

# Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Strategy 2020-2025



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# Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Strategy

## Purpose of the Strategy

Nationally UK literature reports that between 1 and 2% of the school population are absent from school due to emotional reasons (Elliott, 1999, Gulliford & Miller, 2015). This is also becoming an issue in Gateshead and over the past few years increasing numbers of children and young people are reported as not able to attend school due to emotional reasons. These emotional reasons can often present as ongoing anxiety or Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). This strategy sets out Gateshead's approach to addressing the issue of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

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## Introduction

Gateshead is ambitious for the people who live within the borough. Gateshead's vision is for all children and young people to thrive. This strategy supports the Council's strategic approach of Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives; including putting people and families at the heart of everything that we do and tackling inequality so that people have a fair chance. Education plays an important part in this.

This strategy also supports Gateshead's vision for children and young people as set out in 'Vision 2030, the Sustainable Community Strategy for Gateshead' which aims to ensure that children and young people are empowered and supported to develop to their full potential and have the life skills and opportunities to play an active part in society.

This strategy is effective from September 2020 to September 2025 and provides a framework for how Gateshead will provide support and challenge in the area of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). This strategy is in accordance with every child's right to an education; Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (HNCRC), the Equality act 2010 and Section 19 of the education Act 1996, all of which recognises the right of a child to an education.

## Strategic Priorities

In order to provide support for children and young people who present with Emotionally Based School Avoidance, wherever possible ensuring that they are able to access the most appropriate full time education to their needs; the council and Education, Learning and Schools aims to:

- Provide strategic leadership to support pupils who present with EBSA
  - Provide support and challenge to schools to support pupils who present with EBSA
  - Provide a range of strategies that schools can use to support pupils with EBSA to remain within their fulltime educational setting
  - Support the development of training to support pupils who present with EBSA
  - Support transition work for pupils who present with EBSA
  - Support work on an individual basis to engage pupils back into their appropriate education provision
  - Support the development of positive emotional health and well-being in children and young people
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## Definition-What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Emotionally Based School Avoidance is an umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people that have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors which can result in prolonged absences from school. There is a clear distinction between those who are absent from school due to truanting and those that are absent from school due to specific emotional distress that they experience around attending school. (Thambirajah, Grandison & De-Hayes, 2008).

Previously referred to a 'school refuser' this term can be misleading as the word 'refuser' implies that the child or young person has control over school non-attendance. In this instance the terminology locates the problem within the child/young person and detracts from the environmental factors that could be instrumental in supporting a child or young person back into school.

## Reasons for EBSA

Kearney and Silberman's (1990) review of the literature indicates that there tends to be four main reasons for school avoidance:

- To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, such as feelings of anxiety or low mood
- To avoid situations that might be stressful; such as academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment
- To reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, such as parents and/or other family members
- To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time

According to this model the avoidance of the uncomfortable feelings or situations described in the first two points could be viewed as negatively reinforcing the EBSA, whereas in the second two points, the EBSA could be seen as being positively reinforced by factors outside of school (Kearney & Spear, 2012).

For some children and young people, the distress may be obvious and display itself in their presentation and in chronic non-attendance. For others this may not be the case, with distress displayed as sporadic non-attendance or only able to attend school with high levels of support.

The onset of EBSA may be sudden or gradual, although the literature suggests there may be trends corresponding to transition phases in schools (King & Bernstein, 2001).

Some children and young people may appear to recover quite quickly from the initial upsets of school which can mean that the 'legitimacy' of EBSA may be questioned. It is worthwhile noting that in looking at the models of anxiety, it is not unusual for the anxiety to quickly dissipate once the perceived threat has been removed (Thambirajah et al. 2008).

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## Contextual Information

Over the past few years Gateshead has seen an increasing number of children and young people who are refusing to attend school due to EBSA. This issue is not just a mainstream school issue, we also have children and young people with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) who are refusing to attend their special school placement as well as children and young people who have been taken out of school to be home educated due to mental health/anxiety issues.

A recent analysis of data suggests that in the previous academic year we had 29 pupils in receipt of home tuition via EIP. We also know that as a conservative estimate the following numbers of pupils have some type of emotionally based school avoidance, which is making attending school a challenge:

HINT	37
LINT	24 (already have TA support)
EHE	20
Home Tuition	25
SEND	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>

These numbers are a conservative estimate. In addition, there are approximately 515 pupils with an EHCP for ASD (who often have linked anxiety issues)

The Education Inclusion Panel (EIP) is the process by which Gateshead allocates a home tutor to work with a child or young person who is unable to attend their designated educational placement. This is a multi-agency panel with representation from education, health, including CYPS and 0-19 service, Early Help, Platform and social care. Their remit is to decide (with documentary support) the most appropriate provision for permanently excluded pupils and those who are unable to attend mainstream school due to medical reasons.

Once home tuition is agreed by EIP, pupils can on average receive between 4 and 10 hours of home tuition per week, depending on their abilities to access the education on offer.

## Roles and Responsibilities of the Local Authority

Local Authorities are responsible for arranging suitable full-time education for children who-because of illness or other reasons - would not receive education without such provision. This means where a child cannot attend school because of health problems, and would not receive a suitable full-time education, the local authority is responsible for arranging provision and must have regard for this guidance. (Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs; Statutory guidance for local authorities DfE January 2013).

### **Local authorities must:**

- Arrange suitable full-time education for children of compulsory school age, who because of illness, would not receive suitable education without such provision
  - Full-time is not defined by law but children with health needs should have provision which is equivalent to the education they receive in school.
  - If children receive 1-1 tuition, the hours of face-to-face provision could be fewer as the provision is more concentrated.
  - Where full-time education would not be in the best interest of a child because of reasons relating to their physical or mental health, local authorities should provide part-time education on a basis they consider to be in the child's best interest
  - Full and part time education should aim to achieve good academic attainment particularly in English, Maths and Science

### **Local authorities should:**

- Have named officer responsible for the education of children with additional health needs and parents should know who this person is
- Have a written, publicly accessible policy on their arrangements to comply with their legal duties towards children with additional health needs
- Review the provision offered regularly to ensure that it continues to be appropriate for the child and that it is providing suitable education
- Have clear policies on the provision of education for children and young people under and over compulsory school age

## Roles and Responsibilities of other Services

Collaboration between all relevant services (LA, CAMHS, NHS, schools and where relevant school nurses) is essential to delivering effective education for children with additional health needs.

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## Roles and Responsibilities of Schools

The law does not specify a point during a child's illness when it becomes the local authorities' responsibility to secure suitable full-time education for a child. Schools should look to identify the needs of children and young people early, in order to address the issue of emotionally based school avoidance as soon as possible. School would also usually provide support for children who are absent from school for short periods of time.

A child unable to attend school due to health needs remains the responsibility of the school even when the local authority has become responsible for the child's education. Continuity is important for children and knowing that they can return to their familiar surroundings and school can help their recovery and educational progress. Schools can therefore only remove a child who is unable to attend school due to their health needs where:

- the pupil is certified too ill to pursue education, in which case, an appropriate medical professional will need to certify that the pupil is unlikely to be in a fit state of health to return to school before reaching statutory school age, and
  - there is no indication from the parent or pupil that they intend to continue to attend the school post compulsory school age.
- 

## Roles and Responsibilities of Parents/Carers

Parents/carers have an important role to play. Parents can provide important information that can inform the teaching approach taken. Children and young people would also be informed in the decisions made right from the start, reflecting their age and maturity.

Given the complexity of EBSA, parents need to work with services to provide support for their child.

This may include engagement with a variety of professionals from across the early help system, including family intervention and youth justice services, mental health practitioners and support from the voluntary and community sector. Early Help services can undertake a whole-family assessment and develop a bespoke support plan with the child, young person and family – including direct work on school avoidance issues.

This might involve practical support, help with uniform costs, travel advice, direct work on emotional wellbeing, brokerage of therapeutic services and delivery of evidence-based parenting interventions.

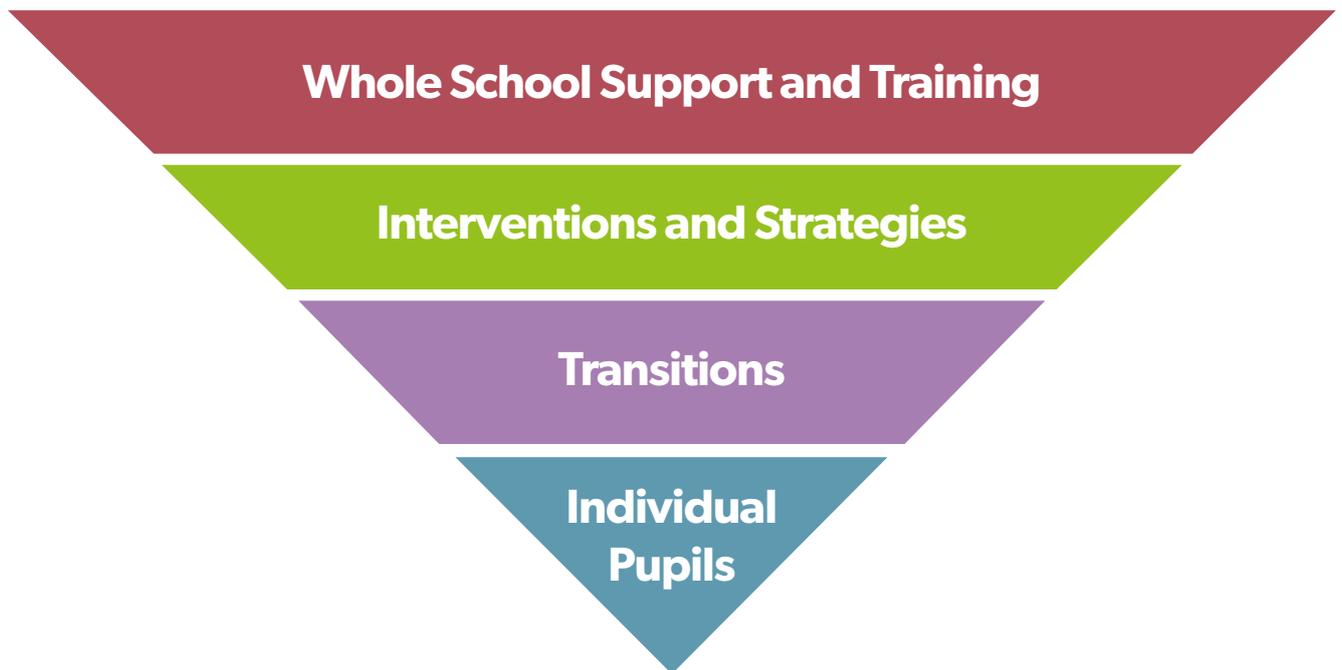
# Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Gateshead's Approach

## Provision of Support for Pupils with EBSA

Given the complexity of the issues, the approach to addressing the needs of children and young people with EBSA needs to be comprehensive and multi-layered. With support however, these issues can, by and large should be managed within a mainstream school setting.

The following sets out Gateshead's approach to meeting the needs of pupils who present with EBSA.

The approach is a 4-tiered approach:



# Whole School Support and Training

There is currently a range of whole school support and training available from within the local authority which can support schools in meeting the needs of pupils who present with EBSA. This includes:

- ELSA training for staff
- EP training and support
- Fair Access Panel EP training to primary schools on a range of areas including (but not exclusively)
  - ACE's
  - Attachment
  - Mental health resilience in children
  - Managing strong emotions
  - The development of social and emotional skills
- Primary Behaviour Support work on whole school support for behaviour management; as well as their advice and guidance support advice sheets
- EYSF training for staff in the area of behaviour
- HINT training on whole school inclusive practice
- Supporting Successful Transitions of Pupils with Autism and social communication Needs (for reception class teachers)

Ongoing training in the area of EBSA will also be provided to support schools. This training will include:

- A better understanding of EBSA and links with anxiety
- Risk and resilience factors of EBSA and the role of the school
- The push and pull factors relating to EBSA
- How to identify EBSA in children and young people
- How to gather information and what information needs to be gathered
- How to work with the child/young person to gather their views on the issues and what needs to be done

## What we still need to do

Continue to develop training to support schools in meeting the needs of pupils who present with EBSA.

# Interventions and Strategies

Kearney and Silverman (1990) describe four types of variables which can maintain school avoidance behaviour; often these variables can be involved at one time:

- To avoid something or situations that elicits negative feelings or high levels of stress
- To escape difficult social situations
- To get attention from or spend more time with significant others
- To spend more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating

Strategies and interventions therefore need to include:

- Strategies for working with the child/young person
- Strategies for working with the parents

## What we have in place

- Primary Behaviour Support to work with schools on whole school and individual behaviour management
- HINT works with schools on providing support for pupils with ASD
- Primary Fair Access EP who works with schools and individual pupils
- Early Help Service to promote and support school attendance with children, young people and parents

The local authority will continue to work with schools to provide them with interventions and strategies to meet the needs of children and young people with EBSA. In line with research, the interventions available will be chosen to work with individuals based on careful analysis of the school avoidance behaviour.

## What we still need to do

Continue to develop a range of strategies to support individual pupils.

# Transitions

Periods of transition can be particularly difficult for children or young people with EBSA. Schools need to be supported to better understand the impact that transitions can have on children and young people and how they can better make adjustments to the transition process while also supporting children and young people to make adjustments to fit in with their new environment

## What we have in place

Transition work is being undertaken this year by the Primary Behaviour Support Team with support from primary schools, with a view to providing strategies to aid primary - secondary transition. This work will link with the work being undertaken by HINT on transition as set out below.

Development of transition arrangements for pupils with Autism and social communication needs which includes:

- Multi-agency pre-transition planning meeting
- Flexible transition programmes
- Opportunity to develop peer relationships
- 'Secondary ready' skills set list
- Key worker support

## What we still need to do

Continue to develop a range of strategies to support transition.



## Individual Pupils

Evidence and experience suggest that children and young people with ASD are at increased risk of EBSA. Given the increased risk of a child or young person with ASD experiencing high levels of anxiety which may lead to EBSA, it is essential that early attention and intervention by schools is given to building the child's social skills, emotional literacy, resilience and their ability to self-regulate.

This process should also apply to anyone who schools have concerns about in relation to mental health issues and/or anxiety related concerns.

### What we have in place

For work with individual children and young people for whom school-based interventions and strategies have not been effective, schools currently have access to support from HINT, Primary Behaviour Support and educational psychology.

Schools can also refer to the Education Inclusion Panel (EIP) for access to home tuition while the pupil is unable to access their mainstream/special school education placement.

In addition schools can access the AVATAR Pilot. The AVI avatar is a telepresence robot designed to help children and young people with long-term illness reconnect with school and their social lives. It acts as their eyes, ears and voice, representing them wherever they cannot physically be, whilst at hospital or at home. The robot cannot record, screenshots are forbidden, and it is a one-user device.

The local authority and schools have provided funding until March 2022 to pilot the use of two EBSA Learning Mentors to provide support for pupils presenting with EBSA. EBSA Learning Mentors will work to support the reintegration and engagement of pupils currently in receipt of 1-1 home tuition back into their educational provision (special or mainstream school). They will also work with schools providing advice, support and guidance to pupils to remain in their educational setting. Appendix 1 sets out the criteria for allocation of these LM.

## Conclusion

**Gateshead Council agrees that all children and young people have the right to an education that is appropriate and suitable to their needs. This strategy sets out the support available for schools and for children and young people to ensure that their education can continue.**

# Appendix 1

## Emotionally Based School Avoidance Learning Mentors

Nationally UK literature reports that between 1 and 2% of the school population are absent from school due to emotional reasons (Elliott, 1999, Gulliford & Miller, 2015). This can often present as ongoing anxiety or Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and with support these issues can be managed within a mainstream school setting.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance is complex and multi-layered, Kearney and Silberman's (1990) review of the literature indicates that there tends to be four main reasons for school avoidance:

- To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, such as feelings of anxiety or low mood
- To avoid situations that might be stressful; such as academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment
- To reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, such as parents and/or other family members
- To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time

Given the complexity of the issues, the approach to addressing the needs of children and young people with EBSA needs to be comprehensive and multi-layered.

Following discussion with School Forum, academies and the local authority finance department, funding has been secured for two EBSA Learning Mentors to work with pupils who are presenting with EBSA. They will work with pupils who are receiving home tuition and also in schools to try and address some of the issues which may lead to non-attendance.

Allocation of an EBSA Learning Mentor will be made by the Education Inclusion Panel. This is a multi-agency panel consisting of representation from health (0-19 service, CYPS), social care, Early Help, SEN, River Tyne Academy and Platform.

This panel meets on a monthly basis.

**Criteria for allocation of an EBSA Learning Mentor for pupils **not** attending school is a two-stage process:**

1. Referral to Education Inclusion Panel for agreement in principle
2. EBSA Learning Mentor recommendation to Education Inclusion Panel

**Criteria for referral:**

- On a school roll
- EIP has already agreed home tuition for the child
- The pupil and the family are supportive of the EBSA Learning Mentor involvement
- Written parental/carer consent
- **Written confirmation from an appropriate medical professional\* confirming anxieties in relation to school**

- Robust information from health, including physical and emotional mental health services on what interventions are being used to support the pupil overcoming their anxieties which are stopping them attending school
- Comprehensive information from school as to the interventions which they have tried **and** the impact of these intervention e.g. what has worked, what hasn't worked and why
- Clear rationale from the school as to why the EBSA Learning Mentor would be supportive in meeting the needs of the pupil in relation to the ESBA
- Information from parents/carers on any support they accessed for their child, what has worked, what hasn't worked **and** why
- Views of parents/carers on how the EBSA Learning Mentor may be supportive of their child
- Information from any other external agency involved with the pupil on the work they have done/are currently doing-what has worked/hasn't worked and why

Education Inclusion Panel will discuss the referral and one of following two decisions will be made:

1. The referral is agreed in principle.
2. The referral is not appropriate.

Schools will be informed of the decision of Education Inclusion Panel.

If the referral is agreed in principle an EBSA learning mentor will make arrangements to visit the home and talk to the family and young person and to talk with the school further. They will formulate a recommendation based on the initial referral and this further work at the next Education Panel. The panel members will make one of two decisions based on this recommendation:

- a. An EBSA Learning Mentor **will** be allocated.
- b. An EBSA Learning Mentor **will not** be allocated.

School will be informed of the decision of the Education Inclusion Panel.

### **Criteria for allocation of an EBSA Learning Mentor for pupils who **are still** attending school**

- On a school roll
- The pupil and the parents/carers are supportive of the EBSA Learning Mentor involvement
- Written parental/carer consent
- Comprehensive information from school as to the interventions which they have tried **and** the impact of these intervention e.g. what has worked, what hasn't worked and why
- Up to date attendance certificate
- Clear rationale from the school as to why the EBSA Learning Mentor would be supportive in meeting the needs of the child in relation to their EBSA
- Information from parents/carers on any support they have accessed for their child, what has worked, what hasn't worked and why
- Views of parents/carers on how the EBSA Learning Mentor may be supportive of their child
- Information from any other external agency involved with the pupil on the work they have done/are currently doing-what has worked/hasn't worked and why
- A TAF may be in place

\* ***Appropriate medical professionals as agreed locally are: CYPS, clinical psychologist, psychiatrist and specialist mental health nurses.***

## Appendix 2

# Attendance Codes

## AVI Avatars, Safeguarding and Attendance

### Safeguarding

Where it has been agreed between parents, school and other relevant agencies that the use of an avatar is appropriate to support a child/young person's education, due consideration must be given to the safeguarding responsibilities and arrangements.

Safeguarding remains the responsibility of the school, in cooperation with the parent's/carers who have day to day oversight of the child/young person while they are learning.

Clear and agreed protocols should be put in place. For example, a member of school staff will make a weekly visit to the home to meet with the child/young person.

### Attendance and register marks

For the sessions the child/young person is accessing learning via the avatar, this can be recorded with a 'B' mark (educated off site, statistically a present mark).

Where the child/young person is expected to be using the avatar, but fails to engage/'log on, this should be an absent mark, using the relevant register code depending on the reason for the absence.

Sessions where the child/young person is not expected to be using the avatar, and is not expected in school, should be marked with the absence code 'C'.

## Emotionally Based School Avoidance Learning Mentors

### Register marking

Where there is a planned, agreed part-time timetable or reintegration plan that involves sessions with an EBSA Learning Mentor, these absences should be authorised by school using the C code.

An 'educated off site mark' would not be appropriate in this instance as the work undertaken by the EBSA doesn't meet the criteria laid down in the regulations, summarised in the guidance: -

### Present at an Approved Off-Site Educational Activity

*An approved educational activity is where a pupil is taking part in supervised educational activity such as field trips, educational visits, work experience or alternative provision. Pupils can only be recorded as receiving off-site educational activity if the activity meets the requirements prescribed in regulation 6(4) of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. The activity must be of an educational nature approved by the school and supervised by someone authorised by the school. The activity must take place during the session for which the mark is recorded.*

The EBSA work is not included in the categories covered by the 'Present at an Approved Off-Site Educational Activity' which are listed below, therefore should be recorded as an authorised absence (C code) for those sessions.

**Code B:** Off-site educational activity

**Code D:** Dual Registered - at another educational establishment

**Code J:** At an interview with prospective employers, or another educational establishment

**Code P:** Participating in a supervised sporting activity

**Code V:** Educational visit or trip

**Code W:** Work experience

## Example register

In a week where the pupil is absent from school but has two sessions with the EBSA LM ON Tuesday and Thursday morning the marks would be:-

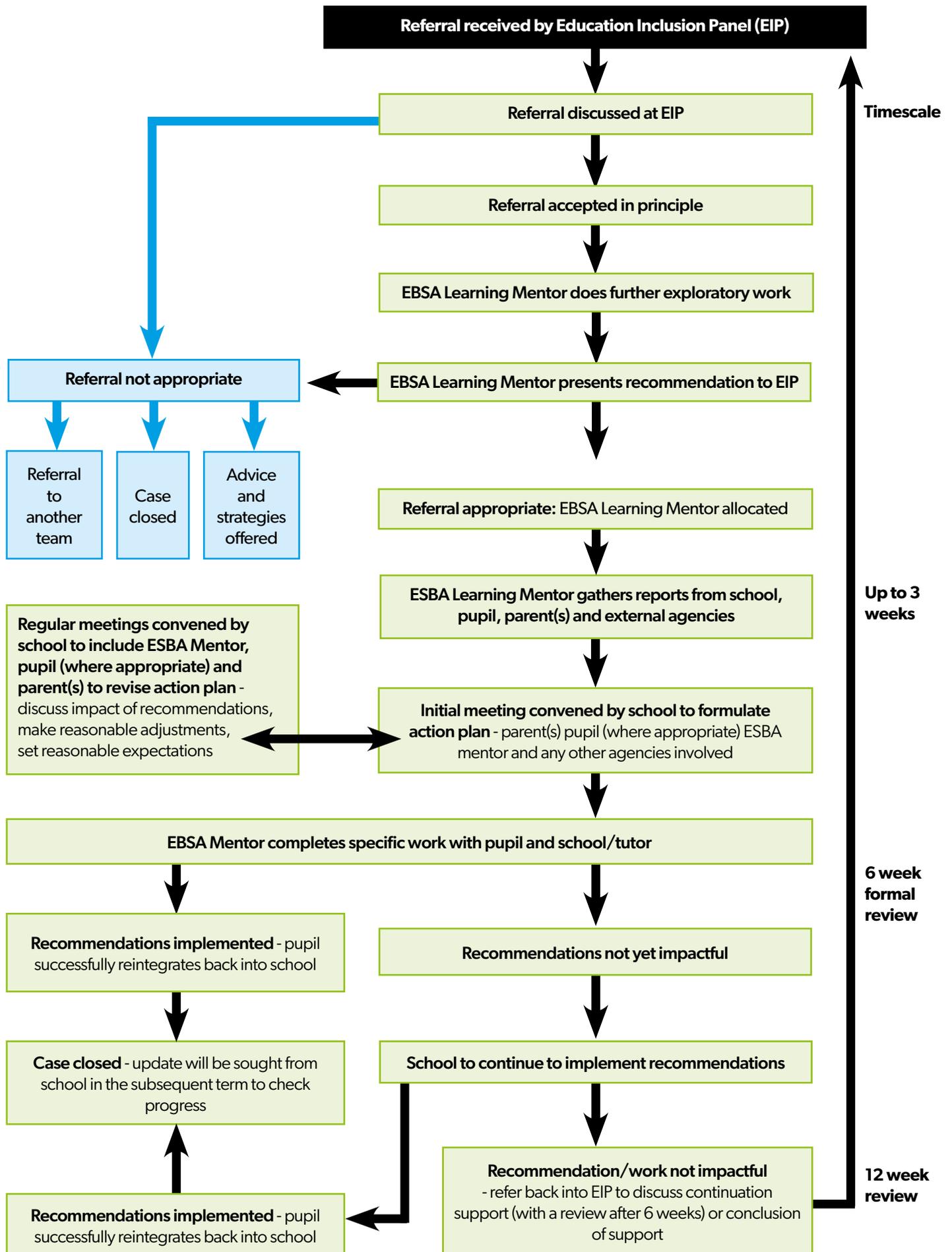
Where school decides the absence is unauthorised -

	AM	PM								
<b>Week 1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Where the school decides to authorise the absence, for example where the pupil is remote learning for those sessions -

|               | AM       | PM       |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>Week 1</b> | <b>C</b> |

# Appendix 3 EBSA Referral Flowchart







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