

Emotionally Based School Avoidance

A signposting and
early intervention
guide for Merton
Schools.



What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance?

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) refers to a collection of behaviours, including avoidance, disengagement and non-attendance, driven by strong emotions associated with attending school. Most often, these behaviours are driven by anxiety.

How to use this document

EBSA
SUPPORT
MAP

How to use this document...

Click through this document by following the arrows and icons at the bottom of the page. Several pages also include links (for further information about services and/or resources)

Click on each section of the Merton EBSA Support Map to see details about support available in Merton at each iThrive level. NB: The document refers to levels of Persistent Absence (PA) and Severe Absence (SA) as defined by the [DofE Guidance for Schools](#), last updated in April 2023. Although guidance is offered about the attendance level (PA/SA) where each level of support should be in place, this is a rough guide. Support needs should always be considered at an individual level.

A NOTE ON SAFEGUARDING

Non-attendance at school may be a sign of safeguarding and neglect. If you have concerns about the safeguarding of children these should be referred to [the safeguarding hub](#). This should be based on the concerns that you have for young people. You could use the safeguarding partnership [“neglect tool”](#) to consider the wider aspects of neglect. Improving school attendance is a major way to improve the safety of children and is a key driver in many safeguarding plans.



NEXT

How to help...

Research suggests a small window of opportunity between early indicators of EBSA and long-term attendance issues. Monitor at-risk CYP closely, particularly at known trigger points, and offer support at the earliest possible opportunity.

Reach out for training/support with any of the following steps BEFORE attendance becomes an issue.

Take steps before attendance drops below 90%. For CYP with particularly strong risk factors, e.g., history of EBSA, ASD or parent mental health issues, take steps at 95%.

Speak to CYP and parents. Gain a detailed picture of what's going on. Use an evidence-based checklist to consider CYP, family, school and social/contextual factors.

Minimise family vs school/school vs family dynamics by developing a **collaborative** action plan to actively address CYP, family, school and social/contextual factors.

Build CYP and parent self-efficacy. Negative thoughts about one's ability to cope can impact on engagement with support. Consider support with social skills and peer relationships.

Identify a team around the family to support attendance, including at least one trusted member of staff CYP can speak to when coming to/being in school feels overwhelming.

Merton EBSA Support Map

Please click on each Thrive segment to see support available at this level

General EBSA guidance and further reading can be accessed here:

[Government and Borough Guidance](#)

[Other Helpful EBSA Guidance Documents](#)



Merton

THRIVING

This is UNIVERSAL guidance, which should be in place for **ALL** students/families



WHAT HELPS?

An effective whole school attendance strategy

Staff who are trained in EBSA

A school climate that fosters a sense of belonging

Healthy peer relationships

Positive relationships with staff

Common barriers to attendance identified and addressed preventatively

Impact of absence on attainment is widely understood

Good or improved attendance is rewarded

Diversity is valued

Effective attendance monitoring

WHO CAN HELP WITH THIS?

Return
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MAP

Virtual Behaviour Service

Support for schools running Nurture Groups through the Nurture Network

Training on Using Zones of regulation as a whole school approach

Lunchtime audit plus midday supervisor training

Education Welfare Service

The EWS can provide training to whole staff teams on registration systems, categorisation of absences, whole school attendance policies and other training around attendance matters.

Education Welfare Officers support whole school attendance approaches and share good practice between schools

NHS Education Wellbeing Service (Mental Health Support Teams)

Working with schools towards a Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Supporting schools to develop a positive school climate that promotes belonging.

Universal Year Six Worry Ninja workshops supporting CYP with managing anxiety.

Universal parent webinars.

Supporting schools to enhance CYP social skills and self-efficacy.

Support with EBSA school audit

MENCAP MERTON

ACES: Youth club for young people with high-functioning autism

Holiday Playschemes and Buddies: A range of activities for CYP with mild, moderate and complex learning disabilities and/or autism



THRIVING

OFF THE RECORD

For schools in the OtR cluster:

Supporting schools with whole school approach, including staff training /consultation

Mental health focused parent coffee mornings and parent workshops

KEEPING CONNECTED Online Support Group: [Online Service \(talkofftherecord.org\)](http://talkofftherecord.org)

Educational Psychology Service

Depending on services commissioned, EP service can offer advice to schools on preventative measures for EBSA, such as promoting a positive school climate.

MERTON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

The IT team can offer guidance/support to schools using SIMS on effective monitoring of school attendance. Other schools should contact their Information Management System provider for support

Return to MAP

GETTING ADVICE

This guidance applies to all students, where a pattern of absence has been identified, particularly those at risk of Persistent Absence

WHAT HELPS?

Early identification of EBSA

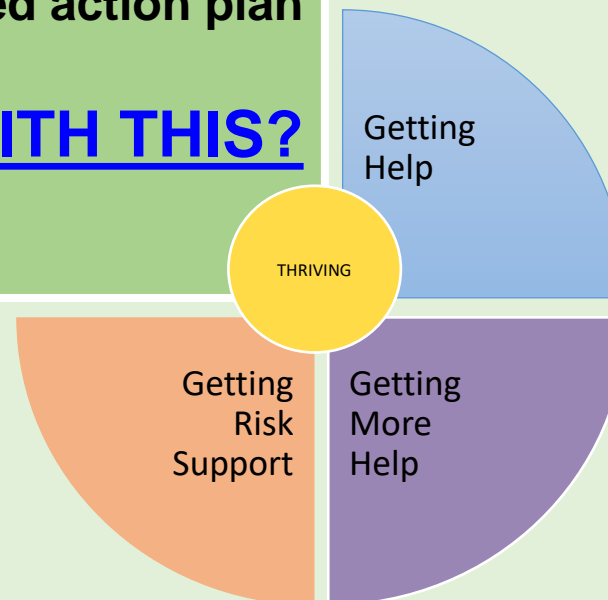
In-school measures

Signposting for [general wellbeing support](#), such as counselling, including [Kooth](#)

Increasing sense of agency and self-efficacy for CYP and parents

Thorough assessment exploring school and home factors leading to a tailored action plan

WHO CAN HELP WITH THIS?



Return
to
MAP

Education Welfare Service

Phone/e-mail advice for parents, schools and other agencies on attendance and punctuality issues, including legal aspects of school attendance.

Guidance and advice to schools on changes to legislation and good practice.

Supporting schools with termly review of all non-attendance cases.

Educational Psychology Service

Supporting ELSA practitioners in the vast majority of Merton primary schools.

Depending on level of service commissioned by schools, training, consultations, supervision may be offered, around EBSA.

Virtual Behaviour Service

Supporting Anxious Children Training

Emotion Coaching: whole day training for staff.

Organises Mental Health Lead Forum on a termly basis where factors influencing EBSA are often covered.

Supporting schools through Nurture Network to embed a WSA to CYP wellbeing

NHS Education Wellbeing Service

Consultation slots for all Merton schools on emerging EBSA. Bookable [HERE](#).

Supporting schools with EBSA assessments and tailored EBSA action plans

Advising schools on interventions for anxiety, social skills and self-efficacy.

Workshops and Webinars for parent

Supporting schools to identify EBSA early

Virtual School

Daily monitoring of attendance of all children in care through Welfare Call call centre to every school or education setting for children of school age.

OFF THE RECORD

Signposting : 0800 980 7475 or (email address here) during working hours.

Outreach support at Pollards Hill youth club by Outreach worker.

Telephone Support Line open weekdays 3-6pm & Saturdays 10am-1pm 0800 980 7475

www.talkofftherecord.org/support-line/

Online CYP Support Groups & Workshops

Online workshops for parents of children with EBSA

CAMHS

Consultation for school staff regarding possible referrals and signposting.

MENCAP MERTON

Workshops, events & training for parents & carers of CYP with special needs & disabilities

[Merton Autism Parent Service \(MAPS\)](#): Confidential listening, support, information and advice service

Getting Advice

Getting Help

Getting Risk Support

Getting More Help

Return to MAP

GETTING HELP

This guidance applies to students whose attendance has dropped below 90% (Persistent Absence). For students at risk of EBSA, these measures should be put in place BEFORE attendance has dropped below 90%.

WHAT HELPS?

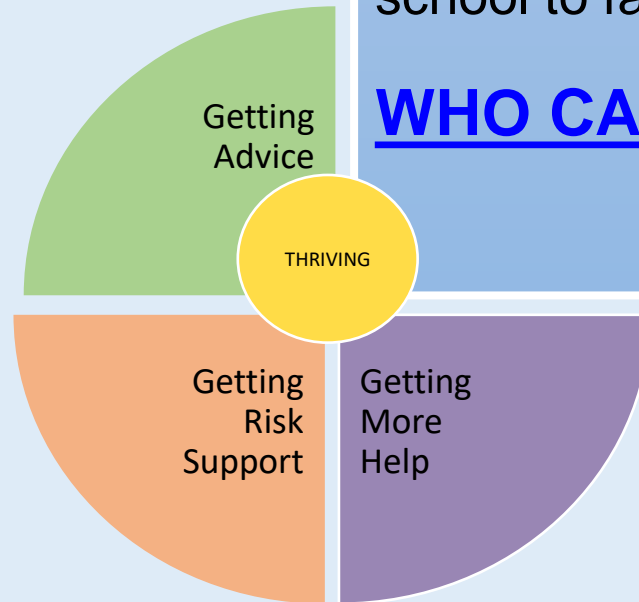
1:1 support for students

Implementing a tailored action plan

Parent Support (signposting/facilitating)

A focus on restoring relationships (peer to peer, CYP to staff, CYP to family, school to family)

WHO CAN HELP WITH THIS?



Return to MAP

Virtual Behaviour Service

Mentoring support for Y6 pupils around transition to Secondary.

Support could be offered as part of more general behaviour support. Behaviour Support Workers can work directly with Primary pupils and parents. Direct referral.

Educational Psychology Service

Depending on individual EPS/school arrangements, time could be commissioned for group/individual work for CYP struggling with attendance. This input would usually be arranged through termly planning meetings.

Education Welfare Service

Advice for schools and parents about the legal aspects of school attendance.

Supporting schools with termly review of all non-attendance cases.

NHS Education Wellbeing Service

1:1 interventions for parents of Primary school aged children struggling with anxiety.

1:1 guided self-help Anxiety and Low Mood programmes for Secondary school students with emerging EBSA (attendance above 85%).

Workshops for parents whose children are struggling with EBSA

Family Support Service

Triple P Parenting programmes, including the Fearless programme

Getting Help

Getting Advice

Getting Risk Support

Getting More Help

OFF THE RECORD

Counselling and Peer Support Worker/ outreach support to address anxiety and other issues that might influence EBSA
www.talkofftherecord.org/merton/counselling/

Telephone Support Line open weekdays 3-6pm and Saturdays 10am-1pm 0800 980 7475

www.talkofftherecord.org/support-line/

Social Workers in Schools (SWIS)

In schools involved in the [SWIS pilot](#), CYP can access drop-in support and schools are offered support where appropriate with engaging parents, TAF meetings and school-based CYP/family support.

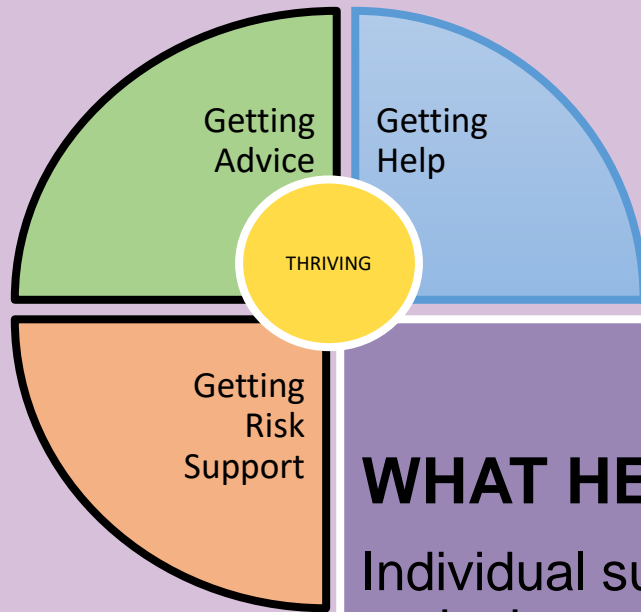
CAMHS

Consultation for school staff regarding possible referrals/signposting.

Merton Autism Outreach Service

MAOS supports the inclusion of pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social Communication Difficulties in mainstream settings. MAOS works in an advisory role supporting school staff in developing understanding of ASD and sharing tools and strategies to enable pupils to access learning and social opportunities. Advice relating to the needs of specific pupils and staff training is also provided. Referrals are facilitated for students with a diagnosis of ASD through the Educational Psychology Service.

Return to MAP



GETTING MORE HELP

This guidance applies to students with persistent absence who are at risk of Severe Absence (attendance below 50%).

WHAT HELPS?

Individual support with anxiety, low mood and other mental health difficulties

Supporting CYP who may be anxious about falling behind academically

Whole family interventions

[Who can help with this?](#)



Getting More Help

Virtual Behaviour Service
 Involvement in multi-agency level support on a base-by-case basis.

Educational Psychology Service
 Support at this level is arranged on a case-by-case basis and is also dependent on commissioning arrangement between schools and the service.

Education Welfare Service

TAC/TAF support for the family for attendance and punctuality (Formalise).

Parenting Contracts - School, parents, child and supporting agencies.

Whole family support plan to improve attendance where there the child is or Severe Absence (50% attendance or below).

Referral to Merton Medical Education Service / Lavender with supporting medical evidence.

Legal sanctions to ensure the attendance of the child. This includes Penalty Warning letter, Penalty Notice, Court action, School Attendance Order and Education Supervision Order.

Family Support Service

The Family Support Service Case Practitioners work to a whole family approach. Referrals to this one to one family support can be made where there are multiple/complex needs, that require a coordinated multi agency response to whole family needs and where there is evidence that needs cannot be met within existing accessible resources.

Virtual School

Support offered to LAC/CIN for children at risk of missing education: Click [HERE](#) for further details

OFF THE RECORD

Signposting : 0800 980 7475 or (email address here) during working hours.

Outreach support at Pollards Hill youth club by Outreach worker. Need details of how to access.

Telephone Support Line open weekdays 3-6pm and Saturdays 10am-1pm 0800 980 7475

www.talkofftherecord.org/support-line/

CAMHS

Assessment and Formulation

Direct Therapeutic work

Multi-agency Working

Referring On

Merton Autism Outreach Service

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ASSESSMENT AND FORMULATION

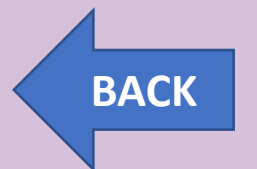
At a more entrenched level, EBSA may be part of a complex mental health difficulty. For young people we are working with we would be assessing to generate a **formulation of the child's difficulties** (e.g. using 4 Ps model) and the function of the avoidance within that formulation (e.g. Kearney and Silverman 1995) – which can be shared with family, child and network. This could involve screening and **further assessment of** co-morbid factors such as **neurodevelopmental disorders** (ASD/ADHD), which we understand to indicate increased risk of school avoidance. This would also consider the contextual factors involved such as parental mental health, past trauma, parenting styles, and including school issues such as bullying, school pressures etc. We would also give recommendations around whether further learning assessment is suggested.



DIRECT THERAPEUTIC WORK

Based on the formulation, we aim to determine individual and systemic factors involved and used **evidence-based treatment** with the family and young person. This would again involve **psychoeducation** around anxiety and avoidance. The evidence has been that for young people who have been out of school for a considerable period, **individual therapy (CBT) alone is not effective**. Often, they may refuse to attend CAMHS.

We are able to offer **sessions to their parents** to provide advice and support, possibly developing graded exposure plans with them. This may involve setting realistic expectations with them and/or providing psychoeducation. **Systemic therapy** is also available, where relational issues are part of the formulation of the child's difficulties.



MULTI AGENCY WORKING

For all cases of EBSA, a systemic, **multi-agency approach** has the most chance of success (what is evidence) and would be adopted by Getting More Help in working with the young people we treat. This would involve:

- Consulting with the child's **school** and thinking about strategies for reintegration. We have found that schools vary in their adoption of reduced timetable approaches and graded exposure, and this can lead to differences in expectations between schools and Getting More Help. We would use EBSA guidelines to work with schools on this.
- Attending **multi-agency meetings** (including TACS, CIN, CP meetings and CETR) and giving a CAMHS perspective, outlining the formulation of the difficulties from a psychological perspective.
- Linking with **social care** around cases where their involvement is required. It could be argued that all children significantly out of school are Child in Need as they are not getting the appropriate education they need. We would want to know what practical support can be provided by the Local Authority to help a young person get in (e.g FWBS).
- Linking with **SEN** and providing evidence for EHCP for young people. We found that it can be difficult to get the appropriate EP/SEN support for young people who have been out of school who are returning to school. If they are bright, it is assumed no further assessment/intervention is needed, whereas they may have missed a year or two of school and it is unknown how this has impacted on their learning. They need intervention to help them catch up after such an absence, which generally only tends to happen when the child already has identified SEN needs or EHCP.

REFERRING ON

For those where multi-agency efforts have been made to get young person to return to school but anxiety is too entrenched, then we would consider supporting a **referral to MMES** as an alternative provision. For some young people, home tuition can be a positive starting place to help them get back into education and rebuild confidence lost. We would also make links with the **Family Wellbeing Service** to support parents in their efforts to get children to get to school, if parenting was thought to be a factor.

We would also advise on referrals onto or links with **Adult Mental Health Services** where parental mental health is an issue.

We also link with **My Futures** and can often work closely with them. Often, My Futures and FWBS can meet the young person out and about, to try and support them in reducing overall avoidance in an active way.



BACK

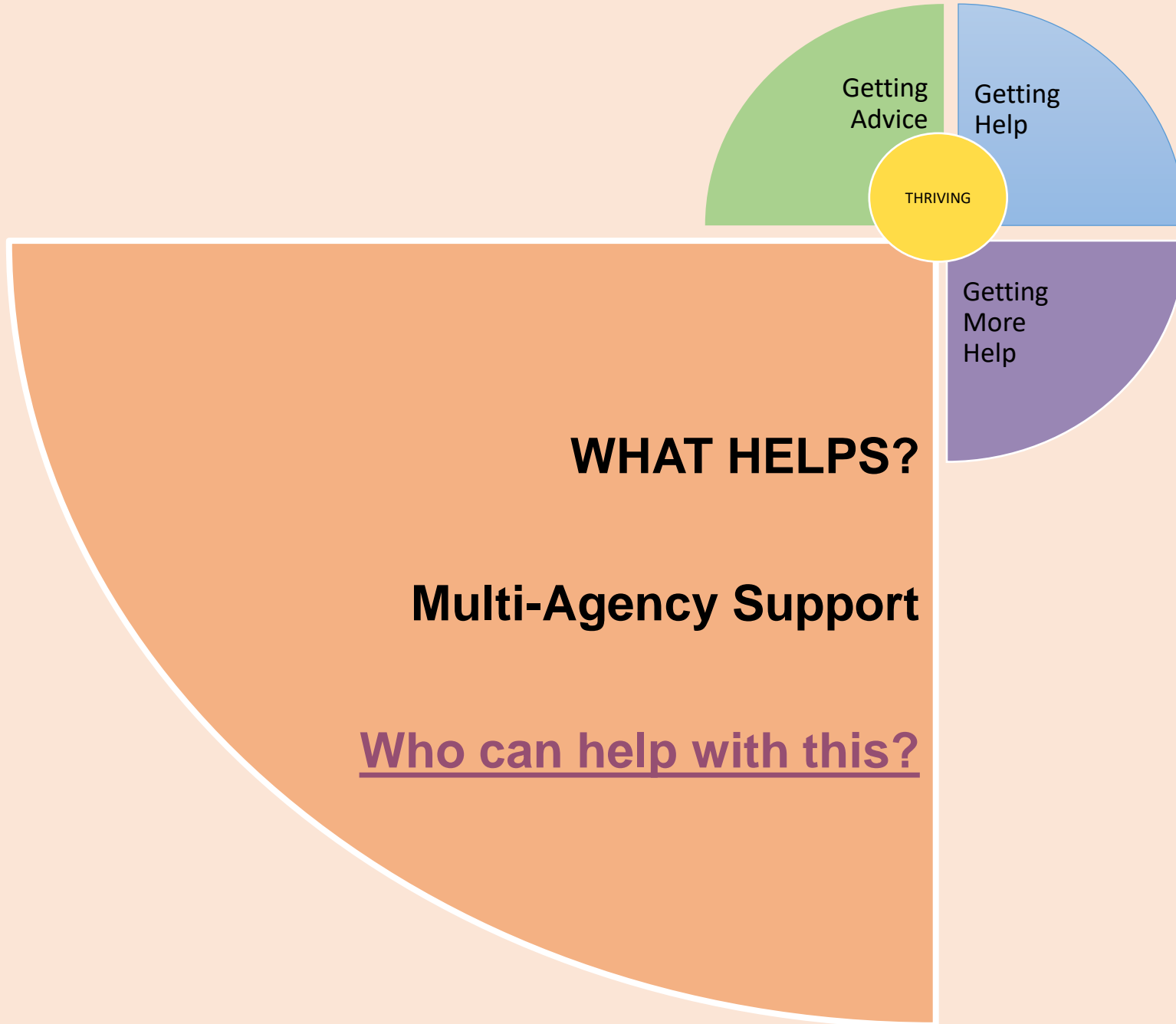
Virtual School Process for Promoting Good Attendance...

- Daily monitoring of attendance of all children in care through Welfare Call call-centre to every school or education setting for children of school age. Post 16 tracking will begin in January 2022 via Welfare Call.
- Weekly data analysis of pupil attendance and absence through RAG update meetings – Advisory Teachers, VS Business Manager and VSHT.
- Respond to exclusion notifications from Welfare Call by contacting schools and social workers to address concerns and review support strategies to prevent future exclusions/suspensions.
- Follow up on Children Missing Education (CME) cases with Social Workers, Admissions Service and Special Educational Needs & Disability Teams to ensure a school place is secured within the Statutory Framework.
- Link in with Virtual School Heads and work jointly with other LA services when issues arise with children placed outside of Merton.
- Escalate cases of concern with regards to high level of exclusion, non-attendance and CSE through the half-termly Virtual School Education Progress Monitoring Meetings.
- Work with individual schools where there are areas of concern in relation to behaviour and use of exclusion.
- Work with schools and Social Workers in identifying suitable alternatives to exclusion on a case-by-case basis.
- Work in partnership with school, Social Workers, carers/parents and other professionals to improve attendance/educational outcomes.
- Collect and analyse details of alternative provision/reduced education offers on a weekly basis and address any matters arising.
- Monitor those pupils on reduced timetables to ensure that the timetable increases within an agreed timeframe.
- Analyse monthly absence data and review performance, with action planned strategic support to address concerns and anomalies.
- Work with the Educational Psychologist on commissioned work to address individual children's needs and provide support for schools.



[BACK TO GETTING HELP](#)

GETTING RISK SUPPORT



This guidance applies to students:

- with Severe Absence (below 50%)
- with Persistent Absence and additional risk factors, such as severe mental health issues.
- receiving statutory support.

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Virtual School

Follow up on Children Missing Education (CME) cases with Social Workers, Admissions Service and Special Educational Needs & Disability Teams to ensure a school place is secured within the Statutory Framework.

Merton Medical Education Service (MMES)

MMES offers specialist provision, which could include home tuition, in community provision, online learning, a placement at one of its 6 campuses or a combination of some/all of these, depending upon the individual needs of the student. MMES works closely with other services to deliver a supportive curriculum, eg: CAMHS, Speech and Language Therapy, Educational Psychology and My Futures. All admissions come through the Local Authority,

Youth Justice Service

For Young People on Orders to the Youth Justice Service the education worker will keywork the young person to improve engagement with education

Education Welfare Service

Tracking via Children Missing Education Panel for anyone below 20% attendance or not on a school roll.

Advice on education for Children Missing from Care and Home Panel.

Pre MACE: High risk contextual safeguarding are tracked. Any professional working with a child can refer to CME Panel.

Tracking Children Missing from home and care via Referrals from the Police: Anyone who scores highly on contextual safeguarding screening referred via social worker.

Family Support Service

Targeted support to families living in the borough of Merton where two or more of the following factors are impacting on a child's development and / or family functioning and wellbeing: Domestic Abuse / Parental Conflict; Parental / Child Substance Misuse; Parent/Child Physical/Mental Ill Health ; SEND; Early Signs of / Low Level Neglect

- Child's Behaviour (impacts on wellbeing/development, or deemed to be risky)
- Children at risk of exclusion/excluded and/or where there are school attendance issues.
- Overuse of chastisement

Case Practitioner Service provides a Lead Professional to coordinate the family plan, following on from request for service via the combined front door, after an assessment or at the end of statutory CSC plan.

Best practice is that families are supported by agencies/professionals/networks that know them. Family Wellbeing Practitioners do not ordinarily know the family, therefore should be considered only when no other suitable agencies/professionals/networks are available.

CAMHS

Tier 4 services in cases where risk may require further support. Case-by-case involvement in multi-agency support.

Getting Risk Support

Getting Advice

Getting Help

Getting More Help

Return to MAP

Effective EBSA Monitoring

Who to monitor more closely

What to look out for

When to monitor more closely

How to monitor effectively

Return to
THRIVING

WHO to keep an eye on...

CYP experiencing
Bullying/Peer pressure

CYP who are socially
isolated

CYP with Young Carer
responsibilities

CYP with siblings with a
history of attendance issues

CYP history of mental health
difficulties

ASD and other
neurodevelopmental issues

History of previous episodes
of EBSA

Parental mental
health issues

Students at high risk of EBSA should be 'on the radar' at all times.

Preventative steps should be taken to bolster areas of need, academically, socially, etc.

Action should be taken as soon as a pattern of avoidance has been identified.

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BACK TO GETTING
ADVICE

Return to
EFFECTIVE
MONITORING

WHAT to keep an eye on...

Persistent lateness

10% unexplained absence
in the past month

Missing more than 2 days
in 1st week of a new term

CYP expressing anxiety about
coming to school

Parent expressing difficulties getting
child into school

Increased or new
separation anxiety

Asking to go home/stay at
home more often than usual

Withdrawal from extra-
curricular activities

Tearfulness/irritability when the topic of
school is brought up

A pattern of absence suggestive of
difficulties with specific lessons/activities

Return to
EFFECTIVE
MONITORING

WHEN to keep an eye out...

Times of transition

Returning to school after a long period of absence

Exams/Assessments and other academic pressures

CYP expressing anxiety about coming to school

Mondays! Look out for patterns of absence on specific days.

Changes to family structure, e.g. separation, new sibling,

Challenging peer behaviour/ classroom management issues

Transport/journey issues

Bullying/Peer pressure/Friendship and peer relationship difficulties

A pattern of absence suggestive of difficulties with specific lessons/activities

Performance anxiety/group activities

Changes to class structure/teachers/routine

Strained CYP/Teacher relationships

Death or illness of a loved one/ other traumatic events

Significant changes to family routine, e.g. parent returning to work, etc.

Return to
EFFECTIVE
MONITORING

HOW to monitor effectively...

Monitoring CYP with EBSA risk factors more closely

Training on EBSA for all staff

Monitoring more closely at key times, like transitions

Working towards an action plan BEFORE attendance drops below 90%

Moving beyond attendance figures to look at PATTERNS of avoidance and disengagement

Looking out for safety behaviours as well as patterns of avoidance

Training and consultation for attendance officers on how best to use existing IT systems for early detection of EBSA/attendance issues

Actively engaging parents in the process of looking out for early signs of EBSA

Return to EFFECTIVE MONITORING

Schools are advised to move away from focusing solely on attendance figures towards monitoring *patterns* of attendance, avoidance and disengagement.

Common patterns of avoidance...

Avoiding
certain
activities

Avoiding
certain lessons

Avoiding
certain days of
the week

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WHO TO
KEEP AN EYE
ON

Schools currently covered by the Social Workers in Schools (SWIS) Pilot

Harris Academy Merton

Harris Academy Morden

Harris Academy Wimbledon

Melrose School

Rutlish School

Ursuline High School

Return to
GETTING
HELP

Advice for schools on effective Whole School Approach (WSA) to EBSA prevention and support.

Helpful [Whole School Audit Tool](#) from Suffolk Council to help schools to evaluate WSA and guide action planning for EBSA.

Public Health and DfE Guidance on [Whole School Approach](#) to Mental Health in Schools

[NICE Guidelines](#) on Whole School Approach to Mental Health in Schools

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng223>

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THRIVING

Government and Borough Guidance...

Merton Guidance Document [Effectively Managing Attendance and Punctuality and Developing a School Attendance Policy](#) (September 2022)

Case Studies of good practice and webinars compiled by the Department for Education: [Improving attendance: good practice for schools and multi-academy trusts](#) (last updated 19th April 2023)

Rapid evidence review of attendance intervention conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation [Attendance-REA-report.pdf \(d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net\)](#) (March 2022)

Department for Education: [Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance](#) (February 2023)

Department of Education Guidance: [Working together to improve school attendance](#) (Last Updated April 2023)



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Helpful EBSA Guidance Documents

Dudley Educational Psychology Service: Solid, evidence-based guidance and lots of practical downloadable tools: [Emotion Based School Non-Attendance | Revolution for Schools | Dudley](#)

Lancashire Educational Psychology Service Downloadable Toolkit: [september-2022-ebsa-guidance-toolkit.pdf \(lancashire.gov.uk\)](#)

Just some of the many excellent toolkits published by [West Sussex Educational Psychology Service](#) on EBSA:

[EBSA Good practice guidance for schools and support agencies](#)

[Return to School Planning Tool - Guidance Document.pdf](#)

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