



# Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### Glossary of terms

**EBSA** – Emotional based school avoidance

**CYP** – Child or young person

**LA** – Local Authority

**SEND** – Special Educational Needs and/or Disability

**CAFA** – Children and Families Act 2014

## Key guidance links

[Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs](#)

[The SEND Code of Practice 2015](#)

[Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance](#)

[Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

## What is EBSA?

Emotionally based school avoidance or EBSA is also commonly referred to as: school anxiety, school refusal and emotionally based school non-attendance/avoidance. All of these are terms are used to describe children and young people (CYP) who experience challenges in attending school due to negative feelings (such as anxiety). EBSA may result in a child or young person:

- Avoiding or prolonging getting dressed in the mornings.
- Refusing to leave the house and/ or transport method to school.
- Showing physical and emotional signs of distress.
- Being reluctant to attend school for the whole week.
- Being unable to attend school at all.

## Can EBSA arise as a result of underlying Special Educational Needs?

Anxiety can sometimes become a Special Educational Need (SEN) if it negatively impacts on a child or young person's ability to learn. If anxiety creates a substantial and long-term negative effect on the child or young person's ability to engage in day-to-day activities, it can be considered a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

EBSA may also occur as a result of having Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). These needs could be:

- Diagnosed or require assessment.
- Medical conditions
- Mental health difficulties.

## How do schools identify Special Educational Needs, including EBSA?

When considering whether a pupil needs additional support, educational settings should focus on the four broad areas of need, as identified in the SEND Code of Practice 2014. These areas of need are:

- Social, emotional and mental health.
- Cognition and Learning
- Communication and Interaction
- Physical/ Sensory

A pupil may have needs under one or multiple areas of need.

There is **no** need to have a diagnosis in place for a pupil to receive support. All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to efficient, full-time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have.

## How can EBSA be supported within a school setting?

All schools have a “best endeavours” (Section 66 CAFA 2014) duty, meaning they must do everything they reasonably can to meet the child or young person’s Special Educational Needs.

Schools have different levels of support, which can be used to provide support for EBSA and SEN.

The first stage of support is ‘Quality First Teaching’ which focuses on inclusion support from the class teacher to provide differentiated learning for all pupils.

If a pupil requires further support, either because Quality First Teaching is not working well or the pupil has been identified as needing more tailored support, the school should adopt a graduated approach of support. This is a process of ‘assess, plan, do and review’ and it should be carried out in partnership between the educational setting and the parent/carer. You can view our [one-sheet information page on the Graduated Approach](#) for more information.

Schools can make referrals to specialists at any point for advice on support and interventions for a pupil. A school should always involve a specialist where a pupil continues to make little or no progress, or where they continue to work at levels substantially below those expected of pupils of a similar age despite receiving the SEN based support described above. Some examples of these specialists could be Speech and Language Therapists, Paediatricians, Early Help or Educational Psychologists.

Some schools may have staff members who can provide pastoral care, which means supporting pupils with their emotional wellbeing. Some schools may offer pastoral care plans or health care plans, which outline the ongoing support a child is receiving or what a pupil can do if they are experiencing anxiety at school.

In some circumstances a part-time timetable may be suitable to meet a pupil’s needs, although page 18 of the ‘Working together to improve school attendance guidance’ states: “a part-time timetable must only be in place for the shortest time necessary and is not treated as a long-term solution. Any pastoral support programme or other agreement should have a time limit by which point the pupil is expected to attend full-time, either at school or alternative provision. There should also be formal arrangements in place for regularly reviewing it with the pupil and their parents. In agreeing to a part-time timetable, a school has agreed to a pupil being absent from school for part of the week or day and therefore must treat absence as authorised.”

## How should my child’s absence be recorded, and do I need to supply evidence?

Schools **must record absences as authorised** where it is not possible for a pupil to attend due to illness (both physical and mental health related).

Part 220 of the Working together to improve school attendance guidance advises that “In the majority of cases a parent’s notification that their child is ill can be accepted without question or concern. Schools should not routinely request that parents provide medical evidence to support illness. Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily as it places additional pressure on health professionals, their staff and their appointments system particularly if the illness is one that does not require treatment by a health professional. Only where the school has a genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the illness should medical evidence be requested to support the absence.”

Parent/Carers may still wish to make a doctor's appointment to see if they will provide initial evidence of their child’s illness. They may also be able to make referrals to other services such as CAMHS or other mental health support, where relevant.

## If my child cannot attend school, can they access alternative education?

The Local Authority (LA) has a legal duty to secure suitable alternative education for children of [compulsory school age](#) who, by reason of illness, exclusion or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them (section 19, Education Act 1996). This applies for those with and without an EHC plan.

LAs should have regard to the statutory guidance entitled: [‘Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs’](#) and this includes anxiety and other mental health conditions.

Page 7 of the guidance highlights that LAs should provide Alternative Education as soon as it is clear that the child will be away from school for 15 days, this can be consecutive days or over the course of a school year. These arrangements should be made as soon as possible, but at the latest by the sixth day of the absence.

Full-time education is not defined in law but the guidance states on page 4 that this should be “good quality education equivalent to that provided in mainstream schools, as far as the child’s health needs allow.” For example, if a child receives one-to-one tuition the hours could be fewer, as the education may be more intensive. However, it would be unlawful to withhold or reduce the provision or type of provision for a child because of costs.

## What should I do if I receive an attendance order?

If you are being threatened with an Attendance Order due to your child’s absences from school, you could write to the LA Educational Welfare Service (as well as any Education Welfare Officer employed by the school or Multi academy trust). You should explain the barriers to attending education your child is experiencing, for example if your child has SEN and/or is experiencing mental health difficulties. Only the LA can issue an attendance order, but they will gather information from your child’s school to help inform their decision so it a good idea to be clear with everyone what difficulties your child is experiencing and what you have done to try and support them to attend school. You could propose to the school that joint working between themselves and other support agencies to help identify and support your child’s needs might be a more effective way of supporting them back into school.

If you have not done so already, make an appointment to speak with your child’s GP to explain your child’s difficulties and ask for a letter to outline these. This may support your conversations with the school.

If the LA continue to propose serving an Attendance Order (or serve one) you may wish to consider seeking legal counsel from an educational law solicitor. You can [check if you qualify for legal aid](#).

The 'working together to improve school attendance guidance' states that the prosecution of parents should take place **where all other routes have failed** or are not deemed appropriate. This could include making the case for a community or parenting order where the parent is convicted to secure engagement with support. You can use our checklist at the end of this document to record what support has or has not been put into place so far.

## What else can schools do to support my child back into school?

- Have regular, open and proactive conversations with parents and where appropriate the child or young person.
- Obtain the views of the pupil to identify barriers to attendance.
- Consider sending work home.
- Consider what referrals could be made to support the pupil back into school.
- Consider how to use their best endeavours and what reasonable adjustments may need to be made.
- If they have not done so already, consider if the pupil has SEND needs and if they require support.
- Consider implementing a part-time timetable.

## What else can parent/ carers do to support their child back into school?

- Contact your GP to discuss your CYP's anxiety/ mental health needs and any support that might be appropriate.
- Consider asking the school nursing team for support.
- Ask for a meeting with the SENCo and check what support has been put in place or can go in place.
- Contact the Local Authority, if a CYP has missed 15 days or more of education, to [request Alternative Provision](#).
- Complain to the school if you are asked to consider home education or changing schools in place of support being offered.
- Ask the school to carry out the Assess stage of the [Graduated Approach](#) to assess all of their social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Consider making an application for an EHC needs assessment if support within school has not been successful.
- If your child has an EHCP, [request an early annual review](#).
- Communicate with the school if further specialist involvement may be required.
- Consider if there is a need for Reasonable Adjustments and how these may look for your CYP. In our [Reasonable Adjustments guide](#) we give suggestions of what a school could consider putting into place.
- Use our checklist below to help identify what actions have already been taken by school and what other options might be available.

## Parent Checklist

Action taken by the school in response to EBSA	Yes	No
Have considered if the child has SEND?		
Started the Graduated Approach/ Response?		
Made a referral to specialist services to consider what support a CYP may require in school?		
Have considered the views of CYP?		
Have school spoken with the Local Authority (LA) regarding the CYP?		
Has a part-time timetable been discussed?		
Has a phased return been considered?		
Have reasonable adjustments been put into place?		
Has alternative provision been considered?		
Has the above helped identify the barriers the CYP experiences? If no than have any been missed that may be worth exploring?		
Has the above helped the CYP be able to attend their educational setting? If no have next steps been discussed with the setting?		

Still concerned? If you are still unclear after reading the toolkit or have any further questions about any other aspect of Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), you have the following options: Call SEND And You Information, Advice and Support line on 0117 989 7725 There is a 24-hour answer phone SEND And You is available on Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 4.30pm Or get in touch via our website at <https://www.sendandyou.org.uk/contact-us/>.

NB: This document refers to the most up to date guidance as of May 2024.