



Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Guidance to Schools:
A Graduated Response to School
Non-attendance

June 2023

Introduction

In Nottinghamshire we now use the umbrella term Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) to describe pupils who may be experiencing difficulties attending school on a consistent basis. This allows schools, parents/carers and professionals to consider a whole host of working hypotheses around the reason for the non-attendance. This also encompasses existing guidance relating to Anxiety Related Non-attendance (ARNA).

‘**Working together to improve school attendance**’ published by the Department for Education (DfE) 2022 states, ‘Improving attendance is everyone’s business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families. The foundation of securing good attendance is that school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn.’

Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and therefore at all stages of improving attendance, schools and partners should work with pupils and parents to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place. Securing good attendance cannot therefore be seen in isolation, and effective practices for improvement will involve close interaction with schools’ efforts on curriculum, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, pastoral and mental health and wellbeing, and effective use of resources, including pupil premium. It cannot solely be the preserve of a single member of staff, or organisation, it must be a concerted effort across all teaching and non-teaching staff in school, the trust or governing body, the local authority, and other local partners.’ [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

Introduction

For the most vulnerable pupils, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided. Research has shown associations between regular absence from school and a number of extra-familial harms; this includes crime and serious violence.

In 2022, the DfE data revealed that: *'The pupils with the highest attainment at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 4 have higher rates of attendance over the key stage compared to those with the lowest attainment.'*

In **March 2023**, the **DfE data showed 22% of pupils** were **missing for more than 10% of sessions** which is the definition of persistently absent.

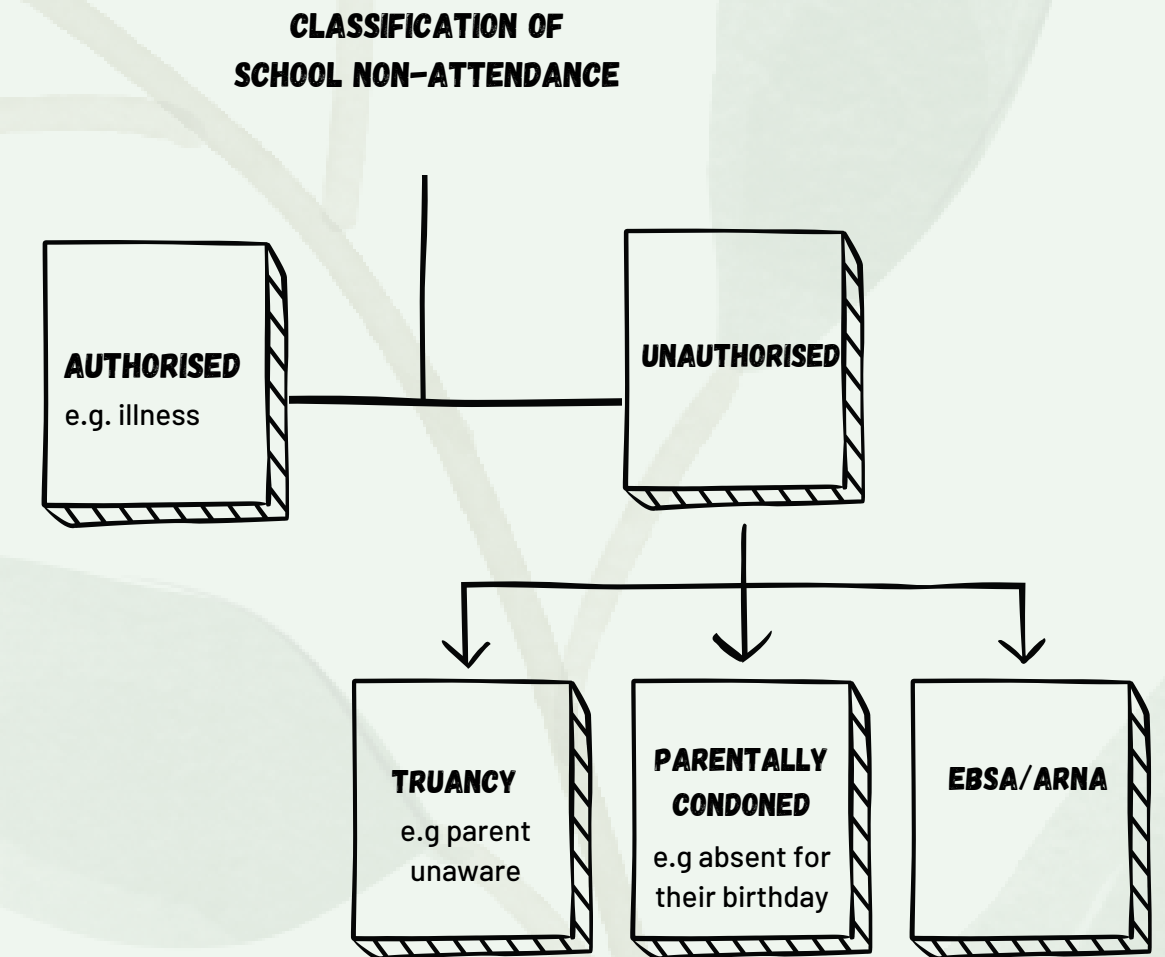
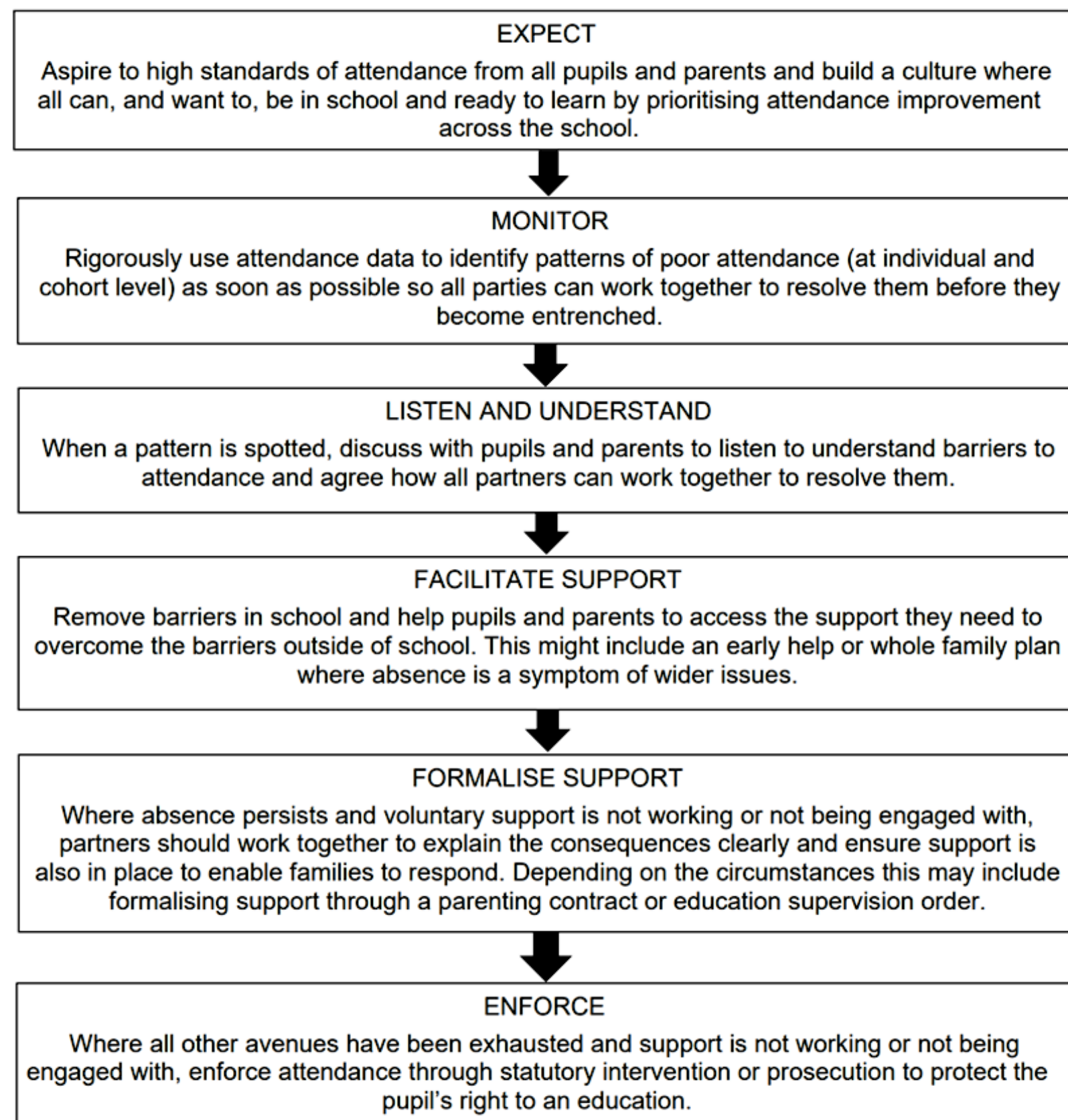


Figure 1: Classification of school non-attendance based on Thambirajah et al. 2008 p.16

School non-attendance is a broad term to describe an individual's behaviour and it tells us very little about the reason for a pupil's absence. Therefore, within this group there will be pupils who are truanting from school (absent without their parent/carer's knowledge), some who are absent with the permission of their parents (condoned absence) and those for whom the prospect of attending school is extremely anxiety provoking.

DfE: Working together to improve school attendance applicable from September 2022 states:

‘Successfully treating the root causes of absence and removing barriers to attendance, at home, in school or more broadly requires schools and local partners to work collaboratively with, not against families. All partners should work together to:



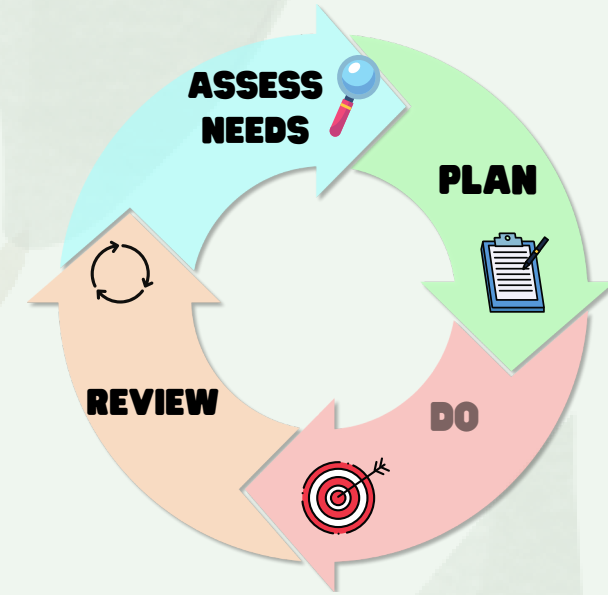
A Graduated Response To School Non-Attendance

Within Nottinghamshire we advocate a graduated response to non-attendance:

1.

All staff should have an awareness of which pupil may be vulnerable to developing emotionally based school refusal. This will include any pupil:

- with a past history of school attendance difficulties or difficulties transitioning into school in the morning. This may be more pronounced after a weekend, school holiday or period of illness
- who has struggled with year group or key stage transitions
- with higher than usual levels of anxiety. For this reason, pupils on the autistic spectrum and young people with attachment related needs can be particularly at risk
- with a parent/carer who is ill and particularly where the young person is closely involved in caring for the adult
- who has recently experienced the death or loss of someone important to them, including parental separation
- who is experiencing friendship difficulties or bullying
- who has been away from school for a period of time through illness or otherwise
- who has persistent difficulties coping with work particularly when there is no peer group with similar experiences
- who sets themselves very high, perhaps unrealistic, expectations for attainment.



There will also be those who mask their anxiety, appearing to quietly 'blend in' at school but who may express extreme negative emotions at home. This may be more prevalent in those pupils on the Autistic Spectrum Continuum (ASC).

A Graduated Response To School Non-Attendance

Within Nottinghamshire we advocate a graduated response to non-attendance:



2.

Persistent non-attendance describes if a pupil's attendance is falling below 90%, but it is our belief that if attendance falls below 95% then school should monitor this proactively with a daily telephone call or letter to parents/carers. Any concerns about attendance needs to be explored as soon as possible.

3.

A note should be made of any young person with significant time off within each week and the reasons given for absence should be checked out. If these reasons are unclear, they should be discussed with parents and the pupil to clarify if there is cause for concern.

A note should also be made of any young person with a recurring pattern of non-attendance (e.g. every Monday and Tuesday) over a longer period of time (4 – 6 weeks) and this should be explored with parents and the pupil.

4.

Any absence for which there is no clear explanation needs to be addressed immediately with a key member of staff identified to do this. Ideally someone who the child has a trusting relationship with to ascertain their perceptions of the situation. The parents' and pupil's views should be listened to carefully and they should be given reassurance that any issues of concern (such as bullying) are being actively addressed (for example providing a safe haven within school at break times). It can be helpful for children to have a key adult and/or activity to transition to. Outcomes and action points from these discussions should be recorded. It is essential that staff within the school maintain good communication with each other so that parents have a consistent response from staff and actions are followed up.

A Graduated Response To School Non-Attendance

Within Nottinghamshire we advocate a graduated response to non-attendance:

5.

It should remain the responsibility of the key person to monitor the pupil's attendance and respond to the action plan over the next fortnight.

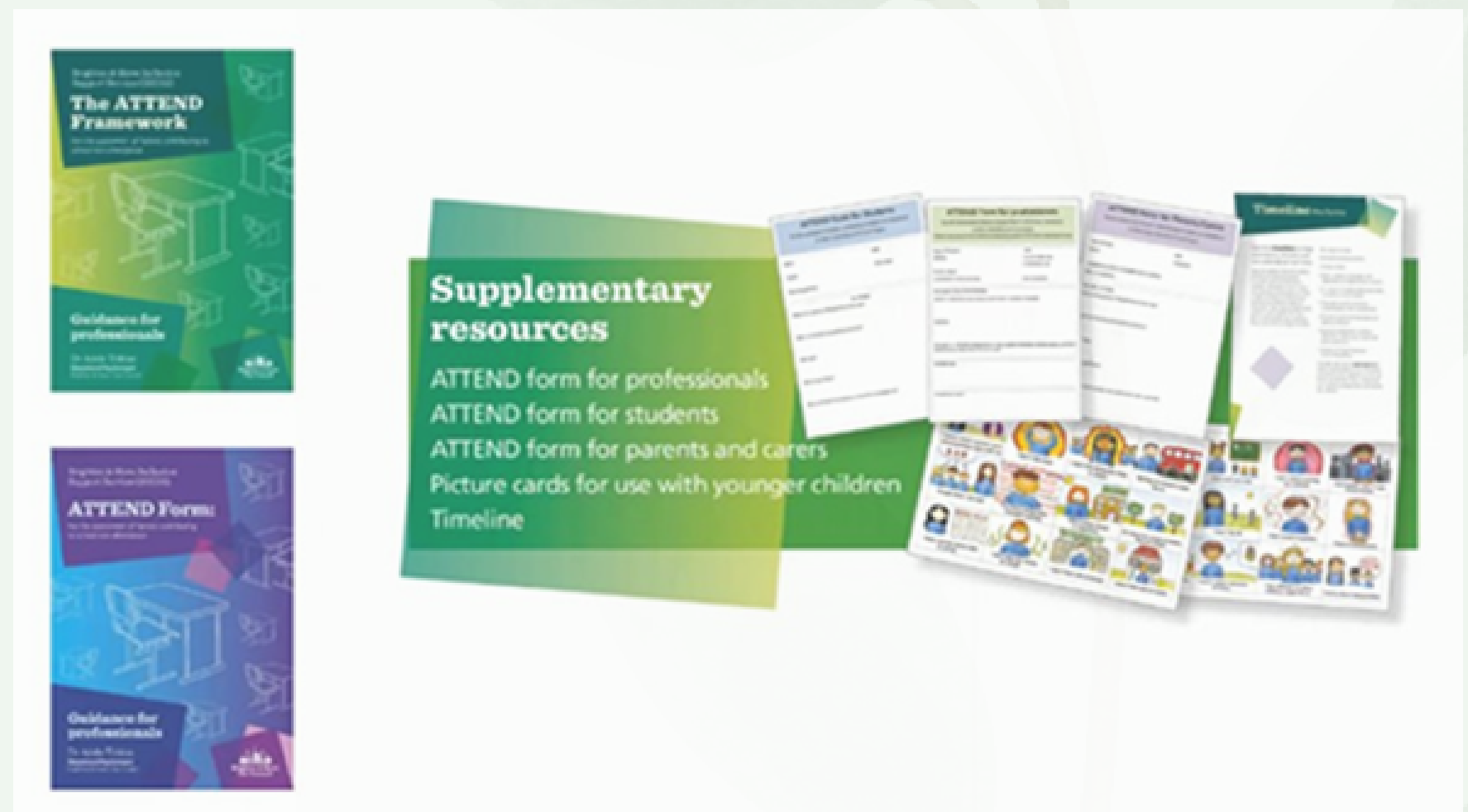
6.

If the situation appears to have resolved, this is positive. However, the young person's attendance should continue to be carefully monitored over subsequent weeks.



7.

If the situation is not resolving after a fortnight, then the school could consider using a tool such as the **ATTEND Framework** (next page) to have a structured conversation with parents and pupil to explore the barriers to attendance.



A Graduated Response To School Non-Attendance

The ATTEND Framework in Nottinghamshire:

The ATTEND Framework is an intervention designed to capture in one place all the underlying 'barriers' which may be impacting on a pupil's ability to sustain their school attendance. Developed by Brighton and Hove EPS, the Nottinghamshire EPS rolled out training to our schools in November 2022.

Dates for further training can be found on the Em-ed Support website, as and when, they are released [Training & Events](#) | [The East Midlands Education Support Service \(em-edsupport.org.uk\)](#).

Using a collaborative approach, parent/carers meet together with staff from school to complete a timeline and think about the strengths of the situation. At the subsequent meeting the two parties complete the respective ATTEND proformas. The pupil will complete theirs independently of the meeting in most cases supported by a member of staff who knows them well. One member of staff is trained to facilitate the ATTEND meeting and the other member of staff is someone who knows the child well. The parent/carer is welcome to bring an ally to support them complete their information. This is done together in the same room, to support transparency and to inform the action planning part of the meeting. The actions will then be reviewed every two weeks. There are leaflets explaining the process on the Em-ed website .

Who attends the ATTEND meeting?

Parent/carer

Parent/carer supporter

School staff –
ATTEND
meeting
facilitator

Member of
school staff
who knows
the child



A Graduated Response To School Non-Attendance

Reasonable adjustments, medical evidence, sending work home and part-time timetables:

It will be essential to maintain active communication between home and school and this may mean a member of staff making regular home visits. The emphasis should continue to be on supporting the child/young person to come into school as often as possible.

The 2023 DfE guidance '**Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools**' addresses the issue of part-time timetables: 'Any part-time timetable arrangements should be designed with the specific barrier to attendance in mind, have a time limit by which point the pupil is expected to attend fulltime, (either at school or at an alternative provision setting), and have formal arrangements in place for regularly reviewing the timetable with the pupil and their parents/carers.'

Any pupil on a part-time timetable arrangements should be carefully documented and recorded with the Fair Access Team:

[Fair access and children missing education | Nottinghamshire County Council](#)

A Graduated Response To School Non-Attendance

Reasonable adjustments, medical evidence, sending work home and part-time timetables:

The 2022 DfE guidance **‘Mental health issues affecting a pupil’s attendance: guidance for schools’** provides more detail about how to manage this:

‘Schools must record absences as authorised where pupils of compulsory school age cannot attend due to illness (both physical and mental health related). There is no need to routinely ask for medical evidence to support recording an absence as authorised for mental health reasons. This is because, in general, primary care health professionals such as General Practitioners are unlikely to be able to offer such evidence to support one-off absences related to mental health.

In instances of long-term or repeated absences for the same reason, however, seeking medical evidence may be appropriate to assist in assessing whether the child requires additional support to help them to attend more regularly, and whether the illness is likely to prevent the child from attending for extended periods.

If a parent proactively seeks out a note from a GP, it does not imply a need for absence unless this is explicit in their letter.’

Sending work home from school during a period of non-attendance is not the same as ‘educating off-site’. It can be an invaluable part of maintaining the sense of connection between the pupil and school.

The school staff leading on attendance should liaise with the school Senco to raise awareness and explore whether the child/young person may have an unmet SEN.

‘The DfE guidance applies to all pupils, but school staff should consider whether a child with a SEND need may be more anxious about attending school. Where a child is disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010, schools will need to consider their duty to make reasonable adjustments under section 20 of that Act. The principles of maintaining consistent high ambitions for the attendance of this cohort of children, remain the same, and schools should strive to maximise their time spent in school.’

Once a graduated response has been implemented:

If, after 2 cycles of action and review, there has been no progress towards achieving better attendance then the schools could seek advice from outside agencies.

- This could include a referral to the Early Help Unit: [Request for Early Help \(Child\) - Introduction - Nottinghamshire County Council](#)
- Or a request for support from the Family Service: [The family service | Nottinghamshire County Council](#)
- It may also include the SENCO requesting a discussion with SENCO colleagues at the termly Springboard meeting and /or seeking advice and discussion from include the Schools and Families Specialist Service (Communication and Interaction) and the Educational Psychology Service or the Health Related Education Team.
- Before referring to the HRET please refer to the HRET's [Supporting Return to School Guidance](#).

Once a further plan has been agreed, this should be implemented, monitored, and reviewed by school on a fortnightly basis with all those involved being kept informed of progress. Larger multi-agency meetings should take place regularly, to keep the situation under review and plan next steps accordingly. This document should be read in conjunction around EBSA including the ARNA resources on the Em-ed Support website: [Emotionally Based School Avoidance \(EBSA\) including Anxiety Related Non-attendance \(ARNA\)](#).

Other sources of support:

- For tools to use with pupils to ascertain their views about school then please visit the Em-ed Support website [Emotionally Based School Avoidance \(EBSA\)](#) [including Anxiety Related Non-attendance \(ARNA\)](#) for resources and examples of good practice shared by schools.
- On this page are all the related guidance documents and resources for schools which are free to download.
- Details of EBSA related training are available from Em-ed Support, including ATTEND Framework training.
- The Anna Freud Centre has a free webinar [Understanding emotionally based school avoidance seminar - YouTube](#) and associated resources [Addressing emotionally-based school avoidance \(annafreud.org\)](#); including videos suitable for pupils and parents to access [Let's talk about anxiety animation - YouTube](#)

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Be U NOTTS
SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT

References:



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Department for Education (2023) *Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools* [Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-issues-affecting-a-pupil-s-attendance-guidance-for-schools)

Department for Education (2022): *Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent school and local authorities* London: DfE [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

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