

National Guidance for Educational Psychologists Supporting School Attendance

March 2026

Executive Summary

Context and Purpose of the Guidance

School attendance has become a national priority in recent years, with rates remaining below pre-pandemic levels and increasing recognition of the complex, multifaceted nature of school absence. This heightened awareness has led to a surge in attendance-related research, including a growing body of doctoral work by Trainee Educational Psychologists.

In response, the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP), in collaboration with the British Psychological Society Division of Educational and Child Psychology (BPS-DECP) and the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP), has co-produced this national guidance. It is designed to support Educational Psychologists (EPs) in their work with children and young people experiencing attendance difficulties. Drawing on national workshops, research evidence, and lived experience, the guidance outlines principles of good practice, approaches to family support, and models of intervention.

Understanding Attendance Difficulties

The guidance emphasises that barriers to attendance are multi-layered and systemic. Research identifies contributing factors such as academic pressures, unmet learning needs, challenging transitions, neurodiversity, and socioeconomic disadvantage. These factors often intersect, creating cumulative stressors that impact a child's sense of safety and belonging in school. For young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), attendance challenges are disproportionately high. While diagnostic labels may help, they should not narrow the lens – attendance difficulties often reflect unmet needs across health, education, family, and social systems.

Framework for Intervention: Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

Effective support is best structured through a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS):

- **Tier 1:** Universal practices that promote inclusion, wellbeing, and belonging for all pupils.
- **Tier 2:** Targeted interventions such as environmental adjustments, flexible support plans, mentoring, and family support to prevent escalation.
- **Tier 3:** Intensive, multi-agency responses including therapeutic input, alternative provision, or innovative solutions such as telepresence technology.

Across all tiers, co-production with families and listening to young people's voices are central.

Role of Multi-Agency Collaboration

Multi-agency collaboration reduces siloed working, ensures consistent messaging, and streamlines support for families and schools. EPs contribute psychological expertise to understanding complex issues, joint planning, data analysis, workforce development, and resource creation – helping to build cohesive, responsive systems of support.

Working in Partnership with Families

Families are key partners in addressing attendance difficulties. They often face stigma and blame, yet their insights and strengths are vital to developing effective solutions. Best practice includes early engagement, strengths-based consultation, parent workshops, peer support networks, and culturally sensitive approaches. EPs play a pivotal role in bridging home and school, reframing non-attendance as a communication of unmet need, and ensuring families feel respected and empowered.

Measuring Success

Success should be measured beyond attendance figures. Meaningful outcomes include improvements in wellbeing, sense of belonging, family-school relationships, engagement in learning and systemic understanding. Tools such as PATH and MAPS, alongside validated wellbeing measures, offer more holistic indicators of progress.

Summary

This guidance calls for a shift in perspective – from viewing attendance difficulties as individual problems to recognising them as indicators of unmet need within broader systems. Through relational, co-produced, and systemic approaches, Educational Psychologists can help create conditions where children feel safe, included, and able to engage meaningfully in education.

Please note: Although written with the English system in mind, the principles that inform this document should be transferable to other areas of the UK. School non-attendance is a current challenge for all UK based school systems.

National Guidance for Educational Psychologists Supporting School Attendance

This guidance has been developed for Educational Psychologists working with children and young people experiencing difficulties with school attendance. Many local authorities rely on their Educational Psychology Services for expertise in this area, and there is a growing need for nationally coordinated approaches that reflect evidence-informed practice across the profession.

The guidance is intentionally broad, recognising the diverse nature of EP involvement – from supporting young people who are attending school but facing challenges, to those who have been out of education for extended periods. It is intentionally based on contemporary and emerging research, and aims to consolidate best practice that EPs can apply directly in their work and use to inform local policies and procedures.



Development Process

This resource has been shaped through collaborative activity between 2023 and 2025, including:

- **March 2023:** NAPEP Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance Seminars, attended by Educational Psychologists
- **May 2024:** NAPEP Conference activities
- **November 2024 to March 2025:** National workshop series for Educational Psychologists with regional representatives (see Appendix 1)
- **March to August 2025:** Case work submissions
- **September 2025:** Peer review via an online survey

A working group – primarily composed of practicing EPs from local authorities – has led the development of this guidance, with the national workshops forming its core structure. Where additional research evidence has been used to support recommendations, this is clearly referenced in the relevant sections.

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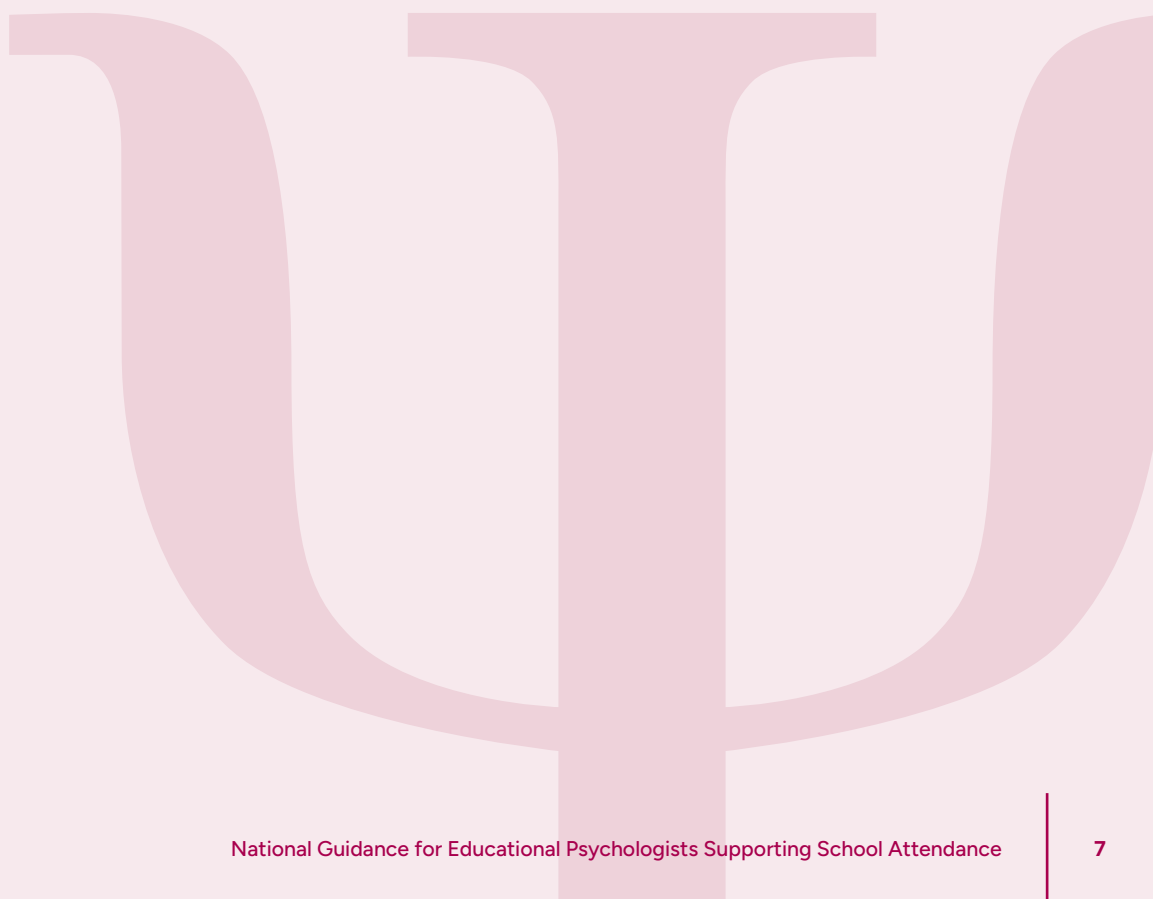


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Language Matters: Naming the Issue of School Non-Attendance

The workshops revealed varied terminology in use, underscoring the challenge of finding a single, perfect term to capture the diverse barriers faced by children and young people. **A key takeaway is the importance of coproducing a locally agreed term to foster shared understanding among families, schools, and services. The term should be broad and inclusive, not limited to SEND or diagnoses.**

Current Terminology in Use:

Various terms are being used across the UK, including but not limited to:

- **EBSA/EBSNA** (Emotionally Based School Avoidance, Emotional Barriers to School Attendance, Emotionally Based School Non-attendance), currently the most widely used
- **Barriers to Attendance/Barriers to Education**
- **ENAS** (Emotional Needs Affecting School, Extended School Non-Attendance)
- **School Non-Attendance**
- **(CCAS)** Children who Cannot Attend School
- **Supporting Attendance Challenges**

Local Discussions:

There are ongoing conversations in many areas about what terminology should be used to describe school attendance difficulties, with a strong desire to adopt language that is accurate, inclusive, and free from blame. There is no clear consensus and therefore terminology is down to local choice and what is meaningful in your local area.

The pre-pandemic shift from using “school refuser” to “EBSA” (Emotionally Based School Avoidance) is widely seen as a positive change, and terms like EBSA and EBSNA (Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance)

are recognisable and provide continuity. EPs in some areas share that the introduction of ‘EBSA’ has been accompanied by significant efforts to reframe the within-child model of school refusal to that of a more compassionate framework. Within this framework, EBSA/‘avoidance’ is positioned as a self-protective strategy in response to environmental stressors and distress, necessitating a broader understanding of avoidance behaviour within the context of the school environment and unmet needs.

Some EPs report that these are the terms preferred by families and young people in their areas. For example, when reviewing terminology with local families there was a strong preference for ‘emotional’ to be included within the name within one local authority, as they felt this was the main presenting issue for their children, albeit that the dysregulation is caused by the demands of the school setting. Additionally some felt it is helpful to distinguish emotional needs from other attendance barriers children and young people may experience and which EPs may not be as involved in supporting, such as health related school absences (e.g. chronic health conditions requiring regular health appointments or periods of time off school).

For others, there are concerns about unintended potential negative implications of the term ‘EBSA’ since this has become a more commonly used term in relation to school absence. Individuals with lived experience* share that the term has inadvertently led to feelings of blame, shame, or guilt, particularly since it became more widely adopted after the Covid-19 pandemic (*please see views shared within the coproduction project [Barriers to Education](#), blogs and books written by parents of neurodivergent children, such as Eliza Fricker, Naomi Fisher and Heidi Mavir). Despite acknowledging the emotional needs behind EBSA, the inclusion of the term ‘avoidance’ can, if not well understood and applied too generally, inadvertently suggest that the issue is purely related to within-child factors, such as irrational anxiety or a “choice” to avoid school by child and parent. Concerns are that the terminology can unintentionally shift the responsibility onto the child to change, despite the fact that most young people report that their

greatest difficulties in attending school are related to the school environment itself – whether that be physical, social, or academic (Corcoran and Kelly, 2022; Can't Not Won't, Fricker, 2023).

Framing the issue in terms of “attendance/non-attendance” may steer support toward solutions that are attendance-driven, such as fines and rewards, rather than exploring the underlying unmet needs, such as SEND or pastoral support. In addition, if not well understood to include a continuum of need (to include children who may be within school but experiencing distress), it may not fully encompass the struggles faced by children who attend school full time but continue to face significant challenges. The inclusion of ‘attendance’ within terminology can also overlook the essential point that access to education is more important than simply being in school at all costs, and that learning doesn’t always have to take place within the confines of a traditional school setting (e.g. Forest school, online education, self-led learning).

Terms that are broader and can encompass and encourage compassion for a wider range of needs and barriers are increasingly being discussed. This can

encompass children who internalise and externalise their distress, as approaches to support EBSA/ non-attendance overlap with those that support a reduction in suspension and exclusions (Day, 2025). A broader term such as Barriers to Education could also incorporate children who experience needs related to chronic ill health (IBD, long covid, epilepsy, etc); poverty; young carers; cultural issues (e.g. the Traveller community), where inclusion is based on holistic understanding, relational approaches, strong home-school partnership and flexibility.

However, families also note support can be hard to find, so terms need to be specific enough that families and professionals can find the right support at the right time, so for some EPs retaining a name that refers specifically to emotional wellbeing and/or neurodiversity is preferred.

As stated at the start, it is important that the name chosen is meaningful to your local context and developed with those delivering and accessing services to ensure a shared meaning and understanding. The following key considerations may help with these local discussions.



Key Considerations

Avoiding blame

Terms that avoid suggesting the issue lies solely with the child (or within families, or schools) are helpful. Attendance difficulties are complex and influenced by a range of health, educational, social, and family factors. In the context of reduced education and health funding, alongside increasing pressure on schools to deliver a narrowed, exam-focused curriculum and meet performance targets, it's crucial to develop a broader understanding of the multiple factors driving non-attendance.

As EPs we need to recognise this whilst also remaining mindful of the wider challenges in education (reduced funding and resources, lack of SEND specific training, staff wellbeing and recruitment challenges), changing views on education and attendance following the pandemic.

Misconceptions and misunderstood terms

Words like "anxiety" or "emotionally-based" can be interpreted in different ways, which may lead to unhelpful assumptions about the causes of attendance difficulties and the appropriate responses. For example, viewing all attendance challenges as solely a child's mental health or neurodiversity issue can create the misconception that specialist diagnosis and treatment are always necessary. This often results in schools focusing on external referrals – services that frequently have long waiting lists – instead of considering environmental adjustments or broader barriers such as emerging or unmet SEND needs, or the impact of poverty.

Focus on environment

EBSA is not a diagnosable condition, but a description of difficulties a young person may experience. A move toward terminology that reflects external or systemic barriers rather than internal child factors is helpful (Nuttall and Woods, 2013).

Beyond attendance

Recognition that focusing only on attendance may overlook broader issues like emotional wellbeing, engagement, and access to education (a child may be in school full time but too anxious to concentrate or even enter classrooms; learning can take place

in a variety of settings). It is important for us all to stay mindful that education is more than just grades. Education happens through everything we do; experiences, connections we make and what we learn inside and outside of the classroom to support engagement with learning (wherever learning occurs) and readiness for adulthood (Heyne et al., 2024).

Child and family voice

Research with those who have experienced attendance difficulties shows children and young people prefer terms like Barriers to Education, as they feel this language better reflects their experiences and feels respectful, non-judgemental, and inclusive (Spectrum Gaming, 2024; Corcoran and Kelly, 2022).

Clarity and accessibility

The name should be clear, meaningful, and easy to remember. Ideally it should be co-produced with those using the associated services/support, so that there is a shared understanding and ownership of the name chosen. Whilst all the above points are important, it is vital to remember that if the name is changed without efforts to develop a shared understanding, the same issues will remain.

National Guidance Preferences

There is no consensus yet, with the most important factor being a shared understanding at local level. However, emerging preferences include:

- **Barriers to Education** (term chosen by young people as part of a multiagency coproduction project, Barriers to Education; Bond et al., 2024)
- **Barriers to Attendance** (as this is the term used in the current DfE guidance, DfE, 2022)
- **Supporting Education Attendance and Engagement** (as this focuses on support)
- Remaining with **EBSA/EBSNA** as it is well known and understood in some areas.

Barriers to Engagement and Attendance

The following summary is based on very recent and emerging research, and represents a body of work that builds on prior understanding. Previously research and guidance around non-attendance has largely focussed on the anxiety cycle at an individual level, and the use of graded exposure to manage this. This remains relevant when it is incorporated as one part of a broader person-centred approach. However, it is important to acknowledge that in many cases an anxiety-focussed approach won't be effective if there have not been changes to other factors within the young person's system.

It is important to note that the following sections are written within a context of well-understood and well-evidenced challenges within the school-system, which include a lack of capacity and resources.

Key Themes

School is too much pressure

Young people tell us that they find it hard to cope with daily life, and that school is a key factor contributing to poor mental health. In fact, 52% of children surveyed identified school as having a negative impact on their mental health (Popoola & Sivers, 2023). When asked how they felt about about nine areas of their life, children and young people expressed being more unhappy with school than any other area (The Children's Society, 2024).

Relationships

Persistent non-attenders view their non-attendance as primarily related to school factors. Relationship difficulties, both with adults and/or peers, are a key factor (Corcoran & Kelly, 2022; Popoola & Sivers, 2023).

Transitions

Year 7 appears to be a particular trigger for reduced attendance, but there is also evidence for a second 'transition' point at year 8. The impact of transitions on attendance is exacerbated for those with SEND (ImpactEd, 2024).

Intersectionality

Risk factors for non-attendance are intersectional. For example, female pupils eligible for free school meals who also have SEND are particularly at risk (ImpactEd, 2024, Bond et al., 2024).

Unmet Learning Needs

Persistent non-attenders also relate non-attendance to difficulties with learning, and experiences of not having their learning needs understood or consistently met (Corcoran & Kelly, 2022).

Neurodiversity

In a study surveying 947 young people non attending due to school related distress, 92% identified as neurodivergent, and 83% described themselves as autistic. Only 6% had mental health difficulties with the absence of a neurodivergent profile (Connolly, Constable, Mullaly, 2023). Neurodiverse learners talk about a poor fit between school environments and expectations, and autistic ways of being in the world. The social and sensory barriers presented by school environments are key, but also policies and procedures that unwittingly penalise neurodivergent behaviours and undermine a sense of belonging (Hamilton, 2024; Connolly et al, 2023).

Inequality

Evidence indicates that school absence occurs disproportionately in areas of socioeconomic deprivation (Bond et al., 2024). Likewise, the cost-of-living crisis and increase in poverty directly impact on attendance. Vulnerable children and those from disadvantaged areas are at higher risk of non-attendance (Burtonshaw & Dorrell, 2023; Bond et al., 2024). Furthermore, Pupil Premium has been identified as the single most impactful factor when it comes to attendance rates (ImpactEd, 2025).

Parent Attitudes Have Changed

There have been seismic changes in the parent-school relationship, which impact attendance. Some of this is in line with current polemic. For example, term-time

holidays have become normalised, and fines are not an effective deterrent (Bond et al., 2024; ImpactEd, 2024; Burtonshaw & Dorrell, 2023). However, some findings contradict popular opinion. For example, research does not support a causal link between increased parental home-working and non-attendance (Burtonshaw & Dorrell, 2023). Likewise, in contrast to a narrative around challenging home-school relationships, parents are keen to work proactively with schools to support their children's attendance (Corcoran, Bond & Knox, 2022).

Young People's Attitudes Have Changed

Young people report that they make a considered decision each day about whether to attend school or not. This is influenced in part by changes in the online landscape, with online interactions often taking place late at night and carrying an emotional demand. However, young people also tell us that they feel a lack of agency in school and see school as a means to an end (Impetus, 2025).

There is a cumulative impact of factors

Children and young people often experience a number of factors which impact on their attendance. These are interactive and risk adding up. The quicker we are able to act, the less risk there is of a cumulative effect and the more likely we are to be able to support change (Corcoran & Kelly, 2022).

SEND and Attendance

It is widely accepted that generally school attendance for pupils with SEND is more challenging than for pupils without SEND (Connolly, Constable & Mullally, 2023; Bond et al, 2024). Persistent absence rates for pupils with Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP) was 36.9% for 2024-2025, in comparison to 16.5% for those categorised as 'no SEN'. There continues to be a rapid increase in EHCPs for pupils, with 97,747 plans starting in 2024, a 15.8% increase from 2023 (DfE, 2025). Alongside this, we continue to see an increase in persistent absence rates across the board. Inevitably, this has led to an increased demand and pressure on educational systems, schools and services. This section explores the interaction between SEND and reduced school attendance.

Interaction between SEND and Attendance

Transition

Both daily (such as moving between classes or activities) and major (such as moving from primary to secondary school) transitions are consistently identified as key factors influencing attendance. The first significant transition a child faces is entry into primary school, which comes with an expectation of being 'school ready'. The way the child experiences this transition can have significant implications for future school 'success' with research showing that children who were not school ready were at higher risk of persistent absence within their school career (Bond et al, 2024; Wood, Gunning & Williams, 2024; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007).

Recent research (ImpactEd, 2024) reports that there is a decrease in school attendance following the transition from Yr7 to Yr8, with this cohort feeling 'less engaged, less safe, and more anxious' (p.14). Secondary schools are often viewed differently to primary schools and experienced as being more rigid, disconnected, noisier, busier and overwhelming (Corcoran & Kelly, 2022).

Individual Vs Environment/Contexts

Most schools are very practiced in the use of evidence-based small group or individual interventions/ approaches to teach new skills, develop knowledge and facilitate progress e.g., emotional literacy programmes, speech/language targets.

However, there is still a clear need for the development of systemic approaches that acknowledge and are sensitive/responsive to young people existing within contexts, relationships and experiences. There is a greater need to consider how the young people are interacting with the environment around them and therefore a graduated approach should include what changes need to be implemented within the systems/ relationships around them too.

Interaction between COVID, SEND & Attendance

The long-term impact of COVID-19 on attendance is still unfolding and it is outside the scope of this paper to explore this fully.

Some research suggests that pupils are presenting with increased mental health needs, gaps in learning, and reduced social confidence (Hamilton, 2024). Young people are also likely to have experienced a sense of disconnection from the school and wider community and fear of illness/loss.

At the same time, some pupils with SEND benefitted from lockdown periods, experiencing less bullying, reduced stress, stronger family connections, and better learning management at home (McDonald, Lester & Michaelson, 2022). There are views that the education system has not sufficiently adapted in response to these diverse experiences, and that rigid systems, behaviour policies, and inflexible curricula continue to act as barriers for many (McPherson et al., 2023).

Discussions during the NAPEP workshop series revealed the needs reported to be most prevalent in EP Work:

Belonging Attachment Autism Relationships Friendships Wellbeing Transition Communication Trauma ADHD Emotional Social Language

Factors that have an impact on the support received

Some key factors have been identified as having a positive impact on the support received by SEND pupils. It is important to note that these factors may also be barriers to success, if not present.

Appropriate resources

This includes finances, physical spaces within schools and access to appropriate services at the appropriate time (e.g., longer term support for complex and embedded situations).

Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

Staff teams/departments (e.g., behaviour, pastoral, attendance, SEND) that work collaboratively to meet the needs of the pupils by sharing information, creating outcomes and action plans together, all contributing to the 'doing' and having an understanding that attendance requires a team to facilitate progress. This factor is even more important in secondary schools. This also applies to outside agencies and parents/carers also working together with educational settings as part of a graduated response.

Belonging and Connection

In order to help support pupils' sense of connection and belonging, staff need to carefully consider the contexts that pupils are placed in, and the possible implications.

For example, ensuring that the pupil is within the classroom as much as possible and not frequently experiencing a disconnect (e.g., interventions outside of class, isolation rooms).

Additionally, following guidance (e.g., Bond et al, 2024) on creating an environment and ethos that promotes pupils' feelings of connection, belonging and inclusion meaning 'children feel connected to their school community', which includes purposeful implementation plans, is paramount.

Relational Ethos

Having a curious and non-judgemental approach to pupils and their families is vital, allowing positive and secure relationships to be established. Ensuring the views and experiences of young people and their families are being heard, trusted and responded to is essential in facilitating positive outcomes. This includes taking the time to understand parent/carer needs, enabling a holistic understanding of the current situation.

Although reference to relational approaches is commonly seen within the educational arena it can be complex to embed such an ethos across a whole system, with commitment and investment needed from staff. There is still a role for services to play in supporting educational settings to define, implement and embed such an approach within school systems.

Focus on need(s)

The systems, services, and processes linked to SEND can give families and school staff the impression that gaining a diagnosis for young people with SEND is required. It is important to acknowledge that in some cases this is true e.g., access criteria for specialist services can require children/young people to be on the pathway to or have a diagnosis. However, it is not a necessity for all services or processes including, educational psychology support or requesting an EHCNA. Having a diagnosis can sometimes provide access to some services, support, or good practice guidance, but it is essential that each child or young person is viewed as an individual with their own individual needs, ultimately leading to more targeted/appropriate progress and support.

Perspectives and plans that concentrate on underlying needs (such as literacy, belonging, or skill development) are more effective than those that simply set attendance targets. Addressing needs directly can improve attendance indirectly. For example, focusing on literacy support may reduce emotional upset and increase engagement.

Understanding the Community

Schools that are sensitive to their wider community context, including socio-economic disadvantage and cultural differences, are more successful in supporting pupils with SEND. Attendance research highlights the role of inequalities at multiple levels: geographical, economic, family, peer, and individual (Bond et al, 2024, p. 15).



Anxiety, SEND, and Attendance

There are wider elements that have impacted how we define/label attendance, for pupils with SEND but also for those without SEND. The language used to describe this outcome (of reduced attendance) has been explored in section one.

The term 'EBSA' is most closely linked with SEND needs and is felt to have implications for the 'emotional' component to become the primary and sometimes only focus. Although there is an evidence base to suggest experiences of worry/anxiety can be present for children and young people with needs that lead to reduced attendance (e.g., Connolly, Constable, Mullally, 2023; Corcoran & Kelly, 2022), assuming this to be the case without systematic assessment or triangulation of information can lead to limited exploration of contributing factors in some cases.

EP experiences suggest that in relation to reduced school attendance there can still be a tendency to:

- quickly provide support for anxiety without understanding the underlying cause/context and that it can be linked to other areas e.g., physical needs, learning needs, loss and bereavement, medical/health needs.
- not always fully explore whether the worries are appropriate and expected for the age/stage or context
- categorise reduced school attendance as SEMH, with this often being cited as the primary area of need
- have worry/anxiety as the sole focus of any approaches/interventions
- some adults around the pupil thinking the solution lies within the child or young person, e.g., they need to be 'more resilient' opposed to all working together to create an environment they feel safe and secure in

The use of anxiety cycle models can be helpful; they can support understanding of how people experience anxiety and the implications it has for being able to access learning/education. It is still important to consider whether worries/anxiety is a contributing factor in reduced school attendance for pupils and an area where support is required.

However, caution should be taken about how quickly the language around and models of anxiety are used. Corcoran & Kelly (2022) suggested that 'emotionally based or anxiety-based terms' are misleading as many of the young people suggested that their mental health difficulties arose after difficulties in their social, physical or learning environment'. Therefore, suggesting that key supportive factors will be earlier/accurate identification of underlying needs and implementation of targeted intervention, minimising the impact and feelings of worry/anxiety and being overwhelmed.

It would be beneficial to use more holistic models of exploration first, including those that consider all broad areas of need, the environment and different ecological system levels to identify individual needs and the focus for support/interventions. When exploration is limited in scope, plans may not be needs-led/individualised and support is often delayed, meaning the risk of impact on the child/young person's well-being/emotional experiences is increased. This can lead to heightened feelings, emotions, anxiety and overwhelm for the child/young person making it challenging for them to access education and an increased risk of it becoming embedded. If the emotional impact is prolonged it can have a significant impact on the child/young person's emotional well-being, with recovery approaches and more specialised emotional support then being needed.

Summary

The interaction between SEND and attendance is multifaceted, involving individual needs, environmental contexts, and systemic factors. Ultimately, reduced school attendance is an outcome of unmet needs, and effective responses must focus on identifying and addressing those needs holistically. Progress depends on systemic approaches that build belonging, relational practice, collaboration, and flexibility in schools, alongside recognition of the broader inequalities pupils and families face.

Helpful Resources

Relational Approaches:

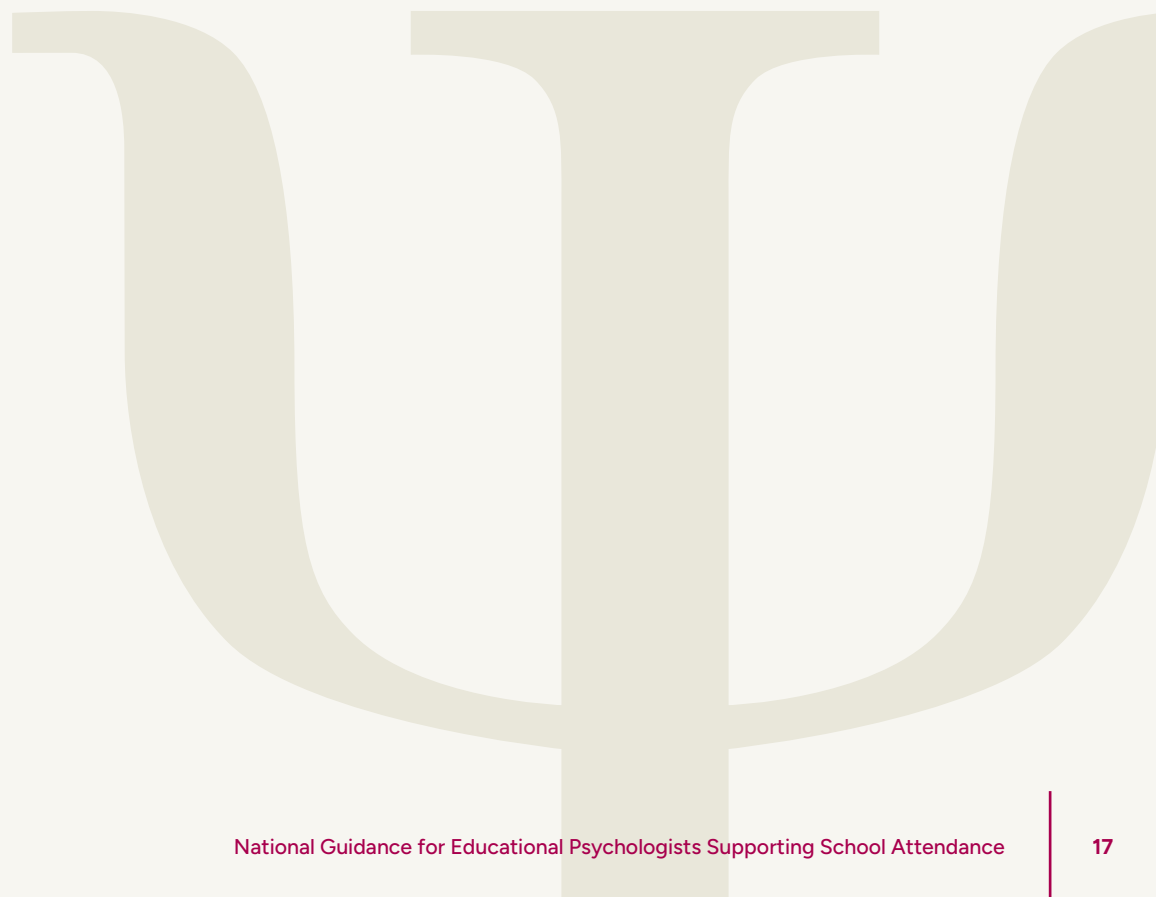
- [A Treasure Box for Creating Trauma-Informed Organizations: A Ready-to-Use Resource for Trauma, Adversity, and Culturally Informed, Infused and Responsive Systems \(Therapeutic Treasures Collection\): Amazon.co.uk: Treisman Clinical Psychologist trainer & author, Dr. Karen: 9781787753129: Books](#)
- [Guidance for developing relational practice and policy – Support for schools and settings](#)
- [Relate to Educate: A Whole Setting Framework for Development – Wakefield Educational Psychology Service](#)

Whole School Approaches/Practice:

- [Attachment & Trauma Aware approaches in education | ARC \(<https://the-arc.org.uk>\)](#)
- [Partnerships for inclusion of neurodiversity in schools \(PINS\) programme – GOV.UK – \(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/partnerships-for-inclusion-of-neurodiversity-in-schools-pins/partnerships-for-inclusion-of-neurodiversity-in-schools-pins-programme>\)](#)
- [Learning About Neurodiversity at School \(LEANS\) | Salvesen Mindroom Research Centre | Salvesen Mindroom Research Centre \(<https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/leans>\)](#)
- [\(PDF\) Outcomes of Good Practice in Transition Process for Children Entering Primary School \(\[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252093921_Outcomes_of_Good_Practice_in_Transition_Process_for_Children_Entering_Primary_School\]\(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252093921_Outcomes_of_Good_Practice_in_Transition_Process_for_Children_Entering_Primary_School\)\)](#)

Exploration and Identification of Needs:

- [Self Determination Theory in the Classroom – Prickett \(2022\) Bing Videos \(<https://youtu.be/hCkGRnD6XTE>\)](#)



Effective Working with Families

A consistent theme across all participating services was the importance of early, respectful, and culturally responsive engagement with families. EPs are uniquely placed to support this work through their systemic lens, consultation skills, and understanding of child development, mental health, and the barriers to education. The approaches described here represent a shared commitment to move toward partnership, equity, and belonging.



Understanding the Parent/Carer Journey

EPs reported a wide range of experiences shared by families of children and young people with school attendance difficulties. Many services are working to understand this journey through co-production, engaging parent/carers forums in the design of guidance, policy, and training.

However, challenges remain:

- **Blamed-based narratives** persist, with terms such as 'soft parenting' used to explain non-attendance, often leading to parent disempowerment.
- **Different Understandings:** Schools and families frequently operate from different understandings, without opportunities for shared reflection. Attribution theory can help explain this, highlighting how differing assumptions can lead to fractured communication.
- **Parent/carers need:** Parents and carers may also be facing their own support needs, including mental health, trauma histories, or systemic disadvantage, which influence their engagement.
- **Cultural differences** can affect how SEND and school non-attendance are perceived. Effective practice must be informed by local demographics, ensuring culturally sensitive and inclusive support.
- **Timely intervention:** EPs are sometimes involved too late, once relationships have broken down and early relational opportunities have been missed.
- **Empathy fatigue** can develop in schools when interventions are not immediately successful. EPs noted that supervision and reflective spaces for school staff can help maintain relational practice.

A consistent theme is the value of shifting from a narrow focus on attendance to one of belonging. When professionals and families work together from a foundation of mutual trust and shared values, they are more likely to develop effective, sustainable solutions.

Support for Families

Families experiencing school non-attendance are supported through a range of local services, though availability and access vary by area. EPs reported the following as key components of support:

Workshops

Workshops sharing psychological theory and strategies with parents and carers can be used to offer psychoeducation and validate difficult experiences, connecting parents and carers with other local families experiencing similar challenges. They can help parents and carers understand the graduated response, what is available in their local area, support their thinking and help them to feel empowered to seek further support for the child/ren. Alternatives might include:

- **EP involvement at coffee mornings** and drop-in sessions for parents/carers to attend.
- **EP-run helplines** (some now discontinued due to capacity) where they can offer parents and carers advice and support.
- **Peer support groups**, both specific to school non-attendance and broader emotional wellbeing. Peer support groups are vital in validating parents and carers thoughts and opinions and can reduce feelings of isolation.
- **General parent groups or coffee mornings** provide support and community, such as parent/carers drop-in sessions where they can feel listened to and can problem solve together to co-create some strategies and next steps.

Liaison with other local authority services is key to join up support and enable consistent messages, for example:

- **SENDIASS** provide families with information, advice, and advocacy.
- **CAMHS** and targeted parent groups.
- **Early Help** services and social care-led interventions.
- **Key workers** coordinating multi-agency input.
- **Rapid response programmes**, linking social care and mental health (e.g. 6-week models).
- **Autism outreach** services offering workshops and tailored support
- **Parent/carers forums** involvement in shaping service delivery

Examples of Successful Approaches

EPs across local authorities have identified evidence-informed strategies rooted in systemic thinking, empathy, and collaboration. These approaches emphasize early intervention, co-production, and relational practice.

Co-Production

Services thrive when parents/carers are treated as equal partners. Co-designing guidance, training, and service models ensures relevance and responsiveness to families' lived experiences.

Relational Consultation

EPs shift from "fixing" to understanding, reframing non-attendance as a signal of unmet needs. Tools like PATH amplify child and family voices, revealing systemic barriers over individual deficits.

Early & Flexible Intervention

Proactive and flexible support reduces pressure and fosters long-term engagement. For example:

- Home-based alternative provision (AP)
- Acceptance of reduced engagement
- Floating TAs for relationship-building

Belonging & Child's Voice

EPs can support parent/carers, schools, and services to reframe attendance in terms of emotional safety and inclusion. EPs help schools to:

- Prioritise the child's lived experience
- Create nurturing environments
- Co-develop reintegration plans

Parent Peer Support

Group work can provide parent/carers with emotional validation and shared problem-solving. EP-led workshops may cover anxiety, trauma, and attachment, empowering parents through connection.

Consistent Presence

Fostering genuine partnerships requires the building of trust over time through ongoing communication and contact, for example through informal drop-ins, coffee mornings, etc.

Cultural & Contextual Awareness

EPs work to ensure that guidance and practice reflect the diverse ways families understand education, SEND, and authority. Fostering mutual understanding means challenging biased narratives, and committing to transparent, respectful communication rooted in dignity, equity, and shared problem-solving. EPs can refer to BPS anti-racist practices guidance and social justice frameworks.

Reflective Conversations

Successful approaches involve slowing down the process, creating space for everyone's experience to be heard. Through multi-agency meetings, MAPs, or family planning discussions, EPs help de-escalate, hold emotional space, and promote thoughtful planning.

Holistic Support Pathways

EPs can work to ensure services are joined-up and that attendance is addressed within a whole-child, whole-family framework. Aligning service enables families to be connected to the right support, such as SENDIAS, CAMHS, Early Help, or Autism Outreach and Rapid Response teams.

Acknowledging Wider Family Impact

This section focuses on how parents and carers are and can be supported, based on feedback gathered during national EP workshops. While the emphasis here is on the parent/carer experience, we recognise that school attendance difficulties can have a wider impact on families, including siblings. These challenges may affect family routines, relationships, and emotional wellbeing. Although this important area was not explored in the workshops that informed this document, we acknowledge its significance and the possibility of further collaborative work at a local level that could be undertaken in the future to address the needs of siblings and the broader family context that would help with signposting/pathways into local support services.

Summary

Effective engagement with parents and carers is fundamental to promoting positive outcomes for children and young people. By engaging families as active partners we can create meaningful solutions that reflect the unique needs and experiences of each family.

Helpful Resources

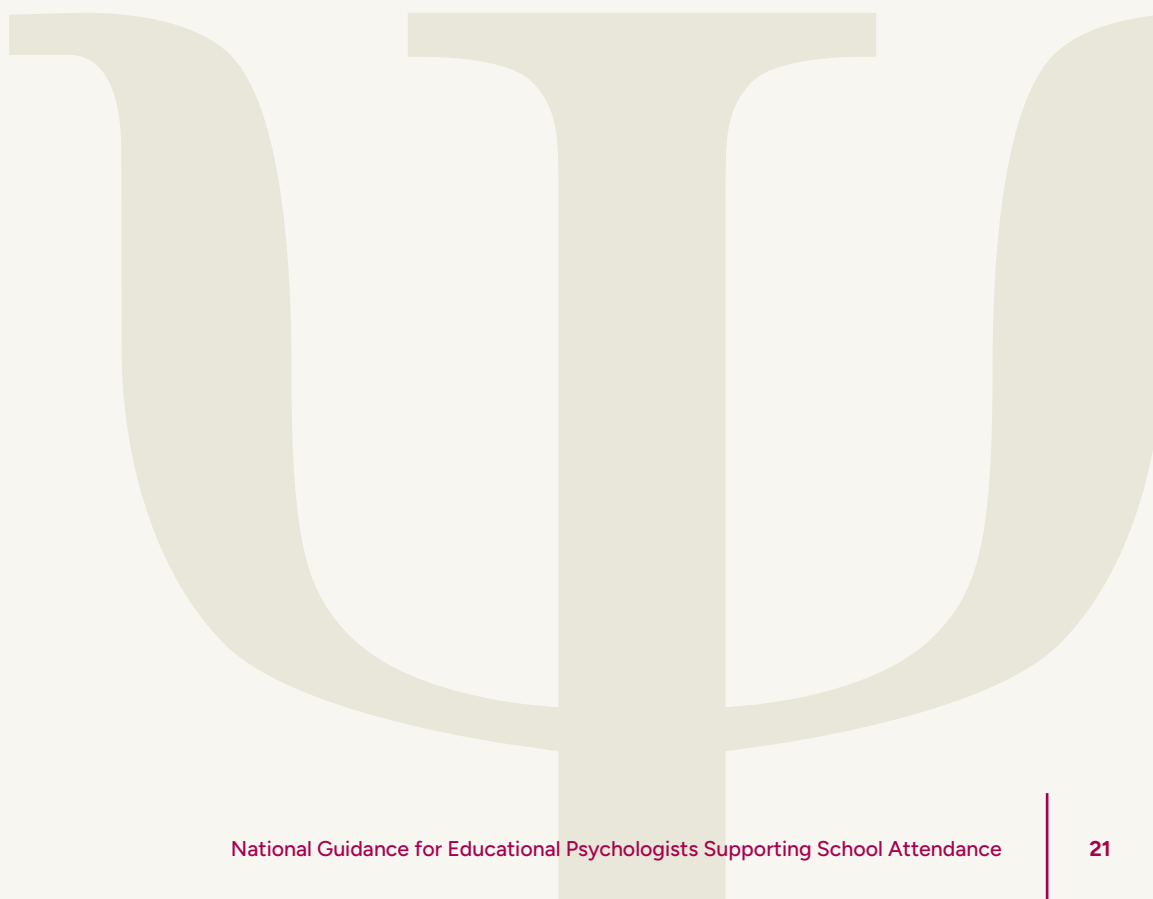
Fricker, E. (2023). *Can't Not Won't: A Story About a Child Who Couldn't Go to School*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Mavir, H. (2022). *Your Child Is Not Broken: Parent Your Neurodivergent Child Without Losing Your Marbles*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Fricker, E. (2020–present). *Missing the Mark* [Blog]. Available at missingthemark.co.uk.

Fisher, N. (2022). *The Trust Test infographic*. [Resource]: Available at https://barrierstoeducation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/The_Trust_Test_infographic_8.pdf

Local Authorities have begun making guidance available to parents/carers through websites or Padlets (e.g. Trafford and Salford).



Effective Multi-Agency Working

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, EPs have become increasingly involved in multi-agency groups, reflecting a broader shift toward collaborative approaches in supporting children and young people. This heightened involvement has been especially evident in the context of school attendance difficulties, where complex needs often require coordinated input from education, health, and social care professionals. EPs have played a crucial role in shaping these through their psychological expertise. As a result, multi-agency working has expanded and deepened for EPs, fostering stronger partnerships and more holistic, child-centered interventions.

EPs can drive systemic, child-centred collaboration by embedding psychological insights into joint working. Key practices identified via the workshops include:

Engagement in multi-agency panels focused on attendance or inclusion

Active involvement of EPs in multi-agency groups and panels (e.g., Section 19/Medical Education panels) facilitates the development of strategic approaches to attendance difficulties which are psychologically informed, and evidence based. It can also enable EPs to provide guidance around which service may be most appropriate to respond to the difficulties, based on the individual's profile of needs.

Participation in local and national interest groups

Through regular meetings, EPs can share up to date research, practice-based evidence and offer peer supervision and support through professional networks. This includes groups of other EPs and multi-agency working groups within and across organisations. This can also reduce duplication of workload where services have developed training or resources which can be shared, alongside sharing learning around what has worked well and not worked well locally.

Shared data analysis

EPs can work with different agencies to analyse attendance data, identifying patterns and risk factors to inform interventions (e.g., working with colleagues from Attendance, and Virtual School Teams).

Share insights on systemic influences

They can also provide perspectives on systemic factors affecting attendance to inform collaborative interventions and commissioning and co-production in service design.

Facilitation of co-production

Through each of these workstreams, EPs can facilitate joined up working between education, health and social care services, and can support commissioning and co-production in service design. Within this, EPs can utilise psychological models, such as the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), to guide decision-making processes.

Development and delivery of training

EPs can support the development of evidence-based training on topics such as school attendance difficulties, relational approaches and neurodiversity. This includes training and support for school staff, parents and carers, and other professionals.

Resource development

EPs can facilitate the commissioning and co-production of resources to support school attendance in their area, such as guidance, toolkits, and training materials, with input from a range of stakeholders and multi-agency partners. These might include resources that strengthen student-adult relationships, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement.

Fostering inter-professional understanding

Through their work at a range of levels (e.g., individual casework, school-level, LA-level), EPs can enhance collective knowledge on attendance and SEND to ensure cohesive support strategies, including prioritisation of relational safety and the importance of trust and connection in addressing attendance issues. EPs could also facilitate this through the offer of training and supervision to other teams (e.g., outreach workers).

Strengthening Home-School Partnerships

As detailed within the previous section, EPs play a valuable role in working alongside multi-agency colleagues to facilitate and strengthen effective home-school partnerships.

Overcoming Common Barriers

Through the series of workshops, EPs also identified several ways in which to overcome common challenges in multi-agency working:

1. Reducing Siloed Working

Develop joint protocols and processes

Establish agreements that promote information sharing and coordinated efforts across agencies. This could include shared development days, toolkits, and facilitating training for other teams.

Build inter-professional relationships

Foster trust and open communication to break down barriers between services. Use every opportunity to promote effective understanding and support for school attendance difficulties.

Engagement with children and families

Effective co-ordination and information sharing between agencies can reduce duplication (e.g., view seeking, home visits) and can support easier engagement for families with one clear action plan and lead professional.

Develop local working/interest group

With representatives from a range of agencies to co-ordinate processes and messaging across the organisation.

2. Reducing Contradictory Messaging & Myth-busting

Promote consistent communication and terminology

Advocate for unified language and approaches to attendance across all agencies involved, for example through guidance documents, sign-posting, and training opportunities. Support understanding through consultations and conversations with different colleagues.

Ensure coherence in interventions

Align strategies to prevent mixed messages that could confuse or alienate families and students. Where misconceptions or 'myths' are identified, provide supportive signposting and/or training opportunities.

3. Working Efficiently with Time and Resources

Cumulative benefit

A cumulative benefit can be achieved via multi-agency collaboration, through effectively sharing and cascading knowledge and resources, this can reduce the impact on individual workloads and maximise available resources.

Embed psychological input efficiently

Integrate EP involvement into existing structures (e.g., Team around the Child or School meetings, attendance network meetings, PEP reviews) to maximise impact without overburdening staff.

Utilise targeted interventions

Focus efforts where they are most needed to make effective use of limited time and resources.

4. Easing Policy Pressures on Schools

Acknowledge school challenges

Recognise the pressures schools face regarding attendance targets and work collaboratively to address them. Highlight the positive outcomes for staff and students when working relationally to support wellbeing and attendance.

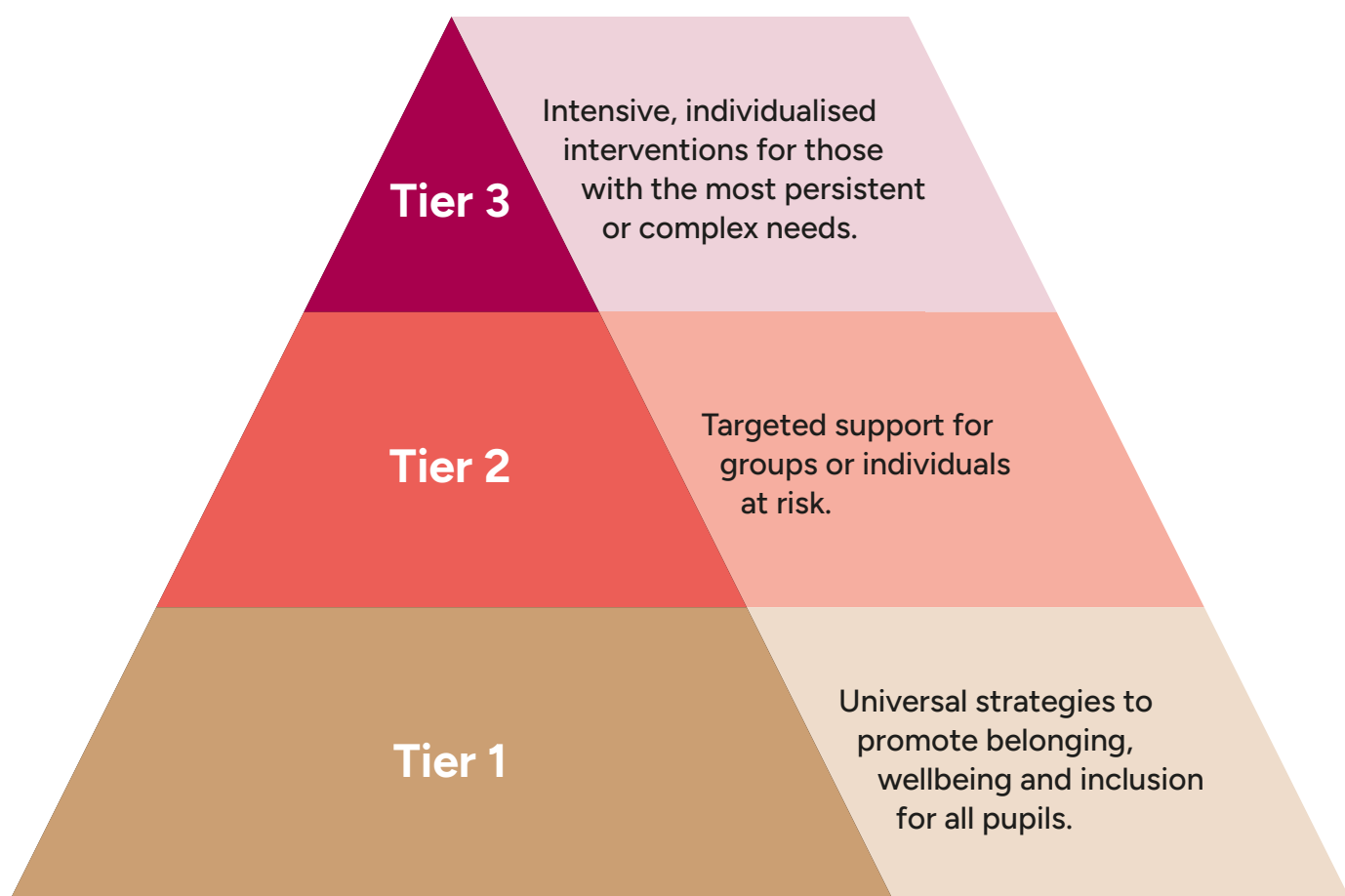
Reframe attendance discussions

Shift the focus from punitive measures to supportive strategies that consider student wellbeing. This could include supporting whole school approaches to attendance and wellbeing, and supporting staff to integrate these into school development plans and processes in a psychologically informed way.

Effective Interventions

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for School Attendance

A useful framework for organising support around school attendance is the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). MTSS is an evidence-informed model that integrates academic, behavioural, and social-emotional interventions across three levels of increasing intensity.



This tiered structure enables schools and services to align resources systematically, monitor impact, and respond proportionately. Given the multifactorial nature of school attendance difficulties, MTSS offers a practical way of embedding early intervention, tailoring support, and ensuring that attendance is addressed as part of wider inclusion and wellbeing.

Tier 1: Universal Support

Strategies for all children and young people to promote belonging, wellbeing and inclusion.

At the universal level, the goal is to create school environments where all children feel safe, included, and engaged. Research shows that strong whole-school cultures of belonging and positive relationships are protective factors against attendance difficulties (Allen & Sims, 2018; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Effective Tier 1 practices include: robust whole school approaches to inclusion and relational practice (e.g. Devon EPS, 2022), inclusive teaching approaches, flexible behaviour policies and pupil surveys (Impact Ed, 2024; Kearney & Graczyck, 2020).

Universal support also encompasses clear communication with families, proactive transition planning, and accessible information about attendance expectations. By embedding relational practice and early identification into everyday school systems, most children and young people are supported to maintain consistent attendance without requiring additional intervention.

An underlying message is that it is everybody's job to improve attendance (DfE, 2022) – this means it is everybody's job to foster belonging and inclusion, and it shouldn't rely on a handful of key staff in school. Government systems (e.g., Ofsted) are encouraged to recognise and reward schools for fostering a culture of belonging and inclusivity (Bond et al., 2024).

Effective Tier 1 strategies include:

- Whole-school approaches to inclusion and relational practice (e.g. Devon EPS Guidance). A positive school culture is essential for attendance (ImpactEd, 2024; Bond et al., 2024).
- Inclusive teaching, flexible behaviour policies, and regular pupil surveys (ImpactEd, 2024; Kearney & Graczyck, 2020).
- Clear communication with families and accessible attendance information.
- Regular pupil surveys to understand pupil experiences and inform support (e.g. BeeWell, ImpactEd, 2024; Kearney & Graczyck, 2020).
- Broad curricula, extracurriculars, and breakfast clubs to foster engagement (Centre for Social Justice, 2023).
- Proactive transition planning.

- Frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory, which are familiar to EPs, can support development work in this area.

Key principles:

Coproduction

Coproducing whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing ensures environments and systems that are supportive and inclusive (Soan et al., 2024).

Relationships

Building strong relationships with young people, parents/carers and supporting staff is key (Boaler & Bond, 2023; Education, Endowment Foundation, 2022; Centre for Social Justice, 2023). This ensures support plans can be genuinely co-developed if difficulties arise and enables their voices must be central to understanding needs and shaping interventions (Demkowicz et al., 2021; Heyne et al., 2024; Corcoran, Bond & Knox, 2022).

Data

Attendance data should be used proactively to identify and address barriers at individual, family, and community levels (Heyne et al., 2024; ImpactEd, 2024; Wood et al., 2024). For example, identifying high-risk times of the week or year (using attendance data and pupil surveys) as well as at-risk groups. ImpactEd (2024) Understanding Attendance Report, based on surveys from over 30,000 young people and attendance data for over 200,000 pupils, highlighted that certain groups face multiple, intersecting challenges that disproportionately affect their school attendance: Children and young people's experiences are not independent, but interconnected. Considering a student's overlapping identities – such as gender, poverty, and disability – provides a more holistic picture of the barriers affecting their attendance. Planning support proactively using this data can have positive effects (please see Case Study 8: Oldham Council).

Tier 2: Targeted Support

Support for pupils with emerging attendance difficulties or increased risk.

Tier 2 interventions provide additional support for pupils who are beginning to experience emerging attendance difficulties or who are at greater risk due to identified needs. These supports are typically small-group or individualised, but still operate within the mainstream school environment. Examples include mentoring programmes, targeted social-emotional interventions, structured peer support, and flexible reintegration plans following absence.

Evidence suggests that building strong connections between school staff, families, and pupils at this stage can prevent escalation and reduce the likelihood of persistent absence (Elliott & Place, 2019). Importantly, Tier 2 work should be collaborative and co-produced, ensuring that pupil and family voices are central to planning. Regular monitoring and review help schools to adapt provision and sustain progress.

Effective Tier 2 strategies include:

- Robust systems for early identification and intervention to provide support as soon as risks emerge. Early, tailored interventions are far more effective than delayed, generic ones (Bond et al., 2024; Pellegrini, 2007).
- To support this teachers need training in mental health and SEND to better identify and respond to emotional needs, support students using inclusive practices (Children's Commissioner, 2023; Sawyer & Collingwood, 2023; Bond et al., 2024).
- Strong relationships between staff, families, and pupils at this stage can prevent escalation and reduce persistent absence (Elliott & Place, 2019).
- Support plans should be co-developed with young people and their families. Their voices must be central to understanding needs and shaping interventions (Demkowicz et al., 2023; Heyne et al., 2024).
- Effective attendance support requires coordinated, multi-agency responses tailored to each child's needs (Bond et al., 2024; Children's Commissioner, 2023; Corcoran et al., 2024).

- Useful interventions at tier 2 include: Mentoring programmes, targeted social-emotional interventions, structured peer support, support to catch up missed lessons (including creative access to learning such as use of AV1s from a safe space in school) and flexible reintegration plans following absence.

Key principles:

Ownership

Avoid adult-led assumptions when exploring barriers and supportive factors, plans are more effective when informed and owned by those they affect: "Plans must be informed by and owned by the young person and their family." (Corcoran, Bond & Knox, 2022).

Child-led

Reintegration plans and the building-up of timetables need to be child-led and at an agreed pace with the young person. Pushing too soon and too quickly can have negative outcomes.

Collaborative

A joined-up approach is essential. Support should be tailored to each child's needs and coordinated across services (Bond et al., 2024; Children's Commissioner, 2023; Corcoran et al., 2024).

Meaningful relationships

Mentors play a key role in Tier 2. The Centre for Social Justice (2022) highlights the success of School-Home-Support practitioners. Effective mentoring should be: Embedded within the school context; Capable of building long-term relationships; Not limited to short-term or unfamiliar adult involvement. Examples include: Student support champions, Check & Connect, and attendance mentors via Early Help or non-statutory agencies (Boaler & Bond, 2023; Bond et al., 2024; CSJ, 2023)

Co-Production

Support must be co-produced with children, young people, and their families. Their voices should guide understanding, planning, and implementation. This may include: Use of tools like the Early Identification of Needs Tool (Boaler & Bond, 2023) and SPIRAL to develop holistic support plans and understand parental needs (Sawyer & Collingwood, 2023) to ensure interventions are meaningful and collaborative (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020).

Mental Health and Emotional Support

Targeted mental health support is essential for pupils at risk of non-attendance. Examples include: Allocation of a key adult/dedicated pastoral support, social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes (1:1 or small group), access to mental health professionals (e.g. Mental Health Support Team, school based counsellors).

Local Authority (LA) Guidance on EBSA/ barriers to attendance

Many LAs have developed guidance to support schools in addressing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), especially post-COVID. EPs are well placed to provide a psychological perspective and support with wider application (e.g. training, solution circles). A recent review of UK LA EBSA guidance documents aimed to establish what advice LAs were providing for schools (Hammond-Price et al., 2025). The review analysed 48 LA guidance documents and consultation with an expert group, the analysis also led to the creation of an evaluation matrix to support LAs with future guidance development (please see Appendix 3). This aims to provide a flexible, reflective tool to stimulate discussion about the development of effective guidance whilst overcoming challenges such as effective facilitation of joint working.



Tier 3: Intensive Support

Support for children and young people with extended or complex attendance difficulties.

Tier 3 interventions are designed for pupils with extended attendance difficulties, often linked to complex needs such as mental health challenges, trauma, or systemic barriers. These supports are highly individualised and may involve alternative provision and multi-agency collaboration. Tier 3 interventions should remain relational and strengths-based, with a focus not only on increasing attendance but on restoring trust, promoting wellbeing, and supporting sustainable engagement in education.

This includes consideration of whether attendance in a school is always the best option for an individual child, and the suggested need to work on engagement, rather than attendance (Heyne et al, 2024). In contrast to traditional approaches which place emphasis on a return to school, Jerricah Holder's Rediscovery Model (Holder, 2023) highlights that in some circumstances, young people may require a period of recovery in which they are not expected to attend a setting. Holder outlines the need for recovery, followed by time to reconnect in safe relationships and rediscover their curiosity, prior to reengagement.

Effective Tier 3 strategies include:

- Child-centred, personalised, flexible support plans (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022; Kearney & Graczyk, 2020).
- To support autistic pupils, use of 'A checklist for professionals when supporting autistic pupils with extended non-attendance' ([Claire Neilson's Barriers to Education Checklist \(autism specific\)](#) – Barriers to Education) which was developed from participatory research into effective practice from the perspective of young people and their parents and highlights the importance of taking things at young people's pace and relational approaches (Neilson & Bond, 2023)
- Collaboration should be proactive, with clear roles, shared goals, and joint planning. This may require more creative meeting formats (e.g. MAPS or PATHS – see Outcomes section – to unstick very 'stuck' perspectives or situations).
- Intensive relational work, to build safe, trusting relationships with key staff, mentors, mental health practitioners or home education tutors.

- Giving time for respite and recovery, removing the pressure, reconnecting through safe relationships, rediscovering curiosity, reengaging with the world (Holder, 2023).
- Focus on engagement, supporting learning wherever it occurs best (Heyne et al., 2024). This may include Telepresence (Fletcher et al., 2024), hybrid learning (Havik & Ingul, 2022), off-site provision or therapeutic settings, Alternative Provision (Brouwer-Borghuis et al., 2019; Bond et al., 2024; Moynihan in progress). or home tuition for some learners (Paulauskaite et al., 2022; O'Hagan, Bond & Hebron, 2021).
- Provision should be tailored to the pupil's needs and reviewed regularly to support reintegration where possible. Schools should remain part of the review process (this may be via a lead professional if preferred).
- Integration of specialist services, often requiring a key professional to act as a key point of contact between the family, school and supporting services. Agencies may include: Attendance Teams, Educational Psychology, CAMHS or mental health services, Early Help, Social Care.
- Staff need specialist training to deliver Tier 3 interventions effectively. Focus areas include: Trauma-informed practices, systemic approaches to EBSA and use of reflective tools and guidance (Boaler et al., 2024; Hammond-Price et al., 2025).
- Telepresence and Assistive Technology. Tools like the AV1 robot are increasingly used to help pupils stay connected during phased reintegration. However, schools may need support to implement these tools effectively. Benefits include:
 - Maintaining relationships with teachers and peers
 - Reducing isolation
 - Supporting confidence and gradual re-engagement

EPs play a key role in embedding technology within psychologically informed frameworks (Fletcher et al., 2024; Neumann et al., 2025). Please see Case Study 2.

Key principles:

- Prioritise emotional safety and trust: Tier 3 support must be grounded in trauma-informed approaches and strong relational practice.
- Avoid punitive responses to non-attendance, which can potentially undermine home-school relationships.
- Use consistent, compassionate and positive communication.
- To facilitate sustained engagement, ensure young people can build long-term relationships with consistent key adults.
- Provide support for parents/carers, to acknowledge the wider impact on families and parental mental health (Onslow and Cartmell, 2025, Dilkes in progress). Provide support to address practical barriers (e.g. transport, housing, uniform, routines)
- Celebrate small wins and progress in re-engaging with education. In 'stuck' situations be guided by young people's steps towards engagement and their aspirations.
- Plan for reintegration (this may need to be the next phase of education) with clear goals and support.



Outcomes and how to measure them

Children and young people live in complex systems, and as such there are many maintaining factors and barriers, as well as strengths and areas of good practice that have the potential to change the nature and experience of school-based non-attendance.

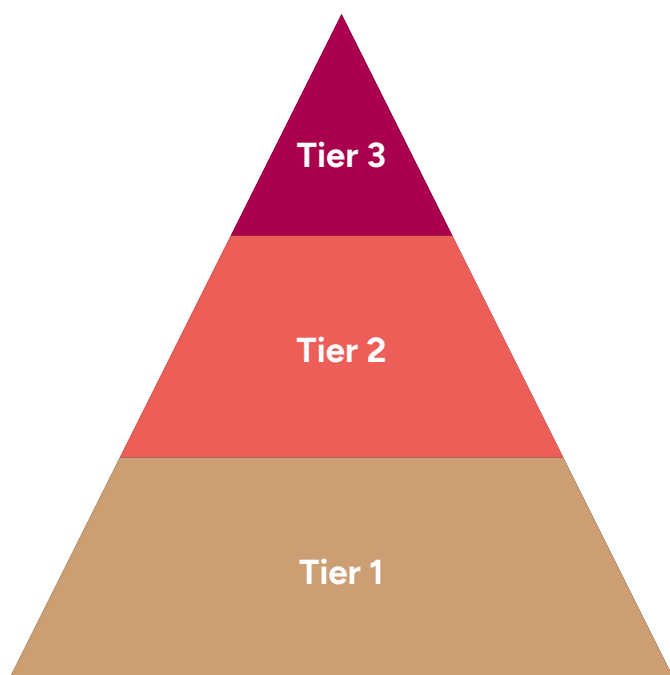
Measuring the outcome of any exploration into issues creating barriers to intervention is a complex endeavour, and some of the factors that can affect school non-attendance are listed in chapter 2. These factors, where they are relevant, may also be useful in the measurement of outcomes for change.

The first question when considering choosing measures is how do we begin to establish the interconnected nature of problems and maintaining factors, whilst working with areas of strength and best chance for change?

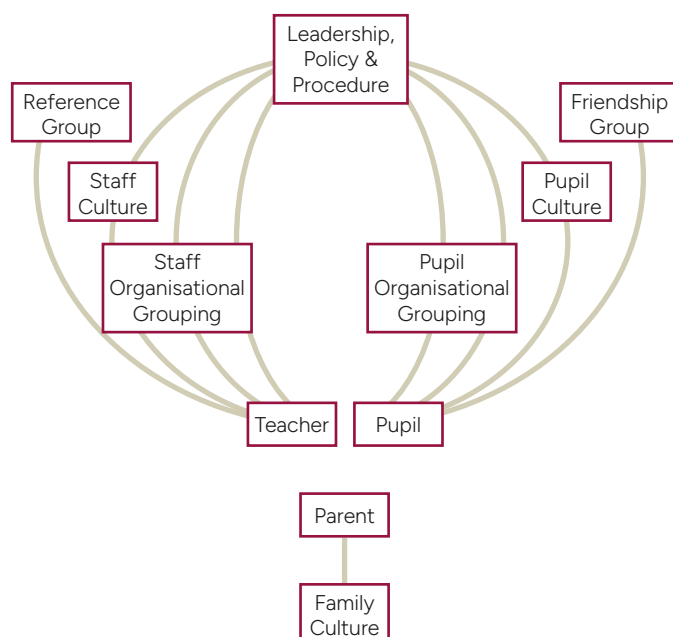
Adopting a systemic model that maps change and outcome measurement in school non-attendance

School non-attendance is very rarely the result of a single factor, and as such, systemic models are far more likely to account for the complexities of the issues involved. Outcomes measurement could be mapped via different psychological systems theories, such as Bronfenbrenner ecological system's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Miller & Leyden's Coherent Framework model (Miller and Leyden, 1999) or Kearney and Graczyk's Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model (see chapter 4).

Kearney and Graczyk's Multi-Tiered System Framework of Supports model



Application of Psychology in Schools - Miller and Leyden's Coherent model



Such systemic models have the common approach of widening the scope from a focus on child or young person perceived 'skill deficits' or a problem outcomes focus to consider the interactive factors involved. Additionally, they include the power of positive environmental supports that can be leveraged to achieve change.

In the national seminars, Educational Psychologists agreed that the following factors were most important in selecting outcome measures in school non-attendance work:

- Evidence base
- How it captures change in the child or young person's environment or systems
- What factors are meaningful to capture for the child or young person
- The accessibility and age appropriateness of any measure
- The child or young person's sense of belonging
- The child or young person's strengths
- Their intrinsic motivation
- Children and young people, staff and parent views

Engaging parents is frequently as crucial as engaging the child or young person themselves (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022) and provides insight into mechanisms of change as well as overall intervention effectiveness (e.g. parental confidence in interventions, as well as their views around barriers and facilitators to attendance or accessing education).

Using a variety of tools, including both quantitative and qualitative methods is also recommended, especially given there can be a discrepancy between child and parent reports of mental health related needs (Ivarsson, T., Skarphedinnsson, G., Andersson, M. et al., 2018).

The use of attendance figures

Attendance figures are a broad measure and can be useful at a commissioning level, for example, Local Authorities are beginning to use local data to explore intersectionality predictors and identify vulnerable groups at transition points. For example, Oldham Council have used this successfully to improve attendance at the Year 6 to 7 transition and are beginning to use data intelligently to target support for children starting school.

However, such data are generally not so useful for measuring individual or group progress. Attempted use of population wide data such as attendance figures may create additional pressure and dissatisfaction as they may only reveal progress in the final stages of intervention.

The DfE (2025) is encouraging schools to move away from broad attendance categories and instead use a banded approach. Attendance is broken down into 5% bands to: provide greater insight and understanding of attendance patterns; to inform attendance strategy; and to provide finer grained measures of impact (moving between 5% bands is more achievable and motivating than aiming to move from severe absence to full time attendance). This has been used effectively to support smaller and more targeted increases in attendance, for example at the second level of Kearney and Graczyck's Multi-tiered System of Supports model.

The screenshot shows a 'Student Overview' table with columns for Student Name, Roll, Stage, PA, DfE Band, Year, Tutor, G, PP, EAL, SEND, YC, CLA, and Attendance % (Att, YTD, Absen, Auth, UnAt, L, U, Poss, Pref). A red circle highlights the 'DfE Band' column, which contains values like 'B3 [10-15]', 'B9 [40-45]', 'B3 [10-15]', 'B2 [5-10]', 'B1 [0-5]', 'B3 [10-15]', 'B5 [20-25]', 'B2 [5-10]', 'B3 [10-15]', 'B5 [20-25]', 'B2 [5-10]', 'B3 [10-15]', 'B2 [5-10]', 'B1 [0-5]', 'B2 [5-10]', 'B3 [10-15]', 'B2 [5-10]', 'B1 [0-5]', 'B2 [5-10]', 'B1 [0-5]', 'B4 [15-20]'. The table also includes a 'Student Actions (0)' button, 'Columns', and 'Export' options. At the bottom, it shows '250 items per page' and '1 of 5 pages (1041 items)'.

Absence DfE Banding Reports

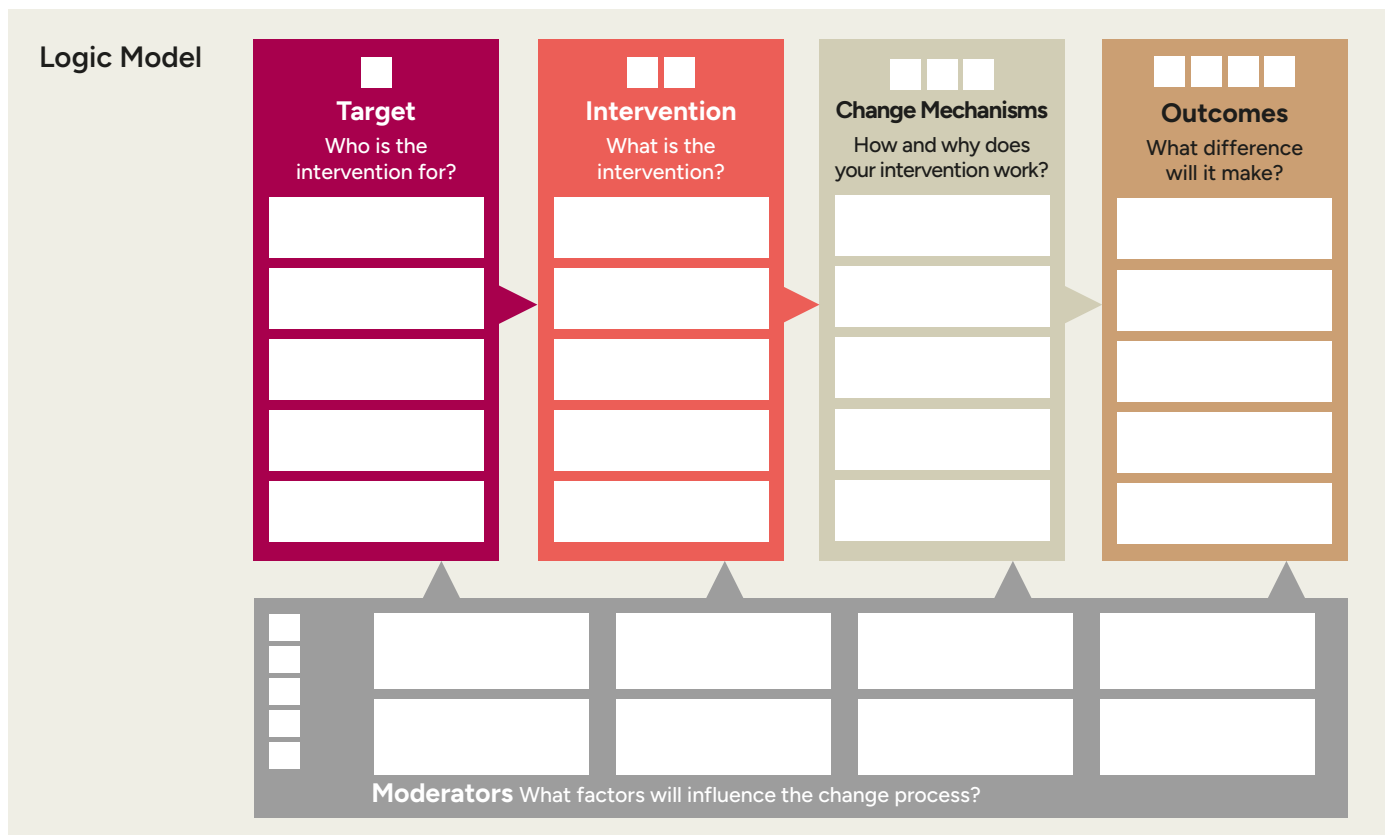
Approaches to baselining and measuring outcomes

Prior to trialling any approach, the following foundational questions are important for any outcome measurement:

1. Does it work?
2. When does it work?
3. For whom does it work?

4. How does it work?
5. How do we know?

Logic models can support in the planning of interventions and outcome measurement, such as the editable framework provided by the Centre for Research Outcomes.



What does success look like?

EPs attending the national seminars felt that success in supporting school non-attendance included the following:

- A better understanding of needs
- Shifts in attitudes and policy
- The young person and their family feel listened to
- The young person feels safer and happier in education
- Integrated Multiagency working
- Sustained positive change
- Schools able to implement and sustain training

Each of these factors would be suitable outcome measures in any approach to increasing attendance.

Success measured against co-produced outcomes

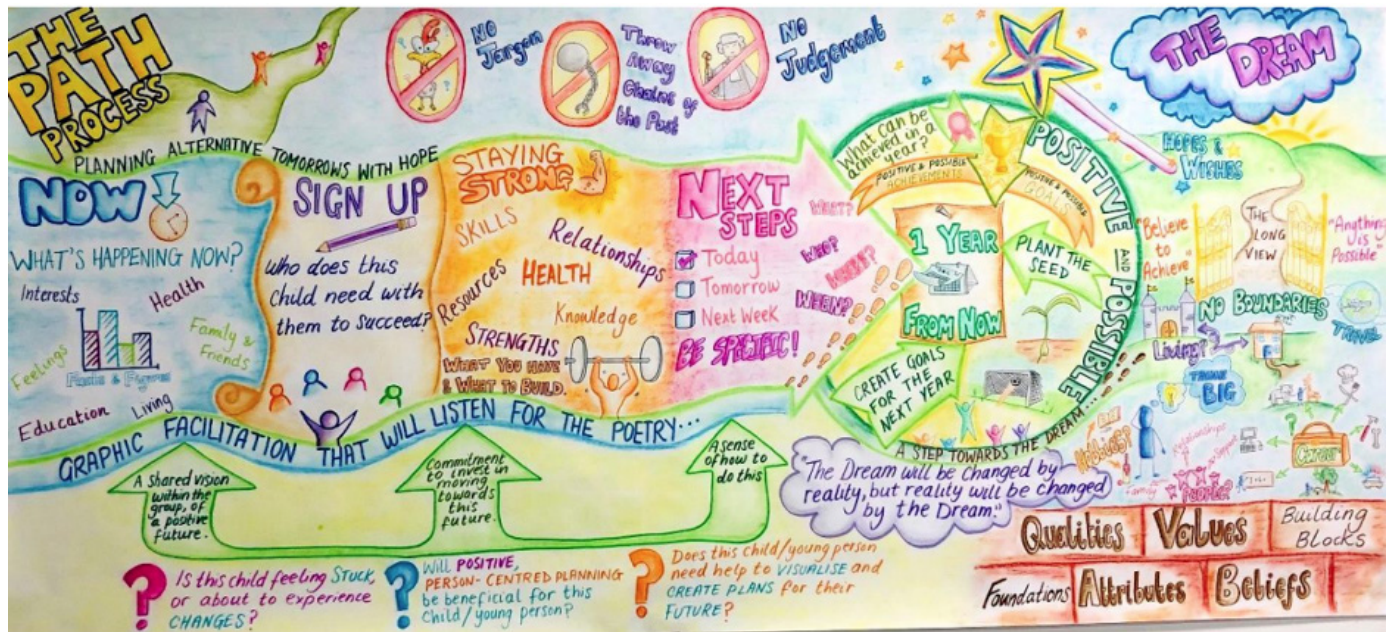
TME

Target Monitoring Evaluation (TME) (Dunsmuir 2009) is an outcome methodology that allows a group to set qualitative measures and record quantitative values for outcomes. TME is a way of actively involving everyone consulted in the action planning process in a way that maximises commitment to action. Derbyshire and Derby City used this in their attendance project; see the case study below.

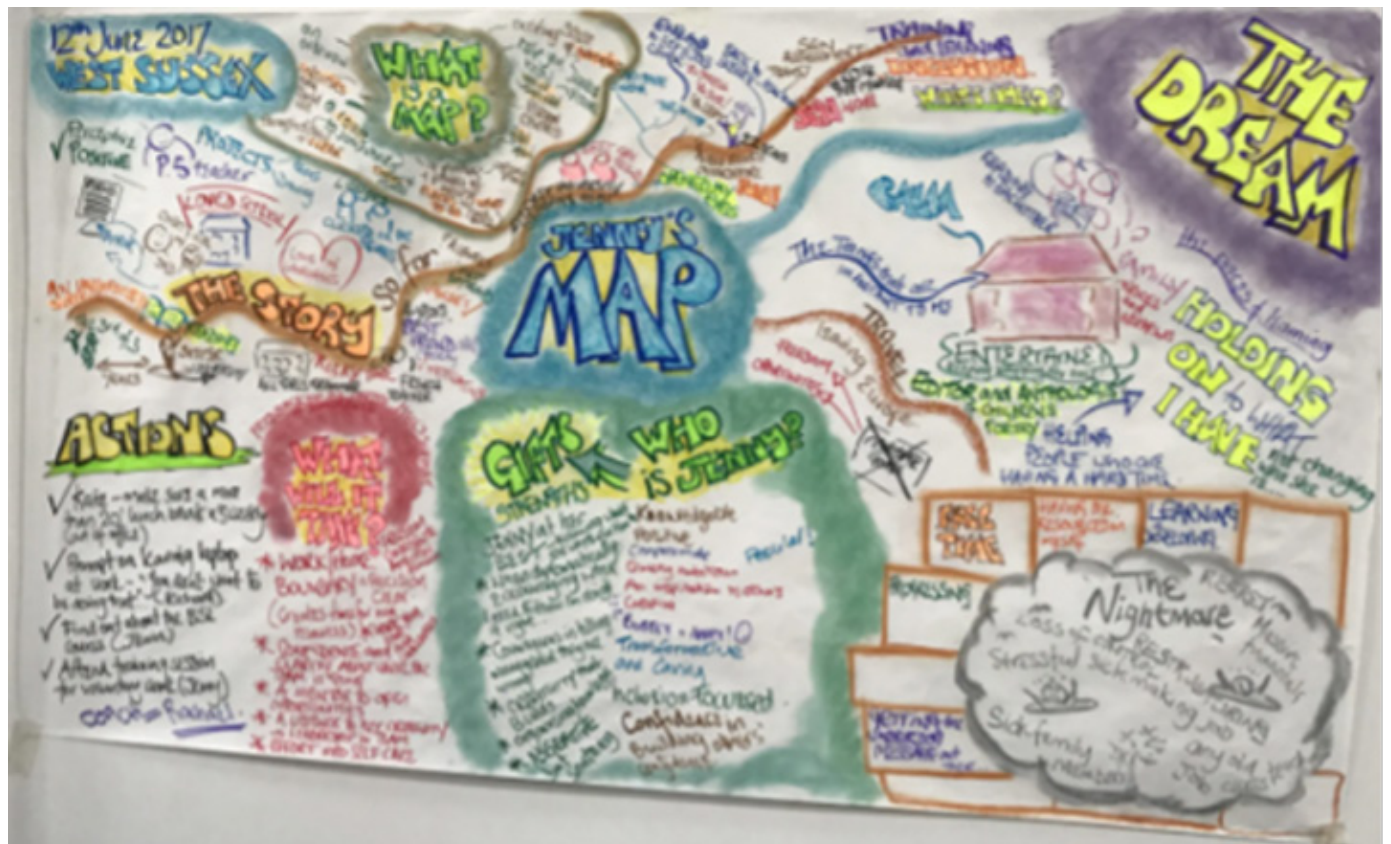
Person Centred Tools

PATHs, MAPs, and other person centred tools can be used to ensure that each participant is able to contribute towards thinking, and to have a say in outcomes and how these are monitored.

What is a PATH?



What is a MAP?

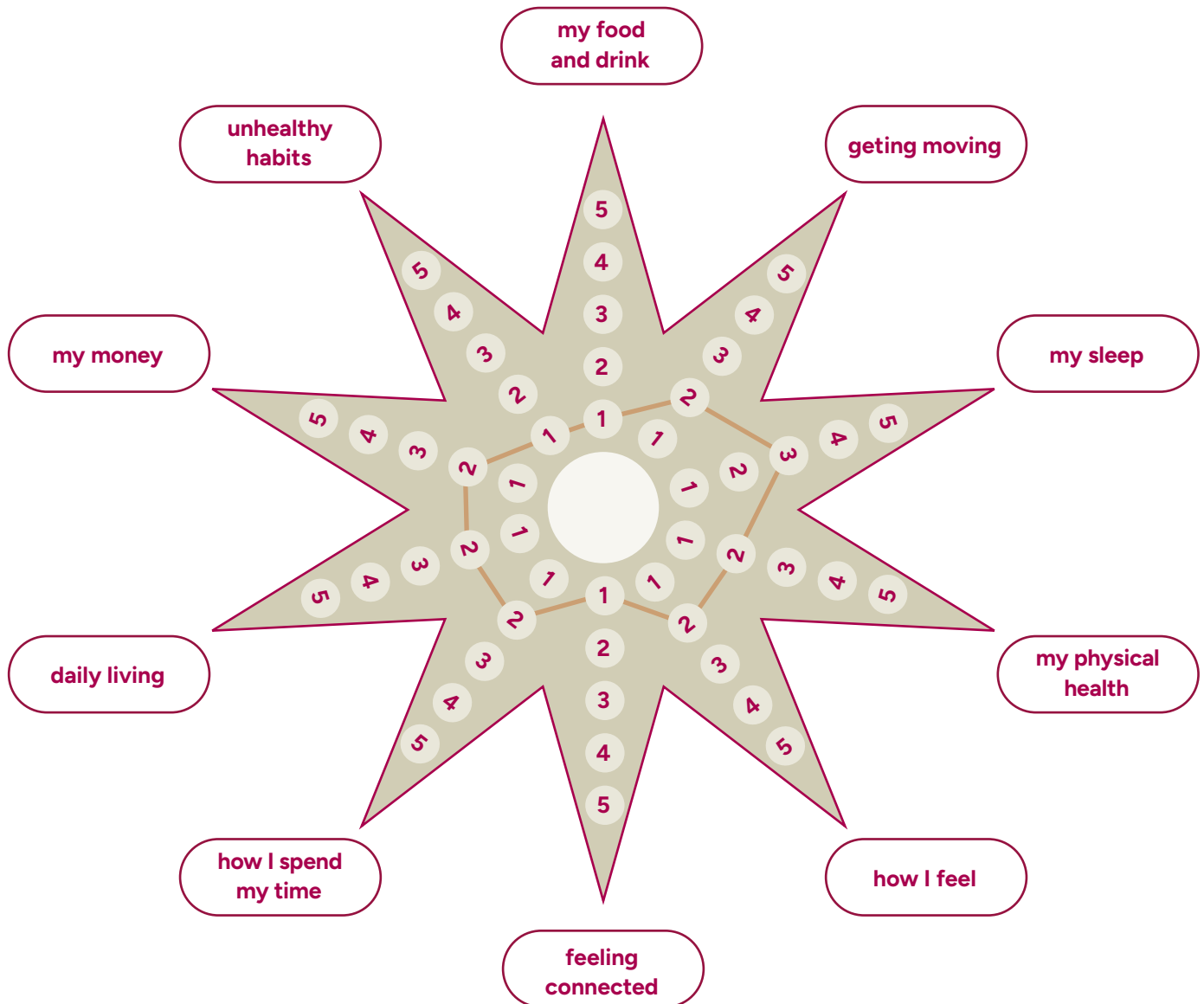


Acknowledgements to [Suffolk EPS](#) for the PATH image, [Inclusive Solutions](#) and [West Sussex MAP and PATH processes](#), [Person-Centred Planning: PATH, MAPS, and Circles of Support](#) – Inclusion Press.

Outcomes Star

Outcomes Star is a validated scale that has been used in community settings with vulnerable children and young people. It is a scale that is paid for, although it is worth reading about how it can be used: [For Life Coaching with young offenders and Is Outcomes Star right for you? – Outcomes Star](#)

For example:



The case studies at the end of this document include examples of:

- Using young people's views to establish how wellbeing is supported at school, through coproducing whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing
- Using engagement scores across the week
- The intelligent use of data to inform risk at transition
- Using TME as part of a LA wide attendance project

Validated scales

Below are examples of validated scales available that may be useful, particularly when conducting research or more detailed baseline work:

- **Whole school and college approach to mental health** – [Whole School and College Approach \(WSCA\) Measurement Toolkit – WSCA](#)
- **The short Warwick Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale (SWEMWBS)**: A within-child scale that looks at optimism, connectedness and problem solving ability. Strong internal consistency with Chronbach Alpha score of 0.89/0.90 with moderate to high test-retest reliability
- **The Wellbeing measurement Framework for primary schools (EBPU)**: A suite of scales suitable for 9-11 year olds
- **Me and My Feelings scale**: Good internal reliability ($\alpha=0.82$) but different subscales vary on their internal consistency
- **Students' Life Satisfaction scale**: Reasonable internal consistency ($\alpha=0.74$), test retest 0.82
- **Student Resilience Survey**: A helpful scale that indicates where solutions may lie, with good construct validity
- **Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS)**: A within child scale that looks at symptomology. Generally considered reliable with internal consistency measured by a Chronbach Alpha score of 0.70+ and good test-retest reliability

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Appendix 1

National workshop series

(November 2024 to March 2025)

With thanks to workshop hosts: Rachel Lyons (Salford EPS), Melissa Jones (Staffordshire EPS), Gemma Holmes (Staffordshire EPS), James Wood (Wiltshire EPS), Shannon Hatton-Corcoran (Trafford EPS), and Faye Hingley (Worcestershire EPS).

	Guest presenter	Date	Attendees
1) Standardising the name and defining the scope of the school non-attendance issue related to emotion/refusal	Ellie Costello (Square Peg)	14/11/2024	29
2) The research evidence base and capturing good practice	Prof. Caroline Bond (University of Manchester)	05/12/2024	56
3) Outcomes and how to measure them		26/11/2024	47
4) Addressing the issue of unmet SEN and neuro-diversity needs		16/01/2025	72
5) Practice-based evidence and effective working with parents	Beth Bodycote (Not Fine in School)	28/01/2025	69
6) Effective multiagency working	Shannon Hatton-Corcoran (Trafford EPS)	13/02/2025	73

Service representation across the workshop series:

Local Authorities

- Barnet
- Bathnes
- Birmingham
- Blackburn
- Blackpool
- Bracknell Forest
- Brighton and Hove
- Bristol
- Camden
- Cardiff
- Cheshire West and Chester
- Cornwall
- Croydon
- Cumbria
- Denbighshire
- Derby
- Derbyshire
- Devon
- Dorset
- Durham
- Enfield
- Flintshire
- Gateshead
- Gwynedd
- Hackney
- Harrow
- Hartlepool
- Hounslow
- Islington
- Kingston and Richmond (Achieving for Children)
- Kirkless
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Leeds
- Leicestershire
- Lewisham
- Liverpool
- Luton
- Manchester (One Education)
- Medway
- Milton Keynes
- Monmouthshire
- Newcastle upon Tyne
- Newham
- Norfolk
- North Lincolnshire
- North Northamptonshire
- Northumberland
- North Yorkshire
- Nottingham City
- Neath Port Talbot
- Portsmouth County
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- Richmond and Wandsworth
- Rotherham
- Salford
- Sandwell
- Solihull
- Southampton
- South Gloucestershire
- Southwark
- Staffordshire
- Stockport
- Stoke on Trent
- Suffolk
- Sutton (Cognus)
- Tameside
- Torbay
- Torfaen
- Trafford
- Wakefield
- Warwickshire
- West Berkshire
- Westmorland and Furness
- Wigan
- Wiltshire
- Worcestershire
- Wokingham
- York

Organisations

- Not Fine in School
- Odgers Psychology
- Spectrum Gaming
- Square Peg
- University of Manchester

Appendix 2

Case Studies

Case Study 1. Guidance

Combining research and lived-experience into good practice: **Barriers to Education**, (Bond, C., Munford, L., Birks, D. et al., 2024)

Through their work with autistic young people and families, Spectrum Gaming (an autistic-led UK charity) and a regional Educational Psychologist interest group identified a gap in current school attendance (EBSA) guidance. They found existing approaches were not meeting the needs of neurodivergent young people with severe or entrenched attendance difficulties and wanted to develop more proactive strategies to prevent problems before they arise.

This coincided with a time of growing parent/carer voices (especially online), new research, and increased media attention – alongside attendance being a top priority for the Department for Education. In response the **Barriers to Education** project was launched. Its aim is to co-produce an evidence-based toolkit for families, schools, and services that is practical, aspirational, and includes both preventative and reactive approaches. This toolkit will inform Local Authority guidance and promote inclusive education across Greater Manchester and beyond.

The Barriers to Education working group is made up of a wide range of multi-agency professionals and experts through lived experience including a parent community, young people's group, and a panel of national experts. While primarily based on autistic/neurodivergent experiences across Greater Manchester, there are representatives from across the country within the steering group and the guidance has been written with all young people in mind.

There are four Key Acknowledgements that underpin the Barriers to Education approach:

1. Young people are internally driven to do well.
2. We need the right approach for ALL young people.
3. The right support, in the right place, at the right time.
4. Recognising the purpose of education.

This philosophy applies to everyone:

- Families are trying their best, but there are a wide range of factors that can impact on young people's attendance. Attendance difficulties are often complex and multi-faceted.
- Professionals who are working their hardest often feel limited in what they can do in a schooling/ healthcare system that is so stressed.
- Young people are doing the best that they can but there are barriers that are preventing them from accessing education.
- When we look through a lens of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2019), we can focus on listening, understanding and support, rather than using blame and judgement, which can exacerbate stress.
- From this mindset we can address the issues surrounding school attendance with **WARMTH**.

Through their coproduction process, the project developed the **WARMTH Framework** – the six foundations to reduce barriers to education, combining research with lived experiences. It has been shared at national conferences and adopted by EP services such as Salford, Trafford and Wirral. WARMTH stands for:

Wellbeing First: Prioritising wellbeing to enable learning and attendance. The understanding that young people are at their best when we prioritise their wellbeing.

Affirming Practice: Accepting and accommodating differences for equity. Everyone is different, and this difference is part of natural human variation. Affirming practice means moving towards approaches that accept and accommodate for all differences, whether young people have a diagnosis or not.

Relational Approach

A relational approach means supporting young people from a foundation of trusting relationships and addressing the underlying reasons behind observable behaviours. Adopting a relational approach doesn't mean having no rules or expectations.

Mutual Support and Partnership

Collaborative working for best outcomes. There can be tension between schools, families and other services when things feel very 'stuck'. This part of the framework is about how we can work together, with the knowledge that we are all working together to try and achieve the same thing: the best possible outcomes for young people.

Timely Response

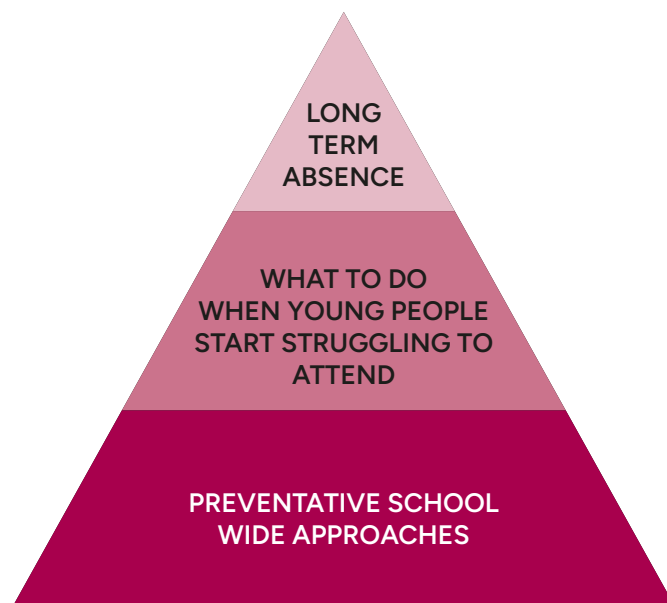
Acting early to prevent escalation. Identifying and responding to the problems that young people face at the earliest opportunity, providing the right support at the most effective time. Professionals must take family concerns seriously and act quickly. The quicker support is offered when concerns are identified, the less likely young people will reach crisis/experience long term attendance difficulties.

Holistic Support

Addressing complex, systemic issues with whole-family approaches. Attendance has always been a symptom rather than a cause, a manifestation of complex issues across the education system and beyond (Burtonshaw & Dorell, 2023). We need to take a whole family/wider service approach, exploring and addressing young people's needs across all facets of their life, reducing silo working by supporting services.

The framework informs a tiered model of support (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020) aligned with SEND graduated approaches (e.g., DfE & DoH, 2014), covering both whole-school preventative strategies and guidance for when attendance difficulties occur (as shown in the image).

To make the new guidance widely accessible, the group has launched a website: <https://barrierstoeducation.co.uk>. It provides detailed sections on each part of the framework, offering guidance for professionals, families, and young people, along with good practice case studies. This approach aims to help reduce barriers to education by focusing on what works.



Through **WARMTH in Practice**, we aim to grow the website's content collaboratively and build a shared community of good practice. At Barriers to Education, we believe real change comes from sharing stories, practical examples, and creative ideas from those who know these challenges best. We invite young people, parents, carers, and professionals to contribute case studies, lived experiences, and examples of what works. By bringing these voices together, we can inspire others, highlight effective approaches, and create a resource filled with warmth, empathy, and hope. Whether it's a small adjustment, a professional strategy, or your personal journey, we'd love to hear from you: [WARMTH in Practice – Barriers to Education](#)

The Barriers to Education Project and WARMTH Framework was included within the N8's evidence based plan for including school attendance which can be found [here](#).

N8 Report

Bond, C., Munford, L., Birks, D., Shobande, O., Denny, S., Hatton-Corcoran, S., Qualter, P., Wood, M. L., et al (2024). A country that works for all children and young people: An evidence based plan for improving school attendance.

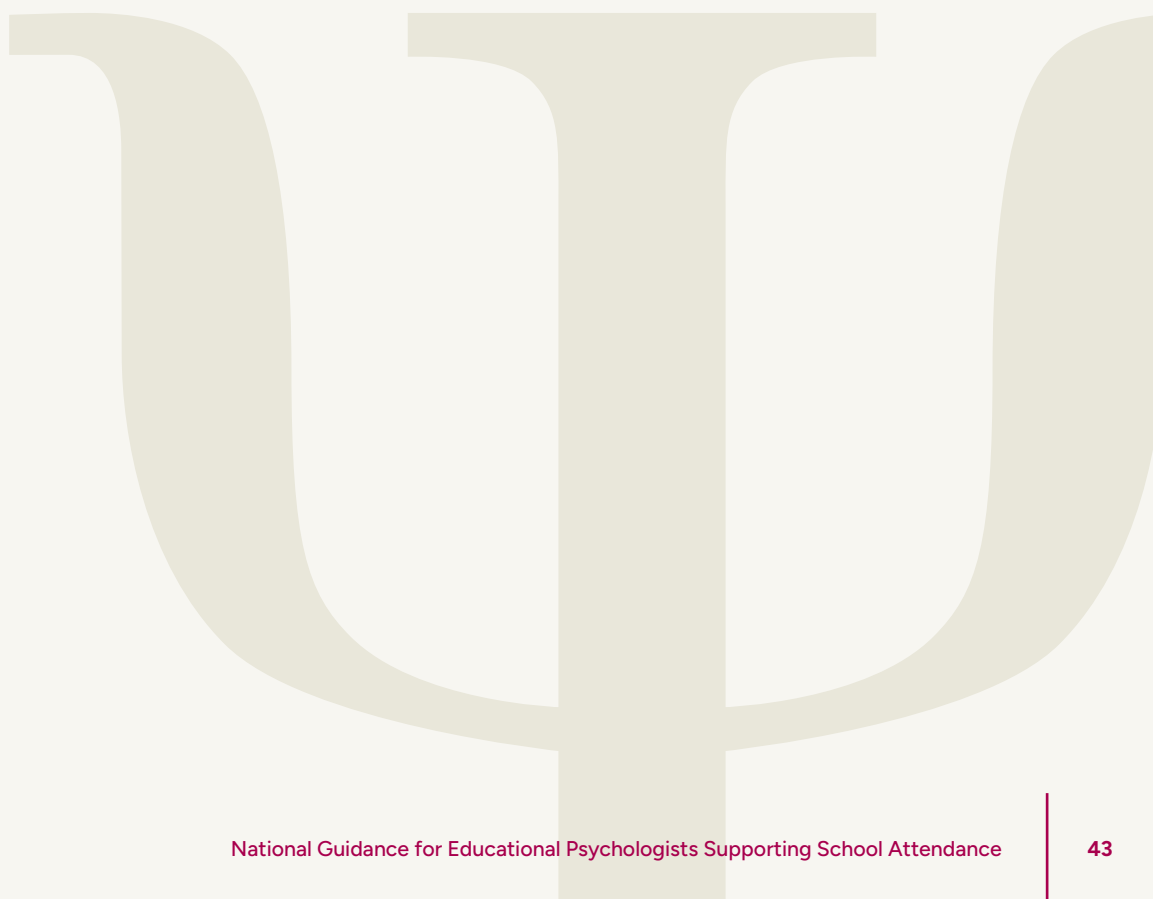
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Kearney, C.A. & Graczyk, P.A. (2020) A multidimensional, multitiered system of supports model to promote school attendance and address school absenteeism. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 23, 316–337



Case Study 2. Intervention

A Local Authority's implementation of telepresence technology to reduce barriers to education (Wirral Educational Psychology Team)

As part of Wirral's approach to supporting barriers to education (see N8 for further information), 12 AV1 devices are available for schools to access to support students who currently do not attend school or do not engage in lessons. Wirral's approach to AV1 use involves embedding this tool within a phased support plan, designed to meet students where they are emotionally and psychologically, and to scaffold their journey back into education.

Wirral EP Team support schools to use the AV1 within the following framework:

1. AV1 Promotes Engagement

- Student uses the AV1 to observe lessons and/or social opportunities.
- Student uses the AV1 to build and/or maintain relationships with staff and peers.

2. AV1 promotes routine

- Student uses the AV1 regularly and consistently as part of a school routine.
- Student is encouraged to interact more via the AV1 e.g., speaking/using the digital expressions.
- The AV1 is used for a combination of learning and social experiences to further promote a sense of belonging.

3. AV1 develops confidence and resilience

- As the student becomes accustomed to the AV1 and shows improved comfortability or confidence, they can then be encouraged to try new experiences e.g., visiting the school.
- Over time, the student then engages with a hybrid timetable i.e. a combination of AV1 streaming and attending lessons in-person.

4. AV1 withdrawal

- The student is encouraged to access more in-person lessons.
- The number of AV1 streaming sessions is slowly reduced over time.

- The AV1 is eventually withdrawn and the student continues to access resources and support available within the school's standard provision.

A psychologically informed approach

The framework outlined above was developed by Wirral Educational Psychology Team, building upon research that explored AV1 implementation within the UK (Fletcher et al., 2023). The framework is a theoretical tool designed to support staff in their thinking of how to use the AV1. This framework is not designed to necessarily be linear or rigid, and the EP team support schools to feel confident in adapting this approach for the student's individual context.

Like any intervention, the AV1 is not a universal tool that all students will benefit from using. Identification is paramount, ensuring that the AV1 is being used by the most appropriate students. In Wirral, a screening tool was created for schools to use to inform their thinking regarding the AV1s and whether it may be useful for a specific student.

The role of EPs is important here, given that they can utilise their psychological knowledge to support school staff in better understanding barriers to education, how to use tools like the AV1, and ultimately support the development of a personalised and research-informed support plan for the student. These approaches are an integral part of the barriers to education training that 95% of Wirral schools have now accessed.

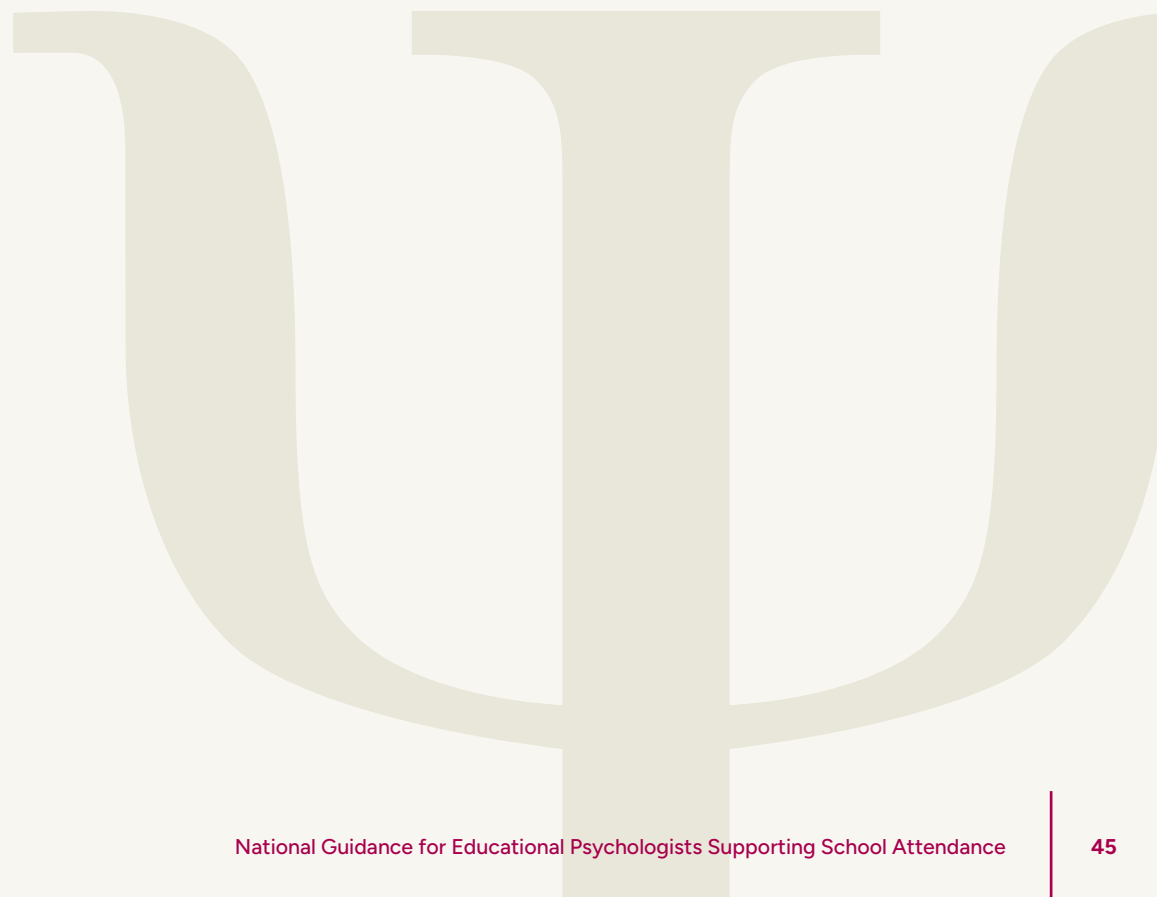
In summary, the research-informed planning and structure of the AV1 rollout has been pivotal to its success in Wirral. Integrating the AV1 into wider barriers to education training, whilst the EP team support schools during AV1 use, has led to the success of the intervention. The impact of AV1s can be seen through increased student engagement, local case studies and feedback, (see N8 and [AV1 by No Isolation – Case studies](#) for further information). Overall, this highlights the AV1's role not just as a technological solution, but as part of a broader, psychologically informed strategy to address barriers to education. Wirral Educational Psychology Team has played a key role in ensuring that each AV1 intervention is personalised, evidence-based, and inclusive.

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https://www.n8research.org.uk/media/CotN_Attendance_Report_10.pdf

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<https://www.noisolation.com/av1/case-studies>



Case Study 3. Intervention

Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery Model, Dr Jerricah Holder

Moving From Recovery to Rediscovery

The Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery model was developed through Dr Jerricah Holder's extensive experience as an Educational Psychologist of over ten years, in both private and Local Authority Practice, supporting children and families who were experiencing entrenched barriers in their school attendance, often where a child had not attended school for several years. The model has been developed in reference to the research literature and shaped through ongoing feedback from children and their families through Dr Jerricah Holder's private practice and therapeutic work with families over time.

The Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery model is a mental health and wellbeing recovery model which recognises the significant impact of school burnout on children's attendance and wellbeing at school. It emphasises the need for alternative approaches for children who experience more pervasive barriers in their school attendance and for whom previous interventions have been ineffective. This model sits within Tier 3 of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS; Kearney & Graczyk, 2020), and is therefore an example of practice applicable to a much smaller proportion of children, such as those who are presenting with persistent and complex barriers in their attendance, and for whom bespoke and individually tailored pathways back to school are required. This model should be considered as part of the wider MTSS model, with emphasis first and foremost on early identification and intervention and addressing barriers at the earliest opportunity in order to keep children connected and engaged with their school placements.

In line with needs of this specific group of children falling within Tier 3, such as escalating mental health and wellbeing needs, concerns regarding burnout and pervasive patterns of non-attendance, the approach distinguishes itself by prioritising respite and recovery, alleviating pressures (both within and outside of school) and promoting a return to 'felt safety' through nurturing relationships and environments. Rather than insisting on a rapid or forced return to school, which have increasingly been found to be counterproductive in the research literature for children with more entrenched

patterns of school non-attendance (Heyne et al., 2024; Kearney & González 2022). Throughout there is an increased focus on "engagement in learning", utilising creative and flexible means to best re-engage that young person in their education through the recovery process and beyond.

The model aligns itself with the rapidly growing body of research literature which highlights the wellbeing benefits of adapted or more flexible school arrangements on children's mental health and wellbeing, coping abilities, and ongoing engagement in learning, for those who have previously found full-time school challenging (Chantler-Hicks, 2025; Griffin et al., 2025; Pryor-Nitsch, 2025). The model therefore requires educators to think creatively about the provision of education with all forms of learning embraced and celebrated particularly in the recovery phases. Reassuring, there is a growing body of research demonstrating that reducing such pressures and taking a Wellbeing-First approach, can be a protective factor in facilitating a longer-term return to the school environment (Neilson, 2023; Sawyer, 2022). In this model, the child's preferences regarding future education and learning pathways are consistently respected.

The five guiding principles of the Moving From Recovery to Rediscovery Model are:

1. Respite and Recovery

Focusing on the wellbeing of the child or young person by providing a safe environment (both physically and psychologically) that supports recovery from burnout and provides an authentic opportunity to rest.

2. Reducing the pressure

Lowering the physical and mental demands to support wellbeing and resilience and lay the foundations for future change and progress. For some children, this may require temporarily reducing expectations related to school attendance so that the child or young person has capacity to focus on recovery.

3. Re-connecting through safe relationships

Re-establishing social connections with both adults and peers, utilising either existing support network or forming new relationships, as a pathway for reintegrating the child back into the social world.

4. Rediscovering their sense of curiosity

Utilising the child's strengths, interests and values, alongside creativity and adaptability, to foster intrinsic motivation, reconnect young people with their passions, and promote meaningful learning experiences.

5. Reengagement with the world

Once a higher level of safety, security, and resilience is established, the child is supported gradually to re-experience the world, with opportunities for enhanced participation and inclusion within educational and community settings, fostering stronger connections and a sense of belonging across all aspects of their life.

Case Study

Mr and Mrs Smith sought support from Dr Jerrica Holder, for their son Thomas (names changed) due to ongoing concerns regarding their son's attendance and wellbeing following transition to secondary school. At the time of the referral, Thomas was undergoing further neurodevelopmental assessment for autism with CAMHS and was experiencing a decline in his mental health and wellbeing, describing to his family how he felt depressed, isolated and lonely. There had been several attempts to return to school, with a pattern emerging in which Thomas would cope for a few days and then completely avoid school and shut down, becoming withdrawn and reclusive at home. The duration of non-attendance was increasing with each attempt to return Thomas to school and, at the time of referral, Thomas had not attended school at all for 6 weeks and had reported to his parents that he no longer felt able to cope with the school environment. At the time of referral, Thomas was still expected to attend school on a reduced timetable with the family having a discussion



with Thomas each morning about whether he could go to school and the informing school of Thomas' decision. Thomas expressed how he dreaded waking up, as he anticipated this question each morning and felt like he was letting his family down when he expressed that could not go to school.

Through following the 'Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery' Model developed by Dr Jerricah Holder, a plan was put in place with the family and school to support Thomas to recover from his experiences of burnout and gradually find his way back to school. Whilst it was acknowledged that Thomas was not currently well enough to attend school, Thomas and his family shared hope that he would return to school in the future. The plan included an initial period of respite and recovery, in which it was agreed that Thomas would spend some time at home focussed on rebuilding his mental health and wellbeing. The family were able to reorganise their work schedules and enlist the support of grandparents so that they could be at home with Thomas, reconnecting him with his sense of self, his strengths and interests, and working on community goals that were important to him.

Respite and Recovery

The initial pathway to recovery, included a shift in expectations around Thomas' sleep routines, with Thomas setting his alarm for 10am instead of 7am, having breakfast downstairs with just one family member, before returning to his bedroom to engage in activities that helped him to find his flow and brought a sense of comfort. This included playing computer games, watching TV and manga art – Thomas is a very talented artist and was encouraged to utilise manga art and cartoons as an outlet for his feelings and a tool to articulate himself. It was important that no time limit was set and that Thomas was given space to rest in the ways that felt comfortable for him; initially, this did mean that Thomas spent a large proportion of his day in his bedroom. Information on the 5 Ways to Wellbeing Model was shared with Thomas and his family, with a recommendation to progressively incorporate elements from the model in order to foster positive mental health and wellbeing practices as he moved through recovery. For example, a daily walk with the dog, once Thomas was ready.

Reducing the Pressure

Through consultation with the school and family, the Educational Psychologist facilitated a reflective conversation around Thomas' attendance and how best to support Thomas moving forward. At this point

Thomas had not attended school for 10 weeks and it was recognised by all that the current expectation/return to school plan was unrealistic. Mr Smith, a member of the pastoral team that Thomas had a good relationship with, suggested he would like to write Thomas a 'We've Missed You' letter, which included personalised 'Keeping in Mind' statements, well wishes, and explicitly expressed acceptance and understanding around his current position of not being able to attend school. The intention of the letter was to explicitly alleviate pressures for Thomas at this moment in time, whilst still maintaining connection and belonging to his school.

Re-connecting through safe relationships

Mr Smith also suggested some dates that he would be available to virtually meet with Thomas, should Thomas want to catch up – Thomas expressed that he would like to keep in contact with Mr Smith and, as Mr Smith was also his English teacher, they later decided that they would set up a book club and use their time together to check-in and share reflections on the book they were both reading. Thomas reported that this helped to ease the pressure on the check-in as it gave him and Mr Smith something to talk about. There was also a focus on enriching Thomas' life outside of school, prioritising areas that Thomas identified as within his zone of comfort and were considered high priority in order to keep Thomas connected to his peers at school. This included continued attendance at Scout's with a peer from school and joining an online magna art class with the support of his sibling.

Rediscovering their sense of curiosity

As Thomas began to feel better in himself, he started to express interest in his learning again. Initially this started with the family following Thomas' lead and any expressed areas of curiosity. A playful and informal approach was utilised and included trips to a local museum, researching topics on the internet, watching films and documentaries together, before then gradually moving towards supporting Thomas to share some of his learning with Mr Smith at school. As Thomas' curiosity grew, he started to engage in some 1:1 session with Mr Smith to start recording his ideas in the form of a learning project which went on to span several weeks and organically grew as Thomas became more engaged and interested. Thomas had also expressed concern to his parents that he felt like he was beginning to fall behind in maths and expressed that he would like to engage in some one-to-one online math tutoring.

Reengagement with the world

Then from a place of increased wellbeing and resilience, a low-demand approach was utilised to refamiliarize Thomas with the school setting and rebuild key relationships with educational staff at school. Thomas' views and wishes were central to this plan at all times, with Thomas deciding that the school allotment was the place that he felt safest (identified through a 'RAG' Red Amber Green using a map of the school). The gradual return to school plan therefore started with Thomas spending time with Mr Smith at school in the allotment after school hours, before then building up to spending time in the allotment with a friend and during school hours. A pattern then developed of different teachers coming to spend time with Thomas in the allotment, as a means to build his relationship with teaching staff before attending their lessons with the support of a familiar friend. The Ladder of Strength and Courage was utilised to support Thomas to identify the small steps required to increase his attendance at school, gradually moving through these small steps at a pace set by Thomas and beginning with the aspects of school that Thomas identified as the most achievable. Prior to the gradual return to school, Thomas met with Mr Smith to 'RAG' different areas of the school environment, as well as his timetable, so that Mr Smith could better understand how Thomas experienced school, identify any concerns that Thomas might have, as well as addressing any continued barriers to his school attendance and wellbeing. Thomas continued to have daily check-ins with Mr Smith to share how he felt the return to school was going and to signal when he was ready to move to the next step and how the school could support him.

Reflections

Through following a child-led and compassionate approach Thomas was able to gradually increase his time physically in school across the autumn term, then moving through to attending 1 lesson per day in the spring term and 2 lessons and one break through the summer term. Both the school and family acknowledged the crucial role of carefully pacing Thomas' return to school to ensure progress was sustained and further burnout avoided through proactively planning in respite and recovery breaks for Thomas. This meant that the return to school plan needed to be flexible and Thomas was able to signal when he required a rest day or needed to come home earlier than planned. When Thomas was not in school, he engaged in self-directed learning opportunities linked to the school curriculum (e.g., completing DT projects at home with his father, followed up by a monthly zoom call with his DT teacher to show

him his work) as well as opportunities to virtually learn alongside his peers using a AV1 robot.

This hybrid and flexible approach meant that Thomas was still able to engage with his learning from home and instilled confidence in Thomas that his views and wishes would be respected at all times. Understanding that progress may fluctuate and the need to proactively seek rest and recovery opportunities, even after a child has returned to school, is an important ongoing aspect of the recovery model.

Reflective discussion with Thomas, his parents and school, also highlighted the importance of temporally reducing the pressure of the school attendance so that Thomas could focus on mental health recovery and so that the school and family could thoughtfully plan a small steps approach to returning to him school once he was ready. A low demand, and slow and steady approach, was also deemed necessary to avoid future burnout and withdrawal. Throughout this process regular liaison and engagement with school was vital to the success of the plan, and the school were proactive in their bids for connection and ongoing commitment to Thomas' sense of belonging at school regardless of his attendance patterns.

It may be of interest for the reader to note that it took 18 months to implement this model and support Thomas to return to school. Thomas is now enjoying school, and his timetable will continue to be increased gradually across the next term. Although the initial steps of the return took more time to establish, Thomas has been achieving subsequent goals much more quickly which is testament to his increased sense of safety and belonging at school and the school's commitment to child-led practice. A number of supportive measures and adaptations remain in place, and these continue to be of up most importance in ensure the stability of Thomas school placement and protection of his mental health.

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Case Study 4. Effective Multi-agency Working

Family Help in Schools: A Whole-Family Approach to Improving Attendance

In 2023, Salford City Council was awarded Department for Education funding as part of the Priority Education Investment Area programme to tackle persistent absence and improve school attendance. Eleven secondary schools with the highest absence rates piloted the **Family Help in Schools model**, which takes a holistic, whole-family approach to addressing barriers to education.

At the heart of the initiative were **Family Help Practitioners (FHPs)**, embedded within schools to work alongside pastoral teams. Their role was to build strong relationships with families, understand the root causes of absence, and coordinate support across agencies. Using the **Family Partnership model**, practitioners engaged directly with young people and their families, offering practical help such as routines, confidence-building, and access to essentials like uniform and food. They also connected families to specialist services for mental health, domestic abuse, financial advice, and housing support.

Family Help Practitioners (FHPs) were co-located in schools, working alongside pastoral teams to:

- Build communication between home and school.
- Provide direct support to young people (e.g., routines, confidence building, practical help with uniform and food).
- Connect families to community resources and specialist services (mental health, domestic abuse, financial support).

FHPs also delivered targeted interventions, working directly with young people, their parents, or school based staff covering:

- Emotional well-being support.
- Parenting and routine guidance.
- Financial and housing assistance.
- SEN support and referrals.

The impact has been significant. Between September 2023 and Spring 2025, 326 young people and their families have engaged, and 218 completed support through the offer. Of those, 71% improved their attendance, with an average increase of 19 percentage points – some by as much as 52 points. Many students who were at risk of not sitting GCSEs went on to complete exams successfully. 34% of young people achieved 90%+ attendance, and 21 young people reached 100% attendance.

Beyond attendance, families reported progress in wider family outcomes, indicating the broader issues attendance related difficulties are often a symptom of, further highlighting the importance of holistic support plans. Improvements were made in relation to outcomes in the following areas through FHP support:

- Child mental health: 85% success.
- Parenting support: 88% success.
- Adult mental health: 91% success.
- Financial stability: 93% success.
- Physical health: 93% success.
- Home conditions: 71% success.

Parents spoke of improved routines, better home conditions, and renewed confidence in supporting their children's education. Demonstrating the programme's lasting impact, not only on attendance but on family resilience and educational outcomes.

Schools highlighted the added value of having practitioners on site, noting that they had reached families they'd previously struggled to develop a good working relationship with.

The success of the pilot has led to sustainability: six schools have committed to continue funding the model beyond the end of DfE funding, extending support into Summer 2026.

To find out more about this project please contact: EPS@Salford.gov.uk

Case Study 5. Effective Multi-agency Working

SPRIAL Framework (Sawyer, R., & Collingwood, N., 2023)

The following case study is taken from Dr Rachel Sawyer's blog post, published with EdPsychEd in June 2023. Available here: <https://www.edpsyched.co.uk/blog/parent-views-emotionally-based-school-non-attendance>

Dr Rachel Sawyer's research explored the views of five parents whose children had previously experienced EBSNA, hoping to learn more about 'what works', as well as what professionals could be doing more of when working with children and families, to inform a 'joined up' approach to support.

The six resulting themes are displayed below, and represent a framework ('SPIRAL') that both schools and external professionals can refer to when planning and implementing EBSNA support, as well as when evaluating existing support pathways. It is hoped that this framework, drawn directly from parental voice and experience, can inform developments in professional practice, leading to parents feeling included, supported and heard when addressing their child's needs.

Supporting Parents

Parents highlighted a need to access emotional and practical support in order to meet their child's needs and feel able to advocate for them, which included communicating with other parents, accessing emotional support and having their own needs met (e.g. health needs, transport, advocacy services etc.)

- Emotional support and reassurance
- Parent-to-parent support
- Understanding parents.

Promoting CYP's Sense of Belonging

Parents highlighted the need for an individualised and person-centred approach to supporting EBSNA that promoted their child's sense of inclusion and moved at their pace. This included considering the child's wellbeing as well as learning and attendance.

- Relationship-based approach
- Person-centred approach
- Promoting psychological safety.

Informing and Including parents

Parents shared that regular communication and information sharing with schools, as well as consistency, contributed to the developing of trusting and collaboration home-school partnerships. This was viewed as critical for successful EBSNA support.

- Maintaining trusted relationships
- Listening to parents' views
- Signposting and navigating services.

Raising awareness of EBSNA

Parents discussed the need for increased understanding of anxiety within schools, and how this supports early identification and intervention for EBSNA-related difficulties.

- Professional knowledge and understanding.
- Need for early intervention.

Accessing external professionals

Parents shared the importance of involving different professionals depending on the child's needs and barriers to attendance, however highlighted that this is most effective when this involvement included parents in action planning. Parents also noted that long waiting lists and complex referral processes were currently preventing early intervention from taking place, and that easier access to professionals is need to support both schools and families experiencing EBSNA.

- Specialist knowledge in action planning.
- Working in collaboration with parents
- Difficulty accessing services.

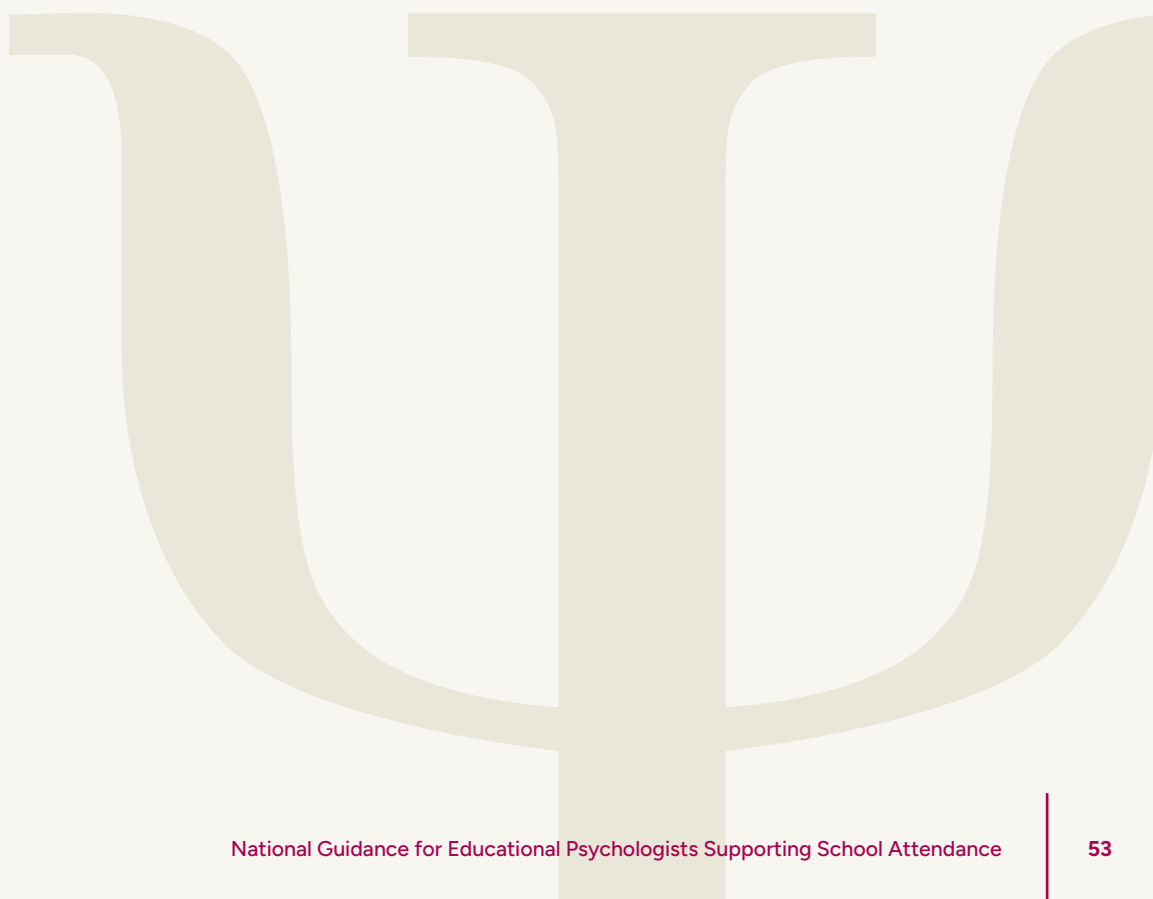
Lessons learnt from Covid

Parents spoke positively about the Covid-19 school closures, with their child's anxiety appearing to reduce with the removed pressure of attending school. Some shared how the remote learning provided this time allowed their child to re-engage and catch up with missed learning time, whilst others discussed how relationships were formed and maintained remotely, suggesting that adjustments made during this time could work well for CYP experiencing EBSNA.

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See also: <https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/Documents/DocumentView/Stream/Media/Default/ChildrenYoungPeopleFamilies/Documents/SEND%20Toolkit/SPIRAL%20Action%20Planning%20Tool%20with%20prompts.pdf>



Case Study 6. Effective Multi-agency Working

Trafford EBSNA Working Group (Bond, C., Munford, L., Birks, D. et al., 2024)

Over the past four years, Trafford Council have worked to develop their own multi-agency approach to reduce rates of emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA; co-produced term locally). Since initially establishing a working group in January 2019, their multi-agency team have met half-termly to develop a strategic approach, focusing on early identification of and intervention for school attendance difficulties. While the working group is currently facilitated by Trafford Educational Psychology Service, members of the group represent a range of specialities within the local authority, including representatives from the Virtual School Team, CAMHS, the Pupil Attendance Team, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS), the Special Educational Needs Advisory Service, the Parent Carer Forum, and local third-sector family support groups. Thus, the group brings together representatives from several public services including education, health, and social care, alongside parent and carer representatives who have also advocated young people's voices within the group.

To aid this work, the group have commissioned a series of action research projects via the University of Manchester's Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme, to support the work, to be evidence-informed, and to capture their own practice within the evidence base.

Initially, the working group developed an early identification of need tool (a checklist) to guide early identification and understanding of the factors contributing to individual school attendance difficulties (Boaler, Bond and Knoz., 2024). This was disseminated to educational professionals and settings via local forum events and training opportunities, including through cascading to different teams within the local authority (e.g., Social Care, SEN Advisory Service, Virtual School) who each encouraged effective use of the tool through their own workstreams. The tool is now used widely across Trafford and neighbouring authorities and has received positive feedback around its ability to support staff to understand the causes of pupils' attendance difficulties and to develop tailored programmes of support.

Subsequently, the working group have developed a broader guidance document to sit alongside this assessment tool. The guidance aims to answer, "what next?" once settings have identified the potential causes of the difficulties and is focused on effective whole-school practice and the development of an effective graduated approach to supporting attendance difficulties within a range of settings, in line with the already familiar assess, plan, do, review cycles. The guidance document has received positive feedback from a range of professionals since its launch in 2023 and is now widely used across Trafford to inform school-level support.

Following an initial pilot, it was identified that further training and support would be beneficial to settings to inform their intervention for school attendance difficulties and ensure effective implementation of the advice. As a result, Trafford Council have commissioned centralised training, delivered by the Educational Psychology Service, free to access for all schools within Trafford. Over the academic year 2024 – 25, this training offer sat alongside half-termly drop-in sessions for both parents and professionals, to each access more informal advice and peer support.

Via the University of Manchester Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology research commission model, the working group was recently supported to evaluate their work to date using an action research model. Through this research, Corcoran et al. (2023) identified that a strategic and consistent approach across the organisation has allowed misconceptions about attendance to be identified and challenged and promoted earlier identification and intervention for attendance difficulties through organisational culture shifts and evidence-informed practice. The findings also indicated that a cumulative benefit was achieved via the multi-agency collaboration, which has allowed knowledge and resources to be effectively shared and cascaded, while reducing the impact on individual workloads and maximising available resources.

It also recognises that the Educational Psychology Service were well placed to lead this working group. However, the research also noted that within this type of organisational development, sufficient staff capacity

and funding are required for actions to be undertaken effectively, including consultation with stakeholders and piloting of guidance and training. A strategic approach to supporting attendance cannot be used as a “quick fix”, as work must be tailored to the local systems and context to be successful.

For more information and access to resources, please contact shannon.hattoncorcoran@trafford.gov.uk or visit [Trafford's Padlet, Barriers to Education & Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance \(EBSNA\)](#).



Case Study 7. Effective Multi-agency Working

Multiagency work with Healthcare Professionals

The Suffolk Primary Care Protocol, developed as part of the Barriers to Education (BTEd) initiative is the result of a working party collaboration with Suffolk's Psychology and Therapeutic Service, GPs, Local Medical Council, Integrated Care Board representatives, colleagues from School Nursing, Safeguarding, Attendance and the Education Access Service. It aims to improve school engagement and outlines best practices for consistency in managing absences, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in supporting children and young people (CYP) across Suffolk.

Central to the protocol is the emphasis on clear pathways and effective communication between health professionals and educational settings. It seeks to reduce inappropriate requests for medical evidence in the case of **non-medical barriers** to education, such as anxiety or sensory issues. It links to guidance and early support for families and schools when patterns of non-attendance emerge. The protocol, which will be available to all Suffolk GPs and Healthcare professionals, signposts to the BTEd website and clear next steps.

Schools and families are supported with a range of resources to encourage early dialogue and steps for accessing support, including referrals to safeguarding services when necessary.

A key impact of the protocol is the reduction of unnecessary GP appointments, freeing up healthcare resources while ensuring CYP receive appropriate support with a holistic view of their needs, rather than foregrounding attendance. It also promotes consistency across schools in handling absences, aligning with statutory guidance and local authority reporting requirements. By fostering a joined-up approach across services within the Local Authority, the protocol enhances the educational experience for CYP with and without health needs and strengthens the partnership between families, schools, and health professionals.

Overall, the Suffolk Primary Care Protocol represents a proactive and inclusive strategy to tackle attendance challenges, ensuring that non-medical absences are managed with sensitivity, clarity, and efficiency.



Case Study 8. Outcomes

The intelligent use of data to inform risk at transition – Oldham Council

Oldham Council have led the way in using data to inform approaches to intervening with children and young people who are having difficulty attending school. They initially used year 6 data to plan a transition project and, over three years, there has been a significant decline in year 7 persistent absence; Instead of a 1.5% drop in attendance between year 6 & 7, they now record an increase in attendance of 2.1% for the target group. As a result of this work, Oldham's secondary school attendance is 0.6% above national average from a below national average starting point four years ago.

The project involves home visits by the Attendance Team over the summer to families of Year 6 children who are at risk of school attendance difficulties at secondary school:

- Visits are to those the data indicates are at risk of school non-attendance, even if their year 6 attendance is 90+%
- Each visit is focused on removing any barriers, such as uniform, first day start dates and times, bus passes and travel arrangements
- This data has further informed a regression model that is used to plan the following year's project and further locally based support.

A following project based on the same approach, focused on 500 children transitioning from their nursery year to their reception year. Telephone calls were made, planned by the Educational Psychology Service and delivered by the council call support centre. The focus of the calls were to check if families had everything ready for school, and if there was anything they needed. The nature of the calls focused on first day arrangements and organisation, and families were signposted to family hubs and referred to early help where there was a need. This resulted in a 7% increase in attendance for this group and an overall increase in Reception attendance of 2.6%.

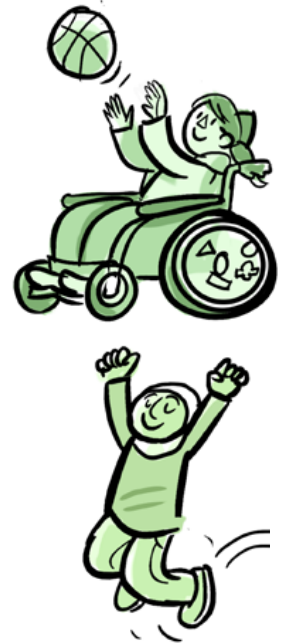


Case Study 9. Outcomes

Birmingham University and National Children's Bureau's use of mental health and wellbeing to capturing children and young people's views

Where in the school is good for your wellbeing?

- Spaces inside the school e.g. classroom, hall, library, dinner hall
- Outdoor spaces e.g. the playground, field, pitches and games areas, play equipment
- 'Time out' and quiet spaces
- Explore what the spaces that are good for their wellbeing look, sound and feel like, and what they have in them



More information on this project can be found here: [Co-producing your whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing with children: a guide and practical activity for schools](#)

Case Study 10. Outcomes

Worcestershire County Council's use of Engagement Scores

Engagement Score used by Education Engagement Officers

Imagine there are 10 opportunities throughout the week to engage with education, learning, development and/or activities to promote wellbeing/confidence. Over the past 2 weeks, what score would you give yourself out of 10 for each week? What has been in your week that leads you to give yourself that score?

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	1	1	1	1	1
Afternoon	1	1	1	1	1

An example of how Engagement scores can be used:

Start	Mid-point review	End
Engagement score – 2/10 – Sammy currently attends school for 1 hour on 2 days of the week.	2/10 – Sammy now attends school for 1 hour on 1 day and stays for the morning 2 days of the week (the model counts two engagement opportunities per day, rather than the specific number of hours).	To be recorded at the end of involvement e.g. 3/10 – if Sammy attends school for 3 mornings a week.

Case Study 11. Outcomes

Using TME as part of a LA wide attendance project- Derbyshire and Derby City Council Attendance Project

A team of 6 Assistant Educational Psychologists supervised by a Senior Educational Psychologist to work with 82 children and young people who were experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

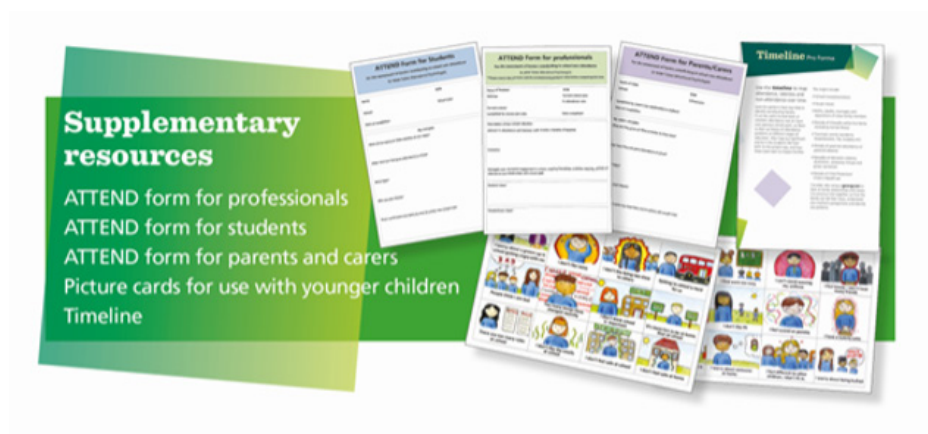
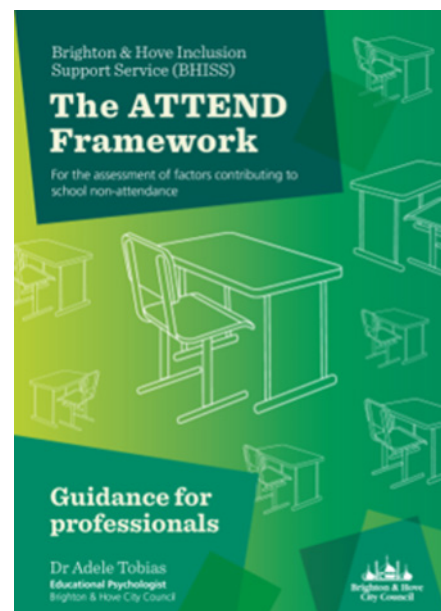
- A key focus was using PATH and using TME to set individually relevant goals.
 - Goals set did not specifically include attendance.
 - Participants valued the PATH process and felt it was 'positive' 'helpful' and 'collaborative'.
 - The TME ratings showed a statistically significant increase in ratings post intervention, which felt particularly important given the person centred approach allowed a bespoke plan for each individual.
- 94% of parents and carers felt that they had a greater understanding of the situation, and their child/young person's strengths and needs, 88% of parents felt they had more strategies and approaches to support their child or young person and 94% felt more confident in supporting them.
 - 76% of school staff felt that they had a greater understanding of the situation, and the child/young person's strengths and needs, 76% of school staff felt they had more strategies and approaches to support their child or young person and 64% felt more confident in supporting them.
 - Children and young people identified the themes of strong trusting relationships, having flexibility in approaches and strategies. They valued the skills and the involvement of the Assistant Educational psychologists and the PATH process.



Case Study 12. The ATTEND Framework

Brighton & Hove Inclusion Support Service (BHISS) (Tobias, 2020)

ATTEND is early intervention for children and young people (between 5 and 16/18 years) with low school attendance. It is both an assessment tool for systematically identifying the underlying reasons for low attendance, and a framework for setting up support plans collaboratively with families.



Development

The phenomenon of school non-attendance appears to be highly complex and without a single unifying theory that can be drawn upon in deciding how to intervene. It is suggested that support must therefore be bespoke, collaborative and multi-factorial (Kearney & Graczyk; Lyon & Cotler, 2009; Nuttall & Woods, 2013). From a practical perspective in a local authority role, starting with a completely blank slate each time a case is presented, may not be the most efficient use of time. This is especially true in the context of stretched public services and resources and long waiting lists for specialist support.

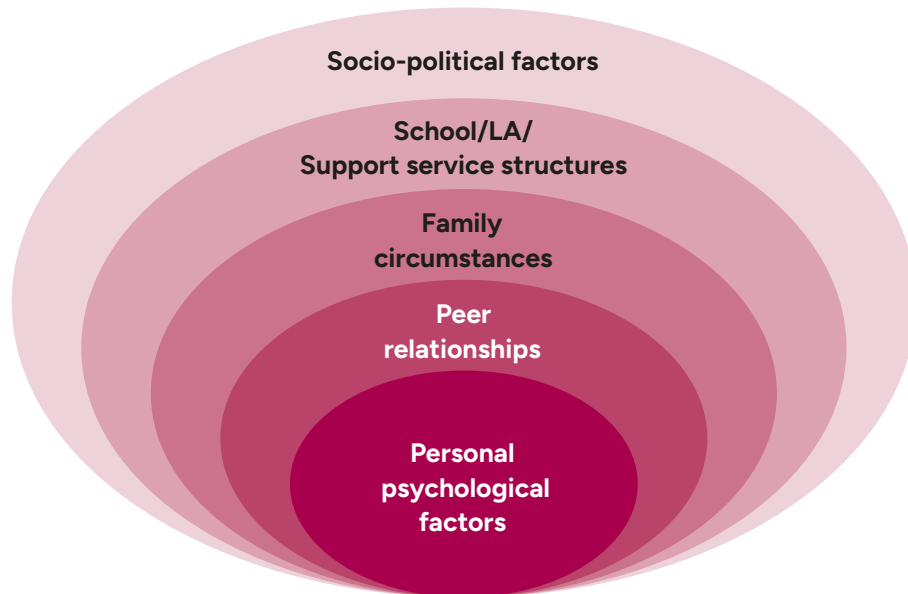
The ATTEND framework was developed through several years of doctoral research (Tobias, 2019) followed by two years of piloting and developing the resource through ongoing work with local professionals, schools and families.

The goal was to try to capture in one place, in as simple and usable a resource as possible, all of the potential unmet needs that were creating barriers to full school attendance, so that the right support could be put in place and nothing important would be missed. Teams of Social Workers, Behaviour Specialists, Primary Mental Health Workers, Educational Psychologists, Specialist Teachers, Teaching Staff, Family Coaches, Education Welfare Officers, SENCOs and Safeguarding Leads contributed to drafts and the development of the factors. Further factors were added through focus groups and during individual casework with children and families while the framework was being piloted. The ATTEND framework came together and was published in March 2020.

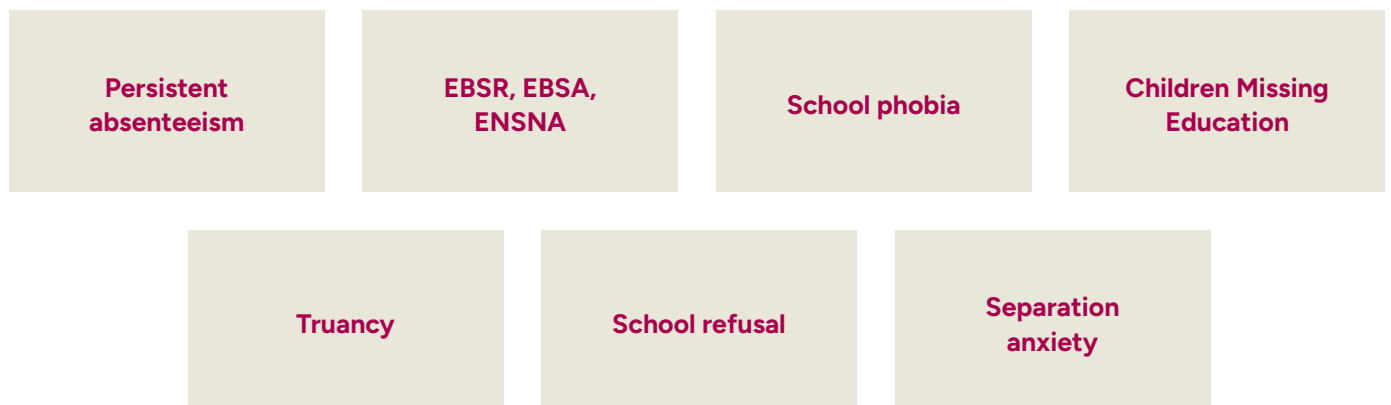
Psychological underpinnings

ATTEND covers a wide range of different factors including physical health, disability, mental health, social issues, transition and change, peer pressures, academic issues, motivational issues, home difficulties, socio-economic factors, sensory problems and community-related issues (such as criminal exploitation). It employs an interactional, eco-systemic model which is drawn from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).

Maintenance factors



Scope of use



There are many labels associated with low school attendance. ATTEND does not facilitate categorising and labelling because it theorises that the underlying reasons are often complex and cross over despite the label. It could be argued, for example, that many of the reasons for truancy are 'emotionally-based'. The ATTEND Framework is designed for use in any of these circumstances and regardless of the label.

Process



The basis of ATTEND is to build a relationship with the family and to complete the professionals form through the use of the other resources in the pack over time. The student and parent forms are designed to be used to frame conversations, rather than as a checklist.

Each factor on the professional's form is coded. Professionals can formulate an action plan by writing down the code for every identified problem and deciding upon an appropriate support strategy. There is an accompanying guidance booklet which contains support strategies with corresponding codes and can be used to form ideas that will contribute to the support plan. The strategies are considered to be generic best practice, but the most effective support plan will be bespoke to the student – organic, creative and coproduced with the family drawing on the available resources.

The programme then uses an 'assess, plan, do review' approach. Regular review dates are set so that how each strategy is working can be evaluated and support can be adjusted accordingly. Gradually, the support put in place should help each individual's experience of and therefore engagement with school-based learning. The idea of ATTEND is not necessarily to 'fix' everything but to put in enough support in enough areas that school becomes possible again.

The codes can also be used to explore reasons for low attendance across groups. Professionals in schools or local authorities are able to identify the most common reasons for disengagement within their student populations in order to inform larger-scale interventions.



Current use

ATTEND is now being used in several local authorities as an early intervention programme.

This is one of the best resources we've got in terms of having a robust and structured approach to attendance. It allows standardisation and quality assurance across the school and ensures everyone has their voice heard.

Deputy Headteacher

As the parent of a long-term refuser I firmly believe that there is a need for a screening programme such as ATTEND to identify the underlying causes of school-based anxiety. The current academic research is limited and relies on professional expertise, so a programme that allows trained school staff to better understand a child's anxiety – and then identify potential and relevant interventions – is invaluable.

Parent

The success of the ATTEND Framework is just starting to be measured more widely and in a more formal way, though it has been piloted in its draft form for some time in local schools. Professionals have commented that they have found the framework "a really good way to start conversations around very difficult topics" (Safeguarding Lead) and that it created "a short cut to students being able to express their life experiences without feeling judged" (Inclusion Co-ordinator). Others have said that it seems to help a child or young person to "feel they have been heard" and that "they can identify with lots of things on the form that they find it hard to tell you without a structure" (Primary Mental Health Worker). The primary benefits seem to be that it provides "a great framework for tackling our most challenging cases" (Secondary School Attendance Officer) and that it can be "really helpful as a way of systematically making sure you have identified all possible issues that could support school attendance" (Family Coach).

To find out more about the ATTEND Framework enquiries can be made to the Brighton and Hove Inclusion Support Service (BHISS) which is part of Brighton & Hove Council.

Email: BHISS@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Case Study 13. A model of commissioning for larger scale EP support

Staffordshire EPS

Staffordshire EPS have development work included within the weekly working model. School Non-Attendance (SNA) was agreed as a priority focus during the COVID-19 lockdown. There is now an established SNA EP team. Based on the literature and research, the team strived towards a multi-agency model of working by forming and leading a local community of practice. This has strengthened our network, collaboration and knowledge of the local community but any multi-agency proposals have not yet come to fruition.

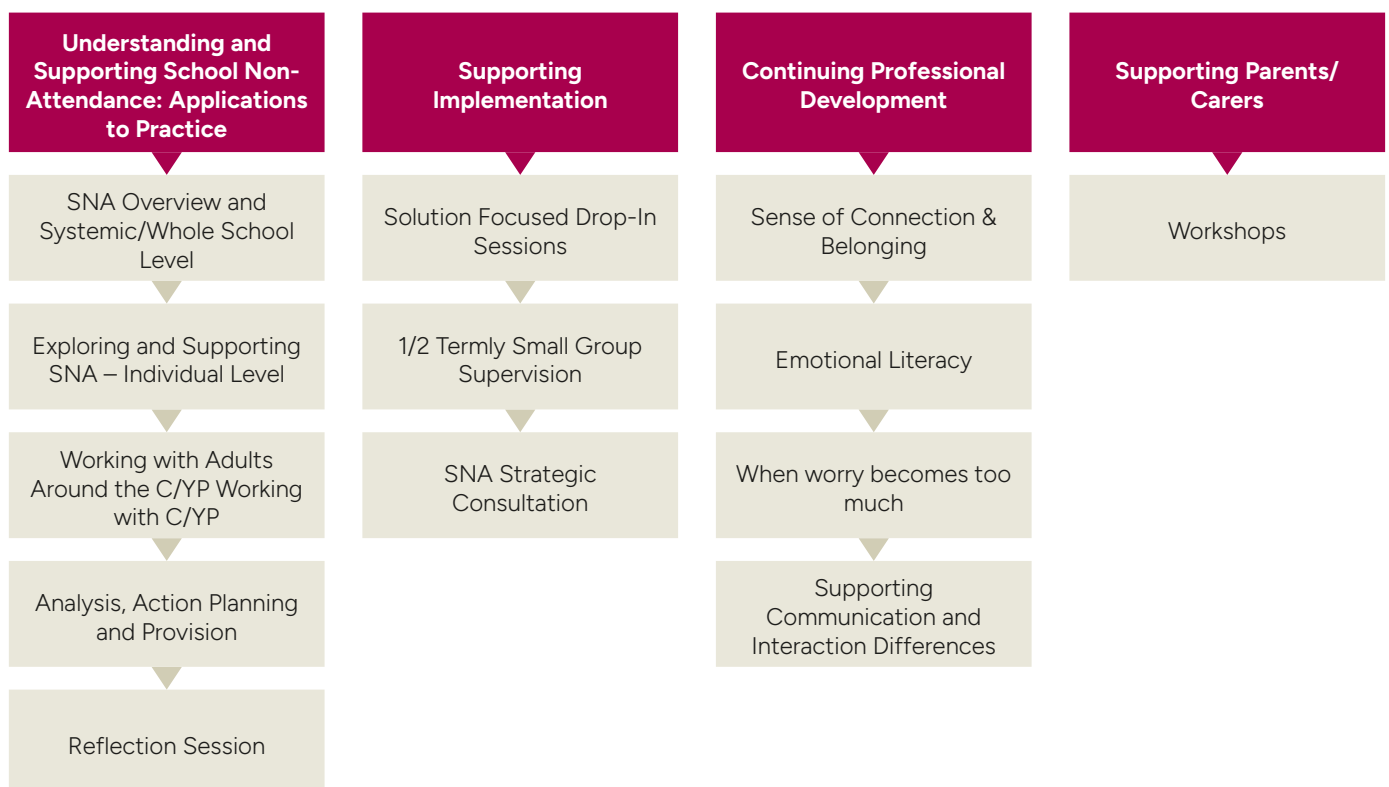
It is acknowledged nationally that school non-attendance levels have increased and impacting on a wider population within the educational community. Therefore, we had to proceed as an EPS and be proactive with finding ways to offer support that has a wider reach and impact, and until a local authority model is agreed, also find our own commissioning opportunities to be able to implement this. Over the past two years we have managed to secure commissioned

work through our district based SEND and Inclusion Hubs (approximately 20-30 schools per district) and Academy Trusts.

What does the offer look like?

The approach detailed within this proposal is aimed at supporting early intervention within the educational setting. It is universal in its application, meaning it can be adopted for any educational setting/child/young person, where SNA is present as an outcome. One aim being, to provide educational settings with evidence-based tools/models for application to practice, supporting their graduated approach to SNA.

When a commission is being explored a 'package of support' is designed based on the outcomes agreed and their local community. This can include different strands/elements of support within the image below.



Strand 1: Understanding and Supporting SNA: Application to Practice

This strand of workshops/training sessions are compulsory within any commission, each element is ½ day. Schools send the same nominated member of staff to each session. This nominated member of staff has an integral role in 'attendance' within the educational setting, and they are working directly with the child/young person and their families. A member of the Senior Leadership Team, ideally those overseeing and having a responsibility for attendance, is invited to join workshop one to help take forward whole school approaches and hear the evidence base/research for SNA.

Strand one focuses on increasing staff knowledge, curiosity, reflection and application of evidence-based practices.

It includes enhancing confidence to use the SCC EPS guidance booklets which are available to all schools. These guidance booklets aim to support staff to explore the current situation for the child/young person and their family, alongside the identification of any unmet needs.



Staffordshire County Council

School Non-Attendance
Booklet One: Whole School Level

Name of Setting:
Name of staff member leading on whole school practice:
Date:
Planned Review Date:

Published October 2025

Staffordshire County Council

School Non-Attendance
Booklet Two: Individual Level - Exploration

Name of C/YP:
Name of staff member leading on support:
Date exploration commenced:
Date of reviews:

Updated: February 2026

Staffordshire County Council

School Non-Attendance
Booklet Three: Individual Level - Summary and Action Planning.

Name of C/YP:
Name of staff member leading on support:
Date exploration commenced:
Date of reviews

Updated: February 2025

Models/tools within these booklets, to support exploration and implementation of a graduated approach, include:

- Whole school – a reflective framework S.E.C.U.R.E (Holmes & Lowe, 2025) and multidimensional multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) (Kearney and Graczyk 2020).

Shared Responsibility	A collaborative, strategic approach to attendance should be a shared responsibility across the whole staff team, with clear roles supporting both individual and community needs. Strong leadership is key, with attendance leads connected to senior leadership and empowered to drive best practice. Cross-departmental collaboration-across inclusion, SEND, pastoral, safeguarding, and attendance teams-ensures cohesive planning. Schools should engage external services for complex cases, seek professional input to refine strategies, and assess resource capacity for effective implementation
Ethos	Using positive, person-centred language is vital when addressing reduced attendance, including a focus on needs and aspirations. Staff should balance empathy and solution-focused conversations, especially during reintegration. Attendance-related policies-such as behaviour and bullying-should be flexible, relational, and co-produced with the school community. Staff development should cover key attendance factors like bullying, transitions, social relationships, and wider community issues to build confidence and capacity
Community	Supporting attendance requires a rich understanding of the local community's unique characteristics. Schools should tailor strategies to reflect community strengths, needs, demographics, and cultural diversity, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. Socio-economic factors must be acknowledged, with targeted support to address disadvantage. Fostering belonging is key-through celebrating diversity, inclusive opportunities for pupils with reduced attendance, and avoiding practices that cause disconnection. Community-building through social events and flexible engagement strengthens inclusion
Understanding	Capturing pupil and parent/carer voice is essential. Schools should use inclusive, structured approaches to understand contributing factors-academic, environmental, social, and societal-supported by evidence-based tools. Attendance data should inform context-driven support strategies, not just track percentages. Individual plans must be tailored, addressing transitions, environmental adjustments, and wider school, home, and community needs.
Relationships	Strong, empathetic relationships with pupils and families are vital for improving attendance. Regular, meaningful contact that involves supportive communication builds trust and connection. Schools should maintain relationships during absences and have clear reintegration plans. Support should be non-judgemental and responsive to individual experiences, with trust prioritised before corrective action.
Effectiveness	To improve attendance through a strategic, evidence-based whole-school approach, schools should regularly review both broad strategies and individual plans, aligning them with pupil and family goals and adapting based on impact. Interventions must be research-informed and address key contributing factors. Staff should receive relevant training and professional development. Outcome measures should reflect meaningful progress, be context-specific, capture engagement, and inform decisions beyond attendance figures.

- Early indicators and important curious questions framework
- The 6 psychological needs for normal healthy learning and development -rating scale for children/young people/parents/carers
- SEND – 4 broad areas of need
- 3 picture card sorting activities – School Views, Risk and Protective Factors and 'What I Need'

Ecological Systems Factors – framework for meeting and collaborative action planning

Strand 2: Supporting Implementation

This strand was included to support staff/schools with the implementation of evidence-based/good practice and ensure they were accessing continued support. Those attending strand 1 are placed within supervision groups, accessing supervision for 2 hours every ½ term. In our current commission all schools within the district can request a strategic consultation, if they wish to have a reflective conversation about their whole school approach to supporting attendance.

Strand 3: Continuing Professional Development Workshops

To provide further support we have incorporated CPD workshops to provide staff with comprehensive input on areas of need that are present within their communities, and likely to be contributing to SNA. The theme of these workshops is agreed between the EPS and 'commissioner', so could change within each commission. However, incorporating the 'Sense of Connection and Belonging' workshop into any commission is highly recommended.

Each of the workshops has some staple elements e.g., providing the research/evidence base, good practice recommendations, outcomes/measures and using the MTSS (Kearney and Graczyk 2020) – to share input and encourage staff/schools to think about their own approaches/practice/areas for change.

Strand 4: Supporting Parents/Carers

To ensure our support is also reaching parents/carers strand 4 was incorporated. The theme of the workshops is decided through discussion with the school, district, trust based on what they feel will be most helpful for their parent/carer community. For example, in the current commission the workshops have an Emotion Coaching focus.

There is an acknowledgment that this only provides 'light touch' support at this stage, and we are working towards a model where EPs are embedded more within the wider community, with the hope being our EP support is wider reaching and informed by the views of parents/carers within our local community.

Appendix 3

EBSA* guidance evaluation matrix (Hammond-Price, Bond, Hatton-Corcoran, & Lyons, 2025)

This evaluation matrix is aimed to support organisations (including LAs) to reflect on the information captured within their EBSA guidance. Some of the prompts below are to support reflection on key components. The underlined elements are ideal.

1. Developer and purpose

- Who developed the guidance? How was the guidance developed? For example, multi-agency, EPS
- Who is the intended audience?
- With what aim? Is the length/content of the document relevant to the aim/purpose? For example, clear, concise documents for school staff
- Date?
- Contact details of key person?
- Accessibility of the document, for example, clear contents page, headed sections, tools clearly explained

2. Terminology used in relation to persistent/severe school avoidance

- Term used
- Rationale

3. Context

- How is the context defined? For example, local context, national context
- How is the guidance positioned in relation to national guidance? For example, DfE docs

- What is the rationale for the guidance? Increased local/national prevalence; long term impact etc.

4. Key principles underpinning the development of the guidance

- How does it dovetail with wider policies?
- Is it holistic? For example, tiered (universal, targeted, specialist) or just one level/ecosystemic model?
- What is the role of YP and parents? For example, views captured/involved in development
- Does the guidance adopt neuroinclusive approaches?
- Does the guidance promote multi-agency implementation?

5. How does evidence inform the guidance?

- Literature
- General psychological literature?
- Attendance specific models/research?

6. How does the guidance support prevention and early identification?

- Are there whole school approaches to supporting attendance? What systems are in place to identify and respond to needs early on?
- What is in place to support both staff and CYP wellbeing?

7. Does the guidance include recommendations for intervention?

- What is the process of intervening? For example, early identification, more entrenched needs

*EBSA is used to reflect its wide use within the documents to date, however the thinking around this is evolving.

- What approaches are used? (For example, relational approaches, PACE, SDT, MI, anxiety management)
- Tools For example, view gathering, assessment etc.
- Case studies or worked examples
- Does the guidance consider professional development of those supporting CYP and their families?

8. What wider support is available beyond the school?

- Within education
- Other services
- Wider support (For example, community/youth support)

9. Does the guidance discuss wider considerations or adaptations for specific circumstances/groups?

- Contexts For example, Covid/transition/legal considerations
- Groups For example, EY, post-16, neurodivergence, young carers
- Access to alternative pathways/funding for home tuition/telepresence if available

Reference

Hammond-Price, C., Bond, C., Hatton-Corcoran, S., & Lyons, R. (2025). An analysis of UK local authority (LA) emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) guidance. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 41(3), 332–352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2025.2486161>



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