

# St Joseph's Catholic Primary

School, Wallasey



## Emotional Barriers to School Attendance Policy

(Updated: September 2025)

Version 1

Mission Statement:

*"Love one another as I have loved you"*

School Values:

<i>Service</i>
<i>Justice</i>
<i>Love</i>

School Vision:

We seek to build a welcoming, caring community of faith, where we love and serve our children to support them to gain all the necessary spiritual, academic, personal and social skills to succeed in our local and global community.

## Document Control

**Authors:** Wirral EBSA Strategy and Wirral Attendance Team

## Document History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Changed by
1	September 2025	Creation of advisory EBSA Policy template that schools can adapt for their individual setting. This policy has been created to complement schools' Attendance policy.	Wirral EBSA Strategy and Wirral Attendance Team

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## Introduction

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School recognises that regular attendance is essential for raising educational standards and for maximising the educational opportunities available to students. We aim to help students become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who can realise their full potential and make a positive contribution to their community.

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School understands that there are instances when students who have emotional and / or mental health needs may find it difficult to attend their classes or the school altogether. We are committed to valuing, respecting and understanding students who experience Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA), and will provide continuous, professional support to these students, working with families in a student-centred way, prioritising support and developing strong working relationships.

The main aims of this policy are:

- To describe the information, support, process and procedures available at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School for students who experience EBSA and their families.
- To ensure that staff are educated on emotional and mental health to encourage early identification and support.
- To ensure the school is welcoming and every student feels a sense of belonging, connectedness and safety – enabling them to thrive in school.

## Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to the following legislation including, but not limited to:

- Children and Families Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- Mental Health Act 1983, as amended in 2007

This policy also has due regard to the following guidance:

- DfE (2024) Working together to improve attendance
- DfE (2023) Arranging Education for Children who cannot attend school because of health needs
- DfE (2023) Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance

This policy is implemented in conjunction with the following school policies which can be found at [https://st-josephs.eschools.co.uk/website/policies\\_\\_documents](https://st-josephs.eschools.co.uk/website/policies__documents):

- Attendance policy
- Behaviour policy
- Relationships policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Safeguarding policy
- Special Educational Needs policy and information report

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

The governing body is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the school community recognises EBSA as a significant emotional health issue.
- Ensuring appropriate and timely support measures are in place for students with EBSA.

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Establishing, ensuring and communicating procedures for attendance monitoring and safeguarding.
- Promoting an inclusive and welcoming ethos for all students and families.

The SENDCO and/ or Senior Mental Health Lead is responsible for:

- Overseeing the pastoral team.
- Identifying and supporting special educational needs.
- Liaising with external support, such as Mental Health Support Team in Schools and Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS).
- Ensuring that all staff have up to date knowledge of research and good practice to support EBSA.

Our Pastoral Lead and SLT are responsible for:

- Gathering student's views and those of their parents about the barriers to school attendance / engagement.
- Determining and documenting students' emotional triggers.
- Liaising with and building strong working relationships with parents/carers of students who experience EBSA on a regular basis.
- Supporting students during the school day.
- Working together with staff, parents/carers and students.

Parents/Carers are responsible for:

- Maintaining open communication with the school regarding their child's emotional wellbeing and attendance, reporting any concerns as soon as possible to school.
- Working collaboratively with school staff to identify and understand the underlying EBSA triggers.
- Attending meetings and contributing to the development of support plans or interventions for their child.
- Implementing agreed strategies at home to support their child's return to school or engagement with learning.
- Providing relevant information about the family context, external services involved or diagnoses that may impact their child's attendance or emotional health.
- Encouraging and reassuring their child about school attendance in a calm and supportive manner.
- Monitoring and reporting any changes in their child's behaviour, mood, or routines that may affect school attendance.

- Engaging with external services when referrals are made by the school, such as CYPMHS or Early Help.

## **Definition of EBSA**

EBSA is a term used to describe situations where students feel unable to attend school or lessons due to feeling worried or anxious. EBSA may mean that:

- School attendance is hard
- A student feels unable to go to school; sometimes they may even become upset/angry when asked to go to school
- A student may go to school but feel unable to attend lessons
- A student says that they feel unwell/sick; this may be before school or on a Sunday night
- A student finds reasons to want to stay at home
- A student appears nervous or worried when entering school or when talking about school

If a student is showing one or more of these behaviours, they may be experiencing EBSA and require additional support to go to school.

Wirral's Family Toolbox Page contains more information about EBSA- [Emotional Barriers to School Attendance - EBSA - Family Toolbox](#)

## How we support EBSA at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

### Staff Development

We are pleased to inform parents/carers that selected staff at our school have attended Wirral EBSA Strategy's one-day workshop, helping to ensure that we have access to psychologically-informed EBSA resources and strategies. This includes training for staff to recognise the early signs of EBSA and know how to support students' social, emotional and psychological wellbeing.

In addition to this, our school staff have received further training in person and online from the Inclusive Attendance company.

### Whole-School Approaches

Our school is committed to embedding a whole-school approach to emotional health and wellbeing, in line with the eight principles outlined by Public Health England (2015). These principles guide our ethos, policies, and practices to ensure that all students, including those experiencing EBSA are supported in a nurturing and inclusive environment.

#### 1. Leadership and Management

Senior leaders actively promote emotional wellbeing as a core part of the school's vision and strategic planning.

#### 2. School Ethos and Environment

We foster a supportive and inclusive school culture that prioritises emotional safety and belonging for all students.

#### 3. Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Our curriculum includes opportunities for students to develop emotional literacy, resilience, and coping strategies.

#### 4. Student Voice

We ensure that students have regular opportunities to express their views and influence decisions that affect their wellbeing. Each class has two class representatives who meet with SLT on a regular basis to discuss issues across school.

#### 5. Staff Development, Health and Wellbeing

Staff receive ongoing training and support to promote their own wellbeing and to effectively support students with emotional needs.

#### 6. Identifying Need and Monitoring Impact

We use data and student feedback to identify emotional health needs early and evaluate the impact of interventions.

### 7. Working with Parents and Carers

We work proactively in partnership with families to support student wellbeing and address barriers to attendance.

### 8. Targeted Support

We provide timely and appropriate support for students with identified emotional health needs, including those who experience EBSA.

See the next section for further information about what support is available at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School.

## **Preventative Approaches and Early Support**

At St Joseph's Catholic Primary School we recognise that early identification and preventative support are critical in supporting and preventing EBSA. Research consistently highlights that timely, relational, and student-centred approaches are most effective in reducing the risk of long-term disengagement from education.

### **1. Early Identification and Monitoring**

We adopt a proactive stance by:

- **Training staff** to recognise early signs of EBSA, such as increased anxiety, frequent absences or withdrawal from peers and learning.
- **Using attendance data** alongside pastoral observations to identify emerging concerns.
- **Engaging with families early**, ensuring that concerns are shared and explored collaboratively through a non-blaming and non-judgemental approach.

### **2. Capturing Student Views**

At St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, we utilise a range of approaches to ensure that the views of students are collected and listened to. These approaches include: student council, suggestion boxes, things I wish my teacher knew activities to name a couple.

The views of individual students are particularly important when supporting EBSA. We gather pupil views initially using Next Step cards with our Pastoral Lead.

### The School Wellbeing Cards

To understand the lived experience of students who experience EBSA, we use the School Wellbeing Cards (School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Card Set). This tool allows students to express how they feel across different areas of school life, including:

- Relationships with peers and staff
- Sense of safety and comfort in the school environment
- Confidence in learning and participation



- Emotional wellbeing and regulation

The cards are used in a non-judgemental, one-to-one approach facilitated by a member of staff that the student trusts. Responses are used to co-create support plans that reflect the student's own priorities and preferences, ensuring that interventions are meaningful and respectful of their voice.

### **3. Supporting Student Motivation**

Our school approach to supporting EBSA is informed by psychological research about motivation which emphasises the importance of meeting three basic psychological needs to foster intrinsic motivation:

- **Autonomy:** Students are given choices and a sense of control over their learning and support plans. We involve them in decision-making processes and respect their perspectives for example finding out their preferred way of communicating/ being welcomed into school.
- **Competence:** We provide scaffolded opportunities for success, celebrate small wins, and ensure that tasks are appropriately challenging to build confidence. We set daily targets with pupils and their families and build up confidence in small steps.
- **Relatedness:** We prioritise warm, trusting relationships between students and staff. Key adults are identified to provide consistent emotional support and check-ins. Children feel confident and can list 5 trusted adults on one hand who they can turn to if needed.

By embedding these principles, we aim to reduce EBSA behaviours and increase students' internal motivation to re-engage with school life.

### **4. Promoting a Sense of Belonging**

A strong sense of belonging is a protective factor against EBSA. We promote this through:

- **Inclusive classroom practices** that celebrate diversity and ensure every student feels seen and valued.
- **Peer connection opportunities** that enable students to develop friendships and work/socialise with peers that have mutual interests. We use buddy systems and social skills groups to foster positive and supportive friendships.
- **Safe spaces** within school where students can regulate and reconnect when feeling overwhelmed for example in the sensory room, tents or pastoral lead office. We respect what children choose as their safe space.
- **Whole-school culture** that prioritises emotional wellbeing, kindness, and relational safety. We teach, model and celebrate gospel values in action.

We believe that when students feel they belong, are understood, and are supported in ways that honour their individuality, they are more likely to thrive and attend school consistently.

## Support and Intervention

For students who experience complex EBSA or have not responded to the support outlined above, St Joseph's Catholic Primary School adopts a personalised approach that is rooted in compassion, collaboration, and evidence-based practice co-produced with the family and child / young person. These situations are often multi-faceted and support is required that addresses both emotional and environmental factors contributing to EBSA.

### 1. Collaborative Planning Using the ATTEND Framework

We use a tool called the ATTEND framework ([ATTEND framework - Support for schools and settings](#)) to guide our collaborative work with families. This structured approach helps us to talk with the student and family about their attendance, think about what's going on and understand more about how the student feels.

Through this framework, we co-create a **Personalised Support Plan** with the student, parents/carers, and relevant professionals. This plan outlines agreed strategies, responsibilities, and review points, ensuring that the student and their family feels heard, empowered, and supported throughout the process.

### 2. Trauma-Informed Approaches

We recognise that many students who experience EBSA may have also experience traumatic situations or high levels of stress following a specific, adverse incident. Our trauma-informed practice includes:

- Creating **predictable, safe environments** with consistent routines and trusted adults.
- Using **emotionally attuned communication** to reduce shame and build trust.
- Avoiding punitive responses to non-attendance, instead focusing on understanding the underlying causes.
- Staff are trained to respond with empathy and curiosity, not judgement, and to prioritise **relational safety** in all interactions.
- The identification of a safe place and trusted adults to speak to

### 3. Anxiety and Emotional Literacy Strategies

We support students to understand and manage their emotions through:

- **Psychoeducation** about anxiety and the body's stress response.
- **Cognitive-behavioural strategies** such as worry management and thought-challenging.
- **Emotional literacy work**, including naming feelings, using visuals (e.g. Zones of Regulation), and developing self-regulation skills.
- Access to **calm spaces** and **sensory tools** to support emotional regulation during the school day.

These strategies are embedded into the student's support plan and delivered by trained staff in a consistent, relational manner.

#### **4. Use of Wirral EBSA Strategy Tools**

As part of our commitment to local best practice, we implement tools from the **Wirral EBSA Strategy training**, including:

- **EBSA Formulation Tools:** These help us understand the unique drivers behind each student's EBSA, using a psychological lens.
- **EBSA Support Plans:** Structured templates that document agreed strategies, adaptations, and review timelines.
- **Student Voice Tools:** Used to ensure that the child's perspective is central to all planning and decision-making.

These tools support a **graduated response**, ensuring that interventions are proportionate, flexible, and regularly reviewed.

### **Multi-Agency Support and Flexible Attendance Arrangements**

For most students who experience EBSA, the large amount of support described above can be sufficient in supporting them with re-engaging in school. However, for some students, we recognise that EBSA can be very complex and feels stuck at times.

To support our students who need more complex support, who have trialled the previously discussed support, we may offer the following flexible arrangements:

- **Reduced Timetables**  
A short-term, time-limited intervention used in exceptional circumstances (e.g. following prolonged absence, emotional or mental health needs, or medical recovery). These are agreed with parents, monitored closely, and include clear reintegration plans and safeguarding measures.
- **Telepresence Technology**  
As part of the Wirral EBSA strategy offer, we can access the AV1 robot ([AV1 by No Isolation | Reduce school absence with AV1 telepresence robots](#)) to help students stay connected to school life and learning while they are unable to attend in person. This supports gradual reintegration and reduces feelings of isolation.
- **Flexi-Schooling\***

Flexi-schooling is an arrangement where, following a formal request from parents and with the approval of the school, a child spends some part of the week attending school and the rest of it being educated at home. Combining schooling and non-schooling education in any ratio is perfectly legal, provided that the outcome is the provision of suitable full-time education for the child, and the Local Authority must satisfy itself that this is so.

In Wirral, the Local Authority believes that full-time education within a school environment is usually the best option for all children and young people to achieve and attain to their full potential – this is also the option most parents choose. The Local Authority recognises, however, that parents may choose other ways for their child to engage in effective, full-time and suitable education. One way could be for them to request for a school to agree a flexi-schooling arrangement. Flexi-schooling is not a

parental right and must be agreed upon by the Headteacher based on the best interests of the student.

We actively engage with a wide range of professionals including Wirral Attendance Team, Educational Psychology, Early Help, Mental Health Support Team and the SEND Team to ensure that our support is holistic, coordinated, and responsive to each child's needs. If we feel that a student may require support from another service, we work with the student and their family to access this.

We also recommend to our families that further mental health support can be access via Branch- [Home](#) | [Branch Wirral](#)

# **Our School's Process for EBSA Support**

## **What to Do If You Have Concerns**

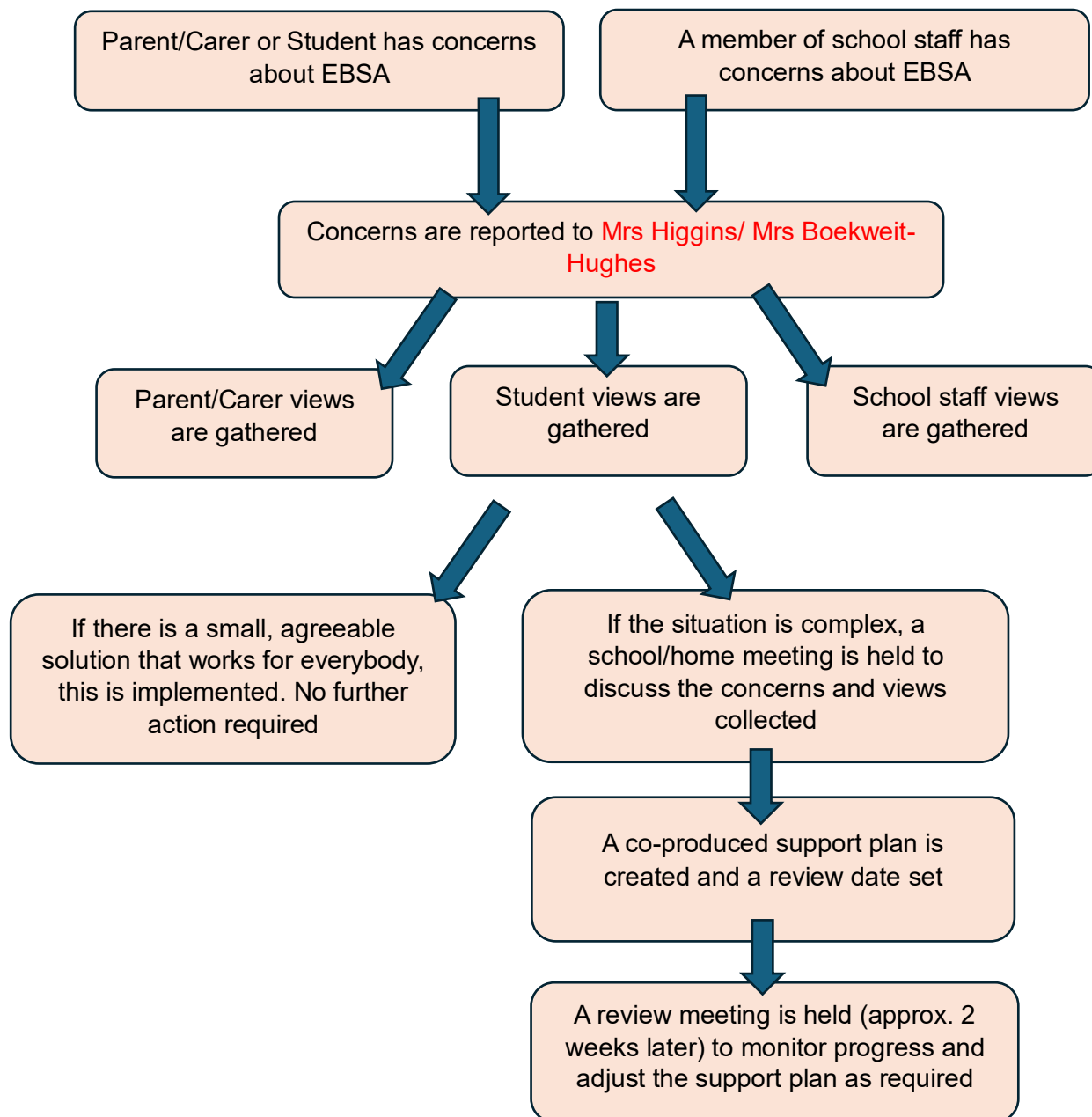
If you're worried that your child may be experiencing emotional barriers to school attendance:

1. **Speak to your child's class teacher or form tutor** – they can share observations and begin initial support.
2. **Contact the school's pastoral lead Mrs Higgins or SENCO Mrs Airey** – they can offer guidance and coordinate further support.
3. **Request a meeting with the school's EBSA lead Mrs Boekweit-Hughes** – to discuss concerns in more detail and explore tailored strategies.

## Process Flow Chart

*Suggested content: This section will be bespoke to your school, particularly in terms of what the process is for supporting EBSA.*

*Suggested wording. Please add or remove sections as appropriate for your setting.*



## **Additional Services**

For further Advice and support:

[Emotional Barriers to School Attendance - EBSA - Family Toolbox](#)

[Home | Branch Wirral](#)

[SENDLO Wirral](#)

[zillowirral](#)

**Policy date:** *September 2025*

**Review:** *September 2027*