

Parent Carers' Experiences of Children with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

A report by Healthwatch Bath & NES and Banes Parent
Forum

Why look at this question ?

The Parent Carer Forum raised this issue, due to the feedback they were hearing from parent carers including:

- the variable way in which EBSA is dealt with by GPs and schools
- new guidance given to schools around attendance, which is impacting especially on those children with EBSA, but where any other diagnosis is absent
- if a child has an EHCP then the needs of children are much better met, but anxiety can be a standalone issue without any diagnosis, or there could be delays in EHCP
- EBSA has become more common since COVID but was present beforehand
- The Parent Carer Forum are part of an EBSA steering group involving schools, Educational Psychologists, Sendias and the Local Authority, but with limited health input

What we did ?

Healthwatch B&NES and B&NES Parent Carer Forum devised a survey which was shared via their membership and also via Healthwatch social media channels and monthly newsletter

The survey was open for 4 weeks and 30 responses were received

All respondents cared for a child or children with special or additional needs, who were experiencing anxiety around school attendance

Responses were received in roughly equal numbers in relation to primary and secondary school pupils

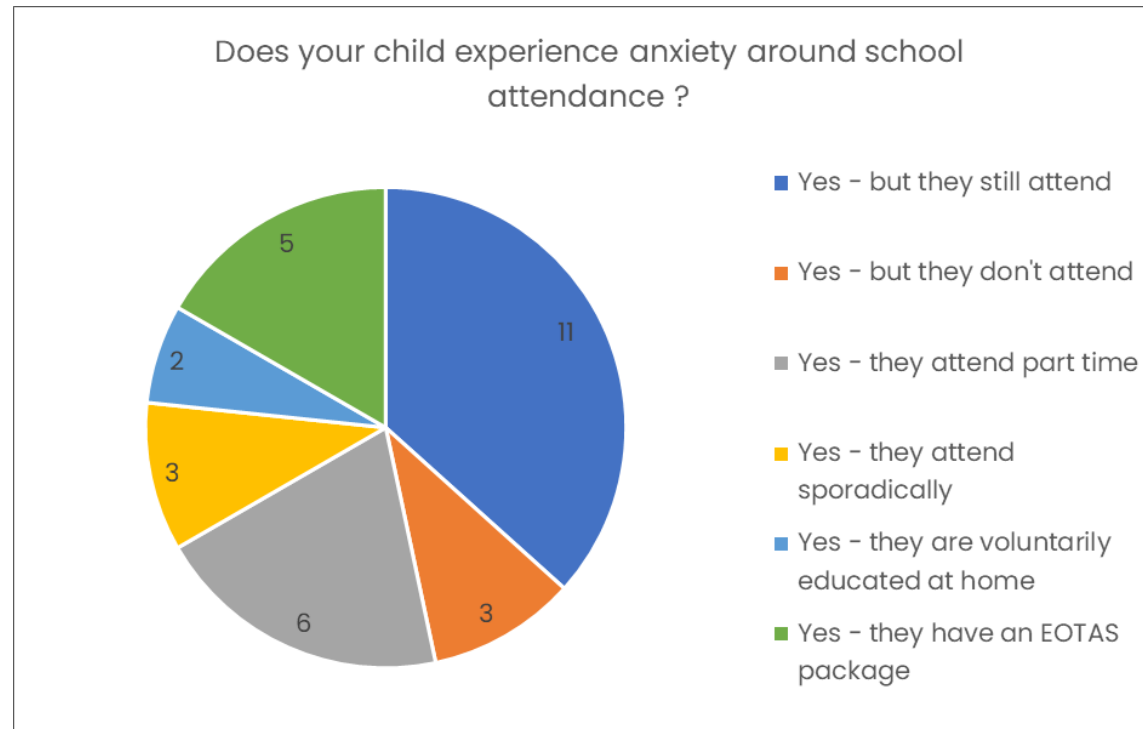
There was a mix of responses with regard to whether a diagnosis had been received, was in progress, or where there was no diagnosis:

- 17 children had multiple diagnoses
- 5 children had a single diagnosis

It is clear that many parent carers and children were managing complex and multiple conditions, including physical condition

What we found out

Just over a third said their children still attended school and 10% that they were not attending 30% were attending either part-time or sporadically. The remainder were educated either at home or through an EOTAS (Educated Other Than At School) package



What we found out – support and advice from GPs

The survey asked about parent carers' contact with their GP and whether they received helpful support and advice.

73% of respondents had either visited or spoken with their GP about this issue
46% were offered advice by their GP but only 18% found the advice helpful, with a further 23% being unsure, with the remainder saying the advice was not helpful

Only 10% of respondents said their GP recognised EBSA

Examples:

“To contact CAMHS – GP said they had no power to help. Couldn't issue a sick note or back up anxiety diagnosis”

“To get my child back into mainstream school as soon as possible” The GP had no understanding of school anxiety and would not write a letter to the school. I had to change GP's to eventually get a letter of support and also change GP surgery.

“The GP has written several letters supporting my daughter's EBSA and has been very helpful.”

What we found out – responses from schools

The survey asked about parent carers' contact with school and whether they received helpful support and advice.

A majority (80%) had consulted the school teacher, and 43% had contacted the school manager or administrative staff and 30% the school nurse.

70% had been offered advice – levels of support varied immensely as with GPs

Examples:

“The previous school didn't even try to understand and just said she had to go. Some staff even resorted to telling her they might lose their jobs if she didn't go in as they were responsible for her.”

“Head of SEN at (secondary) school telling daughter to 'leave her mental health issues at home”

“The staff at my daughter's secondary have been amazing in meeting her every day for the first two years, endlessly patience and working in co - production with myself as a parent.”

Key findings – 1

Recognition of EBSA and support for parents and children experiencing EBSA is extremely varied from GP to GP and between schools

Parents are working very hard to try and find support from GPs, schools and other voluntary organisations

Having or not having a diagnosis e.g. of autism or other, did not appear from results to impact on the support provided

As there was no specific EHCP question we can't say whether having or not having an EHCP had an impact on support. However, we know how challenging some parents find this process – including delays and having to fund parts of the process privately

Timeliness of support is really important as children can miss out on key stages of learning, and social development, as a result of delays in support

That good practice is out there alongside bad or unhelpful practice – need to proactively support the change from unhelpful to helpful

Key findings – 2

Examples illustrating key findings:

“More awareness and understanding and access to support. LA speed up with decisions! GPs understanding that EBSA is real!”

“I would have liked some practical support to support my child to get to school before it got to the stage she was too scared to attend.”

“Help for children who can't attend school without a diagnosis or at least during the process of gaining one as 2+ years in limbo without support is not good enough at all and creates more trauma for the children and families”

“For schools to have more empathy and a better understanding of children who are undiagnosed and have school anxiety. Better understanding of autism and masking. School should stop treating absence like it's all the same and stop threatening parents with fines and this just piles in more stress for the family.”

Recommendations – 1

1. All schools in BANES to take up the available EBSA training e.g. Horizons training & Parent Carer Forum training. This should include all staff and the level of take up be reported to the EBSA steering group.
2. Health professionals (GPs, school nurses, Health Visitors, specialist nurses, paediatricians) should access EBSA awareness training, and be aware of strategies to help.
3. At the transition between key stages schools should share information which specifically identifies EBSA, where this is relevant rather than sharing only low attendance. Linked to this it is recommended that all secondary schools ask the same question on this issue for ease of completion of forms by primary schools.
4. Clarity should be provided to parent carers whose children are educated 'out of county' about which local authority or agency they should communicate with for help and support around EBSA.

Recommendations – 2

5. Schools should be aware of the support available to parent carers and signpost them appropriately to this support.
6. GPs should be aware of the support available to parent carers and signpost them appropriately to this support
7. Education and health providers should find ways to share examples of good practice so schools and GPs can learn from each other
8. More mental health support should be provided for teenagers especially, both in and outside school
9. More support should be available for children to help build their confidence and resilience for example, mentoring support, whether they are in alternative provision, or struggling to maintain attendance in school.

Link to report and contact details for PCF

Link for report on Healthwatch Bath & North East Somerset website

[Parent Carers Experiences of Children with Emotionally Based School Avoidance \(EBSA\) | Healthwatch Bathnes](#)

B&NES Parent Carer Forum & contact details

B&NES Parent Carer Forum (PCF) are parents of children or young people with a variety of disabilities, who bring their experiences and knowledge together to provide a voice to advocate for change.

The PCF work closely with parent carers through their website, information sessions, social media and events. PCF works in partnership with the Local Authority and other strategic groups to ensure that they listen and hear what it is really like for families, children and young people. Highlighting what change is needed to ensure that there really is an inclusive offer

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B&NES Parent Carer Forum



THANK YOU

Do you have any questions ?

What is your response to the report and recommendations ?