

Emotionally-based School Avoidance (EBSA) Invest to Save Evaluation Report
April 2021 – March 2022
CONFIDENTIAL

Context

In 2021/22, the Schools Forum allocated £110,657 to a new Invest to Save project to support pupils experiencing emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA). The main aim of the funding was to help schools reduce their rates of persistent absence due to anxiety, increase pupil attendance and reduce the need for alternative provision. The funding was split into two parts i) £54,500 to appoint 3 part time EBSA posts from September 2021, hereby known as the 'EBSA Team', to offer specialist support to schools, pupils and families and ii) £56,157* as an EBSA Fund to directly support interventions requested by schools for individual pupils. One secondary school chose to contribute their share of the funding distributed to secondary schools (£11,065 per school) to the project, which increased the EBSA fund to *£67,222. To access the EBSA team and/or EBSA Fund, schools were required to make a referral into the EBSA Forum.

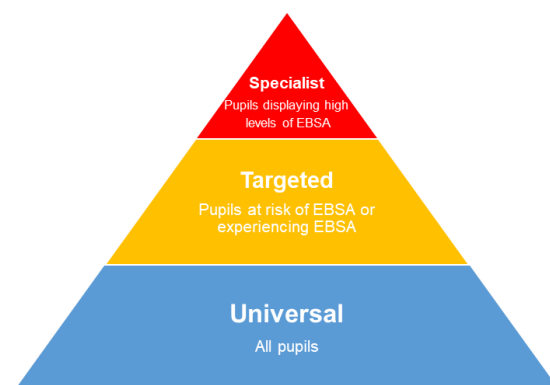
This report provides a summary of the referrals into the EBSA Forum, the support offered, pupil outcomes and the overall impact of EBSA support for the financial year 2021/22.

NB: This report reflects only 7 months of work by the EBSA Team. This gives a snapshot of work undertaken, but it must be appreciated that this is a short timescale to have been able to progress some of the cases due to their complexity.

EBSA Forum

As part of a graduated approach to reducing persistent absence, the EBSA Forum was established to offer specialist support to those schools whose previous initiatives to address EBSA behaviours (universal and targeted approaches) had been unsuccessful.

This multi-disciplinary panel chaired by Dr Michelle Sancho (Principal Educational Psychologist & Service Manager: Mental Health & Wellbeing) met monthly and panel members included representatives from: the SEN Team, the Education Welfare Service, the Children in Care team, the Autism Team, the Therapeutic Thinking Support Team (TTST), the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Schools were invited to refer individual pupils and to gain advice and support. As part of the referral process, schools were asked to complete an EBSA referral form, EBSA risk profile and an EBSA plan demonstrating the school support and progress to date.



As part of the referral process, schools were asked to complete an EBSA referral form, EBSA risk profile and an EBSA plan demonstrating the school support and progress to date.

Referrals

Across the year, 25 referrals were made into the EBSA Forum from 13 schools. Of these, 10 referrals were received from one secondary school. Table 1 shows the number of referrals into the EBSA Forum from April 2021 – March 2022 by month.

Table 1

	May	June	July	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	No. of referrals (No. of schools)
Primary	0	0	0	0	3	3	1	3	2	3	15 (12)
Secondary	2	4	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	10 (1)
Total	2	4	0	1	4	3	3	3	2	3	25 (13)

Each referral reflected the individual's unique story and schools were encouraged to use the 'EBSA Level' (shown below) to indicate the level of complexity/severity.

EBSA Continuum*			
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
The pupil is attending school but shows occasional reluctance to attend and/or is anxious about attending lessons/school.	The pupil is attending school but they are experiencing higher levels of anxiety. Parents express that pupils may be reluctant to attend school. Occasional absences may occur.	The pupil increasingly displays periods of sporadic absence (from lessons/school). There may be patterns to be absence. Parents may be increasingly concerned.	The pupil is absent from school over an extended period of time. They have strong, negative feelings about school.

*EBSA Guidance (Educational Psychology Service 2020)

The majority of referrals into the EBSA Forum were for pupils at Level 3 (still in school but showing patterns of non-attendance) and Level 4 (no longer attending school) whom had been out of school for a significant period of time. Obviously the longer a pupil has been out of school (e.g. EBSA Level 4), the longer it will take to re-integrate them back into school. It is possible that the majority of referrals were Level 3 and 4 as prior to establishing the EBSA Forum, there was no opportunity to access specialist support. Going forward, it is hoped that now there is an appropriate team to refer to, schools can be encouraged to make referrals to the EBSA Forum earlier on, to address issues earlier/avoid issues becoming entrenched, and therefore to decrease the time taken to integrate pupils back into school.

Table 2 shows the number of referrals into the EBSA Forum from April 2021 – March 2022 by EBSA Level (as stated on the EBSA referral form).

Table 2

	EBSA Level			
	1	2	3	4
Primary	0	2	7	6
Secondary	0	1	4	4
Total	0	3	11	11

Of the referrals, approximately 60% were identified as having or as likely to have special educational needs (SEN) and 24% either had an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or had submitted a referral for a needs assessment. Just less than half (48%) had either a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or were awaiting assessment and a further 3 pupils were awaiting assessments on the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Anxiety and Depression pathways. Table 3 shows the number of referrals into the EBSA Forum from April 2021 – March 2022 for pupils with EHCP/SEN.

Table 3

No. pupils = 15	EHCP	EHCNA application	ASD diagnosis	ASD pathway	ADHD pathway	Anxiety and Depression pathway
Primary	2	3	4	7	1	0
Secondary	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total*	2	4	5	7	1	2

*The total number of pupils with SEN/EHCP is greater than the number of pupils in this table due to comorbid conditions

Schools were asked to explain the main drivers for the pupil's EBSA behaviours and these were again reported to be varied and complex. Principally, schools cited anxiety (general and separation) and family-related factors as the main drivers for school absence along with other pupil, home and school based factors. It should be noted that separation anxiety is often cited by the school as being a reason for school avoidance; however, in our understanding it is often the case that the pupil doesn't feel safe or that their needs are not being met in school, and therefore pupils do not want to leave home or the safe adults in the home.

Table 4 shows the number of referrals into the EBSA Forum from April 2021 – March 2022 by the main drivers of EBSA (as stated on the EBSA referral form).

Table 4

No. pupils = 25	Drivers of EBSA								
	Anxiety (separation anxiety)	Family related factors	ASD related factors	ACEs*	Covid related factors	Mental health factors	Sensory factors	Medical factors	Social factors
Primary	14 (6)	7	4	5	2	0	2	1	0
Secondary	7 (1)	3	2	1	3	3	1	1	2
Total	21 (7)	10	6	6	5	3	3	2	2

*ACEs stands for Adverse Childhood Experiences

Schools were asked about the help they would like from the EBSA Forum and most requested individual support for the pupil (13) to help with access to school, access to learning or anxiety reduction. In addition, there were requests for specific support in school (6) and for support for the family (5). One third of schools requested general help as they were unsure how best to support the pupil and 3 schools requested a change of placement. Table 5 shows the number of referrals into the EBSA Forum from April 2021 – March 2022 by the type of support requested (as stated on the EBSA referral form).

Table 5

No. pupils = 25	School support		Pupil support				Family support	Other	
	TA	AV1 [±]	Online tutor	Taxi	Therapy for pupil	EBSA Team	Parental support	Change of provision	General help
Primary	2	1	0	0	3	1(MHW)	4	2	4
Secondary	3	0	2	3	1	2(MHW) 1 (EP)	1	1	0
Total	5	1	2	3	4	4	5	3	4

[±] AV1s are robots that are the eyes, ears and voice of a pupil who is not able to physically access the classroom. For more information, please see AV1 section below.

EBSA support

Following the school's presentation of the case at the EBSA Forum, the panel made decisions on the type of support that could be offered to help reduce the pupil's anxiety and increase their level of attendance. Some cases were referred back to schools for more information, others were subject to monitoring, referred to more appropriate services or offered EBSA funding or EBSA Team support from September 2021. In most cases, the EBSA Forum suggested a combination of support approaches e.g. pupil/school support via the EBSA team, funding for a specific intervention and/or AV1 usage. Table 6 shows the decisions made by the EBSA Forum from April 2021 – March 2022.

Table 6

No. pupils = 25	EBSA Forum support*					
	Refer back to school ^a	Monitor ^b	Refer to other services ^c	Allocate EBSA Fund ^d	Assign to the EBSA Team ^e (EP, MHW, PATH meeting)	AV1 ^f
Primary	1	1	4	3	14	4
Secondary	2	1	2	3	5	2
Total	3	2	6	6	19	6

*Multiple decisions were made per case, so the total support offered is higher than the number of EBSA pupils.

^a Refer back to school

Some EBSA cases were referred back to schools so they could implement initiatives or to obtain more information from the teacher/pupil/family.

^b Monitor and refer to EBSA team

It was agreed to monitor some EBSA cases whilst awaiting outcomes of school interventions, where family situations had changed or whilst awaiting the outcome of an education, health and care needs assessment (EHCNA). It was agreed that these cases would be brought back to the EBSA Forum for allocation to the EBSA Team if still appropriate.

^c Refer to other services

It was decided that some EBSA cases needed referrals to other services e.g. to the school educational psychologist (EP), the Autism Team and to the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) for parental support e.g. access to the 'Overcoming Your Child's Fears and Worries' course.

^d Allocate EBSA Fund

Schools were able to apply for funding to support individual pupils. These requests included a range of support types e.g. transport to get to/from school, TA support at key times of the day and support to meet other needs/increase pupil engagement. Table 7 below shows the type and value of EBSA Funds allocated from April 2021 - March 2022.

Table 7

No. of pupils = 6	TA time	Taxi to/from school	Other
Primary	£661.36 £2,555.00		Breakfast club £442
Secondary		£5,990 £1,850	(JAC) Stables £600
Total	£3,216.36	£7,840	£1,043
Total EBSA Fund			£12,098.36

° Assign to the EBSA Team

The EBSA Team was established in September 2021 and consists of: an EBSA Co-ordinator, an EBSA Mental Health Worker and an EBSA Educational Psychologist (EP). Table 8 shows the roles of the key personnel with their associated costs.

Table 8

Role Title	Role description	Cost
EBSA Co-ordinator (2.5 days/wk.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single point of contact for schools and families and WBC teams • Co-ordination of EBSA cases and reviews • Co-ordination of EBSA funding • Organisation of person-centred meetings • Co-ordination of AV1 usage 	£20,675
EBSA Mental Health Worker (2.5 days/wk.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of support for families and pupils using solution-focused therapy to reduce anxiety and increase attendance • Graphic facilitation of person-centred meetings 	£17,205
EBSA Educational Psychologist (1 day/wk.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of psychological approaches and assessment to understand the pupil and barriers to attendance • Provision of psychological advice and support for schools, families and pupils • Facilitation of person-centred meetings 	£16,620
Total cost		£54,500

Once pupils were referred to the EBSA Team, the EBSA Co-ordinator contacted the school and parents for more information and the team met to discuss the cases and plan their activities. In many cases, the EBSA situations were far more complex than reflected in the referral paperwork or shared at the EBSA Forum. Reasons for this included:

- Relationship break down between school/home
- Schools/parents expecting a rapid, emergency response/service from the EBSA team
- Long term entrenched school avoidance behaviours i.e. the pupil having been out of school (Level 4) for a long period of time
- Schools not being supportive of the pupil's return to school
- Parents not being supportive of the pupil's return to school

Following the initial engagement, the EBSA EP and EBSA MHW worked with the school, parents and pupil to understand the situation and put in place bespoke interventions to increase attendance and reduce anxiety, this often included a combination of home/school visits, assessments, psychoeducation, therapy and practical support. Table 9 shows the support offered by the EBSA team.

Table 9

No. of pupils = 19	EBSA EP	EBSA MHW	PATH meetings**
Primary	5	6	4
Secondary	2	3	0
Total	7	9	4

**NB: Whilst PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrow's with Hope) meetings were recommended for 4 EBSA pupils by the EBSA Forum, these were delayed and a different type of person-centred meeting (MAP – Making Action Plans – thought to be a more therapeutic approach) were held for them in June 2022, which is outside of the scope of this report.

° AV1

AV1s are robots that enable a pupil to interact with the classroom remotely. The AV1 sits in the classroom, whilst the pupil operates the AV1 from another room in school or home via their smart phone/tablet. Following an initial trial, where 5 AV1s were rented from No Isolation (£3,000), West Berkshire Council purchased 5 AV1s to loan out to schools at a cost of £15,840. Reference: [No Isolation |No Isolation](#)

The AV1s were used by 5 pupils (4 schools) and Table 10 shows AV1 usage from April 2021- March 2022 (as reported by No Isolation)

Table 10

No of AV1s included in this data collection: 5	School type	Mins/hours Autumn	Mins/hours Spring	Additional comments
AV1 1	primary	-	11h 12	
AV1 2	primary	2hr 6	6h 9	
AV1 3	secondary	6hr 22	23m	Usage for 2 pupils
AV1 4	primary	1h 15	38m	
AV1 5	-	-	-	Allocated to school but not used

EBSA costs

Total costs for the EBSA project April 2021 – March 2022 are shown in Table 11.

Table 11

	EBSA support costs
EBSA team	£54,500
EBSA fund spend	£12,098.36
AV1s	£18,840
Total EBSA costs	£85,438.36

EBSA pupil outcomes

Due to the individual nature of EBSA difficulties, it can be difficult to consistently measure the outcomes of involvement; however, the following measures are reported:

- Number of pupils with increased attendance
- Number of pupils with a reduction in EBSA level
- Number of pupils where attendance is now above 90%
- Number of pupils with increased engagement in learning
- Number of pupils with a reduction in school anxiety

Of the 25 referrals, 6 EBSA cases were closed without receiving any support due to a change of circumstances following the referral (4 of these cases were taken on prior to the EBSA team being in place) so 19 pupils received EBSA support. Of those, 2 EBSA cases were put on hold, 1 was monitored due to alternative support being in place and 3 were newly referred in March 2021, so it is only possible to review the data for 13 EBSA cases in the financial year 2021/22.

Pre/Post measures for the 13 cases showed that as a result of EBSA involvement:

- attendance increased for 61.5% EBSA cases
- the EBSA Level reduced for 46% EBSA cases
- the attendance level rose to over 90% for 15% EBSA cases
- engagement in learning increased for 54% EBSA cases
- school anxiety reduced for 54% cases

Table 12 shows a summary of the change in attendance and anxiety levels for all EBSA cases (both closed and live) in the year ending March 2022.

Table 12

No. of pupils = 13	No. of cases	No. of cases with increased attendance [‡]	No. of cases with attendance above 90% [‡]	No. of cases with reduction in EBSA level	No. of cases with increase in engagement in learning	No. of cases with reduction in school anxiety [∞]
Closed EBSA cases	6	4	1	3	5	4
Live (ongoing) EBSA cases	7	4	1	3	2	3
Total cases	13	8	2	6	7	7

[‡] As measured by school attendance data

[∞] As measured by anxiety scales

Closed EBSA cases

A number of cases were closed in this financial year due to reasons outside of EBSA control i.e. pupils moving provision or a school no longer buying into EBSA support. Pre/Post measures of these closed cases showed that as a

result of EBSA involvement attendance increased in 66% cases, the EBSA Level reduced in 50% cases, engagement in learning increased in 83% cases and school anxiety reduced in 66% cases. As pupils experiencing EBSA are at high risk of poor life outcomes, it is also important to note additional benefits that have been noticed following EBSA support. These impacts, whilst difficult to quantify are reported below and a table containing the details of individual cases is included in the appendix. Additional impacts included:

- the pupil being able to trust a professional and talk about their difficulties for the first time
- improved family functioning
- improvements in the pupil's level of confidence
- the pupil being better able to take part in daily activities e.g. have a hair cut
- the pupil having improved social skills/engagement e.g. being able to travel independently by train, engage with a tutor

CASE STUDY – Pupil X

Background: Year 7 pupil

Referral to EBSA: Fear of being in school, using the school bus, attending lessons, worries over safety of his mother whilst in school, general anxiety around safety in cities and the behaviour of others.

Attendance at time of referral: 15%

EBSA support: (Sept 2021- Mar 2022)

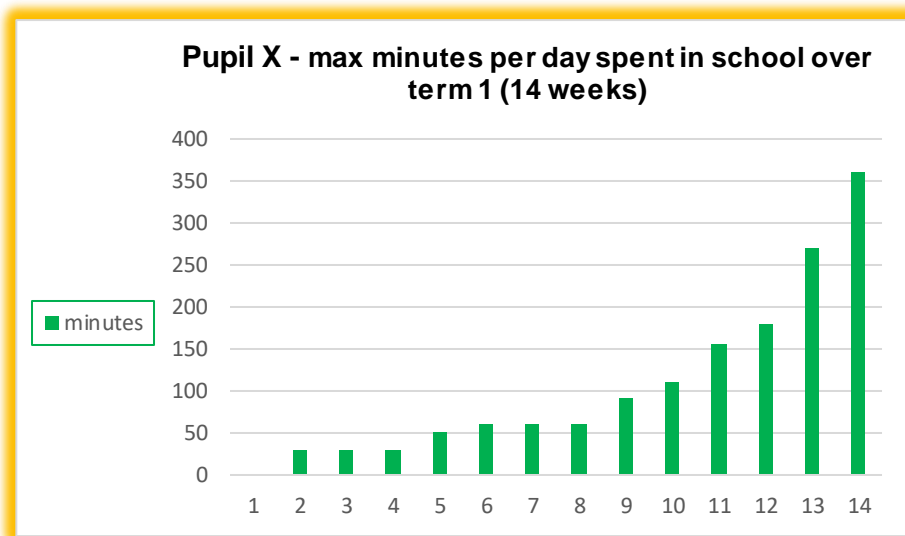
- EBSA MHW solution-focused support (weekly)
- AV1 use
- Support for parent (including MHST support)
- Collaboration with school

Pupil outcomes:

- Accepted support and engaged well with professionals
- Moved from Level 3/4 to Level 1
 - Slow initial increases in attendance – minutes per day
 - Rise in attendance from 15% to 50% (end October) then 80% (end December) and 100% (end January)



AV1 robot



Pupil feedback regarding the AV1:

“It was fun. It was interesting. It definitely helped me. The other boy was using the AV1 also to go into lessons. I wanted to go into lessons and wanted to feel a sense of achievement.”

“The AV1 helped me to see what the classroom looked like and how the teacher taught before I went into the class.”

Parent feedback:

“The EBSA MHW has been absolutely amazing! She was able to form a positive relationship with X very quickly – which is very important to X. She has a magical way of just talking to X without overwhelming him, and this rapport that she has built is what is allowing him to make the progress. I can't fault the EBSA MHW, or speak highly enough of the support that she's given to X and me”

Live EBSA cases

A further 13 cases remained active within this financial year and support continued post April 2022. Two of those cases were put on hold whilst awaiting EHCNA applications and another was monitored due to school EP involvement. Of the remaining 10 cases, 3 had only been referred in March 2022, so there was no time to implement EBSA support before the end of the financial year.

Therefore, pre/post measures for the remaining 7 live cases indicated that as a result of EBSA involvement attendance has so far increased in 57% cases, the EBSA Level has reduced in 43% cases, engagement in learning has increased in 29% cases and school anxiety has reduced in 43% cases. It should be noted that support for these pupils is ongoing, so this is a snapshot of their progress to date. As above, EBSA support so far has impacted the lives of these pupils and families in a range of ways that are outside the scope of reported pupil outcome measures (above) so this information and live EBSA case data is included in the appendix.

Impact of EBSA involvement

The impact of EBSA involvement evaluates the support offered by the EBSA Forum to pupils experiencing emotionally based school avoidance, which includes the work of the EBSA Team, which was only established in September 2021, so reflects their work across a 7 month period. Due to the individual complexity of EBSA cases, especially the time taken to build trust, the need for collaborative working with schools and families and the need to try a range of approaches before finding out 'what works' for each pupil, it can be difficult to quantify the financial impact of EBSA involvement. Considerations are outlined below that relate to both short and long term benefits of EBSA involvement and potential cost savings.

Long term benefits

Long term benefits are difficult to quantify; however, by supporting a pupil to remain in school or to return to school/education, their life chances will be improved. This will not only benefit the pupil themselves, but also their family, and benefit and reduce costs to society in the future.

Research shows that pupils experiencing EBSA risk poorer long term outcomes:

- Reduced access to, or engagement with education, employment or training post compulsory schooling (Taylor, 2012)
- Increased risk of lower socio-economic status in future (DfE, 2012)
- Impaired social functioning & social exclusion in adulthood and poor relationships with peers (Havik et al., 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2019)
- Higher risk of experiencing poor mental health in childhood, as adolescents and as adults (Kearney, 2008; Lyon and Cotler, 2007)
- Increased levels of risky behaviours such as suicide attempts, substance misuse and teenage sexual activity (Kearney, 2008)

Therefore, by supporting pupils with EBSA difficulties, we help to avoid these risks in the future, thereby increasing the pupil's life chances and reducing costs to society.

Short term benefits

The EBSA team has not only helped to support the pupil staying in/returning to school/education, but also supported the family/system, which can be chaotic, due to the EBSA issue and/or other contributing factors. To make change happen, it is acknowledged that regular communication with families is vital to improve relationships, their motivation for change and family functioning. The EBSA Team have been able to offer this and in so doing, have filled a gap in the system. They have achieved this by:

- The EBSA Coordinator providing regular check-ins/support for families and acting as a single point of contact when families feel that no-one else is listening and they have nowhere else to turn.
- The EBSA EP providing a clear bespoke EBSA plan after assessing the pupil's needs.
- The EBSA mental health workers supporting the pupil with their anxieties, and supporting both the pupil and their families to be able to make necessary changes in order to re-engage with education.

Short term cost savings

In order to quantify potential cost savings as a result of EBSA involvement, information was gathered from a number of sources (EBSA referral form, discussions with schools, discussions with and knowledge about parents and their circumstances, and results from a survey monkey questionnaire) to answer the following questions:

- How likely the pupil was to stay at/return to/engage with their current school before EBSA involvement
- If the pupil was unlikely to return to school (or unsure about this), which alternative provision/placement would be most likely for them?
- At the end of EBSA involvement/end of the financial year, had the pupil returned to school?

From this information, potential cost savings have been estimated where pupil attendance/engagement is greater post EBSA involvement than previously expected by the school. Table 15 shows school views about the likelihood of the pupil returning to school pre EBSA involvement compared with the pupil status post involvement/at the end of the financial year and any potential cost savings. NB: The view of the school does not necessarily reflect those of the family and their individual circumstances.

Table 15

Pupil	Pre EBSA involvement		Post EBSA involvement / current situation	
	Pupil likely to stay at/return to school? (Yes; No; Unsure)	Likely alternative placement?	Status	Potential cost saving?
Pupil A	No	SEMH placement	Moved to SEMH provision (closed)	n/a – pupil referred too late for EBSA support to be effective
Pupil B	Unsure	Medical Tuition Service	Attending school (closed)	Y
Pupil C	Unsure	Elective Home Education	Attending school (closed)	Y
Pupil D	Unsure	Medical Tuition Service	Attending school (closed)	Y
Pupil E	Unsure	Medical Tuition Service	Attending school (closed)	Y
Pupil F	No	Medical Tuition Service	Medical Tuition Service	n/a – MTS was recommended as part of EBSA plan
Pupil G	Unsure	Elective Home Education	Attending school	Y
Pupil H	Unsure	Medical Tuition Service	Attending school (live)	Y
Pupil I	No	Permanent Exclusion / iCollege	Engaged well with EBSA EP	Y
Pupil J	Yes	n/a	Attending school (live)	N
Pupil K	Yes	n/a	Attending school (live)	N
Pupil L	No	Autism resource	Not attending school (live)	N
Pupil M	Unsure	SEMH placement	Attending school (live)	Y

Based upon the above information from schools, cost savings have been estimated by considering the potential reduction in the need for alternative educational provision/placement as shown in Table 16. The amounts included consider the approximate cost to the local authority for a one year period.

Table 16

Impact of EBSA support	No of pupils	Cost per pupil p.a.	Total cost saving p.a.
Reduction in need for alternative placement			
Reduction in need for Elective Home Education (EHE)	3	n/a	n/a
Reduction in need for alternative placement due to permanent exclusion e.g. iCollege	1	£20,000	£20,000
Reduction in need for alternative 1:1 SEMH placement e.g. Engaging Potential	0	£40,000	0
Reduction in need for Medical Tuition Service (MTS) N.B. These are costs to schools, which are a contribution towards the cost of MTS. WBC covers the rest of the costs (tutors time, travel costs etc), therefore this saving will be higher than the actual amount shown.	4 (1 primary, 3 secondary)	<u>Primary</u> £4,042.74 <u>Secondary</u> £5,044.26	£19,157.52
Reduction in need for ASD resource placement	0	£10,000	0
Reduction in need for SEMH placement e.g. New Barn/Unicorn	1	£80,000	£80,000
Total potential cost saving			£119,157.52

As these pupils were all experiencing high levels of EBSA (Level 3-4), there may also be additional cost savings attributable to EBSA involvement due to a reduction in support costs e.g. EP support. Table 17 shows the estimated additional cost savings.

Table 17

Impact of EBSA support	No of pupils	Approx. cost per pupil	Approx. cost saving
Reduction in time to support the pupil			
Reduction in EHA/MHST time/support	9	£1,000	£9,000
Reduction in need for EP time/assessment	7	Approx. £1500 per assessment (3 days EP time)	£10,500
Total cost saving			£19,500

Table 18 shows the estimated total cost savings attributable to EBSA involvement.

Table 18

Impact of EBSA support	No of pupils	Total cost saving
Reduction in need for alternative placement	8	£119,157.52
Reduction in time to support the pupil	16	£19,500
Total cost saving		<u>£138,657.52</u>

EBSA Feedback

To further evaluate the impact of EBSA involvement, regular feedback was gathered from pupils, schools and families. Key questions included:

- What has changed as a result of EBSA involvement?
- How helpful has EBSA involvement been?
- How satisfied have you been with EBSA involvement?

School feedback

Throughout the course of EBSA involvement, SENCOs were contacted to give feedback. Their comments included:

From SENCO: *“The EBSA EP was amazing and gave my colleague and I, as well as the family a good amount of time to really understand the challenges. (MHST) has been wonderful too and we can see that she is dedicated to helping (pupil name).” 9/10 for EBSA service.*

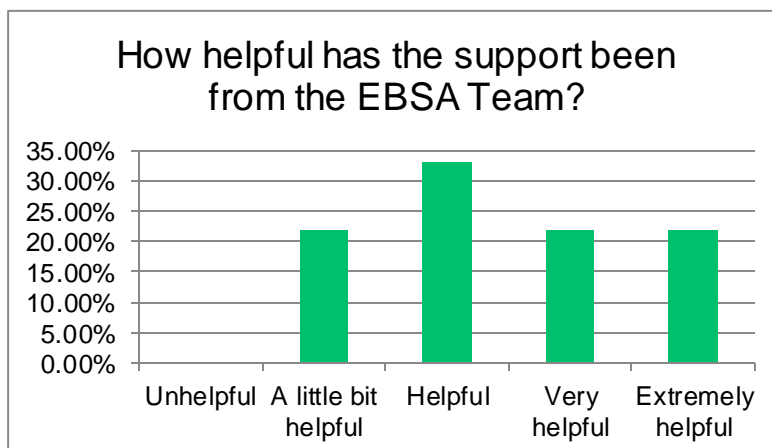
From key school contact/ELSA: *“Without EBSA it would have taken a lot longer to help (pupil name), it’s good to have an intermediate agency that can support and guide. As an ELSA I recommend to all I can!”*

From Headteacher: *“They were great, having accessed the service I now feel in a much better place to refer sooner.”*

From SENCO: *“(Pupil name) is due to come into school for the first time in 6 months tomorrow, hopefully this will break the cycle and a reintegration timetable will start next academic year if all goes well.”*

Nine SENCOs also responded to a Survey Monkey questionnaire about how helpful/satisfied they were with EBSA Team involvement. 77% of SENCOs found the EBSA support helpful-extremely helpful and were satisfied-extremely satisfied with the support. The results are shown in Charts 1-2.

Chart 1



Comments

School 1

Worked with pupil at home and had good link with school.

School 2

Quick access to EP was great. AV1 trial was a success.

School 3

I'm sure the child enjoyed the sessions with the EBSA MHW but her overall attendance has decreased.

School 4

Whilst it has not helped us to achieve anything with the child, it has enabled us to access medical tuition.

School 5

The AV1 was great. Work done with the student by EBSA forum was useful to the student but caused a number of unnecessary difficult situations for the school with the family.

School 6

Support at home with ASD team has been invaluable.

School 7

Reassurance and guidance.

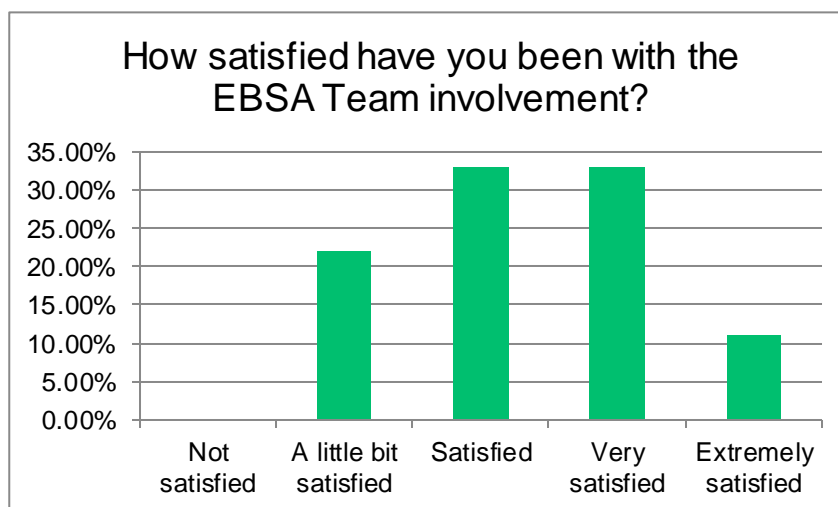
School 8

Useful for annual review although not much info in relation to how pupil is doing before or since this meeting.

School 9

No comments given

Chart 2



Comments

School 1

EBSA team spoke to parents and school in timely manner and built relationships quickly.

School 2

I felt included at every stage and kept informed.

School 3

I found the process longwinded. The forms were very complex and the forum itself although useful to talk around the problem, and it did come up with a solution that partly worked the overall result is not good.

School 4

On the whole, it was helpful, but mainly the AV1. We are more than capable of taking the lead with a flexible bespoke plan for our students. On this occasion however, it was made difficult for us when the EBSA support made suggestions that were unrealistic and unhelpful, and which risked affecting our relationship with the family. Whilst

working together is important, we were not in need of someone to take the lead in the journey with the student and despite repeated attempts to convey this, it was very hard to get that message through.

School 5

We have been able to access medical tuition.

School 6

I do not know exactly what involvement has looked like for EBSA with this child currently so it is hard to comment.

School 7

Good communication

School 8/9

No comments given

Parent feedback

Throughout the course of EBSA involvement, parents were contacted to give feedback. Their comments included:

From parent: *“A big thank you to the EBSA MHW for helping him to find himself again, his teacher said the other day .. ‘the old (pupil name) is back’..*

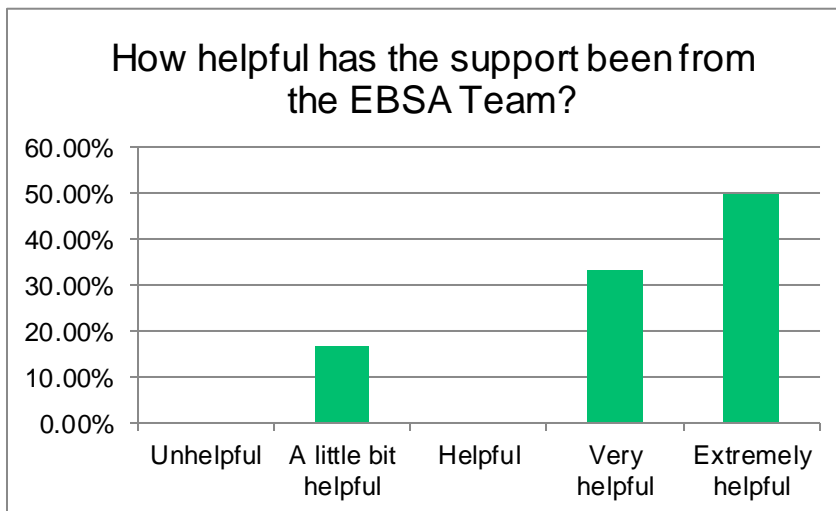
From parent: *“I can’t thank you guys enough again for all the help you have provided for (pupil name). I’m praying things start to get better soon for him.”*

From parent: *“Can’t thank the EBSA team enough for what they’re doing for (pupil name) and for me”*

From parent: *“You (EBSA MHW) really understand (pupil name) and have this magical of way of just talking to him without overwhelming him and this rapport that you have built is what is allowing him to make the progress.”*

Six parents also responded to a Survey Monkey questionnaire about how helpful/satisfied they were with EBSA Team involvement. 83% of parents found the EBSA support helpful and were satisfied-extremely satisfied with the support. The results are shown in Charts 3-4.

Chart 3



Comments

Parent 1

Our support worker was able to engage with (pupil name) and that in itself was a victory as she was completely shut down. Again had we been given sufficient time, I’m sure some progress and impact could have been made but the sessions were only available for a limited period.

Parent 2

EBSA have been very helpful, they have given support and guidance which has been valuable, they have helped with school having a better understanding and being more supportive in ways they can help.

Parent 3

I felt the team worked well with (pupil name), they showed interest in him and made him feel comfortable enough in time to be able to engage and open up a little, something I feel school have completely failed to do.

Parent 4

My child’s support came from the EBSA MHW. Her approach to supporting my child was incredibly effective and she was able to engage with him from the outset. She also provided excellent guidance to me as his parent, helping me understand what he was experiencing and how best to support. She coordinated with the school so we were working as a team with the school’s support manager, this was so important to my child’s progress and gradual introduction to school/lessons etc. I couldn’t fault the support provided by the EBSA team.

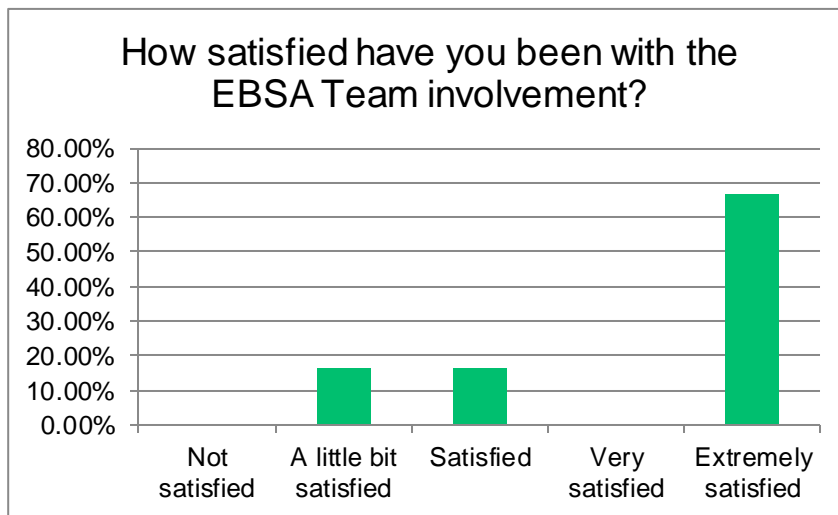
Parent 5

Getting to school vastly improved.

Parent 6

No comments given

Chart 4



Comments

Parent 1

Very satisfied. It's an amazing support that families especially SEN children need as they cannot conform/perform like most children in a school environment.

Parent 2

I'm very happy with the work that has taken place with (pupil name), I feel it would have worked out better if both primary and secondary schools were fully on board with, and actually did the things that they were supposed to.

Parent 3

Breakfast club plus working with the EBSA MHW had a very positive impact on my daughter.

Parent 4

I'm sure score will be higher once things planned happen.

Parent 5

Again not long enough or early enough.

Parent 6

No comment given

Pupil feedback

There were also opportunities to capture some comments from pupils about their EBSA support:

Pupil 1

After using the AV1 – ‘I got so much more work done!’ and ‘It was like I was in the classroom!’

Pupil 2

After using the AV1 and sessions with the EMSA MHW

“I absolutely frickin love school. I can't wait for each day. It's the friends I've made and the people outside my tutor group as well. There are so many supportive people that understand. There is so many people who totally understand.

Someone I'm really good friends with had anxiety and she totally understand and she gets it. I've got to know so many brilliant people so... umm yeah...teachers understand too. My science teacher's really nice.

You look at it (school and lessons) and think it's impossible... but when you get out there an challenge yourself you see that there is people there that are supportive and I've got my friends there and my teachers there and they will speak to me and try and distract me and do everything they can to try and help me. I look forward to seeing my friends every day now and I don't want to not be there.'

'A big factor was getting out at break and lunch and meeting those people. I want to be around them.'

He also said about (other EBSA pupil):

'(Pupil name) is now out at break and walking around with his back pack on his back. Before he wouldn't come out at break and he wouldn't walk around with his back pack on. Now I seen (pupil name) also out before registration. He has definitely improved as well. He fuelled me to use the AV1 and I fuelled him to go outside.'

Pupil 3

When asked whether Pupil 3 had any advice about coping, following his sessions with the EBSA MWH, he said:

'What is there to worry about really? There are big problems and there are little problems. If it's a small worry then try and tackle it. If it's a big worry then break it down into smaller ones and take small steps. After all - it's just school.'

Pupil 3's 'tag line' *If a teacher shouts, they will calm down and be ok - they won't be angry the next day.'*

'Learn from your mistakes.'

Learnings

Over the past year, there have been many learnings about how best to support pupils experiencing EBSA. These include:

- There is no 'typical' EBSA case, each pupil's situation is different based on a range of complex and interacting factors. It is important to understand these factors before developing and implementing interventions to maximise their effectiveness.
- Working with the pupil alone is not enough, robust efforts need to be taken to support and communicate with the whole system (school and family) around the pupil.
- It can take a long time to engage those pupils who are no longer able to attend school due to intense levels of anxiety. It takes time to build up the relationship and trust that is needed to most effectively work with them.
- In some situations, parents can also maintain the cycle of anxiety and/or block attempts towards school re-attendance. We need to work with parents to help them to understand that their child needs to take (supported) steps to challenge their anxieties, and support the parents in being able to do this.
- Early referral and intervention is most effective. Late referrals can mean that pupils are less likely to engage and/or are no longer able to access mainstream education due to the entrenched nature of their difficulties and school/family relationship breakdown.
- It can be difficult to measure the impact of EBSA support when the pupil is not yet back in school. School attendance is a key measure; however, some pupils are so anxious that they are no longer able to leave their bedrooms, so smaller indicators of change should also be measured. Developing broader life and social skills for these pupils is imperative.
- For optimal EBSA success, all parties (school, family and pupil) must want the pupil to return to school. Where relationships have broken down and this is not the case, then it is much harder to achieve the attendance goals. Negative pupil narratives can hinder successful re-integration.
- Use of AV1s can be successful but there needs to be SLT buy-in and support to set up, practice and engage pupils, families and staff.
- Differences in registration practices means that whilst some EBSA pupils are being penalised for non-attendance i.e. unauthorised absence and EWO engagement, other schools are authorising attendance. This subtle but important difference can act as a barrier to re-engagement as seeing absence as 'pupil refusal' rather than non-attendance due to a range of emotional/social factors, can encourage a narrative of blame and negativity about the pupil/family. Attendance is everyone's responsibility so clarification is needed for schools about how to mark EBSA pupils consistently on the register and encourage them to understand the reasons for non-attendance.

Future considerations

Due to the complex and individual nature of difficulties, it is key for support to be tailored to pupil needs. Referrals have been focused on individual pupils; however, it is recognised that there are many other factors affecting pupil non-attendance. To this end, a more systematic approach should be considered to reduce anxiety and increase attendance. In the future, EBSA solutions need to:

- Facilitate more collaborative working
- Address factors impacting the system around the child
- Champion the pupil voice
- Educate adults supporting pupils experiencing/at risk of experiencing EBSA
- Encourage earlier identification of EBSA difficulties

Conclusion

The Invest to Save grant of £110,657 has supported pupils experiencing emotionally-based school avoidance. As these pupils are at high risk of poor life outcomes, it has been important to understand the complex nature of their difficulties and to develop bespoke interventions to meet their needs. As a result, figures for the year 2021/22 are encouraging with attendance increasing in over 60% of cases, engagement increasing in 54% cases and anxiety reducing in 54% cases. In addition, it is estimated that there has been a cost saving of approximately £138,657 due to a reduction in the time needed to support these pupils and a reduced need for alternative placements. Whilst difficult to quantify, the longer term benefits of supporting pupils back into school cannot be under-estimated and short term benefits have already been seen in both pupils and families who have felt that someone has listened to them for the first time, and as a result their confidence has grown and they are better able to function as a family and engage in society. Supporting EBSA pupils means believing that non-attendance is a symptom of wider factors, not simply refusal and collaboration is required to support the family and system around the pupil to understand their needs and encourage change. Without this support, the longer term impact to society will be costly.