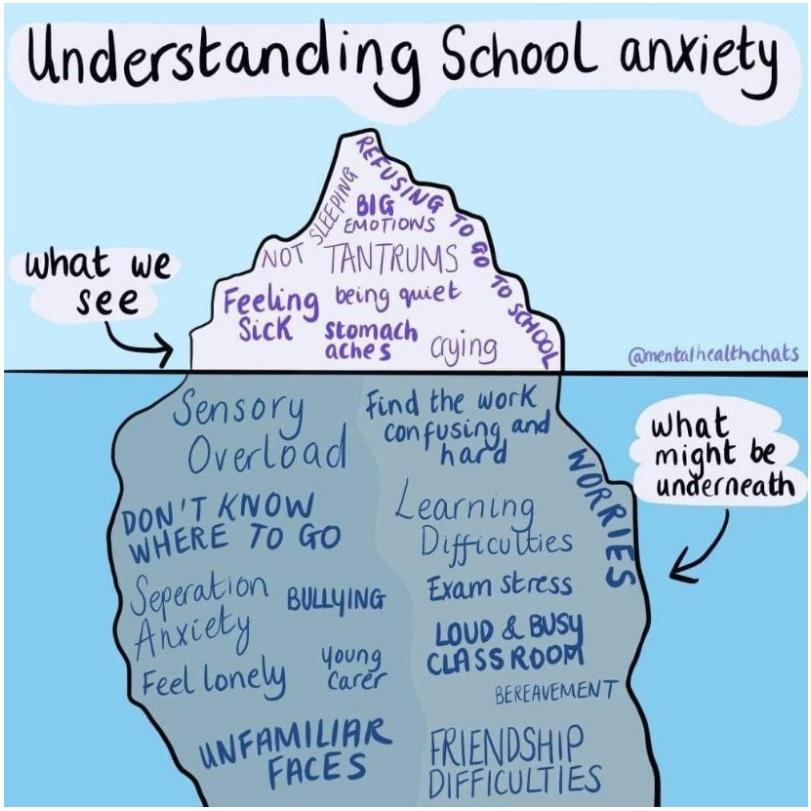
Cognitive safety – When the above forms of safety are in place, CYP will hopefully feel a greater readiness for learning. Support here focuses on reconnecting with learning in a way that feels positive and possible.

Iceberg Model

The Iceberg Model represents the idea that despite some CYP appearing to cope in school, they may be experiencing a complex interplay of factors contributing to underlying, unresolved, stresses and anxieties.

This may not be immediately obvious through emotions, behaviour or attendance, and there may be a difference in presentation between home and school. For example, they may mask their true feelings in order to continue physically attending school, but the stress and anxiety may contribute to disengagement during lessons.

Appearing to be fine can be a common misconception of education staff and it may be all too easy to dismiss potential difficulties. However, remaining curious, is an essential part of early intervention and support in cases of EBSNA regardless of the stage of non-attendance.



We can think of EBSNA as being the **tip of the iceberg** and linked to certain behaviours that we may notice first. Beneath the surface are likely to be unexplored needs that warrant further attention and support.

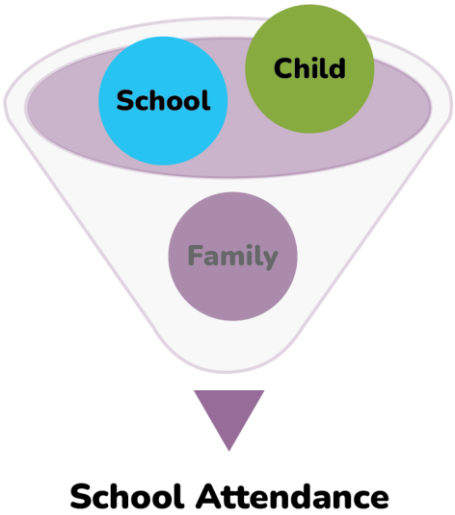
It is essential to understand what a CYP's observed difficulties may be telling us and therefore what the CYP is trying to communicate. Useful questions to consider include:



What may contribute to the development of EBSNA?

Simply, there is no one single cause for EBSNA and there are likely to be various contributing factors for why a CYP may experience barriers to their school attendance.

Factors contributing to non-attendance may be grouped into one of three overarching categories, those related to the individual **young person**, the **family** or the **school environment** (Thambirajah et.al, 2008). What is clear, is that EBSNA should not be viewed solely as a 'within child' issue.



Risk Factors

Possible risk factors that staff may need to consider in every EBSNA case may include:

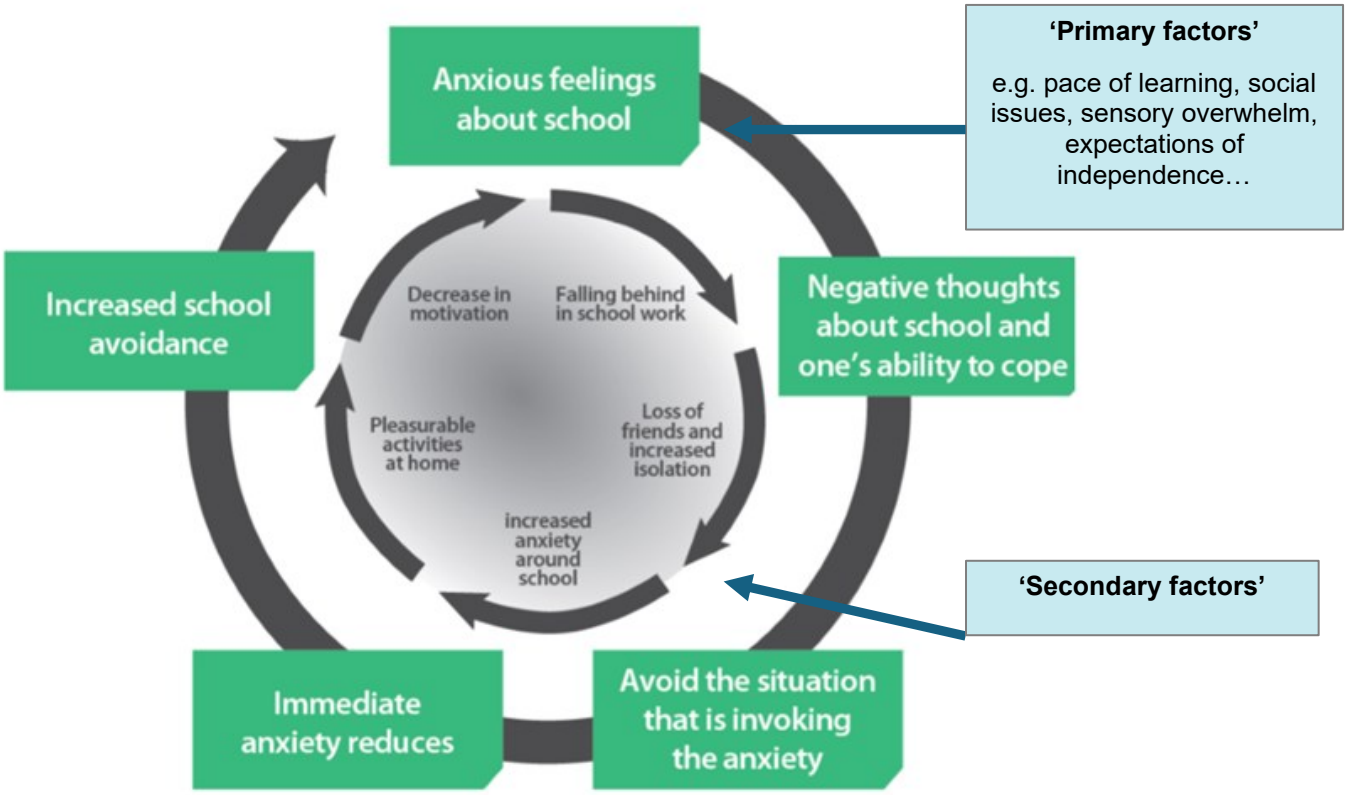
School Factors	Family Factors	Child Factors
• Bullying • Difficulties in specific subjects • Transition to secondary school, key stage or change of school • Structure of the school day • Academic demands • Transport or journey to school • Exams • Peer or staff relationship difficulties • Disruption to typical school routines *(e.g., COVID-19 pandemic)* • Rigidity of school rules and expectations regarding behaviour, learning, attendance, uniform etc. • Access to toilets • Transitions during the school day • Limited access to supportive resources and spaces e.g., sensory equipment and quiet spaces	• Bereavement or loss in the family • Parental separation, divorce or changing family dynamics • Parents with physical or mental health difficulties • Overprotective or risk-averse parenting styles • High levels of family stress or conflict • Financial hardship or low income • Unstable or insecure housing • Lack of reliable local transport • Family history of school non-attendance • Young carer responsibilities • Looked-after child, previously in care, or in kinship care • Belonging to a minority ethnic or cultural group • LGBTQIA+ identity and lack of acceptance • Risk of exploitation (e.g. County Lines or Child Sexual Exploitation)	Emotional and psychological factors including: • Shyness or reluctance to engage in new settings • Difficulty trusting others • Poor emotional awareness or limited emotional vocabulary • Struggles with stress, worry or emotional wellbeing • Fear of failure and low self-confidence • Mental health challenges • Experiences of trauma • Separation anxiety from parent Learning, health and developmental needs: • Learning difficulties • Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) • Neurodivergent needs (diagnosed or undiagnosed) • Speech, language, and communication needs • Physical health/medical needs • Sensory processing difficulties or sensitivities • Sleep difficulties

Early warning signs

While school attendance difficulties can develop at any point, it is important to work in an early intervention, preventative way wherever possible. Schools need to be vigilant in monitoring attendance of young people and noticing any patterns in non-attendance or changes to behaviours. Some possible early indictors may include:

- Difficulty attending school at the usual start time.
- Difficulties separating from parents/family on arrival to school, difficulties getting out of the car.
- Patterns in absences, for example, particular days and/or subjects, after weekends and/or holidays.
- Periods of prolonged absence.
- Difficulties in managing transitions: returning to term time, change of year group, change of key stage etc.
- Fear, anxiety, outbursts or other negative emotional expressions when presented with the idea of going to school.
- Complaints of physical ailments such as sweating, sickness, aching limbs, headaches, panic attacks that increase with the prospect of school attendance, but subside at weekends/holidays.
- Frequent absences for an increasing number of minor illnesses.
- Parent/carers notice the CYP is reluctant to leave the home.
- Worries about leaving the home environment specifically e.g., worry expressed about the safety and wellbeing of those at home, or an expressed need to be with those at home for increased sense of security and reassurance.
- The CYP wanting to attend school/lessons but feeling unable to do so.
- Academic challenges and underachievement.
- A reduced sense of academic confidence and competence.
- Social isolation and avoidance of classmates or peer group.
- Notable reductions in openness to socialising/instability of friendships/social communication needs.
- Distressed behaviour, or behaviour that may be perceived as challenging by school staff, particularly in relation to specific situations at school.
- Reduced engagement with previously pleasurable or favoured activities, clubs or hobbies.
- Reduced self-worth, low mood, low self-esteem and lack of confidence.
- Signs of increased emotional exhaustion, particularly towards routine demands and activities.

Primary and Secondary Factors



(Credit: West Sussex County Council, 2018).

Any combination of **primary factors** may cause a CYP's school attendance to begin to decrease.

Following this, **secondary factors** are likely to emerge which can further affect the CYP's wellbeing, further affect non-attendance and make it harder for the CYP to consider a return to education (these are sometimes referred to as **maintenance factors**). These may include factors such as falling behind with schoolwork, losing touch with friends, or feeling apprehensive about facing difficult questions relating to their absence and not knowing how to answer these.

EBSNA and anxiety



(Credit @journey_to_wellness)

Understanding anxiety and school non-attendance:

Anxiety is often a key factor in EBSNA. It's important for school staff to understand the difference between typical **worries** and **anxiety that becomes a barrier to attendance**.

What is worry?

Worry is a normal emotion that many CYP experience during their time at school. It might arise before a test, during social interactions, or when facing new challenges. These feelings are part of everyday life and usually pass without causing major disruption.

When worry becomes a barrier:

When worry becomes **intense or overwhelming**, it can interfere with a CYP's ability to carry out daily routines—such as getting ready for school, participating in lessons or interacting with peers. At this point, worry may be better understood as **anxiety**, which can significantly impact school attendance.

The body's stress response:

When CYP face situations they perceive as threatening or overwhelming, their bodies may react with a **stress response**. This is a natural survival instinct designed to protect them from harm. These responses can be triggered by:

- Learning tasks that feel too difficult
- Unkind or unfriendly peer interactions
- Sensory environments that feel overwhelming
- Relationships with staff that lack trust or safety

Importantly, the body does **not distinguish** between real and perceived threats—it reacts the same way to both.

Common stress responses:

CYP may respond to stress in one of five instinctive ways:

- **Fight** – reacting with aggression or defiance
- **Flight** – avoiding or escaping the situation
- **Freeze** – becoming still or unable to act
- **Flop** – shutting down or becoming passive
- **Fawn** – trying to please others to avoid conflict

In cases of EBSNA, CYP are often in **flight**. This is not a conscious decision, but an automatic reaction to stress. Avoiding school may be their way of trying to feel safe in the absence of other coping strategies.

Protective Factors

Just as there are risk factors to school attendance, there are also important protective factors that can support a CYP's wellbeing in school, mitigating some of these risks. These can include but is not limited to:

School Factors	Family Factors	Child Factors
• Trusting relationships with key staff members. • Positive relationships and friendships with peers. • School flexibility in approach and strategies, led by the CYP's needs. • Staff understanding of EBSNA. • Supportive school senior leaders. • Safe spaces in school. • CYP feels supported by staff in school. • School willingness to work with family and support agencies.	• Good parent communication and trust with school. • Parents feeling able to contribute their support ideas. • Parents and carers talking positively about school. • Home life feeling calm, stable and secure. • Gentle encouragement and reassurance about attending school. • Siblings who also attend school consistently.	• Good emotional vocabulary skills. • A desire to attend school. • Ambitions, goals and aspirations for the future are retained. • School is viewed as important in working towards long-term goals. • Interests and activities outside of school that provide fun and enrichment. • CYP can recognise their own needs and use calming strategies that work for them. • CYP can recognise their strengths and demonstrates pride in themselves. • CYP feels listened to and understood.

EBSNA and Neurodivergence

"The majority of children struggling with school attendance are autistic or otherwise neurodivergent" (Authentically Emily, 2024).

A study found that "92.1% of CYP currently experiencing barriers to attendance were described as neurodivergent (ND) and 83.4% as autistic" (Connolly et al., 2023). The odds of an autistic child experiencing school distress were 46.61 times higher than a child without an autism diagnosis (Connolly et al., 2023).

Neurodivergence includes, but is not limited to, Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Sensory Processing Disorder, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and other learning differences.

Neurodivergent children often face unique challenges in mainstream schools, including sensory overload, social complexities (like bullying), communication difficulties, and rigid environments that may not accommodate their needs.

Most commonly, difficulties arise as a result of reported 'unmet needs'. This may be because of misunderstanding needs, inflexibility in the systems supporting the CYP, rigidity of school policy and limited resources, amongst other factors.

Our further guidance relating to the neurodivergent population and school attendance difficulties can be found here.

Other vulnerable groups

National data highlights the prevalence of persistent absence in other vulnerable groups:

- CYP with an **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)** - 36%;
- CYP receiving **SEN Support** - 31%;
- CYP receiving **Free School Meals** - 35%;
- CYP with **Young Carer** status - 46%
- Children in Need are twice as likely to be persistently absent and four times more likely to be severely absent or suspended.

The adverse impacts of COVID-19 on pupils' mental health, attendance, or academic attainment have also been most evident in already disadvantaged groups.

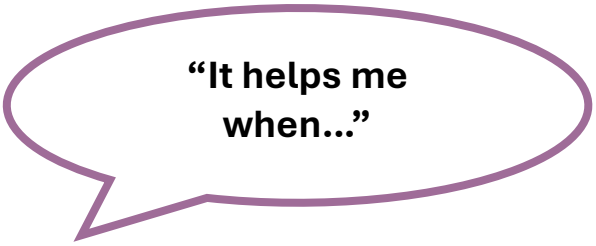
(Government data for mainstream schools and NHS statistics, 2023)

What young people say

Key themes from EBSNA research highlight the importance of CYP feeling central to planning support and feeling empowered to share their ideas.

CYP and families need to feel that their stories and experiences are being heard, that their feelings are being considered, and that they are directly involved in any planning of support.

Feedback from local CYP has highlighted the following themes:



You really know me

The focus is more on ‘us’ rather than our results

You explain things and give the reasons why, to make it relevant to me

You take an interest in what I am interested in, so you can engage me in a conversation on my interest, which you knew was what I needed in order to calm down

We can use things that help, like ear defenders or headphones

We can have breaks when needed

We are comfortable in the clothes we wear, and for many of us school uniform is not comfortable, adding to our physiological stress

We can learn how we learn best

Our plans are followed

You listen to my ideas and really want to understand how these can help, and we make a plan together

You stayed so calm when I wasn't

You are willing to work out a plan, not just say no

You ask me, 'do you need anything', rather than, 'get on with your work'

You offer help, especially when I struggle to ask for it, because I don’t want to stand out

We need to know what is happening, so let us know if plans need to change

We are given the time needed to be calm, so having the opportunity to leave the classroom without having to explain why, if we need 2 mins to breathe

I can move to keep my brain alive

There are staff that listen and understand

Staff recognise that we are struggling

You do what you said you would do

You keep promises, and you are honest when you can’t

We have a quiet space to go to

You create stuff to do based on what I like, even though it is more work for you

We can sit where we are most comfortable in lessons… recognise that this shouldn’t be changed

You give me the printed notes, so I feel calmer and more able to concentrate.

I can do what I need to do to focus

“It helps me when…you make all of this possible”.

Further research with CYP has also highlighted the following helpful reasonable adjustments, provided by their school/setting:



(Credit: East Sussex County Council, 2022)

Watch our video exploring young people's experiences of EBSNA, including advice on how to capture young people's views

Chapter 2: Universal provision and early intervention

Practical guidance on managing non-attendance

Universal provision

This provision is expected to be ordinarily available within schools and is what every student should experience. This forms part of our good practice guidance for schools.

For example, it is hoped that there will be a commitment to providing an inclusive, supportive whole school ethos with an underlying understanding of EBSNA across the staffing team.

Accompanying this, there will be appropriate school policies and processes in place to provide clear guidance and transparency when supporting vulnerable students facing barriers to their school attendance.

Furthermore, a non-judgemental, no blame, trauma-informed and relational approach to communicating and working with CYP and their families should be an essential underpinning and core feature of the school environment.



Core examples of universal provision in its broadest sense are detailed in the image below, however as we move through the chapter, these and other examples will become more tailored to EBSNA needs. See EBSNA Matrix of Support.

Identification and early intervention

It is important to outline here why early intervention and support is so important and what difference this can make.

For example, the earlier that needs and barriers are identified, the earlier they can be supported through good quality action planning and support. The implementation of universal measures and further reasonable adjustments may help to avoid the need for a setting to engage in repeated cycles of the graduated approach (see next chapter) and might allow the CYP the opportunity to re-engage with their learning with minimal impact on their overall sense of wellbeing.

At this phase, it is hoped that there is an inherent attitude of **curiosity** and a fundamental drive to engage in **collaborative conversations** with CYP and their parents/carers as a way of better understanding their personal wellbeing needs.

This **first wave of intervention**, if delivered in a timely, **proactive** way, may avoid future non-attendance difficulties, with barriers to attendance identified and resolved. A framework to support this investigation and collaboration will be shared later in the chapter, along with an outline of recommended support.

Information gathering

Baseline assessment tools

So how can schools uncover what is happening for a CYP when they first notice signs of attendance difficulties?

Perhaps there have been some repeat days missing (for example every Wednesday for the past month) or there is a pattern of arriving late to school , after the first lesson, for the past couple of weeks. Using **school attendance data** will open these conversations and highlight some patterns, but to better understand these, we outline two resources below, either of which could be suitable, for use in those conversations with CYP and their families:

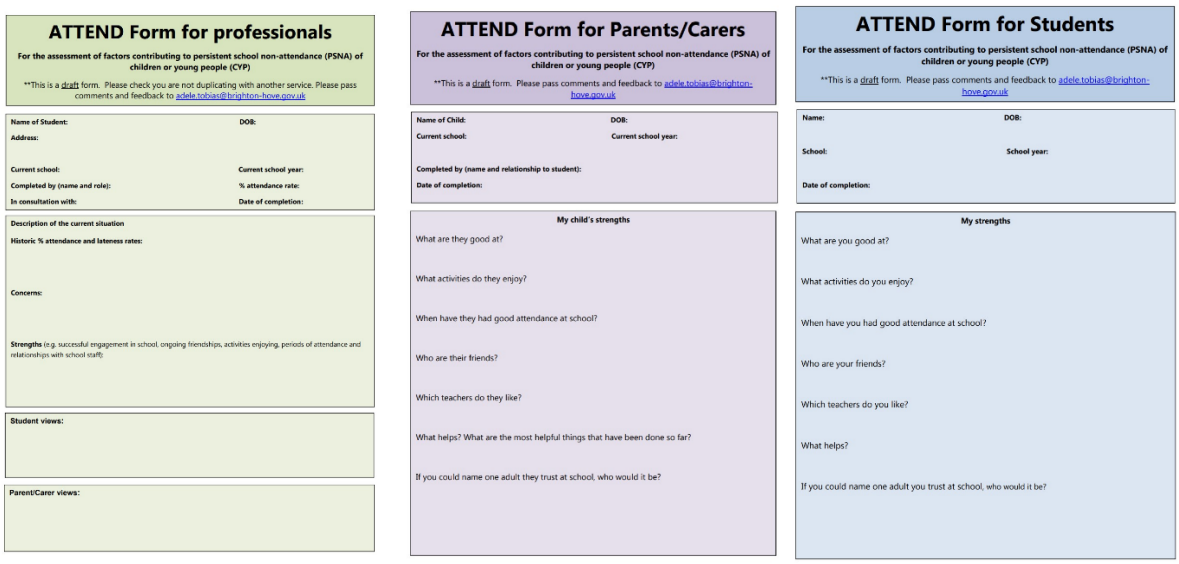
- The ATTEND Framework;
- The CATS (Checklist for Attendance Tracking and Support), either of which could be suitable.

The ATTEND Framework

The ATTEND Framework is a structured, collaborative tool designed to help schools, families, and CYP aged 5–16 explore and address the complex barriers affecting school attendance. Rather than focusing on a single cause, it encourages a holistic view—recognising that emotional, social, and environmental factors often combine to make attending school difficult.

The document guides staff through a three-step process: gathering information from both home and school perspectives, identifying all contributing barriers, and co-creating an action plan tailored to the CYP's needs. The framework uses a strengths-based, non-blaming approach that values every perspective of the CYP's experiences, aiming to build shared understanding and practical solutions that support the CYP's wellbeing and re-engagement with learning.

All Warwickshire Schools and Settings will receive a funded copy of the ATTEND Framework, distributed to school senior leaders by Warwickshire Attendance Service (WAS). This framework provides school, family and the CYP copy questionnaires:



ATTEND Form for professionals

For the assessment of factors contributing to persistent school non-attendance (PSNA) of children or young people (CYP)

**This is a draft form. Please check you are not duplicating with another service. Please pass comments and feedback to adele.tobias@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Name of Student: DOB:
Address:
Current school: Current school year:
Completed by (name and role): % attendance rate:
In consultation with: Date of completion:

Description of the current situation
Historic % attendance and lateness rates:
Concerns:
Strengths (e.g. successful engagement in school, ongoing friendships, activities enjoying, periods of attendance and relationships with school staff):

Student views:

Parent/Carer views:

ATTEND Form for Parents/Carers

For the assessment of factors contributing to persistent school non-attendance (PSNA) of children or young people (CYP)

**This is a draft form. Please pass comments and feedback to adele.tobias@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Name of Child: DOB:
Current school: Current school year:
Completed by (name and relationship to student):
Date of completion:

My child's strengths

What are they good at?
What activities do they enjoy?
When have they had good attendance at school?
Who are their friends?
Which teachers do they like?
What helps? What are the most helpful things that have been done so far?
If you could name one adult they trust at school, who would it be?

ATTEND Form for Students

For the assessment of factors contributing to persistent school non-attendance (PSNA) of children or young people (CYP)

**This is a draft form. Please pass comments and feedback to adele.tobias@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Name: DOB:
School: School year:
Date of completion:

My strengths

What are you good at?
What activities do you enjoy?
When have you had good attendance at school?
Who are your friends?
Which teachers do you like?
What helps?
If you could name one adult you trust at school, who would it be?

These questionnaires include sections such as:

- **The CYP's strengths**/what they enjoy.
- **What helps**? What support has been tried so far?
- **Protective factors**: friends, trusted adults, favoured subjects...
- **Risk factors**: causes of worry; health and wellbeing needs; sensory processing needs; social belonging or fitting in; school work and learning needs; teacher relationships; changes to family life or family-level stresses.
- **Maintenance factors**: preventing the child from feeling safe and able to return to school.
- **Hopes for the future:** thinking about next steps of progress.

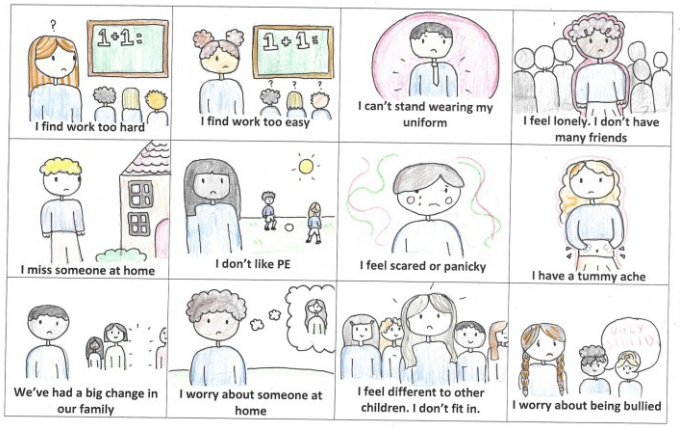
As per the graduated approach – please invite parents/carers in at the **earliest opportunity**, for preventative working together. Please share the handout 'ATTEND Framework - Information for schools, parent/carers and pupils' with families in advance of this meeting.

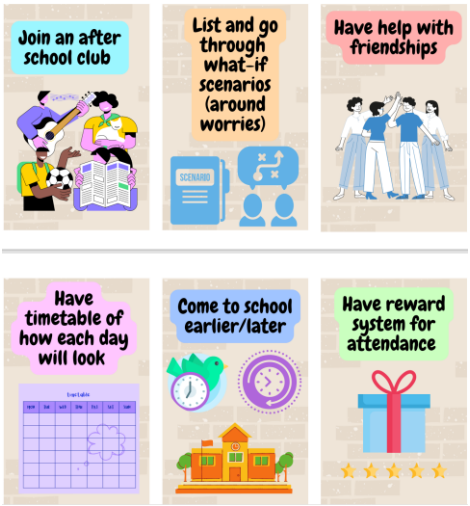
It may be helpful to explore the different forms separately, or you may bring all parties (CYP, school staff, family) together for joined up conversations, using one form.

The ATTEND Framework also includes a manual outlining support ideas to consider. For further ideas to try, links and resources to explore, and external agencies to consider, view the EBSNA ATTEND Support Strategies Guidance.

Watch our video introducing the ATTEND Framework, based around a case study example.

The ATTEND Pupil Voice Cards





Included within the ATTEND Framework are the Pupil Voice Cards (see above left). These are applicable for CYP of all ages and help you to capture the CYP's views on the challenges or stresses they face in school.

CYP should be supported to sort cards into two piles, those that they agree with, and those that they don't. From the most relevant cards, they should be supported to pick their top two to five to focus on first. This is so that any plan of support feels clear and doable for everyone.

In addition, schools can access the ATTEND Support Strategies Cards (see above right), also applicable to CYP of all ages. These are provided with full credit to Derby City Council and are available here. CYP should be supported to sort these cards into three piles; things that could help, things that won't help; and things that they want more information from school about. Again, select a few priority ideas to focus on first, so that any plan of support feels doable for everyone, and reassuring for the CYP and their family.

The Checklist for Attendance Tracking and Support (CATS)

The CATS Checklist is a practical tool designed to help schools work compassionately and collaboratively with families when a CYP is experiencing EBSNA. It invites the family to tell their story and interpretation of the CYP's circumstances, and the support that they feel may be needed.

It supports staff in tracking attendance patterns and understanding the underlying reasons behind absences, especially when anxiety or emotional distress may be involved. By inviting parents and carers to reflect on each missed session and share insights, the checklist encourages a shared approach to identifying barriers and planning supportive strategies. The focus is on building a clearer picture of the CYP's experiences and avoiding any risk of judgement or blame, so we can respond with empathy, care, and tailored support that helps them feel safe and ready to re-engage with school.

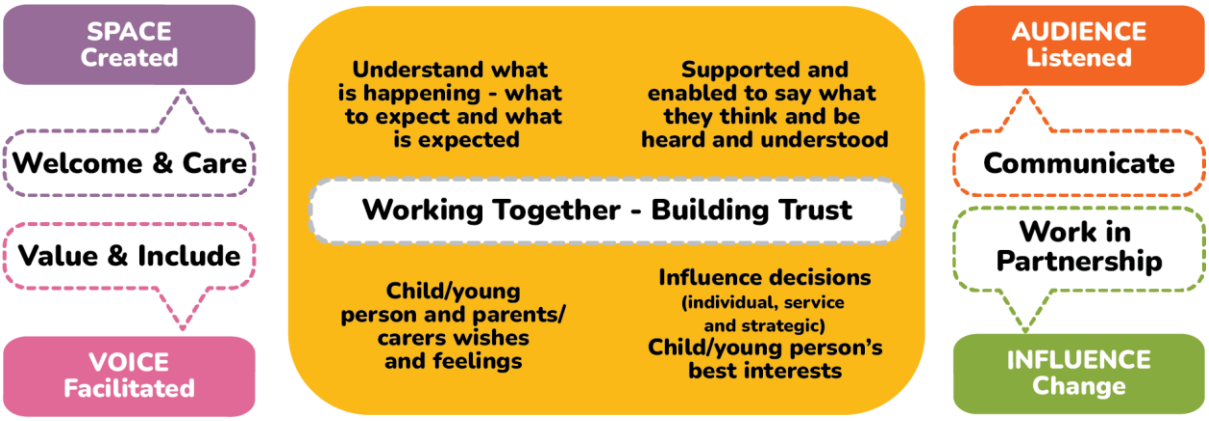
Watch an initial overview of the CATS resource here

Watch our video introducing these assessments tools to parents/carers

Capturing young people's views

Capturing CYP's views and wishes should be at the heart of all assessment and planning. As a basic right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, CYP have the right to be heard, and due respect given to their views (Article 12).

The Voice, Influence & Change Team (WCC), Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice and IMPACT (Warwickshire's Young Person's Forum for SEND) have created a version of Lundy's Model of Participation, for considering how CYP are supported to feel safe, comfortable and able to share their views.



(Credit: Voice, Influence & Change Team, WCC, 2024)

They have coproduced some questions to help you think through and work with CYP to develop their own plan for effective support.

Welcome and care – space created:

- Where does the CYP feel safest to meet?
- Is there a sensory safe space available to the CYP?
- Can they choose where to meet? Remain mindful that this often won't be the family home, as many CYP need to keep this as a place of sanctuary.
- Does this need to be face-to-face, or could this be via online or other means?
- What preparation is needed beforehand?
- Who would the CYP like involved? Family, friends and/or staff?

Value and include – voice facilitated:

- How can you agree the focus of conversations and plans? Could you provide the family and CYP with written questions first? **Watch our video introducing the assessment tools for families. Please share this link directly with families**.
- Can you discuss the focus in advance, so the discussion is clear and aligned with the CYP's priorities?
- Do you have a shared understanding of what would be a meaningful outcome for the CYP?
- Have you provided information in advance? Our guidance includes a handout for families on what to expect from an ATTEND Framework discussion, for example.
- Who can help share the CYP views, if they need help?
- Have you recorded the CYP views, even if you disagree with these?

Communicate – audience listened:

- How does the CYP prefer to communicate and/or receive information?
- Do they need support to provide their views in writing, ahead of any conversations?
- Do they need written notes to help memory?
- Can you show you are listening and have heard, by reflecting what you have understood?
- Who needs to hear this? Is there consent from the CYP to share their views?
- Are the decision makers involved in the conversation?

Work in partnership – influence change:

- Can you be led by what the CYP needs and is asking for?
- Have you been clear about what is and isn't possible and what may need further exploration?
- Can you provide the creativity, flexibility and consistency that is needed to build trust, rather than starting from a one –size-fits-all approach?
- What are the steps needed to progress a plan? Focus on a step-by-step approach.
- Does the CYP feel under pressure, or do they feel that they have an influence over what is happening and when?

Support and reasonable adjustments

After using one of the above assessment tools and arriving at a shared understanding of the CYP's barriers to attendance, a plan of support and reasonable adjustments should be designed, bespoke to each CYP. This is the action phase where you will identify what can be done to support the CYP.

Typical examples may include adjustments to:

- Teaching and learning approaches
- Morning arrival routines
- Learning expectations - being flexible according to CYP's emotional wellbeing and readiness for learning
- Transitions - for example allowing a CYP to leave a lesson early
- Task expectations - be realistic and match to CYP's ability
- Seating arrangements - for example allowing a CYP to sit with an established friend or letting them choose their place in a seating plan
- Classroom or school environments - thinking of sensory demands on a CYP
- School uniform - helping to provide a sense of physical comfort

- Activities - being flexible on a CYP's participation in activities if this feels too overwhelming
- Social times - such as quiet places to meet with friends or a quieter place to eat lunch
- Direct intervention support may be required for CYP with learning/special educational needs.

To learn how to use the assessment materials and develop support strategies with CYP and their families, please look at our written case study examples and video introducing several of these case studies. These show flexible and supportive approaches used by local schools and settings.

Watch the video with case study examples

Read the case study examples

Summary of whole-school approaches and best practice

Whilst the information above has focused on how to work with and support CYP and their families, supporting school attendance starts with whole-school approaches to promoting positive wellbeing.

Our good practice guidance for schools introduces these ideas and emphasises the importance of creating a safe, inclusive, and emotionally supportive school culture where every CYP feels they belong. Key principles include **early identification**, understanding **behaviour as communication**, and **valuing the voices of CYP and their families**. The guidance promotes collaborative working, flexible and individualised support, and a graduated response model that prioritises wellbeing over attendance statistics.

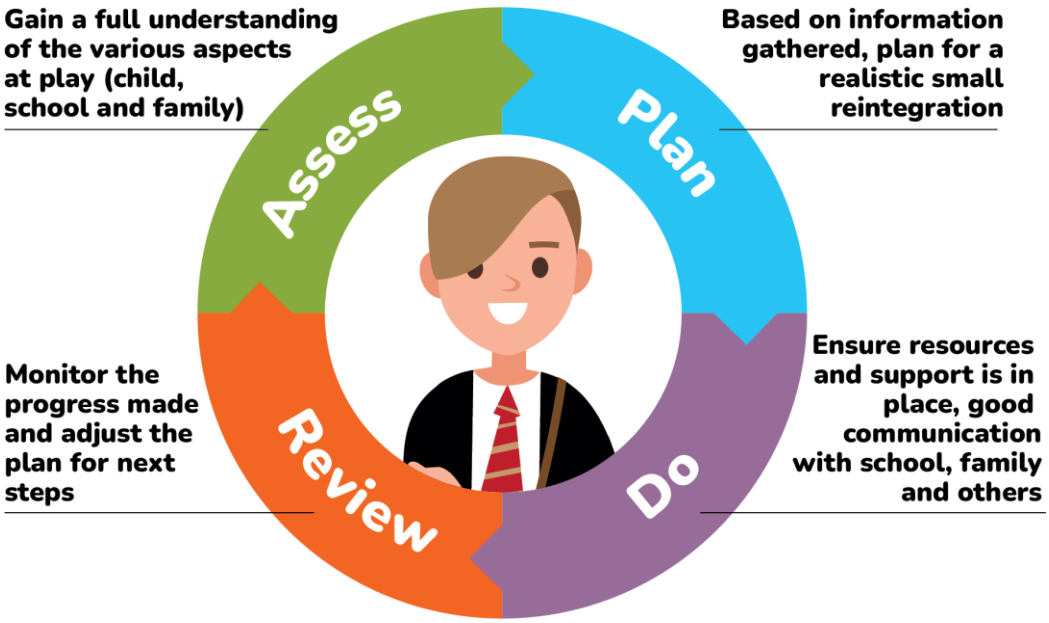
The tools provided include our Whole School EBSNA Audit designed to support your school and senior leadership team to reflect on your school development and training needs over time.

Watch our video on whole-school EBSNA approaches and best practice

Chapter 3: The graduated approach

CYP experiencing barriers to attendance will require reasonable adjustments and support. For some CYP, these may be shorter-term, whilst for others there may be repeated cycles of support to help stabilise attendance.

In line with the SEND Code of Practice (SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK), schools should identify needs as early as possible and follow a process of assess, plan, do, review. In doing so, CYP are likely to be placed on the school's SEN Register, as ongoing support and progress monitoring is required over time.



Patience is required when supporting CYP experiencing barriers to attendance as change and progress can at times feel slow despite best efforts. However, it is important to remain positive, listen to the CYP and their family, be prepared to unpick challenges along the way, as well as to set realistic, small step targets, and be creative in exploring ways to overcome barriers for each CYP presenting with needs.

Assess

When the CYP's attendance reduces to 95% or lower and/or the CYP shows increased signs of distress in school and/or difficulty in coming to school.

Undertake information gathering – observe patterns to non-attendance (for example specific lessons, times of the day, days of the week) and discuss with colleagues (Form Tutor, Head of Year, Class/Subject Teacher(s), SENCO, Pastoral Team etc), using our staff round robin tool.

Begin conversations with parents/carers and CYP, using our baseline assessment tools. Ensure that the family's views are taken seriously.

Plan

A plan should be made after baseline information has been gathered and collated from home, school and the CYP. Our EBSNA Matrix of Support provides support ideas to consider, or alternatively you can use the support manual provided with the ATTEND framework. The EBSNA Additional Support Plan offers a template for capturing these ideas for each CYP.

This involves CYP, families and school staff working together to decide next steps of support and goals to work towards.

If you feel that signposting to further agencies for support is required, please see our comprehensive ATTEND Support Strategies Guidance.

For examples of this support in action, please see our EBSNA Case Studies from local schools and settings.

Do

Agree to follow the 'Do' stage of the plan for a length of time personalised to the needs of the CYP and in accordance with the interventions and/or strategies selected to support them.

It is essential to continue providing Quality First Teaching, alongside reasonable adjustments, noting how these make a difference. Ensure that provision is delivered as it is meant to be or refined, with adjustments made if necessary. Continue to use the EBSNA Additional Support Plan to document the support in place (and any impact) over time.

Review

The effectiveness of the plan should be regularly monitored and reviewed. Adjustments should be made as required but based upon the CYP's progress and response to the support provided.

It needs to be agreed **who** should attend the reviews, and **how often** these should be. **This will be different in every case**. Greater frequency (for example fortnightly) is recommended at first, to make a positive start and to respond to any teething problems. Use our EBSNA Additional Support Plan for this.

Repeating the cycle

In line with our EBSNA assessment flow chart, continue the cycle of assess, plan, do, review as often as necessary.

Please see our EBSNA Graduated Approach for a more detailed overview, including how to introduce further support, such as support from external agencies when needed.

Chapter 4: Targeted and specialist support for longer-term EBSNA

Warwickshire's Graduated Approach for Supporting EBSNA outlines how to increase support over time, the **targeted** and **specialist** levels of support.

This support applies for CYP experiencing developing or longer-term barriers to school attendance over time, with a specific focus on supporting their overall emotional wellbeing.

Targeted Support

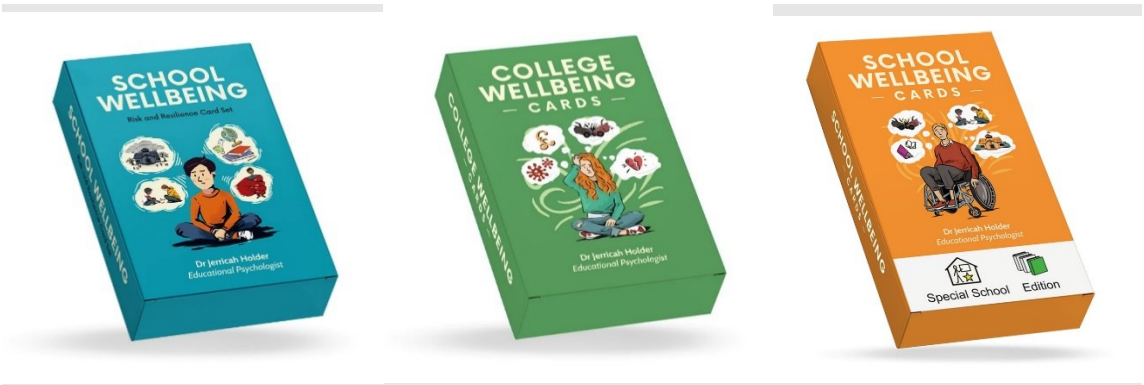
Targeted support is designed for CYP whose attendance difficulties persist despite initial interventions. At this stage, schools should deepen their understanding of the CYP's needs by either revisiting tools such as the ATTEND Framework and Pupil Voice Cards or exploring additional assessment tools (see below).

The focus is on personalised strategies that support emotional wellbeing and re-engagement with school, as set out in the EBSNA Matrix of Support. Examples include daily check-ins with a trusted adult, calming breaks, adapted curriculum tasks, and access to quieter spaces. Schools should convene a professionals' meeting to coordinate support and update the CYP's EBSNA support plan. Reviews should take place after one term to assess progress and adjust strategies as needed.

The School Wellbeing cards

The School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Card Set and **College Wellbeing Card Set** can be purchased by schools and settings for exploring risk factors and protective factors relevant to a CYP's attendance and wellbeing needs (click here to see website). These cards can be used directly with CYP or jointly with CYP and their family/carers.

The School Wellbeing Cards – Special School Edition – provide assessment support for CYP with additional learning needs and communication difficulties, including the use of Widget visual supports to aid understanding.



Watch our video introducing the cards and how best to use them

Mapping the landscape of your school

The *Mapping the Landscape of Your School* tools (Primary version and Secondary version, credit to Lancashire County Council) are pupil and student voice resources designed to help CYP reflect on how different aspects of school life affect their wellbeing and comfort. These tools guide CYP to rate their experiences across three key areas:

- the **physical environment** (e.g. corridors, classrooms);
- the **social environment** (e.g. interactions with peers and staff);
- and the **learning environment** (e.g. classroom tasks, subject preferences).

Using colour-coded maps and rating scales, CYP can identify spaces and situations that feel safe, uncomfortable, or anxiety-inducing. This information helps staff understand individual triggers and protective factors, enabling more personalised and empathetic support planning. These tools are especially useful for identifying hidden barriers to attendance and engagement, and for shaping targeted interventions that feel relevant to the CYP .

Watch our video outlining these additional EBSNA assessment tools

Watch our video introducing families to the EBSNA assessment tools

Please note: Following the use of any assessment materials, an agreed plan of support strategies and reasonable adjustments should be agreed by the young person, their school and their family using the EBSNA Additional Support Plan template.

Specialist support

Specialist support is also outlined in Warwickshire's Graduated Approach for Supporting EBSNA. Specialist Support is for CYP experiencing more entrenched, longer-term barriers to school attendance.

This may involve direct input from external services such as Educational Psychology, Specialist Teaching Services, or CAMHS (dependent upon referrals for support). Schools should lead a 'Team Around the Student' approach, using tools like the CATS checklist and the Target Monitoring Evaluation (TME) approach to target setting to plan small, achievable steps of progress for the CYP.

Support may include remote learning, adaptive technology, reintegration planning, or referral to external agencies, such as Warwickshire's Medical Education Team for pupils with medical needs.

The emphasis is on safeguarding wellbeing through bespoke, flexible strategies and close collaboration with families and professionals. If needs exceed SEN Support, schools should consider initiating an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment.

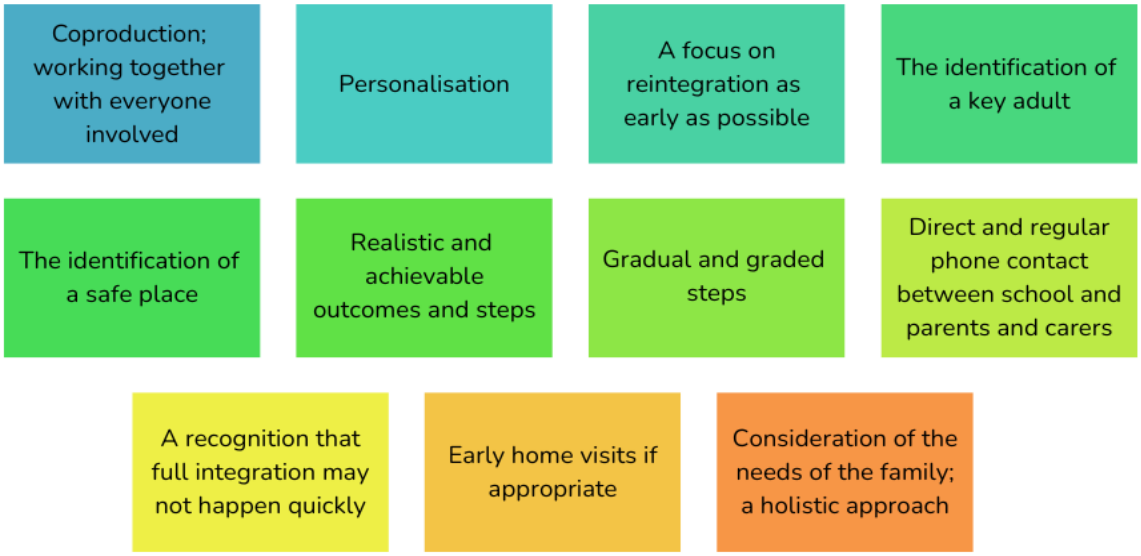
Graded exposure – reintegration planning

As part of the graduated response introduced in this guidance, the agreed steps of **plan** and **do** may be focused on supporting a CYP's reintegration back into education.

If the CYP feels ready, and with their consent, **graded exposure** is a structured approach that helps them gradually return to school by breaking down the process into manageable steps, tailored to their comfort and readiness.

This starts with identifying the least anxiety-provoking aspects of school - such as brief visits to the school site or meeting a trusted adult - and slowly builds up to more challenging tasks like attending lessons or social times. Each step is practiced repeatedly until the CYP feels more confident, with progress celebrated along the way. This approach helps reduce overwhelm, builds trust, and supports a more sustainable reintegration into school life.

The key features of an effective return to school action plan include:



(Credit: Sheffield Educational Psychology Service, 2020)

We are developing guidance around reintegration and longer-term EBSNA needs which will be added to our EBSNA webpages in due course (by Spring 2026). See EBSNA homepage.

Support from Warwickshire's Medical Education Team

Making a referral

Schools should initiate discussions with the Medical Education Team (MET) when a CYP has been absent for 15 days due to medical reasons, whether related to physical or mental health. This process typically begins when the school completes the Sickness Return Form, which includes an option to explore Section 19 support in line with 'Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs' (DfE, December 2023). This marks the first formal step in considering MET's involvement.

For a referral to be deemed appropriate, MET requires confirmation that the CYP has been out of school for at least 15 days and is receiving ongoing medical care. At a minimum, this includes a completed medical form from a GP, along with evidence that a referral has been made to CAMHS for mental health support or to other specialists linked to a physical condition. Referrals solely for neurodiversity

assessments are not considered sufficient, as these do not constitute a medical need and would be considered a special educational need (requiring reasonable adjustments and SEND support within school).

If the CYP is already under the care of a specialist, that professional should complete the medical form. While GPs may sometimes be reluctant to sign the form, MET may accept alternative evidence on a case-by-case basis. Schools are encouraged to contact MET directly if they are uncertain about the adequacy of their documentation. Additionally, MET expects schools to provide a record of the support already offered to the CYP, including interventions, reasonable adjustments, and any external advice sought. This support can be captured in a pupil or student's EBSNA Additional Support Plan.

Following a referral

The support provided by MET is tailored to the individual needs of each CYP. Upon acceptance of a referral, the CYP is assigned an Inclusion Mentor who conducts regular home visits – typically once per week for secondary and twice per week for primary. If the CYP is deemed well enough by a medical professional to begin reintegrating into school, MET may support this transition through home or in-school sessions, access to online lessons with a team of qualified teachers, or attendance at MET hubs designed to foster social skills and confidence.

In some cases, MET may also facilitate the use of an AV1 robot to maintain a connection with the school environment. If the CYP is not yet well enough to attend school, MET will provide access to online lessons from home or assist the school in setting up remote learning support through AV1 robots. Please see the section for guidance on making a referral for AV1 support below.

The MET's involvement ends based on updated medical advice. When a medical professional determines that the CYP is ready to return to school, MET collaborates with the school to support a phased reintegration. This may occur even if the CYP remains under medical supervision, provided they are considered fit to return to school.

The use of assistive technology for supporting early intervention and/or reintegration

Research (Fletcher, 2023) has looked into the use of AV1 robotic devices for supporting CYP who experience barriers to attending school due to physical health of emotional wellbeing needs:

"…the AV1 robot allows children and young people, who are hospitalised/at home, to connect with their school setting via a computer tablet. The robot sits in the young person's seat in their class, allowing them to communicate with peers/adults (Johannessen et al., 2022) via 360° movement, a microphone, and a range of lights/digital expressions. Unlike other robots available, the AV1 provides one-way video only, allowing the young person to watch a live stream of their classroom, without staff/ peers being able to see the young person's face, as they may desire privacy due to their health needs" (Fletcher, 2023; 2).

For more information on how AV1 robots can be used, visit www.noisolation.com/

In practice, the AV1 robot is an app-linked device fitted with a camera, speaker and microphone, that opens a two-way audio and one-way visual channel between the student and their classmates, allowing them to learn alongside their peers, and maintain social contact with their friends, without obliging them to appear on camera themselves.

The robots are carried from lesson to lesson by a classmate. Some children in primary schools have even taken the robot into the playground or to lunch, so their classmates can be involved in all elements of the school day.

Please note that the use of an AV1 will not be appropriate for all and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. AV1 robots are typically used to maintain the CYP's connection with the school environment; and should be part of a reintegration plan back into school/education, wherever possible.

Please note: When making an application for AV1 support, schools will be expected to evidence a graduated approach of support for the CYP.. This should have included use of the EBSNA baseline assessment tools, to explore barriers to attendance with CYP and families.

Assessment for issue of AV1 for use by WCC pupils (Form)

Rethinking progress for vulnerable CYP

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to understanding personal steps of progress, for CYP experiencing EBSNA needs. Personalised steps of progress will often need to be carefully planned, so that these feel positive and achievable to the CYP, and the adults supporting them.

Progress should be considered in the broadest sense, and it is important to remember that progress may be focused upon:

- Increasing time in school or on the school site, but not always.

- Increasing time in lessons, but not always.

A CYP feeling increasingly confident with understanding their own EBSNA needs, and/or feeling increasingly able to contribute to planning of their own support/strategies.

- Building trusting relationships with key adults in school.
- Building friendships and a sense of belonging in school.
- Building confidence with and connections to learning, lessons and the curriculum, but not always in lessons, and possibly at home/elsewhere, as a first step.
- Building confidence with leaving the family home or accessing the local community.
- Building steps towards re-establishing a daily/weekly routine, that may lay the foundation towards returning to school/education.
- Ensuring CYP feel listened to; that their experiences are understood, and that their wellbeing needs are supported.
- Most broadly, activities and steps towards ensuring that CYP feel happy, safe and well – as the foundation to any other progress (academic attainment, school attendance, or otherwise) being possible.

This approach is appropriate for all CYP experiencing EBSNA needs but is particularly applicable to CYP experiencing more entrenched EBSNA difficulties.

Targeted Monitoring Evaluation (TME) Framework

If you are keen to capture bespoke, smaller steps of personalised progress for individual CYP, then a 'Target Monitoring Evaluation' (TME) framework is recommended. This framework supports planning between CYP, their family and school.

TME is a practical tool designed to help schools rethink what progress looks like for CYP experiencing barriers to attendance, especially those reintegrating after extended absence. Rather than focusing solely on attendance figures, TME encourages schools to set up to three personalised targets in collaboration with the CYP and their family. These targets reflect meaningful steps - such as rebuilding routines, reconnecting with trusted adults, or engaging with learning - that support emotional readiness and gradual reintegration. Each target is tracked using a simple 1–10 scale. This approach helps staff celebrate small wins, tailor support, and maintain flexibility around progress.

We are developing guidance around reintegration and longer-term EBSNA needs which will be added to our EBSNA webpages in due course (by Spring 2026). See EBSNA homepage.

Chapter 5: Further considerations and signposting

Key principles overview

Throughout this guidance, the following principles are applicable to supporting all CYP:

Identify barriers early: Understand the reasons behind absence to provide timely, appropriate support.

Listen to the CYP: Involve the CYP in discussions to uncover what helps and what hinders.

See behaviour as communication: Look beyond actions to understand emotional needs.

Act early: Spot signs of EBSNA early and intervene quickly.

Avoid blame: Trust families' intentions and insights; avoid assumptions.

Work together: Collaborate with families, professionals, and the CYP to agree on support strategies (deciding **with** families, rather than **for** families).

Tailor support: Use a flexible, person-centred approach based on individual needs.

Share info across staff: Ensure all staff know agreed adjustments to build trust and consistency.

Support the whole family: Signpost to wider services (e.g. Early Help, SEND groups) to support family wellbeing.

Plan for transitions: Provide extra support during key school transitions (e.g. starting school, moving to secondary).

Track absence effectively: Use clear systems to record and understand reasons for absence.

Redefine progress: Focus on small, meaningful steps for the CYP– and avoid a focus on raising attendance figures alone. Importantly, **celebrate holistic progress** and recognise the CYP's emotional, social, and learning milestones as broadly as possible.

Avoid punishment: Build relationships before considering legal routes of intervention.

Be transparent: Build trust by clearly communicating what support may or may not be feasible.

Review regularly: Agree on a review schedule with the CYP and family to keep plans of support as relevant as possible.

Planning for transitions

Research shows that key transition points within education can be periods where school non-attendance behaviours are likely to occur, i.e. between 5-6 years and 11-13 years (Nutall & Woods, 2013; Pellegrini, 2007; Thambirajah et al, 2008). Therefore, CYP who have associated risk factors for EBSNA within these educational stages should be closely monitored and additional transition support considered. This is unsurprising, given the added changes and demands CYP face during these times.

These can include:

- Changes to school timetables and routines
- Increased number of teachers, differing teaching styles
- Lack of familiarity with teachers and key support staff
- Increased learning expectations, academic pressures
- Increased size of the school/school site
- Increased numbers of students
- Possible loss of, or changes in friendships, and meeting new people
- Increased expectations of independence and self-organisation

With time and careful support, most CYP gradually get used to these changes.

However, for vulnerable learners – such as those with additional needs, high anxiety, or a history of EBSNA - these challenges can feel greater. These challenges grow when transition leads to the unavoidable loss of previous protective factors, for example familiar routines, support systems, trusted adult relationships, or friendships in school.

Successful transition involves the CYP being supported to be able to make adjustments to fit in with their new environment. Good transition support includes:

- **Early communication** – Any CYP at risk of EBSNA difficulties should be identified with the school SENCo prior to transition, by their existing/feeder school. This should happen early enough to allow personalised support to be explored and ideally, in the summer term of Year 6.
- **Collaboration with families** – Ensuring that any reasonable adjustments are agreed with the CYP and their family. How will they feel listened to?

- **Effective channels of communication** – who needs to know about the CYP's needs at the new setting? Who is responsible in the existing setting for sharing this information?
- **Pertinent information** – What is already known about the CYP's barriers to education, what needs to be shared? What academic and pastoral information needs to be shared?
- **Preventative working** – what support strategies are already known to be effective? How can these be embedded in the new setting? What are the priority areas for support?
- **Targeted support** – feeder primary schools may wish to run additional transition visits for smaller groups of vulnerable pupils in the summer term of Year 6, to offer a bridge of support. The receiving school may wish to continue targeted mentoring support (or similar) for the first term.
- **Familiarising CYP in advance** – some secondary schools welcome CYP from feeder primary schools to weekly afterschool clubs during year 6, to build familiarity with the school site in advance. Planning events at quieter times, such as smaller group tours, can also familiarise CYP and help them with finding their way around the school site.

These ideas apply, even if the attendance concerns were minor once and attendance may now be fine, as preventative working is essential. **We encourage secondary schools to ask for this information directly in any transition information forms**.

Good transition also involves providing practical information to CYP and their parents/carers, including:

Travelling to school – how will they get there?	➡	Practise the school journey in advance. Discuss contingency plans and travel companions.
Morning arrival routines – what do these involve?	➡	Provide clear information during transition visits and in transition booklets for over the summer break.
Key people in school	➡	Give a simplified structure chart, provide photos, identify key people.
Finding their way around school	➡	During transition visits offer a tour of the school and practise routes around the site, provide school map (colour-coded) and timetables.
Understanding school timetable – make break and lunchtime systems clear	➡	Provide timetables well in advance and include information on break and lunchtime systems, clubs, quiet places etc.
Understanding how lessons are structured	➡	Give information about how lessons are structured and homework expectations. Ensure that teachers are made aware of any adaptations to universal teaching for specific CYP.

Social times and support – supporting social interactions and friendships for more vulnerable CYP	➡	Identify how CYP will be supported to make new friendships including access to supported social activities. Share school bullying policies.
School support systems	➡	Set out how school pastoral and SEN support systems work, including key members of staff. Clarify key locations in school for support. Support the CYP to make a one-page profile of their key support needs.
Equipment needed	➡	Provide a checklist for each day's timetable.

Warwickshire County Council transitions support and guidance:

WCC recognises that starting a new educational setting, or moving to a new phase in their education, can bring out a range of emotions for a CYP and their family, including excitement, anticipation, and anxiety. For more advice and support with planning for transition, please visit: www.warwickshire.gov.uk/transitions

For guidance from Warwickshire Educational Psychology Service, please see the following webinars:

Transitioning to reception

Transitioning to primary school

Transitioning to secondary school

School attendance, the law and latest government guidance

Despite the challenges that EBSNA presents, it is essential that education settings are aware of their legal duties to a CYP not regularly attending school. We have therefore created separate guidance to help schools understand the legal requirements:

↗ The section of our webpages 'EBSNA, The Law, School Attendance and Government Guidance' outlines key themes in more detail.

Watch our video on understanding EBSNA and attendance law, guidance and coding. We strongly encourage all school staff, senior leaders and governors to watch this.

The legal context has been based on the following most recent guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) and is therefore accurate at the time of writing (November 2025). We recognise that there may be further documents and guidance for settings to consider following these publications.

Guidance from the DfE includes:

- **Working together to improve school attendance** (August 2024).
- **Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance** (February 2023).
- Case study examples of **support for pupils where a mental health issue is affecting attendance** (February 2023).

Most notably, the 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance provides a significant change in the approach to attendance for schools. Schools now need to recognise attendance as the symptom of what may be happening in a CYP's life, focusing support on the barriers to their attendance.

The DfE recognise that many families are working incredibly hard to try and support school attendance for their CYP, whilst also trying to prioritise their emotional wellbeing needs too.

It states: *'Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and therefore at all stages of improving attendance, schools and partners should work with pupils and parents to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place. Securing good attendance cannot therefore be seen in isolation, and effective practices for improvement will involve close interaction with schools' efforts on curriculum, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, pastoral and mental health and wellbeing, and effective use of resources, including pupil premium'.* (Working together to improve school attendance, pg. 8).

Safe and Well Checks - monitoring children and young people's wellbeing

School staff must undertake safe and well checks for CYP who are not attending, in line with statutory expectations outlined in Chapter 2 of the 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' guidance (DfE, August 2024). This emphasises the importance of day-to-day processes to follow up absence and ensure CYP welfare.

School staff should consider initiating a safe and well check when:

- The child has been **absent for one day** and the absence is **unexplained, out of character, or raises safeguarding concerns**. All concerns must be raised with the school's designated safeguarding lead.

- The child has been **absent for three or more days** with **no contact or confirmation of wellbeing**.
- There are **known vulnerabilities**, for example SEND, previous safeguarding concerns, mental health issues.
- **Repeated patterns** of absence emerge, even if individual absences are short.
- **No reliable adult** has confirmed the CYP is safe and well.

Support from Warwickshire Attendance Service

Warwickshire schools and settings can seek advice and guidance from the Attendance Adviser. Please see the Warwickshire Attendance webpages and guidance for parents/carers.

Where a school has already implemented substantial support - regardless of whether the CYP's attendance has reached the Persistent Absence (PA) threshold (for example 80% attendance) - the school should submit a Notification for Attendance Intervention (NAI). The school's linked Attendance Adviser (AA) will then review the NAI form along with all supporting documentation to assess whether sufficient 'Support First' measures have been taken by school, in close working with the family and CYP.

If the AA concludes that more support is needed before formal intervention, the NAI will be returned with guidance on additional strategies. However, if the AA determines that the support provided is adequate, a formal 10-week monitoring period will begin, during which progress will be regularly reviewed and a joint decision made on whether to escalate to legal intervention.

Please note, the overarching aim of the Warwickshire Attendance Service (and Warwickshire County Council) is to foster collaborative partnerships between schools and families, ensuring that all interventions are grounded in empathy and a deep understanding of the individual challenges faced by each CYP.

EBSNA training offer/support for schools

Warwickshire County Council offers a variety of training and CPD opportunities to help schools and settings support CYP experiencing EBSNA.

Centralised training courses

Schools can access pre-arranged centralised training courses at set dates throughout the academic year. Please see here for the latest flyer and training dates.

Half-day 'Introduction to EBNSA' training package

Schools can access as part of their INSET training programme, available via the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and Specialist Teaching Service (STS). This can be arranged through the link practitioner from either service and delivery would be chargeable using existing service level agreement time. This package is also available as two twilight sessions, if this is easier to facilitate.

Pre-recorded training videos

A suite of pre-recorded training videos are available to school staff to watch in their own time: EBSNA Training Videos Playlist.

For any further training needs and support, it is recommended that schools seek advice, guidance and training from their link local authority agencies, such as the Educational Psychology Service or Specialist Teaching Service.

EBSNA and Additional Needs

CYP with special educational needs are often at greater risk of emotional wellbeing difficulties, including EBSNA needs (DfE, 2019). This might be for several reasons, including:

- communication difficulties in describing what they are feeling;
- feelings of frustration regarding things they can and cannot do;
- perceiving their world to be an unsafe and unpredictable place;
- overwhelm from the sensory environment;
- feeling that they have less control and more restraints on them;
- limited safety and security in their relationships with peers or adults;
- difficulties managing the curriculum independently;
- greater difficulty managing uncertainty.

Having additional needs, including but not limited to a learning disability, can make it more difficult for CYP to establish and maintain protective factors (that would protect their wellbeing), without additional support. For example, CYP with additional needs may:

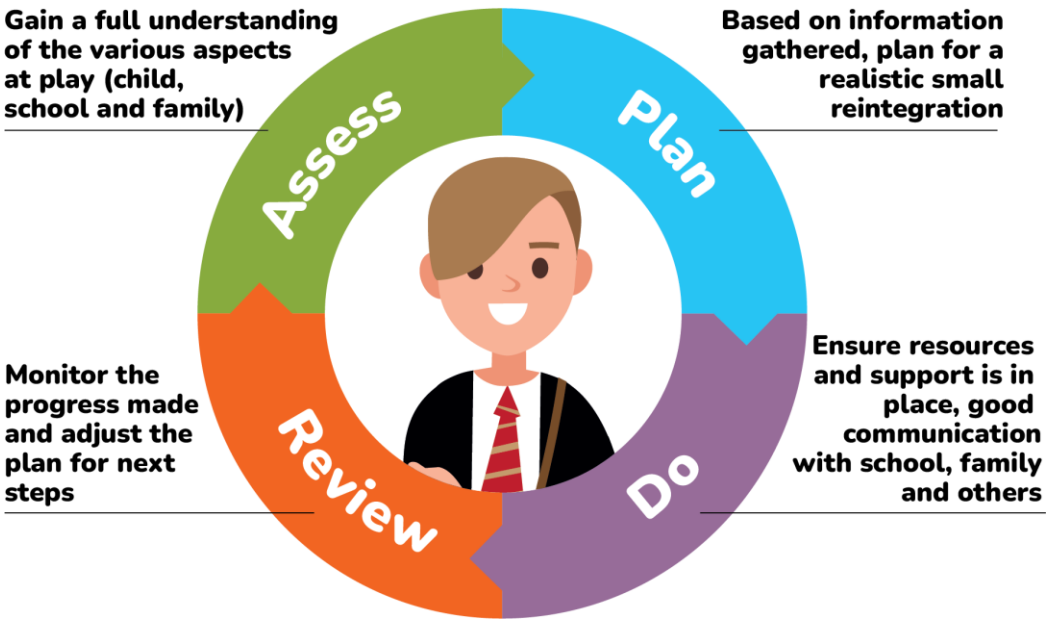
- Find it difficult to make and maintain friendships;
- Confide in others about their feelings or concerns;
- Process or understand the challenges and stresses they are experiencing;
- Find it difficult to find solutions to daily challenges without support.

EBSNA and requests for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs)

Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are for CYP who have a special educational need or disability (SEND) that cannot be met by the support that is available at their school or college setting. For most CYP with SEND, they will receive help in their education setting without the need for an EHCP. They will most likely be recorded at 'SEN Support' within the school's planning.

In some cases, CYP who display barriers to school attendance/EBSNA may have underlying special educational needs and may require support above the SEN support level. That, or the level of additional support required to support the young person's wellbeing and/or stabilise their school attendance is also above the SEN support level. If this is the case, schools or parents/carers, can request that the local authority undertake an Education Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment. To decide whether an assessment should occur, the local authority will need to see evidence that the school or college have taken appropriate action following the assess, plan, do and review cycle and there is evidence that the CYP has not made adequate progress or has only made progress because of a very high level of support. Please see Warwickshire's Graduated Approach for Supporting Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance for further guidance.

You can use our EBSNA Additional Support Plan to capture any personalised support for a CYP over time.



The local authority will require evidence that the school has sought and followed advice from:

- SEND and Inclusion agencies that advise schools such as the Educational Psychology Service, Specialist Teaching Service and others.
- Health professionals including CAMHS or the Mental Health In Schools Team, as applicable.
- Professionals that support families, including Early Support and others, as appropriate.
- Support agencies that may facilitate the CYP's access to education, such as the Medical Education Team, as required.

Before making a request for an EHC needs assessment, schools should refer to: Warwickshire's Graduated Approach for Supporting Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance and WCC's guidance around requesting an EHC needs assessment.

Warwickshire's SEND Inclusion Guidance can be found here including an overview of the Graduated Approach for all CYP.

The SEND Code of Practice (2014) can be found here.

Signposting support

Warwickshire SENDIAS is a free independent advice and support service for families with SEND in Warwickshire.

Connect for Health is a school nurse-led service that supports the health and wellbeing needs of school-age CYP and their families in Warwickshire.

Coventry and Warwickshire Mind - Adult mental health support can be found via Coventry and Warwickshire mind.

IMPACT is Warwickshire's SEND youth forum, giving 13-25 year-olds a voice in shaping local support, including tackling barriers to education.

Kooth offers anonymous, online support for CYP aged 10-18 years (or up to age 25 for CYP with SEND).

Not Fine in School is a parent support and advice group made up of parents with CYP who have experienced attendance barriers.

Rise provides wellbeing and mental health services for CYP in Coventry and Warwickshire. Click on the 'young people' tab to find out more about Rise, mental health explained and information on local support.

Square Peg are a national organisation working to effect change for CYP who struggle to attend school, and their families.

Warwickshire Young Carers supports young people and their families. This service may be able to offer support for siblings of young people experiencing EBSNA, to enable them to fulfil their own needs as individuals.

Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice is Warwickshire's independent, parent carer-led organisation for everyone with a child or children with special educational needs and/or disabilities aged 0-25.

Young Minds are a mental health charity for CYP and their parents and have EBSNA specific resources on their website. They run a parent helpline, webchat and email.

Find help now:

If you are concerned about your child's mental health, you can visit your GP.

If you have immediate concerns about your child's mental health and feel they are in crisis take them to A&E straight away. You can also telephone the Rise Crisis and Home Treatment Team on 08081 966798 (select Option 2). To find help now, please see the following link.

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Further reading and resources

Absence: What am I walking into? - Steven Russell

Anna Freud Centre: Addressing emotionally based school non-attendance - For school leaders, senior mental health leads and classroom teachers.

Barriers to Education - A range of information and resources underpinned by the WARMTH framework, aiming to address barriers to education so young people can thrive.

Can't not won't: A Story About A Child Who Couldn't Go To School - Eliza Fricker.

Changing Our Minds: How children can take control of their own learning - Dr. Naomi Fisher.

EBSNA: Prevention - Pooky Knightsmith

EBSNA: Early Intervention - Pooky Knightsmith

EBSNA: Reintegration - Pooky Knightsmith

EBSNA: ADHD & Autism - Pooky Knightsmith

Navigating education and working well with school webinars series - Eliza Fricker, Dr. Naomi Fisher available via Autism Central.

Square Pegs: Inclusivity, Compassion and Fitting In – A Guide for Schools - Fran Morgan with Ellie Costello.

Success into Secondary: Supporting Transition with Circle Time (Lucky Duck Books) - Cherrie Demain.

Understanding and Supporting Children & Young People with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) - Dr Tina Rae.

Your Child Is Not Broken: Parent Your Neurodivergent Child Without Losing Your Marbles. – Heidi Mavir.

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- *The Warwickshire Mental Health in Schools Team*
- *Warwickshire Attendance Service*
- *Warwickshire Early Support*
- *Warwickshire Medical Education Team*
- *Warwickshire IMPACT*
- *Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice*
- *Warwickshire School Age Speech and Language Therapy Service*
- *Warwickshire SENDAR*
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- *East Sussex County Council*
- *EBSA Horizons*
- *Hampshire County Council*
- *Lancashire County Council*
- *Nottinghamshire County Council*
- *Salford City Council*
- *Sheffield City Council*

- *Somerset Council*
- *Suffolk County Council*
- *West Sussex County Council*

This document is accurate at the time of publication November 2025 and is intended to be reviewed by December 2026. Guidance and resources may change over time, so schools and settings are encouraged to check for the most up-to-date information.

We hope you have found this toolkit accessible and useful.

Warwickshire Educational Psychology Service, Warwickshire Specialist Teaching Service and partner agencies.