

Let's Talk - We Miss You... Guidance for Governors

What is it?

Let's Talk - We Miss You is a resource that addresses the issues of school attendance difficulties, including Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). The latest DfE Guidance on Attendance stresses the importance of schools and families working together to support children into school, and for this reason, two editions have been created by Essex County Council: one for schools and one for families.

“ promoting the values of kindness, compassion, hope, connection and belonging.

What's in it?

Both editions set out a framework for understanding school attendance difficulties. This links in with Essex's strategy for understanding behaviour and supporting emotional wellbeing - Trauma Perceptive Practice (TPP). As part of this strategy, the stress cycle, the impact of trauma and the importance of relationships is addressed through development of policy and practice.

The school edition emphasises a whole-school approach to attendance promoting the values of kindness, compassion, hope, connection and belonging. Staff are asked to consider how risk and protective factors (individual, within

the family and in the wider community) can impact children and young people. The aim is to create a whole school ethos that communicates the belief that school is a great place to be. It includes ideas and guidance about what can be implemented by the school to support this.

Evidence shows that early intervention is essential: spotting the signs, understanding the needs and addressing minor issues before they become more of a barrier. It references the graduated approach of the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle. Importantly, it identifies four possible key functions of non-attendance:

1. Authorised absences - usually medical illness
2. Parentally Permissive Absence - children being allowed to stay home for parentally agreed reasons: for company, to assist with care or even due to a dispute with the school
3. Self-Determined Absence - where there is no emotional distress and the child is seeking a pleasant experience rather than attending school (meeting with friends, gaming etc)
4. Emotionally-Based School Avoidance (EBSA) - where there is the presence of extreme emotional distress when thinking of, or attending school



Whilst both editions impress the importance of a thorough assessment to determine the barriers to school attendance, the school's version also includes practical assessment tools for the school to use in conjunction with families and children to understand what the challenges are. Without this key step it is difficult to put meaningful interventions in place to support attendance. The families' edition prepares parents and carers for the types of question they will be asked.

Following the assessment, both editions provide ideas and strategies for support and targeted interventions broken down by the four functions identified above. For schools this includes how to run targeted interventions, work closely with the family, work with the child to pinpoint then remove barriers to ensure their needs are met. In the families' edition there are suggestions such as promoting good sleep hygiene, encouraging ongoing dialogue between school, peers and the child and understanding their motivations in relation to non-attendance.

The impact of SEND on school attendance is also considered, as well as the added pressure that can be presented by key transitions such as primary to secondary, or even from one year group to another. Again, ideas and interventions are available to support the child in this stage of their education to minimise disruption to school attendance.

The schools' version includes case studies to show what this looks like with examples of good practice. Where further support is required, it also considers the involvement of the Education Access Team.

Finally, both signpost to relevant support, guidance, information and helplines.

How is it used?

All Essex schools and settings have access to the document and have had the opportunity to attend familiarisation training. In addition, there is a webinar available that talks schools through the guidance and how to use it.

For parents and carers, this has been promoted widely through the family networks, schools

and through social care and health colleagues.

Schools requesting legal enforcement will be required to evidence that they have followed this guidance and completed the assessment before the Attendance Compliance Team will make use of the statutory powers available to the Local Authority. The expectation is that schools and settings work with families using this guidance to increase pupil attendance by identifying, analysing, and addressing any challenges. When, on a rare occasion it has not been possible to do so, the school will be required to share the circumstances and rationale which have prevented such use.

What can Governors do to support this?

1. Ensure the Senior Leadership Team are familiar with, and are implementing, the guidance (and the families are aware).
2. Monitor attendance and ask about what is in place to support those with attendance difficulties.
3. Review a case study which highlights when this guidance has been used.

