



Peel Park

Primary School  
and Nursery

*The Path to Success*

# **Strategy for Supporting Pupils and Families at risk of or experiencing Emotional- Based School Avoidance.**

June 2024

Review Date: June 2025

## EBSA can be described as:

'A broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school' (West Sussex Guidance, 2022).

## Why does EBSA happen?

Kearney and Silberman (1990) propose that there are four main reasons, or functions, for school avoidance:

- 1. To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, such as feelings of anxiety or low mood.**
- 2. To avoid situations that might be stressful, such as academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment.**
- 3. To reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, such as parents or other family members.**
- 4. To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time.**

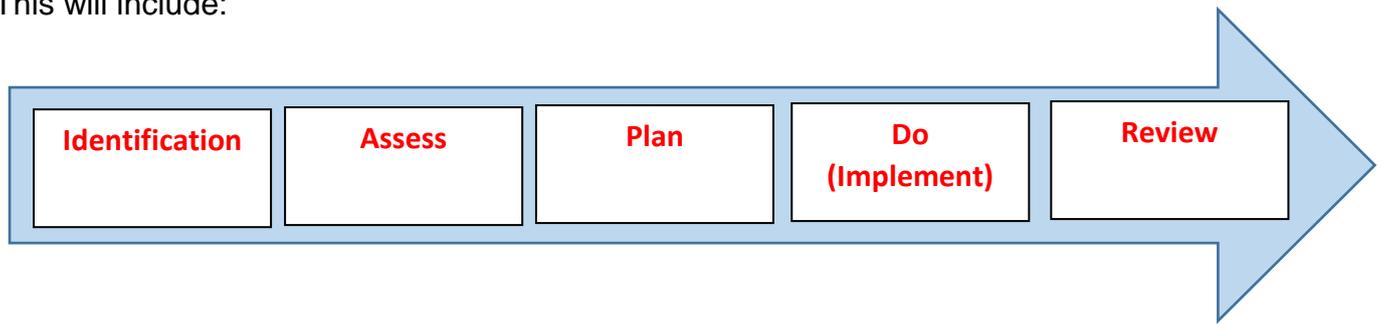
Reasons 1 and 2 may be considered to be **negative reinforcers**, whereby the young person attempts to *avoid* uncomfortable feelings or stressful situations. In contrast, reasons 3 and 4 could be considered **positive reinforcers**, where the young person is *seeking* something that elicits more pleasurable feelings. (Taken from the Bradford Guidance for School: Responding to Emotionally-Based School Avoidance.)

**Predisposing risk factors** may be associated with *child-based factors* (e.g. separation anxiety; prior trauma; key transition points), *family-based factors* (e.g. parental mental or physical health; family dynamics) or *school-based factors* (e.g. peer issues and/or social isolation; learning needs; difficulties with particular subjects). (Taken from the Bradford Guidance for School: Responding to Emotionally-Based School Avoidance.)

School Factors	Family Factors	Child factors
Bullying (the most common school factor)	Separation and divorce or change in family dynamic	Temperamental style- reluctance to interact and withdrawal from unfamiliar settings, people or objects
Difficulties in specific subject	Parent physical and mental health problems	Fear of failure and poor self confidence
Transition to secondary school, key stage or change of school	Overprotective parenting style	Physical illness
Structure of the school day	Dysfunctional family interactions	Age (5-6, 11-12 & 13-14 years)
Academic demands/high levels of pressure and performance-orientated classrooms	Being the youngest child in the family	Learning Difficulties, developmental problems or Autism Spectrum Condition if unidentified or unsupported
Transport or journey to school	Loss and Bereavement	Separation Anxiety from parent
Exams	High levels of family stress	Traumatic events
Peer or staff relationship difficulties	Family history of EBSA	
	Young carer	

## Early Identification and Information Gathering:

This will include:



### Identification

At Peel Park Primary School, we will ensure the identification process through:

- 1) Monitoring both attendance and punctuality;
- 2) Monitoring of patterns of absence;
- 3) Frequent absences for minor illnesses;
- 4) Monitoring of illnesses reported by the child when in school;
- 5) Observation and noting with changes of behaviour – reluctance to engage with peers and/ or learning which would indicate a change in presentation;
- 6) Challenging behaviours;
- 7) Lower self-esteem and lack of confidence;
- 8) Anxieties in making transitions to school and separating from parents;
- 9) Reluctance to attend school trips;
- 10) The child demonstrating worries about parents when at school;
- 11) Displays of anxiety, avoidance, fear and panic in relation to school/ school activities.
- 12) Evidence of under-achievement;
- 13) Physical changes such as changes in weight, stomach pains, headaches;
- 14) Conversations with parents who may express concerns about their child's behaviours in relation to school;
- 15) Conversations with children or when using Talking Mats to engage children in discussions about feelings.

### Assessment

When EBSA is suspected, school staff will undertake an assessment through:

- 1) Meeting with the child's parents to discuss any SEND needs which either are already identified, or which are as yet unidentified. The discussions with parents will involve gathering of information to ensure a holistic understanding of the concerns. See Appendix 1 regarding the information to be collected.
- 2) School staff, who work with the CYP, will meet as a team to identify information (See Appendix 2) relating to:
  - Strengths;
  - What is working well;
  - What is not working well;
  - Any difficulties noted;
  - Peer relationships;
  - Relationships with adults;
  - Response to academic tasks;
  - Emotional distress: what has been noted and what caused it?

- What support/ differentiation is already in place and how the CYP is responding to this;
- 3) Risk and Resilience questionnaires with staff and parents to support and guide intervention. (See Appendix 3 from the Bradford EBSA Toolkit)

### Seeking the CYP views:

This will require great sensitivity so that the child can engage. There are a number of means that staff can deploy to support the child in being able to indicate their own viewpoint and these should be appropriate to the child's developmental stage. The different ways of being able to gain the child's views can include:

- 1) Using paints, playdough, collage etc. and asking questions such as: 'What would call the feeling you have when you think about school?' 'What does your anxiety/ worry look like?' 'How does this prevent you from coming to school?' 'Can you paint how you feel about school?'
- 2) Creating a timeline of the school day in relation to emotions;
- 3) Developing awareness and understanding of emotional responses through the use of the 5 point scale/ Zones of Regulation;
- 4) Depicting a school timetable of the week and colour coding in red, amber and green to explore and to try and identify key themes. This could also be applied to a map of the school and different aspects related to school;
- 5) My ideal school – depiction through drawing between adult and child (Appendix 2.9 of Bradford's EBSA Toolkit);
- 6) Talking Mats and sorting activities to identify key themes as well as likes, dislikes, strengths and concerns.

### Planning and Implementation

Peel Park Primary School will consider the possible formulation questions below:

- 1) What appears to be the function of the EBSA? (Associated with Kearney and Silberman's four functions)
  - To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, such as feelings of anxiety or low mood?
  - To avoid situations that might be stressful, such as academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment?
  - To reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, such as parents or other family members?
  - To pursue tangible reinforces outside of school, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time?
- 2) Are there any factors which appear to maintain the anxiety cycle in the school avoidance?
- 3) What are other people's perceptions of the situation? Are there any differences?
- 4) What are the risk factors that have been identified (school/child/home)?
- 5) What strengths or protective factors have been identified that can be built upon?

(Adapted from West Sussex, 2022.)

School will use Bradford Council's Educational Psychology Team have developed their own EBSA Formulation Record for schools and settings to use (EBSA Toolkit: Appendix 2.10). Included as Appendix 3 to this strategy for Peel Park Primary School.

Using the planning and formulation guidance, school will implement a plan of support for the CYP, using the Bradford's EBSA Toolkit planning guide. (Appendix 4 of Peel Park Primary School's Strategy.)

As recommended in the Bradford's EBSA Guidance for Schools:

Key elements of an effective support plan should include:

- Establishing regular phone calls between parents/carers and school staff, agreeing on how often to connect and setting realistic response times.
- If the young person is out of school, some form of return to school at the earliest opportunity.
- Conduct early home visits, if appropriate, to discuss the child's difficulty with attending school.
- Collaboratively agree on actions and ensure everyone sticks to the plan until the next review.
- Create a personalised plan for each student, including a flexible timetable, transportation arrangements, buddy systems, and a safe space in school.
- Provide the young person with access to a designated staff member they can approach if they feel overwhelmed with anxiety at school (i.e. a key worker).
- Inform all staff, including supply teachers, about the student's challenges, especially during class or key stage changes.
- Designate a safe place in school where the young person can go if needed.
- Assign a staff member for the student to 'check in' with throughout the day.
- Consider if support for the family (e.g. Early Help) would be beneficial.

It will be crucial for staff to work with parents and CYP to support feelings related to fear and anxiety. For some children, there will need to be a gradual reintegration to school so that they are not overwhelmed by their emotions which could lead to further withdrawal from the school environment.



## Review

From the Bradford EBSA Guidance for Schools: The following flowchart should be used to support identification and decision-making for young people with EBSA:

