

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

Overview of survey undertaken by Family Voice Surrey

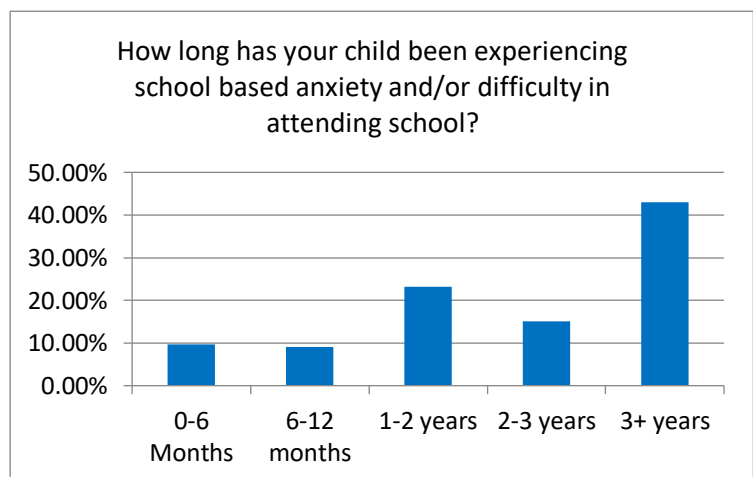
*“No child and/or parent would EVER choose to be in this situation! We need timely support, clear guidance, kindness and understanding, not punitive action... It is NOT naughtiness.”
(Parent of secondary school non-attender, emphasis respondent’s own)*

Background demographics and education

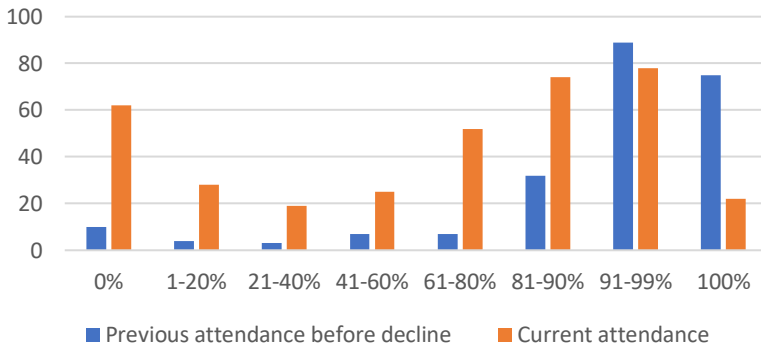
- 366 Survey Monkey responses from parents between December 2021 and February 2022.
- Similar proportions of girls and boys were experiencing EBSNA (51% male and 45% female).
- 72% had a diagnosis, with a further 16% having either an undiagnosed or suspected additional need or disability.
- Over half of children were in secondary education (56%) with 29% in junior school and 4% in infant school. A further 11% were in post 16 education.
- 75% of CYP were on role in a mainstream setting, with 19% in a specialist setting. 6% were offrolled because of their anxiety.
- 55% had an EHCP or were at assessment stage. 42% did not have an EHCP.

Incidence of EBSNA

- In addition, for those children whose attendance was relatively high 56% of respondents said that it takes significant force/restraint to get them into school each day.
- A similar proportion of families found that their child’s attendance decreased gradually (57%) as those whose attendance decreased suddenly (43%).



Change in attendance between current and prior to most recent decline*

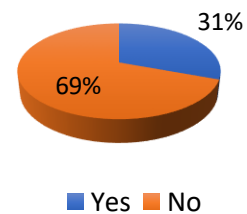


The chart shows the current and previous levels of attendance and is simply a count of all the responses – they do not correlate with specific responses. But very few children have 100% attendance compared to levels prior to the most recent decline. There are good levels of attendance between 81-90% currently but at the other end of the spectrum there are a large number of children who are not accessing education at all. Prior to the most recent decline it can be seen that levels of attendance were much higher.

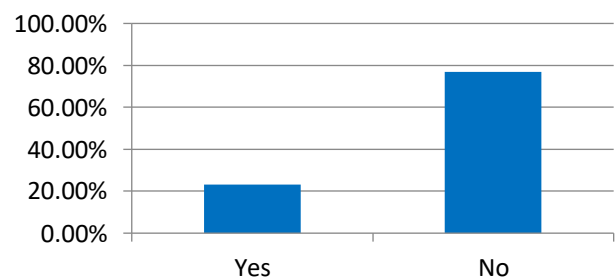
Support for families experiencing EBSNA

- GPs were involved with approximately 60% of children and young people in relation to school based anxiety. GPs referred onto to CAMHS and other professionals and a small proportion provided evidence for schools.
- Where GPs had not provided medical evidence, this was often because evidence from other professionals had provided evidence or they hadn't been asked. In a few instances, GPs would not provide evidence or "sign off" a child from school.
- Two thirds of children and young people had not had any support with work from their school when they were unable to attend. Nearly 80% who had not been able to attend school for a prolonged period had no access to alternative provision.
- For those with access to alternative provision, it took more than 12 weeks to put in place for over half of families who responded (56%).
- An inclusion officer was involved in only 21% of families and of those with an inclusion officer 49% had a support plan.
- 83% of those without the involvement of an inclusion officer did not have a support plan.

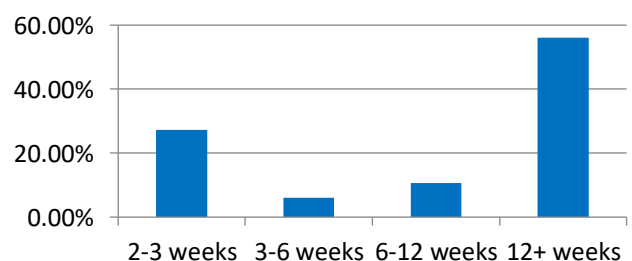
Has your child or young person had support with work by the school when they are unable to attend?



If your child has been unable to attend for a prolonged period have they had access to alternative provision?



If they have access to alternative provision how long had they been unable to attend before this was put in place?



How does it feel to be a parent?

It is soul-destroying. It impacts your own mental health. It has a negative effect on all other relationships ... It is the most isolating challenge I have ever faced (Post 16)

It is a relentless battle... knowing exactly how each day will begin and end (junior school)

I have had no follow up from school when my son is out of school, no interest in why he is unable to attend or what triggers and feeds his anxiety. (junior school)

- The language used by parents to describe their experiences was powerful with words such as “fight”, “battle” and feeling “threatened” used in several responses.
- Families reported how difficult it was to find and access support for their children.
- They felt unheard and not understood by both schools and GPs. Some schools didn’t understand what EBSNA was.
- Families reported managing difficult behaviour at home but this not being replicated in school (masking) and schools not understanding that there was any difficulty or issue.
- They felt alone and isolated.
- There were concerns not only for their child’s mental health but for their own mental health – a few responses spoke about their own increased stress and deteriorating mental health issues.
- Some parents spoke of concerns about their other children – siblings were frustrated or upset as they were often late for school, or they mirrored the behaviour of their sibling.
- What was apparent was that the whole family is affected by a child having difficulty attending school and that families are doing everything they can to get their child to school. They feel blamed – that it is their fault that their child isn’t in school.
- Some talked about knowing that their child must go to school and the guilt associated with feeling they were “forcing” their child to do something they didn’t want to do and that was damaging.
- Families spoke of feeling “threatened” by potential punitive response when they wanted help.
- There was a financial impact for some families with examples of parents:
 - Giving up work/reducing hours
 - Paying privately for education provision at home
 - Paying privately for counselling/therapy
 - Paying privately for assessments and reports

It is extremely isolating and I feel very judged for not trying hard enough to 'force' my daughter to school. The truth is we've been asking for help for 5 years (secondary school)

I have been repeatedly told by the school I am at risk of prosecution and imprisonment which has caused my mental health to deteriorate. (secondary school)

it is disruptive and can impact his brothers as well (infant school)

How does it feel to be a child?

- Children feel lonely and isolated
- Many have missed out on chunks of their education, were behind and so risk not achieving their potential.
- There were several responses that spoke of the mental health issues that children were experiencing – ranging from feeling down to self-harm, suicide ideation and hospitalisation due to breakdown.
- For some children the school they attended was felt to be the wrong place – “a square peg in a round hole” – parents spoke of their child being “broken” by the school system.
- Some children attended school but masked their behaviour and feelings
- Some children attended school but did not go to lessons so whilst marked as attending were not actually present in class learning.
- Where adjustments had been made for children e.g. cards to allow them to leave the class room or the use of another classroom – some would not use them as they did not want to stand out as different

My child hasn't attended school since March and no education has been put into place at all... she is left at home uneducated, lonely and isolated. (secondary school)

We nearly lost them to suicide and endured severe self harm. I had to fight for every shred of help... They are still in recovery and have missed KS5 entirely. (Post 16)

We keep having to reiterate to teachers that looking fine is not the same as being fine (secondary school)

He masks completely in school and teachers do not see it at all but he has extreme anxiety about school which is causing him to talk regularly of suicide and he has very low self esteem. (junior school)

How do parents feel about the response from school/alternative provision?

- Families felt there was a lack of understanding of EBSNA – what it was and how to support children experiencing it.
- There was also a lack of understanding of how mental health issues manifested and could be supported in neurodiverse children
- They felt that their schools would benefit from training in EBSNA to be able to better understand, support and signpost families.

School will not provide school work, CAMHS waiting list is 2.5 years. Currently only attending for 1 hour each day but it's more often than not she is unable to attend (secondary school)

- Families felt isolated and that schools did not communicate well with them when their child was absent – to understand what was wrong, to identify what support could be provided or to work together to encourage the child to return.
- Families felt that schools had to focus on attendance and attainment and that this was at the detriment of the wellbeing of their children. That having children in school was the main driver for the school.
- There was inconsistency in schools providing work at home for children to undertake and children often had no education for long periods of time. The time it took to put in any alternative provision or send work home was also commented on. That it took too long.
- Families felt schools couldn't be flexible in their response to support children to come into school.
- Some parents felt "threatened" by schools about the involvement of inclusion officers, the prospect of being taken to court and being issued fines when really they wanted support and help.
- Parents were confused about how absence was being recorded by schools. From the responses there does not seem to be a consistent approach by schools with some authorising absence and some coding as unauthorised absence.

There appears to be a huge lack of understanding, compassion, empathy or support from schools in this. (junior school)

The school is ill equipped to deal with it (secondary school)

When parents reported a more positive experience they highlighted that:

- They felt supported and schools understood the issues they were facing and referred on to other services
- Schools were flexible in their approach to the child attending and some sent work home for children who weren't able to attend
- There were good communication channels between the family and school.
- For a few parents, attendance improved in a different setting or when there was a good understanding of the child's needs and appropriate support was put in place in school.

School have been very good but have exhausted their expertise (secondary school)

full credit to the school who have an incredible pastoral support who engages with my son, me at home and we have an effective two-way communication... (Secondary school)

School have been amazingly supportive, but we have had to compromise on a reduced timetable

How do parents feel about the response from health?

There were fewer comments about health involvement in the responses from parents but similarly to schools there was a perception that GPs did not understand or acknowledge EBSNA and did not know how to support children and families. There was also a similar response and lack of understanding of the co-morbidity of neurodiversity and mental health concerns.

GPs did refer to CAMHS but families spoke of the long waiting times for support from Mindworks/CAMHS – either for therapy or for assessments.

There appeared from the responses to be an inconsistency and lack of clarity about the role of GPs in providing evidence or being able to support a young person, particularly if they have been referred to Mindworks already.

I spoke to Camhs and they helped (junior school)

*Our GP wasn't interested as he is under CAMHS but CAMHS have done nothing to help whatsoever as they say they don't get involved with problems at school.
(junior school)*

*It is neither well understood or well supported by professionals, it was described as truancy by a (young!) GP and school could not offer any support unless child was in school
(secondary school)*

Recommendations and next steps

Clarity and Consistency

- A clear process that is transparent and understood by all parties for the pathway for supporting a child experiencing EBSNA. This should be developed collaboratively with schools, parents, young people, and relevant teams across health and Surrey County Council.
- Consistency in approach by schools and GPs so that families know what they can expect and agencies have clarity on what they are responsible for.
- The development of a support plan template that meets the *need* of the child and family that can be used by all agencies, families and children. This should be developed collaboratively with schools, parents, young people, and relevant teams across health and Surrey County Council.

Pathways

- A mapping of the offer at school and in the community/at home that is available to children and families experiencing difficulty attending school. This would include:
 - Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health support
 - Mentoring
 - Parental support
 - Alternative provision

Training

- Build capacity to expand the EBSNA training and support for schools, other practitioners and parents developed by the Surrey County Council Educational Psychologists to embed a deeper understanding of EBSNA and associated practice across the children's system.
- Embed training for schools on neurodiversity including the co-morbidity with mental health and masking.
- Promote training on active listening and professional curiosity to ensure parents feel heard and understood.

Sharing the learning

- This work should be shared and reflected throughout other workstreams, programmes and transformation across the Children's System to avoid duplication and ensure everyone is working collaboratively.

A multi-agency group have come together to develop an action plan to take forward these recommendations and other learning that can help support children and their families experiencing EBSNA.

“He has lost out on approx 3yrs of education, but actually he has lost out on so much more...He learnt sure, he learnt not to trust... he learnt to hide and mask how he truly felt... He learnt not to trust himself. He learnt he was a bad person, a failure...”
(parent of secondary school non-attender)

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