



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

An Appreciative Inquiry into How Primary and Secondary Schools Support Emotionally Based School Avoidance

A research thesis submitted in part requirement for
the Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology.

The University of Sheffield, School of Education
May 2024

Registration No: 210103247

Hannah Lees-Smith

Word Count: 38,319

Abstract

This research sought to gather data using a sequential mixed methodology to explore Emotionally Based School Avoidance in a local authority situated within the West Midlands.

Using a quantitative and qualitative mixed methodology to collect data, this thesis reports on a study investigating Emotionally Based School Avoidance, by carrying out an appreciative interview to discover how schools have successfully supported Emotionally Based School Avoidance cases.

The following two research questions drove this research study:

- Research Question One: *Have schools within the local authority seen an increase in children and young people who are not attending school due to Emotionally Based School Avoidance since the COVID-19 Pandemic?*
- Research Question Two: *What interventions are schools in a locality within the local authority currently using to support children and young people facing Emotionally Based School Avoidance-related difficulties accessing their learning? What does success look and feel like for schools, and how is success measured?*

The methodology consisted of two initial quantitative and qualitative phases and additionally, two subsequent phases took place in response to limited participation.

For Phase One, A questionnaire was distributed to all secondary and primary school Special Educational Needs Coordinators in that particular local authority to address research question one which had eleven responses. In addition, during Phase Three, an interview with a Local Authority Officer was conducted to further collect persistent and severe non-attendance data.

To address research question two, a 'Discovery' appreciative interview through the medium of a focus group with three Special Educational Needs Coordinators took place during Phase Two. Later, during Phase Four, a follow-up appreciative interview using the 'Dream' phase of appreciative inquiry was conducted with a focus group participant.

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcript of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator's focus group and the follow-up 'Dream' interview that took place through an appreciative analysis of identifying what works and a follow-up interview to organise and interpret the transcribed data by identifying "patterns within the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79, 2019).

Findings suggest that there is a prevalence of Emotionally Based School Avoidance within this particular local authority and that all schools are seeing increasing numbers of persistent and severe absences from school since COVID-19. The research has highlighted that there is not one approach that schools use when supporting Emotionally Based School Avoidance cases. Schools are building strong connections with parents, families, and external agencies such as mental health practitioners and local authority traded services.

Subsequently, this research has identified that the participants felt that supporting children and young people facing Emotionally Based School Avoidance-related challenges include the following:

- Monitoring attendance patterns and working collaboratively with LA officers to work with the CYP in their homes and create action plans to provide early intervention.
- Schools can be flexible and provide bespoke interventions for each CYP when required. Individual adaptations can help build resilience in attending school and become a protective factor that supports CYP to attend school.
- Working collaboratively with parents, families, and external agencies to ensure a holistic approach to supporting children and young people is established and entrenched to enable further protective factors.
- CYP maintain connections and a sense of belonging within their setting with peers and staff members who are not classroom-based can provide an essential layer of support for CYP and be available to visit them at home and build connections that may have become lost due to long-term absence.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank:

Those who participated in this research journey and shared their invaluable experiences and insights with me.

Thank you to my research tutors, Dr Lorraine Campbell, and Dr Victoria Lewis.

My heartfelt thanks go to my course tutors, fieldwork supervisors, colleagues, and fellow Trainee Educational Psychologists who have provided me with their wisdom and support over the past three years.

Without the support of my family and friends, I would not have been able to go through this journey alone, I would not have made it through without your guidance, care, patience, and love.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	3
List of figures	11
List of tables	12
List of acronyms	13
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	14
1.1 Introduction	14
1.2 Research positionality	15
1.3. Research background and context.....	16
1.4 Rationale	17
1.5 Introduction to the research approach and methods	19
1.5.1 Pilot study	19
1.5.2 Phase one	20
1.5.3 Phase two	21
1.6. Research aims and questions	21
Chapter 2: Literature review	23
2.1 Language and terminology in describing non-attendance patterns in schools ..	23
2.1.1 Truancy.....	23
2.1.2 School phobia.....	24
2.1.3 School refusal.....	24
2.1.4 Government policy terminology	25
2.1.5 Emotionally based school avoidance	26
2.2 Barriers to school attendance.....	27
2.2.1 The macrosystem	27
2.2.1.1 Government policy	28
2.2.1.2 COVID-19 pandemic.....	32

2.2.1.3 Cost of living crisis	34
2.2.1.4 Special educational needs and disabilities provisions.....	36
2.2.1.5 Mental health support	37
2.2.2 The exosystem	38
2.2.3 The mesosystem	39
2.2.3.1 Family and school interactions.....	39
2.2.4 The microsystem	39
2.2.4.1 School system.....	40
2.2.4.2 Family system	42
2.2.4.3 Trauma	43
2.2.4.4 Anxiety	44
2.2.4.5 Autism and anxiety	46
2.3 School non-attendance and the impact it has upon CYP	46
2.4 How emotionally based school avoidance may be prevented	50
2.4.1. Systemic level.....	50
2.4.1.1 The importance of identifying risk and resilience	51
2.4.1.2 Push and pull factors linked to risk and resilience	52
2.4.2 Supporting individual's resilience through solution-oriented enquiry.....	53
2.4.2.1 Using a narrative technique to elicit stories of experience	54
2.4.2.2 Dr Perry's 6 R's framework	54
2.4.2.3 Parent and carer relationships with education	56
2.4.2.4 Collaborative working with external agencies	57
2.4.2.5 Education not in school settings.....	58
2.4.2.5.1 Alternative provision.....	58
2.4.2.5.2 Education other than at school	59
2.4.2.5.3 Elective home education	60
Chapter 3: Methodology	61

3.1 Introduction	61
3.2 Identifying the methodology	61
3.3 Research position and approach.....	62
3.3.1 Phase one: The place of critical realism	63
3.3.2 Phase two: Interpretivism through social construction	64
3.4 Initial research design	65
3.5 Selecting methods.....	65
3.5.1 Phase One: Questionnaire	66
3.5.1.1 Pilot study.....	67
3.5.1.2 Data collection variance	68
3.5.1.3 Validity: phase one.....	68
3.5.2 Phase two: Focus group using appreciative inquiry.....	70
3.6 Participant sampling and recruitment	71
3.6.1 Phase one: Questionnaire sampling.....	71
3.6.2 Phase two: Focus group sampling.....	72
3.7 Data collection and analysis.....	72
3.7.1 Phase one: Quantitative data analysis	72
3.7.2 Phase two: Qualitative reflexive thematic analysis	73
3.7.2.1 Reflexive thematic analysis process	74
3.7.2.2 Generating initial codes.....	74
3.7.2.3 Searching for themes	75
3.7.2.4 Reviewing themes	75
3.7.2.5 Defining and naming themes	76
3.7.2.6 Producing the Report	77
3.7.3 Phase three: additional Data Collection Interview	77
3.7.3.1 Exploring the LA non-attendance data interview	77
3.7.4 Phase four: additional appreciative inquiry interview	78
3.7.4.1 The 'Dream' interview	78

3.8 Ethical considerations	79
3.8.1 Consent	80
3.8.2 Potential harm	81
3.9 Data processing	81
Chapter 4: Data analysis	82
4.1 Results from the questionnaire (phase one).....	82
4.1.1 Responses for question one	83
4.1.2 Responses for question two	84
4.1.3 Responses for question three	84
4.1.4 Responses for question four	85
4.1.5. Responses for question five	86
4.1.6 Responses for question six	87
4.2 Findings from reflexive thematic analysis (phase two)	87
4.2.1 Introduction: Focus group reflexive thematic analysis	87
4.2.2 Theme one: Going beyond the role of a teacher	89
4.2.2.1 Sub-theme 1.1	89
4.2.2.2 Sub-theme 1.2	91
4.2.2.3 Sub-theme 1.3	92
4.2.3 Theme two: In-school adaptations for CYP	93
4.2.3.1 Sub-theme 2.1	93
4.2.3.2 Sub-theme 2.2	94
4.2.4 Theme three: Successes of intervention and support	96
4.2.4.1 Sub-theme 3.1	96
4.2.4.2 Sub-theme 3.2	97
4.2.4.3 Sub-theme 3.3	98
4.2.5 Theme four: Barriers to school attendance	99
4.2.5.1 Sub-theme 4.1	100
4.2.5.2 Sub-theme 4.2	102

4.2.5.3 Sub-theme 4.3	103
4.3 Findings from additional data collection	104
4.3.1 Phase three: The ‘Dream’ interview	105
4.3.1.1 Theme one: Changes already implemented	105
4.3.1.2 Theme two: The dream of future steps	106
4.3.2 Phase four: interview: Exploring the la non-attendance data	108
4.3.2.1 Interview question 1	108
4.3.2.2 Interview question 2	109
4.3.2.3 Interview question 3	110
4.3.2.4 Interview question 4	111
4.3.2.5 Interview question 5	112
4.3.2.6 Interpretation summary	113
Chapter 5: Discussion	114
5.1 Discussion of key findings	114
5.1.1 Macrosystem level	114
5.1.1.1 Research question one	114
5.1.1.2 Research question two.....	116
5.1.2 Mesosystem Level	117
5.1.2.1 Research question two.....	117
5.1.3 Microsystem Level	119
5.1.3.1 Research question two.....	119
5.2 Implications and recommendations for practice	121
5.2.1 Macrosystem level	121
5.2.2 Mesosystem level	122
5.2.3 Microsystem level	124
5.3 Strengths and delimitations	125
5.4 Further reflections	128

5.5 Future research	129
5.6 Conclusion	130
References.....	133
Appendices	151
Appendix 1: Research timeline	151
Appendix 2: Pilot study information sheet	152
Appendix 3: Pilot study consent form	155
Appendix 4: Phase one questionnaire	157
Appendix 5: DfE non-attendance codes	159
Appendix 6: Focus group script	160
Appendix 7: Phase one information sheet	161
Appendix 8: Phase one consent form.....	164
Appendix 9: Phase two focus group information sheet.....	166
Appendix 10: Phase two focus group consent form.....	169
Appendix 11: Phase three interview information sheet	172
Appendix 12: Phase three interview consent form.....	175
Appendix 13: Phase four follow-up ‘dream’ interview information sheet	178
Appendix 14: Phase four follow-up ‘dream’ interview consent form.....	181
Appendix 15: Focus group transcript excerpt with codes	184
Appendix 16: Final codes and descriptions	187
Appendix 17: Searching for themes	188
Appendix 18: Reviewing themes	189
Appendix 19: Refining themes	190
Appendix 20: Table of sample extracts from the transcript for refined candidate themes	191
Appendix 21: Excerpt of transcript for the follow-up ‘Dream’ interview	193
Appendix 22: Ethics application and addendum	194

Appendix 23: Ethics approval letter and addendum approval notice	199
Appendix 24: Second amendment to ethics application.	200
Appendix 25: Extracts of transcript related to sub-themes 1.1 and 1.2.....	201
Appendix 26: Executive summary of findings	203

List of figures

Figure 1: The self in practitioner research

Figure 2: The Three R's (reason, relate and regulation): Reaching the learning brain

Figure 3: Explanatory sequential mixed methods design

Figure 4: Research question map highlighting the research questions

Figure 5: Question 1 pie chart: What do you feel is the current impact of EBSA on school non-attendance?

Figure 6: Question 2 pie chart: Have you seen an increase in EBSA cases since the COVID-19 pandemic impacted school closures?

Figure 7: Question 4 pie chart: How successful do you feel these interventions have been over the past year?

Figure 8: Question 6 pie chart: Have you referred an EBSA case to an educational psychologist previously?

Figure 9: Theme one: Going beyond the role of the teacher

Figure 10: Theme two: Adaptations for CYP

Figure 11: Theme three: Successes of intervention and support

Figure 12: Theme four: Barriers to school attendance

Figure 13: Follow-up interview refined candidate themes

Figure 14: Local authority published persistent and severe absence data.

Figure 15: Severe absence: A comparison of national, regional and LA data for autumn and spring data

Figure 16: Persistent absence: Comparing national, regional and LA data for autumn and spring data

List of tables

Table 1: Question 3: Interventions tally chart

Table 2: Question 5: External agency tally chart

Table 3: LA officer interview question 5: Hopes and outcomes of the EBSA pilot

List of acronyms

CYP – Children and Young People

DfE – Department for Education

EBSA – Emotionally Based School Avoidance

EHCP – Educational, Health, and Care Plan

EP – Educational Psychologist

EPS – Educational Psychology Service

LA – Local Authority

RQ – Research question

SEMH – Social emotional mental health

SENCo - Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SLT – Senior Leadership Team

TA – Thematic Analysis

TEP – Trainee Educational Psychologist

Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

Before commencing the doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology in 2021, in my early teens, I gained invaluable experience working with children and young people (CYP) by becoming a volunteer at a junior club and playscheme. This experience inspired me to complete an undergraduate degree in community and youth studies in 1998, which qualified me to become a practising youth worker. In 2003, I trained as a teacher whilst working as a teaching assistant in a special school. In 2010 I completed a master's degree which included gaining a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) qualification.

I have had experience working in both mainstream and special schools, mainly in secondary school, during the latter stage of my teaching career, the school where I was employed additionally opened an attached primary school to which I took on SENCo responsibilities.

Following the move from working in a special school to being situated within a mainstream school environment, my interest was sparked in how schools could effectively support CYP who were not attending school due to EBSA. This was due to encountering CYP who were experiencing barriers to not attending school due to anxiety difficulties. Later, in my SENCo career, I had the opportunity to work alongside some CYP who had completely stopped attending school due to them not being able to overcome their anxiety levels or access their learning in school. At this time, I can now reflect that I had a limited understanding of EBSA and that I did not have a toolkit to support these CYP.

Therefore, I had limited knowledge when introducing interventions and the rationale behind using the following: I attempted to use reduced timetables, nurture-based classes, and external agency support and carried out regular home visits.

After deciding to change my career path, I had the opportunity to work for a Local Authority (LA) as a Legal Compliance Tribunal Officer which provided me with the experience of working alongside multi-agency professionals who supported CYP with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families.

The underlying motivation behind why I chose this research field was developed whilst I was a SENCo as I felt quite helpless when attempting to support the CYP who experienced EBSA. Some of the CYP for whom I was responsible could not access their education during their time on roll, but despite them wanting to access their learning, attending school was a huge barrier for them to overcome. I have also been inspired by colleagues who work within the EPS as I have attended various training courses on this subject, including those EPs who work in the LA where I am currently on placement.

I aim to uncover how school staff can create opportunities for positive outcomes with CYP who are experiencing similar barriers to accessing their learning.

I have chosen to use the term emotional-based school avoidance (EBSA). This term will be used throughout this study and refers to CYP “who have severe difficulty attending school due to emotional factors which lead to prolonged absences from school” (Morgan *et al.*, 2018, p. 3). This study does not include when CYP do not choose to attend school due to truancy nor does it consider those CYP who might be experiencing non-attendance through other means (for example, suspensions or permanent exclusion).

1.2 Researcher positionality

Bias is a naturally occurring characteristic of being human so therefore being aware of where I am situated and what my position is as a researcher needs to be addressed and identified (Throne, 2012).

I accept there is no value-free or bias-free design when carrying out research. I will not claim that I can be objective but, I aim to be fair and factual throughout to be able to present this research in line with my ontological and epistemological stances as discussed earlier in his chapter (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).



Figure 1 – Situating self in practitioner research (Throne, 2012)

Using the figure above I have been able to explore my positionality as a researcher which provides a context into where I am with my knowledge, professional practice, and discipline (Throne, 2012).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, before becoming a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and embarking upon the journey of becoming a student at The University of Sheffield, I had worked many years as a teacher and SENCo in both mainstream and specialist schools teaching Information Communication and Technology (ICT), before that, I was a qualified youth worker.

My previous job roles enabled me to develop knowledge and experience in supporting CYP in educational and non-educational settings, driving my desire to implement change that benefited the CYP with whom I worked.

I am engaged with currently practising as a TEP in the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) that serves the local authority, where this research was carried out. I do not have relationships with many of the school SENCo's as I am only linked to three of the primary schools who were invited to participate in this research out of all the schools within the local authority through my TEP casework.

My background and previous employment experiences have provided me with knowledge that has given me a critical awareness of what it is like to work within an educational setting. Supporting CYP who are facing emotionally related difficulties with attending schools as I have had lived experience (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994; Bukamal, 2022) of being a SENCo for over ten years.

I acknowledge that my previous role as a SENCo affects my decision-making process, how I interpret information, and gather data (Bukamal, 2022). Therefore, I aim to be reflexive about having shared experiences with education staff, how this may impact my choices of methodology, and how I analyse my findings (Morganti, Carassa and Riva, 2008; Bukamal, 2022; Mack, 2024).

1.3 Research background and context

This research will contribute towards development work between the Local Authority (LA) and the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) where my placement is based. The possibility of my research contributing to this work emerged from a meeting with one of the specialist senior educational psychologists (EP) when I first started my

year two placement as a TEP. The meeting allowed my research to potentially contribute to a wider undertaking, with both practical and systemic benefits. As such, this research project has focused on contributing to collecting information from secondary schools, in the initial phase, about their current EBSA cases and what interventions or involvement they are having with their CYP.

As mentioned earlier, the LA is developing its EBSA offer to schools and will be rolling out a pathway that schools can choose to opt into, therefore I wanted to contribute towards this development project by gathering data that can inform this work.

It is anticipated that analysis and outcomes from this research will contribute to the literature on celebrating and sharing good practices within schools to support EBSA cases.

This research will comprise of two phases:

Phase One:

- This phase will gather background data within the LA regarding the numbers of CYP experiencing EBSA and the types of interventions being drawn on by schools.
- Secondly, this phase will briefly investigate what success schools have experienced through using interventions.

Phase Two:

- This phase will discover and celebrate the success of how the schools have helped CYP who are experiencing EBSA-related difficulties to access their education.

1.4 Rationale

The government through the Department for Education (DfE) have, over time, updated policy, and guidance documents for schools and LAs to work together and reduce the occurrences of non-attendance, as there is a focus on improving attendance, especially following the COVID-19 Pandemic (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008; DfE, 2022d). The DfE carried out an initial survey of Her Majesty's Inspectors in the summer term of 2021 and found that the schools being

inspected during that term were noticing more attendance-related issues than normally observed (DfE, 2022c). The DfE have also thought about how they collect school attendance data, following a realisation that attendance data was historic, and that there needed to be a more accurate method of accessing attendance trends (DfE, 2024b).

A trial run of automatic data collection via an online service called View Your Education Data (VYED) has been circulated which is currently not mandatory for schools to opt into, but 78% of the schools in England have already opted into using (DfE, 2023b).

Government data also reflects that “over one-fifth of pupils missed 10% of their sessions across the 2021-22 academic year and that persistent absence in the last year was much higher than pre-pandemic (COVID-19) levels” (Roberts, 2023). Therefore, the extended absence from school may have increased following the experience of COVID-19 as having restrictive measures imposed has devastating effects on the psychology of CYP due to feeling stressed, anxious, and fearful (Pedrosa *et al.*, 2020).

Having a prolonged absence from school can further exacerbate a CYP's existing known needs associated with EBSA. The number of persistent non-attenders increased because staying at home may feel safer (Akat and Karataş, 2020; Barcham *et al.*, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 on CYP imposes a barrier to attending school. As of March 2023, it was reported that 59,000 school aged CYP in England had been identified as having long-term COVID symptoms which persisted for more than 12 weeks after the infection had passed (The Education Committee, 2023).

Despite the government's efforts to ensure school attendance is a priority for schools to ensure that interventions are taking place to reduce non-attendance, the percentage of recorded persistent absences in England during the first two terms of 2022-2023 within primary schools was 17.3%, and in secondary schools was 25.2% (Gov.UK, 2023).

Worryingly during the spring term of 2023, the number of persistent absences rose to 23.1% and went up even higher to 24.3% in the summer term, 18.6% for primary schools and 31.3% for secondary schools (GOV.UK, 2024).

The DfE attendance data illustrates that the number of severe absentees for those who miss 50% or more sessions, has also risen from 0.8% pre-pandemic (2018-2019) to 1.9% (2022-2023) and is more prevalent in mainstream secondary schools as the severe absentee figure was 3.1% for the autumn and spring terms of 2022-2023 (GOV.UK, 2024).

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is an area that requires further investigation considering the recent government attendance data that reflects that during the academic year of 2022-2023. Therefore, unpicking how school staff support CYP who are not attending school due to EBSA-related difficulties is an area to be examined so that schools can help them access their learning and be able to provide early identification of CYP who may be missing their sessions due to emotional related reasons to prevent further absences.

Previous research focusing solely on EBSA intervention outcomes appears limited and has been carried out through small-scale case studies. Ten years ago, Nuttall and Woods (2013), used a case study of two CYP who were not attending school due to anxiety and concluded that what worked with one professional might not work with another (Nuttall and Woods, 2013). Then more recently in 2022, Corcoran et al. also completed a case study, again with just two CYP, which explored successful returns to school in a primary school. The two CYP had previously experienced anxiety around school attendance, and the research concluded that further empirical research into stakeholder views would contribute towards a more generalised understanding of stakeholders' experiences of EBSA (Corcoran, Bond, and Knox, 2022).

1.5 Introduction to the research approach and methods

1.5.1 Pilot study

Using a multi-strategy methodology design approach (also known as mixed method studies) for data collection would enable combining methods and research strategies (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Robson, 2011; Creswell, 2022). This paradigm was applied using two initial planned phases with elements of qualitative and quantitative single-application methods commencing with a pilot study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

The purpose of piloting the questionnaire was to gather the participants' opinions about the flow and clarity of the questions, to ensure that it was accessible to test this research method and to evaluate if the questions worked well (Thomas, 2013; Beatty *et al.*, 2019). I piloted the questionnaire with a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) based in a secondary school where I had carried out two pieces of casework, one of which involved an EBSA-related case. The questionnaire was then shared with a senior EP who works within the service, to ensure that they felt it was fit for purpose and could also inform the project.

Carrying out a trial run of phase one enabled me to practice and assess the effectiveness and explore what data would be obtained upon completion. The pilot study also aided me in testing the validity of the measures used during the analysis stage. It also provided me with the opportunity to ensure that I had not missed any essential details of the information sheet and identify any potential problems before distribution to the schools.

The quantitative approach of designing a questionnaire was undertaken to gather data on persistent absence, and EBSA case figures and gain a general understanding of what approaches or pathways schools implement when supporting their EBSA cases.

The questionnaire also provided an opportunity for staff to rate how successful they felt their interventions had been, as well as explore if schools involved external agencies to support them. The final question was used to ask if the participants would be willing to take part in the second phase of the research.

1.5.2 Phase one

The questionnaire was distributed (please refer to Appendix 4) to the school SENCo's via email. I sent the questionnaire, information sheet, and consent form out to all 61 secondary schools within the locality on three different dates over the summer term. Due to only recruiting three willing participating secondary schools by the end of the summer term, I decided to send it out to the 179 primary school SENCos. I also took up the offer from my EP colleagues to directly ask their SENCos to respond to the survey phase.

In the autumn term, the questionnaire was sent out to all schools on two further occasions and again distributed by two colleagues who organised the SENCo networks for both primary and secondary schools. Sending out the questionnaires again did not recruit participants. Therefore, in the spring term, I changed the paper-based questionnaire to a web-based version, hoping to attract further participants. The survey was sent out again in January 2024 and re-distributed via the SENCo network.

1.5.3 Phase two

During the second phase, a qualitative approach using a focus group was used to discover current school practices and add rich data to the research process. The focus group initiated a discussion centred on the participant's interventions using the first step of appreciative inquiry, the discovery stage (Barrett and Fry, 2005). This positive approach is intended to identify the strengths of the school's effective practice, celebrate success, and share good practices to promote systemic change.

1.6 Research aims and questions

This research aims to explore the current picture of emotionally based school non-attendance. I would hope to gain an insight into the current extent of school non-attendance related to EBSA in schools based within the LA where I am currently practising as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and to explore if schools have seen a rise in EBSA cases since the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Another outcome would be to discover how schools support those CYP experiencing EBSA and celebrate the successes schools may have seen following their interventions. The level of school support may include interventions such as focusing on risk and resilience factors that CYP may have built up over time, or they could be implementing Educational Psychology Services (EPS) pathways available through Local Authorities (LA).

The overall aim of this research is to explore the current practice that is taking place in secondary schools based within one LA in the West Midlands. It will also investigate current practices and interventions that schools have adopted, such as exploring risk and resilience factors and using existing EPS pathways to support CYP who are dealing with EBSA-related difficulties and not accessing their learning.

Using and developing research can help explore current practices, enabling mechanisms for effective practices to be illustrated and providing practice-based evidence for EPs, schools and LAs (Nuttall and Woods, 2013). This small-scale piece of research aims to be beneficial to the EP profession as it could further explore successful interventions within schools and help professionals choose interventions that have been tried and tested (Fox, 2003).

In addition to exploring the nature of EBSA issues, I want to celebrate the successful interventions that schools implement to support CYP in managing EBSA-related school non-attendance, promoting change, and providing the means for schools to share their practice.

The following research questions (RQs) guided this study:

RQ1: Have schools within the local authority (LA) seen an increase in CYP who are not attending school due to EBSA since the COVID-19 Pandemic?

RQ2: What interventions are schools in a locality within the LA currently using to support CYP facing EBSA-related difficulties accessing their learning? What does success look and feel like for schools, and how is success measured?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Language and terminology in describing non-attendance patterns in schools

2.1.1 Truancy

Over the decades an array of terminology has been used to label or describe a CYP who is not attending school over an extended period. In 1932, Broadwin used a "form of truancy" to describe when a child was absent from school for several months or even a year, which he linked to their character or neurosis. Interestingly, he also highlighted the importance of identifying cases of non-attendance early on by asking questions such as why a CYP is not attending school (Broadwin, 1932).

The term truancy has had a negative connotation and has been used for a century, so perhaps this term is somewhat outdated and has been frequently referred to by many since Broadwin. In 1997, Berg described school refusal and truancy as a condition where CYP are reluctant to participate due to emotional upset triggered by the prospect of attending school (Berg, 1997).

Kearney used similar terminology in several of his papers based on Berg's description, which was extended to school refusal behaviour (Kearney, 2001), which other authors have also used, such as Nuttall and Woods (Nuttall and Woods, 2013).

Zhang et al. (2007) carried out a study of young people who had been referred to the South Carolina justice system in the United States. They describe that truancy has been identified as one of the top ten educational problems and was an important predictor of later delinquent behaviour. They felt that truancy could be the first sign of 'trouble' and was typically linked to four major factors:

- Family factors – e.g., lack of parental supervision, domestic violence, and substance abuse.
- School factors – e.g., school environment, class size, inflexibility of meeting diverse cultural and learning needs.
- Economic factors – e.g., single-parent homes, high mobility rates, student employment.

- Student variables – e.g., substance abuse, social influences, mental and physical health difficulties. (Zhang et al., 2007)

Similarly, Kearney (2008) cited that the underpinnings of truancy could be linked to criminal behaviour, academic problems, and intense family conflict (Kearney, 2008a). Also, truancy has been referred to as an act of being absent from school without permission (Rivers, 2010) along with the notion that CYP may have a lack of motivation to attend school (Ek and Eriksson, 2013).

The language used within these terminologies produces a more negative narrative that almost seems to blame the CYP for perceived behaviours. Thambirajah et al. and Pellegrini note that the wording to describe non-attendance has been reliant upon within-child factors that ring-fence CYP into stereotypes (Pellegrini, 2007, p. 66; Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008).

2.1.2 School phobia

Johnson et al. (1941) coined the term school phobia following a study of a small group of children from the Institute for Juvenile Research in Chicago, USA. The term was used to describe a syndrome which was a form of neurosis.

The 1941 paper which reported upon the study findings, highlighted that school phobia was an initiation of common factors; acute anxiety in the child, an increase of anxiety in the mother and poorly resolved early dependency relationship of children to their mother (Johnson *et al.*, 1941).

In 1985, Heath used the term school phobia to describe an irrational fear or anxiety about attending school and felt that a distinction could be made between the school-phobic and the truant. He wrote that the incidence of school phobia was not significantly related to birth order, intelligence, or socioeconomic factors (Heath, 1985).

2.1.3 School refusal

Moving away from the term school phobia, Wimmer (2004) originally cited the term school refusal within a handout for educators to describe when children refused to attend school, which was often a result of separation anxiety or debilitating anxiety. Like Heath (1985), she felt that school refusal was different from truancy.

Wimmer noted that truant students hide their non-attendance from their parents, and they do not experience emotional difficulties associated with attending school.

Wimmer felt that school refusal may be developed in response to anxiety over separation from a parent, anxiety about performing well in school, social anxiety or other situations at school or home which were not too far from the common factors cited by Johnson et al. fifty years prior (Wimmer, 2010).

Kearney (2005) devised a model with his colleagues to assess the function of the behaviour of non-attendance. Tangible reinforcers draw CYP to stimuli away from attending school such as playing with friends, riding a bicycle, sleeping late, or wanting to watch television. The school refusal assessment model cites that non-attendance can be maintained by one or more of the following circumstances:

- “To avoid school-based stimuli that provoke a general sense of negative affectivity (anxiety and depression)
- To escape aversive school-based social and evaluative situations
- To pursue attention from significant others
- To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school”

(Kearney, Chapman and Cook, 2005, p. 217)

2.1.4 Government policy terminology

The terminology used in government policy and reports for school non-attendance has also evolved and changed. During the academic year of 2005/2006, the then Department for Education and Skills (DFES) (who are now known as the DfE) used the term ‘persistent truant’ within their behaviour and attendance strategy, which was in response to their large-scale intervention in non-attendance. At this time, the threshold of the marker for persistent truancy was set at 20 or more days of unauthorised absence.

In a report by the DfE in 2006 it was documented that there were then around 13,000 persistent truants which accounted for a fifth of unauthorised absences from secondary schools in England (Johnson, 2006) which is a stark contrast to the reported 122,000 persistent absences in 2022.

In October 2011, the threshold for persistent non-school absence was redefined by the DfE to describe persistent absence as when a CYP had missed 15% or more of

school, as they felt the original 20% marker would have been too late for intervention. At this point, there had been an increased rate of school absences. Hence, schools needed to be more ambitious about tackling absence.

In September 2015, the DfE updated the threshold again for persistent absence, further reducing it from 15% to 10%, changing the focus from an overall standard absence rate to one based on each CYP's possible sessions. Further to the persistent absence term remaining at the threshold of 10% absence, Section 5 of the DfE's Working Together to Improve School Attendance Guidance describes an additional category for non-attendance; the term severely absent is to be used when a CYP's non-attendance increases to 50% or more of not being in school (DfE, 2022d).

On a positive note, the DfE literature no longer uses the term truant, which implies that persistent absence could be a within-child issue that may have indicated that the blame was placed upon the individual CYP. Instead, guidance documents now refer to school non-attendance as a barrier and emphasise the need for schools to develop action plans with pupils and families by leaning on multi-agency working to support CYP (DfE, 2022d). The term barriers to school attendance (BtSA) has emerged from government guidance and recent literature has also adopted this term. Want and Gulliford (2024) reported that the BtSA enables a more holistic systemic understanding of school non-attendance, capturing individual stories of factors that include family, health, well-being, and education (Want and Gulliford, 2024).

Guidance documents may have gone full circle as Broadwin had mentioned the importance of uncovering why a CYP was not attending school back in the 1930s (Broadwin, 1932). This continues to highlight the importance for schools to investigate why CYP are persistently not attending school, and to work with LAs by establishing additional targeted support.

2.1.5 Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)

In 2004, a multi-disciplinary group was formed by the West Sussex Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to produce an Emotionally Based School Refusal (EBSR) guidance manual for schools that started to use the term EBSR. This guidance had

the vision of improving the prospects of CYP in attending school regularly to help build their self-confidence and resilience (Emmerson *et al.*, 2004).

Pellegrini (2007) who worked for the West Sussex EPS, authored an article that reviewed descriptions and terminology being used in literature to describe school non-attendance and advocated the use of the phrase 'extended school non-attendance'. He felt that the term 'school refusal' referred to purely a child-motivated refusal to attend school, which underpinned their behaviour (Pellegrini, 2007).

Considering Pellegrini's thinking, in 2018 the multi-disciplinary group at West Sussex EPS further updated their school guidance by changing their terminology moving away from using EBSR to citing emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA).

EBSA was defined as the umbrella term to describe a group of CYP who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school. They explained that the term 'refuser' could be misleading and implied that a CYP had control over their anxieties and ability to attend school (Morgan *et al.*, 2018, p. 3).

2.2 Barriers to school attendance

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977) views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by the multiple levels surrounding a CYP (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Guy-Evans, 2024). Keeping this theory in mind may help to explain the systemic interactions and relationships occurring at each level that could potentially create barriers for CYP to attend school.

2.2.1 The macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to laws, and policies, from which the government influences the social contexts that affect a CYP's development because the law sets out the values that establish the social conditions surrounding a CYP (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Wider barriers impact school attendance, such as CYP living in poverty due to the cost of living crisis, CYP experiencing mental health problems, or CYP experiencing possible discrimination, may circulate and also be compounded by intersectional factors such as race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2023; Lucas *et al.*, 2023; Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024a).

2.2.1.1 Government policy

On July 4th, 2024, the general election resulted in a change of government. Since the election, King Charles's speech (July 2024) included details of a new Children and Wellbeing Bill which aims to put children and their well-being at the centre of education and remove barriers to ensure that the school system promotes equality. A curriculum and assessment review will explore the "foundations to equip every child with the essential knowledge and skills for the future" (Prime Minister's Office, 2024).

However, current legislation and guidance do not adequately account for the wider barriers to attendance and have provided schools with a punitive approach to how parents and families are fined and punished for school non-attendance, further adding to the barriers that CYP face to attending school (Lucas *et al.*, 2023; Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024a). In England and Wales, the offence of 'truancy' is deemed to have been committed by parents and carers of CYP who have not attended school regularly, missing 10% of school sessions. Section 7 of the Education Act (1996) stipulates the parental duty to secure the efficient education of children by ensuring the child's regular attendance at school or otherwise (Epstein, Brown and O'Flynn, 2019).

The current law in England (Education Act 1996) stipulates that every child is entitled to access an official education or training from the age of five until they are eighteen years old, and it is every parent or carer's responsibility to ensure their child receives that education (DfE, 2022d). Parents and carers are therefore expected "to ensure that their child attends school every day." If their child is experiencing barriers to attending school, then they are expected to engage with formal support proactively "offered to prevent the need for more formal support" (Department for Education, 2022, p. 4).

Under current policy, parents and carers have the right to educate their CYP at home and the term elective home education (EHE) is now being used to describe the choice being made by families to provide education at home (DfE, 2019). The newly proposed Children's Wellbeing Bill stipulates that local authorities must track all children not in school through registers and provide parents support who home-educate their CYP (Prime Minister's Office, 2024). In 2020 the Association of

Children's Services Directorates EHE, reported that 86,335 CYP were being educated at home.

In addition, Section 19 of the Education Act (1996), stipulated that local authorities shall make suitable arrangements for CYP to access education at school or otherwise than at school when there are reasons for illness or exclusion. In January 2013 the DfE updated the regulations and replaced previous guidance to define alternative provisions, and stipulated that local authorities could arrange education for those CYP because of exclusions, illness or other reasons could attend off-site educational provisions (DfE, 2013). In 2014, the Children and Families Act under Section 61, introduced Education Otherwise at School (EOTAS) which enables the local authority to state that CYP with an EHCP can have their provision (Section F), met in a named package of the provision in Section I which is not in a formal school setting.

The DfE, under the previous Conservative government, stated that it is “everyone's business” to improve attendance and that a multi-disciplinary support approach should be embedded with schools and LAs to maintain high attendance levels. The current DfE guidance highlights that where all other avenues of intervention to improve attendance have been exhausted, legal interventions that were established under the Education Act (1996) can be enforced by prosecuting parents, such as paying a fine of £60 in the first instance (DfE, 2022d).

In May 2022, The Department for Education (DfE) published updated non-statutory guidance for the first time since 2016 on school attendance (*Improving School Attendance: Support for Schools and Local Authorities*) for those who work with CYP in education to help maintain elevated levels of attendance. A second DfE document first published in 2022, called *Working Together to Improve School Attendance* suggested that all schools have a responsibility to manage and improve attendance effectively. It also described that it is everyone's responsibility in a school to see that attendance should not be dealt with in isolation and that there are foundations that should be in place such as providing a safe and supportive environment to ensure pupils want to attend school (DfE, 2022d). McCluskey et al. (2004) would agree with this guidance section, as they stated, that schools that offer a safe environment are more likely to have a higher attendance rate (McCluskey, Bynum and Patchin, 2004).

Section 6 of Working Together to Improve School Attendance also sets out a flow chart of when schools might use legal intervention about persistent absence (DfE, 2022b).

Also in May 2022, a proposed government Schools Bill, also known as the Schools White Paper, was going to introduce new statutory guidance. This bill included how the previous government was to delegate power to enable the Secretary of State to issue penalty notices to parents and set fixed penalty notices for school non-attendance. The Schools Bill also proposed to create a register of non-attendance for CYP not in school that was going to be administered by local authorities (DfE, 2022a).

In April 2024 the Children Not in School Bill was introduced to amend the Education Act (1996) to enable local authorities to maintain a register for children educated not in schools. Since the change of government, this bill has not been passed but a similar proposal was included in the King's Speech (July 2024).

The current DfE guidance highlights that there needs to be a shift for schools to work alongside external agencies and for the LA to help parents and carers feel that they are not being blamed for their CYP not attending school. It was anticipated that from September 2023, the DfE's Working Together document would become a statutory document but due to the changes in parliament, it further remained a guidance document. In February 2024, the DfE published an updated version of the Working Together to Improve School Attendance stipulating that from August 2024 the guidance will become statutory (DfE, 2024b).

The Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance (2024), also stipulated that LAs should provide a free service for all schools to access which supports their processes when dealing with persistent absence difficulties. This means that LAs are to provide support for schools without charge, and many EPs are working with LA teams to revise their EBSA pathway documentation (Henshaw, 2022; DfE, 2024b).

In the Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance on maintaining attendance, the DfE stipulate that they are trying to help schools and LAs become more proactive in supporting CYP who struggle to attend school early on. The guidance also encourages teaching staff to work alongside external agencies to

support and establish relationships with a network of organisations that focus on developing targeted interventions and action plans.

Reflexive Box A

The 2022 DfE guidance emphasises schools working alongside LAs and other partners. To better understand what may be creating barriers to attendance before the legal route is followed, and to ensure that all other avenues have been exhausted. This may reflect that collaborative working to support non-attendance can provide schools with a way forward in supporting CYP, and perhaps this creates a further implication for resources to be made available for schools to access this level of support without cost.

The DfE online improving attendance case study materials (found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/improving-attendance-good-practice-for-schools-and-multi-academy-trusts>) along with the Working Together to Improve School Attendance document, provide a foundation of principles for schools to embed. These include having ambitious standards of aspiration, monitoring attendance data rigorously and removing barriers in school to help pupils access the right support early on. The DfE appear to want schools to ensure that their support package is established through teams working together such as collaborating with governing bodies and LAs when pupils are at risk of regular non-attendance or are persistently absent (DfE, 2022b).

On the more punitive side of the government guidance and law, Chapter 6 of the Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2024) of the DfE legislation, further highlights the legal intervention process of how schools can ‘formalise’ their interventions and enforce them through prosecuting parents and carers by using an attendance contract which can lead to education supervision orders (ESOs) made through the Family or High Court. If the ESO has not been successful then local authorities can prosecute parents and carers in the Magistrates Court (DfE, 2024b). The penalties for not responding to the attendance orders can lead to a maximum fine of £2500, or parents and carers could face a community order and even a sentence of up to three months imprisonment (Schools Week Reporter, 2022). A study carried out by Impact Ed (2024), which included 350 schools in England and

over 70,000 CYP reported that, “It’s everyone’s job to develop a community around attendance” and that there needed to be a shift from having a punitive sanction approach to attendance by introducing a collaborative model by elevating the voices of staff and families (ImpactEd Group, 2024, p. 25).

Reflexive Box B

Having an option for using a punitive approach could further impact families that are already experiencing difficulties and having the threat of a jail sentence is quite harsh, especially if a CYP is not attending school due to underlying reasons that are associated with emotionally based triggers. Therefore, schools should use attendance orders with caution and as a last resort by ensuring that they have followed the guidance early on when there are indicators that a CYP may face barriers to attendance.

2.2.1.2 COVID-19 pandemic

On the 23rd of March 2020, the Prime Minister announced that people had to remain in their homes resulting in a lockdown in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) sweeping across the world and causing fatalities. On the 25th March 2020, the Coronavirus Act (2020) legally imposed lockdown measures in the UK (Institute for Government, 2022).

The national lockdowns forced schools to close which meant that CYP remained at home without access to resources and materials to learn. CYP in England had a disruption in accessing their education during the three different lockdowns that took place. The attendance restrictions impacted the academic, mental, and physical health of CYP as it was not until September 2021 that schools reopened to all pupils (Longfield, 2020; Howard, Khan and Lockyer, 2021; Roberts and Danechi, 2022).

During the school closures, learning was disrupted as not all CYP were able to access online remote learning because not all CYP had the use of a laptop, broadband or a quiet place to work (Longfield, 2020). Ofcom estimated that over 1 million CYP under 18 lived in households without access to a computer device and over 500,000 households had no access to the Internet at home. During the second lockdown, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2021) reported that 40% of CYP were

spending less time on remote learning and disadvantaged CYP spent longer in isolation and had less access to school provisions (Roberts and Danechi, 2022).

The DfE commissioned research among primary and secondary schools between the academic years of 2020-2022 which gathered 764 survey responses across England with a focus on attendance and attainment. The key findings found that the most common challenge faced by schools as a result of COVID-19 in the Autumn Term of 2021, was staff and pupil absences and secondary schools viewed CYP's emotional health and well-being as a main challenge in supporting CYP catch up on the learning that was missed (Crossfield *et al.*, 2023). The Children's Commissioner at the time of the pandemic, Anne Longfield (2020) and a research team, Bowyer-Crane *et al.* (2021), looked beyond attendance and attainment and reported on the impact of returning to a classroom, and how without adequate transition support, CYP would struggle to return to fulltime education and that disadvantaged child faced a greater struggle (Longfield, 2020; Bowyer-Crane *et al.*, 2021).

Longfield also reported that there would be "a greater chance of CYP becoming persistently absent, excluded, or isolated within schools because of COVID-19" (Longfield, 2020, p. 2).

Those CYP who started their education journey in the Autumn Term of 2020 could not access an early years setting. Therefore, these CYP did not have the preparation to move into Reception classes, which was similar to those CYP starting secondary school and moving up to Year 7 (Bowyer-Crane *et al.*, 2021; ImpactEd Group, 2024).

In addition to the COVID-19 school closures, the pandemic also impacted family income due to parents and carers being furloughed because of employer's operations being halted or even losing their jobs which has not recovered since the pandemic.

There has been slow growth in the labour force in the UK which means that the economic performance has not recovered. There is some evidence that underlying health conditions due to COVID-19 continue to influence work capacity. The pandemic contributed to a recession and as a result, led to a decline in economic activity following the lockdowns and caused rising inflation.

In November 2021, according to the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (2022), 87% of adults in Great Britain reported that their cost of living had increased because of the coronavirus which had a further strain on families due to not working and having a reduced income. All outcomes for families increased due to the higher fuel and food costs (Harari *et al.*, 2022; Lewis *et al.*, 2022; Disney, 2024).

The pandemic also has had a significant impact on health care due to the virus creating a strain upon the NHS, the services have suffered underfunding and budget cuts. Over 200,000 people in the UK lost their lives because of the virus and the population is still experiencing long covid symptoms. The pandemic has also impacted the mental health and well-being of adults which will be creating further barriers for CYP in attending school, due to their parents and carers potentially not being able to care for their CYP as a direct impact, and the need for CYP looking after their family members. The British Medical Association (BMA) (2024), reported in March 2022, that one in three adults living in the UK had stated that their mental health has deteriorated because of COVID-19, which will have an impact on the interactions and relationships taking place within the CYPs microsystem as a result. At the end of October 2022, more than 7.2 million referrals were waiting to be seen in hospitals across England which illustrates that the NHS has not yet been able to recover following the pandemic (BMA, 2024; Shah, Robertson and Sheikh, 2024).

2.2.1.3 Cost of living crisis

The financial and economic systems influence a context that impacts CYP development as household incomes and levels of poverty place restrictions on a CYP's life (Newman and Newman, 2020).

The Department of Working Pensions (DWP) annual household income levels reflected that 4.3 million (30% of all children living in the UK) CYP were living in poverty in the year to April 2023 (up from 3.6 million in 2010-11 (CPAG, 2024). The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) cited that the DWP data shows the following:

- “100,000 more children were pulled into relative poverty (after housing costs)
- 69% of poor children live in working families
- 46% of children in families with three or more children are in poverty, up from 36% in 2011/12

- Poor families have fallen deeper into poverty: 2.9 million children were in deep poverty (i.e. with a household income below 50% of after-housing-costs equivalised median income) 600,000 more than in 2010/11
- 36% of all children in poverty were in families with a youngest child aged under five
- 47% of children in Asian and British Asian families are in poverty, 51% of children in Black/African/Caribbean and Black British families, and 24% of children in white families
- 44% of children in lone-parent families were in poverty
- 34% of children living in families where someone has a disability were in poverty”

(CPAG, 2024)

Since the pandemic, the cost of living has risen across England, including a rise in household bills which impacts further on the well-being and mental health needs of CYP due to these pressures. In 2022, over 439,000 households lacked heating and over 328,000 households lacked food (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2023). The economic status interacts with CYP as they require additional financial support from school to access their learning and attend social and extra-curricular activities, as parents and carers are not able to afford basic items for their children such as food, clothing and the rising travel costs (Lucas *et al.*, 2023).

Poverty and housing conditions interact with CYP as they create barriers to attending school because of not being able to afford transport to school, wearing the correct school uniform, feeling exhausted as they may not have access to adequate food, heating, sleep, and becoming unwell due to poor housing conditions or not having enough food. The Education Act (1996), Section 7, is not helping families overcome their financial difficulties as there are a significant amount of fines being given to parents and carers which add to the already challenging economic climate. In 2019 there were over 35,000 prosecutions for families as a result of school non-attendance and during the academic year of 2021-2022, the fixed fines totalled £8.6 million (‘Why Kids Miss School’, 2022; Gibbs, 2023; Want and Gulliford, 2024).

Reflexive Box C

As a result of current government law and policy, parents and carers are being blamed and unheard because they are being made accountable for persistent or severe school non-attendance due to the interactions of policy within school culture. Policies provide a power imbalance as schools can use the legal framework to impose proceedings that can add to further financial burdens on families and even separation due to jail sentences.

2.2.1.4 Special educational needs and disabilities provisions

Educational resources influence the development of CYP as the funding for supporting CYP with SEND provided by the government is finite. In 2023, only 24% of identified SEND pupils had an EHCP which could suggest that if needs are not being met, barriers for CYP with SEND increase and contribute towards a lower attendance rate as mainstream schools must admit a CYP with an EHCP, regardless of availability of places or allocated funding (Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024a).

CYP with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have significantly higher rates of absence than their peers and the rate of absence in special schools is higher than in mainstream schools (The Education Committee, 2023). These figures could be influenced by schools not having appropriate resources to effectively meet the needs of CYP with SEND. In March 2023, the previous Education Secretary presented to Parliament an improvement plan called the Right Support, Right Place and Right Time which identified that “significant issues remain and we know that providers and services are facing delivery pressures” (Keegan and Barclay, 2023, p. 3).

The DfE reported that since the COVID-19 pandemic, the persistent non-attendance of CYP who have educational health care plans (EHCPs) in England attending a state-funded special educational needs school, had risen from 28.5% before COVID-19 (2018-2019) and peaked at 49.4% during the autumn and spring term of 2020-2021. The persistently absent figure has not yet returned to the level it was at before the pandemic as during the past academic year of 2022-2023, the rate for special

schools was still at a high of 38.7% compared to the mainstream national average of 22.3% (GOV.UK, 2023).

Many CYP who have SEND can become overwhelmed by daily activities and therefore having a predictable routine can reduce anxiety (Thompson, 2017). Difficulties in returning to school following the pandemic would have further impacted hugely the CYPs' routine and familiarity with the school environment. Having to return to an environment where there was less predictability, could have been one of the contributing factors to triggering an already prominent level of distress, as well as adding to the worries of parents and carers about existing health conditions (Rae, 2020), thus contributing towards the special school numbers of persistent absences being higher than their mainstream counterparts.

2.2.1.5 Mental health support

Healthcare resources also influence the development of CYP and have become a postcode lottery to which groups of CYP can access the care they need (Graley, May and McCoy, 2011). The support for CYP who experience mental health-related differences is currently on the new Labour Government's agenda, as mentioned above in the King's speech. Before the change of government, there was a green paper called Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision (2017) which set out to improve and expand the National Health Service (NHS) mental health services for CYP (DfE, 2017). As a result of this, Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) were introduced, however, CYP have still not been able to access the support that they need which creates barriers to attending school because CYP are not being assessed or followed up consistently.

Findings from Barnardo's have highlighted that 6.5 million CYP have not been able to access the right level of support as there has been a gap in funding for CYP mental health services and an increase in demand for these limited services. Barnardo's also reported that referrals to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have increased up to 134% since the COVID-19 pandemic which results in only one in four CYP being seen (Barnardo's, 2023; Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024a).

The Centre for Mental Health and the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition in April 2024, jointly produced a parliamentary briefing to recommend that there should be an introduction of a mental health and well-being code for schools to use, which could help to empower schools to identify needs earlier and track the impact of mental health and wellbeing (Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024b).

2.2.2 The exosystem

The exosystem includes the social context in which families function and influence the micro and mesosystems directly such as the institutions and organisations that interact with the family and community. At the exosystemic level, social structures do not directly interact with CYP but can influence their parents and carers, such as the place of work, community resources or mass media (Childs and Scanlon, 2022; Guy-Evans, 2024).

The cost of living crisis as mentioned above, has impacted businesses as they are still recovering from the pandemic, and also need to keep up with the increase in fuel costs, goods, and materials which has reduced the growth in wages (McCorquodale, 2023). Therefore, barriers to attending school can be created when parents and carers work longer hours, or their salaries are not inflating with the rising costs of running a home. Parents and carers are not present because they might be working two jobs which means they may not be available for their CYP when they need encouragement, support, care or help with school attendance and homework (Guy-Evans, 2024).

Local councils are making cuts in providing public services which include a reduction of waste collection, road repairs, libraries and leisure services because of a lack of funding (Haves, 2024). There are also rising costs for local authorities providing implications, such as increasing council taxes due to them meeting the increased demands for their services and the inflation costs in providing the services. Reducing vital public services that parents and carers can access and increasing the costs of running households will directly impact the microsystem that surrounds a CYP because this further influences their well-being and removes the support networks for those adults closest to them.

2.2.3 The mesosystem

The interactions and relationships taking place in the social and cultural environments of a CYP do not function independently. Interactions between families and schools or families and peer groups can create barriers to school attendance for a CYP (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Cherry, 2023; Guy-Evans, 2024).

2.2.3.1 Family and school interactions

The relationships and interactions that take place between teachers, parents and carers can create conflict which can impact further on school attendance. These can be triggered by events such as a breakdown in communication between home and school because of the school culture of blaming parents for non-attendance due to government policy. When parents feel blamed for their CYP not attending school it can create negative experiences for the families (Want and Gulliford, 2024).

The interactions and relationships between peers and families can also create barriers for CYP in attending school as there can be a breakdown of relationships with siblings and peers following conflict, or if peers' recreational habits are introduced into the family microsystem. The unresolved issues can influence how a CYP might be able to overcome any worries or fears as a result and they could stop attending school to avoid such conflict (Guy-Evans, 2024).

2.2.4 The microsystem

The microsystem is the innermost level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977) directly influencing CYP in their immediate environments such as those systems at the family and school levels. CYP are influenced by those who are close to them, and they also affect their environment, and the people around them. People's beliefs and actions can contribute towards or create barriers to attending school as relations and interactions are bi-directional and impact the development of a CYP as they shape their values and beliefs (Cherry, 2023; Guy-Evans, 2024).

Cultural and social factors impact members of the CYP microsystem within the family and school structures as they can inform how a CYP is looked after and developed (Newman and Newman, 2020; Cherry, 2023; Guy-Evans, 2024).

2.2.4.1 School system

The influence of school has a significant direct impact on a CYP and a positive school environment can be a protective factor when there is a positive school experience (Newman and Newman, 2020). However, a variety of factors can create a reaction of stress that arises from the relationships and interactions of a CYP with their school environment due to the dynamics between the demands and the resources available for the individual CYP to face them (Campos-Gil, Ortega-Andeane and Vargas, 2020).

School culture refers to the values, beliefs and social norms that influence how interactions operate in schools (Cheong, 2000; Fullan, 2015) and the school climate can describe the atmosphere and personality of a school and how this influences the CYP directly (Syahril and Hadiyanto, 2018). Therefore, the school culture and climate are factors that contribute to creating barriers for CYP to attend a school which can be anxiety-provoking and impact their mental health. Including a sense of connection or belonging to the school enables a CYP to feel safe, accepted, and valued. When there are difficulties with building or maintaining relationships with staff in school, CYP may find it difficult to overcome their anxieties or worries and attend school therefore, having an effective nurturing school environment that has a relational approach to developing teacher relationships and feeling safe, can influence a CYP development of school belonging (Kearney, 2008b; El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022; Anna Freud, 2024; Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024a).

School culture and practices include how schools use systems to monitor CYP, share good teaching practices, have high expectations of all CYP, establish positive relationships between staff, parents, carers and CYP, and implement strategies to support all CYP (Baars *et al.*, 2018; Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024a).

Focusing on external markers such as GCSE grades and competing with peers when collecting house points or prizes can have an impact on a CYP as the pressure can reduce their self-esteem and confidence, which further creates barriers to wanting to attend school. Especially when they feel that they cannot excel as they see other peers achieving and if they do not believe in their ability to achieve (Bishop, 2020; Newman and Newman, 2020; Hunt *et al.*, 2022; Anna Freud, 2024).

Barriers to attending school can be created when the school environment creates inconsistencies and stress for the individual, and school experiences are a significant factor in CYP's mental health as a result of elements of school life and harmful experiences (Popoola, Sivers and Ahad, 2024). Negative harmful experiences can include bullying, managing sensory demands such as noise, making it impossible to concentrate on problem-solving and decision-making, demanding workload, dealing with high levels of stress, or having too many changes such as the rotation of teachers or transitioning into a new school or year group (Campos-Gil, Ortega-Andeane and Vargas, 2020; Popoola, Sivers and Ahad, 2024).

The West Sussex EPS (2022) reported that bullying within a school is the most common influencing factor as to why CYP face barriers to attending school. This is a common theme in recent literature regarding school attendance and significantly correlates to school non-attendance (Hunt *et al.*, 2022; Anna Freud, 2024; Prosser and Birchwood, 2024). In 2023, the DfE funded the United Against Bullying programme which surveyed 65,000 CYP schools in England and reported that almost one in four CYP (23%) reported that they had been frequently bullied in the last few weeks and that 71% of CYP reported that they had experienced being victimised within the school (Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2023). The Office for National Statistics for England and Wales (2024) reported that in the year ending in March 2023 using a Crime Survey for 10-15-year-olds estimated that over 1.5 million CYP have experienced in-person bullying behaviours (Office for National Statistics, 2024) which also highlights the extent of how frequently bullying takes place.

Power imbalances can shape inequality within the systems that directly interact with CYP within their microsystem and they can create distinct experiences and outcomes (APS Group Scotland, 2022). Research was carried out by Censuswide in 2020, and polled 1000 British CYP 6-15-year-olds, they reported that almost a third of those CYP had heard racist comments being made at school (Gayle, 2020).

The DfE data for the 2021-22 academic year shows differences in ethnicity for persistent non-attendance within local authorities. The summary of the data shows that out of those local authorities whose data was available:

- “Camden had the highest persistent absence rates for Asian pupils (30.1%)
- Cornwall had the highest rate for black pupils (25.6%)

- East Riding of Yorkshire had the highest rate for pupils in the Chinese ethnic group (20.7%)
- Torbay had the highest rate for pupils with mixed ethnicity (32.0%)
- Middlesbrough had the highest rate for white pupils (30.6%)” (DfE, 2024a)

Teachers and schools often evaluate progress and achievement by one factor such as gender which can reinforce inequality and inequity for CYP, as this can limit and restrict access to adequate support such as fostering a sense of belonging and identity within the classroom to support a sense of self-worth and not feeling marginalised (Kapcia, 2022).

Intersectionality acknowledges how the multiple identities of an individual face challenges at the intersections of these identities and can face oppression and discrimination. People’s perceptions of CYP can create barriers to non-attendance due to their race, gender, and family social economics (Crenshaw, 1991; Morganti, Carassa and Riva, 2008; Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2020; Lahlou, 2024). School policies do not always consider the CYP individual needs and intersectionality which may drive absenteeism in racialised communities as some punitive practices in schools are disproportionately used with CYP from some racialised communities (Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024a).

By applying an intersectionality framework, school staff can recognise and address the interconnected nature of CYPs’ social identities, gain a better understanding and respond to the diverse needs of all CYP, and develop strategies to acknowledge CYPs’ diverse experiences to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Being marginalised can create barriers to attending school because CYP may not have a sense that they belong to the school community, feel successful and understood within those relationships and interactions that are taking place within their microsystem (Kapcia, 2022; Dope Black CIC, 2023).

2.2.4.2 Family system

The relationships and interactions with the family system directly influence CYP and school attendance, such as when parents and carers cannot provide educational support at home for their CYP when parents/carers dealing with their mental health,

or if there are any areas of conflict taking place within the family home (Adams, 2022; Anna Freud, 2024; Guy-Evans, 2024; Want and Gulliford, 2024).

Factors such as parental separation, CYP needing to carry self-care or caring for siblings/family members, domestic abuse and neglect contribute towards creating barriers for CYP attending school (Kearney, 2008b). Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley (2024) cited that there are 800,000 young carers in the UK and that CYP managing family finances, looking after family members and juggling their responsibilities create challenges that are likely drivers of school non-attendance. Over 25% of young carers aged 11-15 regularly are not attending school as they struggle to balance caring with accessing their education (Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024a).

Those CYP who have experienced a family breakdown and have entered the care system are more likely to experience mental health-related differences. In 2021 NICE reported that 45% of CYP aged 5-15 who are looked after and 72% of those in residential care had experienced emotional and mental health problems, which compound barriers to school attendance as a result of experiences linked to trauma and abuse (NICE, 2021; Anna Freud, 2024; Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley, 2024a). The DfE (2023), reported at the end of March 2023 that there were 83,840 CYP looked after (CLA) in England which is a 2% increase rise seen since 2022 which highlights that the macrosystem influences such as the cost of living crisis mentioned earlier, are hugely impacting families which is directly affecting the microsystem of CYP (DfE, 2023a; Anna Freud, 2024; Guy-Evans, 2024).

2.2.4.3 Trauma

Trauma has a particularly long-lasting impact on CYP as their brains develop rapidly. Often, CYP do not have the necessary coping skills to manage the effects of stressful events on their own. A trauma-informed approach to supporting CYP in schools was developed in the United States over twenty years ago (Wallace, 2020). Harris and Fallot (2001) suggested that applying this approach enabled practitioners to question how they understand a CYP instead of trying to seek out the problem. "In a trauma-informed approach, the emphasis is on understanding the whole individual and appreciating the context in which that person is living her life" (Harris and Fallot, 2001, p. 15).

Childhood trauma, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) calibrate the body's stress responses in the absence of protective factors, CYP may overdevelop fight, flight, or freeze stress reactions (Read Daniels, 2022). Hence, trauma can impact the ability to talk about their experiences and feelings and may also affect a CYP's capacity to process verbal information (Rae, 2020; Mental Health America, 2021).

When a CYP's trauma response is to disengage, this demonstrates that they are protecting themselves from future harmful situations and so their trauma response is to do what is asked of them, to ensure the adverse experience does not happen again which results in triggering a 'survival' mode (Wadlow, 2022).

Therefore, CYP who are coping with trauma, including school-related trauma such as bullying or managing the effects of the pandemic, may experience difficulties with attending school due to their heightened levels of anxiety and distress by responding with a fight, flight or freeze reaction (Mental Health America, 2021; Read Daniels, 2022; Wadlow, 2022).

2.2.4.4 Anxiety

West Sussex EPS have documented over the past ten years, that the two fundamental features of EBSA are related to the presence of anxiety and are a combination of predisposing factors that interact with changes to CYP circumstances (Emmerson et al., 2004).

Finning et al. concluded from their research after systematically reviewing evidence from existing quantitative studies on anxiety and school attendance, that there is evidence to suggest that school non-attendance is associated with anxiety (Finning et al., 2019).

Egger et al. (2003) examined the association between anxiety and school non-attendance. They reported that out of 1422 CYP aged 9-16 in North Carolina USA, 88.2% of CYP had mental health-related difficulties and increased emotional and behavioural difficulties. They also found that fear of attending school was the most common fear of those not attending school, and these might arise from adverse experiences in response to events that have occurred in their lives or at school (Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003).

Finning et al. also concur with the report by Egger et al. as they suggest that there is evidence that there is an association between anxiety and school refusal following their review of research that had been previously carried out, which included eleven studies from six different countries across North America, Asia and Europe which combined a sample size of 13,056 CYP from 5-21 years old (Finning *et al.*, 2019).

'Mind,' a charity that supports making mental health a priority in England and Wales, explored the views of 1271 CYP aged 11-25 in England between September 2020 and April 2021. They reported that 68% of the participants felt that attending school created significant challenges due to their mental health and were fearful of being punished for non-attendance. Also, 96% of the CYP surveyed reported that their mental health had affected their schoolwork at some point during that time (Spall et al., 2021).

During May and June 2022, the Children's Society conducted a household survey across the United Kingdom (UK) and collated responses from a sample of over 2000 CYP between the ages of 10-17. They discovered that 14% of the respondents reported that motivation towards feeling happy about attending school was impacted by the demands of schoolwork and passing exams (Russell, 2022).

The cause-and-effect elements of EBSA identified by Malcolm et al. (2003) can also be described as the risk factors which can influence the increase of anxiety for a CYP (Malcolm *et al.*, 2003) and have contributing factors on an individual level but can also be created by their family situation and school environment (Barcham et al, 2020).

Thambirajah et al. (2008), feel that there is a need for staff to consider numerous factors that contribute towards creating vulnerability, which can be at the level of the child, family, and school, and needs to be identified separately (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008). Helping a CYP understand the benefits of attending school can help them see the successful consequences, such as gaining a qualification that they need to move onto the next step of their chosen career path, which in turn can help them overcome several types of risk factors (Greene, Galambos and Lee, 2004).

2.2.4.5 Autism and anxiety

CYP who have an identification of autism may face factors that include anxiety and poor stress management which may worsen during adolescence as CYP can experience complex social interactions. CYP often become more aware of their differences and interpersonal difficulties, and evidence suggests that due to the anxieties that autistic CYP experience, they are at increased risk of EBSA (Hunt *et al.*, 2022).

Identifying key factors that impact CYP with autism helps to highlight that sensory processing differences can make the world unpredictable for those CYP. School life can create sensory experiences that contribute towards an elevated level of intolerance to being in a school environment.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA) which is a cross-party group of MPs 2017 worked alongside the National Autistic Society to research schools how schools in England worked for CYP with an identification of Autism. The research included 176 CYP with an identification of Autism, 2,573 parents and carers and 308 teachers in England. They found that CYP and families felt that “having a teacher who understands Autism would make school better” and that “children often have to fail before support is provided” (APPGA, 2018, p. 4,7).

Given the increased risk of a CYP with autism experiencing elevated levels of anxiety, there must be prompt attention and intervention, and schools should ensure that CYP can access their learning by training all staff (APPGA, 2018; West Sussex EPS, 2020).

2.3 School non-attendance and the impact it has upon CYP

In March 2021, Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children’s Commissioner for England, felt that considering the COVID pandemic, further work on school attendance needed to be conducted, so “The Big Ask” survey was launched. This survey involved 557,077 children aged four to seventeen in England and explored their hopes, fears, and dreams following the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The initial findings highlighted that 5000 CYP reported being home-educated, and about 2000 CYP were not in school then. The interim report reflected that CYP said

that they faced several additional barriers to school attendance, including a lack of support around mental health, emotional and care needs, and problems around feeling safe and supported in school.

The findings also reflected that in autumn 2021, there were 1.7 million children persistently absent from school, meaning that CYP missed at least seven days of school in the term. Even more concerning, it was reported that 98,000 CYP were severely absent from school, meaning that they missed at least 35 days of school in the term (de Souza, 2022).

As a follow-up of this study, in March 2022, the Children's Commissioner of England further investigated school attendance and found no reliable figures for those CYP who were missing from education. At this time, it was reported that 122,000 CYP missed at least half of their schooling in England. Dame Rachel de Souza (The Children's Commissioner for England) reported that the persistent absence figures had equated to 1.8 million of the eight million school cohort in England (22.3%).

The government statistics which provide an overview of headline figures show a doubled rate from before the pandemic of persistent absence. Their data for 2018/2019 reflected that 10.9% of CYP were persistently absent from school in England (Jeffreys, 2022). Out of those recorded as being persistently absent between 2021-2022 (22.3%), worryingly, 37.9% of CYP had free school meals (FSM) and 33.4% had education, health, and care plans (EHCPs) (Rhoden-Paul, 2023). During the academic year 2021-2022, the DfE data illustrated that the secondary school persistent absence (27.7%) rate in England was higher than the primary school persistent absence (17.7%) (DfE, 2023b).

Schools are still struggling to achieve the same attendance figures as before the government lockdowns were imposed following COVID-19, when just over one in ten CYP were persistently absent from school. The struggle is evident when examining the most recent DfE school absence data (Autumn and Spring Term 2022-2023), as the attendance figures reflect that one in five CYP in England frequently misses 10% or more of their educational sessions

Reflexive Box D

I do agree with the government that something drastic does need to happen to support these CYP who are not accessing their learning and that early identification and intervention are key. The published attendance data is provided directly from schools. I would say that this data is likely to be as accurate and reliable as it can be (considering there is still room for human error). Currently, the data is directly collected from the attendance systems of the schools that opted into using the previously mentioned online DfE data collection trial. However, there is a restriction to how schools record non-attendance, which means that coding for why a CYP is absent is down to the decision taken by the person recording the reason using the limited codes provided by the DfE.

The DfE have reported that there has been a reduction in persistent absence numbers as the alarmingly high figure of 24.2% that was recorded during the autumn term of 2022 dropped to 20.6% in the spring term which means the overall figure for that academic year was 21.2% (DfE, 2023b). The overall figure of persistent absence for 2022-2023 is still nearly double what the pre-pandemic numbers were, which was 10.9% in 2018-2019.

Hallam and Rogers (2008) believed that there was difficulty distinguishing between the several types of absences and that there was a need to consistently make clearer distinctions when recording absences, clarifying the reasons behind non-attendance (Hallam and Rogers, 2008). Since it is a challenge to see the underlying reasons why CYP are persistently absent from school when looking at the published attendance data, it is difficult to ascertain how many actual cases of EBSA there are in schools across England.

The two categories used when a CYP is not present in school are authorised and unauthorised non-attendance which are then accompanied by choosing a code when completing registers.

The DfE codes reflect that the non-attendance occurred due to certain reasons that include illness, medical appointments, family holidays or exclusions (please see Appendix 5 which provides a comprehensive list of the codes).

The current coding for registration unfortunately does not include EBSA, so potentially a reason for such disparity and lack of clarification that Hallam and Rogers reported upon back in 2008, has been created by limited registration coding that is contained within the DfE guidance. Therefore, the available data still does not paint a transparent picture to reflect why persistent attendance is occurring creating difficulties in ascertaining actual figures on how many CYP are not attending school due to EBSA.

In 2003, Malcolm et al. carried out research using face-to-face interviews and questionnaires to study absence in schools across seven different LAs in various parts of England. The research took place within seven LAs in England across 13 primary schools (662 pupils) and 14 secondary schools (528 pupils) which explored the views of CYP, parents/carers, and teachers about the causes of absence. They reported that teachers believed that having good attendance supported self-esteem, and achievement, and contributed towards social skills and career development (Malcolm *et al.*, 2003).

Over the past four years, researchers have also concluded that those CYP with reduced attendance may face an increased level of difficulties associated with lower attainment in grades, and risk-taking behaviours such as substance abuse and unemployment (Gubbels, Ven der Put and Assink, 2019; DfE, 2022c; John *et al.*, 2022).

The research findings highlight that the right amount of help and support for CYP must be provided by schools and LAs, as they need to be acting early to provide the right support for the CYP who are persistently absent to access their education and ensure they do not just become part of government statistics.

In 2022, the DfE published data regarding GCSE results that coincide with the research outcomes. The DfE focused on the link between absence and attainment data from the end of key stage 4 in 2019 in England, illustrating that those pupils who did not achieve a grade of 9-4 in Maths and English had an overall absence rate of 8.8%. They also reported that those pupils with the highest attainment had higher

attendance rates, among those pupils who did not miss during KS4, 83.7% achieved grades 9 to 4 in English and maths compared to 35.6% of those pupils who were persistently absent (DfE, 2022d).

Reflexive Box E

This creates no surprises as these CYP have been able to access their learning and achieve higher grades compared to those who are persistently absent.

2.4 How emotionally based school avoidance may be prevented

2.4.1 Systemic level

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977) views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by the multiple levels surrounding a CYP. Keeping this theory in mind may help an EP explain to school staff about potential systemic difficulties that could be contributing towards an EBSA case.

Having an ecological approach that includes parents, carers, and professionals, can support successful reintegration into a school. DfE guidance (2022) instructs all levels of those involved with schools, including school governors and the LA, to focus on those CYP falling into the persistent and severely absent category.

The DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance states (2024), that a good first step would be ensuring that schools provide a safe environment that offers all CYP support that encourages school attendance. Secondly, the guidance stipulates that school staff need to proactively identify those who are not attending quickly and should implement interventions (Finning *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, having staff notice that a CYP is missing from their lesson or not present during form time is essential for the school to be able to explore the reasons a CYP is not in school. Making changes and adaptations solely to the school system or working exclusively with the CYP may not create sustainable changes in attendance.

Interventions may need to identify and address systemic environmental factors as the conflict between systems might contribute to the non-attendance of a CYP and may be a maintaining factor. Intervention is more likely to succeed when all the relevant systems cooperate, and share aims and values (Tobias, 2019).

Kearney et al. proposed that CYP should have access to ‘treatment techniques’ from a clinician and that applying a family-based treatment may support CYP who have tangible reinforcers that contribute towards the factors of their non-attendance. They also advocate using methods such as contracting to upsurge incentives, such as increased supervision from a parent, along with the introduction of teaching peer refusal skills training to help a CYP effectively address offers from peers to miss school (Kearney, Chapman and Cook, 2005).

One approach supporting a CYP on a systemic level could be done by identifying a CYP’s risk and resilience factors, this can help those who can scaffold and support EBSA cases, such as teaching staff and EPs, to understand how risk and resilience factors can interact with the CYP in their environment.

2.4.1.1 The importance of identifying risk and resilience

Resnick (2000) describes a resiliency paradigm as identifying protective, nurturing factors for CYP by exploring positive prospects and emphasising strengths, resources, and assets focusing on intervention at the individual, family, school, and community levels (Resnick, 2000).

Thambirajah et al. (2008) also believe that it is often a combination of predisposing factors interacting with a change of circumstances that leads to EBSA-related difficulties. A combination of factors can stem from the school, family, or child and these are not independent of one another as they are not static or unchangeable because they are interactive with each other (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008). Resilience can mean adapting to negative life experiences such as trauma, and stress and responding successfully to substantial risk (Fraser, Galinsky and Richman, 1999).

Kaplan (2005) feels there are hidden complexities, contradictions and ambiguities when looking at resilience factors, as he questions whether resilience refers to

characteristics of more inclusive systems, such as the ecosystem, and that the absence of resilience implies vulnerability to adversity (Kaplan, 2005).

Kaplan may be correct in his thinking that resilience refers to the systems surrounding a CYP, and potentially having a risk and resilience approach to try to unpick why a CYP may be struggling to attend school, can help conceptualise problems and develop action plans for individuals.

Schools and practitioners can adopt a risk and resilience approach to understand what circumstances in a CYP's life "can contribute to successful consequences in the face of adversity" (Greene, Galambos and Lee, 2004, p. 76). This approach to EBSA prevention can also provide clues for those who are supporting CYP on how to buffer the risks, through the lens of both ecosystems and risk and protective factors (Fraser, Galinsky and Richman, 1999; Greene, Galambos and Lee, 2004; EdPsychEd, 2022).

Resnick (2000) concludes that there is evidence that the effectiveness of enhancing protective factors and nurturing CYP development, will continue accumulating and provide best practice guidelines (Resnick, 2000). Protective factors can include personal, family, and environmental factors that can help reduce anxiety or fear in CYP, which can help promote school attendance (Rae, 2020). This can provide thinking about areas of strength and sources of resilience that are available which can serve to protect CYP from maintaining EBSA-related difficulties and promote a successful inclusion back into school. Having positive reinforcements can affect the reversal of the EBSA cycle slowly and gradually (Rae, 2020; Milton Keynes Council, 2022).

2.4.1.2 Push and pull factors linked to risk and resilience

Thambirajah et al. (2008), promote the need for schools to be aware of push and pull factors that influence school attendance which is like the risk and resilience approach mentioned above.

Pull factors are the risk factors that can outweigh resilience when stress and anxiety pull a CYP away from attending school, these factors can include a CYP feeling anxious when leaving a parent or carer or feeling anxious when in school. Push factors are those factors that can help push a CYP towards attending school, such

as having a feeling of safety when in school or having a trusted group of friends. When the pull factors are greater than the push factors, the protective resilience factors are no longer at the forefront for the CYP and act as a pull away from attending school (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008).

Adopting a push and pull framework in analysing school non-attendance can provide a useful way of exploring relationships, feelings, cultures and home-school interactions as something may be happening in the home or community that prevents school attendance from remaining a priority (Roffey, 2014).

The West Sussex EPS team concur with Resnick, as they stress the importance of identifying factors associated with vulnerability, which can be potential triggers that lead to school avoidance. Identifying these factors can alert schools and act as an early warning system to enable them to initiate preventative work to aid CYP in getting back into school (Emmerson et al., 2004).

2.4.2 Supporting individual's resilience through solution-oriented enquiry

Using a solution-focused approach when working with CYP who are managing high anxiety, and other EBSA-related difficulties can help focus CYP to positively look at their future which could help influence a change of focus. The application of a solution-oriented practice can help a CYP to focus on their strengths and resilience by looking at solutions that may have helped them in the past and examining the exceptions to the problems (Trepper *et al.*, 2006).

Having a solution-focused approach occurs when one person helps another to produce thoughts, ideas, and answers, that turn out to be useful for them which can help them make changes in their lives by talking (Shennan, 2019). Goal identification, scaling questions and miracle questions are some examples that educational psychologists can apply and use as part of their solution-focus framework (Stobie, Boyle and Woolfson, 2005).

Kelly would argue that using a solution-focused approach does not identify the problem a CYP faces, which may have a narrower focus than a more problem-solving approach (Kelly, 2006). However, a solution-focused approach can encourage listening to and validating the issues that CYP may face and focus on

differences that help an individual repeat successful behaviours (Harker, Dean and Monsen, 2017).

2.4.2.1 Using a narrative technique to elicit stories of experience

Creating a narrative is a positive way forward for all who hear a CYP's story, as there are always alternative stories on how life might be for them. Having their voice heard and listened to, could encourage the CYP by allowing them to do more of the same and genuinely impact their lives to reach their full potential and attend school to access their learning (Wagner, 2008).

Applying a trauma-informed practice when working with a CYP who is experiencing EBSA-related difficulties, can help to increase staff awareness of how trauma can negatively impact a CYP and further understand the need for a CYP to feel safe by developing trusting relationships (GOV.UK, 2022).

Staff often interpret behaviours of CYP as a failure to obey or respond to directions as a wilful defiance rather than modify how they approach supporting CYP.

Therefore, school staff can become mindful of how they respond when supporting CYP in managing emotional-based difficulties, especially those who have experienced trauma (Rae, 2020). A dysregulated adult can never regulate a dysregulated child, staff in schools can create a sense of safety and routine as well as change their expectations and behaviours (Perry, Dr Bruce, 2020; Rae, 2020).

2.4.2.2 Dr Perry's 6 R's framework

Staff can adopt different approaches to providing security and regulation for CYP including a secure base and providing a regulated classroom by following Dr Perry's 6 R's Framework (Stirling Educational Psychology Service, 2021). The framework stemmed from The Neurosequential Model in Education (NME), which is a model that provides a basic understanding of brain development for teaching staff, and how the impact of trauma impacts the CYP's ability to function in the classroom environment (Stirling Educational Psychology Service, 2021).

Cooke Douglas (2021) cites the stages for the 6 R's Framework as:

1. "Relational, building strong relationships to help CYP feel safe

2. Relevant, observing and reflecting on strengths and weaknesses to have reasonable expectations
3. Repetitive, creating predictability and consistency
4. Rewarding, using CYP's interests and preferences to provide opportunities for learning and connection
5. Rhythmic, patterned repetitive activities provide balance and organisation for the lower brain to be regulated
6. Respectful, foster respect to promote growth, healing, and resilience.”

(Cooke Douglas, 2021, p. 6)

The framework is an approach that schools can adopt to support CYP who have experienced trauma and enables teachers to work with CYP in and outside the classroom (Perry *et al.*, 2024). The first step of the 6 R's Framework highlights the need for staff to develop positive relationships that can be supportive and provide a sense of safety for CYP, therefore, being able to develop trust and being available can support emotional development, feeling safe and calm provides a foundation that allows all other elements of wellbeing to develop (Schofield and Beek, 2005; Perry and Daniels, 2016; National Educational Psychological Service, 2021). The 3 R's, Regulate, Relate and Reason is a simplified version of the above model.

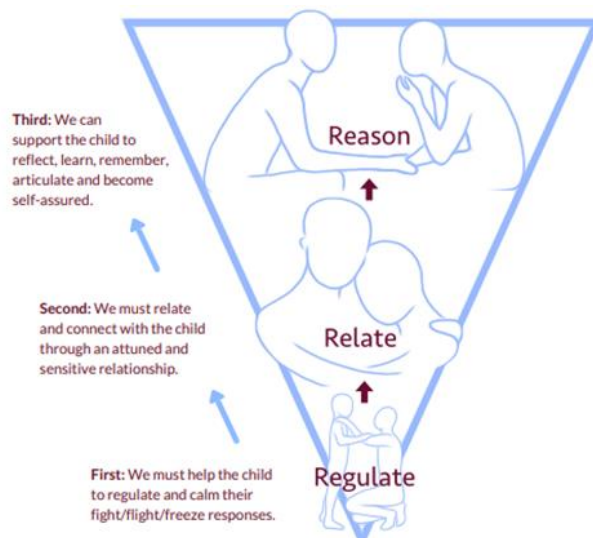


Figure 2: The Three R's: Reaching the learning brain: Dr Bruce Perry (Beacon House, 2019)

Reflexive Box F

I agree with the likes of Perry and Read Daniels, that fostering a sense of safety within a regulated classroom can help CYP overcome some of their anxieties or worries, by having a secure base and through building up trusting relationships with staff (Ludy and Perry, 2010; Read Daniels, 2022).

There can be many contributing factors to not feeling safe and regulated, which can include adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and developmental trauma. Such experiences calibrate the body's stress response system which is responsible for survival and in the absence of protective factors, a CYP may be overdeveloping their fight, flight, and freeze reactions, so not wanting to attend school can be part of that stress response (Read Daniels, 2022).

CYP accessing a regulated classroom can help to shift the practices of teaching staff to provide an environment that enables a CYP to recover more quickly from stress-educating circumstances. Examples are, attending school or leaving their family members by creating a sense of safety through building trusting relationships with staff, predictability, and consistency (Cooke Douglas, 2021; Read Daniels, 2022).

2.4.2.3 Parent and carer relationships with education

Interaction acknowledges that personal and environmental influences are bi-directional, and situations can affect subsequent behaviour (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, relational and systems theories can help unravel underlying causes for school non-attendance and become contributing factors for EBSA cases. As well as teachers and school factors, parents and carers can influence a CYP's non-attendance, and the microsystems model can be used in establishing the relations of family, classroom, or school with a CYP's achievement (Marchant, Paulson and Rothlisberg, 2001).

It is not only the adults who directly work within the school that creates an influence on attendance but indirectly, the larger environment also has an impact on a CYP. Some of these contributing factors could stem from a classroom feeling too busy, or a school building that does not foster a sense of security, these factors are important

to consider because the school falls into the microsystem at the most influential level. A CYP may respond to the systems around them, so the perceived problem does not always come from within-child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Beaver, 2011).

Practitioners such as EPs and school staff should build up and maintain a rapport with a CYP when they are not attending despite a pupil being absent. The CYP should be at the centre of all approaches just like they are at the core of the ecological system, as teaching staff can influence them in their school environment despite not attending school consistently (Guy-Evans, 2020).

Thus, relationships in a microsystem are bi-directional, meaning that a CYP can become affected by other people in their environments, such as their parents and carers, siblings, and friends; CYP can also change the beliefs and actions of others (Guy-Evans, 2020).

The interactions within microsystems are often very personal and are crucial for fostering and supporting the CYP's development. Beaver believes that developing or maintaining a quality relationship with a CYP can help ensure their insights into why they are not attending school and that taking on their suggestions can influence change (Beaver, 2011).

2.4.2.4 Collaborative working with external Agencies

The Warnock Report (1978) emphasised the necessity of early identification through multi-agency working was an important need to be met ('Warnock Report', 1978). Previous policies and reports produced over the years by the government have emphasised multi-agency working-to ensure that all CYP with additional needs had a named key worker (Farrell, 2006).

The DfE reported that working together as a group of professionals can support CYP who are not attending school. They state that the LA, statutory safeguarding partners and other local partners are crucial in helping pupils overcome barriers to non-attendance. Collaborative working can help to ensure that CYP can access full-time education as LAs are facilitators of wider support. Individual families and schools need help to overcome barriers in the short term. They also stipulate that schools are to share information and work collaboratively with each other (DfE, 2024b).

Chapter 6 of the SEND Code of Practice (2015) guides schools to work closely with specialist services to provide appropriate interventions and strategies for the CYP with SEND to meet provision outcomes through early identification of needs (*SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years, 2015*). It is evident from the data collected that the participants are collaboratively working with many diverse types of external agencies and have placed importance on early identification.

2.4.2.5. Education not in school settings

Accessing an alternative to school offers CYP the opportunity to access support, that can be adapted to meet their needs holistically, with a unique approach to learning, and removes barriers created by attending school. CYP must receive access to an equivalent to full-time education, but this can be at a centre for alternative provision organised by a local authority, or via being educated in their home following a decision made by parents and carers (DfE, 2019). Therefore, education in a school setting is not the only way CYP can access their learning as other options can be put in place for CYP, to remove barriers to them accessing their education such as being in busy and noisy classrooms, and feeling anxious about attending school or having unmet special educational needs (Not Fine in School, 2024).

2.4.2.5.1 Alternative provision

Local authorities and schools can arrange education for pupils who would not receive a suitable education for reasons such as illness or exclusion (DfE, 2013). In 2021, there were at least 32,083 CYP educated in alternative provision settings and 81% of those CYP were on the SEND register (Simms, 2022). Alternative provision supports CYP who cannot access mainstream education due to many factors that include, mental health and physical differences, special educational needs and experiences of bullying (Academy 21, 2024).

The DfE guidance (2013) stipulated the following:

“Good alternative provision is that which appropriately meets the needs of pupils which required its use and enables them to achieve good educational attainment on par with their mainstream peers. All pupils must receive a good education, regardless of their circumstances or the settings in which they find themselves.

Provision will differ from pupil to pupil, but there are some common elements that alternative provision should aim to achieve, including:

- Good academic attainment on par with mainstream schools – particularly in English, maths and science (including IT) – with appropriate accreditation and qualifications
- That the specific personal, social and academic needs of pupils are properly identified and met to help them overcome any barriers to attainment
- Improved pupil motivation and self-confidence, attendance and engagement with education; and
- Clearly defined objectives, including the next steps following the placement such as reintegration into mainstream education, further education, training or employment” (DfE, 2013, p. 10).

There are various alternative provisions across the UK which provide CYP with accessing their education which can take place face-to-face in a centre or through virtual learning. Alternative provisions using a blended approach to delivering educational and emotional well-being support can be adapted to meet individual needs and provide a sense of security and belonging (Academy 21, 2024).

2.4.2.5.2 Education other than at school

Not all CYP can overcome barriers to attending school by attending a specialist school setting, as these are still formal environments which can create a level of anxiety and may not be the correct provision to meet their needs. The local authority at an Educational Needs and Health Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) or an EHCP review may agree to provide arrangements for provision to be made to secure a provision that is stipulated in Section F of their EHCP (IPSEA, 2018; Mason, 2021).

CYP can benefit from having an Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) package included within their provision to enable them to access a more personalised approach, tailored to meet their specific needs, such as online tuition, work placements, voluntary work and alternatives to school settings. Accessing environments that feel safer or more comfortable for accessing learning can lead to better learning outcomes and improved mental health and well-being. EOTAS provisions recognise that not all CYP can do the same thing and at the same pace

as peers at their age. It can provide unique opportunities to develop skills that formal educational school settings might not cater to. EOTAS provides opportunities for CYP to access specialist areas such as vocational skills and may also positively impact the entire family as it can reduce the anxieties about CYP having to attend a formal setting and not feel blamed for their CYP not attending school (Kerbey, 2023; Accepting Behaviour Ltd, 2024).

2.4.2.5.3 Elective home education

Elective Home Education (EHE) can help to provide a balance for a CYP and their family as attending a school setting is impacting their mental health and well-being. Home education can enable a parent and carer to tailor their CYP's education which can be set at their pace and with a curriculum that follows the CYP's interests. CYP may have experienced bullying or inequity when attending a formal school setting so therefore home education can reduce the anxiety and pressures of attending a school environment (IPSEA, 2018; Fairhead, 2024).

Alburey (2021) carried out research with 567 participants using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to seek insight from parents within the home education community. The report cited that CYP home-educated have a broad range of situations to engage and socialise with as there is a vast amount of socialisation opportunities outside the home education community (Alburey, 2021).

Chapter Three - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter describes my methodological and procedural choices and their development. As mentioned in Chapter One, the research plan included two phases of data collection. Qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather data focused on school-based staff situated within the locality of my EPS placement.

3.2 Identifying the methodology

Research methodology is the general principle that guides research and is the overall approach to carrying out the study (Dawson, 2009). Choosing to use a combination of mixed methodological practices to carry out this study adds rigour, breadth, and depth to my research. Allowing to yield complementary and corroborating evidence to aid triangulation and a deeper understanding (Flick, 2007; Dawson, 2009; Maxwell, 2011; Plano Clark and Ivankova, 2016).

Using a mixed methodology approach to my research brings about the opportunity to apply both quantitative and qualitative data to integrate the findings from each form of data. It can offer different perspectives from the participants and provide a better “understanding of the research problem” (Creswell, 2022, p. 54).

I chose to use two phases of data collection, using quantitative (small q) and qualitative (big Q) approaches to gather data, which had a focus on participants from the schools located within my current placement in the LA. This was guided by the explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Plano Clark and Ivankova, 2016; Creswell, 2022). To provide a connection between the quantitative and qualitative data, a less dominant-dominant first phase design of quan/QUAL (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

The less dominant first phase collected the quantitative data via the questionnaire and was followed up with the dominant phase two using a focus group. The focus group collected qualitative data that allowed further explanation of the firsthand experiences recorded within the phase one results in more detail (Creswell, 2022).

Both qualitative and quantitative methods offered complimentary forms of information that encouraged a flexible and open-minded attitude to finding a solution and addressing a critical issue. Using a mixed methodological approach lent itself appropriately to applying different research paradigms, as there are varied ways to observe and understand perceptions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Willig, 2008; Plowright, 2011). Also, applying mixed methods will provide the research with richer data and validate the results using the second approach during phase two, which complements the data (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

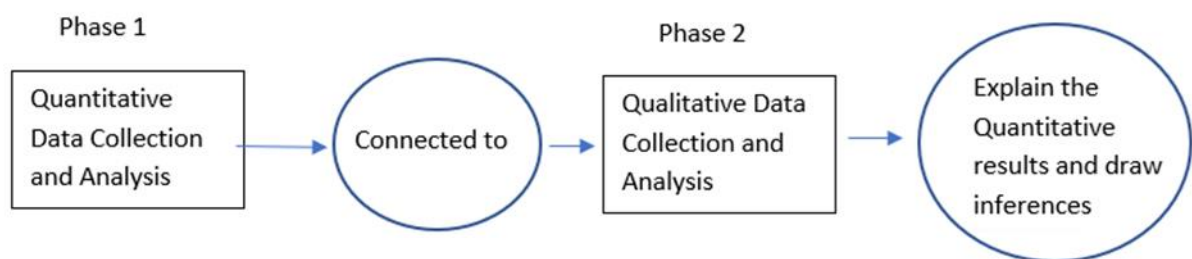


Figure 3: Sequential mixed methods design (Creswell, 2022)

3.3 Research position and approach

Ontology refers to the starting point of research concerning the study of being and what is real (Grix, 2002; Fryer, 2020). Realists believe that there is one truth which does not change, and a relativist believes that there are multiple versions of reality (Lopez-Alvarado, 2017). Knowledge, reality, and truth can be developed through practical situations and data or involve abstract conceptualisation through different ontological perspectives (Howell, 2013).

Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowing and how to produce knowledge (Grix, 2002; Trainor and Graue, 2012), informing the relationship between the researcher and their research, guiding the methodology to acquire knowledge, and testing out the experimental research-specific hypothesis (Patel, 2015; Lopez-Alvarado, 2017; Hoose, 2020).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that all research is interpretive and “is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world” but in contrast, an empiricist would argue that research should be drawn from evidence and should not be based on the researcher's bias and be objective free (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 157; Ryan,

2018). Stainton Rogers and Willig (2017) wrote that all qualitative research in psychology is empirical, as it collects data which is analysed or interpreted to obtain a conclusion and is mediated by the researcher. Psychological research can bring hidden elements to light and seek a deeper understanding (Willig and Stainton Rogers, 2017). Each paradigm makes particular demands on a researcher, including how questions are asked and interpreted (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

I have explored how knowledge, reality and truth can be conceptualised by adopting an ontological perspective and considering the epistemological relationship between myself and what I observe (Howell, 2013).

Stainton Rogers and Willig (2017) emphasised that qualitative psychology research can be characterised by having a scope of approaches and positions as there is a complex relationship with how we acquire knowledge (Willig and Stainton Rogers, 2017). As this research will be using a multi-strategy design that involves using both quantitative and qualitative methodology for the collection of data, I will be shifting amongst ontological and epistemological paradigms to carry out the two different phases of this study in support of mixed methods (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; McEvoy and Richards, 2006; Robson, 2011).

3.3.1 Phase one: the place of critical realism

Critical realism can help me to explore beyond what I already understand and see a larger reality with attention to other elements, which may include wider macro structures such as politics (Watkins and Cooperrider, 2000). Critical realism provides a way of thinking about the world that draws on social theory to search for explanations concerning social phenomena, alongside using analytical tools to support data collection and analysis. One could argue that knowledge is not a copy of an objective reality but is a result of the mind selecting and making sense of one's experiences (Lohman, 2021).

I hoped that using a questionnaire for Phase One would enable me to collect data and gain insight into the tangible reality of what schools face by establishing regularities through data analysis (McEvoy and Richards, 2006).

Critical realism enabled me to focus on what people can achieve in the social context, which in this case is within schools, and gain facts on current practices that

are grounded by the experiences of school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators where lived experience can be drawn upon (SENCos) (Bhaskar, 2008; Stutchbury, 2022).

Combining an ontological critical realism stance with relativism to form pragmatism allowed me to seek answers, search for what can be achieved by facilitating an understanding of persons through practical experiences that are contextually situated, and have a view that current truth, meaning, and knowledge will change over time (Howell, 2013; Moon and Blackman, 2017; Bhaskar, 2020).

Having a pragmatic position allowed me to retain a flexible approach to working towards finding a solution to the research problem, as this enabled me to see that there are many ways to solve a problem and explain regularities, outcomes, and patterns by providing key evidence through analysis of data so that there can be a positive change (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Bishop, 2015; Research Articles, 2019).

3.3.2 Phase two

Phase two is the qualitative phase of this research, guided by using an interpretivism approach while applying a social constructionist perspective to help me make meaning (Burr and Dick, 2017). Using an interpretivist approach allowed me to reject the idea that there is only one methodological approach to consistently gaining the truth and that there is no one right path to knowledge (Nickerson, 2023).

I felt that having a viewpoint that knowledge is not a copy of an objective reality but is a result of the mind selecting and making sense of one's experiences by emphasising what drives and strengthens lent itself to using appreciative inquiry. Applying an appreciative inquiry interview approach helped me make sense of the experiences of school staff through applying the discovery step as it is based on the belief that human systems are created and imagined by those who work and live within them (Watkins and Mohr, 2001; Lohman, 2021).

Interpretivism through social construction provided me with the understanding that asserting the reasoning in a social situation is essential to decoding the meaning of the data that can be collected around a phenomenon (Nickerson, 2023).

Adopting a social constructionist stance permitted me to have a viewpoint that perceives theory and method as a human construction "that allows things to be seen

and done.” It also helped me to discover what practices have been implemented in schools to support CYP by seeing that reality is constructed through human activity, as individuals create meaning through interactions (Bushe, 2012; Kim, 2012).

3.4 Initial research design

As cited by O’Sullivan (1991), using an evaluation crosswalk table can help to triangulate the methodology for answering the research questions. I mapped out which data collection phase would answer the individual questions as a visualisation to see what was most appropriate (O’Sullivan, 1991).

Research Question	Data Collection Phase	
	Phase One (Quantitative)	Phase Two (Qualitative)
1: Have schools within the local authority (LA) seen an increase in CYP who are not attending school due to EBSA since the COVID-19 Pandemic?	P	x
2: What interventions are schools in a locality within the LA currently using to support CYP facing EBSA-related difficulties accessing their learning? What does success look and feel like for schools, and how is success measured?	P	P

Figure 4: Research question map

Using the above map, I planned out a timeline of the explanatory sequential design using a procedural diagram to help illustrate the flow of the research timeline to model and plan the integration procedures (Plano Clark and Ivankova, 2016; Creswell, 2022). (Please also refer to Appendix 1 for the research timeline).

3.5 Selecting methods

I started with the premise of wanting to use appropriate methods to serve as an inquiry (Greene, 2008) so that I could explore the picture of how many persistent and severe absences were occurring in schools within the chosen LA through potentially emotionally based avoidance issues and compare this to the rest of England.

In line with Cooperrider and Witney (2005), I wanted to identify a method that could help celebrate the work of schools when supporting CYP who are facing the challenges of EBSA, so I decided to use a focus group incorporating the Discovery

phase (first phase) of appreciative inquiry to search for what was best by asking questions that could heighten positive potential (Barrett and Fry, 2005; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005).

Therefore, combining elements of mixed methods would provide multiple ways of

Reflexive Box G

As mentioned in Chapter 2, I discovered from carrying out extensive reading in preparation for completing my literature review that there is not a central LA record of how many CYP are not attending schools due to emotional-based difficulties as a result of the limited coding available for schools to use on the registration system. Therefore, it is impossible to ascertain the reason for the persistent and severe absences. I reflected that looking at the persistent and severe data for non-attendance could provide me with a possible insight into the current EBSA-related non-attendance situation.

seeing, hearing, and making sense of what is important and what can be valued (Greene, 2007).

3.5.1 Phase one: questionnaire (including the pilot study)

To commence the first phase of the explanatory sequential mixed methods design, I chose to apply the quantitative approach of using a questionnaire as a less dominant method (small q). The questionnaire used closed and open-ended items to address my research questions, collecting numbers and words. These questions were as follows:

- *Have schools within the local authority (LA) seen an increase in CYP who are not attending school due to EBSA since the COVID-19 Pandemic?*
- *What interventions are schools in a locality within the LA currently using to support CYP facing EBSA-related difficulties accessing their learning?*

The open-ended questions used predetermined categories or scales in the hope that participants would not be completely restricted when responding. In contrast, the closed-ended questions were based on predefined responses using a Likert-type scale, which produced response scales that enabled me to compare data from the

perspective of what works (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

3.5.1.1 Pilot study

To commence the pilot study, I recruited a secondary school SENCo whom I had met face-to-face during a statutory piece of casework. The purpose of piloting the questionnaire was to gather opinions about the clarity of the questions and to check out the flow of the questions (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001), which also allowed me to see if any changes were needed.

In preparation for sending out the pilot paperwork, I created an information sheet and consent form to ensure that I followed the ethical expectations of this research, which focused on key elements of the purpose, protecting identity and data storage (please refer to Appendix 2 and 3).

Carrying out a pilot of the questionnaire also helped me test the validity of the measure that would be used during the analysis stage, enabling the checking of the details in the information sheet to be clear and to the point.

This step also ensured that essential details were not overlooked and identified potential problems (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001; Doody and Doody, 2015). The benefit of carrying out a pilot study of phase one enabled an opportunity for a practice run and assessment of the effectiveness of my planned data collection (Doody and Doody, 2015).

This was supported by an LA representative acting as a supervisor, who also reviewed the updated questionnaire following the feedback from the pilot study to ensure that they were happy with the document before it was sent out to the schools.

Running a pilot study with two participants allowed me to develop and evolve the quantitative survey. Initially, the questionnaire only used a yes or no scale as an outcome of the pilot study. The questionnaire design evolved and was updated using more Likert-type scales following the feedback gained, as the SENCo had felt that providing options for answers would allow for the prospective participants to answer with more speed and ease.

Following the pilot study, one further question was added regarding the local authority pathway and querying if schools had come across it. The question also signposted the participant to have access to a contact email address for schools to use if they wanted further information (please see Appendix 4 for the final phase one questionnaire).

3.5.1.2 Data collection variance

This small-scale survey with eleven participants aimed to investigate the number of EBSA cases that schools in the locality have encountered and to determine what the intervention pathways in schools looked like.

I anticipated that the data collected through this quantitative method would produce a variant in the number of EBSA cases. The answer would be a difference in the percentage of persistent non-attendance figures (Thomas R Black, 2005).

I also expected to see a further variable when schools reported on whether they have had any success stories with EBSA cases. These would differ on a school-to-school basis, so there was a potential that schools would record that they had cases of limited or no success following their interventions.

3.5.1.3 Validity: phase one (quantitative)

Robson (2011) states that there are two elements in establishing research trustworthiness: validity and generalisability. The benefits of using a mixed methods approach allowed the corroboration between quantitative and qualitative data to enhance the validity of findings through combining research approaches. Therefore, applying two different forms of methodology would help me to produce a complete data analysis and enable the identification and explanation of unanticipated or unusual findings that may emerge (Robson, 2011).

If the questionnaire were sent to the same participant on a different occasion, an anticipation would be that it would produce the same data due to the length being short and the timeframe being based on one academic year, becoming a reliable source of information (Thomas, 2013).

3.5.2 Phase two: focus group using appreciative inquiry (qualitative)

The purpose of phase two was to investigate in more depth how a school may have successfully supported CYP who faced EBSA and are not accessing their learning because of their ongoing difficulties. Phase two was based on a qualitative method of setting up a focus group using an appreciative inquiry approach.

Appreciative inquiry assumes that if something creates an impact and can scaffold change when success has been identified, analysing what is working can inform other practitioners to make a change and impact CYP (Hammond, 1998; Barrett and Fry, 2005).

The application of appreciative inquiry during the focus group provided a strength-based approach to accelerating the shared learning of participants, which enabled the opportunity to explore systems within the participating school environments.

The use of this method brings hope of creating a catalyst for the sharing of experiences by conversing and changing current practices by schools facilitating action that both supports CYP and educational practitioners (Barrett and Fry, 2005; Macpherson, 2015).

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, to inform the appreciative inquiry phase, I chose to adopt the first step of the following The Appreciate Inquiry "4-D" cycle (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005):

1. 'Discovery' – The first step of this cycle will enable me as the researcher to concentrate the focus group inquiry on what has been the best of the past. It also allows the learning journey to commence by discovering stories of strength to provide reminders of what has been accomplished to articulate key strengths.
2. 'Dream' – The next step can build capacity on what has been discovered by extending what is possible by mapping out opportunities for change. This phase also helps to uncover common themes when things went well to know how to do more of what worked.
3. 'Design' – This step can aid the process of transforming stories, ideas and feelings from data that has been gathered by the researcher into reality. It

also helps to highlight the crucial elements that can create change and convert findings into transformative action.

4. 'Destiny' – The cycle's ultimate step enables the researcher to explore their findings and consider what next steps can be taken to drive change and provide momentum for learning.

(Barrett and Fry, 2005; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005).

I chose to apply an appreciative inquiry-based approach using the 'Discovery' step to enable me to add another layer in taking theories beyond the boundaries and to challenge some of the current discourse which is in circulation about EBSA (Watkins and Cooperrider, 2000; Moore, 2005).

A qualitative method such as a focus group enables an interactive and emergent process by applying non-directive open-ended questions to explore the school interventions. This creates an opportunity for a flexible approach using closed questions that lean towards being more of a quantitative approach to interviews (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p. 101; Pell Institute, 2023).

The focus group was driven by applying an appreciative inquiry style that has its foundations built upon a strength-based approach. Helping to uncover the existing resources, strengths, and benefits (Abbott, 2019) (please refer to Appendix 6).

Reflexive Box H

I wanted to be in a position to discover what schools were doing to encourage and facilitate change in CYP lives, exploring how performing well happened and how to do more of what initiated the change (Hammond, 1998). I felt that having a strength-based approach was important as a result of my own teaching practice experience. Through performance management processes, picking up on the negatives appeared frequent, and there was not enough time to celebrate the successes.

Phase two was limited to only applying the first stage of the 4-D cycle as the study was a small-scale research project. Therefore, I would not have had the adequate time limit to implement the other three steps and to complete the full cycle effectively.

The positionality that I decided to take during the focus group was to be the facilitator and a non-participant observer and to be able to observe the phenomena (Laycock Pedersen and Nikulina, 2021).

To be able to remain an observer during the first appreciative inquiry 'Discovery' stage, a limited set of questions drove the focus groups:

- *Please could you talk about a highpoint experience or a time when you felt most proud of the work you or your colleagues have done concerning EBSA cases?*
- *How would you apply this again in your setting?*
- *Does anyone have anything else to build up on?*

To round up the focus group, I would use the following prompts –

- *What learning did you take from this?*
- *What would you feel contributed towards the success?*
- *What are the takeaways from today after listening to the themes that have been highlighted?*

3.6 Participant sampling and recruitment

3.6.1 Phase one

Following the informed consent sought through a clear explanation of the process and methods, I requested support from the school SENCo to act as the gatekeeper by sending the questionnaire directly to them as they would be the targeted individual within the school who could open the organisation to participate (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

I used the SENCo as the gatekeeper because the questionnaire was aimed at the school staff supporting EBSA cases, and from having a critical awareness of how schools operate, I felt that they would be in the best position to either have directly been involved with EBSA cases or they would have knowledge of who would have access to this information I was seeking.

To commence phase one of the data collection, I emailed out the questionnaire to secondary schools in the LA on two separate occasions in the first instance and as a result of a low rate of responses (3% of the 62 secondary schools), I emailed the questionnaire to all primary schools.

When sending out the questionnaire and consent form, I also included an information sheet about the research so that the participants could be fully informed about the study (please see Appendix 7 for the phase one information sheet).

3.6.2 Phase two

Once the data analysis of the first phase was completed, the seven participants for the focus group had been identified. The final question of the phase one questionnaire allowed the participants to indicate if they were willing to participate during this second phase and responded by agreeing to be involved with the focus group using an appreciative inquiry approach. A consent form and information sheet were also provided for phase two as per phase one (see Appendices 8 and 9).

3.7 Data collection and analysis

The explanatory sequential mixed methods design included two distinct stages of data collection and analysis procedures. Phase one is for the quantitative stage, and phase two is for the qualitative stage.

3.7.1 Phase one (quantitative)

The first data set analysis occurred after the quantitative data collection phase had closed. Five questions produced categorical data that provided some comparisons of the answers from each participant. Allowing for descriptive statistics was carried out using the pie charts that Google Forms had produced, using a spreadsheet to provide lists and a tally of answers to questions three and five (please see pages 61 and 63).

Organising the data collected during phase one provided descriptive statistics from the results by analysing the pie charts and creating simple tables to provide immediate meaning (Thomas, 2013).

For the analysis of the open-ended questions, I checked for any traits or characteristics that were similar in terms of responses that could be used to illustrate tendencies (Thomas R Black, 2005).

3.7.2 Phase two (qualitative)

The second analysis stage was undertaken following the focus group and applying the first stage of the 4-D cycle appreciative inquiry approach using a 'Discovery' interview (Hammond, 1998; Barrett and Fry, 2005).

Social constructionist analysis expands, diversifies a meaning, and orders the data collected from this qualitative phase of the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Having a social constructionist stance when applying appreciative inquiry allowed me to use provocative propositions to identify themes from the narrative (Hammond, 1998), draw upon the meta-inference, and connect the quantitative data analysis to the qualitative data analysis (Schoonenboom, 2022).

Initially, I had wanted to hold two focus groups. I emailed a quick poll to check which date and time would be most suitable and to seek their preference. Unfortunately, due to the participant's commitments and not attending the second organised group, only one focus group went ahead with three participants lasting one hour remotely.

A consensus was reached for the focus group to be scheduled online and after school. The focus group was organised through negotiation and best fit for the participants to attend.

In line with the information sheet and consent form, the data files of the online recording were stored securely on the University's Google Drive.

A transcript of the focus group was produced to commence using a reflexive thematic analysis of the data collected. "Reflexive thematic analysis can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches" as this can provide rich and detailed accounts of the data collected (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 5, 2019, 2023b).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase guide to reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcript. They describe these as the following:

- Phase 1: familiarising yourself with your data

- Phase 2: generating initial codes
 - Phase 3: Searching for themes
 - Phase 4: reviewing themes
 - Phase 5: defining and naming themes
 - Phase 6: producing the report
- (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2023b)

3.7.2.1 Reflexive thematic analysis process

3.7.2.1.1 Familiarising myself with my data

To commence the immersion process, I used the online platform transcript produced after the focus group had ended. I edited the transcript to anonymise the participants, adhering to the ethical application. Changing the names protected the identities of the participants.

Once the data was anonymised, I listened to the audio of the focus group several times to check the accuracy of the transcript. I went through the transcript many times to correct any colloquial references that may have been misunderstood, ensuring that it was an accurate reflection of what had been said by the participants.

During the process of checking the transcript and listening to the recording several times, I was able to immerse myself in the data so that I was able to become familiar with the depth and breadth of the content so that I could start to search for meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.7.2.2 Generating initial codes

After immersing myself in the data generated by the transcript on several occasions, I highlighted the discourse that I found interesting. Using an online platform called Taguette enabled me to organise my data into a list of extracted text to produce initial codes, giving my full attention to each data item (Braun and Clarke, 2006) (please see Appendix 15 for an excerpt of the transcript).

Keeping my social constructionist epistemological stance in mind for this qualitative phase (please see Appendix 15), I was able to analyse the underlying meanings and actions of the collected data by carrying out a reflexive thematic analysis when clustering together the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019; Hogue, 2024).

I made 465 highlights in the first instance and then revisited the coding using the Taguette online platform to refine and re-check my codes (Rampin, Rampin and DeMott, 2021). I was able to ensure that the labelling of the codes stood out and could be easily identified by adding a description of each code. This process was repeated three more times, enabling me to highlight further extracts, which meant that the number of highlights went up to 881.

The codes evolved through the immersion of re-reading the transcript several times and kept in mind psychological theories related to EBSA. I checked the codes for similarities or duplications and reduced the number of codes by considering the meaning. After reviewing my codes again through reflexivity, I merged some of the codes that I felt overlapped. For example, the intervention code and provision code were similar (please refer to Appendix 16 for the list of codes). This process allowed a distinction of the coding, which I felt was important in exploring the research questions to provide a clearer view (Bakeman and Gottman, 1986; Braun and Clarke, 2023b).

I also separated the staff feelings code into two different codes because it contained positive feelings about interventions and negative views, which provided two separate narratives.

Reflexive Box I

Upon reflection, this process took a long time, but it allowed me to be immersed in the data I had collected and provided the time for me to pause and think about the patterns that were emerging. I have developed skills that I had not yet mastered in my practice as I had become too quick to jump to hypotheses without actually immersing myself in the information gathered. As a result of this experience, I will take this approach forward in my day-to-day practice when undertaking future casework.

The process of bending back on the transcript many times enabled the development of latent coding by interpreting the data. Latent codes capture the underlying meaning of the dataset to enable the meanings to be obvious and make sense (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2023a). As a result of remaining reflexive and becoming saturated with the transcript, I reduced the number of codes to 20 after repeating this phase a further three times (see Appendix 16), as having too many codes can lead to the result being unclear by having a large number codes may lead

to making it harder to search for the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2023a; Medelyan, 2019).

3.7.2.3 Searching for themes

I immersed myself again in the coded data extracts and started to analyse how the codes may be combined to form overarching themes and re-read the latent codes to search for emerging patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

To visualise the emerging patterns, I used a thematic mind map to sort out the codes using a Word document. This enabled moving around the codes with ease, and I used two assorted colours to distinguish the themes from the codes. Carrying out this phase allowed an examination of the codes through re-reading the transcript, further identifying patterns of meaning and producing potential themes by moving back and forth to the first two phases. As a result of this phase, ten candidate themes were identified, with some of my initial codes turning into sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Sud, 2020) (see Appendix 17).

3.7.2.4 Reviewing themes

I approached this phase by re-immersing myself with the data extracts that created the coding, then within each of the ten themes. I then carried out a further analysis of each of the initial themes and sub-themes. This process resulted in being able to review the themes and sub-themes, discard those that were overlapping, or combine and separate some of the themes and sub-themes.

I again read all the collated extracts for the themes and considered whether they formed a coherent pattern (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I reviewed the thematic map further and renamed some of the candidate themes so that they accurately reflected the meanings, and then I was left with five candidate themes and moved around the sub-themes (see Appendix 18).

3.7.2.5 Defining and naming themes

To refine and define the final candidate themes, a review of the collated data extracts for each of the five themes was conducted. I further analysed the thematic map and again re-immersed myself in the data. At this phase, I wanted to check that the themes and sub-themes were coherent and consistent with the accompanying

narrative of appreciative inquiry. This enabled me to remove candidate themes and sub-themes that were not solution-focused or related to the research focus of appreciative inquiry.

This refinement process provided me with the opportunity to identify the essence of the final three themes, enabling a sense of what the themes were related to.

Therefore, the themes were renamed and defined (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Sud, 2020) (see Appendix 19).

3.7.2.6 Producing the report

After reviewing and refining the thematic map, I was then able to weave together the analytic narrative and data extracts (see Appendix 20) to tell the story of my data, which included a concise and coherent account, in an attempt to go beyond a description of the data and make an argument about my research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Sud, 2020).

3.7.3 Phase three: additional data collection process

3.7.3.1 Exploring the LA non-attendance data interview

Phase Three consisted of an interview with Beverly (a pseudonym to protect identity and job role not named), a local authority officer currently supporting the new EBSA pathway project. Beverly had analysed the DfE published figures for persistent and severe non-attendance for schools in the LA and produced tables and charts to make the raw numerical data accessible. The purpose of the interview was to further add to the data I had collected as I had limited participation during the planned phase one. Therefore, I wanted to add to the collected data to ensure I could answer the research questions with rich data. Again, an information sheet and consent form were provided to ensure that this additional step to phase two considered the ethical practice previously followed for the data collection stages (see Appendix 13 and 14). This interview was not recorded because of discussing unpublished data, so I made handwritten notes only.

I used the following five questions to gather further data about the current picture of EBSA cases within the LA and gain information about the new EBSA pathway project, which is in the preliminary stages of its trial period:

- *Tell me about the impact of EBSA on the attendance data and whether there has been an increase in persistent and severe non-attendance figures following the COVID-19 pandemic*
- *How are educational providers identifying EBSA cases within their attendance data?*
- *How does the LA data compare to the national data for persistent and severe absence?*
- *Tell me about the initial findings of the new EBSA project*
- *What are the hopes of this project, and what would you like to do more of?*

3.7.4 Phase four: additional data collection process

3.7.4.1 The 'Dream' interview

In response to not being able to organise a second focus group with the other participants who had agreed to take part during the Phase One stage, due to their time commitments they were able to attend, I carried out an extra phase which took place in the form of a follow-up interview with one of the participants of the focus group. This interview was carried out by applying the second step of the 4-D cycle 'Dream' with one participant. When the best of practice has been discovered, capacity building to build a vision for a preferred future can be imagined. Therefore, the purpose of this interview was to extend practices that could be in supporting EBSA cases within the participants' schools and to invite them to present their ideal future (Barrett and Fry, 2005).

Due to interviewing one participant and being online, it was not possible to implement the suggested approach of this step, which could be using songs, poems, or graphical illustrations to represent their visions (Barrett and Fry, 2005). Due to the practicality of holding an online interview with one participant, I prepared the following script to explore their 'Dream':

- *To discuss the best of what has been discovered and what the vision may be to allow a preferred vision to take place when supporting EBSA cases in schools.*
- *What do you most desire for the future?*
- *What are your possible actions, opportunities or changes?*

The follow-up interview took place online, which produced a transcript (see Appendix 21) stored in the University's Google Drive in adherence to the original ethics submission and destroyed within six months of the successful submission of the thesis. An information sheet and consent form were provided to ensure the additional step to phase two was within the ethical practices followed for the previous data collection stages (see Appendix 11 and 12). To analyse the data, I again used the reflexive thematic analysis process described above, immersing myself in the transcript to find emerging patterns.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was agreed upon by the University of Sheffield School of Education Ethics Panel on the 5th of June 2023.

The ethics application included compliance with the laws covered by the Data Protection Act (2018) and the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) (GDPR) (refer to Appendix 22). I adhered to the ethical application throughout this study, following the guidance provided by the BPS and HCPC codes of practice related to research to ensure that I respected the rights and dignity of participants (BPS, 2021; HCPC, 2023).

In addition to the originally agreed ethical application, an initial amendment was requested on 03.01.2024, seeking consent to produce an online version of the phase one questionnaire because I had only three returned from the original paper-based distribution.

The details of the information sheet and consent form had been combined. To enable participants to spend less time completing the survey, I removed the data

Reflexive Box J

Upon reflection during a discussion with my research supervisor, I felt that perhaps sending out a link and QR Code would enable participants to electronically sign the consent form and complete the eight questions more quickly. Using a QR code may encourage more participation as it provides a more convenient way to complete the questionnaire online using a Google Form rather than sending back a completed Word document. I will include further reflection on this process during my discussion chapter.

sub-questions to allow the questionnaire to be easily completed in the hope of gaining more returns. The link and QR codes were sent out in a poster and emailed to all the primary and secondary schools. The amendment was approved on 25.01.2024 (refer to Appendix 23).

In acknowledging that there was a small interest of participants in both phase one and phase two of this research, a third phase of data collection addressed the two research questions. Informed consent was sought again using the phase two consent form format and research information sheet using the QR code process. Ensuring the two later interviews were compliant with the initial ethical considerations.

A second amendment was requested to update the original ethics approval to reflect the extra phase. Phase Three interviewed one additional participant to gather further non-attendance data relating to that particular local authority. Phase Four included one 'Dream' appreciative interview with participant two from the focus group (refer to Appendix 24). The identification of participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms. I generalised their job role by using the phrase local authority officer to ensure their identity was protected from being recognisable.

3.8.1 Consent

Consent was sought from participants during all the stages of this research, including the pilot study, phase one questionnaire, phase two focus group, and the additional phase three interviews. The participants had copies of information sheets at all stages of the research emailed to them before they were expected to provide their consent.

The participants were also provided with my university contact email address so that they could contact me at any point to gain further information about the research and explore the study further or to ask any questions.

The participant consent form provides an opportunity for informed consent to be gathered. Participants were reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the process and withdraw their consent without a reason and that there would be no consequence for their withdrawal (see Appendices 3, 7, 9, 11, and 13).

3.8.2 Potential harm

Although it was perceived to be minimal, the risk of harm to the participants within the research was considered. I was mindful that there may have been potential for participants to be impacted by the discussions taking place due to the sensitive nature of EBSA during the focus group. To account for this, I reminded the participants during the start of the focus group that they could withdraw from the group at any time and stop the discussion at any point (see Appendix 6).

I hope that due to the nature of using the discovery stage of appreciative inquiry, the focus group enabled the participants to positively explore their experiences of supporting CYP and celebrating their practice.

3.9 Data processing

All those who participated in the research had provided their consent before their involvement with the understanding that any data collected during the process would be stored on the University's secure Google Drive.

Google Drive is a protected storage system, accessible by a multi-level protection system that uses identification verification using a password via an authentication system.

I ensured that all data presented within the analysis did not contain personal information that identified any individual or setting and that all participant's names were changed to uphold anonymity.

During the creation of the transcripts for phases two and three in preparation for data analysis, participants' names were labelled as one, two, and three, further protecting identities. The recordings of the online focus group and follow-up 'Dream' interview were stored directly on Google Drive along with the original transcript in compliance with the ethical considerations.

Chapter Four - Data Analysis

The initially planned method of carrying out two phases of the research expanded into four phases due to the limited number of participants in phases one and two.

The phase one questionnaire only had eleven responses, which limited the amount of data collected and provided a restriction to gathering rich information on how many potential EBSA cases schools were experiencing within the local authority.

Consequently, Phase Two also encountered limitations due to having a few participants for Phase One. Seven out of the eleven respondents were initially interested in participating in the focus group.

Due to limited capacity to attend because of timing and workload commitments, only one focus group took place, including three participants. An interview (phase three) was then conducted with one of the three focus group participants to follow up on the initial appreciative inquiry 'Discovery' phase using a 'Dream' phase approach to the interview.

Following phases one to three, an additional phase (phase four) was introduced to the initial methodology by interviewing an LA officer who had an overview of local school attendance data and was part of the newly set up EBSA pathway project. The purpose of the interview was to gain a more informed understanding of the current situation for schools concerning EBSA within the LA, as the officer had access to all the recent school attendance data within their LA and had insight into how the LA was aiming to uncover a richer picture of possible reasons to why CYP were not attending school.

4.1 Phase one: findings from the questionnaire to the SENCo's.

From the responses to the distributions of the questionnaire that took place over five months on four separate occasions, the final number of participants equates to 4.5% of the schools within the LA.

As outlined in the methodology chapter, I have used a descriptive analysis approach to summarise and represent the data collected.

The pie charts were generated using Google Forms software as a result of using the online questionnaire. As the software has produced the pie charts from the raw data collected, this helps to validate the results as I have not manipulated or changed the data in any way.

Tables were generated using a flat spreadsheet to represent the open-ended responses for questions three and five.

- Question 3 - *What interventions do you currently implement to support Children and Young People (CYP) facing EBSA-related difficulties in accessing learning?*
- Question 5 - *What external agencies do you work alongside when supporting EBSA cases?*

The tables enabled me to list each of the results, and they also provided a tally of how many times the same response was mentioned.

4.1.1 Responses to question one

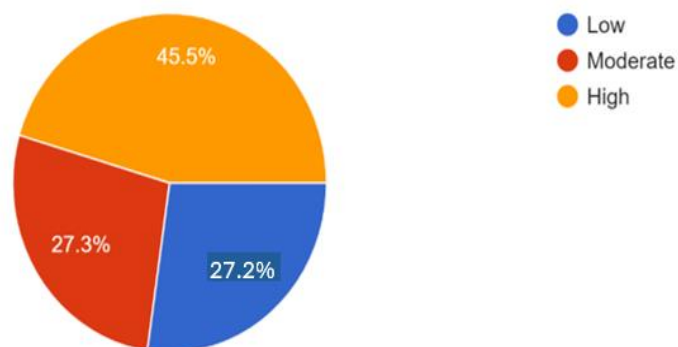


Figure 5: Question 1: What do you feel is the current impact of EBSA on school non-attendance?

Figure 5 indicates schools that participated in the questionnaire reported that EBSA has a variant level of impact on their non-attendance data.

The most predominant answer was high, with five (45.5%) out of the eleven schools choosing this category.

4.1.2 Responses for question two

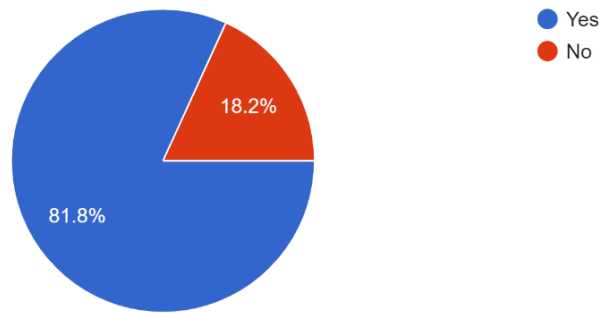


Figure 6: Question 2: Have you seen an increase in EBSA cases since the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted school closures?

The data collected for this question illustrates that nine out of the eleven participants (81.9%) responded that since the COVID-19 Pandemic, they have seen an increase in EBSA cases.

It is evident from the data collected that the impact of COVID-19 is still felt by schools.

4.1.3 Responses from question three

Question 3 - *What interventions do you currently implement to support Children and Young People (CYP) facing EBSA-related difficulties in accessing learning?*

The most favoured responses by each participant have been recorded here:

Intervention	Tally
Pastoral/Support Worker	5
Regular Parent/CYP Contact	5
Mental Health Practitioner	4
LA Attendance Officer	4
Monitor Attendance	4
Internal Alternative Provision	4
Individual Timetable	3
Early Help/TAC Meetings	3
Thrive	3
External Agency Assessment	3
1:1 Support	2
External Alternative Provision	2
Dimensions Portal	2
Home Visits	2
CYP Profiling Assessments	2
Action Plan	1

Reward Charts	1
Creative Therapy	1
Zones of Regulation	1
Stress Buckets Approach	1

Table 1: Question 3: Interventions tally chart

Table 1 illustrates that schools are using a range of interventions to support their CYP. The results indicate that there is no one preferred method of intervention, but schools are using some of the same approaches.

Two of the most popular approaches listed were pastoral support and having regular contact with the parents/carers and CYP via telephone calls/Microsoft Team meetings. These are high up on the list, as well as using the support of the local authority attendance officer and involving mental health practitioners.

4.1.4 Responses from question four

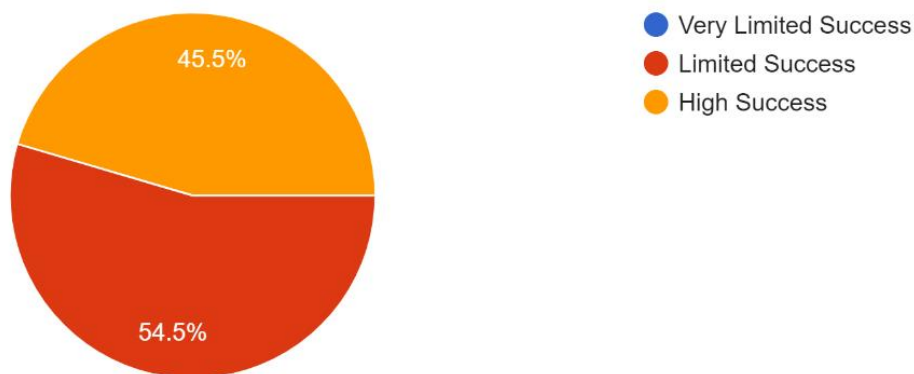


Figure 7: Question 4 Pie Chart: How successful do you feel these interventions have been over the past year?

Six out of the eleven participants (54.5%) have recorded that their interventions had limited success, and the remaining five participants recorded that they had high success.

Schools are seeing a difference in the success following their interventions and pinpointing what has been successful as schools are using many diverse types of approaches.

4.1.5 Responses from Question 5

Question 5 - *What external agencies do you work alongside when supporting EBSA cases?*

External Agency	Tally	Percentage
CAMHS/MHST	6	55%
EPS	6	55%
Specialist Teachers	5	45%
Children's Services	4	36%
External Alternative Provision	4	36%
Neurodevelopment Team	4	36%
School Nurse	3	27%
LA Attendance Team	2	18%
Early Help/Family Support	2	18%
School Counsellor	1	9%
Clinical Psychologist	1	9%

Table 2: Question 5: External agency tally chart

Table 2 illustrates what external agencies schools use to support their work with their EBSA cases.

Illustrating that four out of the eleven schools (36%) are reaching out to external alternative provision providers. Six schools (55%) are requesting the support of mental health practitioners, and the same number of schools are requesting the support of EPs.

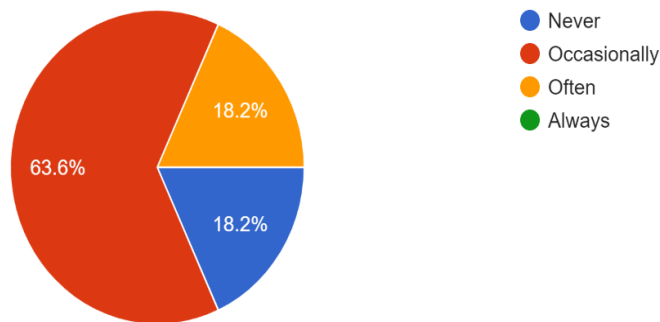
Schools use a range of external agencies and are variable when compared to the data collected in question three.

Illustrating that there is not one consistent method of support used within the schools despite being in the same local authority.

A quarter of the participants who responded to the questionnaire reported alternative provisions in the form of smaller classrooms that provided a nurturing approach, which was also discussed during the focus group.

Therefore, making individual adaptations to the timetable can help build resilience in attending school and, thus, can become a protective factor that supports CYP attendance (Barcham *et al.*, 2020).

4.1.6 Responses from Question Six



**Figure 7: Question 6 -
Have you referred an
EBSA case to an
educational psychologist
previously?**

Figure 7 reflects that the responses from the participants show that seven schools (63.6%) occasionally refer their EBSA cases to their link EP, which is in stark contrast to only two schools (18.2%) reporting that they often refer their EBSA cases to the EPS.

Overall, this suggests that schools are not relying on the support from EPs despite them being able to be in a position to support CYP through home visits and having direct contact with their families.

4.2 Phase Two

4.2.1 Introduction: reflexive thematic analysis following the focus group of three participants

The analysis of the focus group presented in this chapter reports on the patterns identified within the data by following the process of reflexive thematic analysis to capture themes that are important to my research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019).

This section is the sixth phase of Braun and Clarke's suggested process, as described in the previous chapter, by remaining mindful of the research questions and considering how schools support EBSA cases and what success feels like for schools.

To protect the identity of all participants their names have been changed throughout the transcript, and when referring to the participants of the focus group and quoting parts of the transcript the following will be used: Participant One, Participant Two and Participant Three.

Key themes and sub-themes were identified within the stories told by participants during the focus group by going back to the data extracts to generate meaning from the participant's experiences, views and perspectives (Clarke and Braun, 2016).

One theme, 'outcomes of the focus group', was omitted from the final analysis as this did not address the two research questions. *The outcomes of the focus group* referred to the experiences of the participants as a result of taking part in the focus group and how sharing their experiences provided a time for reflection and comfort to hear that they were not alone in their journey of supporting EBSA cases.

Four themes with connecting sub-themes were identified, which represented the views and experiences of the focus group participants:

- Theme 1 - Going beyond the role of the teacher
 - Sub-theme 1.1: Staff motivation to navigate challenges of providing support
 - Sub-theme 1.2: Collaborative working with external agencies
 - Sub-theme 1.3: Parent and family level support
- Theme 2 - In-school adaptations for CYP
 - Sub-theme 2.1: Timetable adaptations
 - Sub-theme 2.2: Approach to Learning Pedagogies
- Theme 3 - Successes of intervention and support
 - Sub-theme 3.1: Positive staff feelings at a teacher level
 - Sub-theme 3.2: Positive staff feelings about CYP interventions
 - Sub-theme 3.3: Positive staff feelings about parent interventions
- Theme 4 – Barriers to school attendance
 - Sub-theme 4.1: SEND provision and processes
 - Sub-theme 4.2: School relationships with parents and carers
 - Sub-theme 4.3: Anxiety

4.2.2 Theme 1: going beyond the role of a teacher

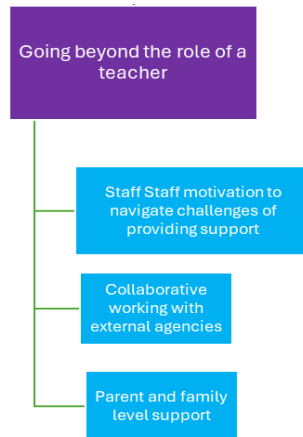


Figure 9: Theme one: Going beyond the role of the teacher.

This theme was originally named 'school actions and processes', but after further reflection and to provide clarity, the extracts of data echoed the support for CYP.

This theme relates to the support offered by staff to support a CYP, goes beyond the boundaries of the classroom, and is greater than the role of a 'classroom teacher.'

The participants frequently referred to going beyond the role of a 'classroom teacher' was consistent throughout. This sub-theme emerged that staff to enable support for CYP facing EBSA challenges is suggesting being able to run the intervention outside of the classroom or in the home of the CYP.

Examples of going beyond will be included within the following three subthemes:

4.2.2.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Staff motivation to navigate challenges of providing support

This sub-theme relates to the sustained motivation of members of the staff team and navigating the challenges to provide support for CYP who are experiencing EBSA-related difficulties in attending school.

All participants throughout the focus group frequently mentioned how hard staff were working to support CYP and that having extended timeframes for providing the support was needed.

One participant frequently emphasised how much effort was needed to support CYP and said:

"We've tried really hard", "We put a lot of effort", and "Chase constantly"

[Participant one, lines 8, 17 and 183].

Participant Two was passionate about ensuring CYPs' needs were met and that the efforts of staff needed to be bespoke to each CYP. This was to ensure that the right support was in place and explained that:

"It's about taking the right course for every individual child." [Participant two, lines 257 and 258].

Participant Three's contributions came from a financial angle and included how much of their time was needed to request adequate financial resources from the LA.

It was apparent that an increased level of effort and time ensured that resources were available to provide adequate staff support to navigate the challenges:

"I spend a lot of time writing costs out for young people for extra support, extra things." [Participant three, line 106].

Reflexive Box K

Upon reflection, I picked up on how hard the staff were working when supporting EBSA cases felt like the staff were working with maximum effort, offering flexibility and different approaches which need consideration and creative thinking. The participants communicated that staff are not giving up as they are resilient and are trying something else if the first intervention does not work. This was illustrated through their descriptions of how much effort is required and that this goes beyond the role of a class teacher as the support takes place outside the classroom walls.

When factoring the length of interventions for EBSA cases, participants suggested that careful consideration of time limits is essential to ensure that interventions have adequate time to become impactful. This indicates that ample time is necessary for interventions to be successful and should not be time limited.

Participants mentioned the time factor seven times about how long interventions can take and that they can take a long time with perseverance. One participant explained that it was important for timescales not to be limited to enable interventions to become successful.

“Being able to give it time,” and “Being at peace with it being a process and it can be a long process” [Participant two, lines 437 and 453].

Support does not always take place within the classroom environment.

Participants inferred that current practice is taking place outside of the classroom, and potentially, the work starts in the home:

“Somebody needs to go around that house that day and go and find out what the problem is” [Participant three, line 138].

A similar point was also made by another participant:

“We just can't do it sitting in a school, standing at the door, waiting for children to attend because they don't” [Participant one, lines 143-145] (see Appendix 24 for extracts of the transcript).

The findings indicate that when supporting EBSA cases, the journey is long and winding, and strides forward can be taken, but there are days when steps backward happen due to difficulties being faced by CYP.

Time limits need to be variable for interventions because each case is different, and successes may not be evident in the school attendance figures but have an enormous impact on the well-being of the individual CYP.

4.2.2.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Collaborative working with external agencies

This sub-theme highlights the importance of collaboratively working with external agencies within the local authority and working as a team.

The sub-theme of collaborative working describes how participants worked with other agencies as they shared their experience of working alongside different professionals, mentioned eleven times, such as alternative education providers or other LA services.

One participant pointed out that success stories had been a result of working with external agencies to support EBSA cases:

“That's been through joined-up work with the social worker, with the Virtual School [looked after children support service], with our Family Liaison Officer at school [internal member of staff].” [Participant one, lines 30 and 31].

The types of external agencies that participants have collaboratively worked alongside were raised several times, and examples of agencies mentioned were: “*mental health practitioners*” [Participant two, line 44/ line 70], “*social services*” [Participant one, line 30], “*LA SEND officers*” [Participant three, line 95/Participant One, line 354], “*psychologists*” [Participant three, line 319] and all three participants mentioned “*online alternative provision providers*”.

4.2.2.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Parent and family-level support

This sub-theme draws on the evidence provided by all participants, as they suggested on twelve occasions that building positive relationships with parents and families is essential for improving attendance.

This indicated that the three schools that participated in the focus group provided elevated levels of support for parents and families.

Two participants mentioned that their schools have started to offer parents and families training either by involving them in their training inset days or through online training.

There was also mention of how one school is ‘*coaching*’ parents, and the participant identified that to encourage the involvement of parents and families to attend, they had set up parent and family days to replace staff training days.

The participants implied that work is taking place within their schools and is going further than the classroom environment.

Being able to reach out to CYP in their home was mentioned as all participants spoke about how it is essential to work jointly with parents and external agencies, as they can help schools provide further support for CYP directly in the first instance.

Future planning of interventions and adding an extra layer to the support for CYP in the home requires extra considerations for this to be enabled.

All the focus group participants spoke about having an extended support network and increasing their work with parents and families.

Participants emphasised that they would provide staff members who would not be classroom-based.

One participant stated that they were considering having a staff member who can work with families directly and explained:

“I’m just about to employ somebody else who’s not going into a classroom”

[Participant three, lines 123 and 133]

A further participant made a similar point and said:

“We’ve got to employ people with certain skills that are not classroom-based, that can be out there.” [Participant One, lines 169 and 170].

4.2.3 Theme 2: In-school Adaptations for CYP

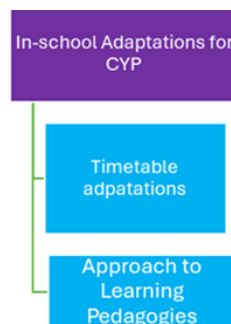


Figure 10: Theme two: Adaptations for CYP

Adaptations for CYP emerged as a prominent theme frequently referred to by the participants.

Even though the term 'adaptations' was not used directly by the participants, in the spirit of interpretation, I felt that some of the interventions and support mechanisms implemented by the schools communicated that adaptations for the CYP were implemented.

4.2.3.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Timetable adaptations

All participants spoke about adapting the CYPs' timetable as a repeat sub-theme and identified that making adaptations to the CYP's day and timetable can have a significant impact.

The participants mentioned that adaptations to the timetable included providing a personalised timetable for an individual timetable and incorporating time spent with an adult for well-being check-ins at the start of, and/or before they end their day.

Several comments were made about providing CYP with key adults to talk to at the start or the end of the day, providing the time for reflection and offloading any worries CYP may have before they attend class or go home.

One participant called it *“Meet and greet, end and send”* [Participant one, line 456].

4.2.3.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Approach to learning pedagogies

This sub-theme developed from the participants’ discussions about how the curriculum was adapted and delivered to CYP.

The term ‘pedagogy’, derived from Greek origins, was not directly used by the participants and is a term that can describe a way of being and interacting within education. Pedagogy refers to the process that can be used by teachers to bring learning to life and connect with CYP to teach the curriculum (Smith, 2021).

Drawing upon the evidence provided by the participants, the three schools appear to be child-centred and are providing bespoke levels of interventions to meet individual CYP needs.

Support mechanisms are taking place at a universal and targeted level, ranging from having well-being check-ins with a mentor before accessing their learning to sourcing appropriate alternative provisions that can meet the needs of the CYP online in their home.

One participant gave an example of how their school made universal adjustments and said:

“We find a way for them to communicate, but every child contributes, and it's sort of the high five thing” [Participant one, lines 499 and 500].

Participant Two mentioned alternative provision six times and referred to this when talking about learning taking place in the CYP's home.

Participants described that they have arranged for individual CYP to access online learning and remove the anxiety about physically needing to attend the school environment:

“Other successes we have with them is if we can engage through an online platform” [Participant two, line 95].

The same participant also mentioned that they provided CYP with the opportunity to attend an external alternative provision placement that is smaller and said:

"We've got about eight learners with them at the minute, but they also offer the hub" [Participant two, line 424].

Through adaptations made to how learning takes place, the consensus from all the participants suggested that schools are attempting to be creative in their interventions and are going further than 'quality first teaching' as they go beyond the classroom.

Two participants mentioned that they are planning to develop further staffing resources so that they can do home visits and directly support those CYP who are not able to attend school.

Participant One made a point about increasing staffing levels and said:

"We're bringing in people who are in a position now to be able to make those home visits" [Participant one, lines 141 and 142].

Participant Three also made a similar point about providing the capacity to have more staff who can carry out home visits and explained:

"I'm toying with the idea of re-budgeting for next year, to actually have CYP taught by teachers that are not timetabled. So that I can actually put them out to houses, to ensure the education of these young people are getting"
[Participant three, lines 156-159].

Reflective Box L

I reflected that these approaches put the child at the centre of the learning, which enabled smaller group working or accessing bespoke alternative provisions. It was felt that the participants had thought about how CYP could access learning and that they had become creative in introducing changes to curriculum delivery.

Adaptations were applied to an individual and made at a group level through targeted support. I acknowledge that my previous experience as a SENCo has influenced this interpretation.

4.2.4 Theme 3: Successes of intervention and support

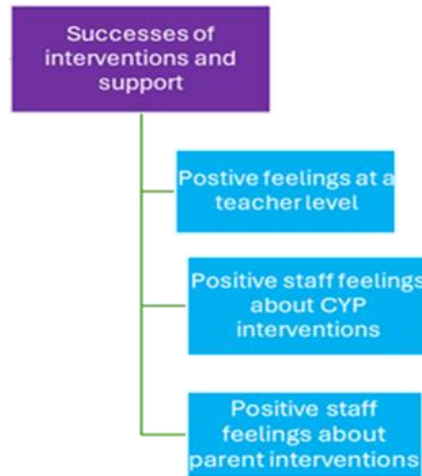


Figure 11: Theme three: Successes of intervention and support

Drawing upon evidence provided by the participants, in direct response to the focus group question, to discover the successes that schools have seen following their interventions.

The term success was raised 22 times by the participants during the focus group; all participants shared their feelings about the successes and spoke about the changes that had occurred.

Participants indicated that outreach work and coaching can positively impact success in supporting EBSA cases. The three participants are thinking about how they can provide a level of support to the parents and families of CYP who are experiencing EBSA-related difficulties.

The data collected suggests that schools have started to use their resources at a greater level of support as they provide opportunities for parents and families to develop their knowledge and understanding of their children's needs.

4.2.4.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Positive staff feelings at a teacher level

This sub-theme highlighted how participants felt after interventions had taken place. Participants provided reflections during their discussions, and it became evident that these feelings had resonated with them after reflecting upon their support.

Participant Three stated how they experienced success and described:

"The successes within that because we're getting them to go somewhere"

[Participant three, lines 113 and 114],

Participant Two inferred that adapting their approaches and having used successful interventions has improved their provision and said:

"We're better now than we are as a school." [Participant two, line 441].

Having a 'win' was a term used by all the participants and was referred to 14 times throughout the discussion about successes.

A consensus from all participants suggested that they felt a sense of winning because of the interventions, which positively impacted them directly.

4.2.4.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Positive staff feelings about CYP interventions

This sub-theme draws upon how all participants discussed their feelings about the successes seen at the level of an individual CYP or a group level raised eleven times.

Evidence provided by the participants implied that these successes were related to the change process, and they were not just increasing the CYP's attendance but also referring to the personal journey of an individual CYP, such as confidence building.

All participants suggested that changes occurred at a CYP level because of their interventions. Participant Two said:

"One CYP today has made some huge successes", "We've had a few successes with children coming back into school", and "A young person who's not been in school for quite a considerable amount of time has got 32% (attendance) on her online learning platform" [Participant two, lines 50,73 – 75, 427 and 428].

Participant Three described that some CYP's attendance had increased and said:

"have gone up 90% in terms of their attendance" [Participant three, lines 115 and 116].

All participants raised their feelings of success at a group level and mentioned this theme seven times as a consensus from the participants that school interventions had impacted more than one CYP.

Participant Three described how changes at the group level gave them a sense of success:

“Getting to sit their examinations, which was never even a thought for these young people when they're in year nine because they couldn't be in a building long enough and they've learned the skills to study so they can just about do it” [Participant three, lines 114-116].

Participant Two explained that their interventions had had an impact on several of their CYP:

“It's made a huge difference to some of our children that were not coming in because they were taking it home”, and “We have had another success of ours that's worked really well with children, and we have a lot on this now is the end of day check-in and it's made a huge difference” [Participant two, lines 448-449].

Participant One made a similar point about how the interventions impacted more than one CYP, they said:

“They became very proud of themselves” [Participant one, lines 14 and 15].

4.2.4.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Positive staff feelings about parent interventions

This final sub-theme draws upon the information provided by the three participants in connection to how they felt about the changes that took place following the interventions with parents and families.

Schools and families can positively interact within the mesosystem, a crucial factor for schools to consider as the relationship between the school and parents/families influences a CYP.

Two participants suggested their resources provided interventions directly to parents and families made positive changes by supporting EBSA cases:

“It makes a huge difference (external agencies who provide CPD)” [Participant three, lines 335 and 336] and *“Sharing of experiences (parents coming together to share their stories)”* [Participant one, lines 363 and 364].

Reflexive Box M

I reflected that this needed to be a separate sub-theme to the individual CYP sub-theme because it highlights that participants often spoke about how their interventions successfully impacted the parents and families, which had a clear distinction from the individual CYP and related to the microsystem surrounding a CYP.

The development of a CYP is affected by the relationships that surround their environment, which includes their immediate family and school (Guy-Evans, 2024).

Overall, this theme celebrated the outcomes of the intervention and highlighted the successes and changes that took place.

It had become evident that participants used similar language to describe their success and feelings, which illustrated the change process that had occurred because of the interventions and support being provided by schools.

4.2.5 Theme 4: Barriers to school attendance

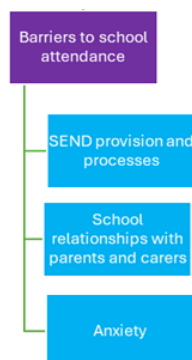


Figure 12: Theme four: Barriers to school attendance

This theme refers to barriers to attending school, which became prevalent in the participant's discourse throughout the focus group as varied factors can impact school attendance and have a direct influence on a CYP. This theme draws on evidence provided by the participants to the factors that contribute towards persistent or severe non-attendance.

There was no single contributing factor identified for non-attendance by the participants that created barriers to school non-attendance.

The data suggested that the interactions and relationships within the macro, meso, and microsystem of the CYP contributed towards these barriers within the three participating schools.

4.2.5.1 Sub-theme 4.1: SEND provision and processes

This theme refers to the pressures that the participants experienced when meeting SEND needs, which can create difficulties for schools when providing provisions to meet identified needs for CYP. Participants mentioned tensions or expectations on ten occasions, which either are a consequence of the EHCP stipulated provision or from a parental level. Therefore, the participants have suggested that it is difficult for them to provide elements of provisions for CYP who have identified SEND which indicates that when provisions within a school cannot be provided to meet identified SEND, this can impact CYP attending school as it is not always possible for schools to have the right level of support in place:

“...there are children that end up having to leave here because we can't meet their needs, and if we can't here, there isn't really much else in the LA that can meet their needs” [Participant three, lines 400-402].

There was a consensus among the participants about difficulties in providing CYP with small class sizes to meet identified needs, as this cannot always be possible due to resources and the physical school environment.

One school mentioned difficulties in creating sensory environments and finding the space for CYP to work individually. All participants mentioned that they have

experienced having limited resources when there are requests for a CYP to access a small class size and questioned how small is small.

One participant stated:

“...if we're all going to the small classroom, that small classroom becomes a big classroom” [Participant one, lines 392-393].

Participants also described limits to what schools can access in terms of external agency resources to support the school's internal processes, such as gathering evidence for an EHCP assessment request. One participant mentioned that they did not have any EPS time left for the remainder of the term because of the increasing number of parents requesting assessments.

All participants pointed out that when the SEND provisions have not proven successful, a CYP may stop attending school altogether, resulting in a request for a change of placement to the LA.

The process of a placement change can be lengthy when waiting for a different type of school/provision to be named within an EHCP:

“We know that you could be looking at two years for a smaller provision or something that will suit” [Participant two, lines 329-332].

Despite having a specialist school named within the EHCP, participants had a consensus that it is not always possible for the specialist placements to provide every provision element included within an EHCP because there are restrictions to what can be put in place for a CYP and the resources that are available in that school. One participant, in particular, suggested that it's not always possible to meet all needs within the specialist provision, creating further barriers to attending a school, as it may not be the correct placement to provide the provision stipulated.

Therefore, alternative provisions can be put in place to meet needs:

“I've got about three or four children on roll at the moment who are risk assessed off coming onto my site, and I've got an alternate provision in place for them, and they've been sat for two years, and there isn't anything out there

as the LA does not offer provision that they could find that on paper that could meet needs the way the EHCP had been written” [Participant three, lines 403-406].

4.2.5.2 Sub-theme 4.2: School relationships with parents and carers

Within this sub-theme, developing positive relationships with parents and carers was mentioned. Participants indicated that without schools having open communication built upon trust with parents and carers, interactions and relationships become fractured, contributing towards barriers to attending school. It was suggested that if there is not a positive relationship between schools and families, this can then directly impact CYP attendance. One participant described:

“If we can't win the hearts and minds of the parents, then there was no way of winning these children over” [Participant three, lines 390 and 391].

The above statement suggests that it is important for schools to work closely with parents and carers as this enables bidirectional interactions and relationships formed that positively influence the individual CYP.

Being able to have open and honest conversations appears to be key to informing parents of how processes work and that trusting relationships can strengthen the working relationship and help to build up resilience in overcoming challenges and barriers faced in attending school.

Participants suggested that by having positive relationships with parents and carers, schools can develop positive interactions by being able to have staff work in the family home and implement changes at an individual CYP level:

“...people who are in a position now to be able to make those home visits because it's that outreach work which is absolutely fundamental to any success” [Participant one, lines 199-202].

Two participants emphasised that expectations formed at a parent and carer level can create tensions, such as going through the EHCP process and mentioned that without having opportunities for opinions to be discussed, there have been times when parents and carers can have preconceptions of SEND processes.

For example, having an EHCP will provide a solution to addressing all barriers faced by CYP, such as overcoming attendance barriers, which could be triggered by the school environment that is busy, noisy, or crowded. As stated by one participant:

"...what you need to do is get the school to get them an EHCP, and there's your magic trick" [Participant one, line 309]

Similarly, another participant said:

"That misunderstanding of what an EHCP brings and actually, it's not a plaster" [Participant two, lines 316 and 317].

Reflecting upon their experiences of parents having a belief that once their CYP has an EHCP, one participant stated:

"I really don't think that parents have any concept that an EHCP isn't the golden ticket and that and they have got no concept that the majority of children can manage and survive mainstream with their diagnosis because adaptation can work and has been proven to work for many, but it's this blinkered approach of process of so now we've got a diagnosis, now we need an EHCP, and that will get us a special setting" [Participant one, lines 371-379].

One participant remarked that it can be difficult to change the opinions of parents and carers' thought processes, and it can be hard for staff to ensure that the views of the CYP are included in decisions being made about an individual CYP during meetings:

"...it's a really hard process because you're trying to change the mindsets of the families and what they believe..." [Participant two, lines 450-451].

Factors that were perceived to be successful when supporting parents and carers are outlined in sub-theme 3.3.

4.2.5.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Anxiety

This sub-theme refers to worry, or anxiety as a contributing factor towards barriers created to attending school. Mentioned by all participants through the descriptions of behaviours observed in school:

“...the child was sort of under the table all the time, literally screaming..”
[Participant one, lines 16 and 17] and *“...one of the CYP’s parents emailed last night, their CYP is really worrying...”* [Participant two, line 81].

The above discourse indicates that anxiety-related differences experienced by CYP impact how an individual can overcome their challenges to attend school triggering different influencing factors that are not always apparent at the time.

One participant described that CYP can worry about their parents, which is a pull factor that increases barriers to attending school, and this is not a one-off occurrence:

“...children that won't come into school because they think that mum's not going to be ok...” [Participant three, lines 469-470].

This suggests that when parents experience feelings of anxiety, this can also influence school attendance and that CYP may remain at home as a result of trying to be a support for their family members.

The feeling of safety was also mentioned, suggesting that this also contributes towards CYP feeling anxious about attending school:

“If someone doesn't feel safe and culturally safe in an environment, you're a little bit on the back foot straight away” [Participant three, lines 586-587].

The data suggests that the narrative from the focus group illustrates that all three participants have experienced CYP managing worry or anxiety, and it is a prevalent factor for CYP to overcome when attending school.

4.3 Additional data collection

Reflexive Box N

I aimed to keep in mind the research questions to consider how schools support EBSA cases. Particularly to find out how being part of the focus group has influenced a change in practice after hearing the stories of success from the other participants. This was to follow the appreciative inquiry process and to explore the 'Dream' of Participant Two.

4.3.1 Phase Three: The ‘Dream’ interview

The analysis of the follow-up ‘Dream’ interview with Participant Two of the focus group, who is a school SENCo, is presented in this chapter and reports on the patterns that have been identified within the transcript data.

A second process of thematic analysis is to capture themes important to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

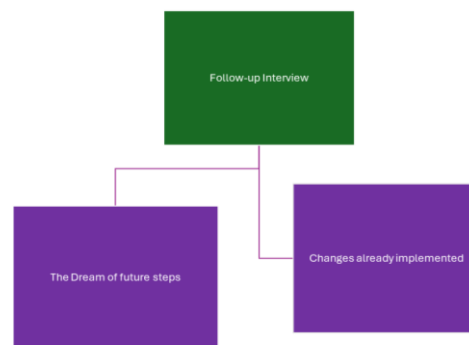


Figure 13: Follow-up Interview refined candidate themes

4.3.1.1 Theme One: Changes already implemented

This theme was developed in direct response to Participant Two's information about what changes they had already implemented because of participating in the focus group.

Participant Two identified that after the focus group had taken place during Phase Two of this study, they had reflected upon their current school practices and had started to make changes as a result.

The changes to practice that Participant Two mentioned that they had explored their current support practice:

“We are so invested in what we can do, looking at more support we can put in place, and we've had a bit of a change around, as well of our practices” [Line 15].

They also described that staffing roles and external agencies have been explored and considered:

“We are looking at trying with our attendance officer and with our SEMH mentor to look at the program of delivery and how that's going to look” [Line 21].

Participant Two also mentioned that they have reached out to external agencies to explore other channels of support for individual CYP:

"I've already inquired about what's a suitable program because there's so much out there, and already signposted me to some really good things (specialist teacher)" [Line 52].

The information provided by Participant Two suggested that referring CYP to external agencies to provide a further layer of support in accessing appropriate provisions had also been explored:

"I've just done two EHCP referrals for children that are in the alternative provision at the minute and have really struggled with school and actually the right thing to do. If these children aren't managing in our school, then what next for all of them because actually, this isn't the right setting," they also mentioned, "We need to be working alongside one another, but I think sometimes we're more reactive than proactive. So, we're a lot better now at having our take off, we've gone through the timetable, we've gone through referrals, we've gone through consultations" [Lines 97 and 175].

This theme suggested that since Participant Two had participated in the focus group, they reflected upon the current practice and implemented some immediate changes to the school's practice in how they support EBSA cases.

Being able to be part of a discussion about how other settings support EBSA cases has been a catalyst to empower change in such a brief period.

In response, sharing success stories and best practices within the LA schools can enable systems to change and further support CYP facing EBSA-related difficulties.

4.3.1.2 Theme Two: The Dream of future steps

This theme evolved out of the key focus for the interview, which was to explore the 'Dream' that Participant Two had formed as a result of participating in the focus group and reading the executive summary (see Appendix 25) along with their visions of future practice to support EBSA cases in her setting.

Participant Two mentioned that the school is looking into setting up a safe place on the school site but not part of the classroom areas and reviewing how they organise the individual's bespoke timetable:

“To have essentially a provision because they still want these children to be part of school. What I want to offer is that they're not in the school building, they're in what we would call our inclusion areas” [Line 166] and “I think that is important that we have already got our reduced timetable, reintegration and timetable plan, and we meet and go through that. But actually, then what, you know, six weeks, we might not change everything. So I think that's going to be important” [Lines 202-205].

Participant Two also talked about how they wanted to review the transition support they offer Year 7 pupils and explore how primary schools set up their programmes and explained:

“I don't know whether or not we're missing a trick from that primary transition level. We have also got the key stage four transition that we need to look at and also make sure our children are prepared for the post-16 transition because those children that don't go on to anything you know” [Lines 184-188].

Collaborative working was also raised, which included working with parents and external agencies more closely and effectively:

“It's part of what we spoke about, vision and dream, and I think it's supporting those parents as well in what way we signpost to a lot of courses and a lot of our parents”, and “I am excited to see what we can do, what we will be doing and working like. It's not a solo job, is it, it's part of a bigger picture” [Lines 220 and 234-236].

Participant Two emphasised that working alongside external agencies was important and felt that building positive relationships with families was essential:

“The partnerships with external agencies and, you know, mental health professionals is important, but family are more important” [Line 239].

Overall, this theme has identified Participant Two's dreams and visions for future interventions.

It also illustrates what steps they would like to take to provide support and interventions for the school's EBSA cases.

This theme highlights that discovering what can facilitate and evoke best practices provides an opportunity to share successes and enables staff to gain knowledge and excitement to have a desire that elevates the school systems and practices to imagine what could be in an ideal future (Barrett and Fry, 2005).

4.3.2 Phase four interview: exploring the LA non-attendance data

In this section, key findings and discussion from the perspectives of the local authority officer have been presented.

I used my handwritten notes to make a record, and I re-read my notes to become familiar with the answers set out in section 3.7.3 of the methodology.

4.3.2.1 Interview question 1: *Can you tell me about the impact of EBSA on the attendance data and whether there has been an increase in persistent and severe non-attendance figures following the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The LA has seen an increase in persistent and severe non-attendance data since the pandemic, but it is hard to ascertain how many EBSA cases there are.

The data comparison provided by the LA officer in Figure 13 clearly illustrates the increases.

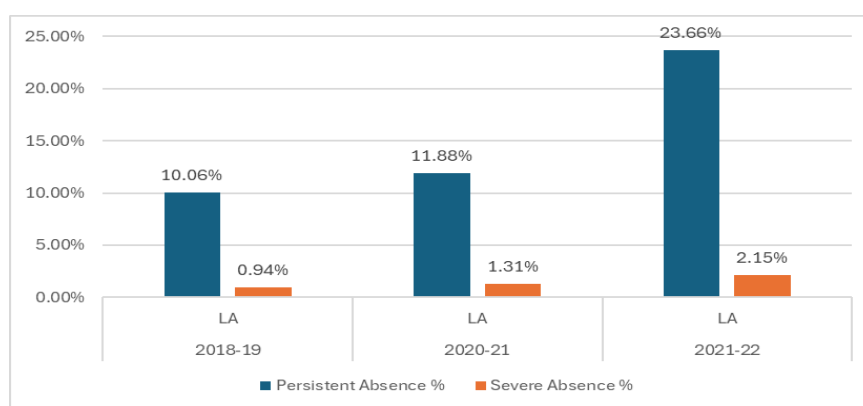


Figure 14: Local authority published persistent and severe absence data as defined by the DfE for the academic years between 2018-2022

The data from the LA illustrates that since COVID-19, schools have seen a drastic increase in persistent absences, which has more than doubled from 10.06% for the 2018/2019 academic year to 23.66% for the 2021/2022 academic year.

The severe absence rate has also doubled from 0.94% to 2.15% over the same period, indicating that schools are seeing an increase in EBSA cases since the pandemic.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the coding stipulated by the DfE creates limitations to how schools code their non-attendance, thus creating difficulties in seeing the picture of EBSA cases.

The LA officer commented that one of the leaders within the LA had suggested that all persistent absenteeism, in their opinion, is related to EBSA, which is an interesting stance to take.

4.3.2.2 Interview question 2: *How are schools identifying EBSA cases within their attendance data?*

Currently, there is no requirement for schools to distinguish EBSA as a reason for school non-attendance. Therefore, attendance data published by the DfE does not provide clarity as to why a CYP is absent.

In response to the limitation of coding provided by the DfE to clearly define why CYP may not attend school over a prolonged amount of time, the LA has developed a numerical coding system for their schools to report on potential reasons behind severe absences.

The LA has devised a series of numbers that provide an extensive list for the schools to choose from, including EBSA, for those schools who have opted into the pilot of the EBSA Pathway project and are starting to identify EBSA indicators.

The data highlighted that during the autumn term in 2022, out of 75,674 CYP on roll within the LA, as defined by the DfE (please refer to the Literature Review in Chapter Two, page 28), 17,823 CYP were persistently absent from school (23.55%) and 1624 CYP were severely absent from school (2.15%).

When comparing the LA data to national trends, the schools using the 'I' code (referring to illness) remain high, which could also indicate that EBSA prevalence is increasing.

Schools participating in the pilot of the LA EBSA Pathway have recorded that out of the 720 CYP who are severely absent in these schools, over 50% have been recorded as having mental health-related difficulties, and 20% of the severely absent figure were EBSA.

4.3.2.3 Interview question 3: *How does the LA data compare to the national data of persistent and severe absence?*

The following bar charts were shared during the interview and illustrate that there has been an increase in persistent and severe absences for the autumn and spring comparisons from 2018 until 2022 at national, regional, and LA levels.

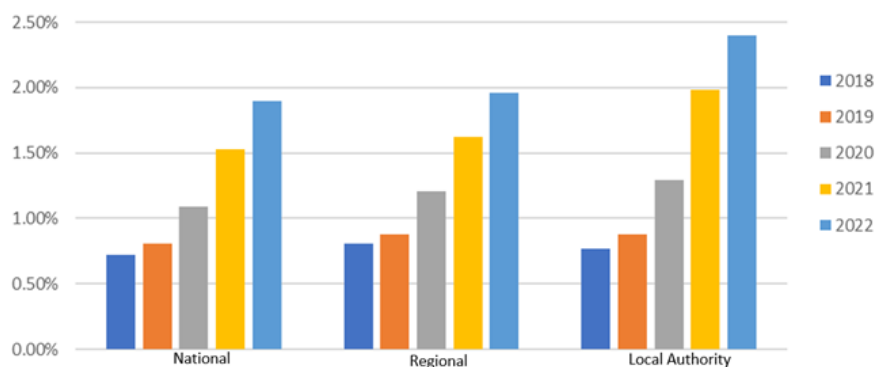


Figure 15: Severe absence: comparing national, regional and LA data for Autumn and Spring data for the academic years between 2018-2022

Figure 14 illustrates that in 2018, the LA school data indicated that 0.77% of their cohort were severely absent, peaking at 2.40% in the autumn and spring terms in 2022.

The data also showed that 1488 pupils were severely absent from school during the autumn and spring terms of 2021-2022, which increased to 1851 during the following year (2022-2023) for the same two terms.

The LA officer reported that the schools in their LA could have seen an increase in their severe absence data because from 2020 until Autumn 2022, a further code (X)

released by the DfE in light of the COVID-19 pandemic recorded that a CYP was not required to attend due to the pandemic lockdowns.

Schools in the LA stopped using this code after August 2022 and used the alternative codes, but there was a crossover at this time, and other LA schools may have still been applying the 'X' code, which reflected that CYP were not required to be in school, which would have reduced the national data figure for non-attendance

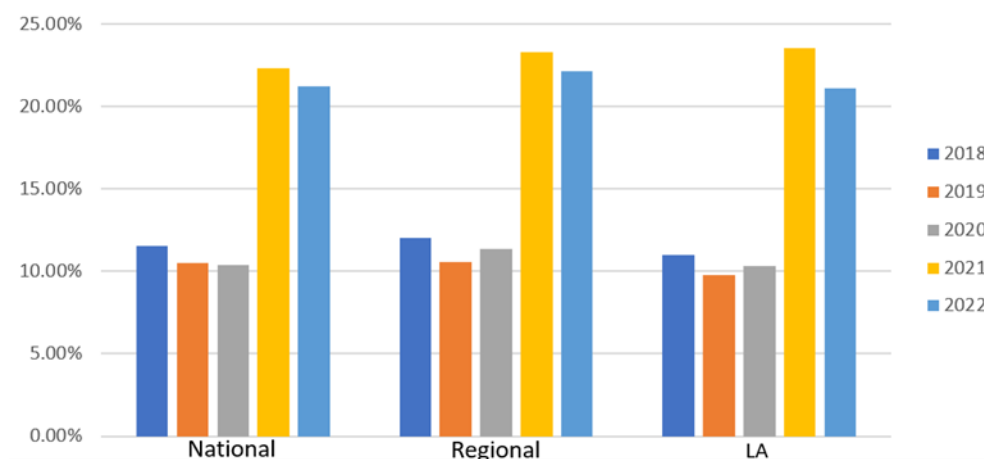


Figure 16: Persistent absence: comparing national, regional and LA data for Autumn and Spring Term data for the academic years between 2018-2022

Figure 15 illustrates that in 2018, the LA school data indicated that 11.02% of CYP were persistently absent, but this figure has nearly doubled since the pandemic and reached 20.80% for the academic year of 2022-2023.

The data comparison tables provided by the LA officer (published by the DfE), indicated that 17,920 (23.66%) CYP were persistently absent during the academic year of 2021-2022 within the LA, which was higher than the national average of 22.51% (1,643,876 in England).

4.3.2.4 Interview question 4: Can you tell me about the initial findings of the new EBSA project?

The EBSA Pathway project commenced in September 2023 within this particular LA, so therefore, it is early days for the schools to use the newly implemented coding system.

Currently, for the schools that have opted into using the pilot scheme, there have been 720 pupils categorised using the numerical codes and are classed as severely absent from school.

The schools who participated in the pilot have reported that 145 of the 720 pupils are coded as being EBSA, which is 20% of the current EBSA pilot's cohort.

4.3.2.5 Interview question 5: *What are the hopes of this project, and what would you like to do more of?*

EBSA Pilot Aims	Attendance Data Aims
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To help schools provide adequate support for CYP flagged up under Section 19 of the Education Act (1996). ➤ Section 19 sets out arrangements that the LA should make arrangements for the provision of suitable education for CYP who cannot attend school for several reasons (GOV.UK, 1996). ➤ We will be running for 12 months, and after this period, it is hoped that all schools in the LA can access the EBSA Pathway interventions to ensure all CYP who face EBSA-related difficulties can have the support provided early on. ➤ Aims - to help schools support those CYP who are initially starting to be raised as a cause for concern. This would include those CYP whose attendance is between the 90-95% figure in the hope that early intervention through early identification can provide the support to target CYP before persistent absence becomes an issue for them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Attendance data will fall within the boundaries of the national data for persistent and severe absenteeism. ➤ The initial persistent absence data for the current academic year (2023-2024) indicated that the LA data is forecasted to reduce, which brings it lower than the national data, but this was not published.

Table 3: LA officer interview question 5: Hopes and outcomes of the EBSA pilot

4.3.2.6 Interpretation Summary

Interviewing the LA officer provided me with data to illustrate how many CYP were not attending school, as the phase one questionnaire response was limited.

Having the complete data set for all schools within the LA provided a more reliable answer to research question one:

- *RQ1: Have schools within the local authority (LA) seen an increase in CYP*

The additional data collected during this phase provided current numbers of CYP who were not attending the schools within the LA because the LA officer shared their charts and graphs, which unpicked the DfE raw data for the LA.

The data reflected an increase in how many CYP were persistently and severely absent from all schools within the LA.

The information given by the LA officer during the interview also provided the opportunity to compare national data to the LA data, contributing towards the formulation of answering research question one.

The analysis provided information on how the LA school attendance data changed since COVID-19, which helped to form a more informed answer to research question one than relying on the limited phase one data.

Also, the interview information provided a deeper dive into the school absence data as the LA has piloted a new matrix that goes beyond the DfE absence coding for the schools participating in the new EBSA pathway. The matrix provided the LA schools with a further breakdown of reasons for persistent and severe absences, creating a numerical system to identify individual cases such as mental health and EBSA.

This additional information has also contributed towards strengthening a recommendation made in the following chapter illustrates the need for the review of attendance coding.

Chapter Five

5.1 Discussion of key findings

In this chapter, I have presented my analysis, findings and discussion of the data collected using a sequential mixed methods approach to undertake this research. Carrying out the four phases enabled me to synthesise my findings and put together what made sense to produce a narrative by correlating the relationship between ideas and discovering where things fit together (Thomas, 2013).

This chapter evaluates the results by exploring the research questions through an application of a systemic lens using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. I have revisited the data to develop a discussion to explore what this may suggest by answering the research questions using the rich data collected (Kidder and Fine, 1987; Clarke and Braun, 2013; Creswell, 2022). Subsequently, the strengths and delimitations of the research and implications for practice are summarised.

5.1.1 The macrosystem

5.1.1.1 Research question one: *Have schools within the local authority (LA) seen an increase in CYP who are not attending school due to EBSA since the COVID-19 Pandemic?*

It is difficult to ascertain the reasons CYP are not attending school because of the limitations that the government policy creates in how schools record non-attendance. The codes provided by the DfE do not allow schools to break down reasons why a CYP are not attending school. Indications from the LA officer who took part in the phase four interview gave an insight into how their LA has set up a numerical matrix for participating schools in their EBSA Pathway and code the non-attendance data, which included a code for mental health-related reasons and EBSA. This supports Hallam and Rogers (2008) theory that there is a need to make clear distinctions when recording absences, to enable schools to monitor accurately reasons and be able to clarify why a CYP is not attending school. This is also in line with the recommendations made to parliament by Shafan-Azar and Bottomley (2024) that the DfE should introduce a mental health and well-being absence code to support early identification.

The LA school attendance data indicated that in 2018, 0.77% of their cohort were severely absent and missing at least 50% of their sessions, but this peaked at 2.60% for the academic year 2022-2023. The LA data identified that 1488 pupils were severely absent from school during the autumn and spring term of 2021-2022, which increased to 2014 for the following academic year (2022-2023). The LA officer indicated that the schools who participated in the pilot of the LA EBSA Pathway recorded that out of the 720 CYP who were severely absent in their schools, over 50% have been recorded as having mental health-related difficulties, and 20% of the severely absent figure was recorded as EBSA. These figures support the findings of the DfE-commissioned research into the effects of COVID-19 on education that unsurprisingly concluded that attendance and mental health had been significantly impacted by the pandemic.

Despite schools re-opening their doors on the 8th of March 2021, schools in England did not have all of their CYP return, a growing number of CYP remained at home due to their unprecedented experiences of being part of national lockdowns and being told to stay in their homes. In 2018, the LA attendance data for all of their schools further indicated that 11.02% of CYP were persistently absent and missing at least 10% of their sessions. This figure has nearly doubled since the pandemic and reached 20.80% for the academic year 2022-2023. This figure was similar to the national average for England for the academic year of 2022-2023 as the figure was 21.22% (1,569,303 pupils), and the national severe absence rate was slightly lower than the LA at 2% (150,256). These figures support the findings of many recent research studies mentioned in Chapter Two, which have reported CYP have not returned to school following the pandemic and make it apparent why The Centre of Social Justice described these CYP as being the “*ghost children of the pandemic*” (The Centre for Social Justice, 2023, p. 3). CYP are not able to overcome barriers to attending school which have been compounded by the pandemic and pupils have become confined to remaining in their homes due to mental health and well-being related reasons.

The school non-attendance data for the LA and the national data produced by the DfE could illustrate that EBSA cases in schools have risen since COVID-19, which was indicated in the limited results of the phase one survey.

Out of the 11 schools that participated in the questionnaire, the results formed a picture that they had seen an increase in EBSA-related cases since the COVID-19 pandemic. 81.8% of the schools reported that they had experienced increased EBSA cases. Of which 45.5% of the participants felt this was having a high impact on the school non-attendance data.

5.1.1.2 Research question two: *What interventions are schools in a locality within the LA currently using to support CYP facing EBSA-related difficulties accessing their learning? What does success look and feel like for schools, and how is success measured?*

Educational resources influence the development of CYP as the delegated funding provided for schools to provide adequate intervention and resources, especially those CYP with identified SEND, have not had the right support at the right time. The focus group participant discussion revealed that there is a resource implication to providing the adequate support needed for CYP experiencing EBSA-related difficulties to enable interventions to be successful.

The availability of provisions to meet identified needs within an EHCP was discussed by all participants. The length of time it takes for an appropriate placement to be identified and provided after a decision has been made that the current provision cannot meet needs creates further barriers to attending school. There was a consensus that it can take over two years for a CYP to be allocated a provision as it is a difficult process for LAs because there is not always a provision that meets all needs stipulated in the EHCP. Participants also shared that identified SEND needs cannot always be met within a specialist school as they have restrictions to what can be implemented due to the available resources and that their environments are not always the most appropriate as they can still be sensory overwhelming.

The theme of *going beyond the role of a teacher* emerged from the reflective thematic analysis and a sub-theme of *staff motivation to navigate challenges to provide support* highlighted that securing funding to provide extra staffing resources arose during the discourse during the focus group. Which also mirrored further, during the phase three interview with Participant Two. The findings support Keegan and Barclay (2023), that CYP deserve to have the right support to thrive, especially

for those CYP with SEND and that providers and services are facing delivery pressures, echoed by the three schools who participated in phase two of this research study. As found by Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley (2024), schools are well placed to support CYP with mental health-related difficulties but schools are inadequately financially resourced.

Discourse arose during the focus group about employing experienced staff who are not classroom-based and who can continue working in the homes and sustaining interactions and relationships with parents and carers. Despite the funding restraints that schools are facing, it is clear that those schools who are not imposing a punitive approach to 'blaming' parents for school non-attendance are *going beyond the role of a teacher* and are putting much effort into providing support for CYP creatively within the restraints of their allocated school budget.

5.1.2 The mesosystem

5.1.2.1 Research question two: *What interventions are schools in a locality within the LA currently using to support CYP facing EBSA-related difficulties accessing their learning? What does success look and feel like for schools, and how is success measured?*

Two of the sub-themes identified during the analysis process for the focus group were linked to parent and carer relationships and interactions, sub-theme 1.3 – *parent and family level support*, sub-theme 3.3 – *positive feelings about parent interventions*, and sub-theme 4.2 - *school relationships with parents and carers*. Sub-theme 1.3 drew upon the evidence that participants are establishing relationships and having regular interactions with parents and carers. Providing parent/carer training, coaching, and family open days, resulted in positive changes for the development of CYP as it enabled school staff to be in a position to visit the CYP in their homes and work directly with them for the interventions to be successful. Sub-theme 3.3 identified that providing interventions directly to parents and families made positive changes to how they supported EBSA cases and enabled parents and carers to support each other and share their stories by providing them with a support network. Sub-theme 4.2 highlighted that pre-conceptions from parents and carers can create tensions if there is not a relationship of trust built between the school. This has a direct impact on school attendance because there is no scope for

interactions to take place that can ease these tensions when fractured relationships occur. Bronfenbrenner (1977) stated that the macrosystem can act as the “carriers of information” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515), therefore, if there is not a level of trust built between schools and families then staff will not be in a position to assert influence upon changing pre-conceptions of processes that are held by parents and carers. This has a significant impact on school attendance because it is through forming positive relationships and interactions with families a supportive environment can be created (Guy-Evans, 2020).

The factors mentioned above further support the recommendations of Impact Ed and the Children's and Young People Mental Health Coalition/Centre for Mental Health for the government and schools to review the use of punitive sanctions for parents and carers by schools and holistically support attendance. Maintaining positive interactions and relationships with parents is such a fundamental approach for interventions to become successful and contribute towards the development of CYP who cannot attend the school environment due to barriers created by the relationships and interactions that take place at this systemic level.

Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem model (1977) identified that the relationships and interactions taking place between families and schools influence CYP. For example, in schools that use a punitive approach to enforcing sanctions for parents and carers and blaming them for non-attendance, barriers to attending school can increase due to fractured relationships evolving between home and school.

The current Education Act (1996) created a climate where schools imposed fines and penalties for parents and carers as they were to 'blame' for their CYP's non-attendance. The former government proposed the School's Bill, which was thankfully scrapped, aimed to make sanctioning parents and carers easier. A fine would be given if a CYP missed five days of school for unauthorised absence, despite all the barriers to attending school that had further arisen since the pandemic restrictions. As suggested by Epstein et al (2029), criminalising non-attendance harms families and increases disadvantage, vulnerability and adversity, and there are many parents and carers with vulnerable CYP who have identified SEND who face barriers to attending school and have received fines and threats of being sentenced. Therefore it is imperative for schools to take on board what others have highlighted (Impact Ed,

2024 and the DfE Working Together guidance, 2024) that it is everyone's job to approach attendance. The government's conflicting advice should be amended in their laws and guidance to avoid parents being blamed and to stop sanctioning those parents and carers who have vulnerable CYP with mental health-related barriers to attending school and find a more holistic way forward because this will change the current school culture of imposing fines on families who are already vulnerable.

The practice that participants highlighted during the focus group, in terms of working with parents and families, would also fall in line with what the West Sussex EPS formulated after looking into EBSA studies. Participants emphasised the importance of the relationship between parental anxiety and anxiety in CYP which reflected that parents/carers may have received minimal information and support on how they can support their children. Therefore, schools should be working closely with parents and families to help find solutions and not rely on fining parents and holding them accountable (Hunt *et al.*, 2022).

Participants raised building positive relationships with external agencies such as alternative provision providers, which directly influenced the sub-theme 1.2 *Collaborative working with external agencies*. Developing positive relationships and interactions with external agencies was frequently mentioned, and this echoes the DfE guidance (2022/2024) that teams working together can provide a package of support for CYP by collaboratively working with different diverse external agencies as this can help schools to develop a system of early identification such as monitoring attendance patterns.

5.1.3 The microsystem

5.1.3.1 Research question two: *What interventions are schools in a locality within the LA currently using to support CYP facing EBSA-related difficulties accessing their learning? What does success look and feel like for schools, and how is success measured?*

There was a consensus from the three schools who participated in the focus group that schools can make adaptations for CYP and can make a difference in reducing some of the barriers faced in accessing their learning. The sub-theme 2.1 *Timetable adaptations* were identified as a result of the participant's discourse that making changes to timetables, adding in mentoring time, and providing quiet spaces and

areas for CYP to access during the school day led to successful outcomes. Echoing Thambirajah et al (2008) need for schools to promote the pull factors for CYP to be able to attend school as the risk factors, such as feeling anxious about attending school can outweigh their resilience.

There is a need for schools to make adaptations for CYP who are facing EBSA-related difficulties as the relationships and interactions that take place directly with a CYP within their microsystem can trigger or exacerbate anxiety and stress for an individual CYP, which can further create or add to mental health and well-being difficulties.

Adaptations made by schools do not always take place within the school environment. The sub-theme 2.2 - *Approaches to learning pedagogies* included the discourse of the participants concerning the school arranging alternative provisions through online learning, which had taken place within the CYP's home. Providing online learning enabled a successful process for those CYP who had not been accessing any learning since they stopped attending completely and had an impact on building more positive relationships with the CYP and families as this reduced the pressure and expectation of attending school. Supporting the findings of Academy 21 (2024), which reported that online learning can provide access to blended learning in delivering education and providing emotional well-being support. Sub-theme 4.1 - *SEND provision and processes* identified that there are restrictions to what can be implemented at a school level because of not having access to resources or having the capacity to provide smaller classroom environments that can support sensory differences as the school environment can be crowded or noisy.

Theme Three, *Successes of intervention and support*, highlighted that the characteristics of success can be varied and individual to each CYP. Participants suggested that success was related to a change process and that this was not solely increasing attendance but also developing an individual's well-being and self-confidence.

All participants of the focus group revealed that anxiety is a contributing factor to why barriers to attending school occur which was highlighted within sub-theme 4.3. As suggested by Kearney (2008) and Resnick (2000), having a nurturing school

environment that has a relational approach can influence the development of CYP as they can feel safe which builds the protective factors that can build up resilience by focusing on interventions at an individual level as well as a family and community level. Two participants identified that providing parental training on matters that related to their CYPs' SEND has successfully added to the protective factors, such as understanding Autism and how this influences their CYPs' development.

The training provided by the two schools has enabled parents and carers to develop their knowledge and understanding of what their CYP may be experiencing, which directly impacts their interactions and relationships with their CYP within the home. It may be important for other schools to adopt this approach as working at a family level can increase parents' and carers' understanding of how a CYP may be feeling. This has a change process in how they can impact their CYPs' development and help to reduce some of the barriers faced when accessing their learning or attending school. For example, if parents and carers are feeling anxious about their CYP not attending school, this can have an impact on the interactions that are taking place as they may feel pressured to try and force their CYP to attend school to avoid a sanction, creating a fracture in the parent/carer and CYP relationship as a result.

Schools that adopt a nurturing approach enable them to provide support at a holistic level as parents and schools can have a common focus in the CYPs' immediate setting as they have a shared understanding of needs (Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000).

5.2 Implications and recommendations for practice

The following section highlights implications and recommendations that were formulated as a result of the findings of this small-scale research that took place in one local authority. Recommendations are presented at three levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, which impact the development of CYP.

5.2.1 Macrosystem level

- As identified by Costello (2023), Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley (2024), Impact Ed (2024) and several other agencies, the government law and policy about school attendance is punitive and blames families for school non-attendance. The practice of sanctioning parents and carers should be reviewed as this is

not a holistic approach to supporting CYP who are facing mental health and well-being-related difficulties.

- The DfE should review the attendance codes that track school attendance. An introduction of a code for schools to use that reflects mental health and well-being-related absences can help schools identify patterns early on and be in a better position to support EBSA cases. This has also been mentioned by Costello 2023, Shafan-Azhar and Bottomley (2024) and The Centre for Social Justice (2024).
- The government should review how SEND is funded in schools to ensure that schools can provide the right support at the right time for CYP. As identified in the DfE school attendance data, persistent absence is higher in special educational settings compared to mainstream schools.
- The DfE has indicated that there is an expectation for LAs to rigorously track local attendance data to help prioritise CYP and schools to provide support and focus on how to reduce barriers to attendance (DfE, 2024b). This research has highlighted the importance for LAs to work alongside schools to identify patterns of non-attendance and further unpick the contributing factors to why a CYP may attend school.
- The data collected reflected that the participants contacted attendance teams who are based within the LA to help them problem solve and work alongside parents and families to produce action plans. Following the identification of EBSA, it is important to individually tailor the interventions that target the functions of EBSA (Corcoran, Bond, and Knox, 2022).
- Although it is important for LAs to work alongside schools, schools need to access services that they trade with little cost. Traded services such as the EPS provide cost implications to schools as they must purchase these external agencies. Schools that do not have the financial budget to access the traded services, then CYP will be deprived of not being able to access the essential support that is needed to assess their needs and help to be part of the early identification process. As a result of this study, the question of how schools can access external agencies without cost to support EBSA cases needs to be asked. How can services like EPs become involved with individuals if schools cannot buy LA-traded services?

5.2.2 Mesosystem level

- Schools should work collaboratively with parents/carers, and external agencies can provide a consistent approach to help staff understand the needs of those CYP experiencing EBSA-related difficulties. Applying a multi-agency approach with external agencies can help school staff work towards a common goal and share their successes, dreams, and visions to facilitate change (Nuttall and Woods, 2013).
- Schools should access networks that include both mainstream and special school settings to open doors to sharing the best practices so that an alternative future can be imagined. Confirming knowledge between practitioners can provide confidence and inspiration to transform practices as staff can have a heightened awareness of what is working for other schools (Hammond, 1998).
- The transition process is a critical time in CYP lives, COVID-19 halted transition processes. Therefore, it is important for schools to work with feeder schools and gather information that informs their planning and support packages for CYP (Longfield, 2020; Bowyer-Crane *et al.*, 2021; Want and Gulliford, 2024).
- Schools can also work with families during the transition period to gain information that informs their support and interventions before a CYP attends their new school. It has been documented that early identification of EBSA cases is key to informing intervention, so therefore by having effective systems in place at a school level can help to monitor their processes. Completing a holistic assessment of an individual CYP can help schools understand probable causes (Nuttall and Woods, 2013).
- EPs are in a valuable position to scaffold and encourage school staff to promote protective factors supporting a CYP's mental health and resilience and can work with CYP on many levels (Pellegrini, 2007). Understanding protective factors can positively impact CYPs' lives as EPs can use their knowledge and skills to select an appropriate evidence-based practice to influence change and help schools develop an understanding of the risk factors that create barriers to attending school (Kelly and Woolfson, 2008; Roffey, 2017; Prosser and Birchwood, 2024).

- EPs are in a position to find out how the family system is functioning for those CYP who are facing EBSA-related difficulties as they can work at a systemic level and act as a mediator between school and families to help identify needs early on using assessment and by meeting with families to discuss the CYP's needs and development (Pellegrini, 2007; Want and Gulliford, 2024).

5.2.3 Microsystem level

- Schools should avoid using a punitive approach to viewing non-attendance and provide a holistic and nurturing approach when planning CYP interventions and forming action plans to provide support. This approach needs to be individualised to each CYP as all cases are unique due to the influences of their microsystem, as a direct result of the relationships and interactions that take place on a family, school and community level.
- Schools need to remain flexible in their approaches and work with CYP in their home to establish a collaboration process with parents and families to build trusting relationships with them. Multi-agency working can then help schools hear the narrative of the CYP as to why they might be finding it impossible to overcome barriers to attending school, to have a more holistic understanding of what may be the root cause of the non-attendance and to identify these behaviours early on (Want, 2020). Having flexibility was a recurring narrative of the focus group participants, so it is essential to be flexible to make a difference when approaching intervention and setting up support for a CYP (Nuttall and Woods, 2013).
- Time factors are essential considerations for schools to further support their work with CYP. Having a child-centred approach enables the system to provide adequate support, which is not time-dependent, as supporting EBSA is a journey.
- EPs can be in a well-placed position to facilitate guidance and to raise awareness about EBSA needs they can also provide support through direct assessment with a CYP and collaborate with other professionals to conduct co-production of an individualised action plan (Corcoran, Bond, and Knox, 2022).

- EPs can use pupil consultation to gain pupils' voices, which can impact the CYP directly and influence the systems around them to create change and help remove some of the barriers to attending school. These changes can also help teachers, schools, parents/carers, and LAs (Newman and Rosenfield, 2018).

5.3 Strengths and delimitations

This research was a small-scale study in one local authority and experienced limitations in recruiting participants. Only 4.5% of all schools in the locality participated. Recruiting participants proved difficult potentially due to the sensitivity of unpicking unpublished non-attendance data, as EBSA appears is not fully acknowledged as a contributing factor towards persistent and severe absences by the government, and there has been a significant number of fines given to families, which could suggest that the punitive approach to school non-attendance is the preferred practice.

Having a limited response of eleven participants and having such few participants makes it difficult to have reliable statistical results that represent all of the LA schools (Moran and Budiu, 2021). Generalising the results for the wider LA has not been possible which has created an unintentional limitation of analysis due to the partial data collected to which the above statistics can only provide a narrowed view of what schools are currently experiencing. Potentially this could have been overcome by having an extended amount of time for schools to participate and distributing the questionnaire using the online format sooner.

Using appreciative inquiry provided a way to discover the practices of SENCOs to offer the opportunity to explore what works. Potentially, this can help other schools replicate the practices of the three schools that took part, which have enabled success in implementing change. However, tensions have been created by only including the narrative of schools because the research did not include hearing the voices of parents/carers and CYP. Focusing on schools limited the findings on what success looks like as this research only included the school's perspective on their views of success. The narrative from parents, carers, and CYP may not view the success of support and interventions provided by schools in the same light as the

SENCo's but would provide a richer set of results if a comparison to the outcomes had been sought.

Appreciative inquiry is a solution-focused approach based upon positivity, as it seeks out the strengths on the assumption that some aspects of an organisation are working well and can create change (Ali *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, as Kelly (2006) pointed out; applying this type of research approach can narrow the focus of the study by looking for what changes may take place within an organisation and what is successful, which does not provide the opportunity to identify weaknesses in a system.

Upon reflection, appreciative inquiry is grounded in social constructivism, the research has enabled participants to be part of a social process that allowed them to share their stories of interventions when they were at their best. These stories generated ideas that aided change following the discussions and storytelling (Bushe, 2001). I feel that the current practice in the participants' settings reflected that the three schools have prioritised elements of their work with parents and families to work jointly alongside them. Also, resources have been directed to this level of work, and they are not applying a punitive approach by sanctioning parents and careers for non-attendance but are working towards change.

A willingness to engage with research can inform and evolve practices so therefore, by taking part in this study, the three participants who took part in the focus group were able to reflect upon the ripeness of other practices that result in change and explore alternative futures (Waring and Evans, 2014). The participants reported that they found the 'Discovery' process of the appreciative interview beneficial and 'therapeutic.' The participants had a reflective space to consider their success stories and celebrate their accomplishments with each other.

As the focus group only consisted of three participants it is less amenable to generalising the findings than if further focus groups were held to represent a larger sample of school SENCo's within the LA (Willig and Stainton Rogers, 2017). In relation to organising a second focus group, there were barriers to facilitating a date and time when participants could attend due to the busy workloads of a SENCo. This factor limited the data collected, which meant that only one focus group took place,

enabling a deeper dive into the discovery phase of the appreciative inquiry and providing rich data analysis into the participant's experiences of their successes.

As a result of only having three schools' information, the data analysis results have provided limited insight into how schools within the LA support EBSA cases and this needs to be taken into consideration. The SENCOs who agreed to take part in the phase two focus group were passionate about supporting their CYP and had taken measures to try and reduce barriers to attending school, but this is not always the case as the data of fines that have been given to parents is vast. The approaches discovered during this phase may not always be the case in terms of the local or national picture.

Having only one follow-up interview to the focus group, provided a limitation to generalise the impact of the focus group on all participants. The analysis would have been more enhanced if I had been able to interview the other two participants as it could be that the single participant of the 'Dream' phase was more proactive in implementing change to EBSA practice within their school.

When using handwritten notes to make a record of an interview can provide a limitation to the analysis of the interview as the data collected for the open-ended questions is my interpretation of the answers that have been recorded. Accuracy of notetaking can be impacted by the speed of how the participant speaks and misinterpretations of language can take place. Also, taking notes can lead to missing out on key points and details which may be lost due to my consideration about what I felt was essential to record (Russo, 2023).

This research has evolved in response to low participation. Adapting the questionnaire from paper-based to online did prove to be more successful in collecting several more responses. If I were to repeat this study or carry out research in the future, I would ensure that when collecting quantitative data online surveys would be used as this proved a much more effective means to respond.

It would be short-sighted to make generalised conclusions as a result of this research due to it being a small-scale study with a limited number of participants. However, reading this research can provide readers the opportunity to identify those celebrating successes and 'wins' that can provide opportunities for replicating those

successes and doing more of those interventions that can make a difference to a CYP.

5.4 Further reflections

This research study was influenced by my previous experiences as an ex-SENCo, which was isolating at times as there is usually only one member of staff with this responsibility. I had preconceptions formed of how busy SENCOs can be, and it is not always possible to take time and pause to review the positive changes as a result of the support and interventions carried out. I have reflected that I had an insider-outsider position because I had shared inside knowledge about the attributes of the SENCo role previously but was now an outsider as I no longer belonged to the teaching profession (Bukamal, 2022).

Action research initially was considered as my methodological approach to carry out the study by exploring the systemic processes that took place within schools and how they supported EBSA cases. Application of this method would have enabled working alongside members of the school's community directly with both staff and pupils. Following reflection, the outcome of this approach was to 'solve a problem', this did not align with the ethical considerations of working directly with CYP who potentially were already experiencing a high level of anxiety. They may not have benefited from having an unfamiliar adult attending their homes or classrooms, so I could not guarantee that this would not have caused harm to participants. Also, I felt that I was not in a position to be able to solve school non-attendance therefore, action research was not possible.

After exploring the literature on EBSA research, I noticed that I could not find any studies that involved SENCo's and what the outcome was as a result of interventions carried out to support EBSA cases. There appeared to be a significant amount of literature on how and why schools should introduce interventions, but there seemed to be little literature on the outcomes of interventions carried out in schools and how these created change for CYP.

My past SENCo experiences shaped my final methodological decision to use appreciative inquiry as I felt that this would provide an opportunity to enable SENCOs to be included in a discovery journey. It was felt that applying an appreciative inquiry

approach to the methodology would provide a forum to share good practices and celebrate the success of what has worked when supporting EBSA cases and also enable the sharing of knowledge to make changes in other schools to potentially replicate those practices that were successful.

My experience working in the teaching profession provided me with an insight into how performance management systems can tend to be focused on the negatives and emphasise what needs to be improved. Therefore, further influenced my decision to use appreciative inquiry and provide the opportunity to discover practices and to explore the strengths that might be taking place in schools. The application of a solution-focused methodological approach would enable the research to celebrate successes.

Positioning the research to celebrate the success of support and interventions created a bias to the study as the chosen methodology presumes that the work of a SENCo is successful. Furthermore, appreciative inquiry does not uncover the problems that may be taking place within schools, nor does it consider government policies and what is taking place at the macrosystem level. The choice of methodology did not enable the perspectives of the SENCo to be critiqued as the research did not include the voice of parents, carers or CYP to verify the level of success. Again this creates a bias of opinion as it assumes that the SENCo's views are accurate and that their current practices are having a positive influence on CYP experiencing EBSA-related difficulties.

I acknowledge that having an insider-outsider perspective can provide me with a 'rose-tinted' view of how SENCo's work hard and do everything they can to have a child-centred approach to their work as this is how I approached my role, which may not be the case for all practitioners doing the same job. Therefore, this bias has a direct impact on how the information is interpreted and influences the results as a consequence.

5.5 Future research

The focus of the study was chosen to explore how schools support EBSA by adopting a sequential mixed-method design. The quantitative questionnaire provided a small snapshot of data, therefore future research should focus on gaining an

understanding of what schools are implementing and obtaining more success stories.

This research study has provided a perspective on the experiences of SENCOs in schools, which has offered a unique insight into the extent of what schools are setting out to do to support their EBSA cases. However, further evidence is needed to allow the discovery of what schools are doing to generalise the results and create opportunities to celebrate the success.

On the back of this study, research could be carried out at a family level and a CYP individual level, to explore the experiences of parents and families during the interventions by using appreciative inquiry to discover what is best to support their CYP and how they measure or view success. Future practices across the schools in the LA could be mirrored to replicate successful interventions. It would also be beneficial to involve the CYP to hear their voices about how successful the support and interventions have been for them due to the nature of EBSA, creating further anxiety when participating in research needs to be kept in mind.

5.6 Conclusion

CYP are facing barriers to attending school, and these can be related to emotional based reasons such as experiencing differences in their mental health and well-being. Several contributing factors have been identified as to why barriers to attending school are created, which can be impacted by the layers of systems, as identified by Bronfenbrenner (1977), that surround CYP, with which they do not always have direct interactions and relationships, such as the current government law and policy on attendance.

This research has given a limited glimpse into hearing the stories of the three participants who took part in the focus group, giving their perspective on their construction of successes, which has been an area that has had little attention in previous research.

The findings suggest there is a prevalence of EBSA within this particular local authority and that schools are seeing increasing numbers of persistent and severe absences from school since COVID-19. Also, this could be true when comparing the LA attendance data to the national data.

This research has highlighted that there is not one approach to supporting EBSA cases. Schools can be in a position to build strong connections with parents, families, and external agencies such as mental health practitioners and local authority-traded services to provide early intervention and make a change to CYP. From the limited participation of this study and a significant prevalence of parents and carers being fined for non-attendance, one could reflect that not all schools have the passion and resources to work on an individual basis with a CYP and their families creating a punitive approach to addressing attendance.

Considerations and conversations need to take place at the macro systemic level about the current laws and policies that are in place which inform and dictate school culture. The current legislation interacts with the current climate of schools being punitive and 'blaming' families who are already vulnerable for their CYP's non-attendance and does not take into consideration the real barriers that CYP are facing daily.

This research has identified that the participants of this study felt that supporting children and young people facing EBSA-related challenges can be successful which includes the following:

- Monitoring the attendance patterns and working collaboratively with LA officers to work with the CYP in their homes and create action plans to provide early intervention.
- Schools can be flexible and are in a position to provide bespoke interventions for each CYP when required which can include having alternative provisions provided such as online learning. Individual adaptations can help build resilience in attending school and become a protective factor that can help remove barriers that CYP face when attending school.
- Working collaboratively with parents, families, and external agencies to ensure a holistic approach to supporting children and young people should be established and entrenched to enable further protective factors.
- CYP maintain connections and a sense of belonging within their setting with peers and staff members who are not classroom-based can provide an

essential layer of support for CYP and be available to visit them at home and build connections that may have become lost due to long-term absence.

References

- Abbott, S. (2019) *Appreciative Inquiry, Organizing Engagement*. Available at: <https://organizingengagement.org/models/appreciative-inquiry/> (Accessed: 20 January 2023).
- Academy 21 (2024) 'The Benefits of Online Alternative Provision'. The Content Classroom.
- Accepting Behaviour Ltd (2024) *EOTAS*, <https://www.acceptingbehaviour.com/>. Available at: <https://www.acceptingbehaviour.com/eotas/> (Accessed: 27 July 2024).
- Adams, D. (2022) 'Child and Parental Mental Health as Correlates of School Non-Attendance and School Refusal in Children on the Autism Spectrum', *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 52(8), pp. 3353–3365. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05211-5>.
- Akat, M. and Karataş, K. (2020) 'Psychological Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Society and Its Reflections on Education', 15, pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.44336>.
- Alburey, J. (2021) *How societally visible and engaged are the children of home educating parents who access online home education support groups*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.35996.00644>.
- Ali, I. *et al.* (2020) 'To what extent can appreciative inquiry be a substitute/alternative or perhaps complementary to problem- centric approaches? A paradox', *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 11, pp. 3485–3496.
- Anna Freud (2024) 'School attendance and mental wellbeing : Mentally Healthy Schools'. Available at: <https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/school-attendance-and-mental-wellbeing/>.
- Anti-Bullying Alliance (2023) 'Pupil bullying, wellbeing and school experiences in schools in England 2023'. National Children's Bureau.
- APPGA (2018) 'Autism and Education in England'. The National Autistic Society. Available at: <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/news/autism-and-education-in-england-launched>.
- APS Group Scotland (2022) 'What is meant by the concept of “intersectionality”?' Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/using-intersectionality-understand-structural-inequality-scotland-evidence-synthesis/pages/3/> (Accessed: 19 July 2024).
- Baars, S. *et al.* (2018) 'School cultures and practices: supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils'. DfE.
- Bakeman, R. and Gottman, J. (1986) *Observing interaction: an introduction to sequential analysis*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <http://archive.org/details/observinginterac0000bake>.

Bandura, A. (1977) *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall. Available at: <http://archive.org/details/sociallearningth0000band> (Accessed: 9 December 2022).

Barcham, C. *et al.* (2020) 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Guidance for Educational Settings'. Staffordshire County Council EPS.

Barcham *et al.* (2020) 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Guidance for Educational Settings'. Staffordshire County Council EPS.

Barnardo's (2023) 'It's hard to talk: Expanding Mental Health Support Teams in education'. Barnardo's. Available at: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/research/its-hard-talk-expanding-mental-health-support-teams-education>.

Barrett, F.J. and Fry, R.E. (2005) *Appreciative inquiry: A positive approach to building cooperative capacity*. First edition. Chagrin Falls, Ohio: Taos Institute Publications (Focus book (Taos Institute Publications)).

Beacon House (2019) *The Three R's: Reaching The Learning Brain*. Available at: <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/The-Three-Rs.pdf>.

Beatty, P.C. *et al.* (2019) *Advances in questionnaire design, development, evaluation and testing*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Beaver, R. (2011) *Educational psychology casework: a practice guide*. 2nd ed. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Berg, I. (1997) 'School refusal and truancy', *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 76(2), pp. 90–91. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1136/adc.76.2.90>.

Bhaskar, R. (2008) *A realist theory of science*. Rev. ed. London: New York: Routledge (Classical texts in critical realism). Available at: <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=USheffield&isbn=9780203090732> (Accessed: 18 February 2023).

Bhaskar, R. (2020) 'Critical realism and the ontology of persons*', *Journal of Critical Realism*, 19(2), pp. 113–120. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2020.1734736>.

Bishop, C. (2020) *Winning isn't everything – Why too much competition is bad for schools and students*, *Teachwire*. Available at: <https://www.teachwire.net/news/winning-isnt-everything-why-too-much-competition-is-bad-for-schools-and-students/>.

Bishop, F.L. (2015) 'Using mixed methods research designs in health psychology: An illustrated discussion from a pragmatist perspective', *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 20(1), pp. 5–20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjhp.12122>.

BMA (2024) *The impact of the pandemic on population health and health inequalities*. 5. British Medical Association. Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/what-the-bma-is-doing/the->

impact-of-the-pandemic-on-population-health-and-health-inequalities (Accessed: 30 July 2024).

Bowyer-Crane, C. *et al.* (2021) 'The impact of COVID-19 on school starters: Interim briefing 1 - Parent and school concerns about children starting school'. Available at: <https://www.niesr.ac.uk/publications/impact-covid19-school-starters-interim-briefing-1-parent-and-school-concerns-about-children-starting-school> (Accessed: 30 July 2024).

BPS (2021) 'Code of Ethics and Conduct'. British Psychological Society. Available at: <https://www.bps.org.uk/guideline/code-ethics-and-conduct>.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019) 'Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), pp. 589–597. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2023a) *Thematic Analysis: Understanding the Process Online Resources*. Available at: <https://study.sagepub.com/thematicanalysis/student-resources/chapter-6/understanding-the-process>.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2023b) 'Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher', *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 24(1), pp. 1–6. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>.

Broadwin, I.T. (1932) 'A Contribution to the Study of Truancy', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 2(3), pp. 253–259. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1932.tb05183.x>.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977) 'Toward an experimental ecology of human development.', *American psychologist*, 32(7), p. 513.

Bronfenbrenner, U. and Evans, G.W. (2000) 'Developmental science in the 21st century: Emerging questions, theoretical models, research designs and empirical findings', *Social Development*, 9(1), pp. 115–125. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9507.00114>.

Bukamal, H. (2022) 'Deconstructing insider–outsider researcher positionality.', *British Journal of Special Education*, 49(3), pp. 327–349. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12426>.

Burr, V. and Dick, P. (2017) 'Social Constructionism', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Social Psychology*, pp. 59–80. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51018-1_4.

Bushe, G. (2012) 'Foundations of Appreciative Inquiry: History, Criticism and Potential', *AI Practitioner*, 14(1), p. 13.

Campos-Gil, J.A., Ortega-Andeane, P. and Vargas, D. (2020) 'Children's Microsystems and Their Relationship to Stress and Executive Functioning', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00996>.

Cheong, C.Y. (2000) 'Cultural Factors in Educational Effectiveness: A framework for comparative research', *School Leadership & Management*, 20(2), pp. 207–225. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430050011434>.

Cherry, K. (2023) *A Comprehensive Guide to the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model, Verywell Mind*. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/bronfenbrenner-ecological-model-7643403> (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Childs, J. and Scanlon, C.L. (2022) 'Coordinating the Mesosystem: An Ecological Approach to Addressing Chronic Absenteeism', *Peabody Journal of Education*, 97(1), pp. 74–86. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2022.2026722>.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. SAGE Publications.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2016) 'Thematic analysis', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12, pp. 1–2. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>.

Cooke Douglas, A. (2021) 'Meeting Children Where They Are: The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics', *Adoption Advocate*, (160), pp. 2–10.

Cooperrider, D.L. and Whitney, D. (2005) *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*. 1st edition. San Francisco, Calif: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Corcoran, S., Bond, C. and Knox, L. (2022) 'Emotionally based school non-attendance: two successful returns to school following lockdown', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 38(1), pp. 75–88. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2022.2033958>.

CPAG (2024) *Child poverty reaches record high – failure to tackle it will be 'a betrayal of Britain's children'*, *Child Poverty Action Group*. Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/news/child-poverty-reaches-record-high-failure-tackle-it-will-be-betrayal-britains-children> (Accessed: 22 July 2024).

Crenshaw, K. (1991) 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), pp. 1241–1299. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

Creswell, J. (2022) *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. 2nd Edition. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark, V.L. (2018) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Third edition.; International student edition. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Crossfield, J. *et al.* (2023) *School recovery strategies: year 2 findings*. DfE.

Dawson, C. (2009) *Introduction to research methods: a practical guide for anyone undertaking a research project*. 4th ed. Oxford: How To Books. Available at: <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=USheffield&isbn=9781848033429> (Accessed: 10 November 2023).

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2000) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Second edition. Thousand Oaks; London: Sage.

Department for Education (2022) 'Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance'. Crown Copyright.

DfE (2013) 'Alternative provision'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision>.

DfE (2017) 'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: a green paper'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper>.

DfE (2019) 'Elective home education'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>.

DfE (2022a) *Everything you need to know about the Schools Bill – The Education Hub*. Available at: <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/05/12/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-schools-bill/> (Accessed: 23 July 2024).

DfE (2022b) *Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance/framework-for-securing-full-attendance-actions-for-schools-and-local-authorities> (Accessed: 18 September 2022).

DfE (2022c) *Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-good-attendance-and-tackling-persistent-absence/securing-good-attendance-and-tackling-persistent-absence>.

DfE (2022d) 'Working together to improve school attendance'. Crown Copyright. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance> (Accessed: 30 June 2022).

DfE (2023a) *Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2023*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions> (Accessed: 26 July 2024).

DfE (2023b) *Pupil attendance in schools*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools> (Accessed: 11 August 2023).

DfE (2024a) *Absence from school*. Available at: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/absence-from-school/latest/> (Accessed: 25 July 2024).

DfE (2024b) 'Working together to improve school attendance'. Crown Copyright.

Disney, R. (2024) 'Has job furlough reduced UK labour force participation after Covid-19?', *Economics Observatory*, 10 January. Available at: <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/has-job-furlough-reduced-uk-labour-force-participation-after-covid-19> (Accessed: 30 July 2024).

Doody, O. and Doody, C.M. (2015) 'Conducting a pilot study: case study of a novice researcher', *British Journal of Nursing (Mark Allen Publishing)*, 24(21), pp. 1074–1078. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2015.24.21.1074>.

Dope Black CIC (2023) 'The Importance of Intersectionality in Education • Dope Black', *Dope Black*, 29 May. Available at: <https://dopeblack.org/importance-of-intersectionality-in-education/> (Accessed: 25 July 2024).

EdPsychEd (2022) *4 Key Strategies For Supporting Emotionally Based School Avoidance*, EdPsychEd. Available at: <https://www.edpsyched.co.uk/blog/4-strategies-for-supporting-emotionally-based-school-avoidance>.

Egger, H., Costello, J. and Angold, A. (2003) 'School Refusal and Psychiatric Disorders: A Community Study', *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 42(7), pp. 797–807. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.CHI.0000046865.56865.79>.

Ek, H. and Eriksson, R. (2013) 'Psychological Factors Behind Truancy, School Phobia, and School Refusal: A Literature Study', *Child & family behaviour therapy*, 35(3), pp. 228–248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07317107.2013.818899>.

El Zaatari, W. and Maalouf, I. (2022) 'How the Bronfenbrenner Bio-ecological System Theory Explains the Development of Students' Sense of Belonging to School?', *Sage Open*, 12(4), p. 21582440221134089. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221134089>.

Emmerson, P. *et al.* (2004) 'Emotionally Based School Refusal: Guidance for Schools and Support Agencies', *West Sussex EPS*, p. 73.

Epstein, R., Brown, G. and O'Flynn, S. (2019) 'Prosecuting parents for truancy: who pays the price?', *Centre for Crime and Justice Studies*, 4 February. Available at: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/prosecuting-parents-truancy-who-pays-price> (Accessed: 31 July 2024).

Fairhead, S. (2024) *Home Education, Home Education in the UK*. Available at: https://home-ed.info/home_ed_articles/pros-and-cons-of-home-education (Accessed: 27 July 2024).

Farrell, P. (2006) *A Review of the Functions and Contribution of Educational Psychologists in England and Wales in light of Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, London: Department for Education and Skills; 2006. Report No. RR792. Department for Education and Skills. Available at: <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/jrul/item/?pid=uk-ac-man-scw:93204> (Accessed: 12 April 2022).

Finning, K. *et al.* (2019) 'Review: The association between anxiety and poor attendance at school – a systematic review', *Child and adolescent mental health*, 24(3), pp. 205–216. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12322>.

Fitzpatrick, S. *et al.* (2023) *Destitution in the UK 2023*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, p. 116.

Flick, U. (2007) *Designing Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications, Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208826>.

Fraser, M., Galinsky, M. and Richman, J. (1999) 'Risk, protection, and resilience: Toward a conceptual framework for social work practice', *Social Work Research*, 23(3), pp. 121–143.

Fryer, T. (2020) 'A beginner's guide to critical realism'. Available at: <https://criticalrealismnetwork.org/2020/10/30/a-beginners-guide-to-critical-realism/> (Accessed: 4 November 2023).

Fullan, M. (2015) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. 5th edn. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gayle, D. (2020) 'One-third of children in UK "have heard racist comments at school"', *The Guardian*, 21 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/sep/22/one-third-of-children-in-uk-have-heard-racist-comments-at-school>.

Gibbs, P. (2023) *Should school non-attendance be treated as a crime?*, *Transform Justice*. Available at: <https://www.transformjustice.org.uk/news-insight/should-school-non-attendance-be-treated-as-a-crime/> (Accessed: 22 July 2024).

GOV.UK (1996) 'Education Act 1996'. Crown. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/19>.

GOV.UK (2022) *Working definition of trauma-informed practice*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice> (Accessed: 30 October 2023).

GOV.UK (2023) *Absence and pupil population data in England, Find school and college performance data in England*. Available at: <https://www.find-school-performance-data.service.gov.uk/school/125515/-school/absence-and-pupil-population> (Accessed: 5 April 2023).

Gov.UK (2023) *Pupil attendance in schools, Week 8 2023, Pupil Attendance in Schools*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools> (Accessed: 18 March 2023).

GOV.UK (2024) *Pupil attendance in schools, Week 8 2024*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools> (Accessed: 7 March 2024).

Graley, C.E., May, K.F. and McCoy, D.C. (2011) 'Postcode Lotteries in Public Health - The NHS Health Checks Programme in North West London', *BMC Public Health*, 11(1), p. 738. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-11-738>.

Greene, J.C. (2007) *Mixed methods in social inquiry*. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.

Greene, J.C. (2008) 'Is Mixed Methods Social Inquiry a Distinctive Methodology?', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 2(1), pp. 7–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689807309969>.

Greene, R.R., Galambos, C. and Lee, Y. (2004) 'Resilience Theory', *Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment*, 8(4), pp. 75–91. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1300/J137v08n04_05.

Grix, J. (2002) 'Introducing Students to the Generic Terminology of Social Research', *Politics*, 22(3), pp. 175–186. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.00173>.

Guba, E. and Lincoln, Y. (1994) 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 105–117.

Gubbels, J., Ven der Put, C. and Assink, M. (2019) 'Risk Factors for School Absenteeism and Dropout: A Meta-Analytic Review', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48, pp. 1637–1667.

Guy-Evans, O. (2020) '[Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory]', <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html> [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html> (Accessed: 21 May 2022).

Guy-Evans, O. (2024) 'Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory', 17 January. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/bronfenbrenner.html>.

Hammond, S.A. (1998) *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. 2nd Edition. Thin Book Publishing Co.

Harari, D. *et al.* (2022) 'Economic impact of covid-19 lockdowns'. House of Commons. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2022-0215/>.

Harker, M.E., Dean, S. and Monsen, J.J. (2017) 'Solution-oriented educational psychology practice', *Frameworks for practice in educational psychology: A textbook for trainees and practitioners*, pp. 167–193.

Harris, M. and Fallot, R.D. (2001) 'Envisioning a trauma-informed service system: a vital paradigm shift', *New Directions for Mental Health Services*, (89), pp. 3–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.23320018903>.

Haves, E. (2024) *Local government finances: Impact on communities, UK Parliament*. Available at: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/local-government-finances-impact-on-communities/> (Accessed: 22 July 2024).

HCPC (2023) *Revised standards of conduct, performance, and ethics*. Available at: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-conduct-performance-and-ethics/revised-standards/>.

Heath, C.P. (1985) 'School Phobia: Etiology, Evaluation and Treatment', in. *National Association of School Psychologists*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807>.

Henshaw, P. (2022) *Attendance guidance kicks in as DfE unveils new data toolkit, Headteacher Update*. Available at: <https://www.headteacher-update.com/news/attendance-guidance-kicks-in-as-dfe-unveils-new-data-toolkit-1/247589/> (Accessed: 20 November 2022).

Hogue, E. (2024) *A Comprehensive Guide to Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research*. Available at: <https://www.getbridged.co/resource/thematic-analysis-of-qualitative-research>, <https://www.getbridged.co/resource/thematic-analysis-of-qualitative-research>.

Hoose, N.A.-V. (2020) 'Experimental Research'. Available at: <https://edpsych.pressbooks.sunycreate.cloud/chapter/experimental-research/>.

Howard, E., Khan, A. and Lockyer, C. (2021) *Learning during the pandemic: review of research from England*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-during-the-pandemic/learning-during-the-pandemic-review-of-research-from-england> (Accessed: 30 July 2024).

Howell, K.E. (2013) *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Methodology*. SAGE Publications Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957633>.

Hunt, A. *et al.* (2022) 'Emotionally Based School Refusal: Guidance for Schools and Support Agencies. Updated Draft', *West Sussex EPS*, p. 76.

Institute for Government (2022) *Timeline of UK government coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions*, *Institute for Government*. Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/data-visualisation/timeline-coronavirus-lockdowns> (Accessed: 30 July 2024).

IPSEA (2018) *Home education and 'education otherwise', (IPSEA) Independent Provider of Special Education Advice*. Available at: <https://www.ipsea.org.uk/home-education-and-education-otherwise> (Accessed: 26 July 2024).

Jeffreys, B. (2022) 'Almost two million pupils regularly missing school', *BBC News*, 9 March. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-60659304> (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

John, A. *et al.* (2022) 'Association of school absence and exclusion with recorded neurodevelopmental disorders, mental disorders, or self-harm: a nationwide, retrospective, electronic cohort study of children and young people in Wales, UK', *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 9(1), pp. 23–34. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(21\)00367-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00367-9).

Johnson, A. (2006) 'Department for Education and Skills Departmental Report 2006'. Crown Copyright.

- Johnson, A.M. *et al.* (1941) 'School Phobia*', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 11(4), pp. 702–711. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1941.tb05860.x>.
- Kapcia, S. (2022) *Creating inclusive classrooms: Intersectionality in curriculum and classroom*, *SecEd*. Available at: <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/creating-inclusive-classrooms-intersectionality-in-curriculum-and-classroom/> (Accessed: 25 July 2024).
- Kaplan, H.B. (2005) 'Understanding the Concept of Resilience', in S. Goldstein and R.B. Brooks (eds) *Handbook of Resilience in Children*. Boston, MA: Springer US, pp. 39–47. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/0-306-48572-9_3.
- Kearney, C.A. (2001) *School refusal behaviour in youth: a functional approach to assessment and treatment*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association.
- Kearney, C.A. (2008a) 'An Interdisciplinary Model of School Absenteeism in Youth to Inform Professional Practice and Public Policy', *Educational Psychology Review*, 20(3), pp. 257–282. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-008-9078-3>.
- Kearney, C.A. (2008b) 'School absenteeism and school refusal behavior in youth: a contemporary review', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28(3), pp. 451–471. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2007.07.012>.
- Kearney, C.A., Chapman, G. and Cook, L.C. (2005) 'School Refusal Behaviour in Young Children.', *International Journal of Behavioural Consultation and Therapy*, 1(3), pp. 216–222. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0100746>.
- Keegan, G. and Barclay, S. (2023) 'Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan'. HM Government.
- Kelly, B. (2006) 'Exploring the Usefulness of the Mosen Problem-solving Framework for Applied Practitioners', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 22(1), pp. 1–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360500512312>.
- Kelly, B. and Woolfson, L. (2008) 'Developing a system of complementary frameworks', in B. Kelly, L. Woolfson, and J. Boyle (eds) *Frameworks for Practice in Educational Psychology*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 237–250.
- Kelly, L., Burton, S. and Regan, L. (1994) 'Chapter 2 Researching Women's Lives or Studying Women's Oppression? Reflections on What Constitutes Feminist Research', in Maynard, M. and Purvis, J., *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sheffield/detail.action?docID=1223058> (Accessed: 12 November 2023).
- Kerbey, L. (2023) 'Why I LOVE EOTAS!', *The Neurodivergent Educator*, 2 April. Available at: <https://theneurodivergenteducator.blog/2023/04/02/why-i-love-eotas/> (Accessed: 27 July 2024).

Kidder, L.H. and Fine, M. (1987) 'Qualitative and quantitative methods: When stories converge', *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, 1987(35), pp. 57–75. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.1459>.

Kim, B. (2012) 'Social constructivism', in *Emerging Perspectives on Learning, Teaching and Technology*. The University of Georgia: Createspace Independent Pub.

Klein, M., Sosu, E.M. and Dare, S. (2020) 'Mapping inequalities in school attendance: The relationship between dimensions of socioeconomic status and forms of school absence', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 118, p. 105432. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105432>.

Lahlou, A. (2024) *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Intersectionality, Knowledge and Library Services*. Available at: <https://bartshealth-nhs.libguides.com/c.php?g=693304&p=5114595> (Accessed: 25 July 2024).

Laycock Pedersen, R. and Nikulina, V. (2021) *Understanding researcher positionality using the insider-outsider continuum, Integration and Implementation Insights*. Available at: <https://i2insights.org/2021/12/14/insider-outsider-continuum/>.

Lewis, B. et al. (2022) *Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain - Office for National Statistics*. Office for National Statistics. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/1april2022> (Accessed: 30 July 2024).

Lohman, L. (2021) *Social Constructivism Theory & Examples*, *Study.com*. Available at: <https://study.com/learn/lesson/social-constructivism-theory-examples.html> (Accessed: 20 January 2023).

Longfield, A. (2020) 'The impact of Covid-19 on the disadvantage gap'. The Children's Commissioner's Office.

Lopez-Alvarado, J. (2017) 'Educational Research: Educational Purposes, The Nature of Knowledge and Ethical Issues', *International Journal of Research and Education*, 2, pp. 1–5. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.19239/ijrev2n1p1>.

Lucas, M. et al. (2023) *Cost-of-living crisis: Impact on schools*. National Foundation for Educational Research. Available at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/cost-of-living-crisis-impact-on-schools/> (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Mack, J. (2024) 'Intersubjectivity', *The Child Psychology Service*. Available at: <https://thechildpsychologyservice.co.uk/theory-article/intersubjectivity/> (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Macpherson, A. (2015) *Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry*. Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

Malcolm, H. et al. (2003) *Absence from school: a study of its causes and effects in seven LEAs*. University of Glasgow: DfES Publications.

Marchant, G.J., Paulson, S.E. and Rothlisberg, B.A. (2001) 'Relations of middle school students' perceptions of family and school contexts with academic achievement', *Psychology in the Schools*, 38(6), pp. 505–519. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.1039>.

Mason, H. (2021) *EOTAS: Education Otherwise Than At School. What is it, and can I get it?*, *Special Needs Jungle*. Available at: <https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/eotas-education-otherwise-than-at-school-what-is-it-and-can-i-get-it/> (Accessed: 26 July 2024).

Maxwell, J. (2011) 'Paradigms or toolkits? Philosophical and methodological positions as heuristics for mixed methods research', *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, 24, pp. 27–80.

McCluskey, C., Bynum, T. and Patchin, J. (2004) 'Reducing Chronic Absenteeism: An Assessment of an Early Truancy Initiative', *Crime & Delinquency*, 50, pp. 214–234. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128703258942>.

McCorquodale, R. (2023) *The Cost of Living Crisis and Its Impact on Businesses*, *Funding Circle UK*. Available at: <https://www.fundingcircle.com/uk/resources/news/cost-of-living-crisis/> (Accessed: 22 July 2024).

McEvoy, P. and Richards, D. (2006) 'A critical realist rationale for using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods', *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 11(1), pp. 66–78. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987106060192>.

Medelyan, A. (2019) 'Coding Qualitative Data: How To Guide', *Thematic*, 11 October. Available at: <https://getthematic.com/insights/coding-qualitative-data/>.

Mental Health America (2021) 'How trauma impacts school performance'. Mental Health America.

Milton Keynes Council (2022) 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance Guidance for Schools. Part 1: Information'.

Moon, K. and Blackman, D. (2017) *A guide to ontology, epistemology, and philosophical perspectives for interdisciplinary researchers*, *Integration and Implementation Insights*. Available at: <https://i2insights.org/2017/05/02/philosophy-for-interdisciplinarity/>.

Moore, J. (2005) 'Recognising and questioning the epistemological basis of educational psychology practice', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 21(2), pp. 103–116. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360500128721>.

Moran, K. and Budiu, R. (2021) *How Many Participants for Quantitative Usability Studies: A Summary of Sample-Size Recommendations*, *Nielsen Norman Group*. Available at: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/summary-quant-sample-sizes/> (Accessed: 27 July 2024).

Morgan, A. *et al.* (2018) 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Good practice guidance for schools and support agencies'. West Sussex EPS. Available at: <https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483>.

Morganti, F., Carassa, A. and Riva, G. (2008) *Enacting intersubjectivity: a cognitive and social perspective on the study of interactions*. 1st ed. Amsterdam ; Washington, DC: IOS Press (Emerging communication: studies in new technologies and practices in communication, v. 10).

National Educational Psychological Service (2021) 'The Response to Stress Information for School Staff'. NEPS Ireland.

Newman, B.M. and Newman, P.R. (2020) 'Chapter 11 - Ecological theories', in *Theories of Adolescent Development*. Academic Press, pp. 313–335. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-815450-2.00011-5>.

Newman, D. and Rosenfield, S. (2018) *Building Competence in School Consultation: A Developmental Approach*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315776972>.

NICE (2021) 'Looked-After Children and Young People (update)'. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng205/documents/evidence-review-6>.

Nickerson, C. (2023) 'Interpretivism Paradigm & Research Philosophy', 24 May. Available at: <https://simplysociology.com/interpretivism-paradigm.html> (Accessed: 10 November 2023).

Not Fine in School (2024) *Not Fine in School, Not Fine in School*. Available at: <https://notfineinschool.co.uk/home> (Accessed: 26 July 2024).

Nuttall, C. and Woods, K. (2013) 'Effective intervention for school refusal behaviour', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 29(4), pp. 347–366. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2013.846848>.

Office for National Statistics (2024) *Bullying and online experiences among children in England and Wales*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/bullyingandonlineexperiencesamongchildreninenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023>.

O'Sullivan, R.G. (1991) 'Improving evaluation design and use through the "evaluation crosswalk" method', *National Forum of Applied Education Research Journal*, 4, pp. 43–49.

Patel, S., Dr (2015) 'The research paradigm – methodology, epistemology and ontology', 15 July. Available at: <https://salmapatel.co.uk/academia/the-research-paradigm-methodology-epistemology-and-ontology-explained-in-simple-language/>.

Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic evaluation*. London: SAGE. Available at: <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=USheffield&isbn=9781473924857> (Accessed: 11 March 2023).

Pedrosa, A.L. *et al.* (2020) 'Emotional, Behavioral, and Psychological Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.566212>.

Pell Institute (2023) *Determine Collection Method, Evaluation Toolkit*. Available at: <http://toolkit.pellinstitute.org/evaluation-guide/collect-data/determine-collection-method/> (Accessed: 22 January 2023).

Pellegrini, D.W. (2007) 'School Non-attendance: Definitions, meanings, responses, interventions', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23(1), pp. 63–77. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360601154691>.

Perry, D.B. *et al.* (2024) *The Neurosequential Model in Education - NME, NMnetwork*. Available at: <https://www.neurosequential.com/nme>.

Perry, D.L. and Daniels, M.L. (2016) 'Implementing Trauma—Informed Practices in the School Setting: A Pilot Study', *School Mental Health*, 8(1), pp. 177–188. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-016-9182-3>.

Perry, Dr Bruce (2020) 'Emotional Contagion: Neurosequential Network Stress & Trauma Series', 30 March. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96evhMPcY2Y> (Accessed: 30 October 2023).

Plano Clark, V.L. and Ivankova, N.V. (2016) *Mixed methods research: a guide to the field*. Los Angeles: SAGE (Sage mixed methods research series, 3).

Plowright, D. (2011) *Using mixed methods: frameworks for an integrated methodology*. 1st edition. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Popoola, M., Sivers, S. and Ahad, A. (2024) "School is too much pressure", p. 45. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vdxravNG6MVNzhd_M3b4GMbJjRlvwWCZ/view?usp=share_link&usp=embed_facebook (Accessed: 27 July 2024).

Prime Minister's Office (2024) 'The King's Speech 2024'. Crown Copyright.

Prosser, R. and Birchwood, J. (2024) 'A systematic review identifying factors associated with emotionally based school non-attendance in autistic children and young people', *Educational and Child Psychology*, 41(1), pp. 31–54. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2024.41.1.31>.

Rae, T. (2020) *Understanding & supporting children & young people with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)*. Banbury]: Hinton House Publishers Ltd (Hinton House practical therapeutic resources).

Rampin, R., Rampin, V. and DeMott, S. (2021) *Taguette: Open-source qualitative research tool*. Available at: <https://app.taguette.org/>.

Read Daniels, E. (2022) *The Regulated Classroom*. Third. United States: Here This Now, LLC. Available at: <https://regulatedclassroom.com/>.

Research Articles (2019) 'The Pragmatic Paradigm', *The pragmatic paradigm*, 15 May. Available at: <http://researcharticles.com/index.php/pragmatic-paradigm/> (Accessed: 12 March 2023).

Resnick, M. (2000) 'Protective Factors, Resilience, and health youth development', *Adolescent Medicine, Hanley and Belfus Inc.*, 11(1).

Rivers, B. (2010) *Truancy: Causes, Effects, and Solutions*. 107. St. John Fisher University.

Roberts, J. (2023) *School absence: 1 in 4 pupils persistently absent last spring*, *Tes Magazine*. Available at: <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/school-absence-1-4-pupils-persistently-absent-last-spring-attendance> (Accessed: 18 March 2023).

Roberts, N. and Danechi, S. (2022) 'Coronavirus and schools'. House of Commons.

Robson, C. (2011) *Real World Research*. Third. Cornwall: Wiley.

Roffey, S. (2014) *Pushed out or pulled out? Why kids don't want to go to school*, *The Conversation*. Available at: <http://theconversation.com/pushed-out-or-pulled-out-why-kids-dont-want-to-go-to-school-23401> (Accessed: 9 December 2022).

Roffey, S. (2017) *Young people's wellbeing in schools: student voice and agency*, pp. 1–11. Available at: <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws%3A57432/> (Accessed: 16 October 2022).

Russo, A. (2023) *Recording vs. Taking Notes. Which One to Choose?* Available at: <https://gotranscript.com/blog/recording-vs-taking-notes-which-one-to-choose> (Accessed: 27 July 2024).

Ryan, G. (2018) 'Introduction to positivism, interpretivism and critical theory', *Nurse Researcher*, 25(4), pp. 14–20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.2018.e1466>.

Schofield, G. and Beek, M. (2005) 'Providing a secure base: parenting children in long-term foster family care', *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(1), pp. 3–25. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616730500049019>.

Schools Week Reporter (2022) *Schools bill: The 15 new laws proposed by the DfE*, *Schools Week*. Available at: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-bill-the-15-new-laws-proposed/> (Accessed: 4 December 2022).

Schoonenboom, J. (2022) 'Chapter 4: Developing the meta-inference in mixed methods research through successive integration of claims', in J. Hitchcock and A. Onwuegbuzie (eds) *The Routledge Handbook for Advancing Integration in Mixed Methods Research*. London ; New York: Routledge, pp. 55–70. Available at: www.taylorfrancis.com.

SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years (2015) GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25> (Accessed: 17 February 2022).

Shafan-Azhar, Z. and Bottomley, B. (2024a) *Not in school: The mental health barriers to school attendance*. CYPMHC. Available at: <https://cypmhc.org.uk/publications/not-in-school/> (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Shafan-Azhar, Z. and Bottomley, B. (2024b) 'Not in School: The mental health barriers to school attendance Parliamentary Briefing'. CYPMHC. Available at: <https://cypmhc.org.uk/publications/not-in-school/>.

Shah, S.A., Robertson, C. and Sheikh, A. (2024) 'Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on NHS England waiting times for elective hospital care: a modelling study', *The Lancet*, 403(10423), pp. 241–243. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)02744-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)02744-7).

Shennan, G. (2019) *Solution-focused practice: effective communication to facilitate change*. Second edition. London: Macmillan International Higher Education: Red Globe Press. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sheffield/detail.action?docID=6234830> (Accessed: 30 October 2023).

Simms, D. (2022) *What the evidence tells us about good-quality Alternative Provision*, *The Centre for Social Justice*. Available at: <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/newsroom/what-the-evidence-tells-us-about-good-quality-alternative-provision> (Accessed: 26 July 2024).

Smith, M. (2021) "What is pedagogy?", *The encyclopaedia of pedagogy and informal education*.

de Souza, R. (2022) 'Where are England's Children? Interim findings from the Children's Commissioner's Attendance Audit'. Children's Commissioner. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/where-are-englands-children-interim-findings-from-the-childrens-commissioners-attendance-audit/> (Accessed: 20 November 2022).

Stirling Educational Psychology Service (2021) *Neurosequential Model in Education*. Available at: <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/stirlingeps/neurosequential-model-in-education/>.

Stobie, I., Boyle, J. and Woolfson, L. (2005) 'Solution-Focused Approaches in the Practice of UK Educational Psychologists: A Study of the Nature of Their Application and Evidence of Their Effectiveness', *School Psychology International*, 26(1), pp. 5–28. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034305050890>.

Stutchbury, K. (2022) 'Critical realism: an explanatory framework for small-scale qualitative studies or an "unhelpful edifice"?' , *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 45(2), pp. 113–128. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2021.1966623>.

Sud, D. (2020) 'Thematic analysis part 3: six phases of reflexive thematic analysis', *Students 4 Best Evidence*, March. Available at: <https://s4be.cochrane.org/blog/2020/03/31/thematic-analysis-part-3-six-phases-of-reflexive-thematic-analysis/>.

Syahril, S. and Hadiyanto, H. (2018) 'Improving School Climate for Better Quality Educational Management', *Journal of Educational and Learning Studies*, 1, pp. 16–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.32698/0182>.

Tashakkori, A. and Teddlie, C. (1998) *Mixed methodology: combining qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California; London: Sage (Applied social research methods series; v.46).

van Teijlingen, E. and Hundley, V. (2001) 'The Importance of Pilot Studies', *Social Research Update*, (35), pp. 1–4.

Thambirajah, M.S., Grandison, K.J. and De-Hayes, L. (2008) *Understanding school refusal: A handbook for professionals in education, health, and social care*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The Centre for Social Justice (2023) 'Lost and Not Found'. The Centre for Social Justice.

The Education Committee (2023) *Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils - Education Committee*. House of Commons, p. 79. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmeduc/970/report.html> (Accessed: 29 October 2023).

Thomas, G. (2013) *How to do your research project: A guide for students in education and applied social sciences*. Second edition. Los Angeles, London: SAGE, SAGE Publications.

Thomas R Black (2005) *Doing Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences: An Integrated Approach to Research Design, Measurement and Statistics*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Thompson, S. (2017) *Importance of Routine & Structure for Special Needs Children, How To Adult*. Available at: <https://howtoadult.com/importance-routine-structure-special-needs-children-22715.html> (Accessed: 29 October 2023).

Throne, R. (2012) 'Chapter 4 - Positionality', in *Practitioner Research in Doctoral Education*. Kendall Hunt, pp. 55–77.

Tobias, A. (2019) 'A grounded theory study of family coach intervention with persistent school non-attenders', *Educational psychology in practice*, 35(1), pp. 17–33. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2018.1518215>.

Trepper, T.S. *et al.* (2006) 'Steve De Shazer and the Future of Solution-Focused Therapy', *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 32(2), pp. 133–139. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2006.tb01595.x>.

Wadlow, C. (2022) 'School Attendance Difficulties and School-related Trauma – Sunshine Support', August. Available at: <https://sunshine-support.org/school-attendance-difficulties-and-school-related-trauma/> (Accessed: 29 October 2023).

Wagner, P. (2008) 'Consultation as a Framework for Practice', *Frameworks for Practice in Educational Psychology*. Edited by Kelly *et al.*, pp. 194–216.

Wallace, C. (2020) 'An overview of Trauma-Informed Approaches'. Cardiff University.

Want, H. and Gulliford, A. (2024) 'Barriers to school attendance as experienced by young people and their parents: A Narrative Oriented Inquiry', *Educational and Child Psychology*, 41(1), pp. 9–30. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2024.41.1.9>.

Waring, M. and Evans, C. (2014) *Understanding pedagogy: Developing a critical approach to teaching and learning*. Routledge, an imprint of Taylor and Francis.

'Warnock Report' (1978). Available at: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/warnock/warnock1978.html> (Accessed: 24 April 2022).

Watkins, J. and Cooperrider, D. (2000) 'Appreciative Inquiry: A Transformative Paradigm', *OD Practitioner*, 32.

West Sussex EPS (2020) 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and Autism'. West Sussex County Council.

'Why Kids Miss School' (2022) *Panorama*. UK: BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001c9zw> (Accessed: 22 July 2024).

Willig, C. (2008) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: adventures in theory and method*. 2nd Edition. McGraw-Hill.

Willig, C. and Stainton Rogers, W. (2017) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526405555>.

Wimmer, M. (2010) 'School Refusal: Information for Educators'. National Association of School Psychologists.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Research timeline

Timeline		Phase	Procedure	Outcome
Sept 23 – Jan 24	1	Quantitative Data Collection	Questionnaire to be emailed out to schools	Categorical Data
February 24		Quantitative Data Analysis	Data analysis Immediate analysis – spreadsheet	Descriptive statistics - Bar charts/pie charts
February 24		Case Selection and phase 2 protocol development	Selecting participants Development of focus group/interview questions	Follow-up of cases
March 24	2	Qualitative Data Collection	Focus groups using appreciative inquiry. Use of a Dictaphone to record conversations	Transcripts and notes. List of provocative propositions
March/April 24		Qualitative Data Analysis	Explore the narrative from the focus group	Logically concluding the outcomes.
April 24		Integration of the Quantitative and Qualitative Data results	Interpretation and explanation of results Reflection of Appreciative Inquiry	Discussion Implications Findings Future research

Appendix 2: Pilot study information sheet

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Pilot Study Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in the pilot study for a piece of research being conducted as part of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology course. Please take the time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether you would like to take part. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if anything needs clarification or if you want more information. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This research aims to provide insight into the current extent of school non-attendance related to EBSA in the Local Authority (LA) and investigate what approaches or pathways have successfully been used to support CYP facing EBSA-related difficulties. I hope this research can provide further understanding for the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) on what practice is currently being used in your schools. Overall, I want to celebrate the successful interventions that schools implement to support CYP in managing EBSA-related school non-attendance, promoting change, and providing the means for schools to share their practice.

Why has your school been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen because I would like you to proofread the questionnaire in preparation for sending this out to school staff. Your feedback will help ensure that the questions are appropriate and fit to aid the collection of the data for the research aims to be reached.

Does your school have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. You can do this by contacting me at any point. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.

If you decide that you would like to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to participate, you will also be given this information sheet to keep and withdraw at any time by the 1st of July 2023, without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason to withdraw.

If you wish to withdraw from the pilot study, please contact me, the researcher (see email below). Please note that participating in this research will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University.

What will happen to you if you decide to take part?

Your name and workplace will not be used, and you will be anonymised to protect your identity.

Will I be paid for this pilot study?

No, there is no money being offered for this research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no foreseeable disadvantages or risks in participating in this pilot study however, if any problems arise during the research, such as not having adequate time to take part due to your own work commitments, then these should be brought to my attention immediately.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those participating in the project, this project will help your school (and perhaps other schools) better understand supporting EBSA cases. As a result, it may inform other schools, educational psychologists (EPs) and Local Authorities (LAs) of interventions that can support pupils facing similar difficulties.

Will the school's identity in this project be kept confidential?

Participants will always have complete confidentiality. All the information I collect about you during the research will be strictly confidential. Participants will not be identified in any reports or publications. All data will be anonymised.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to the General Data Protection Regulation (applicable in the UK and EU from 25 May 2018), I am required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)).

What will happen to the results of the pilot study?

I will use your feedback to inform any amendments needed before sending the questionnaire to the schools.

I will write a thesis to complete my university coursework that a university tutor will mark. I will present and discuss the project findings within the thesis, which will be available for school staff and Educational Psychology Services once published.

Due to the nature of this research, other researchers may find the data collected useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

The documents will be stored electronically in the University Google Drive and deleted one year after publication.

Written documents and any other physical materials will be locked in a secure place.

Who is the Data Controller?

The University will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via The University's School of Education ethics review procedure, administered by The School of Education Ethics Committee.

What if something goes wrong, and you wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If there is concern about any aspect of this research project, it should be addressed by contacting the researcher (see below). You can also contact the university lead. *Information removed.*

Should you feel your complaint has not been handled satisfactorily, contact the University's Head of the Education Department: *Details removed.*

If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: *Details removed.*

Contact for further information:

Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions. If you have further queries or need any further information, the contact details are:

Researcher: Hannah Lees-Smith

Details removed.

Researcher supervisor: *Details removed.*

Finally...

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and your signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Appendix 3: Pilot study consent form

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Ye s	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I agree that I will take part in the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have read and understood the project information sheet, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part in the project will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proofreading the questionnaire on EBSA cases within the school. • Giving feedback on questions to the researcher 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that choosing to participate as a volunteer in this pilot study does not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent without giving a reason before 29th February 2024. There will be no adverse consequences if I or they choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How will my information be used during and after the project?		
I understand that personal details such as my name will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the research findings will be shared with other researchers, psychologists, local authority employees and University staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that any data collected may be published in an anonymous form in academic books or journals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. My name or workplace will not be used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the data collected will be stored on the University's Secure Network, and the audio files will be destroyed a year after publication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		

I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--	--------------------------	--------------------------

	Signature	Date
Name of participant [printed]		

Name of Researcher [printed]	Signature	Date
------------------------------	-----------	------

When completed:
1 copy for the participant
1 copy for the researcher

Appendix 4: Phase one questionnaire

EBSA Questionnaire - Phase 1		
Name:		
Email:		
School Name:		
School Address:		
Contact Number:		
<p>Please record your answers in the blank spaces directly underneath the question box.</p> <p>For convenience, you can use a word processor to complete this questionnaire and email it back with your signed consent form to xx.</p>		
<p><i>Q1. What do you feel is the current impact of Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) on school non-attendance? Please highlight your answer below.</i></p>		
Low	Moderate	High
<p><i>Could you provide your current persistent non-attendance figure for the past academic year?</i></p>		
<p><i>Q2. Have you seen an increase in EBSA cases since the covid-19 Pandemic impacted school closures? Please highlight your answer below.</i></p>		
Yes	No	
<p><i>Q3. What were the figures of persistent absence during 2018-2019?</i></p>		
<p><i>Q4. What interventions do you currently implement to support Children and Young People (CYP) facing EBSA-related difficulties in accessing learning?</i></p> <p><i>For example, you may use an EBSA Pathway of assessment in your school or setting, in which you tend to use the same assessment resources to explore a CYP's needs or a certain method to create an action plan.</i></p>		
<p><i>Q5. How successful do you feel these interventions have been over the past year? Please highlight your answer below.</i></p>		
Very Limited Success	Limited Success	High Success

Please also expand; for example, what has helped and what has hindered.

Q6. What external agencies do you work alongside when supporting EBSA cases?

Q7. Have you referred an EBSA case to an Educational Psychologist previously?

Please highlight your answer below.

Never	Occasionally	Often	Always
--------------	---------------------	--------------	---------------

Q8. Are you aware of the LA's EBSA pathway offer?

Please highlight your answer below.

Yes	No
------------	-----------

If you want further information on LA's EBSA pathway offer, please email *details removed*

Q9. Would you be interested in participating in Phase 2 of this research project, which involves attending a focus group to explore further and discover how successful your interventions have been implemented when supporting EBSA cases in your school with other school members? It is anticipated that the focus group will take under an hour of your time.

Please highlight your answer below.

(Please see the information sheet and consent form for Phase 2)

Yes	No
------------	-----------

Appendix 5: DfE non-attendance codes

CODE	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
/	Present (AM)	Present
\	Present (PM)	Present
B	Educated off-site (NOT Dual registration)	Approved Education Activity
C	Other Authorised Circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/description)	Authorised absence
E	Excluded (no alternative provision made)	Authorised absence
G	Family holiday (NOT agreed <u>or</u> days in excess of agreement)	Unauthorised absence
H	Family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
I	Illness (NOT medical or dental etc. appointments)	Authorised absence
J	Interview	Approved Education Activity
L	Late (before registers closed)	Present
M	Medical/Dental appointments	Authorised absence
N	No reason yet provided for absence	Unauthorised absence
O	Unauthorised absence (not covered by any other code/description)	Unauthorised absence
P	Approved sporting activity	Approved Education Activity
R	Religious observance	Authorised absence
S	Study leave	Authorised absence
T	Traveller absence	Authorised absence
U	Late (after registers closed)	Unauthorised absence
V	Educational visit or trip	Approved Education Activity
W	Work experience	Approved Education Activity
D	Dual registration (i.e. pupil attending other establishments)	Not counted in possible attendance
X	Untimetabled sessions for non-compulsory school-age pupils	Not counted in possible attendance
Y	Enforced and partial enforced closure	Not counted in possible attendance
Z	Pupil is not yet on roll	Not counted in possible attendance
#	School closed to pupils	Not counted in possible attendance

Appendix 6: Focus group script

Thank you for coming to talk about the EBSA cases your school has been involved with.

The discussion will be recorded and saved on the University's secure network and will not be published. As a reminder, I am recording the session for transcript purposes only.

Within the online request for signing the Phase 2 consent form, there was included at the beginning the information sheet for you which was also attached to the Phase One email.

Here are a few ground rules:

I will remind participants that:

- *I am interested in their responses and experiences*
- *They should speak one at a time (for the audio recorder and note taker)*
- *I would like to hear everyone's views*
- *They should listen to each other*
- *They should respect each other's views and diversity*
- *They should share openly and honestly their views and experiences*
- *Notify participants that I may ask them to move on to a question or re-visit a question according to the time available*
- *Remind participants that any views or opinions expressed during the focus group will be confidential and anonymised. Participants must respect this and not repeat opinions or experiences outside the focus group.*
- *Remind participants that they can ask to stop the audio being recorded at any time*

Questions:

- *Please could you talk about a highpoint experience or a time when you felt most proud of the work you or your colleague have done concerning EBSA?*
- *How would you apply this in your setting?*

Round Up

- *What learning did you take from this*
- *What would you feel contributed towards the success?*
- *What are the takeaways? – themes have been highlighted.*

Appendix 7: Phase one information sheet

School Staff Information Sheet - Phase 1

You are invited to take part in a piece of research being conducted as part of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology course. Please take the time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether you would like to take part. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please ask me if anything is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This research aims to provide insight into the current extent of school non-attendance related to EBSA in the Local Authority (LA) and investigate what approaches or pathways have been used to support Children and Young People (CYP) who are facing EBSA-related difficulties successfully. I hope this research can provide further understanding for the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) on what practice is currently being used in schools and share the use of interventions with other schools by publishing the research findings once the thesis is completed. Overall, I want to celebrate the successful interventions that schools implement to support CYP in managing EBSA-related school non-attendance, promoting change, and providing the means for schools to share their practice.

Why has your school been chosen to take part?

The purpose of this study is to address the topic of school non-attendance related to factors such as anxiety, also known by some Local Authorities as Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

Schools that take part in this study can help contribute towards collecting data and information on the EBSA cases they may be dealing with and share experiences of their current practice and interventions that have been implemented.

Does your school have to take part?

Your school's participation is entirely voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. You can do this by contacting me at any point. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.

If you decide that you would like to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you will also be given this information sheet to keep and withdraw at any time by the 29th of February 2024, without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason to withdraw. By 1st March 2024, the data collected will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study.

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the researcher (see email below). Please note that choosing to participate in this research will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University.

You will be given a copy of the phase two information sheet along with your signed consent form to keep.

What will happen to your staff if they take part?

You have been chosen because I would like to understand your school's current information on how many EBSA cases you may have, whether this figure has increased since the Covid-19 Pandemic, and what pathways or approaches you are implementing to support these children and young people (CYP). I would also like to explore which external agencies you may involve when supporting EBSA cases and how you measure the success of your interventions.

There is a questionnaire that can be completed electronically and emailed back to the researcher. There is an option at the end of the document for staff to show their interest in taking part in the second phase of this research. All names of schools and staff members participating in this research will be anonymised to protect their identity.

Will I be paid for this research?

No, there is no money being offered for this research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no foreseeable disadvantages or risks in taking part in this research. However, if any problems arise during the research, such as not having adequate time to complete the questionnaire due to your work commitments, these should be brought to my attention immediately.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, this project will help Educational Psychologists and other professionals to gain a better understanding of how other schools are supporting EBSA cases and what approaches have been successful. As a result, it may inform other schools, educational psychologists and Local Authorities of interventions that can be used to support pupils who might be facing similar difficulties.

Will the school's identity in this project be kept confidential?

Participants will always have complete confidentiality. All the information I collect about your school during the research will be strictly confidential. Participants will not be identified in any reports or publications. All data will be anonymised.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to the General Data Protection Regulation (applicable in the UK and EU from 25 May 2018), I am required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)).

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Questionnaires will be used only for data analysis during the research. All data will be anonymised so that it will not be possible to identify your school, and the data will be destroyed one year after the work has been published.

I will write a thesis to complete my university coursework that a university tutor will mark. I will present and discuss the project findings within the thesis, which will be available for school staff and Educational Psychology Services once published.

Due to the nature of this research, other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

The completed questionnaires will be stored electronically in the University Google Drive and will be deleted one year after publication.

Written documents and any other physical materials will be locked in a secure place.

Who is the Data Controller?

The University will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via The University's School of Education ethics review procedure, as administered by The School of Education Ethics Committee.

What if something goes wrong, and you wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If there is concern about any aspect of this research project, it should be addressed by contacting the researcher (see below). You can also contact the university leads, *Details removed*

Should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the University's Head of the Education Department: *Details removed*

If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice.

Contact for further information:

Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions. If you have further queries or need any further information, the contact details are:

Researcher: *Details removed*

Researcher supervisor: *Details removed*

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Appendix 8: Questionnaire consent form - phase one

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Ye s	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I agree that the school will take part in the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have read and understood the project information sheet, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part in the project will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing a questionnaire on EBSA data, strategies and interventions used within the school. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research does not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent without giving a reason before 17 th November 2023. There will be no adverse consequences if I or they choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How will my information be used during and after the project?		
I understand that personal details such as my name or the school's name will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand the research findings will be shared with other researchers, psychologists, local authority employees and University staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that any data collected may be published anonymously in academic books or journals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. My name or the school's name will not be used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the data collected will be stored on the University's Secure Network, and the audio files will be destroyed one year after publication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		

I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--	--------------------------	--------------------------

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher *Details removed.*

Signature *Details removed.*

Date *Details removed.*

Project contact details for further information:
You can contact the researcher if you have any questions about this research.

Researcher:

Name: *Details removed*
 Email: *Details removed*

Research Supervisor:

Name: *Details removed*
 Email: *Details removed*

If, in the event of a complaint, you wish to contact a person outside the project:
 Name: *Details removed*

When completed:
One copy for the participant
One copy for the researcher

Appendix 9: Focus group information sheet – phase two

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

School Staff Information Sheet - Phase 2 – Focus Group

You are invited to take part in the second phase of this piece of research being conducted as part of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology course. Please take the time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether you would like to take part. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please ask me if anything needs to be clarified or if you want more information. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This research aims to provide insight into the current extent of school non-attendance related to EBSA in the Local Authority (LA) and investigate what approaches or pathways have been used to successfully support CYP who are facing EBSA-related difficulties. I hope this research can provide further understanding for the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) on what practice is currently being used in secondary schools and share the use of interventions with other schools by publishing the research findings once the thesis is completed. Overall, I want to celebrate the successful interventions that schools implement to support CYP in managing EBSA-related school non-attendance, promoting change, and providing the means for schools to share their practice.

Why have you been chosen to take part?

During the first phase of the research, when you completed the questionnaire, you indicated that you would be happy to participate in the focus group. You have been chosen because I would like to understand further what you feel is working well with the pathways and approaches that are implemented in your school when supporting EBSA-related cases and exploring their success.

Do you have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. You can do this by contacting me at any point. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.

If you decide that you would like to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you will also be given this information sheet to keep and withdraw at any time by the 16th of February 2024 without any negative consequences. On February 23rd, 2024, the data collected will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study. You do not have to give a reason to withdraw.

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the researchers (see emails below). Please note that choosing to participate in this research will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University.

You can also request that the audio recording of the Focus Group can be stopped at any point, and if the meeting is held online, you can also ask for the audio to be stopped whilst using Google Meet.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

What will happen if you wish to take part?

There will be a focus group held with at least three to five members of staff from different secondary schools lasting for a minimum of about 45 minutes using an appreciative inquiry approach to discover the strengths of your interventions used with EBSA cases. The discussion will centre on how EBSA cases have been supported and what the success of these interventions looks like for schools to celebrate the strengths of these approaches. I aim to conduct the focus groups face-to-face within a school which all participants can access to limit travel time.

The focus group will be audio-recorded using a Dictaphone. If the meeting takes place online, then recording of the Google Meet will be recorded using the online platform software. The recordings will be stored using the University's secure network facility and only used as a memory prompt for the researcher when analysing the results.

Will I be paid for this research?

No, there is no money being offered for this research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no foreseeable disadvantages or risks in taking part in this research. However, if any problems arise during the research, such as not having adequate time to take part due to your work commitments, these should be brought to my attention immediately.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Using an appreciative inquiry approach aims to celebrate the success of what schools do and provide an opportunity to share good practices. It is hoped that this project will help your school (and perhaps other schools) to understand better how other schools support EBSA cases and what approaches have been successful. As a result, it may inform other schools, educational psychologists (EPs) and Local Authorities (LAs) of interventions that can support pupils facing similar difficulties.

Will the school's identity in this project be kept confidential?

Participants will always have complete confidentiality. All the information I collect about your school during the research will be strictly confidential. Participants will not be identified in any reports or publications. All data will be anonymised.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to the General Data Protection Regulation (applicable in the UK and EU from 25 May 2018), I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e))

What will happen to the results of the research project?

I will write a thesis to complete my university coursework that a university tutor will mark. I will present and discuss the project findings within the thesis, which will be available for school staff and Educational Psychology Services once published.

Due to the nature of this research, other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

The transcribed documents and audio recordings will be stored electronically in the University Google Drive.

Written documents and any other physical materials will be locked in a secure place.

All data will be anonymised so that it will not be possible to identify your school, and the data will be destroyed one year after the work has been published.

Who is the Data Controller?

The University will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via The University's School of Education ethics review procedure, as administered by The School of Education Ethics Committee.

What if something goes wrong, and wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If there is concern about any aspect of this research project, it should be addressed by contacting the researcher (see below). You can also contact the university leads - *Details removed*.

Should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact - *Details removed*

If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice:

Contact for further information:

Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions. If you have further queries or need any further information, the contact details are:

Researcher: *Details removed*

Researcher supervisor: *Details removed*

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Appendix 10: Focus group online google consent form – phase two

Phase Two Consent Form - Focus Group

Consent Form

Please read the information sheet and complete the following form for the Focus Group.

Thank you

1.

Email

* Indicates a required question

2.

I agree that I will take part in the research.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

3.

I have read and understood the project information sheet, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

4.

I will participate in one focus group with other staff members who support EBSA cases. These will last at least 45 minutes. Using an approach of appreciative inquiry, which focuses on celebrating success and looks at what has worked well, the discussion will be centred on exploring further staff experiences of implementing EBSA strategies and how these approaches or pathways have been implemented.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

5.

I understand that the focus group will be audio-recorded if carried out face to face or recorded using Google Meet Software or Microsoft Teams if carried out online. I agree that the focus group should be recorded and used for transcript purposes in the research.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

6.

I understand that participating as a volunteer in this research does not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University.

Mark only one oval.

Yes
No

7.

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent without giving a reason before Friday 22nd February. There will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.

Mark only one oval.

Yes
No

8.

I understand that personal details such as my name or the school's name will not be revealed to people outside the project.

Mark only one oval.

Yes
No

9.

I understand the research findings will be shared with other researchers, psychologists, local authority employees and University staff.

Mark only one oval.

Yes
No

10.

I agree that any data collected may be published anonymously in academic books or journals.

Mark only one oval.

Yes
No

11.

I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. Your name will not be used.

Mark only one oval.

Yes
No

12.

I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

Mark only one oval.

Yes
No

13.

I understand that the data collected will be stored on the University's Secure Network, and the recordings will be destroyed by 02.08.2024

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

14.

Name of Participant

15.

Name of School

16.

Electronic Signature

17.

Date of Signature

Appendix 11: Interview information sheet - phase three

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Information Sheet - Phase 2 – Interview

You are invited to take part in the second phase of this piece of research being conducted as part of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology course. Please take the time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether you would like to take part. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please ask me if anything needs to be clarified or if you want more information. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This research aims to provide insight into the current extent of school non-attendance related to EBSA in the Local Authority (LA) and investigate what approaches or pathways have been used to successfully support CYP who are facing EBSA-related difficulties. I hope this research can provide further understanding for the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) on what practice is currently being used in secondary schools and share the use of interventions with other schools by publishing the research findings once the thesis is completed. Overall, I want to celebrate the successful interventions that schools implement to support CYP in managing EBSA-related school non-attendance, promoting change, and providing the means for schools to share their practice.

Why have you been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen because I would like to understand further how EBSA is impacting attendance in the Local Authority and what interventions will be taking place to support CYP in the same authority.

Do you have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. You can do this by contacting me at any point. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.

If you decide that you would like to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you will also be given this information sheet to keep and withdraw at any time by the 14th of March 2024 without any negative consequences. On March 17, 2024, the data collected will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study. You do not have to give a reason to withdraw.

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the researchers (see emails below). Please note that choosing to participate in this research will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

What will happen if you wish to take part?

There will be an interview held with you lasting for a minimum of about 45 minutes. The discussion will centre on how many EBSA cases schools may be facing and how this may be impacting the data along with covering the new EBSA Pathway.

The interview will not be recorded due to the sensitivity of the discussion and respecting GDPR regarding data. The researcher will take handwritten notes only which will be used to inform the data analysis.

Will I be paid for this research?

No, there is no money being offered for this research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no foreseeable disadvantages or risks in taking part in this research. However, if any problems arise during the research, such as not having adequate time to take part due to your work commitments, these should be brought to my attention immediately.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that this project will help schools to understand better how to support EBSA cases and what approaches have been successful. As a result, it may inform other schools, educational psychologists (EPs) and Local Authorities (LAs) of interventions that can support pupils facing similar difficulties.

Will the school's identity in this project be kept confidential?

Participants will always have complete confidentiality. All the information I collect during the research will be strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or publications. All data will be anonymised.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to the General Data Protection Regulation (applicable in the UK and EU from 25 May 2018), I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e))

What will happen to the results of the research project?

I will write a thesis to complete my university coursework that a university tutor will mark. I will present and discuss the project findings within the thesis, which will be available for school staff and Educational Psychology Services once published.

Due to the nature of this research, other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

The transcribed documents will be stored electronically in the University of Google Drive.

Written documents and any other physical materials will be locked in a secure place.

All data will be anonymised so that it will not be possible to identify your school, and the data will be destroyed one year after the work has been published.

Who is the Data Controller?

The University will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via The University's School of Education ethics review procedure, as administered by The School of Education Ethics Committee.

What if something goes wrong, and wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If there is concern about any aspect of this research project, it should be addressed by contacting the researcher (see below). You can also contact the university leads - *Details removed.*

Should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact - *Details removed.*

If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice:

Contact for further information:

Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions. If you have further queries or need any further information, the contact details are:

Researcher: *Details removed.*

Researcher supervisor: *Details removed.*

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Appendix 12: Online google consent form – interview – phase three

Phase Two Consent Form - Interview

Consent Form

Please read the information sheet and complete the following form for the Interview.

Thank you

1.

Email

* Indicates a required question

2.

I agree that I will take part in the research.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

3.

I have read and understood the project information sheet, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

4.

I will participate in one interview. This will last at least 45 minutes. The discussion will be centred on exploring the new EBSA Pathway and the Local Authority absence data.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

5.

I understand that the interview will not be recorded due to the sensitivity of the data discussed and that the researcher will take handwritten notes only.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

6.

I understand that participating as a volunteer in this research does not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

7.

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent without giving a reason before 14.03.24. There will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

8.

I understand that personal details such as my name or the Local Authorities' name will not be revealed to people outside the project.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

9.

I understand the research findings will be shared with other researchers, psychologists, local authority employees and University staff.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

10.

I agree that any data collected may be published anonymously in academic books or journals.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

11.

I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. Your name will not be used.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

12.

I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

13.

I understand that the data collected, and handwritten notes will be typed up and stored on the University's Secure Network. All data will be destroyed after 12 months after the research is completed.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

14.

Name of Participant

15.

Electronic Signature

16.

Date of Signature

Appendix 13: Information sheet follow-up 'Dream' interview - Phase four

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

You are invited to take part in the second phase of this piece of research being conducted as part of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology course. Please take the time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether you would like to take part. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please ask me if anything needs to be clarified or if you want more information. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This research aims to provide insight into the current extent of school non-attendance related to EBSA in the Local Authority (LA) and investigate what approaches or pathways have been used to successfully support CYP who are facing EBSA-related difficulties. I hope this research can provide further understanding for the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) on what practice is currently being used in secondary schools and share the use of interventions with other schools by publishing the research findings once the thesis is completed. Overall, I want to celebrate the successful interventions that schools implement to support CYP in managing EBSA-related school non-attendance, promoting change, and providing the means for schools to share their practice.

Why have you been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen because I would like to understand further how EBSA is impacting attendance in the Local Authority and what interventions will be taking place to support CYP in the same authority.

Do you have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. You can do this by contacting me at any point. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.

If you decide that you would like to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you will also be given this information sheet to keep and withdraw at any time by the 20th of March 2024 without any negative consequences. On March 22nd, 2024, the data collected will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study. You do not have to give a reason to withdraw.

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the researchers (see emails below). Please note that choosing to participate in this research will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

What will happen if you wish to take part?

There will be an interview held with you lasting for a minimum of about 20 minutes. The discussion will centre on the data analysis findings and the 'Dream' stage of the appreciative inquiry as a follow-up from the focus group.

The interview will be recorded for transcript purposes only to inform the data analysis using the online meeting platform. The recording will be stored electronically in the University Google Drive.

Will I be paid for this research?

No, there is no money being offered for this research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no foreseeable disadvantages or risks in taking part in this research. However, if any problems arise during the research, such as not having adequate time to take part due to your work commitments, these should be brought to my attention immediately.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that this project will help schools to understand better how to support EBSA cases and what approaches have been successful. As a result, it may inform other schools, educational psychologists (EPs) and Local Authorities (LAs) of interventions that can support pupils facing similar difficulties.

Will the school's identity in this project be kept confidential?

Participants will always have complete confidentiality. All the information I collect during the research will be strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or publications. All data will be anonymised.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to the General Data Protection Regulation (applicable in the UK and EU from 25 May 2018), I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e))

What will happen to the results of the research project?

I will write a thesis to complete my university coursework that a university tutor will mark. I will present and discuss the project findings within the thesis, which will be available for school staff and Educational Psychology Services once published.

Due to the nature of this research, other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

The transcribed documents will be stored electronically in the University Google Drive.

Written documents and any other physical materials will be locked in a secure place.

All data will be anonymised so that it will not be possible to identify your school, and the data will be destroyed one year after the work has been published.

Who is the Data Controller?

The University will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via The University's School of Education ethics review procedure, as administered by The School of Education Ethics Committee.

What if something goes wrong, and wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If there is concern about any aspect of this research project, it should be addressed by contacting the researcher (see below). You can also contact the university leads - *Details removed*.

Should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact *Details removed*.

If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice:

Contact for further information:

Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions. If you have further queries or need any further information, the contact details are:

Researcher: *Details removed*.

Researcher supervisor: *Details removed*.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Appendix 14: Online google consent form – follow-up interview ‘Dream’ – phase four

Phase Two Consent Form - Follow-up Interview

Consent Form

Please read the information sheet and complete the following form for the Interview.

Thank you

1.

Email

* Indicates a required question

2.

I agree that I will take part in the research.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

3.

I have read and understood the project information sheet, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

4.

I will participate in one interview. This will last at least 20 minutes. The discussion will be centred on exploring the executive findings from the research and carrying out the second appreciative inquiry stage - 'Dream'.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

5.

I understand that the interview will be recorded. I agree that the interview should be recorded and used for transcript purposes in the research.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

6.

I understand that participating as a volunteer in this research does not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

7.

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent without giving a reason before 20.03.24. There will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

8.

I understand that personal details such as my name or the school's name will not be revealed to people outside the project.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

9.

I understand the research findings will be shared with other researchers, psychologists, local authority employees and University staff.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

10.

I agree that any data collected may be published anonymously in academic books or journals.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

11.

I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. My name or the school's name will not be used.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

12.

I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

13.

I understand that the data collected will be stored on the University's Secure Network, and the recordings will be destroyed by 02.08.2024.

Mark only one oval.

Yes
No

14.
Name of Participant

15.
Electronic Signature

16.
Date of Signature

Appendix 15: Transcript excerpt

Transcript pages 2-4 with highlights and code references.

[Participant Two]

"Yeah, I don't mind. Well, *lots of different incidences* [Outcome of Focus Group, Positive feelings about intervention]. We've had a couple of year 8 girls that have struggled to a point where one girl still *has to be brought into school with mom* [Provision/Interventions], but that helps. So, we go with that, and she *goes home 5 minutes earlier to avoid the crowds* [Provision/Interventions]. We were just. We've built it up over time, and we've got our *hub area* [Provision/Interventions] which seems to work really well. For our young people to settle them back into being in school full time and then we *slowly integrate the lessons* [Provision/Interventions] which seems to work really well. *One girl today she's made some huge successes* [Push Factors, Opinions of staff, Behaviours of CYP seen in school, Outcome of Focus Group] as probably we all do. We *RAG rate the timetable* [Provision/Interventions] and we go from there, but we *review it weekly with the student* [Provision/Interventions]. If they're in school because actually they need to take ownership of that and then obviously, we have review meetings with the parents. I think it's about that *flexibility*. [School level constraints, Staff effort to provide support, School staff ideologies] So after 1/2 term, one of the girls' parents emailed last night. She's *really worrying* [Pull Factors, CYP Feelings]. Can she stay in the hub all day? And there has to be a bit of a we're almost we don't want them to kind of take charge, but then they know their child better, don't they? So it's hard to you know let them kind of yeah no problem but you know we kind of have that *allowances* [Positive feelings about intervention] but also *spoke to the own person and she did attend more than one lesson today* [Positive feelings about intervention, Outcome of Focus Group, Behaviours of CYP seen in school] which was a *bonus* [Positive feelings about intervention] and she's *happy to communicate* [Outcome of Focus Group] that she's *going to a whole day of lesson* [Outcome of Focus Group] so. *I think it's just having that flexibility* [Positive feelings about intervention], *isn't it?* [Provision/Interventions, Outcome of Focus Group, Positive feelings about intervention, School staff ideologies, Influences on CYP/families] We're never going to like you said, we're going to be up and down all the time, aren't we? But it is having that *flexibility* [Positive feelings about intervention], the ones that are quite difficult are the *young people that won't come into the building*, but other *successes* [Positive feelings about intervention] we have with them is if we can kind of *engage through an online platform*, [Provision/Interventions] it's *still a win* [Positive feelings about intervention] and actually had a conversation with someone today rise actually because we work closely with *RISE* [External Agencies] to support young people that have emotional base school avoidance to get their input as well, because actually, we're not always the professionals in that sense. We need that, you know, that kind of *medical or professional* [External Agencies] import and she said that, you know, a young person who's not been in school for quite a considerable amount of time has got a 32% on her *online learning* [Provision/Interventions, Push Factors] platform. And she said *that's a win* [Positive feelings about intervention]. You've got to take that because actually, you had someone that wasn't engaging in any education and now is *engaging in online* [Outcome of Focus Group]. So, there's just a couple of

examples of good things that have happened [Outcome of Focus Group, Positive feelings about intervention].”

[Participant Three]

“Yeah, I didn’t catch what schools everybody was from before, but we’re I’m an SEMH school, so attendance and emotional based attendance is a major impact [Negative views formed by staff, Staff effort to provide support, Outcome of Focus Group, Influences on CYP/families]. In fact, the majority of my students come to me having not been to school for probably about a year and a half. By the time I get hold of them. So, in terms of successes [Positive feelings about intervention] over the last year I’ve just done a study for our attendance strategic plan and I think 33% of our cohort has gone up by like 20% [Outcome of Focus Group] from where their starting point was and that’s averaging out because there’s children that have gone up 90% [Outcome of Focus Group] in terms of their attendance. But the amount of work that has to go into increase that attendance [Outcome of Focus Group, School staff ideologies, Staff effort to provide support], some of the kids, they just wanted a place. So that’s great. But then there’s a child that we had who unfortunately is off at the moment, but a child that we had the year and a half two years ago. Who started off his school life here doing 4 minutes a day? And it was just literally walking in the door, walking back out again, and we built him up to being a 95% attender [Outcome of Focus Group] Unfortunately, because of the way we transition and we’re only up till year 11, he’s really struggled with the idea of leaving the year [Challenges faced, CYP Feelings]. And so, he’s taking control of what he can take control [Outcome of Focus Group] of and he’s not in school at the moment. But we’ve made a plan and put plans together in terms of successes [Positive feelings about intervention]. The LA are coming to me, and the plan Co [External Agencies] is actually coming to me and actually saying to me, would you like some more money so you can put more things outside [Budget related implications, External Agencies, Provision/Interventions], which is the first I had an e-mail on Wednesday. It’s the first time I’ve had an e-mail from them rather than me asking them for money then offering it, which is very unusual.”

[Participant One]

“Yeah, we’ve, we’ve experienced that recently. You know the tide has turned [Positive feelings about intervention], hasn’t it? And we feel that people are being more prepared to come to the table and offer rather than sort of saying over to you [External Agencies, Positive feelings about intervention, Challenges faced, School staff ideologies, Budget related implications].”

[Participant Three]

“Yeah, I spend a lot [Budget related implications, School staff ideologies, Staff effort to provide support, Challenges faced] I’ll spend.”

[Participant One]

“I mean, we could do with more of it, but it’s a sea change all the same [Positive feelings about intervention].”

[Participant Three]

“I spend a lot of time writing cost out for young people for extra support

[Provision/Interventions], *extra things* [Challenges faced, Budget related implications, Staff effort to provide support, Influences on CYP/families]. *I think my, I know we're meant to be talking about positives, but my biggest concerns at the moment is the amount of students I'm having to find alternate provision [Provision/Interventions] for because even our school we only have 50 children here. Even our school is too big for them [Pull Factors, Positive feelings about intervention] and they can't cope being around people [Pull Factors]. Because Two years ago, we weren't at PAN, and we were in like 38 on-site at a time. We've now hit it, but that doesn't mean they're all on-site [Provision/Interventions], but the successes [Positive feelings about intervention] within that because we're getting them to go somewhere [Staff effort to provide support, Outcome of Focus Group, School staff ideologies]. They are still getting to sit their examinations, which was never even a thought for these young people when they're in year nine because they couldn't be in a building long enough [Behaviours of CYP seen in school] to even study. And they've learned the skills to study [Outcome of Focus Group] so they can just about do it [Behaviours of CYP seen in school, Provision/Interventions, Outcome of Focus Group, Positive feelings about intervention, Challenges faced, Staff effort to provide support, School staff ideologies] with support online. But it's not the way you'd want to do it, but it works for them. The big, as I say, the big concern is when they when they leave us in year 11 [School level constraints, Challenges faced] that they just drop off the map completely because I haven't got a staff team that are running around all of the time for them chasing them. But no lot, lots of successes with individual cases [Positive feelings about intervention] where some of our kids that come to us and they are meant to have been on a full timetable, but they've probably done an hour at maximum a day because that's all they've been allowed to go into the school, so. Trying to build that up is incredibly difficult [School level constraints, Staff effort to provide support, School staff ideologies]."*

Key

Highlighted speech of interest

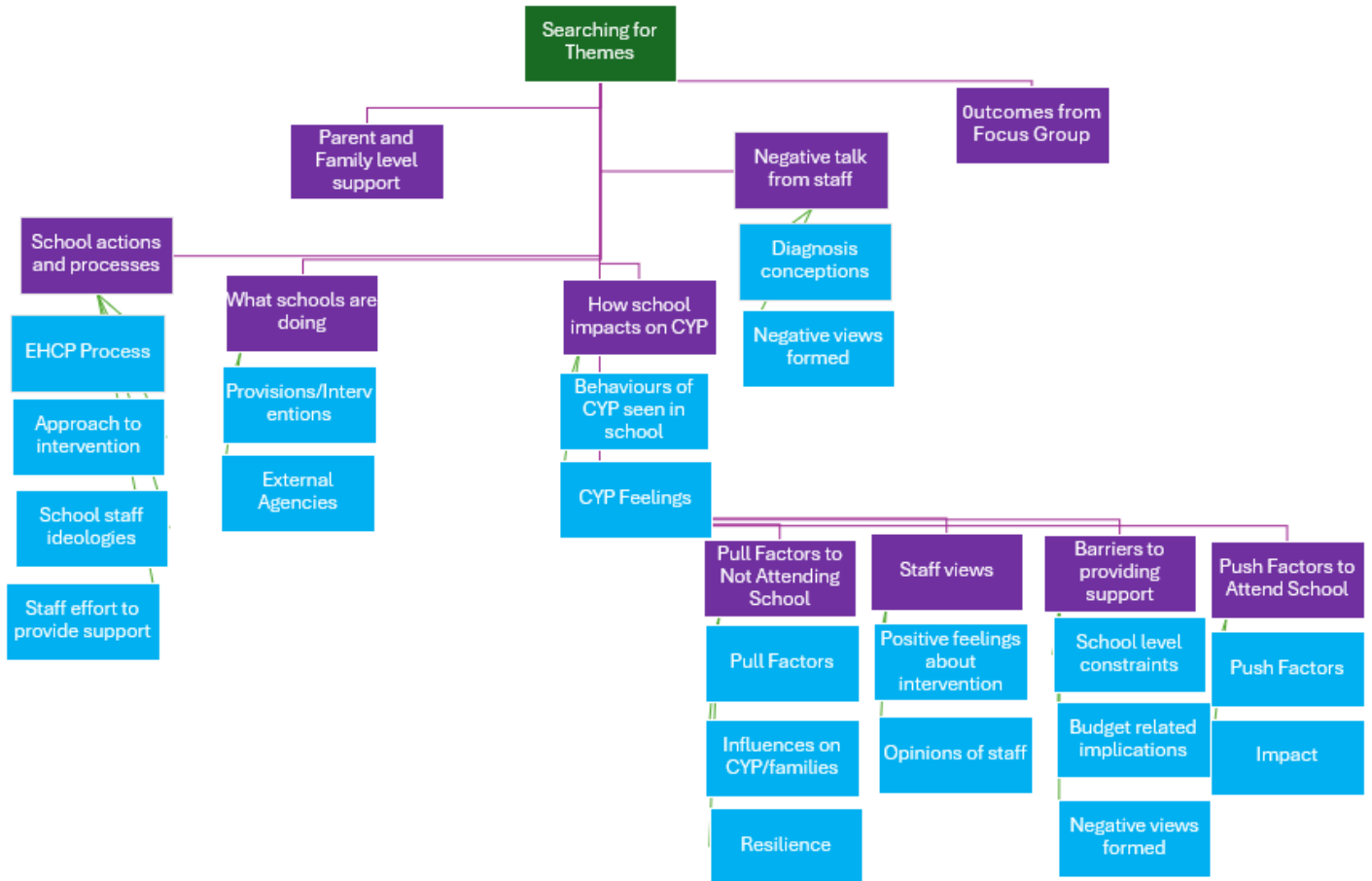
Code assigned

Appendix 16: Final codes and descriptions

Code	Description
CYP Feelings	Staff describing the CYP's feelings and emotions.
External Agencies	Agencies that schools have involved to support their support and interventions
Provision/Interventions	What schools are doing to support CYP and families
Individual provisions	Things that are done at the individual CYP level and help push them to attend school.
Pull Factors	Things that keep CYP at home and prevent them from attending school.
Behaviours of CYP seen in school	What staff have seen in school and how CYP may be communicating their feelings.
Resilience	Where staff have mentioned the resilience of CYP/parents/families.
EHCP Process	Views about getting an EHCP, challenges faced by parents, families, and schools.
Parent and Family level support	What schools are doing to build relationships with parents and families
Diagnosis conceptions	Schools' view of CYP gaining a diagnosis, and implications these may have.
School level constraints	What may impact the school putting in a provision?
Influences on CYP/families	Things that may impact school attendance and supporting parents/families.
Outcome of Focus Group	Participant's view of the process of the focus group
Positive staff feelings about intervention	Staff positively mentioned interventions and the support that they have used.
Challenges faced	Challenges that are faced by schools, CYP, parents and families.
Negative views formed by staff	Participants use of negative language when talking about CYP/families
Staff effort to provide support	What schools feel they have put into CYP/families
School staff ideologies	How do staff and schools approach CYP/families, and what are their influences?
Opinions of staff	Participants' opinions about reasons why things happen/views taken.
Budget related implications	Where participants have mentioned the spending costs on interventions/staffing

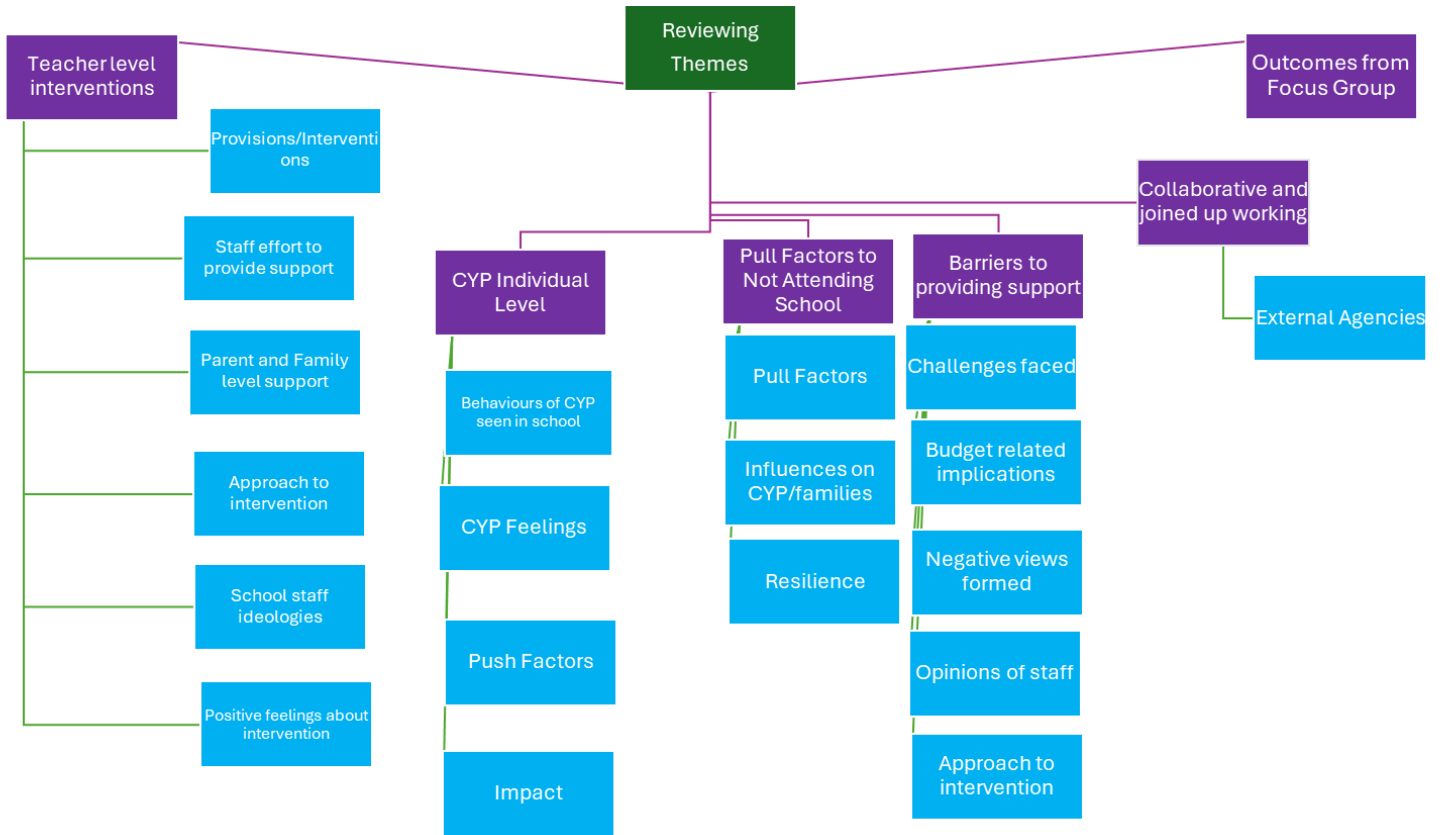
Appendix 17: Searching for themes – initial thematic map

Phase 3 of thematic analysis



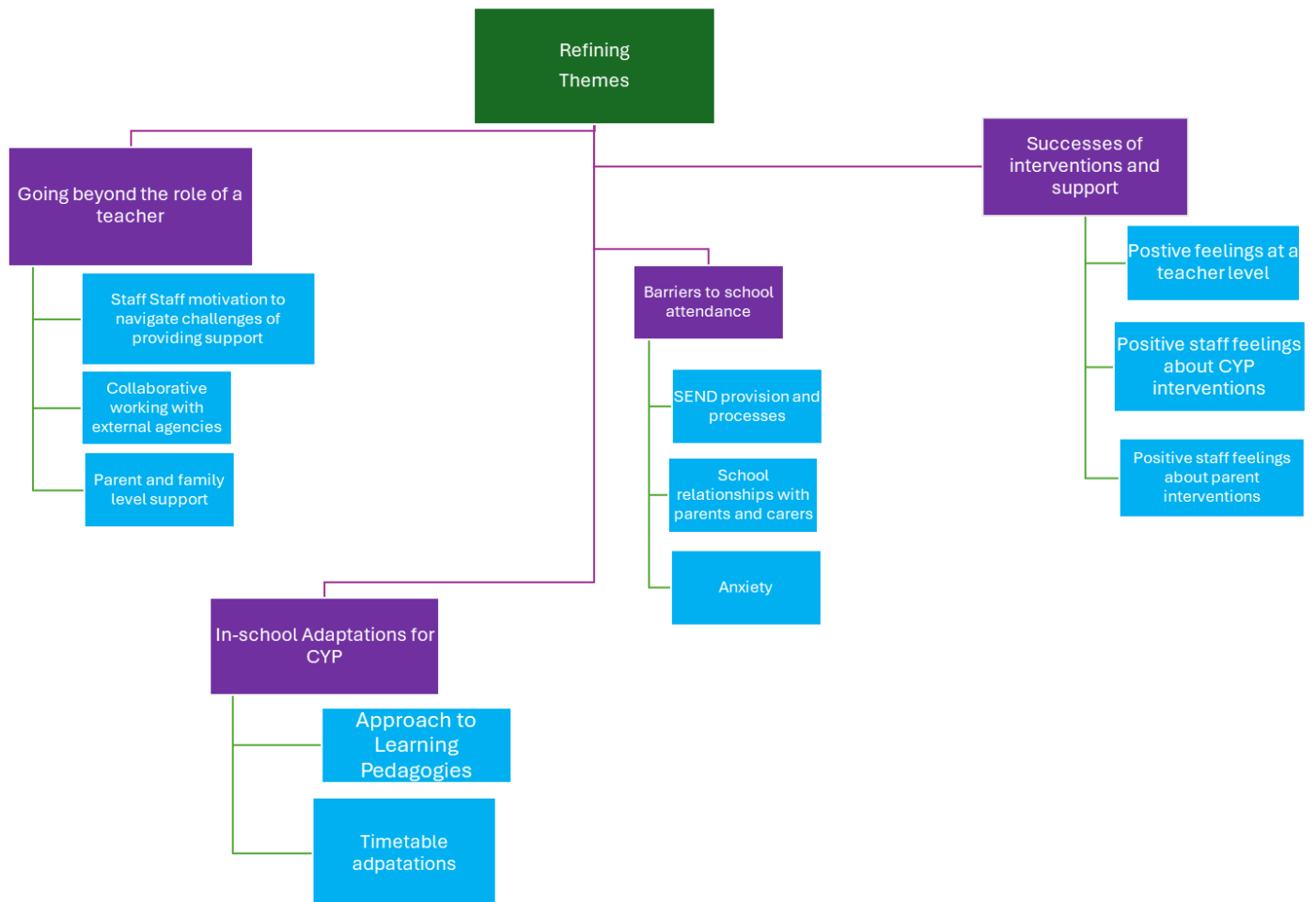
Appendix 18: Reviewing themes

Phase 4 of thematic analysis



Appendix 19: Refining themes

Phase 5 of thematic analysis



Appendix 20: Table of sample extracts from the transcript for refined candidate themes

Final Candidate Theme	Sample Extracts of Transcript
Going beyond the role of a teacher	<p><i>“Actually, coaching parents”</i></p> <p><i>“They were in the family were in really restricted accommodation. It was tiny. And we put a lot of effort”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers available that are not timetabled that I can actually put them out to houses”</i></p> <p><i>“Chase constantly”</i></p> <p><i>“Keep them safe”</i></p> <p><i>“We’ve got to employ people with certain skills that are not classroom-based, that can be out there”</i></p> <p><i>“Yeah, we’re trying to”</i></p> <p><i>“Outreach work which is absolutely fundamental to any success”</i></p> <p><i>“Somebody needs to go around that house that day and go and find out what the problem is”</i></p> <p><i>“flexibility”</i></p> <p><i>“I think it’s just having that flexibility, isn’t it?”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s about taking the right course for every individual child”</i></p> <p><i>“We’re actually trying to put them in front of parents, and it makes a huge difference”</i></p> <p><i>“Family team to phone the parents”</i></p> <p><i>“Been getting attendance right has been our biggest source of battle”</i></p> <p><i>“Good relationship with the flexible working team in the LA”</i></p> <p><i>“Being at peace with it being a process and it can be a long process”</i></p>
In-school Adaptations for CYP	<p><i>“Goes home 5 minutes earlier to avoid the crowds”</i></p> <p><i>“One girl still has to be brought into school with mom, but that helps”</i></p> <p><i>“Positive social time today”</i></p> <p><i>“Friendship groups”</i></p> <p><i>“Bespoke every single lesson”</i></p> <p><i>“We’ve got about 8 learners with them at the minute, but they also offer the hub the life hub”</i></p> <p><i>“Online learning”</i></p> <p><i>“Alternate provision in place for them”</i></p> <p><i>“We do, we’ve another success of ours that’s worked really well with children and we have a lot on this now”</i></p>

	<p><i>is end of day check-in and it's made a huge difference"</i></p>
<p>Successes of intervention and support</p>	<p><i>"Getting to sit their examinations, which was never even a thought for these young people when they're in year nine because they couldn't be in a building long enough to even study. And they've learned the skills to study so they can just about do it"</i></p> <p><i>"I think 33% of our cohort has gone up by like 20% from where their starting point was and that's averaging out because there's children that have gone up 90% in terms of their attendance."</i></p> <p><i>"Spoke to the own person and she did attend more than one lesson today"</i></p> <p><i>"One girl today she's made some huge successes"</i></p> <p><i>"They became very proud of themselves"</i></p> <p><i>"Work really well to get in key stage four students out of the house to attend learning there"</i></p> <p><i>"a young person who's not been in school for quite a considerable amount of time has got a 32% on her online learning platform"</i></p> <p><i>"Lots of successes with individual cases"</i></p> <p><i>"That's a win"</i></p> <p><i>"Still a win"</i></p> <p><i>"Parents have become so used to coming"</i></p> <p><i>"Spoke to the own person and she did attend more than one lesson today"</i></p> <p><i>"A little win can feel like such a big mountain"</i></p> <p><i>"Sharing of home versus school and the crossover and the sharing of experiences"</i></p> <p><i>"We've had a few successes with children coming back into school"</i></p> <p><i>"We're better now than we are as a school"</i></p>
<p>Barriers to school attendance</p>	<p><i>"We don't need to go there because we're going to get this school eventually, but it's not always the reality is it we know that, you could be looking at two years for a smaller provision or something that will suit"</i></p> <p><i>"Only provision that they could find that on paper could meet needs the way that the EHCP had been written"</i></p> <p><i>"The young person's almost in the middle of what the parents wanting rather than that parent family is letting them"</i></p> <p><i>"Children that won't come into school because they think that mum's not going to be OK"</i></p> <p><i>"It actually creates more anxiety for these families because it's not the answer"</i></p> <p><i>"Had bad experiences"</i></p>

Appendix 21: Excerpt of the transcript from the phase four follow-up 'Dream' interview

[Researcher]

"I would like to discuss the best of what has been discovered and what your vision may be to allow your preferred vision to take place when supporting EBSA cases in your school?"

[Participant Two]

"Yeah, no, absolutely. We're so invested in in what we can do, looking at more support we can put in place, and we've had a bit of a change around as well of our practises. We haven't put that into practice yet, but we are on the right path of starting with STS."

"And you know from obviously our meeting. And then I was at another training, I met another colleague from another school and what their practises are. They have two members of staff, who will reintegrate these students and then they will obviously do the home visits and all of that. So from that, we're looking at trying with our attendance officer to with our SEMH mentor to look at the programme of delivery and how that's going to look, because currently we have our inclusion area, the hub, that there's no, you know, it's kind of pretty much we go through a planning meeting we go through a street programme how those students are going to what they're going to do over those six weeks, how many hours are they going to do, how are they going to come in. But as part of that like you said, there's so much more and it was interesting because we do it as the school week. We've got 1500 children, we do a lot of referrals to xx, and we request a lot of consultations to support these young people."

"They actually said to us, your school is very high need, she said, and that is probably because you do so many referrals to us, which we never encourage and now xx are looking at what support perhaps they can put from a whole school level for us."

[Researcher]

"That's amazing."

[Participant Two]

"In supporting those children because you know it's a huge need. And even when children are in school, like you said, it's missing the odd date because they might PE or they might have a subject that they don't like or they don't want to come in on a Friday because they are that you know how we are on the Friday at the end of the week and they can't do anything, you know. And actually, I think it's taken into consideration. You know these children that have additional needs diagnosed or on a waiting list, how they are feeling towards the end of the week after a weekend because often we see don't we did or Fridays are one of the trigger points and after days you know I've put all this in place for after half term and I know I'm going to go right back and even I've had parents and we spoke about parents. Sometimes enabling this, they're not going to be able to manage after the Easter holiday, but let's not talk about it as being a factor that's then going to affect everything moving on. "

Appendix 22: Ethical application and amendment

Application 053247

Section A: Applicant details

Date application started:

Fri 28 April 2023 at 08:04 First name: Hannah Last name: Lees Smith Email: *Details removed*

Programme name: DEdCPsy Module name: Research Thesis Last updated: 05/06/2023 Department: School of Education

Applying as Postgraduate research project title: Schools supporting Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Has your research project undergone academic review, in accordance with the appropriate process? Yes

Similar applications: - *not entered* -

Section B: Basic information

Supervisor **Name Email** *Details removed*

Proposed project duration 3: Project code (where applicable) Start date (of data collection): Thu 1 June 2023 Anticipated end date (of project) Thu 1 August 2024. Project externally funded? No

Suitability Indicators of Risk

Project code

- *not entered* -

Takes place outside UK? No

Involves NHS? No

Health and/or social care human-interventional study? No

ESRC funded? No

Likely to lead to publication in a peer-reviewed journal? No

Led by another UK institution? No

Involves human tissue? No

Clinical trial or a medical device study? No

Involves social care services provided by a local authority? No

Is social care research requiring review via the University Research Ethics Procedure No

Involves adults who lack the capacity to consent? No

Involves research on groups that are on the Home Office list of 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations'? No

Involves potentially vulnerable participants? No

Involves potentially highly sensitive topics? No

Section C: Summary of research

1. Aims & Objectives

This research aims to provide insight into the current extent of school non-attendance related to EBSA in secondary schools who are located within the LA where I am currently on placement and investigate what approaches or pathways have been used to support CYP who are facing EBSA-related difficulties successfully. I am focussing on the placement location because there is currently a project on developing an EBSA pathway led by one of the team's senior educational psychologists (EP). It also will explore the current approaches, such as exploring risk and resilience factors and using EPS pathways, which are used to support CYP who are dealing with EBSA-related difficulties and not accessing their learning. Overall, I want to celebrate the successful interventions that schools implement to support CYP in managing EBSA-related school nonattendance, promoting change, and providing the means for schools to share their practice.

Research questions

Phase 1 Within this research, I aim to investigate the following questions through a quantitative approach using a questionnaire:

- Have schools within the Local Authority (LA) seen an increase of CYP who are not attending school due to Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) since the Covid-19 Pandemic? What were the figures in September 2019 compared to this academic year?

- What interventions are schools in a locality within the LA currently using to support Children and Young People (CYP) facing EBSA-related difficulties accessing their learning?

- Phase 2

I would also like to understand further what schools feel is working well with the pathways and approaches they have been implementing to support CYP using the discovery phase of appreciative inquiry.

- What intervention pathway approaches are working well, and how have they impacted breaking barriers down to CYP accessing their learning?

2. Methodology

The research plan includes two phases of data collection, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather data that will focus on school-based staff located within the LA where my current placement is based.

Phase 1 - To commence the first phase of my data collection, the quantitative approach of designing a questionnaire will be undertaken by applying closed and open-ended items in the same survey to gain a general understanding of what schools understand EBSA to be and how this impacts a CYP over time. Also, I would like to explore what approaches or pathways schools implement to support pupils and rate how successful they feel these have been. I would also like to be able to explore if schools involve external agencies to support them and the CYP and if there is further support that schools would like to source that may help them implement their interventions. Within the questionnaire, I will include a question to ask if the participants would agree to take part in phase 2 of the research.

Phase 2

During the second phase, a qualitative appreciative inquiry approach will be conducted using a focus group of three to five schools who agreed to participate so that I can better understand the school's practice and add insight into the research aims.

The focus group will consist of a 'getting to know you' icebreaker activity followed by a discussion. The sessions will last up to 45 minutes, and the discussion will be centred on the school's interventions using the first step of appreciative inquiry, the discovery stage. This is a positive approach that intends to identify the strengths of the school's effective practice and to celebrate success. If there are more than five schools wishing to take part in the focus group, then I would organise different groups with a maximum of five participants at one time. The participants who agreed to take part in the focus group will only be

expected to attend one focus group. If more than 5 schools wish to participate in the second phase, I will limit this to 10 schools to run a maximum of two separate focus groups to ensure the research is manageable. If the schools cannot participate in the focus group due to work commitments, then as a Plan B, I would hold one-on-one interviews with the participants to carry out the discovery stage. At the start of the focus group, I will go through ground rules with the staff and will remind them that they can stop taking part at any point. I will remind staff that their responses will be anonymised; however, if anything that is said raises safeguarding concerns, the school's safeguarding policies will be followed. The audio from the focus group will be recorded using an electronic device. The audio recording will be uploaded onto my Google Drive on University's Network and removed from the Dictaphone on the same day as the focus group. If the focus group takes place online, I will use Google Meet and record the audio using the software's recording device and this will be stored on Google Drive of University's Network. The recordings will subsequently be transcribed, and the data will be used as a memory prompt for me when analysing the outcome. Participants will be anonymised in the transcription (their real names will not be used). The audio recording will be removed from the University Network by 02.08.2024.

Intended Pilot Study - Carrying out a trial run of phase one will enable me to practice and assess the effectiveness of my planned data collection and analysis. I intend to pilot the questionnaire with one of the Senco's with whom I currently work and share this with the EBSA Senior EP; both are based in my current placement. The purpose of piloting the questionnaire will be for me to gather opinions about the flow and clarity of the questions and also to check the order of the questions, which will also allow me to see if any changes are needed. The intended pilot of the phase one questionnaire can also help me test the validity of the measure that will be used during the analysis stage and check if the information sheets are clear and that I have not missed out on any essential detail, which will help me identify any potential problems. Upon completion of the research, I intend to disseminate the results to share the good practices of the schools that have taken part in the focus groups. I would like to share my research outcomes with the EP team that I am currently based in for my placement and also ask the EBSA Senior EP to share the results of my research with their planning team and all the schools that took part in the study. I could also publish the thesis through the BPS, which can then be shared with the wider EP community.

Data Analysis

Phase 1 - The first data set analysis will occur after the quantitative collection phase, allowing me to conduct descriptive statistics using a basic spreadsheet using percentages, frequencies, and ranges. I will then manage the data to provide some descriptive statistics from the results and present this data using pie charts or bar charts by creating a simple spreadsheet in the first instance. Producing a bar chart or pie chart using a spreadsheet will be relatively easy as I am familiar with this type of software and have the confidence to provide immediate meaning to the data. To analyse the open-ended questions, I will look into if any traits or themes are coming through using thematic analysis which can provide an overview of the common words used within the response to a question. A text analysis tool can give a quicker breakdown of words used and how many times these were mentioned. This data analysis in phase one will help prompt the development of appreciative inquiry questions from the responses that have come from the questionnaire and will be integrated into the research as a whole.

Phase 2 The second phase of data analysis will initially help me to create some provocative propositions that can describe an ideal state of circumstances that support EBSA cases. Overall I will then be able to share the stories from the schools which identify the best of the past in terms of what has been accomplished and highlight the strengths of their interventions to produce a fuller understanding of how the sample of schools have managed EBSA incidence so that the stories told can build on the capacity for change. Using the discovery stage of appreciative inquiry for phase 2 will allow me to identify themes from the narrative that can explain and provide a conclusion that connects quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

I know that you say you would offer more focus groups should there be a larger number of volunteers than anticipated - will you limit the number of focus groups you might facilitate to make the research manageable?

Fri 19 May 2023 at 06:37

Please add some detail about how you intend to analyse the data.

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:35

3. Personal Safety

Have you completed your departmental risk assessment procedures, if appropriate? Not applicable

Raises personal safety issues? Yes

During Phase One, I will be sending out a questionnaire that examines interventions used by the schools to support their student who is classified as EBSA and several cases faced by the school, so the questions are not related to sensitive areas that will impact well-being. I expect that the staff member to complete the questionnaire would be either the Senco or a member of staff responsible for supporting EBSA cases. If there are two members of staff dealing with the EBSA cases, then I would be happy for both of the staff members to participate and complete the questionnaire together. During phase two of the research, the focus group will be carried out in a school building, so this will limit the concern of harm caused to me as I will not be putting myself in danger at any time. During the school visit, I will follow the school's health and safety procedures and safeguarding policies.

Section D: About the participants

1. Potential Participants

The aim of this research is to explore how schools support EBSA cases in secondary schools and how success is measured. Therefore, the school staff who support EBSA-related non-attendance will represent my target population. Potential participants will be from secondary schools that are located within Local Authority (LA), where my placement is currently based. The information sheet will be sensitively phrased to ensure that those identified are not harmed by the invite. They will also be given my contact details should they want to contact me with questions/queries, or complaints. If it is the latter, I will reiterate/reassure participants of the aims of the research and will follow the university complaints procedure. Staff who respond within the specified time limit will be selected to take part in my research on a first come, first served basis until the quota for numbers is filled. The schools will be invited to take part via an email sent to the school Senco in the first instance, as the EPS service has already formed links with these colleagues in the schools. The Senco will be the gatekeeper who will be able to play a key role in passing the questionnaire, information sheet and consent form on to the staff member responsible for supporting the EBSA cases in their school.

Please clarify how the schools that are invited to take part will be chosen and approached.

Please clarify if a gatekeeper will be approached before approaching individual staff members individually.

If there is not a gatekeeper please say why, if there is please detail the process.

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:36

2. Recruiting Potential Participants

Phase one of the research is quantitatively based. It will consist of a questionnaire that will be emailed out to all secondary schools in the locality of my placement, supported by a senior EP leading EBSA in the local authority for the EPS. I will email out the questionnaire with the information page and consent form to the school Senco in the first instance, as the EPS service has already formed links with these colleagues in the schools., and the last question will ask if the school would be happy to participate in phase two's focus group. For Phase 2, participants are likely to be drawn from secondary schools that have EBSA cases and I am aiming to have at least five schools take part in this phase. The target members of staff who participate in the focus group are Senco's, senior leaders or pastoral depending on who is responsible for supporting EBSA cases in their school. These focus groups will be made up of 3-5 staff members. confidentiality is adhered to at all times. The Research does not require for any sensitive data to be collected, and no images or videos will be required. Participants can withdraw from Phase One by the 14th of July 2023, without any negative consequences and they do not have to give a reason to withdraw. By September 2023, the data collected from Phase One will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study.

Participants of Phase Two are free to withdraw consent without giving a reason before 22nd December 2023 and there will be no adverse consequences if they choose to withdraw. By January 2024, the data collected from Phase Two will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study. Participants can also request that the audio recording of the Focus Group can be stopped at any point, and if the meeting is held online, you can also ask for the audio to be stopped whilst using Google Meet. I will remind them of this during the ground rules and during the Focus Group.

What happens if somebody wants to withdraw? Is this an option? If so, how long do they have to withdraw before data is integrated and analysed? This detail appears to be in the information sheets but should also be included in the ethics application. This wording in your information sheet is good, please integrate it into ethics application on 14th of July 2023, without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason to withdraw. By September 2023, the data collected will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study.

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:46

When will physical copies be destroyed? Not sure this means that confidentiality will be upheld as you still need to store consent forms.

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:39

3. Consent

Will informed consent be obtained from the participants? (i.e. the proposed process) Yes

Information about the research will be shared with the secondary school staff and will include details of the research rationale, aims and objectives and methodology. They will also be informed of how all information collected will be stored and who will have access to it. The consent form will be emailed along with the phase one questionnaire and can be completed electronically using a word processor, which can then be emailed back to me.

How will participants complete the consent form? Online or in person? If online, how will this happen? Sign and scan and resend or will software/an online platform be used?

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:37

4. Payment - Will financial/in-kind payments be offered to participants? No

5. Potential Harm to Participants -What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants? To minimise the risk of physical or psychological harm to participants, I will clearly explain the aims and objectives of the investigation to the school contacts. The topic of the focus group (interventions for EBSA cases) may have the potential to create added anxiety due to pressures that staff may face in their work environment. However, it does not have particular emotive meaning to the participants, and the focus group should provide a positive experience for staff participants as phase two will use appreciative inquiry, which focuses on the success of the intervention and celebrates strengths. There are no known other risks to the researcher or participants. The researcher will be interacting with staff in the school setting and following all local health and safety regulations.

How will this be managed to ensure the appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

I will ensure that participants are fully aware of what the research entails and that informed consent is given. Both the participants and I will agree to the ground rules for the focus group prior to the commencement of the discussion. The ground rules will be re-referred to during the focus group if I detect that these are not being followed to ensure a power balance of setting up a respectful environment where all participants feel comfortable sharing their views. Expectations related to the confidentiality of all people involved will be included within consent forms and verbally shared within the group. During this discussion, emphasis will be placed on the importance of confidentiality within the confines of the group. During the second phase of the focus group, I will remind staff of their right to withdraw throughout.

Will ground rules be re-referred to during the focus group session should you detect a breach of them? In managing focus groups, you have to be aware of power differentials for instance between senior leaders and pastoral staff. How can you ensure each participant feels comfortable expressing an authentic opinion?

Tue 23 May 2023 at 07:36

6. Potential harm to others who may be affected by the research activities

Which other people, if any, may be affected by the research activities, beyond the participants and the research team?

In case of a disclosure being made about the safety of a member of staff or pupil, I will follow the school safeguarding policy and report this to the necessary member(s) of staff, the school, and the EPS safeguarding lead. If participants become upset after the session, they will be signposted to a named colleague in the school. This will be mentioned during the ground rules. What is the potential for harm to these people? School staff may feel that they are not meeting the needs of their pupil.

Thereby, impacting the reputation of the school in the wider community. All names of schools and staff members will be anonymised. When transcribing the focus groups, I will produce a code to number the schools and give each staff member a letter to ensure that anonymisation is upheld. The transcript of the focus group will not be published within the research report and will be only used for my purposes as a memory prompt when analysing the data.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate safeguarding of these people?

As the researcher, I will act with academic honesty and integrity at all times. Following BPS, HCPC and DECP guidance. I will also openly communicate the aims/objectives and outcomes of the investigation with all stakeholders. Steps will be taken to ensure that participants are protected from harm to ensure that they enjoy the process. If staff members are impacted by distress created as a result of the research, they will be invited to contact identified colleagues, myself, the researcher, and their supervisors or signposted to external sources of support. All contact details will be given to staff in the information sheet and consent forms. In addition, to prevent specific school staff from being named during focus group discussions, one of the ground rules will be that no names (including that of school staff are used. Any names will also be anonymised during transcription. School staff will be made aware of the confidentiality parameters that will be discussed during the focus group. If

there are safeguarding concerns, these will be raised in line with the safeguarding policy. Participants can also request that the audio recording of the Focus Group can be stopped at any point, and if the meeting is held online, you can also ask for the audio to be stopped whilst using Google Meet. I will remind them of this during the ground rules and during the Focus Group. Because you are limiting your research to a particular locality, it might be easier for schools and individual staff/young people to be identified from your transcribed interviews despite the anonymisation. What steps might you take to ensure that this does not happen?

Fri 19 May 2023 at 06:45

7. Reporting of safeguarding concerns or incidents

What arrangements will be in place for participants, and any other people external to the University who are involved in, or affected by, the research, to enable reporting of incidents or concerns? I, the researcher, have completed online safeguarding training and will report any safeguarding concerns in line with the School's Safeguarding Policy and also to their research supervisor and course tutor.

Who will be the Designated Safeguarding Contact(s)?

The DSL within the school as per the School's Safeguarding Policy. Also, there is a DSL within the EPS team where my placement is based.

How will reported incidents or concerns be handled and escalated?

I will report an immediate risk to the school's DSL or Head Teacher if the DSL is not available and follow the school Safeguarding Policy to handle and escalate concerns. Also, I will follow the EPS safeguarding policy and report any concerns to the EP DSL.

Section E: About the data

1. Data Processing -Which organisation(s) will act as Data Controller? University only

2. Legal basis for processing of personal data

The University considers that for the vast majority of research, 'a task in the public interest' (6(1)(e)) will be the most appropriate legal basis. If, following discussion with the UREC, you wish to use an alternative legal basis, please provide details of the legal basis, and the reasons for applying it, below:

- not entered -

3. Data Confidentiality

What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

Consent from participants will be sought before any research is conducted and the completed consent forms will be uploaded to the University's Google Drive for storage. The consent forms will be deleted from the secure University storage after one year of publishing the final report. When analysing and reporting on the Data, all identities will be anonymised, and participants' names will not be used to ensure confidentiality is adhered to at all times. The Research does not require for any sensitive data to be collected, and no images or videos will be required. Participants can withdraw from Phase One by the 14th of July 2023, without any negative consequences and they do not have to give a reason to withdraw. By September 2023, the data collected from Phase One will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study. Participants of Phase Two are free to withdraw consent without giving a reason before 22nd December 2023 and there will be no adverse consequences if they choose to withdraw. By January 2024, the data collected from Phase Two will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study. Participants can also request that the audio recording of the Focus Group be stopped at any point, and if the meeting is held online, you can also ask for the audio to be stopped whilst using Google Meet. I will remind them of this during the ground rules and the Focus Group.

What happens if somebody wants to withdraw? Is this an option? If so, how long do they have to withdraw before data is integrated and analysed? This detail appears to be in the information sheets but should also be included in the ethics application. This wording in your information sheet is good, please integrate it into ethics application: 14th of July 2023, without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason to withdraw. By September 2023, the data collected will have been processed and cannot be removed from the study.

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:46

When will physical copies be destroyed? Not sure this means that confidentiality will be upheld as you still need to store consent forms.

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:39

4. Data Storage and Security

In general terms, who will have access to the data generated at each stage of the research, and in what form

All of the collected data will be stored on Google Drive, which is only accessible to the researcher and the research tutor using the secure University Network system. The Researcher will not keep any collected data or audio files on their personal devices to ensure that all the data gathered remains confidential and secure. The analysis of data will take place using Google Drive and Google Teams, which is accessed through the university's secure network to ensure that the data cannot be accessed by anyone else and that it is stored securely at all times. The research may be used in further research or published

What steps will be taken to ensure the security of data processed during the project, including any identifiable personal data, other than those already described earlier in this form?

A Dictaphone will be used to record the audio to ensure that the data is kept confidential and will be uploaded to Google Drive and removed from the device the same day to ensure that the audio files are stored securely on the University's Network which has its own vigorous security system to ensure data is kept confidential and safe. If the focus group takes place online, I will use Google Meet and record the audio using the software's recording device, and this will be stored on Google Drive of the University's Network. A Transcript of Focus Groups may be used as a prompt only for reaching a conclusion and will be stored on the Shared Google Drive and not on personal laptops or computers. All names of schools and staff members will be anonymised. When transcribing the focus groups, I will produce a code to number the schools and give each staff member a letter to ensure that anonymisation is upheld. The transcript of the focus group will not be published within the research report and will be only used for my purposes as a memory prompt when analysing the data. The audio files or Google Meet (The University's online platform meeting software) recordings will be destroyed once the project has been presented to the service, and all personal data will be anonymised to ensure confidentiality is upheld.

Please outline when this will take place (this should take into account regulatory and funder requirements).

The consent form for the staff informs them that the data will be stored on the University's Secure Network, and the files will be destroyed one year after the publication. Please state that transcriptions will be anonymised.

How will the anonymous transcriptions link to the individual participants? Unique code/pseudonym?

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:40

What is Google Teams?

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:39

Will all identifiable personal data be destroyed once the project has ended? Yes

Section F: Supporting documentation

Information & Consent All versions

Participant information sheets relevant to project? Yes Document 1120807 (Version 2)

Pilot Study Information Sheet Document 1120822 (Version 3)

Phase One Information Sheet Document 1120823 (Version 4)

Phase Two Information Sheet

From a participants view I would want to distinguish the researcher -the person carrying out the activity - from the research supervisor. I am unsure why you use the plural term researchers. Sometimes people use the term research team but again it's useful if the different roles are identified.

Tue 23 May 2023 at 07:26

Please clarify what recordings you are referring to. Please make it clear that they will be audio recorded.

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:45

Under who has ethically reviewed the project, please state 'The School of Education Ethics Committee' and not the social sciences department.

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:44

Information sheet: Please explain what this means a little more: "However, any problems arising during the research should be brought to my attention immediately. "

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:43 All versions

Consent forms relevant to the project? Yes Document 1120806 (Version 1)

Pilot Study Consent Form Document 1120808 (Version 2)

Phase One Consent Form Document 1120809 (Version 2)

Phase Two Consent Form All versions

Additional Documentation Document 1120825 (Version 2)

Research Action Plan Document 1122957 (Version 1)

Phase 1 Questionnaire Document 1122958 (Version 1)

Phase 2 Focus Group Planning

Please include your questionnaire for phase one and your focus group questions for phase 2.

Wed 17 May 2023 at 14:48

External Documentation

I have uploaded the Questionnaire for Phase 1 and have also attached the planning for Phase 2. The Focus Group will be formed as a result of the Phase 1 data analysis as the research is using a sequential mixed methods approach. I have also amended the Phase 2 Information Sheet by adding a participant can ask to stop the audio recording at any time either face to face or if conducted online.

Section G: Declaration

Signed by: Hannah Lees-Smith Date signed: Thu 1 June 2023 at 17:48

Original application Amendment - Complete (Submitted on 03/01/2024)

Description of changes

Following a lack of response to my Phase One survey, I would like to be able to send the survey and consent form out as a QR code to see if this will speed up the process for the Senco's to complete as opposed to completing the Word Document version of the survey. I propose to use Google Docs through the University's secure network to send out a QR code so that the survey and consent form can be completed online instead. The Survey and Consent forms will be the same as the Word versions submitted and will be sent out to the same gatekeeper (School Senco), so the content has not been changed.

Additional ethical considerations

Do the proposed changes pose any additional ethical considerations? No

Additional risks -Do any of the proposed amendments to the research potentially change the risk for any of the researchers? No

Supporting documentation revisions -Do the proposed amendments require revisions to any of the supporting documentation?

Please note that when uploading new versions of documents which you have previously provided, you should give a description of the document which clearly indicates that this is a new version, e.g. by providing an appropriate version number. It is also helpful to the reviewers if you clearly mark the changes you have made in the document itself (e.g. by highlighting new text or using tracked changes in Word). No

Other relevant information

The Phase One Survey and Consent Form will be converted to an electronic version which will hopefully mean that Senco's do not need to send back PDF versions of the document via email and reduce the time needed to complete the survey and sign the consent form separately.

Decision - Approved

Appendix 23: Ethical approval letter and amendment approval

Downloaded: 05/06/2023
Approved: 05/06/2023
Hannah Lees Smith
Details removed

Dear Hannah

PROJECT TITLE: Schools Supporting Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA)
APPLICATION: Reference Number 053247

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 05/06/2023 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

University research ethics application form 053247 (form submission date: 01/06/2023); (expected project end date: 01/08/2024).

- Participant information sheet 1120807 version 2 (27/05/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1120822 version 3 (27/05/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1120823 version 4 (01/06/2023).
- Participant consent form 1120806 version 1 (28/04/2023).
- Participant consent form 1120808 version 2 (13/05/2023).
- Participant consent form 1120809 version 2 (13/05/2023).

If during the course of the project, you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely
Details removed

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy;
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy;
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or the Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to the security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected

Amendments for "Schools supporting Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA)"
Decision on Amendment - Complete (Submitted on 03/01/2024)

Decision (25.01.24)

Approved

Appendix 24: Second amendment to the ethics application for phases three and four interviews

Description of changes

Additional Data Collection - Phases Three and Four I have not been able to collect ample data due to the time commitments of participants for the planned 2nd Focus Group and limited participation with the questionnaire during Phase One so therefore I propose to carry out a further phase of data collection. After reflection with my research supervisor, it was felt I needed to collect some further data to support this study. The third phase will involve an interview with one of the participants from the focus group to complete the second phase of the appreciative inquiry – the 'Dream' Phase. Also, to support gathering data on school non-attendance for the local area where I am based on placemat. I propose to interview a member of the local authority EBSA pathway team to gather more details on the school non-attendance data for the local authority. I will use the same consent form and information sheet used for Phase 2 and collect the consent through the online Google Form as used previously. The follow-up 'Dream' interview will be conducted and analysed using the same methodology as the Focus Group, it will take place using the online Google Meet platform as per the Focus Group. The interview with the Local Authority Officer will also use the same consent process as the Focus Group but the only difference is that this will not be recorded or transcribed, I will only use handwritten notes and data provided by the officer. Information sheets and consent forms will be collected using the online Google Forms as per Phase Two as described in the first amendment that was approved.

Additional ethical considerations

Do the proposed changes pose any additional ethical considerations? No

Additional risks

Do any of the proposed amendments to the research potentially change the risk for any of the researchers? No

Supporting documentation revisions

Do the proposed amendments require revisions to any of the supporting documentation? Please note that when uploading new versions of documents which you have previously provided, you should give a description of the document which clearly indicates that this is a new version, e.g. by providing an appropriate version number. It is also helpful to the reviewers if you clearly mark the changes you have made in the document itself (e.g. by highlighting new text or using tracked changes in Word). No

Other relevant information: I will use the same information sheet and consent form as used in Phase Two. All data will be anonymised in the same way as the other two phases. All consent forms and data will be stored on the University's Google Drive as per the other two phases.

Decision on Amendment - Complete (Submitted on 27/04/2024)

Decision
Approved

Feedback

Appendix 25: Extracts of transcript related to sub-themes 1.1. and 1.2.

Sub-theme 1.1.

4 Participant One – *“High points are not our normal go-to, are they? I’m trying to think.*
5 *Yeah, I think we have had some today, for example, it’s interesting how. A little win can*
6 *feel like such a big mountain. Today we’ve got a child who’s actually looked after. Who*
7 *had? I mean, obviously there is massive trauma in, in early life. And did transition into*
8 *our school at year 7. And we’ve tried really hard to accommodate their needs in terms*
9 *of, you know, because they’re sort of institutionalised, they’re coming with an adult for*
10 *every permutation. And there came a point where it was clear that no matter how yes,*
11 *everybody’s there to help, we actually had to peel back. The adult intervention, because*
12 *it was just overkill and overwhelming. And at that point, the child was sort of under the*
13 *table all the time, literally screaming for everyone just to back off. And we did and it*
14 *improved for them. For through years seven and eight, they became very proud of*
15 *themselves. The one thing you could rely on was to be that they would get to school and*
16 *so we were on an upward shift and then things started to take a downward turn and*
17 *actually it was. The family were in, really restricted accommodation. It was tiny and we*
18 *put a lot of effort, you know this thing of your damned if you do and damned if you don’t*

35 *And we know that the driving force for him to come into school at all is friendship groups*
36 *but I saw that he was having a really positive social time today and therefore you go*
37 *home hoping that tomorrow he’ll be triggered to come in again and it’s the beginning of*
38 *that journey, isn’t it?”*

53 *area which seems to work really well. For our young people to settle them back into*
54 *being in school full time and then we slowly integrate the lessons which seem to work*
55 *really well. One girl today she’s she’s made some huge successes as probably we all do.*
56 *We rag rate the timetable and we go from there, but we review it weekly with the student.*
57 *If they’re in school because actually they need to take ownership of that and then*
58 *obviously we have review meetings with the parents. I think it’s about that flexibility. So*

106 Participant Three – *“I spend a lot of time writing costs out for young people for extra*
107 *support, extra things.”*

256 *let’s just go down the route of tribunal and we’ll fight for your right. But it’s not about*
257 *fighting for your rights. It’s about taking the right course for every individual child and it is*
258 *not all leading to the small classroom, because if we’re all going to the small classroom,*
259 *that small classroom becomes a big classroom.”*

260 Participant Two – *“Absolutely.”*

261 Participant Three - *“Yeah, and this is the thing that isn’t enough provision out there and I*
262 *think it’s that blink of the track because there are children end up having to leave here*
263 *because we can’t meet their needs. And if we can’t hear, there isn’t really much else in*

Sub-theme 1.2

30 *joined-up work with the social worker, with the virtual school, with our Family Liaison*
31 *officer at school and you know, it’s done me one day, but it it marks as a high today*

164 Participant One – “Yeah, we're trying to, we're looking. We've got a new director of SEN
165 for the trust. But as a trust, we're really far-flung. We go from xx to xx to xx, up to xx and
166 around, and we're sort of stuck as the xx in the middle, but the with the best. Will we
167 kind of separate ourselves as xx and xx and we're trying really hard to look at what we
168 could do to centralised in terms of support as a trust that we, we were sharing the
169 burden, but we know we've got to employ people with certain skills that are not
170 classroom-based, that can be out there. Making that effort or be working with the team
171 and directing and it's very specific training. It's not within our SEN really, it's more a
172 social services Angle, isn't it? I think we're a long way off, but we know that that's the way
173 we've got to go.”/

302 Participant Three – “As much as I see it, I see a lot of attachment issues from parents
303 rather than attachments that have been projected onto children. So I've got children
304 that won't come into school because they think that mum's not going to be OK when
305 they're at school and that five-hour block. I don't know if Mum will be able to cope with
306 that five-hour block so I can only do a part-time timetable. They won't verbalise that, but
307 you can read into a situation. My wife is in SEMH, she's basically in an intervention team
308 for xx and goes into schools and that is pretty much her entire caseload at the moment
309 for school refusers. But she can read that it's the parents keeping at home. They would
310 do it, they would go in, they would and their anxieties only driven by what they're told
311 they're anxious about by parenting, so she'll go to do interventions and she'll be told the
312 parent won't leave the room while they're doing the intervention. Like what we could
313 really. Yeah, but she won't be able to speak to you. And are you feeling too anxious? Do
314 you want to leave the room now? And she's shaking her head, saying I'll stay. Oh, no, I
315 think we need to end the session now, over anxious. But we've got I think that that's the
316 majority of the work that we're doing now. My family people are doing is bringing parents
317 into here and training them because I think that's where the majority of the problem has
318 arisen for us. (Participant Two – “Yep. Same”). I'm sure it's the same thing and we're
319 we're. I'm spending my money on professionals that I bring in here. So clinical
320 psychologists, the EP service, anybody that I can get. And what I'm doing is actually,

417 Participant Two – “Yeah, if I send any parents to you, though, I want to come to your
418 school that would like from there. Oh, but no, that would be.”

419 Participant Two - “No, that's good. I was gonna add as well, I mean something that
420 works really well for us. We've got a really good relationship with the Flexible Working
421 Team in xx. We've worked together for years now and they are a wealth of experience as
422 well and they're always happy to give advice and I don't know if you guys use them as
423 well. But they are brilliant, absolutely brilliant. We've got about 8 learners with them at
424 the minute, but they also offer the hub the xx, it's called the xx church. And they work
425 really well to get in key stage four students out of the house to attend learning there. And
426 yeah, they're just brilliant. We've had a few successes with children coming back into
427 school or more often than not, their children, that we're gathering evidence for an EHCP
428 or needs assessment. And then obviously they'll go from there. But they're great. So
429 that's a positive for us. I forgot to mention that.”

Appendix 26: Executive summary of findings

An Appreciative Inquiry into How Schools Support Emotionally Based School Avoidance.

Purpose of research

To explore the current picture of emotionally based school non-attendance by gaining information about how schools might support CYP who are experiencing EBSA. This support may include interventions that could be based upon focusing on risk and resilience factors that CYP may have built up over time, or schools could be implementing Educational Psychology Services (EPS) pathways that are available through some Local Authority (LA) websites.

Another purpose was to gain an insight into the current extent of school non-attendance related to EBSA in schools based within the LA where I am currently practising as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and to explore if schools have seen a rise in EBSA cases since the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Findings

Prevalence of EBSA

The 4.5% of schools that participated in Phase One of this research, provided a picture that they had seen an increase in EBSA-related cases since the COVID-19 pandemic. 81.8% of the schools reported that they had experienced an increase in EBSA cases of which 45.5% of the participants felt this was having a high impact on the school non-attendance data. The trend reported, also falls in line with the increase of national, regional and LA data for persistent and severe absenteeism following the pandemic lockdowns.

In 2018, the LA school data indicated that 0.77% of their cohort were severely absent and missing at least 50% of their sessions, but this peaked at 2.60% for the academic year of 2022-2023. The data also showed that 1488 pupils were severely absent from school during the autumn and spring term of 2021-2022 which increased to 2014 for the following academic year (2022-2023).

In 2018, the LA school data indicated that 11.02% of CYP were persistently absent and missing at least 10% of their sessions, but this figure has nearly doubled since

the pandemic and reached 20.80% for the academic year 2022-2023. The national average of persistent pupils for the academic year of 2022-2023 was 21.22% (1,569,303 pupils) and the severe absence rate was 2% (150,256).

Successful interventions

Schools use a range of approaches to interventions that are consistent with others that contribute towards being successful as a result.

Schools are using the following interventions and approaches to support EBSA cases:

- Monitoring attendance patterns and working collaboratively with LA officers to work with the CYP in their homes and create action plans to provide early intervention.
- Schools can be flexible and provide bespoke interventions for CYP that can include the following:
 - Individual adaptations to the timetable can help build resilience in attending school and in turn, can become a protective factor that supports CYP to attend school. Including having a trusted Key Adult to facilitate a meet and greet, and an end and send.
 - In-school alternative provisions in the form of smaller classrooms that provided a nurturing approach or sourcing external alternative provisions both in person and online.
 - CYP accessing alternative provision or online learning can enhance and accelerate learning by providing a pupil-centred approach that can meet the diverse learner's needs.
- Working collaboratively with parents, families, and external agencies to ensure a holistic approach to supporting children and young people is established and entrenched to enable further protective factors. This could include:
 - Offering training to parents and families via external agencies can provide advice and support about topics that can help them gain further insight into their child's needs.
 - Holding family social events such as a BBQ has led to cementing relationships and providing access to training.

- CYP maintain connections and a sense of belonging within their setting with peers and staff members who are not classroom-based can provide an essential layer of support for CYP and be available to visit them at home and build connections that may have become lost due to long-term absence.

Recommendations

Early identification of patterns of non-attendance may enable interventions to be actioned quickly to reduce the risk of a CYP becoming a persistent non-attender.

Having support and interventions provided before long-term non-attendance becomes a pattern, can ensure that a collaborative approach is implemented, including using the support of EPs, mental health practitioners and other external agencies that provide a wrap-around level of support for the CYP and their families.

Schools should be able to access a network of support that includes diverse types of placements that include specialist settings so that staff can share resources, provide support for each other, and share their success stories.

On a national level, EBSA should be included within the absence reporting codes to allow schools to track the cases and provide early identification. Schools working alongside them can help further identify EBSA cases which can support early identification.