

Policy for Emotional Barriers to School Attendance

The Discovery School



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The Discovery School's statement: 'Be the best you can be'.

Our Values are Honesty, Respect, Perseverance, Friendship and Kindness

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1. Intent and Context

The Discovery School is committed to promoting emotional wellbeing, inclusion and positive attendance for all pupils. This policy outlines the School's approach to supporting pupils who experience Emotionally Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA), a term used to describe difficulties in attending or engaging with School for emotional reasons most commonly anxiety.

This policy is informed primarily by Kent County Council guidance and is supplemented by best practice from other local authorities and national organisations. Through this policy, the School aims to balance its statutory duty to promote regular attendance with its commitment to inclusion, wellbeing and equity. By following national legislation and Kent County Council guidance, the School seeks to ensure that pupils experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance are identified early, supported effectively and enabled to re-engage with education in a way that is compassionate, supportive and consistent.

2. Aims of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure a consistent, whole-School approach to Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA), in line with Kent County Council guidance, recognising EBSA as an emotional wellbeing and safeguarding concern rather than simply an attendance and behavioural or disciplinary issue. This policy ensures that pupils experiencing anxiety-related barriers to attendance are identified early and supported through timely, proportionate and child-centred interventions, rather than through punitive or enforcement-led responses.

This policy promotes early identification and graduated intervention in accordance with Kent County Council's attendance framework and EBSA Pathway of Support. It recognises that unmet emotional, mental health or special educational needs can escalate rapidly and lead to persistent and entrenched patterns of non-attendance if not addressed promptly. Through a relational and inclusive approach, the School aims to reduce the risk of prolonged absence and support pupils to re-engage successfully with education.

The policy further aims to strengthen effective partnership working with parents and carers, in line with Kent County Council expectations. Planning, decision-making and review processes are co-produced, transparent and solution-focused, ensuring that support plans are informed by a shared understanding of the child's emotional needs and are developed collaboratively with families and, where appropriate, relevant Kent County Council and/or NHS services.

The policy further aims to strengthen purposeful and effective partnership working with parents and carers. Planning, decision-making and review processes are co-produced, transparent and informed by the individual needs the child. Support strategies are informed by a shared understanding of the pupil's emotional needs and promote positive outcomes for attendance, wellbeing and learning.

3. Legislation and guidance

This policy is informed by the Department for Education's statutory guidance *Working Together to Improve School Attendance* (August 2024), which sets out the legal responsibilities of Schools, governing bodies, local authorities and parents. The guidance emphasises early identification of barriers to attendance, including emotional distress and anxiety, and promotes a graduated, supportive approach in partnership with families and external professionals.

The policy reflects the School's duties under the **Education Act 1996**, including parents' responsibility to secure suitable full-time education (Section 7) and the local authority's duty to provide suitable education for pupils unable to attend due to illness or mental health needs (Section 19). These duties underpin the School's collaborative approach with families and Kent County Council in cases of prolonged absence.

The School also meets its obligations under the **Equality Act 2010** by making reasonable adjustments for pupils whose emotional or mental health needs meet the definition of a disability, ensuring equitable access to education through appropriate support and adaptations.

In line with the **SEND Code of Practice (2015)**, the School recognises that EBSA is often associated with special educational needs and follows a graduated approach of assess, plan, do and review. Where appropriate, additional SEN support or an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment will be considered.

This policy aligns with **Kent County Council guidance**, including the *KCC School Attendance Handbook* and resources from the Kent Educational Psychology Service. Kent County Council recognises EBSA as a complex attendance issue requiring early intervention, relational practice and multi-agency collaboration. The School adopts Kent's use of the term Emotionally Barriers to School Attendance to ensure pupils are supported appropriately rather than sanctioned.

Where required, the School will work with Kent County Council services, including Attendance, Educational Psychology, SEND, health and Early Help services, to ensure a coordinated and child-centred response.

4. Understanding Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Emotionally Based School Avoidance is not a medical diagnosis but a descriptive term used to explain attendance difficulties arising from emotional distress. Kent County Council emphasises that EBSA should not be viewed as deliberate refusal or poor behaviour, but as a response to overwhelming emotional experiences. Emotionally Based School Avoidance refers to a **pattern of reduced or non-attendance driven by emotional distress**, rather than defiance or parental condoning of absence.

Children experiencing EBSA often:

- Want to attend School but feel unable to cope emotionally
- Present with physical symptoms linked to anxiety
- Show distress particularly at transitions (e.g. mornings, after holidays)

EBSA is recognised as a **wellbeing and safeguarding concern**, not a behaviour issue.

EBSA may be associated with anxiety, low mood, trauma, unmet special educational needs, sensory sensitivities, peer difficulties, transitions or academic pressures. Pupils may experience significant distress even when attendance is maintained.

The School recognises that pupils with SEND or neurodivergent profiles are at increased risk of EBSA and may require reasonable adjustments and flexible approaches to reduce anxiety and support engagement.

5. Key Principles

The Discovery School's approach to EBSA is underpinned by the principle that emotional safety and a sense of belonging are prerequisites for learning and attendance.

Early identification and intervention are prioritised, as evidence shows that addressing emotional distress early improves long-term attendance and wellbeing outcomes.

Support for EBSA is most effective when delivered through a whole-School, relational approach that values consistency, predictability and positive relationships.

In line with DfE guidance and Ofsted frameworks, the school will:

- Promote **high expectations for attendance**, while recognising individual need
- Identify and respond to attendance concerns **as early as possible**
- Use attendance data alongside **pastoral, SEND, and safeguarding information**
- Avoid punitive responses where absence is linked to emotional distress

- Work in **partnership with parents/carers and external agencies**
- Ensure pupils feel **safe, supported, and included.**

6. Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Body ensures that the School meets its statutory duties relating to attendance, wellbeing and safeguarding and reviews this policy bi- annually or sooner if required.

The Headteacher is responsible for the strategic implementation of this policy, including staff training and ensuring that EBSA is addressed within the School's culture and systems. **All** staff has had the appropriate training and have accessed the relevant materials for professional development recommended by Kent County Council.

The SENCo coordinates identification, planning and monitoring of EBSA cases and ensures appropriate liaison with families and external professionals. Furthermore, the SENCo coordinates support where EBSA intersects with special educational needs or disabilities, including reasonable adjustments and referrals to external services.

7. Identification of EBSA and Graduated Response

EBSA may present through increasing anxiety about School, emotional distress at transitions, frequent physical complaints, avoidance of specific lessons or times of day, or patterns of lateness and absence. Attendance data is monitored regularly to identify emerging patterns, and concerns raised by staff or parents are responded to with curiosity and support rather than sanction.

The Discovery School follows a graduated response aligned with Kent County Council guidance and the assess-plan-do-review cycle. Planning focuses on identifying emotional barriers and agreeing proportionate, individualised strategies and reasonable adjustments.

Step 1: Universal / Early Identification

(Classroom-led, preventative support)

Who: Class teacher with parental and child involvement

Attendance: Generally secure or early signs of difficulty.

Indicators

- Increased anxiety at drop-off
- Tearfulness, clinginess, physical complaints
- Reluctance to attend after weekends/holidays
- Changes in behaviour or confidence

Actions

- Open, supportive conversation with parents/carers and child
- Reassurance and predictable routines
- Classroom-based adjustments
- Emotional check-ins and monitoring

Aim:

To prevent
emotional
barriers
escalating

Step 2: Targeted Support

(SEMH team / SEND involvement)

Who: SEMH team, SENDCo, Attendance Lead

Attendance: Patterns of lateness, partial attendance, or emerging absence.

Indicators

- Ongoing distress linked to School
- Repeated absences for emotional reasons
- Anxiety impacting learning and engagement

Actions

- SEMH or SEND referral
- Increased home–School communication
- Short-term attendance support plan
- Regular review meetings with parents/carers and child

Aim:

Reduce
anxiety and
stabilise
attendance

As part of the EBSA Pathway of Support, parents and carers are encouraged to participate in **awareness-raising activities** and **joint planning meetings** with the School. Resources such as the Kent EBSA Parent Resource Pack and webinars provide practical strategies, help families understand anxiety and EBSA, and build constructive collaboration between the home and School environment.

Step 3: Multi-Agency Support	
<i>(When School-based support is not sufficient)</i>	
Who: School + external professionals Attendance: Limited progress despite sustained support.	
Indicators • High or complex anxiety • Mental health or safeguarding concerns • EBSA persists over time	
Actions • Referral to appropriate services (e.g. KMMHT, CAMHS, CYPMHS) • Team Around the Child (TAC) approach • Continued reasonable adjustments in School – Reduced Timetable • Attendance expectations reviewed in line with professional advice • Ongoing partnership with parents and services	Aim: To address complex needs through coordinated support

8. EBSA Planning and Monitoring

Structured EBSA planning documents support consistency and clarity and may include support plans, barriers assessments, communication logs and review forms.

9. Supporting Parents and Carers

Parents and carers are supported through clear communication, regular review meetings and access to high-quality information about EBSA and anxiety.

In line with Kent County Council's Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA) Pathway of Support, The Discovery School, promotes a **partnership approach** between Schools, parents and carers, and relevant professionals to support pupils experiencing anxiety-related barriers to attendance. The pathway emphasises **early intervention, shared understanding, child voice and collaborative planning** as key elements in helping pupils re-engage with their education. It encourages schools and families to work together to identify the *push and pull factors* that contribute to EBSA and to develop joint plans that are regularly reviewed and adapted to meet the pupil's evolving needs.

In our School, support for parents and carers is rooted in this collaborative approach and is designed to be **responsive, relational and strengths-based**.

The School will:

- **Engage parents and carers early** — from initial concerns about attendance or emotional distress — to establish a shared understanding of the child's experience and needs.
- **Facilitate joint planning** by involving parents and carers in the development, implementation and review of individual support plans based on the EBSA Pathway principles. These plans set out agreed strategies, reasonable adjustments and steps towards improved attendance, with input from the child where appropriate.
- **Provide practical guidance and reassurance**, signposting to relevant Kent County Council services, including Educational Psychology, SEND support, the Attendance Service, Early Help or health professionals, as needed, to form a **multi-agency support network**.
- **Offer regular review and communication** with parents and carers, ensuring that support remains flexible and responsive to the child's progress and changing needs.
- **Encourage active parent involvement** in School-based and external interventions, promoting consistency between home and School strategies to address anxiety and emotional barriers.

This approach reflects the expectations set out within Kent County Council's EBSA Pathway of Support that parents, carers and Schools work in partnership to dismantle barriers to attendance and support pupils' successful reintegration into full participation in School life.

Sources:

1. Kent County Council – *EBSA Pathway of Support*:
<https://www.kelsi.org.uk/support-for-children-and-young-people/health-and-wellbeing/educational-psychology/educational-psychology-services2/emotionally-based-School-avoidance-ebsa>
2. Kent County Council – *EBSA Parent Resource Pack*:
<https://www.kelsi.org.uk/special-educational-needs/psychology/ebsa>
3. Kent County Council – *School Attendance Handbook*:
<https://www.kelsi.org.uk/School-attendance>

Kent County Council provides free webinars for parents and carers, and additional support is signposted through national organisations such as the Anna Freud Centre.

<https://www.kelsi.org.uk>

<https://www.annafreud.org/parents-and-carers/>

10. Safeguarding and Wellbeing

The Discovery School recognises that persistent absence linked to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) may place pupils at increased risk academically, socially and emotionally. In line with Kent County Council (KCC) guidance, all concerns relating to attendance, emotional wellbeing and mental health are considered within the School's safeguarding framework and are addressed through early identification and timely intervention.

Our School promotes a culture of belonging, safety and positive relationships, consistent with Kent County Council's relational approach to supporting School attendance. It is recognised that pupils are more likely to attend regularly and engage successfully with learning when they feel emotionally secure, listened to and supported. Where concerns escalate or risks increase, the School will work in partnership with parents and carers and, where appropriate, engage Kent County Council services, including Attendance, Educational Psychology, SEND and Early Help services, to ensure a coordinated and child-centred safeguarding response.

Occasionally, it may become evident that parents/carers are struggling to engage positively with agreed EBSA plans and Strategies. In these instances, a formal referral Pathway to Kent County Council inclusion services may be required.

11. Sources used in this policy

1. Department for Education (DfE) – Statutory Guidance

- *Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2024)*
- *Keeping Children Safe in Education*
- *SEND Code of Practice: 0–25 years*

2. Kent County Council (KCC) – Local Guidance

- Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA): Guidance & Parent Resource Pack
- Kent Educational Psychology Service (KELSI)
- EBSA Pathway & Attendance Support
- SEND Support in Schools
- Kent Resilience Hub – Emotional Wellbeing Support for Anxious Pupils
- Kent County Council – *School Attendance Handbook*:
- Kent Educational Psychology Service – *EBSA Pathway of Support and resources*:
- Kent County Council – *Safeguarding Children and Young People*

3. Other Local Authority Guidance (Comparative Practice)

- West Berkshire Council – EBSA Guidance
- Lancashire County Council – EBSA Guidance for Schools and Practitioners
- West Sussex County Council – EBSA Guidance
- East Sussex County Council – EBSA Overview