Extended School Non-Attendance: Pupil Experiences and Development of a Local Authority, Multi-Agency Approach to Supporting Regular Attendance

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List of Acronyms

APA	American Psychological Association
APDR	Assess, Plan, Do, Review
AR	Action Research
BPS	British Psychological Society
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DECP	Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology
DfE	Department for Education
EBSNA	Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
ERIC	Education Resources Information Center
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EThOS	E-Theses Online Service
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
INSA	International Network for School Attendance
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
ITEP	Initial Training of Educational Psychologists
JORSEN	Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs
LA	Local Authority
MTSS	Multi-dimensional Tiered Systems of Support
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Learning
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RADIO	Research and Development in Organisations
RCT	Randomised Control Trials
RQ	Research Question
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SLR	Systematic Literature Review
SoP	Standard of Proficiency
SM	Stakeholder Meeting
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UK	United Kingdom
UoM	University of Manchester
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Thesis Abstract

Background: Extended school non-attendance needs are increasing, and many Educational Psychology Services are developing their own localised approaches to support. Whilst research is developing in this area, the views of the children and young people experiencing these difficulties are scarcely represented in the literature.

Methods/participants: A systematic literature review (SLR) explored children and young people's experiences of extended school non-attendance using a meta-ethnographic approach. A year-long action research (AR) project conducted with a North-West Local Authority (LA) explored how a localised approach to supporting regular school attendance can be developed, and multi-agency stakeholders' perceptions of the impact, facilitators, and challenges for implementation.

Analysis/findings: The SLR findings indicate that extended school non-attendance needs appear to arise from a reduced sense of belonging, often relating to cumulative, intersecting difficulties within the physical and social school environment, and pupils' own wellbeing and beliefs about attendance. The AR revealed that development and implementation of a LA approach to promoting attendance requires a gradual, multi-agency approach, which promotes shared ownership of the products and process across all stakeholders to enhance uptake of positive changes to practice. Factors including localisation, multi-agency collaboration and positive feedback facilitated the change process, whilst factors including diminished capacity and misconceptions around roles and responsibilities were barriers to change.

Conclusion/implications: The implications of the SLR include an enhanced emphasis on the need to gather young people's views early, and to use their preferred terminology when discussing their difficulties, with further research required to the translate these experiences into policy and practice. Findings from the empirical paper indicate that development of an effective approach requires the commitment and motivation of a core group, with sufficient time and resourcing. Future research should facilitate evaluation of

these approaches. Clear dissemination strategies for sharing these findings with other multi-disciplinary practitioners are described.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of any application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Acknowledgements

Thesis Introduction

Overall Research Strategy and Aims

The importance of regular school attendance is widely recognised (Heyne, et al., 2016; Heyne, et al., 2020), contributing to a higher quality of life and greater social, academic, and occupational success (Kearney, 2016). However, approximately 5% of children and young people experience persistent difficulties maintaining regular school attendance (Elliot & Place, 2019). In their practitioner review, Elliott and Place (2019) noted that there has been "little substantial advance in knowledge" (p. 4) to guide the work of practitioners supporting school non-attenders over the last two decades. Heyne et al. (2020) identified three key challenges within this research area: (1) lack of consensus; (2) inadequate attention to the voices of all stakeholders; and (3) sub-standard dissemination and implementation of research (p. 1024).

This thesis aimed to contribute to this important research area through developing an understanding of school attendance difficulties from the perspectives of those to whom support and interventions are directed: children and young people, families, and educational professionals (Atkins, et al., 2008). The researcher's preliminary study in this area explored two case studies of school attendance difficulties within the commissioning Local Authority (LA), from the perspectives of parents, school staff, and Educational Psychologists (EPs). The findings of the study provided further support for an interactionist, ecological model of early identification and intervention within the research site (Corcoran, et al., 2022).

Paper One therefore aimed to consider how the views and experiences of children and young people align with this finding. The paper presents a systematic literature review of the existing literature, assimilating over 60 pupil accounts of their experiences of school attendance difficulties to identify and explore common experiences. Paper Two comprises of an empirical study, utilising action research cycles to capture the development of a LA approach to supporting school attendance difficulties, utilising an interactionist model of early identification and intervention. The research also aimed to capture stakeholders'

perceptions of the factors influencing the process, to develop ecologically-valid and transferable practice-based evidence. Paper Three considers the policy, practice, and research development implications of the thesis findings and describes the proposed strategy for the dissemination and evaluation of this research. It emphasises the need for a shared consensus regarding school attendance difficulties and effective integration of stakeholder perspectives at all levels of support. Papers One and Two have been prepared in accordance with the submission guidelines for the Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs (Appendix 1).

Research Commissioning and Preliminary Study

A team of researchers exploring school attendance difficulties has developed within the research commissioning process on the Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology programme at the University of Manchester. As part of this process, links were made with a nearby LA Educational Psychology Service (EPS) who were interested in further developing their practice in this area. The focus, design, and data gathering methods of the research were decided upon following collaboration with the research supervisor, the research commissioners, and other stakeholders in this area.

Researcher's Professional Background

The researcher on this project is a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying for the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Manchester. Prior to beginning the training, the researcher had spent six years working across primary, secondary and specialist educational settings, in the consecutive roles of Teaching Assistant, Primary School Teacher and Assistant Educational Psychologist. Within these roles, the researcher supported a wide range of children and young people with anxiety and saw the ever-increasing prevalence of these difficulties and the wide-reaching impacts which they had on the social, emotional, and educational outcomes for those young people. These experiences also highlighted the valuable contribution of first-hand stakeholder experiences to inform effective intervention, particularly in an area where context and individualisation are so key. This project therefore hoped to further build on the research evidence for supporting children and young people experiencing anxiety in the context of school

attendance difficulties. Through this work, the researcher hoped to highlight the potential facilitators and barriers to school attendance in a range of settings and from a range of perspectives, in order to inform and develop effective identification and intervention practices at an organisational level.

Positioning for Data Access

The empirical research took place within a North West LA organisation. Senior leaders within the LA had noted increasing concern regarding the level of school attendance difficulties, and the increasing strain which this was placing upon LA resources to provide adequate support. Following these concerns, which were shared by the LA EPS, a working group was established to identify and facilitate a cohesive LA approach. This group was comprised of a range of professionals from across the LA who were involved in planning for, or directly supporting, children and young people with school attendance difficulties. This research was commissioned by a Senior Educational Psychologist via the University of Manchester's research commissioning process. It followed on from an earlier research commission, which had developed the early identification and understanding of school attendance needs across the LA. This research commission subsequently focused on the continued development and initial implementation of the LA graduated approach to intervention.

Upon commissioning of the research, the researcher contacted the existing working group to invite members to become stakeholders in this empirical project (Appendix 2.1). They were provided with a brief research proposal which they were invited to shape in line with their groups' needs (Appendix 2.2). Over the course of the project, other professionals from across the LA were also invited to join the group in line with their interests or needs.

Through their doctoral training, the researcher was simultaneously completing a professional practice placement within the LA EPS. This facilitated an enhanced understanding of the organisational context, and ongoing access to the stakeholder group, as the researcher was immersed within the research site throughout and many unanticipated opportunities to engage in research discussions and reflections occurred

throughout the researcher's professional practice placement. This did however create difficulties regarding role boundaries, which required the researcher to meticulously monitor the timing allocated to either placement or research related tasks and ensure that these were contracted and conducted appropriately. For example, ensuring research activities conducted during placement time (for convenience) were subtracted from placement hours and vice versa.

Axiology, Ontology and Epistemology

There are a range of explicit and implicit assumptions which underpin our conceptions of social reality, and therefore how we may plan, conduct, and interpret social research. Firstly, axiology refers to the values and beliefs which the researcher holds and how these influence the way the world is understood, including the purposes of understanding and what is deemed 'valuable' (Cohen, et al., 2017, p. 3). The researcher has described how their own prior experience led to their initial interest in the area of school attendance difficulties. Within this, they hold a number of values and beliefs regarding school attendance, including that school attendance should be a positive experience for children and young people which results in favourable social, emotional and academic outcomes, that educational professionals have a duty of care and should therefore be appropriately trained and resourced to facilitate and achieve this, and most importantly, that all children and young people have the right to regular school attendance (The United Nations, 1989).

Through Paper One the researcher sought to explore the beliefs and values of children and young people regarding their experiences of school attendance and to understand how these could inform the support provided. An inductive approach was taken to data analysis to ensure the findings aligned with the views of the participants rather than the researcher's axiological values. Within Paper Two's empirical project, the researcher also maintained an awareness that their axiological position may not always align with that of other stakeholders, with their varying roles and responsibilities, and sought to ensure frequent opportunities to share and reflect upon these. For example, some saw their responsibility as solely for monitoring and increasing attendance figures, whilst others perceived a role in which increasing social and emotional wellbeing was paramount over creating tangible

change to any attendance data. This explicit reflection on each stakeholder's axiological position enabled implicit assumptions to be brought to the surface and supported a shared understanding of the aims and vision for the project.

This research adopts a position of critical realism. Critical realism began as an alternative to both positivism and constructivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), suggesting that "ontology (i.e. what is real, the nature of reality) is not reducible to epistemology (i.e. our knowledge of reality)" (Fletcher, 2017, p. 182). It acknowledges the "real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories and constructions" but also that "our understanding of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 5). Critical realism is therefore a useful tool for analysing and promoting social change, due to its ability to engage in explanation and causal analysis (Fletcher, 2017).

Critical realism enables the researcher to acknowledge the objective reality of school attendance, whilst allowing the exploration of contextual and environmental influences within and across the research site, and by appreciating the subjective experiences of multiple stakeholders in different school and LA contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the commencement of the project, a full assessment of suitability was undertaken via The University of Manchester's System for Ethical Review and ethical approval was granted on 28th July 2021 (Appendix 2.3). In line with the University of Manchester Ethical Practice and Policy Guidelines (University of Manchester, 2016), all participants in the research were adults who received an approved participant consent form and information sheet detailing the nature of the research (Appendix 2.4 and 2.5). Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time on all documents as mentioned above. All data collected has been stored in adherence with the researcher's Data Management Plan.

The design of the study and documents was also guided by the following professional guidelines: the BPS Professional Practice Guidelines and Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS,

2017; BPS, 2018) and the HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), 2016).

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Paper One: A Meta-Ethnographic Understanding of Children and Young People's Experiences of Extended School Non-Attendance

Prepared in accordance with the author guidelines for submission to the Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs (JORSEN) (Appendix 1).

This paper was since published in JORSEN, on 4th October 2022:

Abstract

The views of the children and young people experiencing Extended School Non-Attendance difficulties are scarcely represented in the literature. This systematic literature review provides a much-needed overview of the existing research evidence through a detailed synthesis of the lived experiences of persistently non-attending young people, using a meta-ethnographic approach. Ten qualitative, UK-based papers were selected and analysed, each of which focused specifically on the direct views of school non-attenders. Using Noblit and Hare's seven-step approach, the analysis generated seven themes: (1) difficult relationships with peer group; (2) inconsistent relationships with and support from adults; (3) negative experiences of school transition; (4) negative experiences of learning in school; (5) emotional wellbeing and mental health needs; (6) others' negative perceptions of the individual's needs; (7) personal beliefs about attendance. Through reciprocal translation of these themes, the overarching higher order concept was developed relating to the impact of a sense of school belonging. The implications of this review include an enhanced emphasis on the need to gather young people's views early, and to use their preferred terminology when discussing their difficulties. While outside the scope of this paper, further research should look to the translation into policy and practice in this area.

Introduction

It is estimated that up to 5% of school-aged young people experience persistent difficulties attending school, with consequent long-term academic, social, and emotional impacts (Elliot & Place, 2019). School non-attendance is thought to be a heterogenous difficulty with no singular causal or explanatory factor identified, and not linked to specific demographic factors, such as gender or socio-economic status, although prevalence has been noted to increase during key transition points, such as entry to school or primary to secondary school transition (King & Bernstein, 2001). Rather, it is suggested that a range of 'push and pull' factors interact between the home, school, and young person themselves (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). Intervention therefore requires an interactionist, functional view of such difficulties, with identification and intervention taking place as early as possible to mitigate the impact of risk factors, and to promote protective factors which support school attendance across eco-systemic levels (Nuttall & Woods, 2013; Corcoran, et al., 2022).

The labelling of non-attendance difficulties is a widely debated but important element of support. The label used may impact upon the way the young person is viewed and treated by those around them, leading to differential access to support services, intervention, and potential legal proceedings (Lyon & Cotler, 2007; Elliot & Place, 2019). Terms such as 'school refusal', 'anxiety-based school non-attendance' or 'emotionally-based school avoidance', have been criticised for their implication of a solely 'within-child' explanation which may move the focus away from other factors, and disempower the young people to enact change (Pellegrini, 2007; Callwood & Goodman, 2018). When asked, pupils were significantly more likely to identify school-based factors as limiting their attendance compared to home-based or individual factors (Malcolm, et al., 2003), and young people have disagreed with the terms 'refusal' and 'avoidance' and described their experience as 'not-coping' (Callwood & Goodman, 2018, p. 1). The term 'extended school non-attendance' has been used here, to promote the need for a shared understanding of the complex, interacting factors which may cause or perpetuate attendance difficulties, and to hopefully encapsulate the experience and preferred terminology of young people themselves.

Effective intervention for school attendance difficulties requires an understanding of the perceived causal and perpetuating factors, including from the perspective of the young person and their family (Purcell & Tsverik, 2008; Corcoran, et al., 2022). Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Section 19 of the Children and Families Act (2014) set out the right of every child to express and have their views taken into serious consideration in all matters affecting them. This active participation is associated with improved long-term outcomes for the young people and their families, as well as higher satisfaction with services received and reduced costs for local authorities (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2014). Despite this, current research suggests that pupil views are often gathered in a tokenistic way and may not be used to contribute meaningfully to educational decision-making processes (Smillie & Newton, 2020).

Where views have been sought, pupils demonstrate a keen awareness of the benefits of regular school attendance and of the consequences of non-attendance, both for themselves and for their parents and carers (Reid, et al., 2010). Key factors noted by the pupils as affecting their attendance were perceived bullying, the use of supply teachers, and "boring" teaching styles. Additionally, simply seeking pupils' views regarding their school experience promoted improved school satisfaction and attendance. A sense of school belonging has also been correlated with engagement and attendance (Korpershoek, et al., 2020), and increasing pupils' sense of safety and belonging in school is frequently recommended as an intervention approach for supporting pupils with attendance difficulties (e.g., West Sussex County Council, n.d.). However, each of these studies focused on general student populations and more specific, qualitative research into the experiences of pupils with attendance difficulties is required (Heyne, et al., 2020).

This literature review attempts to advance our knowledge in this area through assimilation of previously gathered pupil accounts of their experiences of extended school non-attendance. While acknowledging that such experiences remain heterogenous in nature, this study aims to gain a clearer shared understanding through identification and exploration of common experiences. It is hoped that through developing a better understanding from the young people to whom support and interventions are directed,

future research can be supported to inform inclusive provision and access to education for those facing school attendance difficulties (Atkins, et al., 2008).

Method

The researcher took a constructivist position to the review (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009), which was iterative and purposive, seeking to reach theoretical saturation as opposed to representing an exhaustive search. Meta-ethnography was selected as the review methodology, to enable a 'comparative understanding' to be developed from the rich, qualitative data (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 22) while also acknowledging the participants', study authors' and researcher's roles in interpretation (Atkins, et al., 2008). The analysis was informed by Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven step approach, alongside Atkins et al.'s (2008) and Cahill et al.'s (2018) reflections. While the steps are described in a linear manner, the analysis was conducted iteratively, with stages overlapping or running in parallel as needed. Initially, a research focus was determined through identifying a relevant gap in the existing literature. Secondly, the focus of the synthesis was refined and relevant studies identified.

Five databases were searched for relevant papers between June 2021 – October 2021: APA PsycInfo, British Education Index, ERIC, EThOS, and Web of Science. Search terms included a combination of "school attend* OR school avoid* OR school absent* OR school refusal", "child* OR adolescent* OR pupil* OR student* OR young person", "view* OR experience* OR perception* OR perspective*" and "anxiety or emotion*". Searches were limited to peer-reviewed papers published in English. A total of 903 papers were identified, reduced to 875 with duplicates removed. A further 12 papers were identified through reference harvesting. Figure 1 sets out this process within the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Page, et al., 2021).
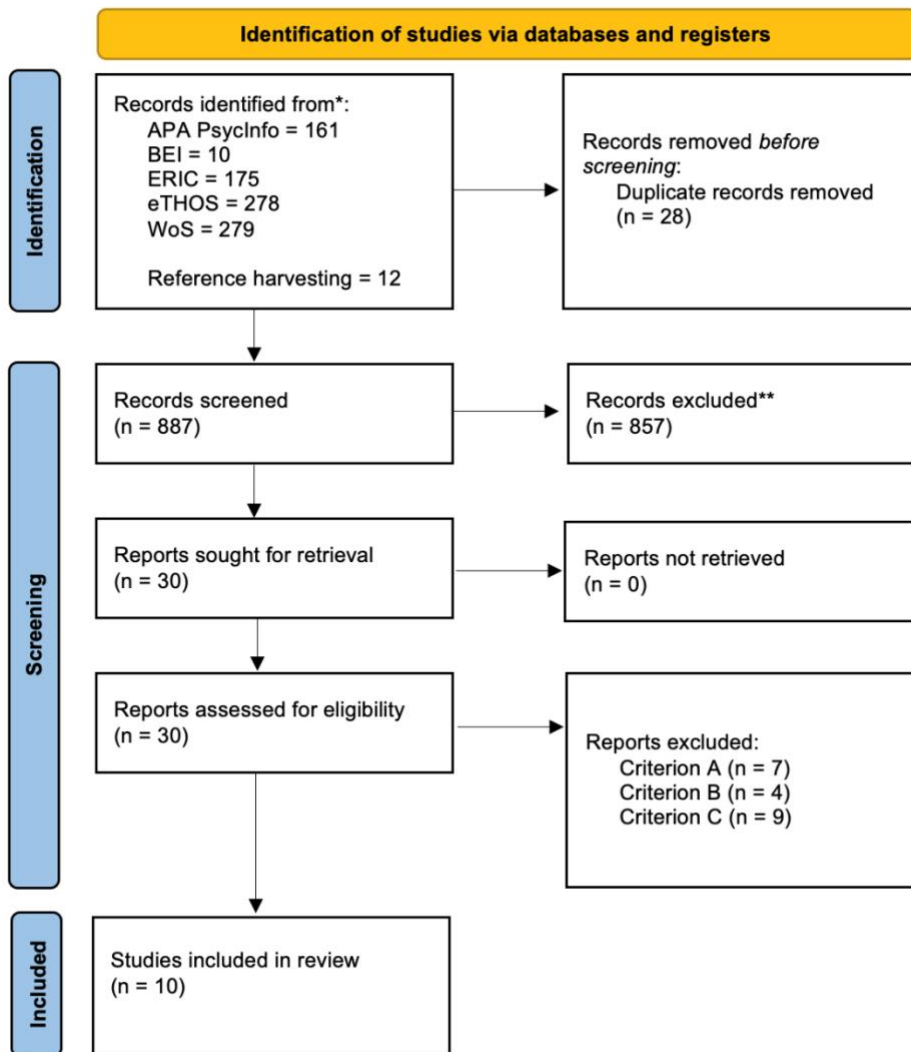
Figure 1: PRISMA reporting flow chart of study identification (Page, et al., 2021)

After initial screening, 30 papers were retrieved. Papers were assessed for eligibility and were included if they: (a) were published within the last 10 years; (b) presented qualitative data concerning experiences of Extended School Non-Attendance; (c) presented clearly distinct pupil views. Studies presenting pupil views alongside parent or staff views were included only if the findings reported the views separately. The remaining ten papers were assessed for methodological quality, guided by the Critical Appraisal Framework: Qualitative Research Framework (Woods, 2020). Quality appraisal was used to guide discussion rather than exclusion decisions (Toye, et al., 2013) and consensus was agreed that each of the papers held sufficient methodological rigour to warrant inclusion.

The ten selected studies were read in depth and the process of extracting metaphors was started. The researcher utilised tables and concept-mapping to identify how the studies were related, before beginning to translate the studies into one another. During this process of reciprocal and refutational analysis, the researcher attempted to maintain the richness of the data by frequently referring to the original papers and context, resulting in the production of seven main themes. The next stage of analysis then looked to synthesise these translations through line-of-argument analysis and resulted in the production of a single, higher-order concept. The final phase, expressing the synthesis, resulted the following model of young people's experiences of extended school non-attendance (Figure 2). Table 1 outlines the process of analysis, guided by Noblit and Hare (1988) and an additional audit trail of the analysis process is provided in Appendix 3.

Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven step approach	Actions and reflections
1. Getting started	Step one involved determining the research aim(s). This was selected following the researcher's pilot study (Corcoran et al., 2022) and preliminary research, which identified a gap in the literature around pupil experiences of non-attendance (e.g., Heyne et al., 2020).
2. Deciding what is relevent	Step two focused on defining the focus of the synthesis and locating the relevant studies. As is outlined within Fig. 1, initial screening took place across five online databases and using reference harvesting (Atkins et al., 2008). Inclusion decisions aimed to reach theoretical saturation and included a methodological quality assessment. Screening stages and inclusion decisions were recorded within an excel spreadsheet for transparency (Appendix 3, Fig. 3.1 and 3.2).
3. Reading the studies	Through step three, the researcher became familiar with the selected 10 studies by reading them multiple times. Cahill et al. (2018) note that reading should be repetitive and highly active, therefore the researcher simultaneously recorded their intial thoughts and reflections within the

	research journal. This step included Noblit and Hare's (1988) process of 'extracting metaphors' or the emerging themes of each study (Appendix 3, Fig. 3.3).
4. Determining how the studies are related	Within step four, the researcher collated the themes of each study within a table (Appendix 3, Fig. 3.4) in order to juxtapose and determine how they fit together. This step looked to 'explain' rather than 'describe' the data to enable a 'comparative understanding' to begin to develop through examination of the commonalities between accounts (Cahill et al., 2018).
5. Translating studies into one another	Step five began with consecutive translation of the themes from each study. France et al., (2019) suggest all three types of analysis (reciprocal, refutational and line of argument) should be completed within a meta-ethnographic synthesis and these were guided by Cahill et al.'s, (2018) reflections. Therefore, the researcher began by conducting reciprocal analysis, identifying similarities within each study's themes (e.g., difficulties with peer relationships), and refutational analysis, which looked to identify differences (e.g., attitudes towards gaming). This identified seven main themes. Whilst conducting these translations, the researcher frequently returned to the study itself in order to retain the 'rich context' of the data (Atkins et al., 2008; Cahill et al., 2018).
6. Synthesising the translations	Step six aimed to move from translational analysis (descriptive) to line of argument analysis (explanatory). Atkins et al. (2009) note the subjectivity of this process, though within the research diary it is noted that the researcher felt they had moved to this stage inherently. Noblit and Hare (1988) describe step six as "making the whole into something more than the parts alone imply" (p. 28). The researcher explored how the seven themes could be related (e.g., sorting into onset and maintenance factors). Both steps five and six occurred iteratively, and included using post it notes

	and flip chart paper to map out ideas and discussions in supervision (Appendix 3, Fig. 3.5 and 3.6).
7. Expressing the synthesis	In line with Atkins et al.'s, (2009) suggestion of expression via a diagram, the researcher then developed Fig. 2, to represent the synthesis themes. These are explored within the findings below. Again, this was explored through post it note manipulation and supervision discussions (Appendix 3, Fig. 3.7 and 3.8).

Table 1: The process of analysis, guided by Noblit and Hare (1988).

Findings

Overview of included studies

Ten studies were selected for review (Table 2). Sample sizes ranged from 3 – 12, totalling 61 young people, all of whom had been identified as having school attendance difficulties. Each paper sought to explore the perspectives and experiences of children and young people who had direct experience of extended school non-attendance.

Citation: Title (Author, Year), Country	Focus of Study	Participant Information, inc. Gender[1]	Summary of Findings
Out of school: a phenomenological exploration of extended non-attendance (Baker and Bishop, 2015), England	Semi-structured interviews used to review how children who have been absent long-term from school make sense of their experience, and how this can inform the	N=4 pupils (2M, 2F) in Year 10 with 'extended school attendance difficulties'.	Participants discussed a range of themes relating to their experiences: initial school experiences; their perceptions of the causes, including bullying and mental health needs; school and other support experiences; feeling punished, blamed or

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[1]Included where reported.

	professionals seeking to support them.		controlled; impacts on friendships and belonging; future plans; and the negative impacts on their own emotional wellbeing.
An exploration of the perceptions and experiences of non-attenders and school staff within a secondary school context (Beckles, 2014), England.	Semi-structured interviews, including solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) scaling and a timeline activity, review perceptions and experiences during the early stages of pupils' non-attendance and their experiences of support.	N=12 secondary-aged pupils and N=6 staff members.	Participants discussed the impact of lesson enjoyment and understanding of work on their motivation to attend, including the influences of teachers and the classroom environment. They also discussed their thoughts and emotions about school and the effects of the absence on their wellbeing and academic performance. The varying impact of family and friends' responses is discussed. The participants also emphasise the role of communication and relationships within the school environment and the need to gain and acknowledge pupils' views to support the management of attendance difficulties.
A Qualitative Exploration of Pupil, Parent and Staff Discourses of	Unstructured interviews reviewing how young people, parents and	N=3 secondary-aged pupils (1M, 2F), all	A negative school experience was a key element of pupils' discourse, including friendships and peer

Extended School Non-Attendance (Clissold, 2018), England.	educators construct the reasons for non-attendance and whether the current terminology used is consistent with these constructions.	of whom have CAMHS involvement. N=4 parents and N=4 staff.	relationships, their academic experience and their transition to secondary school. Pupils also discussed their mental health, including anxiety, depression and self-harm, and the impact which a lack of understanding of their needs had on their experience. They also discussed the support and provision offered, characterised as delayed, unsuitable, and inconsistent.
Exploring the experiences and perceptions of Key Stage 4 students whose school attendance is persistently low (an interpretative phenomenological study) (How, 2015), England.	Semi-structured interviews were used to explore school experiences past and present, perceived barriers to full school attendance, and aspirations and priorities for the future.	N=5 Year 11 pupils (3M, 2F), with school attendance <90%. None were previously known to the EPS.	Participants outline their social and relational experiences, including bullying and social difficulties and the importance of positive relationships. They discussed the impact a sense of control in their non-attendance and the influence which their own values and beliefs had over this. The school system is discussed as negative and ineffective and the impact on pupils' emotional wellbeing is reviewed.

School refusal and isolation: The perspectives of five adolescent school refusers in London, UK (Kljakovic, Kelly and Richardson, 2021), England.	Semi-structured interviews were used, aiming to 'make sense of experience – rather than determining objective or generalisable truths' [Pg 4] of young people attending an alternative provision following school attendance difficulties.	N=5 secondary aged young people seen within an inner London Pupil Referral Unit. (1F, 4M). All participants had been away from mainstream education for 6 months or more.	Six core themes are identified. Four 'relating to the problem': Isolation; Reasons for school refusal; Internet Use; and Individual tuition. Two 'relating to the individual': Current situation; and Values.
Missing: The autistic girls absent from mainstream secondary schools (Moyse, 2021), England.	A series of interviews, including an ideal school interview, life charts and participant thematic analysis, reviewing the girls' personal narratives around their non-attendance and how these experiences can inform educational policy and provision.	N=10 secondary-aged pupils (10F), with a clinical diagnosis of Autism.	The pupils in this study wanted to be in school and identified their disengagement as a gradual process of exclusion from the school environment. The school ethos and physical and social environments were identified as having a negative impact of their mental health. A lack of support was also discussed, linked to their views being undermined or overlooked.

Building Bridges to Realise Potential: an ecological and social capital exploration of young people missing from education to support their re-entry to education or training (Murray, 2012), Scotland.	Through structured discussions and a multiple case study approach, this paper reviews the perceptions of young people and their parents around non-attendance, including issues arising and key barriers. The value of a social capital approach to support is considered.	N=10 secondary-aged pupils (6M, 4F) and their parents N=10.	Issues arising from extended school non-attendance for pupils included: Concern about education and exams; Boredom; Fear of prosecution; and Implications for future job prospects. Support offered was discussed, including relevant professionals and types of support offered. A significant barrier identified was their lack of social capital in relation to knowledge of possible educational options available to them, and a lack of support to help navigate their route back into some form of education or training.
School refusal: perspectives of teenage girls (Pennick, 2012), England.	Video narratives were utilised to capture pupils' experiences, issues of self-image and self-identity, and perceptions of involvement/support.	N=4 secondary-aged pupils (4F).	Findings indicated that pupils' experiences included: Experiences of relationships with peers; Experiences of bullying; Approaches to coping (e.g. self-harming, excessive crying and aggressive outbursts); and the influence of school factors.

			Issues of self-image and self-identity were themed within: Concepts of the self, and Perceptions of group identity. Perceived involvement or support from different agencies was discussed, included the positive impact of Alternative Provision and an individualised approach to support.
An Exploration into the Use of Social Media Technology in Adolescents who School Refuse (Williams, 2019), Wales.	This research aimed to provide an insight into the experience of Anxiety Based School Refusal (ABSR) for the young people and how those involved viewed Social Media Technology (SMT) during this time. A semi-structured interview process was used; all pupil participants attended an anxious and phobic specialist school provision for those who were not attending	N=4 secondary-aged pupils, attending a specialist SEMH provision (2M, 2F). All under referral for or have a diagnosis of Autism.	Four superordinate themes were identified across the pupils' experiences: (1) experience of school, including participants' description of the overwhelming negative experience of school and school as feeling unsafe, feeling trapped, difficult transitions to secondary school and the experience of bullying made up key aspects of the experience. (2) The emotional responses to the difficulties participants experienced throughout their ABSR and how these responses impacted on them as a person. (3) Connections

	mainstream education.		with others, including social and a feeling of disconnection following their non-attendance. (4) Impact of SMT use on these social connections, both positive and negative.
School Refusal Behaviour: How can we support pupils back to school? (Wilson, 2012), England.	Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the precipitating, exacerbating and supporting factors to Looked After pupils' non-attendance.	N=4 secondary-aged young people who were under the care of the Local Authority at the time of recruitment (3M, 1F).	Instability during adolescence for Looked After young people is linked to an increased risk of school attendance difficulties. The factors that contributed to continued attendance difficulties related to unresolved precipitating factors, school, people who mattered to the individual and the individual being ready for change.

Table 2: Table of Included Studies

Meta-ethnographic analysis

Using Noblit and Hare's (1988) meta-ethnographic method, seven main themes were generated through reciprocal and refutational analysis: (1) difficult relationships with peer group; (2) inconsistent relationships with and support from adults; (3) negative experiences of school transition; (4) negative experiences of learning in school; (5) emotional wellbeing and mental health needs; (6) others' negative perceptions of the individual's needs; (7) personal beliefs about attendance. Further synthesis of the themes through line-of-argument analysis informed the development of an over-arching model, which linked the themes through the concept of belonging (Figure 2). The analysis also suggested that the

young people generally associated concepts (1) – (4) with the onset of their difficulties, while (5) – (7) were more typically associated with maintenance. There was however significant overlap between each of the themes, therefore these concepts should be seen as connected and interacting rather than as discrete or sequential areas of experience.
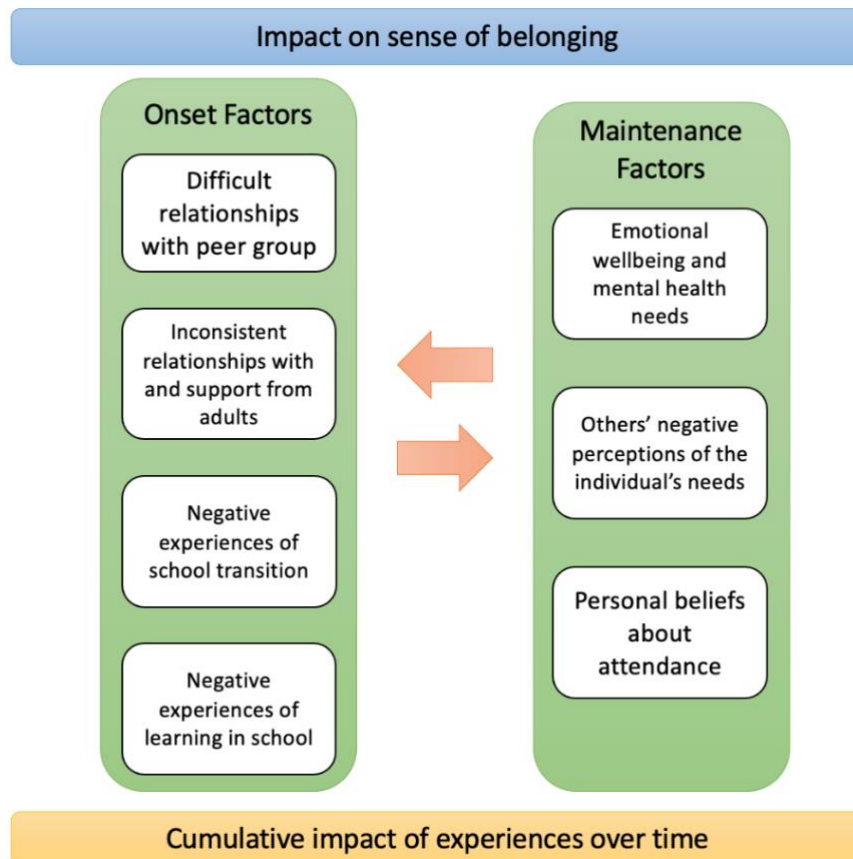

Figure 2: Young People's Experiences of Extended School Non-Attendance in the Literature

Difficult relationships with peer group

Relationships were "the centre of the experiences" for many of the young people (Pennick, 2012, p. 145) and the area they would most like to change (Moyse, 2020). Bullying was identified by many as a factor in their non-attendance (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018; How, 2015; Williams, 2019), alongside intimidation by other students (Murray, 2012), cyber-bullying and relational aggression and conflict (Pennick, 2012). Lack of intervention by school staff was seen to result in feelings of resentment, that those who perpetrated these behaviours were able to stay in school, while the victims were the ones who missed out

(Williams, 2019). In some cases, bullying continued even while absent through social media (Williams, 2019). These experiences resulted in a lack of trust in future social relationships, perpetuating the difficulties (Pennick, 2012).

Some young people shared that they found socialising, conforming to social norms, and forming friendships difficult (Williams, 2019). In some studies, this was attributed to a reduced social-coping capacity relating to the young people's identified social communication needs (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018). Students shared that they struggled to engage in group work (Moyse, 2020) and felt that they lacked genuine and trusting friendships in school (Murray, 2012; Pennick, 2012). Continued non-attendance exacerbated this, with social interactions becoming more challenging over time (Clissold, 2018; Williams, 2019), and a loss of friendships leading to them feeling left behind and 'different' to their peers (Baker & Bishop, 2015).

Despite this, a sense of peer belonging was identified as very important to the young people (Moyse, 2020). Many continued to socialise with their peers outside of school (Wilson, 2012) and on social media (Williams, 2019), and viewed their friendships as a motivator to attend (Beckles, 2014; How, 2015; Moyse, 2020; Pennick, 2012; Wilson, 2012).

Inconsistent relationships with and support from adults

Relationships with teachers were frequently noted in young people's experiences. Teachers were feared (Clissold, 2018) and disliked (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Pennick, 2012) by many of the young people, described as 'strict' (How, 2015; Murray, 2012), unfair (Wilson, 2012) and unpredictable (Beckles, 2014). Teachers were perceived as reluctant to provide support (Moyse, 2020), and uncaring about the young people they worked with (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Beckles, 2014; Clissold, 2018). Some perceived themselves as being disliked by their teachers (How, 2015) and felt that their needs irritated the adults in school (Murray, 2012).

Support offered by school staff was perceived as inconsistent and slow (Baker & Bishop, 2015). This was linked to a lack of perceived validity of the young people's needs and their often-compliant behaviour in school (Clissold, 2018) as well as frequent staff absences and high staff-turnover (Moyse, 2020). At times, this delayed access to specialist services such as

CAMHS (Moyse, 2020), with one young person sharing that this led to further difficulties for them, including depression (Clissold, 2018). One young person noted that school staff would be better able to support them if they were better resourced (Wilson, 2012).

In contrast, positive relationships with teachers were viewed as a protective factor (How, 2015) and adults who were caring, respectful and provided individualised support were valued (Wilson, 2012). The young people described seeing other professionals, such as a Clinical or Educational Psychologist, as helpful in better understanding their own needs and options for the future (Kljakovic, et al., 2021; Murray, 2012).

Family members were identified as believing the young people's needs (Baker & Bishop, 2015), and as a protective influence who supported attendance (Beckles, 2014). However, family could also become a barrier, for example if the young people had caring responsibilities or were concerned about a parent's wellbeing (Beckles, 2014; Murray, 2012). Some families were also identified to put pressure on the young person to return to school before they felt ready (Baker & Bishop, 2015).

Negative experiences of school transition

The transition into a new school was often a difficult experience (Baker & Bishop, 2015). A range of negative feelings were associated with the school environment, including feeling trapped, uneasy, unsafe, and helpless (Pennick, 2012; Williams, 2019) and it was generally perceived negatively (How, 2015; Kljakovic, et al., 2021). Secondary school was a 'hostile and unwelcoming' environment (Pennick, 2012, p. 150), which felt very different to their more positive primary school experiences (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018; Williams, 2019). The new environment was perceived as busy, noisy and overwhelming (Moyse, 2020; Pennick, 2012), contributing to a lack of belonging for the young people (How, 2015). Relationships with peers also became more difficult (Clissold, 2018; Pennick, 2012), and this was exacerbated by a loss of friendships over the transition (How, 2015). Additionally, parents no longer physically accompanied the young person to school, making it feel easier for them to not attend (Clissold, 2018).

Negative experiences of learning in school

Difficulties with learning were noted as a contributing factor by many of the young people (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018; Murray, 2012). They described lacking motivation to attend lessons which they did not enjoy or understand (Beckles, 2014; Kljakovic, et al., 2021; Wilson, 2012) and noted a lack of support (Beckles, 2014; Clissold, 2018), pressure of completing formal exams at the expense of wellbeing (Clissold, 2018), and a perceived lack of purpose to the learning (Clissold, 2018; Kljakovic, et al., 2021; Wilson, 2012). The impact of missed learning over time was highlighted, due to both non-attendance (Beckles, 2014) and not having additional learning needs met (Clissold, 2018). Many young people disliked being 'told what to do' (How, 2015; Murray, 2012), and felt the school's reward and sanction systems impacted upon their motivation to attend (Beckles, 2014; How, 2015).

Motivation was mitigated through more interactive teaching approaches and quieter classroom environments (Beckles, 2014), while attendance also improved when doing a course of choice or seeing more purpose in their education (Wilson, 2012). Flexibility in the curriculum was noted, with access to different learning environments, alternative timetables and more support staff all named as helpful strategies (Kljakovic, et al., 2021; Wilson, 2012). Other young people shared a desire for a school that would 'prioritise the welfare of the students the most' and provide support in a personalised way, which is understanding of their individual needs (Moyse, 2020, p. 120).

Emotional wellbeing and mental health needs

Emotional wellbeing was a common theme. Many young people shared that they had experienced mental health difficulties, including anxiety and depression, prior to or as a result of their non-attendance (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018; Kljakovic, et al., 2021; Moyse, 2020; Wilson, 2012). For some, this was particularly social anxiety (Kljakovic, et al., 2021). For others, they felt their depression was a result of not being understood by others (Clissold, 2018). Young people described anxiety as controlling them (Williams, 2019) and held many fears about the return to school, particularly around potential bullying and staff reprimands (Beckles, 2014).

Many of the young people similarly described the physical experiences associated with their non-attendance. Some detailed somatic issues, including fainting and nausea (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018; Kljakovic, et al., 2021). Others described the impact of disrupted sleep, with many having poor sleep habits at home, feeling too tired to attend school or having difficulty waking up in the morning (Kljakovic, et al., 2021; Murray, 2012).

Self-harm was used by many as a coping mechanism (Clissold, 2018; Moyse, 2020; Pennick, 2012), and other experiences such as angry outbursts, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts and PTSD were attributed directly to their experiences of school non-attendance (Moyse, 2020; Pennick, 2012). Some young people described their desire to stay at home as a comfort from this, rather than a source of enjoyment (Beckles, 2014) and noted a need to hide their emotions due to the negative perceptions of mental health held by others (Baker & Bishop, 2015). Others referenced gaming to relieve boredom whilst at home (Williams, 2019), although they noted that this could become addictive and perpetuate their non-attendance (Kljakovic, et al., 2021). More positive coping mechanisms included listening to music, exercising, accessing specialist services such as CAMHS and being prescribed medication (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Pennick, 2012).

Extended school non-attendance led to a sense of isolation for many of the young people, who described spending most of their time alone (Kljakovic, et al., 2021; Pennick, 2012). Some were able to maintain social connections through youth groups or social media (Kljakovic, et al., 2021), although this was inhibited by cases of cyber-bullying (Williams, 2019). Others felt that their anxiety was preventing them from accessing social connections and other positive life experiences (Williams, 2019). It was also noted that even whilst at school, situations of informal non-attendance such as exclusion from lessons increased this sense of isolation (Moyse, 2020). Young people described being isolated with other SEN students with differing requirements, perpetuating a lack of understanding of their individualised needs (Clissold, 2018).

Others' negative perceptions of the individual's needs

Each of these experiences led to the young people feeling 'different' to their peers (Baker & Bishop, 2015), and that this difference was not valued or accepted (Pennick, 2012). There was a desire to be seen as academically and socially successful, which felt at odds with their relationships with others (How, 2015). Some young people saw their mental health needs as a weakness which if shared, could lead to bullying (Clissold, 2018). Many described feeling rejected, through unsupportive responses to their difficulties (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Beckles, 2014; Pennick, 2012), and through their needs not being perceived as valid or believable (Clissold, 2018). One way this was indicated was through pressure to return to school quickly or to remain in school from teachers, parents, and friends (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Williams, 2019). These responses led to further challenges for the young people then disclosing their difficulties to adults or peers in the future (Pennick, 2012; Williams, 2019).

Many young people also shared experiences of being negatively labelled due to a lack of understanding of their needs (Clissold, 2018; Moyse, 2020; Pennick, 2012). This was exacerbated by the frequent need to explain their non-attendance to others (Beckles, 2014; Clissold, 2018; Murray, 2012; Williams, 2019) and by the fear of punishment or legal consequences for their families as a result (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Beckles, 2014; Clissold, 2018; Murray, 2012). This sense of shame also made it harder to transition back to school after a period of absence (Murray, 2012; Williams, 2019).

Conversely, adults who were perceived as supportive, who answered questions and who recognised the young people's strengths were valued (Moyse, 2020). These adults gave the young people more autonomy around when to return to school and did not take on an 'expert role' around school reintegration (Clissold, 2018).

Personal beliefs about attendance

Many of the young people in these studies perceived themselves as passive in their non-attendance (Williams, 2019), with others being held responsible and the young people being helpless to change this (How, 2015). They did not perceive their non-attendance as 'refusal', but rather a 'straightforward and understandable' response to their circumstance, preferring to use the terms "stopped going" or "dropped out" (Pennick, 2012, p. 159). Many

were keen to understand their difficulties and return to school (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018), while at the same time wanted to hide their needs due to the negative perceptions held by others (Beckles, 2014). Some young people saw non-attendance as a way to maintain a positive self-image, by avoiding experiences which positioned them as socially or academically struggling (Pennick, 2012).

Despite this, many of the young people held high academic aspirations (Moyse, 2020), and were very concerned about the longer term social and academic impacts of their non-attendance (Beckles, 2014; Kljakovic, et al., 2021; Murray, 2012; Williams, 2019). Those young people who had long-term goals, with intrinsic motivators, were better able to attend (Wilson, 2012) and experienced higher levels of resilience to the challenges of the school environment (Pennick, 2012), creating a protective factor for their school attendance (Baker & Bishop, 2015; How, 2015).

Cumulative impact of experiences over time

Many of the young people described the cumulative impact of their experiences over time, perpetuating the different onset and maintenance factors (Clissold, 2018; How, 2015). This has therefore been represented as an underlying influence over each of the seven main concepts (Figure 2). While for some young people their difficulties were a sudden change, most experienced a gradual decline in their sense of wellbeing and felt 'ground down' by the pressures of school, eventually resulting in their non-attendance (Kljakovic, et al., 2021; How, 2015, p. 91). One young person shared that they had "just been off too long [to go back]" (Murray, 2012, p. 115).

Sense of belonging

Through Noblit and Hare's (1988) process of synthesising the translations, the overarching higher order concept was developed:

Extended school non-attendance needs appear to arise from a reduced sense of belonging, often relating to cumulative, intersecting difficulties within the physical and social school environment, and pupils' own wellbeing and beliefs about attendance.

This concept attempts to capture the young people's difficulties in relation to their school experience, including peer and adult relationships, school transition, and/or learning, which subsequently impact upon their emotional wellbeing and self-image. It intends to hold the positive experiences of feeling connected, listened to, and receiving individualised support as conducive to regular school attendance. This is represented in relation to the seven main themes in Figure 2.

This concept was also informed by the presence of a sense of belonging as a prominent theme in the analysis of many of the studies (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Beckles, 2014; How, 2015; Moyse, 2020; Pennick, 2012; Williams, 2019; Wilson, 2012). Within these, belonging is conceptualised similarly to Goodenow and Grady's (1993) definition: "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 80). In their recent narrative review, Allen et al. (2021) emphasise a sense of belonging as "a fundamental human need", measurements of which can predict future mental, physical, social, economic, and behavioural outcomes. Their proposed integrative model appears to relate well to the themes detailed above; they suggest key components of belonging include the skills and competency to connect, opportunities and the motivation to belong, and perceived belonging. Within the young peoples' narratives, they too detail struggling to connect with peers, staff and the school environment, alongside the impact that others' perceptions of them had on their sense of belonging in school. Each of these factors was then explained to impact upon their motivation to try to belong, and ultimately their opportunities to belong through an increased sense of isolation.

Discussion

The range of views included within this review go some way to represent the diversity of young people's experiences of extended school non-attendance and indicate the heterogenous nature of their difficulties (Clissold, 2018). The interactionist nature of the experiences also provides further support for the use of a functional 'push and pull' model of extended school non-attendance, recognising a range of interacting factors which

influence the young person's attendance needs (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). Further focus is placed upon school-based factors as contributing to their difficulties, in line with previous research (Malcolm, et al., 2003) and the Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision green paper, which highlights a link between school-based experiences and mental health difficulties (Department of Health, & Department for Education, 2017). This is extended to include the role of school belonging, in relation to the extent to which student's perceive themselves as "accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p. 80) and the impact of this on pupil motivation to attend. The young people also reinforce the need for early identification and intervention, emphasised in the DfE's SEND review: right support, right place, right time green paper (Department for Education, 2022), which these young people would like to see effectively individualised at a range of levels around them.

A key issue raised is the young people's own perceptions of the causes of their difficulties. They suggest that it was often their initial difficulties in the areas of peer and adult relationships, school transition, and learning, which led to their subsequent difficulties with their emotional wellbeing and self-image. These difficulties were also intensified by the negative perceptions of their needs held by others. This would suggest therefore that terms such as 'emotionally-based' or 'anxiety-based' are misleading, as many of the young people suggested that their mental health difficulties arose after other difficulties in their social, physical, or learning environment. The young people were instead described to view their non-attendance as a logical and understandable response to their situation (Pennick, 2012, p. 159), which was followed by their emotional distress as a result of the difficulties of not attending (Clissold, 2018) and not feeling that they belonged within the school environment. This has important implications for professionals working with these young people and their families, as it adds further weight to previous work around young people's perceptions of their needs and therefore their preferred terminology (Callwood & Goodman, 2018), and reinforces the need for terminology which accurately describes the issue, empowers young people, and challenges negative perceptions of their needs.

The findings also reaffirm the young people's desire to attend school and their high academic aspirations. This is in line with previous research (e.g., Reid, et al., 2010),

suggesting again that non-attendance is a last resort for young people in this situation. Many of the young people emphasised that the onset of their difficulties was gradual, and implied that had they received support sooner, they may have been able to maintain their attendance. They shared however that after a period of prolonged absence, they now felt so helpless and disconnected that they did not see a way back in (Murray, 2012). Again, this has important implications for professional practice, with a key emphasis on an early identification and intervention approach from the young people's perspectives.

It is interesting to note that few of the young peoples' accounts described in detail the role of their families or home lives, or their experiences of support in school. Where this was discussed, it was the value of feeling believed by family and friends (Baker & Bishop, 2015) or the hypothetical support of an 'ideal school' (Moyse, 2020). In other studies, the descriptions focused around the lack of, unhelpful, or fragmented experiences of support from both parents, carers and school staff (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018). This is not to say that the families and home lives of the young people in these studies did not contribute to their school attendance, or that they were not receiving any support from their schools for their difficulties, however these areas were not prominent in their shared recollection of the experience.

Crucially, these findings reiterate the need to gather pupils' views early and to seek to understand their difficulties before they become entrenched. Not only does gathering pupil views promote positive wellbeing and engagement (Reid, et al., 2010), but it will also support those working with children and young people to effectively individualise support and to target those factors which are prominent for the individual (Corcoran, et al., 2022). Furthermore, by using appropriate terminology and considering young peoples' views on their non-attendance, negative perceptions and misunderstandings around their needs can be challenged and their sense of belonging in school can be increased. These actions may require an increased awareness and understanding of extended school attendance difficulties from school practitioners and wider professionals, in order to detect and intervene with these needs early enough. In some areas, this may mean that further training and support would also be of use to practitioners to ensure effective identification and intervention policies and practices are developed and implemented.

Limitations

Kljakovic, et al., (2021) suggest that the lack of literature around the experiences of non-attending children and young people may be due to the 'hard-to-reach' nature of the group. It is noted therefore that the participant groups in each of the included studies may not be representative of the broader population of young people experiencing attendance difficulties. For example, Moyse (2020) outline their use of an opportunity sample, while Kljakovic, et al., (2021) suggest that those young people and families who are more willing to engage in research may also be more likely to engage in school support. The recruitment of participants may also have been influenced by the role of the authors: one of the studies was completed by Clinical Psychologists (Kljakovic, et al., 2021), while the other nine were conducted by Educational Psychologists. It is also noted that whilst the focus of the paper was not specifically on secondary aged pupils, this is where the research is positioned and this may therefore impact the transferability of the findings and also illustrates that further research needs to be done with primary aged pupils. Consideration should therefore be given to how a range of young people are engaged in future research to promote a fair representation of the population, with perhaps a more creative approach to engaging young people in participatory research needed (Bradbury-Jones, et al., 2018).

Many of the participating young people were also experiencing concurrent life experiences, such as being placed into care (e.g., Murray, 2012), or had received clinical diagnoses, such as Autism (e.g., Moyse, 2020). These studies were included in an attempt to represent the diverse range of experiences of extended school non-attendance; however, it may not be possible to attribute their experiences directly to their non-attendance, rather than to other areas of their lives. Likely, the interactionist nature of extended school non-attendance may mean that the influence of each factor cannot meaningfully be distinguished. Future research should continue to examine how best to engage with this group of young people in a meaningful way, prioritising their lived experiences and preferences in decision-making. Research should also consider how best young people's views can be translated into policy and practice, to inform appropriate and effective intervention which supports the best possible outcomes for these young people in the future.

Conclusion

Through this synthesis an overarching higher order concept was developed: Extended school non-attendance needs appear to arise from a reduced sense of belonging, often relating to cumulative, intersecting difficulties within the physical and social school environment, and pupils' own wellbeing and beliefs about attendance. It is hoped that this synthesis provides a more detailed understanding of the experience of extended school attendance difficulties, which has previously been missing from the literature, through representation of the diverse range of experiences. This more detailed understanding can also be used to raise awareness of this vulnerable group of young people and to promote greater understanding and access to appropriate support, from a range of professionals. Future research and practice should continue to develop this understanding from the perspectives of those experiencing attendance difficulties, including development of effective intervention for extended school non-attendance needs.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics statement

Ethics approval was not required for this study.

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Paper Two: Extended School Non-Attendance: Development of a Local Authority, Multi-Agency Approach to Supporting Regular Attendance

Prepared in accordance with the author guidelines for submission to the Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs (JORSEN) (Appendix 1).

Abstract

According to national government guidance in the UK, improving attendance is everyone's business (DfE, 2022a). Following a national and local increase in school attendance difficulties, this paper sets out the work of one local authority (LA) to develop their own multi-agency approach to reduce rates of extended school non-attendance. A Research and Development in Organisations (RADIO) model was chosen to provide a structure for the action research process. Content analysis was then conducted to provide an overview of the development process and to identify facilitators and barriers within this. The development process consisted of cycles of action and reflection, including awareness raising, reflections on current practice, and the integration of stakeholder views, and resulted in the production of a LA early identification and graduated intervention guidance document. The findings suggest that the development of a localised approach required time, with multi-agency collaboration to promote shared ownership of the products and process across all stakeholders and to enhance uptake of positive changes to practice around school attendance. Factors including response to local need, multi-agency collaboration and positive feedback facilitated the process, whilst factors including diminished capacity and misconceptions around roles and responsibilities in monitoring and improving attendance were barriers to change. The findings provide further evidence for the role of multi-agency working in the development of guidance around school attendance difficulties to promote organisational change. Future research should evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches to better inform future support for school attendance difficulties at a LA level.

Introduction

Regular school attendance is widely recognised as a key component of child development (Heyne, et al., 2016; Heyne, et al., 2020). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) declared within Article 28, the Right of the Child to Education, that State Parties should, "*Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates*." (The United Nations, 1989, p. 9). Within the UK, improving school attendance has consistently been a priority for schools and Local Authorities (LAs) (Department for Education, 2016), and more recently in the Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance (Department for Education, 2022a).

It has previously been estimated that up to 5% of school-aged pupils experience persistent difficulties attending school regularly (Elliot & Place, 2019; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014), due to underlying difficulties relating to a range of individual, school, and home-based factors (West Sussex County Council, n.d.; Corcoran & Kelly, 2022). Nationally, over the Autumn and Spring terms 2021/22, it was reported that 22.3% of pupils were persistently absent (i.e., missed 10% or more sessions) (Department for Education, 2022b). This amounts to 1.6 million pupils in the UK. Whilst COVID-19 related illness accounts for 1.3% of absence within this period, there are still a significant number of students not attending school and national media has frequently reported on the increasing mental health-related attendance difficulties post-pandemic (e.g. Financial Times, 2022; iNews, 2022; TES, 2022).

Concerningly, recent research has detailed that this return to school has been increasingly difficult for those children with special educational needs and pre-existing mental health difficulties. McDonald, et al., (2022) noted that COVID-related anxiety, difficulties adapting to new school routines, poor home-school communication and collaboration, and concerns about academic catch-up had all impacted the return to school for students experiencing school attendance difficulties.

Despite their prevalence, the terminology around these types of difficulties is widely debated (Pellegrini, 2007; Callwood & Goodman, 2018), with terms such as 'school refusal', 'anxiety-based school non- attendance' or 'emotionally based school avoidance' being used

frequently in the literature and support guidance to reference the typically high level of anxiety experienced by many of these young people when attempting to attend school. However, the terms 'school attendance difficulties' and 'extended school non-attendance' are used within this paper, to reflect the complex, interacting factors, which may cause or perpetuate attendance difficulties and the related or subsequent anxiety, and to reflect the preferred terminology of young people themselves (Corcoran & Kelly, 2022).

Effective intervention

Existing literature and professional guidance suggest that effective intervention to maintain or increase attendance should be provided as part of a graduated approach and in collaboration with families and children and young people (Department for Education, 2023; Corcoran, et al., 2022; Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). Initially, this should include effective whole school practice and early identification and intervention at a SEN support level, though specialist professionals may become involved as attendance difficulties worsen or do not respond to earlier intervention (e.g., Nuttall & Woods, 2013; West Sussex County Council, n.d.). Influenced by Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory, Nuttall and Woods (2013) propose a multi-level, ecologically situated model of intervention, incorporating four main areas: psychological factors, support for psychological factors, factors supporting the family, and the role of professionals and systems.

More recently, Kearney and Graczyk (2020) have advocated for the use of a Multi-dimensional Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) model. This builds on their previous tiered Response to Intervention model (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014), which outlines universal, targeted, and intensive interventions in a three-tier system, recommending that early identification and preventative work are embedded in school practice, alongside more individualised intervention for those who experience persistent difficulties. This support is more likely to be cost-effective and efficient where the multiple systems are combined and well-integrated in their support (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020), including effective cross-system collaboration, blended team structures and the use of evidence-based practices adapted to individual contexts (Weist, et al., 2018). Most recently, Kearney et al., (2022) state the need to develop multi-stakeholder partnerships to effectively combine resources and expertise to

support school attendance difficulties, in a way which is adaptable to each individuals' unique circumstances and challenges. However, while there is some evidence for the efficacy of these 'wrap-around' approaches (Reissner, et al., 2019) and they appear to be widely used across many UK LAs, robust evidence for effectiveness and cost benefit has not yet been developed (Tonge & Silverman, 2019).

Effective multi-agency collaboration

Whilst both the literature base and current government guidance advocate for multi-agency support for school attendance needs (Department for Education, 2022a; Kearney, et al. 2022), there is less clarity on how this should be achieved. Within school attendance, there are inherent difficulties; many of the professionals who are required to respond quickly and effectively to signs of non-attendance are not classroom-based staff and may be unfamiliar with school-based practices (Elliot & Place, 2019). Further, much of the initial responsibility to identify and assess attendance needs within graduated approach models falls to classroom teachers and senior leaders, who have previously reported training and support in these areas as major impediments to effective practice (Castro-Villarreal, et al., 2014).

More broadly however, it is recognised that multi-agency working can provide a 'collaborative advantage', i.e., a cumulative benefit of collaboration, often resulting from the sharing of resources and/or risk, more efficient working practices, co-ordination of tasks, and inter-professional learning (Huxham & Vangen, 2013). In order to achieve this 'collaborative advantage', Solomon (2019) details the need for consensus and shared goals within the group's vision, alongside sufficient strategic level support to authorise organisational change. Through this, multi-agency groups will be able develop joint working practices and achieve incremental progress in their support of children and young people.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well positioned to work at a multi-agency and organisational level to influence procedures and policies both within and outside of the school context (Woods, 2015), applying psychology in a way that is responsive to local context and individual service commissioner needs (Law & Woods, 2019). Specifically, concerns about increasing rates of school non-attendance have led to a number of

Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) developing their own materials and approaches to support settings at a systemic level. For many EPSs, this has taken the form of a good practice guidance document or webpage, offering accessible information and tools to support early identification and intervention for children and young people who are experiencing these difficulties (e.g., West Sussex County Council, n.d., Staffordshire Educational Psychology Service, 2020). While there is not yet specific research surrounding the development of attendance guidance and support at an organisational level, Moir (2018) suggests that EPs are well positioned to guide and support effective intervention development and implementation through systemic ways of working with multi-agency groups.

Despite this work, Elliott and Place's (2019) practitioner review previously noted that over the past two decades there has been *"little substantial advance in knowledge that can guide practitioners"* (p. 1). Further analysis of effective intervention approaches is therefore required to generate ecologically valid and transferable practice-based evidence (Nuttall & Woods, 2013; Kearney et al., 2022) which can support multi-agency partnerships, including EPs, to better understand the facilitators and barriers to effectively supporting successful school reintegration at an individual, group, and organisational level.

Rationale and Focus

National concerns around school attendance were echoed by one LA in the North West of England, who had decided to develop their own localised graduated approach in an effort to tackle increasing rates of extended non-attendance. The traded, LA EPS was at that point in the early stages of developing their own good practice guidelines around school attendance difficulties, and so they agreed to commission the researchers via the University of Manchester's Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology research commissioning model. The commission was to provide research support to an established, multi-agency group of stakeholders, including representatives from the commissioning EPS, to develop and begin to implement the approach.

Through iterative action research cycles, the researcher sought to capture the development and introduction of this localised approach to school attendance difficulties, including identifying any facilitators or barriers to this process, in order to develop ecologically valid and transferable practice-based evidence in this area which could effectively inform future policy and practice.

Action research is shown to be an effective process for promoting change and improvement at a local level, with a focus upon improving local practice and contributing to broader practice-based evidence (Cohen, et al., 2017). Previous research has highlighted how a LA EPS is well positioned to work responsively to the needs of its local context (Woods, et al., 2013) and to guide this type of action research (Holt, et al., 2022). This research therefore aimed to be collaborative and participatory, using iterative action research cycles with the existing LA stakeholder group to support ongoing reflection and advancement of their school attendance support at an organisational level.

Research Questions

RQ1: How can a local authority approach to supporting children and young people with school attendance difficulties be developed?

RQ2: What are the factors influencing the development of a local authority approach to supporting children and young people with school attendance difficulties?

Methodology

Epistemological position

The epistemological position adopted by this research is critical realism as it enables the researcher to acknowledge the objective reality of school attendance, whilst allowing the exploration of contextual and environmental influences by appreciating the subjective experiences of multiple stakeholders in different school and LA contexts. Critical realism is also a useful tool for analysing and promoting social change, due to its ability to engage in explanation and causal analysis (Fletcher, 2017).

Action research approach

This study employed a participatory action research approach, integrating participants' values and competencies to ensure the materials and guidance produced were well suited to meet the needs of the local context and systems (Cohen, et al., 2017). This aligns with the holistic, systems approach taken by many EPs, appreciating the complexity of educational settings and organisations (Miller & Frederickson, 2006).

A Research and Development in Organisations (RADIO) model was chosen to provide a structure for the action research process (Timmins, et al., 2003). This model was selected as it outlined a clear framework, with specific steps for the researcher and participants to follow, whilst aligning well with assess, plan, do, review cycle which EPs and SENCos are accustomed to operating within (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2014). Previous organisational research has found the RADIO model beneficial both for individual reflective practitioners, and for the identification of future service development needs (Law & Woods, 2019). A previous evaluation of the use of the RADIO model across five studies identified three key factors influencing its effectiveness: firstly, the motivation and interest levels of key participants; secondly, the participants' power to initiate change; and thirdly, the alignment of the research aims to the priorities and needs of the organisation (Ashton, 2009).

Ethical Approval Statement

Ethical approval for this study was obtained through the host institution Research and Ethics Committee (July, 2021, approval number 2021-12635-19906).

The process

The initial action research group comprised of a pre-existing stakeholder group within the LA who had spent the previous year developing an early identification of attendance needs tool (Boaler, 2022). Whilst this research was commissioned by the local EPS, members within the group comprised of a range of specialities within the LA, including representatives from the Virtual School Team, CAMHS, the Pupil Attendance Team, The

SEND Information, Advice and Support Service, the SEN Advisory Service, and local third sector family support groups. All participation in the research was voluntary and some participants joined or left the group over the course of the project, with attendance ranging from between six to ten stakeholders at each meeting, and five at the summative focus group (Appendix 4.1). Table 3 details the action research process, following the RADIO Model's twelve stages. While the stages are presented here in a linear fashion, in action these overlapped, and stages were at times re-visited and re-defined as the research developed (Timmins, et al., 2003). The process was therefore hoped to be dynamic and responsive to the local need and multiple perspectives offered by the stakeholders throughout, to promote engagement and take-up of changes to policy and practice.

RADIO Stages (Timmins et al., 2003)		RADIO Activities
Phase 1: Identification of organisational needs and development of a research partnership	1. Awareness of need	The LA EPS experienced increasing rates of referrals for school attendance difficulties and identified a need for an improved support approach. The link EP within the service initiated the research commissioning through the University process.
	2. Invitation to act	The EPS negotiated the research commission via a Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) Trainee EP. The researcher met with the EPS commissioner in December 2020 where a formal invitation to act was received and developed.

	3. Clarifying organisational and cultural issues	The need for earlier intervention, via a local graduated approach, was discussed. Initial exploration of factors likely to support or impede the initiative were conducted through commissioning meetings with the EPS. The lead researcher subsequently conducted a preliminary study between Jan – May 2021 (Corcoran, et al., 2022) detailing two successful case studies of attendance support within the LA. Discussions were held with the stakeholders in the first and second meetings to further clarify the organisational and cultural context and their priorities (Appendix 4.2).
	4. Identifying stakeholders in area of need	Whilst there was already an existing stakeholder group, the researcher and members continued to identify relevant stakeholders from across the LA throughout the year and extended invitations to them to join.
Phase 2: Research design, including frameworks for information gathering and analysis	5. Agreeing focus of concern (research aims)	During the first stakeholder meeting of this action research (stakeholder meeting 1, SM1), potential areas of focus and research aims were discussed in line with the needs and priorities of the LA. The group shared that their hopes were to embed the previous years' good practice, including the findings of the preliminary study and the locally developed Early Identification of Needs Tool, and to further develop and raise awareness of the graduated approach to support expected within the LA for young people at risk of or experiencing school attendance difficulties.
	6. Negotiating framework for information gathering	Discussions were held throughout the year regarding information gathering. This included regular stakeholder group

		discussions (SM 1 - 6) and identified a need to seek additional feedback from service users and senior leaders within the LA. The group also conducted a professional survey of current practice around pupil views (Appendix 4.3), and piloted new materials through groups such as the SENCo and Headteachers' Forums and individual team training. Feedback was also sought via consultion with third sector organisations, who were able to consult with their own service users, including local parents/carers and young people, for additional stakeholder views.
	7. Gathering information	Information was gathered using the agreed methods. This also included the use of a research diary by the researcher, and stakeholder meeting minutes (Appendix 4.2).
	8. Processing information with research sponsors/stakeholders	Information gathered was collated and shared cumulatively with the stakeholder group through the half-termly meetings (SM 2 – 6). Each time, a process of reflection followed this, collectively identifying the implications of the findings and their application to the organisation and the group's aims in line with action research cycles.
Phase 3: Proposal and management of organisational change	9. Agreeing areas for future action	Informed by the research findings, the stakeholder group agreed areas for future action through the half-termly meetings (e.g. development of a new resource (Appendix 4.5, 4.6), guidance section (Appendix 4.7), or commissioning of additional service user feedback).
	10. Action planning	Actions were collaboratively agreed and recorded through the meeting minutes. These included provision of further training within the LA (Appendix

		5), the development and refinement of the guidance materials, and awareness raising and networking at broader LA events.
	11. Implementation/action	Through implementation of the agreed actions, each of the stakeholders facilitated further development and awareness of the LA approach throughout the year.
	12. Evaluating action	Ongoing evaluation and reflection were facilitated through reflective discussions at each stakeholder meeting. The group also consulted with local young people and parents and carers via local third sector groups, who were able to share the newly developed materials and gather feedback from their own service users. At the end of the 21/22 academic year, a summative focus group discussion (SM7) was facilitated by the researcher to summarise and provide an additional opportunity to evaluate the group's progress (Appendix 4.8 and 4.9).

Table 3: RADIO stages and associated activities completed through the research process.

Data gathering and analysis

Data were gathered through collecting the views of the stakeholder group, recorded in written meeting minutes and a summative focus group (SM7) (n = 5). A reflective journal was also maintained by the researcher to aid conscious reflection on decision-making processes throughout the action research (Draissi, et al., 2021). Initial stages of the data analysis occurred cumulatively, with each stakeholder meeting (SM 2 – 6) beginning with a summary of the previous meeting's minutes and any information collected or analysed in between. A focus group was selected for the summative data point as it provided further opportunity for participatory data analysis, through which the stakeholders could hear each other's feedback and reflect, comment, and develop these themes more than they may

have been able to do in individual interviews or via a questionnaire (Ashton, 2009). Focus group data were gathered by audio recording and full transcription. Through this participatory analysis, the group were able to identify and elaborate upon initial salient themes within the research process.

Content analysis was selected for the analysis as it allows for the flexible analysis of narrative materials, while recognising the subjective nature of this type of process. By applying a directed approach to the analysis, the researcher makes explicit that they are not working from a "naive perspective" and acknowledges the influence of prior theory and knowledge on their analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1283). For example, preliminary research meant that the group were aware that factors such as collaboration were conducive to their work, whilst issues such as capacity were already known to be potential barriers (Corcoran, et al., 2022). While this can create limitations regarding the neutrality and trustworthiness of the analysis, a clear audit trail is provided to mitigate this (Appendix 6).

The data analysis therefore followed a deductive approach, including utilising the research questions to guide focus group discussion and theme identification. Following this, further directed content analysis was conducted on the focus group transcript, research journal and meeting minutes to develop and refine the themes and to produce a chronological 'story-line' of the research process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Findings

RQ1: How can a local authority (LA) approach to supporting children and young people with school attendance difficulties be developed?

Deductive content analysis, guided by RQ1, provided an overview of the research journey including the development of a localised graduated approach and reflections on the action research process. The research journey followed the RADIO model, as outlined in Table 3:

Phase 1: Identification of organisational needs and development of a research partnership

Initially phase 1 began with exploring the shared understanding of the stakeholders, including the LA EPS, that extended school non-attendance was an area of increasing need within the LA and that a graduated approach was required to address this at an organisational level. This had already led to the establishment of a stakeholder group, who had been working through action research cycles since January 2019 to develop an early identification of need tool to guide early identification and understanding of school attendance difficulties (Boaler, 2022). These cycles supported the stakeholder group to identify further organisational needs around subsequent early intervention for attendance, which had led to the commissioning of the present researcher who first met the stakeholder group in September 2021.

Through the initial stakeholder meeting (SM1), the group reviewed their progress to date and explored their aims for the year ahead. It was identified that a lack of understanding of school attendance difficulties, for example perceiving non-attendance as the pupil's choice or within the control of the family, meant that professionals were at times slower to identify and intervene for pupils at risk of or experiencing these difficulties. There were also different understandings reported around whether attendance difficulties were a Special Educational Need, and therefore the responsibility of the SENCo, or whether due to the attendance nature, the responsibility of the Attendance Lead.

"When it goes down a pastoral route, seeing it purely as behaviour rather than kind of looking at those underlying kind of needs… rather than, kind of involving the SENCO and really thinking about it in that broader sense as a special educational need."

Following the implementation of the early identification tool, the group shared that 'what next?' was a common response and that pupils were frequently being escalated to multi-agency support or Education, Health, and Care Plan applications without cycles of support being completed at the school level, compounding already lengthy wait lists for specialist services and causing delays in access to support for pupils and their families. There was also observed to be a reluctance by some staff members to take responsibility for the support,

with a view that if pupils were offsite then it was not possible or would be too difficult to support them.

School staff were also described as becoming quickly frustrated when support did not produce immediate increases in attendance levels, resulting in reduced motivation to engage further and further blame directed at families. This was suggested by some stakeholders to relate to the pressure felt by school staff to increase attendance figures and difficulty distinguishing between authorised and unauthorised absences due to unclear or varying interpretations of national guidance and school-level policy.

It was therefore agreed by the group that clearer guidance around roles and responsibilities and a graduated approach to effective intervention was required, alongside training for schools and LA teams to promote consistency and raise awareness to facilitate earlier identification and intervention. Within this, a need to reinforce pupil and parent voice was agreed, in line with previous research and best practice in this area (Corcoran & Kelly, 2022; Corcoran, et al., 2022). The group agreed to continue meeting half-termly (SM 2 – 6) to share and review this progress and plan further actions.

Phase 2: Research design, including frameworks for information gathering and analysis

"Because you know…a bit like having the [stakeholder] group and…and meeting together means that we're all focused on the same issues and can support schools in a kind of…joined up way really."

A key objective was the focus on raising awareness and changing perceptions of school attendance needs, with the hope of then impacting on practice and promoting earlier identification and intervention. Initially, this included an offer of free training to a range of LA teams, to ensure consistent messaging was being given by all LA professionals to school settings and families (Appendix 5). To supplement this, production of a LA guidance document was agreed, to be written in alignment with the existing graduated approach to ensure that it was familiar and accessible to school staff already working in this way. The group used the existing research literature, including findings from the pilot study and

earlier action research cycles, alongside similar documents from other LAs to guide this process, ensuring the materials were both evidence-informed and tailored to the local context. In line with this, they chose to use the term 'Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance' within their discussions and the LA materials (Callwood & Goodman, 2018; Corcoran, et al., 2022). In order to address the 'what next?' question which often arose after use of the early identification tool, the group co-produced an action plan template and ideas bank of strategies to sit within the guidance, which could then be used to direct support in line with the findings of the tool. To facilitate appropriate onward referrals for specialist support, a clear flow chart was created to direct when and how this should be done (i.e., after initial support cycles), and a signposting section was created to direct who referrals should be made to (Appendix 4.7).

Within the guidance document, sections were also produced to clarify schools' roles and responsibilities in supporting attendance, in consultation with the LA attendance team and national guidance. This also included information on how settings could embed early identification and intervention into whole school practice alongside individual-level support planning. Alongside this, the group decided to produce a whole school training package, to be offered by the EPS (Appendix 5.3). It was intended that this could further address misconceptions around roles and responsibilities and emphasise the slow and steady graduated response needed at a whole school level to effectively address school attendance difficulties in an evidence-informed way.

Following initial drafting of the materials, feedback from the stakeholder group indicated that increased focus on parent and pupil views would be useful. This led to a review of current methods of eliciting pupil views across the LA via a survey, and subsequent construction of a pupil views card sort tool which could be used by a range of professionals (Appendix 4.4, 4.5, 4.6). Additional references to parent voice were added within the flow chart, and parent and child sections were added to the FAQs (Appendix 4.7).

Phase 3: Proposal and management of organisational change

"Well, I think it's been a really positive impact and it's one of the things, one of the tools, that the schools go to first and this is what we always do in our team now…"

Following completion of the materials, consideration was given to an effective dissemination strategy across the LA. Within the summative focus group, the stakeholders discussed those immediate changes which they had already seen as a result of the action research cycles. These included changes to referral pathways, such as the addition of an attendance difficulty screening tool to referrals for the medical education panel, and integration of the attendance guidance materials into the documentation of the Virtual School and Pupil Absence Teams. Stakeholders also detailed that these initial changes at a LA level were now beginning to 'trickle down' into school settings, as the messages were being consistently reinforced by a range of professionals and they felt they were beginning to see a shift in the understanding of attendance difficulties at the school-level. More broadly, the group commented that they felt *"ahead of the curve"* with the recent guidance from the DfE emphasising collaborative working at a LA level to improve attendance.

"…it's helped partnership working develop consistently because we're all coming at it from the same perspective. So, I think…we've got that shared understanding, where we're going and where we need to go. And the big emphasis from the DfE is that attendance is everyone's responsibility, and it is about partnership working going forward, so we're actually ahead of the curve."

The summative focus group also discussed a range of plans for future implementation and maintenance of this organisational change. The group agreed that there would be an initial need to pilot and evaluate the materials, in order to assess their alignment to the local context and needs. It was also agreed that the programme of training should continue at LA and school-level, to disseminate the guidance materials and to continue to raise awareness of attendance difficulties, developing a shared understanding of the graduated approach to support across all settings and service users. Within this, pockets of need were identified, such as a need to initially focus on training pastoral and attendance staff who had been identified as taking a lead on this type of work.

RQ2: What are the factors influencing the development of a local authority approach to supporting children and young people with school attendance difficulties?
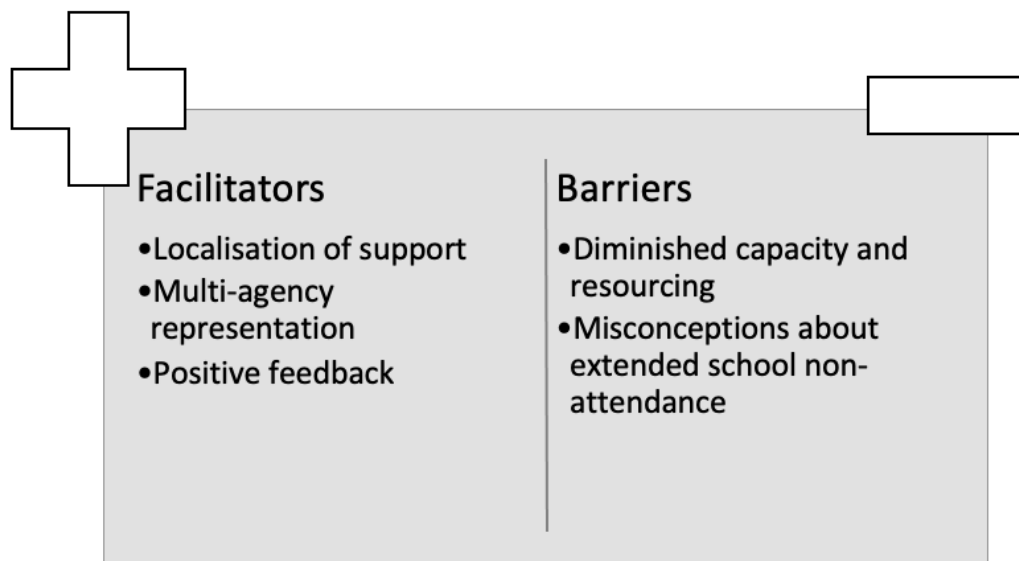
Figure 3: Factors influencing the development of a local authority approach to supporting children and young people with school attendance difficulties.

Through content analysis of the research diary, stakeholder meeting minutes and the summative focus group, five themes were identified which had contributed to the work of the action research group. These were sorted into three facilitators, and two barriers (Figure 3):

Facilitators

Localisation of support

"It feels like an area of increasing need within the local authority and more broadly as well of course…it kind of feels timely really, doesn't it?"

The first facilitator related to the group's contribution to local and national areas of need. All members of the stakeholder group were established staff members, many of whom had worked in the LA more broadly for the majority of their career. Issues around extended school non-attendance were having an increasing impact on their work and those with whom they worked, and they were therefore motivated to offer and implement effective support for families, settings and young people. This locally increasing demand sat alongside increasing national attention, as evidenced by recent government guidance detailing school and LA roles within supporting regular school attendance (Department for Education, 2022a). With this guidance anticipated to become statutory, it was therefore an area of priority for all involved in the group and their service users, motivating ongoing commitment, engagement, and a high level of interest in the development and implementation of a support pathway in this area.

Multi-agency representation

"I suppose we have the benefit of working across, you know, lots of settings so we see it in lots of different kinds of situations and at different levels, so we have that kind of overview, don't we?"

A second facilitator was the multi-agency composition of the stakeholder group. There was participation interest from a range of parties, resulting in a stakeholder group which had broad representation of LA teams and community groups. Through this representation the group had a good overview of local processes, including available support, resources, and opportunities, from the perspective of a range of service uses, including school staff, families, and LA teams. The half-termly meetings enabled regular networking opportunities, facilitating the sharing of best practice, signposting and maximisation of available resources, and reduced duplication of workload. It was also noted that the diversity of experiences and training within the group further facilitated creative problem-solving, contributing to the positive ethos and solution-focused approach of the group.

Positive feedback

"It is so nice to be doing something that is actually positive and working and changing in the middle of all this maelstrom of everything else that's going on…"

Lastly, the summative focus group reflected on the cyclical positive impact of the work. Through the commitment and consistent messaging being given around supporting school attendance, school settings and professionals developed an increased familiarity with the key messages and enhanced their own interest in this area. This promoted further 'buy-in' from these stakeholders as the LA was seen to be giving a 'united front' to service users with a clear position on attendance support. This then had a positive impact on increasing service users' awareness of school attendance needs and available support, which led to further 'buy-in' to the project and enhanced the credibility and ability of professionals to gently challenge settings where needed if their attendance support did not align with the LA's approach. It was also noted that many of those who regularly attended the group, used the guidance materials, or engaged with the project more broadly had found it personally and professionally rewarding and this had then promoted further engagement and recommendation of the support to others via an informal community of practice.

Barriers

Diminished Capacity and Resourcing

"But you know, the issue really and I mean it's outside of the remit of us…it's about…you know, when you've identified all of these things, how can you tap into them in time for it to make…you know, a difference in time – that's the problem because as we know, a lot of those things are just…you know…the waiting lists for everything are just crazy."

The capacity of the stakeholders remained a limiting factor throughout the project. While motivation and interest levels were high, it was noted that many teams had limited time and resource to complete agreed actions. For example, an ongoing focus throughout the year was the development of the localised guidance document, which would be evidence-informed and practically useful for local schools and professionals. While this had the full

support of the stakeholder group and aligned with the work of many other LAs in this area, due to limited time and resources progress was slow. Capacity also limited the ability of the group to conduct formal evaluation of the work to date, limiting the ability to demonstrate impact when requesting further resource allocation to the project in future years.

"We'd like to use the [early identification] tool but what's the point because we know if we do…nothing's going to…we're not going to achieve anything by the outcome…because we're not…you know…the waiting list is too long or…that doesn't exist in our area."

In addition to the internal capacity of the stakeholder group, it was also identified that limited capacity more broadly across the region had impacted upon the acceptance and implementation of the early identification and intervention approach. Due to high workloads, staff turnover, and limited school resourcing, stakeholders reported that many school staff felt that they did not have capacity to offer the preventative level of early intervention work which the approach was recommending. On a regional level, group members shared that extensive waiting times for other services, such as CAMHS, was further demotivating schools and families from seeking professional support. There was a sense of helplessness, which reduced motivation to identify or take responsibility for supporting young people with attendance needs at a school level, as was the goal, as group members reported that some service users expressed a belief that nothing could be done to support the young person once difficulties were embedded and an 'out of sight, out of mind' approach seemed to be taken to some non-attending young people.

"It is a barrier…but…what we hopefully will be able to teach them…or make them see is that if you put that hard work in at the beginning and you take the time to do that tool, it will save an awful lot of hard work down the line... Prevention is better than cure."

Misconceptions about extended school non-attendance

"We need to reach them to get them to buy into it and understand it and understand how it'll help make their jobs easier, rather than harder."

A second limiting factor surrounded the misconceptions held around school attendance difficulties and the responsibilities held by individual staff to provide support. In addition to a lack of clarity around staff roles and responsibilities, there was also still a broad range of attitudes around the causes of extended school non-attendance, with some staff perceiving that children and families were responsible, and that punitive action such as fines would be the most effective solutions. The group agreed that there is still a need for significant work in this area to address misconceptions and to encourage evidence-informed support at both a local and national level.

Discussion

Development of a Local Authority (LA) approach to school attendance difficulties

This paper details the development of a LA approach to identifying and supporting children and young people with school attendance difficulties at an organisational level. Within this, the stakeholder group hoped to provide clearer guidance around roles and responsibilities and effective intervention, alongside training for schools and LA teams to promote consistency and raise awareness to facilitate earlier identification and intervention. Ultimately, the group hoped that this would begin to reduce the increasing rates of extended school non-attendance across the LA.

Progression within the school attendance research base has previously been limited by a lack of consensus, lack of stakeholder voice, and sub-standard dissemination and implementation of findings (Heyne, et al., 2020). Within this project, a core theme was developing a shared vision and aim within the stakeholder group (Kearney, et al., 2022). Through the multi-agency representation in the group, cycles of action and reflection enabled shared, consistent language and aims to be agreed, considering the existing literature (Pellegrini, 2007) and the views of many stakeholders within the LA. Whilst challenging to achieve, agreed language hoped to ensure cohesive support for this group of vulnerable young people across the LA through facilitating better identification and monitoring of needs and effective joint-working (Tonge & Silverman, 2019). This collaboration also facilitated an effective 'multi-tiered system of supports' to be developed

and communicated via the guidance document, again written with a range of stakeholder views and aligned with the research base (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020) and the LA's graduated approach (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2014). Effective cross-system collaboration also supported each members' expertise to effectively localise the guidance to the ecological context (Kearney, et al., 2022) and to disseminate it consistently to service users using the cohesive language around school attendance difficulties and LA expectations (Tonge & Silverman, 2019), whilst maintaining consistency with national guidance (Department for Education, 2022a).

Relatively, Bertram et al. (2011) describe effective implementation of an evidence-based practice as a process that can take two to four years to complete at the local or organisational level [Page 10]. The group therefore intend to continue meeting on a regular basis, with ongoing input from the EPS, to fully embed the new guidance, conduct evaluation, and enable consistent changes to practice across LA teams and settings to be achieved. This aligns with previous organisational work of this nature, where a gradual approach to introduction and implementation of the policy was in itself a facilitator to success (Woods, et al., 2013).

Multi-agency, including Educational Psychology Services (EPSs), role in supporting school attendance difficulties

This work provides further evidence for the role of multi-agency partnerships in supporting the development and effective implementation of guidance around school attendance difficulties at a LA level. Previous research has identified a need for all stakeholders to contribute to the processes involved in organisational initiatives in order to avoid negative responses and to encourage ownership of the improvement process (Timmins, et al., 2003) and a lack of stakeholder voice has been identified as a barrier to progression in school attendance support (Heyne, et al., 2020). In this study, the multi-agency composition of the group provided an effective setting to co-produce the attendance guidance, ensuring a good overview of the context and effective individualisation to the LA and its service users (Kearney, et al., 2022), whilst also providing a rewarding opportunity for the stakeholders to collaborate, build their professional networks and reduce duplication of workload (Huxham & Vangen, 2013). Within this, it was noted that the positive feedback from stakeholders and

service users supported ongoing commitment to the project (Boaler, 2022). The multi-agency partnership also enabled a 'collaborative advantage' to be achieved, with an accumulative result greater than that of any individual teams' output (Solomon, 2019).

Despite concerns around capacity and continuing misconceptions around attendance difficulties, a shared objective within the stakeholder group was to continue to promote early identification and intervention. In line with previously suggested models of effective practice (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020; Kearney, et al., 2022), it was felt that through initially investing time and energy to develop 'Tier 1' practice at a whole-school level, the likelihood of higher need difficulties arising in the future could be reduced therefore reducing the resource demands on stakeholders over the longer term and reducing overall rates of non-attendance. However, in the medium term, the group agreed that enhanced time and resource allocation to the project would have hastened the development and led to earlier implementation and evaluation of the guidance document (Boaler, 2022). It was also noted that capacity for further piloting with school staff and families would aid implementation and enhance the buy-in once the guidance is formally shared with service users across the LA (Weist, et al., 2018).

In this case, the EPS were able to contribute their overview of the local need, through their strong relationships with school settings and collective view of local trends, indicating increasing prevalence of attendance difficulties and initiating the commissioning of the project (Law & Woods, 2019). They were also able to provide a unique contribution within the multi-agency approach via their roles as scientist-practitioners, for instance through the application of both evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence when developing guidance and training materials (Miller & Frederickson, 2006). This aligns with the findings of previous research in this area regarding the psychological contribution and the way in which it can 'legitimise' the advice and promote buy-in from other stakeholders and settings (Woods, et al., 2013) and also for the valuable role of EPs in effective intervention development and implementation at an organisational level (Moir, 2018).

Moving forward, the use of a multi-agency approach to promoting regular school attendance is likely to only increase in prominence (Kearney, et al., 2022). Following the

recent publication of the Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance (Department for Education, 2022a), a key message being issued is that "improving attendance is everyone's business" [Page 6]. It is anticipated that the government guidance will become statutory, requiring LAs to develop and deliver their own individualised, strategic approach to promoting regular school attendance. This research would indicate that effective multi-agency working, including EPSs, is required to develop these initiatives and that action research may provide a helpful structure through which to achieve this.

Limitations

As indicated throughout the literature, successful support for school attendance difficulties must be effectively individualised at both an individual and an organisational level (Nuttall & Woods, 2013, Kearney, et al., 2022). These findings are specific to one local authority's approach, however if appropriately contextualised, the learning around both the product and the process of the work may have some general transferability to practitioners in other contexts (Akremi, 2020; Woods, et al., 2013).

Due to limited capacity within the stakeholder group, effective piloting and evaluation of the guidance document and training was not conducted during this action research cycle. It will be important to seek this service user feedback in order to ensure the efficacy of the recommended approaches (Heyne, et al., 2020; Tonge & Silverman, 2019), and to enhance uptake of the new guidance and facilitate maintained changes to practice (Fixsen, et al., 2009); the stakeholder group plan to conduct this evaluation during the next academic year. Future research should look to capture the impact of these resources to better inform future support for school attendance difficulties, including the development and implementation of similar policies and approaches with other organisations and settings.

Conclusion

This research details the development and introduction of a local authority approach to early identification and intervention for school attendance difficulties. In order for these initiatives to be successful, the findings suggest that the development and implementation of the approach require the ongoing commitment of a core multi-agency group, with time

and resourcing to allow for actions to be undertaken effectively, including consultation with wider stakeholders and piloting and evaluation of materials, to promote a shared understanding of the required support. There should remain the expectation that this process takes time to develop and cannot be done as a 'quick fix', as work must be tailored to the local systems and context. There is also a need to disseminate consistently, in order to challenge misconceptions and to promote early identification and intervention through evidence-informed practice.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Paper Three: The Dissemination of Evidence to Professional Practice

Introduction

This paper concerns the dissemination of evidence to professional practice. It begins with a generic overview and critical consideration of the concepts of evidence-based practice and related issues such as practice-based evidence, followed by a discussion of the literature concerning effective dissemination of research and research impact. The paper will then provide a more specific summary of the policy, practice, and research development implications from the research outlined in Papers One and Two, and the proposed strategy for the dissemination, evaluation, and impact of this research at the research site, organisational level, and professional level.

Evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence

The HCPC Standards of Proficiency, by which all Practitioner Psychologists including Educational Psychologists (EPs) must abide, detail that to be able to assure the quality of their practice all practitioner psychologists must, "be able to engage in evidence-based and evidence-informed practice, evaluate practice systematically and participate in audit procedures" (SoP 12.1). An understanding of research evidence is further referenced, specifically for EPs, in eight additional Standards of Proficiency (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), 2015). It is clear therefore that an understanding of evidence-based practice and related issues is a core skill for EPs.

This professional knowledge should include an understanding of what constitutes 'evidence-based' or 'evidence-informed practice'. In its origins within the medical field, evidence-based practice has been defined as "the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients" (Sackett, et al., 1996, pp. 71 - 72). The HCPC defines these terms as "practitioner psychologists' awareness and use of research and other evidence, where this is available, to guide their practice" (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), 2015, p. 6). Both approaches therefore appear to emphasise the integration and application of external evidence with professional expertise.

Previously, a 'hierarchy of evidence' has been proposed to inform this application of research to practice, which ranks evidence-types based on the rigour (strength and precision) of their research methods. Various iterations of the hierarchy have been proposed, though traditionally all position 'weaker', less reliable study designs at the bottom (e.g., case series), case-control and cohort studies in the middle, followed by randomised control trials (RCTs), and at the top, systematic reviews and meta-analysis of RCTs as 'stronger' and least likely to be influenced by bias (Figure 4) (Murad, et al., 2016).
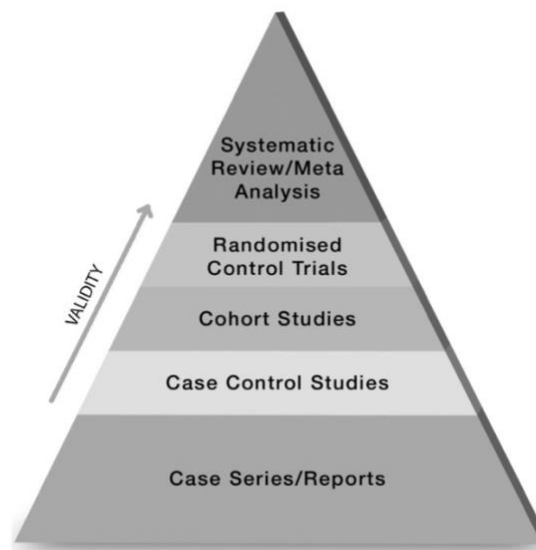
Figure 4: The traditional hierarchy of evidence, as presented in Murad, et al. (2016).

However, this approach has been critiqued in its relevance to EP practice. There are broad-ranging difficulties in translating evidence-based clinical interventions into educational settings due to the ecological validity of their findings and implementation factors, including difficulties ethically applying research findings to complex 'real-world' problems and the "imprecise and tentative relationship" often found between assessment and intervention in professional practice (Miller & Frederickson, 2006, p. 104). For example, Carr (2000) found that even those interventions which had the highest efficacy in empirical research were not effective in practice with around 33% of young people. Therefore, the role of reflection and professional expertise in the ethical application of theoretical knowledge to practice is emphasised, including within the field of school attendance difficulties (Kearney, et al., 2022).

The debate surrounding the role of evidence-based practice remains central to the broader discussion around the positioning of EPs as scientist-practitioners. Through their doctoral-level training, EPs are considered adept at bridging the gap between research and practice and have been identified as making a distinct contribution to children, families, and services through their work as scientist-practitioners (Fallon, et al., 2010; Lane & Corrie, 2006). More specifically, Lane and Corrie (2006) identified four themes to guide the work of applied psychologists as modern scientist practitioners and to attempt to overcome some of the dilemmas when translating research theory into practice:

1. Think effectively,
2. Formulate effectively,
3. Act effectively,
4. Critique our work in systematic ways.

Through this work, there has been an increase in the recognition and application of practice-based evidence to EP practice. Practice-based evidence encourages the inclusion of a broader range of evidence than has traditionally been the case, including implicit and 'intuitive' practitioner knowledge and experience, and therefore moving away from the historic research hierarchy (Lane & Corrie, 2006). This approach aligns with other aspects of EP training, as it places greater emphasis on the ecological context of the work and of the perspectives of those who are involved, such as the client or problem-holder. This arguably enables more effective translation of the evidence base into practice, by improving the ecological validity and implementation of interventions.

In their model, O'Hare (2015) presents an expanded model of evidence-based practice for EPs, which attempts to allow critical and explicit engagement with many types of evidence within practice (Figure 5). Here, the combined contributions of external research evidence, practitioner expertise, ecological factors, and stakeholder perspectives can be integrated to inform EP practice from a both an evidence and practice-based perspective.
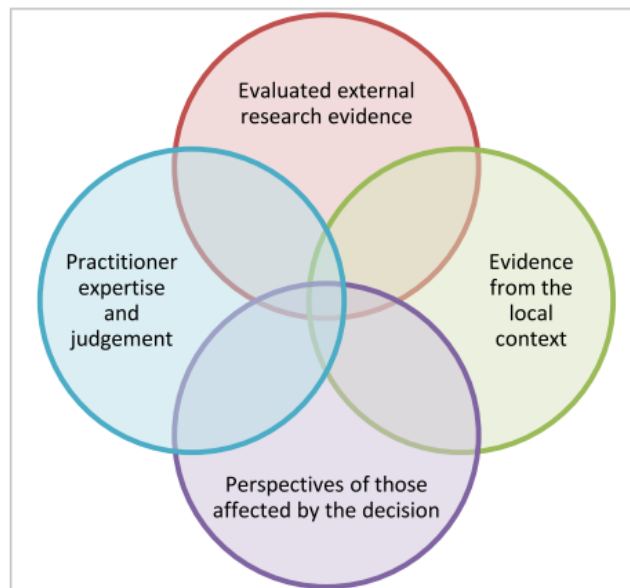
Figure 5: An expanded model of evidence-based practice, adapted from O'Hare (2015).

Over a century's worth of research has contributed to the vast literature base surrounding school attendance needs, moving from a focus on non-attendance as a problem of 'delinquency', towards more internal, medicalised models of anxiety and separation difficulties, and the more recent focus on systemic perspectives, including the role of school environment and the surrounding community (Kearney, et al., 2022). However, in their paper describing the establishment of the International Network for School Attendance (INSA), Heyne et al. (2020) note that there are three key challenges within the current research and evidence-based that demand attention: (1) a lack of consensus surrounding definitions and classification, timing of intervention, and an appropriate research agenda; (2) inadequate attention to the voices of all stakeholders, including the experiences of children and young people, parents and carers, and professionals; and (3) sub-standard dissemination and implementation of research findings, which they argue have likely contributed to the previously mentioned lack of consensus.

This thesis attempts to contribute to the field of school attendance difficulties in line with O'Hare's (2015) expanded model of evidence-based practice. Paper One presents the findings from a systematic literature review, which encompasses the views of over sixty children and young people who have experienced school attendance difficulties, highlighting

those areas which they perceived contributed to the onset or maintenance of their difficulties. By taking a systematic evidence-based approach to the review, the researcher was able to gain a clear understanding of what research literature is currently available surrounding young people's views and experiences, and to consider the implications of these for evidence-based policy, practice, and future research.

Paper Two then looked towards practice-based evidence, focusing on the development and initial implementation of the extensive literature base into professional practice in one Local Authority (LA). Through a series of reflective, action research cycles, the stakeholder group considered how they could effectively build awareness and understanding of school attendance needs through dissemination of the research literature, alongside how they could develop and implement effective, evidence-informed support within their local context. Through this, the research aimed to bridge the gap between the evidence-base and professional practice, whilst considering the local context and implementation drivers and barriers. Paper Two also hoped to contribute to a broader evidence-base, providing a model for other LAs considering or undertaking similar work, and considering how this work could be effectively developed, disseminated, and implemented at an organisational level.

Effective Dissemination of Research and Notions of Research Impact

Effective dissemination of research findings is important to ensure the influence and impact of the generated knowledge upon professional practice. Dissemination is defined as "a planned process that involves consideration of target audiences and the settings in which research findings are to be received and, where appropriate, communicating and interacting with wider policy and health service audiences in ways that will facilitate research uptake in decision-making processes and practice" (Wilson, et al., 2010, p. 2). However, despite the high regard with which evidence-based practice is held by many professionals, there appears to be a continued difficulty in translating this knowledge into practice resulting in a research-to-practice gap. It is argued that research findings are not being used with sufficient "quantity and quality" to impact practice and therefore the intended benefits of the research are not being experienced (Fixsen, et al., 2009, p. 1). More specifically within

the field of school attendance difficulties, sub-standard dissemination and implementation of research has been identified as a barrier to research progression (Heyne, et al., 2020).

It is therefore important to consider the impact of the given dissemination strategy, to review how effectively it is enabling transfer of research knowledge into practice and adapt as required. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) note, "A high quality approach to enabling social science impact should include clear awareness of the principles and practices of knowledge exchange, as opposed to dissemination of knowledge only." They note that this may include:

- "Consulting users when planning and strategising for impact
- Designing training workshops and events for specific user groups
- Planning space to take advantage of unexpected opportunities
- Committing to principal and senior investigator time on knowledge exchange and impact activities" (Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), 2021).

One strength of this thesis is that it was conducted within The University of Manchester's Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology research commissioning process. This process enables a broad range of stakeholders to commission research projects which are highly relevant to their own practice, needs or interests. Therefore, the researchers typically have a ready and willing audience to disseminate their research findings to, increasing the likelihood that some form of implementation will occur. In this case, the commissioner was the Educational Psychology Service, who had recognised a need for enhanced evidence-based practice in their support of school attendance difficulties and were therefore a ready audience for the research findings. They also provided the researcher with opportunities to consult with key stakeholders when planning for dissemination and impact, with the commitment of both the researcher and the commissioner to facilitate time for these activities throughout and following the research process.

More broadly, effective dissemination of research requires a considered dissemination strategy. In their systematic review, Wilson et al. (2010) identified thirty-three different dissemination frameworks, designed to guide researchers' dissemination activities. Within these, they identified three frequently referenced theoretical components: Persuasive

Communication, Diffusion of Innovations Theory, and Social Marketing. The Persuasive Communication Matrix (McGuire, 2001) details the source, the message, the channel, the characteristics of the audience, and the setting as influential over the impact of dissemination. Diffusion of Innovations Theory discusses how, why, and at what rate information can be disseminated through populations or social systems, noting a five-phase innovation-decision process (knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation) (Rogers, 2003). Lastly, Social Marketing references the need to format evidence-based information in a way that it is clear and appealing to the defined target audience (Formoso, et al., 2007). In conclusion, Wilson et al. (2010) reiterate the importance of contextualising dissemination and the need for interaction with the end user to ensure effective transfer of research knowledge into practice.

Within education, Harmsworth et al. (2001) identified three levels of dissemination: for awareness, for understanding, and for action; they note that dissemination which encompasses all three levels is most likely to ensure translation of research into practice. Dissemination for awareness involves sharing the existence of the research with target audiences, focusing on awareness of the issue or topic, and promoting interest rather than a detailed understanding. For example, promoting an awareness of the existence of school attendance difficulties as a specific area of need via signposting in a professional forum, such as a LA Headteachers' Forum. The second level of dissemination is for understanding, in which specific audience groups (e.g., school staff, EPs) may be targeted based upon the relevance and implications of the research to their area of policy and/or practice. In this research, this may include the delivery of training about school attendance difficulties to different school settings and LA teams. Thirdly, dissemination for action focuses on motivating the implementation of the research findings, resulting in sustained changes to policy and/or practice within the relevant areas. Within this research, this would include the development and dissemination of the guidance materials, designed to develop and inform professional practice for those working directly with school attendance needs (e.g., SENCos, social workers, EPs).

Through the iterative nature of Paper Two's action research (AR) cycles, effective dissemination and implementation were able to occur throughout the process at the

research site. Lewin (1946) proposed three goals for AR: to advance knowledge, to improve a concrete situation, and to develop and improve AR methodology. Sommer (2009) argues that in order to achieve these goals a tripartite framework should be utilised: action researchers should aim to publish their findings in related academic journals (to advance knowledge); to produce practical guidance or applied articles accessible to relevant practitioners (to improve the situation); and to share reflections on the methodological approach (to improve AR methodology). Hynes (2013) also discusses the range of inquiry undertaken within AR and the way this in itself may impact upon the dissemination and implementation of the findings: first person (the researcher's own inquiry and reflection), as is reflected within this written thesis; second person (inquiry with others), as was reflected throughout the AR cycles of reflection and action; and third person (inquiry extending outwards towards creating greater impact), as is outlined here within Paper Three.

A summary of the policy/ practice/ research development implications from the research at: the research site; organisational level; professional level.

The thesis comprised of a systematic literature review (SLR) exploring children and young people's experiences of extended school non-attendance using a meta-ethnographic approach (Paper One); and an action research (AR) project which explored how a localised approach to supporting regular school attendance can be developed, including stakeholders' perceptions of the impact, facilitators, and challenges (Paper Two). The research aimed to contribute to knowledge within the field of school attendance difficulties, by synthesising the experiences of the children and young people experiencing these difficulties over the past 10 years and by exploring the development of early identification and intervention practice through AR, the outcomes of which may be of interest to other Educational Psychology Services, Local Authorities and broader professionals wishing to develop their policies and practices in this area.

The subsequent sections outline the implications of the research at a research site, organisational and professional level.

Research site

The research had a number of implications for policy, practice, and further research at the research site. Through the half-termly AR cycles, each of the research participants were able to share their own experiences of supporting school attendance needs and to hear those of others, including the experiences shared by young people through the SLR. This enabled development of both individual and shared understandings of what is meant by 'Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance', the term used within the group. Through subsequent cycles of action and reflection, the group conducted purposive first-person enquiry, and were able to use this understanding to inform and develop their own evidence-based approach and practices to supporting school attendance difficulties within the Local Authority (LA) (Kearney, et al., 2022). For individual group members, they shared a positive impact on their own professional understanding and ability to support young people, families and school settings experiencing these difficulties. Within the summative focus group, many of the participants also shared this positive impact on their own and their team's professional practice following their engagement in the AR process, demonstrating the impact of further second person inquiry:

"…at practitioner level, it's one of the first things that you're discussing with the school, so it's developed into…it's become top of the list as what to discuss in terms of advice and…support to a school."

Through these cycles of reflection, the group were able to co-produce clear, evidence-based guidance for themselves and for other professionals practicing in this area. This guidance was also effectively informed by the findings of the researcher's preliminary study (Corcoran, et al., 2022) and Paper One, which were shared with the group. Through this process of co-production, facilitated by the AR cycles and reference to the literature base, each member of the group had a clear commitment to the guidance documents and training materials, which was hoped to further support their individual dissemination and implementation of this into practice (Weist, et al., 2018).

A further impact was that the AR group enabled many of the participants across the research site to regularly network and build working relationships within and across their teams, forming additional cycles of third person enquiry (Hynes, 2013). This opportunity to

regularly collaborate, share resources and best practice, and achieve collaborative advantage was noted to also contribute to the enhancement of professional practice (Solomon, 2019):

"…it has encouraged partnership working or it's helped partnership working develop…consistently because we're all coming at it from the same perspective. So, I think it's really…what's a really good outcome from this…we've got that shared understanding…where we're going and where we need to go."

Due to the success and ongoing commitment at the research site to continuing their development of evidence-informed policy and practice in this area, the group are currently seeking further research support via the next University of Manchester Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology commissioning process.

On an individual level, the researcher also reflected that facilitation of the AR group had enhanced their own knowledge and understanding of effective, evidence-based practice when supporting school attendance. This has enabled transfer into their professional practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, through increased knowledge and skills within individual and school-level casework.

Organisational level

The research described in Papers One and Two also had a range of implications and outcomes at the organisational level. A key aim of both research papers focused on raising awareness of school attendance difficulties, to enable earlier identification and implementation of support and to facilitate a joined-up, graduated approach across the LA. In part, this was achieved through the nature of the AR process, as the stakeholder group was made up of a range of professionals from across the LA who by means of their participation increased their own awareness of evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence in the area of school attendance difficulties:

"…meeting together means that we're all focused on the same issues and can support schools in a kind of…joined up way really, which is going to be helpful."

Alongside this, many of the of the stakeholders were keen to spread this awareness to their own teams within the LA. They therefore invited the researcher and other members of the research group to speak, for example at team meetings, about the existing literature and current research. To date, the researcher has presented at twelve different meetings and forums (Appendix 5.1), further facilitating the awareness and implementation of effective support for school attendance needs across the organisation.

Following a presentation of the systematic literature review findings from Paper One, the group agreed that further emphasis was required around the need to seek children and young people's views directly when working to support their school attendance. This led to the development of a card-sort tool, which following a piloting stage, has been shared with a range of practitioners across the LA to better facilitate their understanding of pupil views during casework (Appendix 4.5 and 4.6).

A key outcome of the AR cycles described in Paper Two was the co-production of an extensive guidance document, designed to guide and inform the work of a range of professionals across the LA supporting school attendance difficulties in an assess, plan, do, review (ADPR) structured process (Appendix 4.7). The document takes a practice-based evidence approach, providing an overview of the research literature alongside clear implications and next steps within professional practice, with worked examples and templates to enable implementation by setting staff. It is informed by the researcher's preliminary study, which looked at the local context of school attendance difficulties within the LA via two case studies and identified facilitators and barriers to support (Corcoran, et al., 2022), Paper One, emphasising pupil experiences of extended non-attendance, the wider evidence base (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020; Nuttall & Woods, 2013), the expertise and professional experiences of the stakeholder group, and similar documents produced by other LAs (West Sussex County Council, n.d.). It was also written to align with the existing SEN Code of Practice's ADPR process, intending to support implementation by professionals who are already familiar with that style of intervention (Department for Education &

Department of Health, 2014). Following a period of dissemination and piloting, the guidance is hoped to simultaneously raise awareness and understanding of school attendance difficulties and inform and facilitate earlier identification and effective intervention practices in range of settings, in an evidence-informed way. The guidance document will also sit alongside a whole-school training package, produced by the researcher and EPS team, to raise awareness and support implementation of the guidance (Appendix 5.3). As a result, it is hoped that professionals will feel more able to effectively support this vulnerable group of young people, and a subsequent longer-term decrease in the prevalence of school attendance difficulties will be seen across the LA.

"Well, I think it's been a really positive impact and [the early identification tool] is one of the things, one of the tools, that the schools go to first and this is what we always do in our team now..."

Previous research into the support of regular school attendance notes, "the implementation of evidence-based frameworks is inevitably a complex and multilevel process that requires explicit identification of barriers to adoption" (Heyne, et al., 2020, p. 1026). Through the AR cycles and subsequent data analysis, the researcher has been able to identify and mitigate for potential barriers to this implementation process. For example, misconceptions and lack of awareness are being extensively targeted via the previously described guidance materials and training package, and consistent language and messaging across the LA (Tonge & Silverman, 2019). Additionally, capacity, resourcing and competing demands were identified as ongoing barriers through the AR process. Therefore, the researcher and EPS remain in liaison with LA senior leaders to ensure ongoing commissioning of the work, and it remains a key area on the EPS service development plan. The stakeholders also plan to conduct piloting and preliminary evaluation of the guidance materials once they are finalised, in order to develop further practice-based evidence around the utility of this approach at an organisational level and to continue to inform the implementation process (Heyne, et al., 2020).

A further organisational outcome has been the contribution of the researcher to a strategic attendance group focused on implementation of the new Working Together to Improve

Attendance guidance (Department for Education, 2022). Introduced nationally in 2022, and planned to become statutory from September 2024, the guidance outlines the responsibilities for LA professionals in promoting regular school attendance. Using their knowledge of the evidence-base and professional experiences in this area, the researcher and other stakeholder group members have been invited to inform and guide the work of this group in the planned implementation of the guidance at a LA level over the 2022 – 23 academic year.

Professional level

There are a range of implications of this research at a professional level. Paper One's systematic literature review highlights the requirement for an enhanced emphasis on the need to gather young people's views early, as the vast variation in experiences suggests that effectively individualised support cannot be provided without this knowledge of the unique risk and protective factors from the young person's perspective. It also emphasises the need to use young people's preferred terminology when discussing their difficulties, hence the move of the researcher towards the term 'school attendance difficulties'. A further implication from Paper One includes the identification of a sense of belonging as a core aspect within promoting regular school attendance for all children and young people. At a professional level, this is intended to support proactive and preventative work across educational settings, by informing positive changes to practice at a universal level through the promotion of approaches to support a positive sense of belonging for all in schools. This is currently facilitated via an emphasis on universal belonging within the LA guidance documents and training package (Appendix 5.3), and broader training into the importance of belonging in the context of school attendance for a range of teams at a LA level (Appendix 5.1).

The utility of the meta-ethnographic method to rigorously synthesise qualitative research in order to inform policy-makers is regarded within the literature (Cahill, et al., 2018), and there is noted to have been an increase in the use of these types of study to underpin policy and practice (France, et al., 2016). Arguably, this type of review constitutes a 'top-tier' methodology within the hierarchy of research evidence and therefore should be highly

regarded (Murad, et al., 2016). However, it is important to consider that qualitative analyses are based within their social context which may change over time. For example, the Cochrane handbook for systematic reviews of interventions suggests that these should be updated every two years to maintain their relevance and rigour, though specific guidance is not provided for qualitative syntheses (Higgins, et al., 2019).

Within the context of Paper One, it is therefore suggested that further research is required to effectively translate the experiences of the children and young people into intervention-focused policy and practice. This process is beginning within the ongoing meeting of the stakeholder group, the piloting of the guidance and training materials and the hopeful commissioning of further research support for the group.

Paper Two presents an account of the development of a LA approach to school attendance support, including the identified facilitators and barriers within this process. On a professional level, this may offer a useful 'road map' to other professionals hoping to develop similar policies and practices within their own teams or LA (Woods, et al., 2013). Indeed, many LAs are simultaneously developing their own guidance materials around school attendance difficulties and following initial dissemination of the work, and the researcher has been contacted by several EPs wishing to find out more about the AR project to inform their own similar work (Appendix 7). The paper also identifies how local third sector groups can act as 'consultants' with service users, to facilitate meaningful co-production of LA guidance documents and resources. As outlined above, future research is proposed to facilitate evaluation of these approaches and inform the ongoing development and implementation of both evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence in this area.

A strategy for promoting and evaluating the dissemination and impact of the research

Sub-standard dissemination and implementation of research knowledge around school attendance difficulties has likely contributed to the lack of consensus within this research community and a delay in the advancement of policy and practice (Heyne, et al., 2020). Within their review they define, "dissemination is the targeted distribution of information

and intervention materials to specific audiences, while implementation refers to active promotion of the adoption and integration of evidence-based practices, interventions, and policies" whilst stressing the importance of each (Heyne, et al., 2020, p. 1026).

Throughout this research, organic dissemination and implementation of the research knowledge has occurred by nature of the action research (AR) methodology. Through iterative cycles of action and reflection, the group collectively identified opportunities for dissemination and implementation of the findings at a research site and organisational level, for example through networking with colleagues or inviting the researcher to speak at specific events or to contribute to training sessions. There will also likely be some instances of dissemination and implementation which have occurred unbeknown to the researcher, where stakeholders have shared their own involvement and reflections of the research with colleagues to inform ongoing developments to practice. For example, one stakeholder shared that they had amended their team's referral paperwork to ensure that support for school attendance difficulties was considered and delivered in an evidence-informed manner at a school level before accessing specialist services.

A wider dissemination strategy has also been developed by the researcher, informed by the aforementioned levels of dissemination (Harmsworth, et al., 2001), AR first, second, and third person levels of inquiry (Hynes, 2013) and tripartite framework for AR dissemination (Sommer, 2009), at the research site, organisational level, and professional level (Table 4). Actions in italics indicate those which are planned but not yet completed.

	Research Site (Stakeholder Group)	Organisational Level (LA and UoM)	Professional Level
Dissemination for Awareness	Regular attendance in the stakeholder group has maintained awareness and further promoted this via professional networking.	Individual stakeholders have shared their involvement in the research with their team through formal and informal training. Participation in LA attendance strategy groups to promote an awareness of school non-attendance needs within broader policy development (October 2022 and ongoing termly).	Ongoing engagement with Twitter community to promote discussion and awareness of school attendance difficulties and related publications.
Dissemination for Knowledge	Distribution of research analysis and findings with the stakeholder group has occurred throughout the AR cycles.	Presentation of Paper One and Two at an EBSA Conference Day for Trainee EPs at UoM (25.03.22). Engagement in UoM Trainee EP school attendance interest group (termly, 22 – 23 academic year).	Publication of the researcher's preliminary study within Educational Psychology in Practice (January 2022) and Paper One within the Journal for Research in Special Educational Needs (JORSEN) (October 2022). *Planned submission of Paper Two to JORSEN in Spring 2023.*

			Attendance at a regional school non-attendance interest group, for Educational Psychologists to share knowledge and best practice with other professionals and offer further opportunities for dissemination of ongoing research in this area (Summer 2023).
Dissemination for Action	Maintenance of the stakeholder group, who continue to meet half-termly to share and develop evidence-informed policy and practice in this area. *Commissioning of an additional doctoral research project in this area, via the UoM commissioning system (from September 2023).*	Development of guidance materials, including templates for use by professionals across the LA, and training package for school staff. Initial introduction and training has to date been provided at twelve different sessions across the LA. Engagement with new Alternative Provision being established within the LA to guide their support of pupils with	Discussion with two Trainee EPs and one qualified EP who wish to set up their own school attendance support processes within their placement LA (19.12.22). Contribution to an online CPD course for EPs, producing a 10-minute video overview of Paper One's findings and participating in a recorded Q&A session with other specialist EPs in this area (August 2022).

		school attendance needs (Autumn term 2022). *Follow up training is scheduled after initial piloting, and further whole school training is being offered to settings over the 22 – 23 academic year.*	

Table 4: Dissemination strategy.

Dissemination for Awareness

The first level considered is dissemination for awareness of school attendance difficulties. Increased awareness of these needs has been identified as key to successful support (Tonge & Silverman, 2019). This has been achieved at the research site through the regular meeting of the stakeholder group, which has provided regular opportunities to meet and discuss the research with interested professionals. Subsequently, members of the group have shared their knowledge with their individual teams and colleagues across the LA, ensuring school attendance needs remain high on the agenda at an organisational level. Following the formal conclusion of the AR cycles, the group continue to meet half-termly to review and develop policy and practice in this area.

At a professional level, the researcher has engaged in different professional networks to promote an awareness of school attendance difficulties. One example is Twitter, through which the researcher has been able to share the research with an active network of interested professionals, including EPs, teachers, and senior leaders in education. A series of two tweets sharing information about the researcher's preliminary study have been seen by 9,856 total users and received 469 hyperlink clicks through to the full-length published article. A third tweet promoting the publication of Paper One was seen by 3,985 total users and received 142 hyperlink clicks (as of 14th April 2023). The researcher also received thirteen requests for further information from different professionals, including feedback on the utility of the research within Paper One from a Specialist Senior EP (Appendix 8).

Dissemination for Knowledge

A shared understanding of school attendance difficulties across all stakeholders is a primary facilitator to effective identification and intervention (Kearney, et al., 2022). A collective understanding of these needs has been promoted through a range of training and networking opportunities both within the stakeholder group and at an organisational level (Appendix 5). Additionally, the researcher plans to join a regional EP interest group, to facilitate future sharing of evidence-based practice and policy at an organisational and professional level.

Journal publication has provided the primary route for dissemination of this research for knowledge at a professional level. To date, both the preliminary study (Corcoran, et al., 2022) and Paper One (Corcoran & Kelly, 2023) have been published in peer-reviewed journals and Paper Two is currently undergoing submission. Following publication in January 2022, the preliminary study has been viewed 1,469 times in its virtual format (as of 14th April 2023). It has also been cited by two subsequent doctoral theses (Lee, 2022; Tamlyn, 2022), one systematic literature review (Davidsson, 2023) and one peer reviewed paper (Fletcher, et al., 2023). Paper One was published open access to facilitate dissemination and has also since been cited in a prominent discussion piece surrounding the future of school attendance research (Kearney, et al., 2022).

Dissemination for Action

To promote positive change for those children and young people experiencing school attendance difficulties remains the primary aim of this research. At a research site level, this is being achieved via ongoing commitment of the stakeholder group to continue meeting, to effectively disseminate and implement the evidence-based guidance document, and to commission further doctoral research in this area. At a professional level, the researcher is continuing to engage in discussions with interested professionals to promote awareness and implementation of these research findings, including through their contribution to a new online CPD course for EPs (Appendix 9).

A key output of the research has been the co-production of a guidance document and complementary training pack to promote effective identification and intervention for school attendance needs within the LA. This will be disseminated across the organisation from Spring 2023. More formal evaluation of impact is planned for subsequent academic years, with the group currently planning an additional doctoral research commission to facilitate this process.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an overview of the dissemination of evidence to professional practice, including the roles of evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence within Educational Psychology. Effective dissemination and implementation of research require an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings to each, the role of which in relation to the dissemination of Papers One and Two have been explored. It is likely that the introduction of the Working Together to Improve Attendance guidance (Department for Education, 2022) from September 2024 will further increase professional attention and subsequent scrutiny of research and evidence-based practice in this area, hopefully resulting in improved outcomes for children and young people in the future. Nonetheless, the researcher has enhanced their own interest and understanding in this area and plans to maintain its ongoing dissemination and implementation throughout their career.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Journal Submission Guidelines Relevant to T1 and T2

Author Guidelines

The *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* publishes scholarly papers based on original research as well as critical reviews and theoretical essays. This includes submissions from a range of colleagues within the SEN field and across the disability community. Authors are asked to be sensitive to the diverse international audience of the *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* and explain the use of terms that might be meaningful or have a specific meaning in a particular national context. The use of jargon should be avoided and technical terms defined. Standard stylistic conventions based on British spelling and form should be followed.

Sections

1. Submission and Peer Review Process
2. Article Types
3. After Acceptance

1. Submission and Peer Review Process

New submissions should be made via the Research Exchange submission portal at the following web address **https://wiley.atyponrex.com/journal/JORSEN**. Should your manuscript proceed to the revision stage, you will be directed to make your revisions via the same submission portal. You may check the status of your submission at any time by logging on to submission.wiley.com and clicking the "My Submissions" button. For technical help with the submission system, please review our **FAQs** or contact **submissionhelp@wiley.com**.

By submitting a manuscript to or reviewing for this publication, your name, email address, and affiliation, and other contact details the publication might require, will be used for the regular operations of the publication, including, when necessary, sharing with the publisher (Wiley) and partners for production and publication. The publication and the publisher recognize the importance of protecting the personal information collected from users in the operation of these services and have practices in place to ensure that steps are taken to maintain the security, integrity, and privacy of the personal data collected and processed. You can learn more at **https://authorservices.wiley.com/statements/data-protection-policy.html**.

Article Preparation Support
Wiley Editing Services offers expert help with English Language Editing, as well as translation, manuscript formatting, Appendix illustration, Appendix formatting, and graphical abstract design – so you can submit your manuscript with confidence. Also, check out our resources for **Preparing Your Article** for general guidance about writing and

preparing your manuscript. All services are paid for and arranged by the author, and use of one of these services does not guarantee acceptance or preference for publication.

Free format submission

The *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* now offers **Free Format submission**for a simplified and streamlined submission process.

Before you submit, you will need:

Your manuscript: this should be an editable file including text, figures, and tables, or separate files—whichever you prefer. All required sections should be contained in your manuscript, including abstract, introduction, methods, results, and conclusions. Figures and tables should have legends. Figures should be uploaded in the highest resolution possible. If the figures are not of sufficiently high quality your manuscript may be delayed. References may be submitted in any style or format, as long as it is consistent throughout the manuscript. Supporting information should be submitted in separate files. If the manuscript, figures or tables are difficult for you to read, they will also be difficult for the editors and reviewers, and the editorial office will send it back to you for revision. Your manuscript may also be sent back to you for revision if the quality of English language is poor.

An ORCID ID, freely available at **https://orcid.org**. *(Why is this important? Your article, if accepted and published, will be attached to your ORCID profile. Institutions and funders are increasingly requiring authors to have ORCID IDs.)*

The title page of the manuscript, including:

- Your co-author details, including affiliation and email address. *(Why is this important? We need to keep all co-authors informed of the outcome of the peer review process.)*
- Statements relating to our ethics and integrity policies, which may include any of the following *(Why are these important? We need to uphold rigorous ethical standards for the research we consider for publication)*:
    - data availability statement
    - funding statement
    - conflict of interest disclosure
    - ethics approval statement
    - patient consent statement
    - permission to reproduce material from other sources
    - clinical trial registration

To submit, login at **https://wiley.atyponrex.com/journal/JORSEN** and create a new submission. Follow the submission steps as required and submit the manuscript.

Authorship
All listed authors should have contributed to the manuscript substantially and have agreed to the final submitted version. Review **editorial standards** and scroll down for a description of authorship criteria.

Funding

You should list all funding sources in the Acknowledgments section. You are responsible for the accuracy of their funder designation. If in doubt, please check the **Open Funder Registry** for the correct nomenclature.

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Guidelines on Publishing and Research Ethics in Journal Articles

The journal requires that you include in the manuscript details IRB approvals, ethical treatment of human and animal research participants, and gathering of informed consent, as appropriate. You will be expected to declare all conflicts of interest, or none, on submission. Please review Wiley's policies surrounding **human studies**, **animal studies**, **clinical trial registration**, **biosecurity**, **and research reporting guidelines**. This journal follows the core practices of the **Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)** and handles cases of research and publication misconduct accordingly (**https://publicationethics.org/core-practices**).

Peer Review

This journal operates under a **single anonymized peer review model**. Except where otherwise stated, manuscripts are peer reviewed by at least two anonymous reviewers and

an Associate or Assistant Editor. Papers will only be sent to review if the Editor-in-Chief determines that the paper meets the appropriate quality and relevance requirements. In-house submissions, i.e. papers authored by Editors or Editorial Board members of the title, will be sent to Editors unaffiliated with the author or institution and monitored carefully to ensure there is no peer review bias. Wiley's policy on the confidentiality of the review process is available **here**.

Preprint policy:
Please find the Wiley preprint policy **here**.

2. Article Types

Article Types	Descriptions
Original Article	Reports of original research, with methods, findings and conclusions.
Editorial	To convey an opinion, or overview of an issue, by the Editor or someone invited by the editor
Media Review	Short review on the usefulness/quality of one or more books or other media, to aid readers in decision-making
SENCO Policy Paper	Public statement of what a representative group of experts agree to be evidence-based and state-of-the-art knowledge on an aspect of practice/policy.
SEN Policy Research Forum	Public statement of what a representative group of experts agree to be evidence-based and state-of-the-art knowledge on an aspect of practice/policy.

References: References should be listed in full at the end of the paper in alphabetical order of authors' names, set out as below:

Book:
Kornblum, W. & Smith, C. K. (eds) (2004) Social Problems in Schools. (5th edn). Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Chapter in book:
Roof, C. (ed.) (2000) 'Behavioural difficulties in children.' In R. Davies & D. Galway (eds), Listening to Children, pp. 108–20. London: Fulton.

Journal:
Hadaway, C. (1981) 'The English school environment: proposed changes.' Cambridge Journal of Education, 20 (1), pp. 77–89.

Electronic resources:
Belson, K. C. (2005) 'Auditory training for autistic children.' Paediatrics, 102, pp. 41–3. <<a href='http://www.aap.org/policy.html'>http://www.aap.org/policy.html> (accessed 18 January 2005).

Others:
Firth, G. (2004) Developmental Process in Mental Handicap: A Generative Structure Approach. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Department of Education, Brunel University.

Clark, G. N. (1983) Intensive Interaction: Changing Views and Relationships (draft final report). Leeds Mental health NHS Trust: Learning Disability Psychology Services.

Illustrations, tables and figures should be numbered consecutively (e.g. Figure 1, Table 1, Table 2, etc.) and submitted on separate sheets. The approximate position of tables and figures should be indicated in the manuscript.

Manuscripts are subject to an anonymous peer review process, and authors should take care to identify themselves **only on the title page or cover letter**. Please give your affiliation and full contact details, including email. The cover letter should confirm that the manuscript is original work, not under consideration or published elsewhere. Each article should be accompanied by a **150-250** word abstract and a list of up to **7** keywords on a separate sheet. The main body format should be as
follows: **introduction**, **methods**, **results**, and **discussion**.

A PDF proof will be sent to the author to allow for essential corrections. In view of the cost and time involved in correcting we have to insist that changes be kept to a minimum. They should be corrected on the hard copy and returned to the editor within one week.

A PDF offprint will be supplied to all contributors signed up to Author Services, on publication in the journal.

Data sharing, Data Availability Statements, and Data Citation

Data sharing
The *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* has adopted **Wiley's 'Expect' data sharing policy**. Where appropriate and reasonable, authors who are reporting on original data (including code, models, algorithms, methods, etc.) are expected to archive the data underpinning their paper in a public repository. We understand that it may not be appropriate for all researchers to archive their data in a public repository due to ethical or

legal requirements and/or resource implications. Authors are not required to archive or share their data in order to publish with The *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs.* The **FAIR principles** and the **registry of research data repositories** are useful resources.

Data availability statement

Authors reporting original research are required to provide a data availability statement, which describes where, and under what conditions, data underpinning a publication can be accessed. By this we mean the dataset needed to interpret, replicate and/or build on the methods or findings reported in the article. If you cannot share the data described in your manuscript, for example for legal or ethical reasons, or do not intend to share the data, then you must still provide an appropriate data availability statement. Data sharing is not required in order to publish with the *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*. Data availability statements should be included within the title page and will be included in the final version of accepted articles. **Sample statements are available here**. If published, all statements will be placed in the metadata of your manuscript. Please note that data availability statements are required by some funding bodies and institutions.

Data citation

Authors are encouraged to cite underlying or relevant datasets in the manuscript by citing them in-text and in the reference list. Data references should include the following elements: name(s) of data creator; publication year; dataset title; version (where available); data repository/publisher; and global persistent identifier. For example:

Endfield, G.H., Veale, L., Royer, M., Bowen, J.P., Davies, S., Macdonald, N., Naylor, S., Jones, C., & Tyler-Jones, R. (2017) Extreme weather in the UK: past, present and future - event details from the TEMPEST database. Centre for Environmental Data Analysis **doi:10.5285/d2cfd2af036b4d788d8eddf8ddf86707.**

Best practice guidance about data citation is available via **DataCite**.

Preprint Policy

This journal will consider for review articles previously available as preprints. Authors may also post the submitted version of a manuscript to a preprint server at any time. Authors are requested to update any pre-publication versions with a link to the final published article.

Appendix 2: Information relating to ethical approval

Appendix 2.1: Initial invitation to participate

Dear X,

I hope this email finds you well.

As you have recently been involved in an action research working group, focusing on Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance in Trafford, I would like to invite you to take part in a subsequent research study being conducted by Shannon Corcoran, a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Manchester.

The study aims to explore the factors influencing the implementation of a local authority approach to supporting children and young people with Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) needs. The study is also exploring how stakeholder views can inform service development within this context. You have been invited as you have previously been involved with, or have expressed an interest in, developing the LA's early identification and intervention approach for pupils who are at risk of not attending school due to underlying anxiety. Participation in the study would involve invitation to attend half-termly stakeholder group meetings, which would last up to one hour, at a time and date convenient to the group. The first meeting will be conducted at some time during the month of September 2021 and will most likely take place via Microsoft Teams. Participants will not receive any external or additional payment or compensation for taking part in this study.

Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the attached participant information sheet carefully before deciding whether to take part and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you decide that you would like to take part in this study, please respond by email and we will arrange for a consent form to be provided for you, as well as an interview schedule outlining the topics to be discussed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Appendix 2.2: Initial Research Proposal

DEdChPsychol Thesis Research Commission

Programme link supervisor: Caroline Bond

Commissioner: X, X EPS

Research fieldwork location opportunities: X LA

Research Title	Developing an LA Emotionally Based School Non-attendance strategy
Research Strategy Links	**Access and participation** **Developmental differences** **Mental health and therapies** **Professional Learning**
Statement of the Problem ('Knowledge Gap') Research Questions	School attendance is a controversial area which has been thrown into sharp relief by the Covid-19 pandemic and recent return to school process. Although the DfE do not set attendance targets, schools are expected to promote 'good attendance'. Attendance requirements have been tightened in recent years and school aged pupils are defined as persistent absentees if they miss 10% or more sessions. However, how this is enforced is decided at a LA level leading to variability. Pupils may not attend school for a wide variety of reasons including truancy; school anxiety; caring for a parent or siblings or illness and individual patterns of non-attendance may shift over time (Finning et al., 2019). Kearney (2001) suggested 'school refusal behaviour' as an overarching term to encompass both truancy and more emotionally related absenteeism. Recently other terms such as emotionally based school non-attendance or emotionally based school avoidance (West Sussex EPS, n.d) have attempted to capture the needs of those pupils who experience persistent anxiety related to attending school. Rates of emotionally based non-attendance are difficult to determine but appear to range from 1-5% (Elliott & Place, 2019) and are of increasing concern for schools and LAs. The lack of a clear conceptualisation of non-attendance has hampered assessment and intervention (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Kearney and Graczyk (2014) propose a response to intervention model encompassing universal, targeted and intensive interventions to ensure early identification and preventative work are embedded in school practice alongside individualised intervention for those who experience persistent difficulties. At a whole school level they suggest a range of strategies to address aspects such as school climate, feeling safe and mental health; for at risk pupils' interventions include psychological interventions such as CBT, joint work with parents and re-engaging students and for those who are persistently absent, individualised planning. Kearney and Graczyk (2014)

	advocate a functional analysis approach to assessment while others argue for a broader contextual assessment (Tonge & Silverman, 2019). Concerns about rates of non-attendance and its individual and wider social impact have led to a number of EP Services developing their own materials and approaches (West Sussex EPS, n.d.; Babcock, 2020). Additional resources have also been developed to support schools and pupils following the Covid-19 lockdown (e.g. https://www.aep.org.uk/recovery-re-introduction-renewal/).
	This project is part of a wider project aimed at developing a XXX LA early intervention approach for pupils who are at risk of not attending school due to underlying anxiety. A Y2 action research project led by Louise Knox and Rhonda Boaler is underway to develop a XXX EBSNA early identification tool. The current project aims to follow on from this by using lessons learned from successful examples of vulnerable pupils reintegrating into school post Covid-19 lockdown to inform a further stage of XXX LA action research looking at intervention planning for pupils at risk of EBSNA.
Possible Approaches: A1, T1, T2, T1/ T2 links	**RQ: A1**: How have vulnerable pupils made a successful transition back to school following the Covid-19 lockdown (March to July, 2020)? **RQ: T2**: What interventions can schools in one LA put in place to support pupils at risk of EBSNA?
Service user (e.g. commissioner, participants) engagement opportunities (Design, recruitment/ participation, data gathering/ analysis, outputs co-production/ co-authorship, dissemination)	EPS commissioner; participants multi-agency services in XXX, XXX schools A1 – staff interviews re factors which have supported vulnerable pupils to successfully transition back to school. T1 - review of school based interventions for anxiety or mapping LA guidance docs onto themes from Rhonda's review of evidence based school interventions for EBSNA. T2 - action research project focusing on strategies and interventions that schools in one LA can put in place to support pupils at risk of EBSNA.
Potential Practitioner/ Policy Utility of Findings (links to T3)	Development of an approach which can be effectively implemented in XXX schools to reduce incidences of EBSNA. T3 – dissemination to XXX and other LAs/EPSs.
References	Babcock LDP (2020) Anxiety Based School Avoidance. Available at: https://www.babcockldp.co.uk/inclusion-and-ehwb/anxiety-based-school-avoidance Elliott, J.G. & Place, M. (2019) practitioner review: school refusal: developments in conceptualisation and treatment since 2000. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 60(1*), 4-15. Finning, K., Ukournunne, O.C., Ford, T., Danielson-Waters, E., Shaw, L., De Jager, I.R., Stentiford, L. & Moore, D.A. (2019)

Review: the association between anxiety and poor attendance at school – a systematic review. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health.* doi:10.1111/camh.12322.

Heyne, D., Strombeck, J., Alanko, K., Bergstrom, M. & Ulrikson, R. (2020) A scoping review of constructs measured following intervention for school refusal: are we measuring up? *Frontiers Psychology,* https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01744.

Kearney, C. A. (2001). *School refusal behavior in youth: A functional approach to assessment and treatment*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Kearney, C.A. & Graczyk, P. (2014) A response to intervention model to promote school attendance and decrease school absenteeism. *Child Youth Care Forum*, 43, 1-25.

Tong, B.J. & Silverman, W.K. (2019) Reflections on the field of school attendance problems: For the times they are a-Changing? *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice, 26,* 119-126.

West Sussex County Council (n.d) Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Good practice guidance for schools and support agencies. Available at: http://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483

Appendix 2.3: Ethical Approval Letter

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGR

School for Environment, Education and Development
Humanities Bridgeford Street 1.17

The University of Manchester

Manchester

M13 9PL

Email: PGR.ethics.seed@manchester.ac.uk

Ref: 2021-12635-19906

28/07/2021

Dear Miss Shannon Corcoran, , Dr Catherine Kelly

Study Title: Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance: Implementing a Local Authority Approach

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGR

I write to thank you for submitting the final version of your documents for your project to the Committee on 02/07/2021 18:47 . I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the application form and supporting documentation as submitted and approved by the Committee.

COVID-19 Important Note

Please ensure you read the information on the Research Ethics website in relation to data collection in the COVID environment as well as the guidance issued by the University in relation to face-to-face (in person) data collection both on and off campus.

A word document version of this guidance is also available.

Please see below for a table of the titles, version numbers and dates of all the final approved documents for your project:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Additional docs	Initial Stakeholder Meeting Schedule	28/06/2021	1
Consent Form	V1 Consent form_UKGDPR Non Medical	28/06/2021	1
Participant Information Sheet	Participant views PIS_GDPR UoM General Ethics	28/06/2021	1
Participant Information Sheet	Stakeholder group PIS_GDPR UoM General Ethics	28/06/2021	1
Consent Form	Assent form	28/06/2021	1
Participant Information Sheet	PIS for 5-11 years	28/06/2021	1
Participant Information Sheet	PIS for 13-15 year olds	28/06/2021	1
Data Management Plan	DMP v1 Emotionally_Based_School_Non-Attendance__Implementing_a_Local_Authority_Approach	28/06/2021	1
Letters of Permission	DBS	28/06/2021	1
Letters of Permission	Initial invitation	30/06/2021	1

This approval is effective for a period of five years and is on delegated authority of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) however please note that it is only valid for the specifications of the research project as outlined in the approved documentation set. If the project continues beyond the 5 year period or if you wish to propose any changes to the methodology or any other specifics within the project an application to seek an amendment must be submitted for review. Failure to do so could invalidate the insurance and constitute research misconduct.

You are reminded that, in accordance with University policy, any data carrying personal identifiers must be encrypted when not held on a secure university computer or kept securely as a hard copy in a location which is accessible only to those involved with the research.

For those undertaking research requiring a DBS Certificate: As you have now completed your ethical application if required a colleague at the University of Manchester will be in touch for you to undertake a DBS check. Please note that you do not have DBS approval until you have received a DBS Certificate completed by the University of Manchester, or you are an MA Teach First student who holds a DBS certificate for your current teaching role.

Reporting Requirements:

You are required to report to us the following:

1. Amendments: Guidance on what constitutes an amendment
2. Amendments: How to submit an amendment in the ERM system
3. Ethics Breaches and adverse events
4. Data breaches

We wish you every success with the research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kate Rowlands

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGR

Appendix 2.4: Participant Consent Form

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance: Implementing a Local Authority Approach

Consent Form

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

	Activities	Initials
1	I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet (**Version 1, Date 28/05/2021**) for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.	
2	I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself. I understand that it will not be possible to remove my data from the project once it has been anonymised and forms part of the data set. I agree to take part on this basis.	
3	I agree to the meeting being audio recorded.	
4	I agree that any data collected may be included in anonymous form in publications/conference presentations.	
5	I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.	
6	I understand that there may be instances where during the course of the research information is revealed which means the researchers will be obliged to break confidentiality and this has been explained in more detail in the information sheet.	
7	I agree to take part in this study.	

The following activities are optional, you may participate in the research without agreeing to the following:

8	I agree that any anonymised data collected may be made available to other researchers	

9	I agree that the researchers may contact me in future about other research projects.	
10	I agree that the researchers may retain my contact details in order to provide me with a summary of the findings for this study.	

Data Protection

The personal information we collect and use to conduct this research will be processed in accordance with UK data protection law as explained in the Participant Information Sheet and the [Privacy Notice for Research Participants](#).

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Name of the person taking consent Signature   Date

[One copy of this consent form will be returned to the participant, one copy will be retained for the research team on a secure server.]

Appendix 2.5: Participant Information Sheet

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance: Implementing a Local Authority Approach

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

You are being invited to take part in a research study which **aims to explore the factors influencing the implementation of a local authority approach to supporting children and young people with Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) needs. The study is also exploring how stakeholder views can inform service development within this context.** Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully before deciding whether to take part, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, we have made some adjustments to the way in which this research study will be conducted that ensures we are adhering to the latest government advice in relation to social distancing as well as taking all reasonable precautions in terms of limiting the spread of the virus. You should carefully consider all of the information provided below before deciding if you still want to take part in this research study. If you choose not to take part, you need to inform research team. If you have any additional queries about any of the information provided, please speak with a member of the research team.

About the research

➢ **Who will conduct the research?**

Shannon Corcoran, a first year Trainee Educational Psychology, who is studying for the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Manchester.

➢ **What is the purpose of the research?**

The purpose of the research is to explore how an early identification and intervention approach to EBSNA needs can be implemented within one local authority. As a researcher, I will facilitate a series of up to 6 stakeholder meetings using the Research and Development in Organisations (RADIO) model of action research to support the identification of need, clarifying any organisational or cultural issues and agreeing the research aims, ensuring that these align with the current priorities and needs of the local authority. Through our collaborative data collection, I plan to generate key themes which may help to identify facilitators and barriers to implementation and to explore how stakeholder views can inform service development in this context.

Participants have been invited to participate based on either their participation in a previous cycle of action research within the local authority, or based on their role working directly with children within school at risk of EBSNA or at a more external/multi-agency level e.g. for the National Health Service as a clinical psychologist.

➢ **Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

The outcomes of the research will be shared in written form to all participants and there is a possibility of the use of quotations in the thesis publication in the future. A 10,000-word summary

will be submitted to the University of Manchester as part of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology assessment requirements. Findings may be used in future research and could contribute to research submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

➤ **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check**

The researcher is likely to facilitate the initial stakeholder meeting via Microsoft Teams. Some participants may be based within a school building. The researcher has undergone the appropriate level of DBS check as determined by the University of Manchester.

➤ **Who has reviewed the research project?**

The project has been reviewed by the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee.

➤ **Who is funding the research project?**

Funding has been provided from the DfE Initial Training for Educational Psychologists bid 2020-2023 £ 15,950 pa bursary.

What would my involvement be?

➤ **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

Once you have completed the relevant forms, including a written consent form, you will be invited to attend a series of stakeholder meetings throughout the academic year 2021 - 2022. As a member of the stakeholder group you will have the opportunity to contribute your views and ask questions as regards the research groups next steps as to which actions we will prioritise in supporting children and young people with EBSNA needs. The stakeholder meetings will each last for approximately one hour and at the start of the first session I will ask participants to introduce themselves and briefly share their role and experience of emotionally based school non-attendance (the numbers of participants is yet to be confirmed dependent on interest and availability). As a participant you are free to choose how much you talk or listen. The first meeting will be conducted at some time during the month of September 2021 and will most likely take place via Microsoft Teams. Further meeting dates will be agreed over the year at times convenient to the group and you are free to choose how many of these you would like or able to attend.

The primary purpose of the stakeholder meetings is for participants to discuss the research project in a way that reflects as much as possible the honest views of all the research group participants. All participants will be asked to be mindful to share the time available so everyone who wants to talk has the opportunity to do so. Also, that participants will behave in a respectful and non-judgemental manner, this to enable all participants to have a positive experience. You are free to withdraw or opt out of the meetings at any time.

The function of the first stakeholder meeting is to reflect on the analysed data from the first part of the research project and unpick current practice and challenges around EBSNA and discuss how services and strategies could be developed effectively in the future. The aim is that the participants lead the discussions and build on each other's interactions and feel comfortable to challenge alternative views and agree on the group's next steps.

Your participation and all personal details will remain confidential to the researcher. Only participants who have given their written consent including consent to having their contributions audio recorded

will be eligible to participate in this study. All personal information will be removed from the final transcript. Once transcribed, the recording will be deleted from the university's encrypted drive. Confidentiality will be ensured through anonymisation of the data and use of pseudonyms. This will be done in such a way that individuals cannot be easily identified.

➢ **Will I be compensated for taking part?**

Participants will not receive any external or additional payment or compensation for taking part in this study.

➢ **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You will have received an introductory email and a copy of the Participant Information Sheet from the researcher (Shannon Corcoran). After you have read the Participant Information Sheet, please confirm via email your decision to decline or agreement to participate in the study (Shannon.corcoran@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk).

If you decide to take part, you will be given this Participant Information Sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form via email. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself. However, it will not be possible to remove your data from the project once it has been anonymised as we will not be able to identify your specific data. This does not affect your data protection rights. If you decide not to take part, you do not need to do anything further.

Audio recording of the stakeholder meeting is essential to your participation in this study. Therefore, if you do not wish to be audio recorded then you will not be eligible to participate in this study. All participants should be comfortable with the recording process at all times. You are free to stop participating at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

➢ **What information will you collect about me?**

In order to participate in this research project we will need to collect information that could identify you, called "personal identifiable information". Specifically we will need to collect:
   ➢ Full name and signatures on written consent forms.
   ➢ For school and multi-agency staff, we may also collect your job title, brief outline of job role and name of employer.
   ➢ The meeting will be audio recorded for the whole one-hour session using an encrypted device. Once the audio recording has been transcribed, the recording will be deleted from the university's encrypted drive.
   ➢ All personal details and transcribed data will be anonymised by the use of pseudonyms.

➢ **Under what legal basis are you collecting this information?**

We are collecting and storing this personal identifiable information in accordance with UK data protection law which protect your rights. These state that we must have a legal basis

(specific reason) for collecting your data. For this study, the specific reason is that it is "a public interest task" and "a process necessary for research purposes".

➤ **What are my rights in relation to the information you will collect about me?**

You have a number of rights under data protection law regarding your personal information. For example you can request a copy of the information we hold about you, including the audio recording transcript.

If you would like to know more about your different rights or the way we use your personal information to ensure we follow the law, please consult our [Privacy Notice for Research](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=37095.), available at http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=37095.

➤ **Will my participation in the study be confidential and my personal identifiable information be protected?**

In accordance with data protection law, The University of Manchester is the Data Controller for this project. This means that we are responsible for making sure your personal information is kept secure, confidential and used only in the way you have been told it will be used. All researchers are trained with this in mind, and your data will be looked after in the following way:

Only the research team at The University of Manchester will have access to your personal information, but they will pseudonymise it as soon as possible. Your name and any other identifying information will be removed and replaced with a random ID number. Only the research team will have access to the key that links this ID number to your personal information. In line with The University of Manchester's retention policy, data will be stored for a period of five years in secure locations on the researcher's P Drive. When you agree to take part in a research study and with your informed consent, the information about you may be provided to researchers running other studies here or at other organisations. This information will not identify you and will not be combined with other information in a way that could identify you.

Your participation in this research will be recorded in Microsoft Teams and your personal data will be processed by Microsoft Teams. This may mean that your personal data is transferred to a country outside of the UK, some of which have not yet been determined by the UK Government to have an adequate level of data protection. Appropriate legal mechanisms to ensure these transfers are compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation are in place. The recordings will be removed from the above third party platform and stored on University of Manchester managed file storage as soon as possible following the completion of data collection.

Potential disclosures

  o   If, during the study, we have concerns about your safety or the safety of others, we have a professional obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform your school or service safe-guarding lead.

  o   If, during the study, you disclose information about misconduct/poor practice, we have a professional obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform your employer/professional body.

- If, during the study, you disclose information about any current or future illegal activities, we have a legal obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform the relevant authorities.

- Individuals from the University, the site where the research is taking place and regulatory authorities may need to review the study information for auditing and monitoring purposes or in the event of an incident.

For audio recordings:
- The researcher and an approved University of Manchester transcriber will be responsible for the transcription of the focus groups data.
- All personal identifiable data will be pseudonymised in the final transcript.
- The pseudonymised transcription will be archived securely at the University of Manchester for a period of five years and then destroyed.
- Only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

Please also note that individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities may need to look at the data collected for this study to make sure the project is being carried out as planned. This may involve looking at identifiable data. All individuals involved in auditing and monitoring the study will have a strict duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant.

What if I have a complaint?

➢ **Contact details for complaints**

If you have a complaint that you wish to direct to members of the research team, in the first instance, please contact the researcher's university supervisor:

DR CATHERINE KELLY (Educational Psychologist)

catherine.kelly@manchester.ac.uk

Telephone number: 0161 275 3511

School of Environment, Education and Development, Ellen Wilkinson Building, Oxford Road, University of Manchester, M13 9PL.

And /or:

PROFESSOR CAROLINE BOND (Educational Psychologist)

caroline.bond@manchester.ac.uk

Telephone number: 0161 275 3686

School of Environment, Education and Development, Ellen Wilkinson Building, Oxford Road, University of Manchester, M13 9PL.

If you wish to make a formal complaint to someone independent of the research team or if you are not satisfied with the response you have gained from the researchers in the first instance then please contact

The Research Ethics Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 2674.
If you wish to contact us about your data protection rights, please email dataprotection@manchester.ac.uk or write to The Information Governance Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, M13 9PL at the University and we will guide you through the process of exercising your rights.
You also have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office about complaints relating to your personal identifiable information Tel **0303 123 1113**.

Contact Details
If you have any queries about the study or if you are interested in taking part then please contact the researcher(s):
SHANNON CORCORAN (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
shannon.corcoran@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk**.**
Telephone number **0161 275 3511.**
School of Environment, Education and Development, Ellen Wilkinson Building, Oxford Road, University of Manchester, M13 9PL.

Appendix 3: Paper One Data Analysis Audit Trail

Initial search results from each database were collated and screened via a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Figure 3.1: Screenshot of Excel spreadsheet tracking initial search results

Following initial screening to remove duplicates and assess eligibility, the remaining papers were accessed in full with enhanced screening against the inclusion criteria, in liaison with the research supervisor. Column A indicates the decision made and if needed, reason for the paper's exclusion.

Figure 3.2: Screenshot of Excel spreadsheet tracking screening process

During an initial process of immersion in the selected papers, the researcher maintained a log of notes and reflections around each within their research journal.

Figure 3.3: Example of researcher notes during immersion process
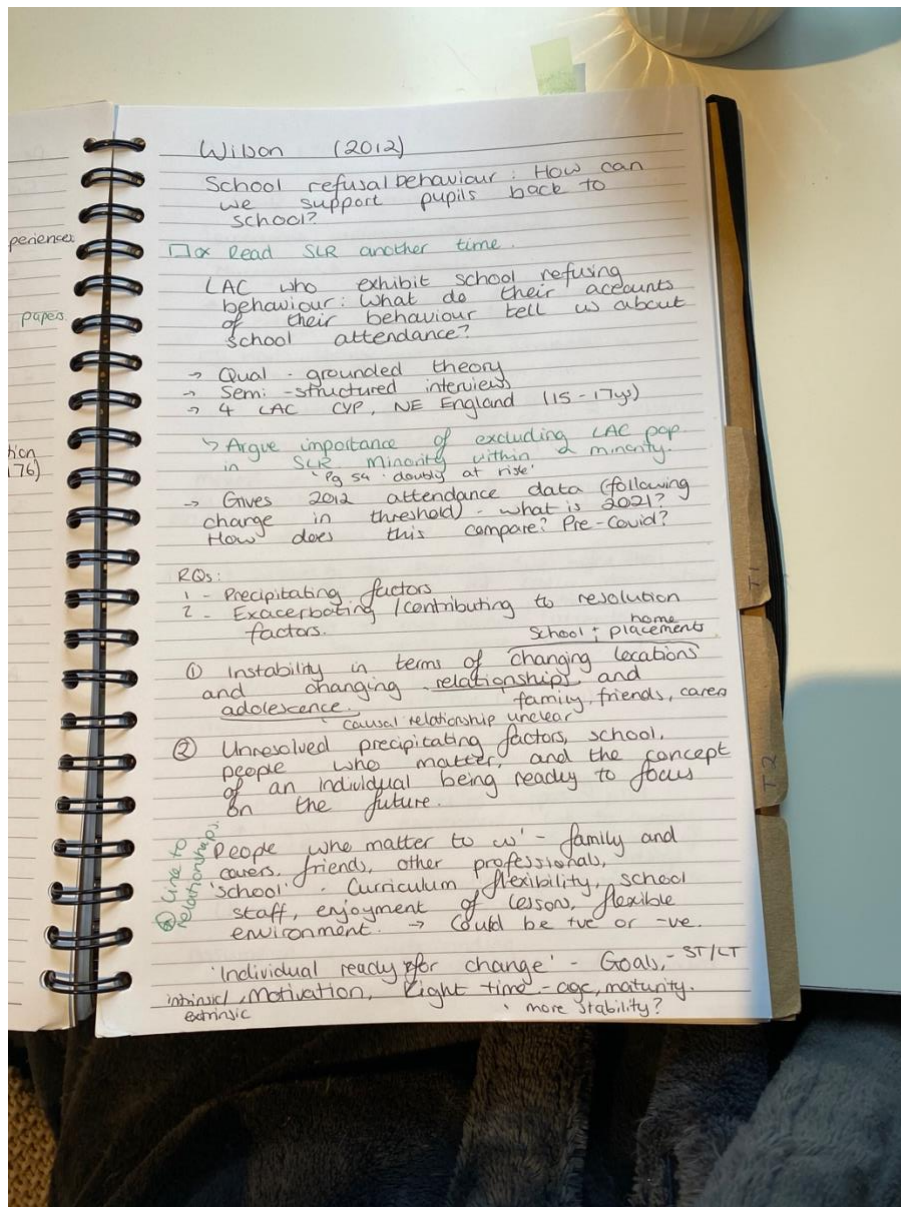
The findings of each paper were then collated in a table of themes, to facilitate initial reflections and groupings. Throughout this process further reflections were discussed with the research supervisor and noted within the research diary.

Table 3.4: Table of themes, briefly summarising findings of each paper

Study	Summary of Findings
Baker and Bishop (2015)	Table 1. Master themes and sub-ordinate themes. **Master theme** — **Sub-ordinate themes** Initial school experiences — – Primary school experiences (4) / – Transition to secondary school (4) / – Multiple schools and relocation (2) Participants' perceptions of the causes of non-attendance — – Bullying (2) / – Nervousness/anxiety (4) / – Depression (1) / – Chronic fatigue (1) / – Fear of teachers (1) / – Social isolation in school (1) / – Separation from parent (1) School and other support experiences — – Initial responses and being disbelieved (4) / – Pressure to return quickly or remain in school (4) / – Slow or inappropriate support experience (4) / – Fragmented support experience (4) / – Medication and prescribing (3) / – Things that might be done differently (4) Punishment, blame and control — – Being labelled naughty (3) / – Being punished and controlled (4) / – Recognising (but not excusing) why (3) Friendship and belonging — – Difficulty accessing a friendship group (1) / – Friends as a positive aspect of school (3) / – "Belonging" to primary school (2) The future — – Future plans (3) Impact on the child's phenomenon — – Anger (4) / – Fear (4) / – Hiding emotions and keeping secrets (4) / – Seeking meaning and making sense (4) Note: Numbers in brackets refer to the number of accounts in which each sub-ordinate theme was present.

Beckles (2014)	- Lesson enjoyment and understanding of work
	    o Motivation to attend school and lessons
	    o Teacher mood and characteristics
	    o Teacher explanations and teaching approaches
	    o Influences on classroom behaviour
	    o Necessity for support with understanding work
	- Thoughts and emotions about school and attendance
	    o Negative and conflicting thoughts or emotions
	    o Pupil concern about attendance
	    o Positive thoughts about school
	- Effects of absence
	    o Enjoyment
	    o Academic difficulties
	    o Unsupportive responses of others
	- Impact of family and friends
	    o Positive influences of friendship
	    o Positive influences of family involvement
	    o Unhelpful family influences
	- Communication and relationships within the school context
	    o Congruence of pupil and staff views
	    o Teacher-pupil relationship
	    o Challenges with disclosing difficulties
	- Gaining and acknowledging pupil views
	    o Opportunities to feel heard
	    o Management of bullying and peer conflict
	    o Management of attendance difficulties
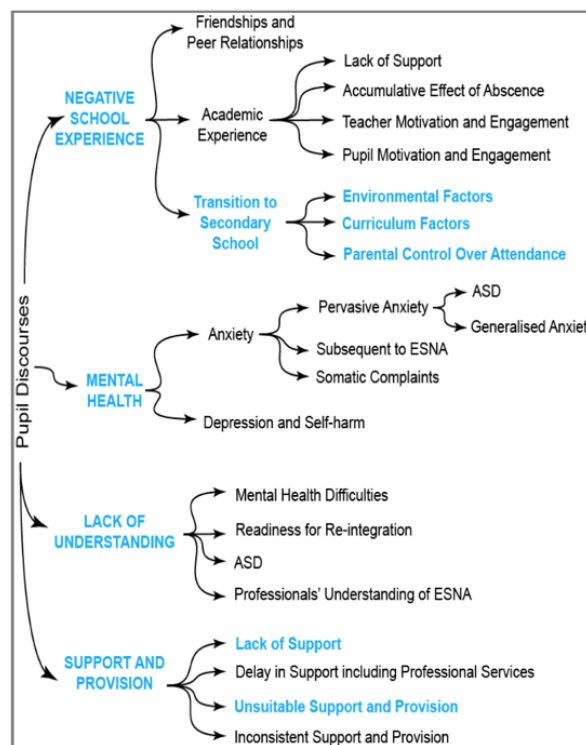
Clissold (2018)	 Fig. 11: Pupil Discourses of ESNA

How (2015)	- Social and relational experience
	   o Bullying and social difficulties
	   o Importance of friendships and positive social experience
	   o Self as different/distant from peers
	   o Teacher behaviour/relationships with teachers
	- Passivity and lack of control
	   o Self as passive victim of others' actions/inaction
	   o Inevitability, lack of power/lack of conscious control
	   o External locus of control/others as responsible
	   o Self as passive/resigned to a situation
	   o Self as passive/helpless within the system
	- Values, beliefs, motivations, and priorities
	   o Personal values/beliefs
	   o Aspiration and priorities
	   o Personal goals and motivations
	   o Values and motivations
	- Personal competence, agency and control
	   o Self as competent and in control of the future
	   o Personal competence and agency
	   o Externally imposed 'control' vs. freedom
	- School systems and the establishment
	   o School systems as negative/ineffective
	   o Self as distant/separate from the establishment
	- The emotional self
	   o The emotional self, stress and anxiety
	   o Fear
	- Other superordinate themes
	   o Impression management and positive self-presentation
	   o School as a holistically negative experience
	   o Temporal aspects of experience

Kljakovic, Kelly and Richardson (2021)	Six core themes:
	- Relating to the problem:
	   o Isolation
	   o Reasons for school refusal
	   o Internet Use
	   o Individual tuition
	- Relating to the individual:
	   o Current situation
	   o Values

Moyse (2021)	Adults Peers Ethos of school - Student wellbeing

Murray (2012)	Issues arising: - Concern about education and exams - Boredom - Fear of prosecution - Implications for future job prospects The young people mentioned several people who tried to provide assistance to get them to return to school. These included social workers (n-4), attendance officer (n-1), young carers organisation (n-1) mum (n-2) teacher (n-1) and one unidentified person (n-1). The type of support that was offered fell into one of the following four main categories: ⬜ Physically taking them to school. ⬜ Spoke to them about another educational placement (in general terms only). ⬜ Letter from school suggesting they would be better off going to college. ⬜ Talked about 'other things' (unspecified). As part of the third strand of the research question the young people were also asked if they would consider a return to school. Only one responded in the affirmative saying yes they would return to school, and five saying no with four saying maybe they would return. A total of five young people said definitely not, with three commenting that they had "just been off too long too hard to go back" (Pupil 4). A total of four young people commented that they maybe go back, but it would depend on which one (school) as there were certain ones they would be unable to attend: a reference to territorial issues (Pupil 9). Whilst another young person stated that a barrier to their return was that they had "nae school stuff", a reference to lack of school clothing.
Pennick (2012)	Experiences: - Experiences of relationships with peers - Experiences of bullying - Approaches to coping (e.g. self-harming, excessive crying and aggressive outbursts) - Influence of school factors Issues of self-image and self-identity: - Concepts of the self - Perceptions of group identity Perceived involvement or support from different agencies: - Positive of AP - Each girl required different approach

Williams (2019)	- Experiences of school - Difficult transition (link to belonging) - School feeling unsafe - Feeling trapped/wanting to escape - Experience of bullying (links to peer relations) - Emotional Responses - I am an anxious person (internalised – links to autonomy/locus of control) - Preventing life experiences (helpless) - Isolation/loneliness (connectedness) - Range of emotions experienced - Social Connections - Challenges of social interactions (prefer SMT) - Feeling connect with others - Maintaining friendships - Fearing loss of friendships - Creating feelings of being left behind - Impact of SMT use - Increased confidence - SMT improving quality of friendships - No escape - Dissociation of negative impacts - Impacts on self; seeing the 'perfect' lives of others
Wilson (2012)	Factors that precipitate a decline in school attendance: - Changing locations - School transition - Maintaining placements - Changing relationships - Adolescence Factors that influence ongoing attendance difficulties: - People who matter to us - Family and carers - Friends - Other professionals - School - Curriculum flexibility - School staff - Enjoyment of lessons - Flexible environment - Individual ready for change - Goals and motivation - Right time

Alongside this process, the researcher utilised flip chart paper and post it notes to physically manipulate the themes and explore possible relationships within and between the papers' findings through reciprocal, refutational and line-of-argument analysis.

Figure 3.5: Example notes during analysis of the themes

Self
- -ve Anxiety/Anticipation Depression SH
- +ve / left behind
- Emotional Responses — Mixed/conflict
- -ve coping / +ve coping Strategies
- buffer / self values
- Helpless / lack of control leads to
- Self-concept experience
- Isolated
- medicated / Somatic
- Phys Health (quite mixed) Sleep
- Pregnancy Fatigue
- leads to Rejected / pressured
- misunderstood / labelled / disbelieved
- Experience of onset / perpetuating factor
- Future plans / aspirations / motivated 'buffer'
- lack of support leads to

Fit w/ health?

Relationships
- Motivator of peers
- self as different to peers
- Peers — Bullying ASC impact — Difficulty socialising — loss + lack of friendships
- Inconsistent support
- Staff / teacher — Fear/dislike — strict/unpredictable — Not cared/valued — inconsistent support
- Warm + engaging
- lots of helpful professionals / individualised
- buffer — listened to
- Believed / advocated
- Young carers
- Family | Pressure to attend

Environment
- General dislike — -ve experience — poor teaching style — trapped / unsafe — Sensory overload
- Boredom / unmotivated / no purpose
- Lack of autonomy
- IT / individualised
- Support - flexible / AP / difficulty
- worse/harder over time / mistrust
- Curriculum — pressure — lack of flexibility — lack of purpose
- Difficult changing
- Transition — Secondary diff to Primary
- No longer taken in. - Autonomy to attend — Overwhelming

Cumulative impact
Diversity of experience

(Experiences of EBSNA)
Cumulative Impacts — Systems

- Sensory → Curriculum
- School environment → AP
- Teachers
- to secondary Transition
- Belonging
- Social → Protective
- Isolation
- Bullying / difficulties → ASC
- Range — Sleep → Somatic
- Health — Depression / Anxiety
- Risk factor ASC / AE
- Protective
- Perception of need
- Misunderstanding / 'Believed'
- Concept of Self
- Rejected / Victim
- Access to help
- Support — slow / inconsistent — Listened to / relationships
- Relationships are key!
- Multi-causal — could be range of things — it is perception of needs which is perpetuated / difficulties leads to AP?
- Aspiration / purpose of school
- Locus of control
- Autonomy

Figure 3.6: Example research journal notes during data analysis

This resulted in a draft 'best-fit' model, which was brought to supervision for further exploration.

Figure 3.7: Initial draft of 'best-fit' model in the research journal

The researcher also met with Clare Nuttall, university tutor and specialist in the field, to review the model and broader data analysis.

Figure 3.8: Notes following additional supervision session with Clare Nuttall
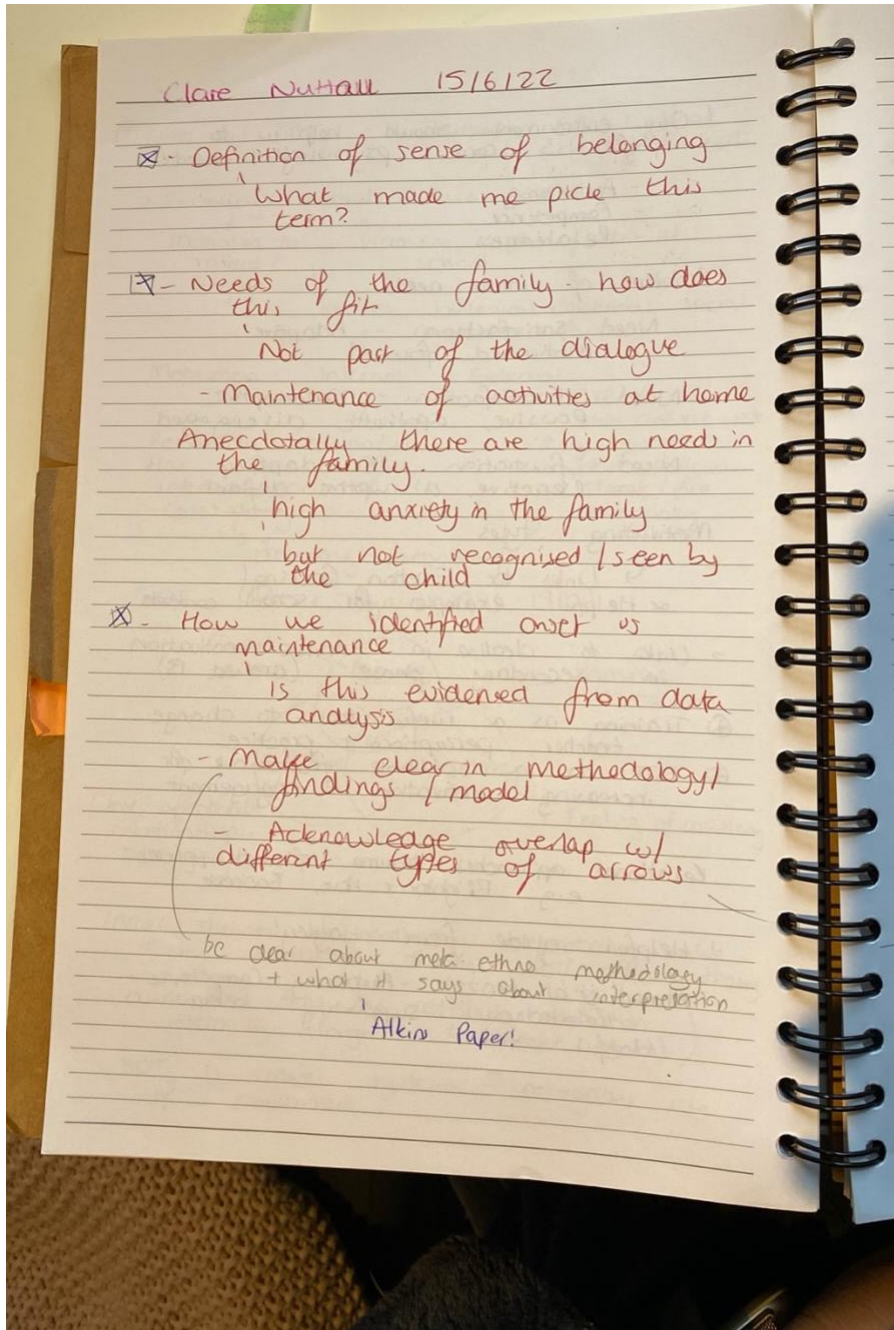
Final tweaks to the analysis were considered in subsequent discussions and reflection with the research supervisor and during the write up of the research paper and JORSEN peer review process.

Appendix 4: Research Instrumentation

Appendix 4.1: Table of attendees at each stakeholder meeting

Meeting Date	Attendees, by role
9.9.21 (Stakeholder Meeting 1, SM1)	Researcher, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Senior Educational Psychologist, First Response Team Education Practitioner, Virtual School Team Practitioner, CAMHS Wellbeing Practitioner, Pupil Absence Team Leader, Head of Education - Vulnerable Children's Team, Team leader SENDIASS.
10.11.21 (SM2)	Researcher, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Senior Educational Psychologist, First Response Team Education Practitioner, Virtual School Team Practitioner, SEN Consultant with SEN Advisory Service, Head of Education, Vulnerable Children's Team, Team leader SENDIASS.
2.2.22 (SM3)	Researcher, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Senior Educational Psychologist, First Response Team Education Practitioner, Head of Education - Vulnerable Children's Team, Team leader SENDIASS, Pupil Absence Team Leader, Service Lead - Thrive in Education (MHST), Specialist Autism Consultant with SEN Advisory Service, Local Parent Group Representative.
24.3.22 (SM4)	Researcher, Senior Educational Psychologist, Principal Educational Psychologist, Pupil Absence Team Leader, Service Lead - Thrive in Education (MHST), Specialist Autism Consultant with SEN Advisory Service, SEN Consultant with SEN Advisory Service, Local Parent Group Representative, LA Head of Inclusion, Virtual School Team Practitioner.
12.5.22 (SM5)	Researcher, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Senior Educational Psychologist, Principal Educational Psychologist, Specialist Autism Consultant with SEN Advisory Service, Virtual School Team Practitioner, Team leader SENDIASS,

	Head of Education - Vulnerable Children's Team.
12.7.22 (SM6)	Researcher, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Senior Educational Psychologist, Clinical Lead - Thrive in Education (MHST), Specialist Autism Consultant with SEN Advisory Service, Local Parent Group Representative.
27.7.22 (SM7/Focus Group)	Researcher, Principal Educational Psychologist, Pupil Absence Team Leader, Team leader SENDIASS, Head of Education - Vulnerable Children's Team.

Appendix 4.2: Example minutes from stakeholder meeting on 10th November 2021

EBSNA Stakeholder Meeting, 10.11.21, 1pm – 2pm
Attendees: Shannon Corcoran (UoM/EPS), XXX (EPS), XXX (EPS), XXX (Ed Practitioner – first response), XXX (VST), XXX (SEN Consultant (Physical and Sensory Needs), SEN Advisory Service), XXX (Head of Education, Vulnerable Children's Team), XXX (team leader SENDIASS).
Apologies: XXX (EPS)

Agenda
- Welcome, introductions and consent/confidentiality reminder. Begin recording.
- Feedback on EIT
    o The EIT has evolved into more of a profiling of needs tool (rather than identification)
    o This is more likely to be used once needs are established, however may still be useful for identification too (e.g. where toileting needs are identified as a sign of anxiety)
    o Useful to move schools' perceptions away from school 'refusal', focus is on needs rather than behaviour
    o Renaming – Early Identification of Needs Tool (EINT)
    o Reflections on scoring – this isn't stacked up by the evidence base so has been removed. May also shift responsibility to the young person which we want to avoid.
    o New additions discussed, link to sensory checklist suggested
    o Action: XX to follow up and advise XX on sensory section.
- Feedback on Graduated Approach (GA) guidance
    o XX is keen to share the latest version on the Med Ed Webpage
    o Supporting schools to reflect on current practice before onward referrals, promoting use of EIT earlier
    o Discussed link to Individual Health Care Plan on Local Offer Directory
    o Outlined need to give parents sight of this document too, allowing them to feel listened to
    o Link raised to prosecutions, supportive for informing when to prosecute and when not to with attendance difficulties
    o Discussed possibilities of differentiated versions, for parents, school staff and professionals
    o Possible inclusion of a worked example suggested – see West Sussex example
    o Action: XX and XX to consider how to integrate push/pull factors information into IHCP, possibly as an appendices/add on
    o Action: XX and XX to meet to discuss creating guidance documents
    o Action: Next meeting, discuss how best to seek feedback from key stakeholders
- Feedback on Pupil Views audit
    o Review of information gathered
    o Action: XX and XX to consider how best to integrate key information into GA doc, filter through to identify what will be accessible to the audience

Next meeting date: **Wednesday 2nd February 2022, 2pm – 3pm**

Appendix 4.3: Survey of Pupil Views Techniques (Sep – Oct 2021)

Gathering Pupil Views on Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance

You are being invited to take part in a research study which aims to explore the factors influencing the implementation of a local authority approach to supporting children and young people with Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) needs. As part of this study, we would like to gain an overview of how different services and professionals capture pupil's views on their experiences of EBSNA (also known as school refusal or emotionally based school avoidance). Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any point by closing the survey window.

If you have any questions about participating, please contact the lead researcher, Shannon Corcoran, shannon.corcoran@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk.

Thank you for your time.

shannon.corcoran@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk Switch account

The name and photo associated with your Google account will be recorded when you upload files and submit this form. Your email is not part of your response.

Team/Role (e.g. TEP)

Your answer

What are your current processes for gaining and using pupil views on their EBSNA difficulties (please attach example materials if possible)?

Your answer

When do you usually gather a pupil's views, and how are these used to inform your EBSNA support?

Your answer

Are there any other processes, tools or methods which you are aware of, in your own or other teams (please attach example materials if possible)?

Your answer

Any other information?

Your answer

Please attach example materials if possible. Alternatively, email to shannon.corcoran@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk.

⬆ Add file

Thank you!

Submit

Clear form

Google Forms

Appendix 4.4: Results of Pupil Views Techniques Survey (November 2021)

How do other LA's gather and use pupil views when supporting children and young people with Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)?

A well-known psychologist (Kelly, 1955) once said:
'..if you don't know what is wrong with someone, ask them, they may tell you.'

The below information is collated from responses to the Pupil Views survey and from LA documents and resources which have been kindly shared with the research group. These include resources from the following Educational Psychology Services: Bury, Cheshire West and Chester, Hampshire, Manchester, Oxfordshire, Salford, Sheffield, Staffordshire, Tameside, Tower Hamlets and West Sussex.

When?

As soon as possible! Schools should be encouraged to begin gathering pupil voice as soon as attendance difficulties are identified (e.g. Salford's EBSA Good Practice Flow Chart, Oxfordshire's Intervention Timeline). Lots of services provide information to schools on this through their Graduated Approach documents, specific EBSNA resources and training.

Either before or just after the initial consultation with school staff and parents is best. Some professionals shared that it was **best to have the young person present** at these meetings, but where this wasn't possible, to have a key adult able to feedback their views.

How?

A huge range of tools and approaches were suggested. These could be completed by a range of people, including school staff, parents, and other relevant professionals. It was emphasised that there is **no 'one size fits all'** and tools are selected as appropriate on a case-by-case basis. For example, ensuring accessibility for those with social communication or learning needs. It was also emphasised that activities should be fun, creative and relaxing.

Conversation/Consultation

Just having a chat with the young person was a key suggestion. This was also used alongside many of the tools below, which can be used as conversation openers/starters with young people and/or their parents. Some emphasised the importance of taking a solution-focused approach to seek exceptions and successful support strategies with the young person.

Identifying the function of the non-attendance

- Questionnaires/checklists:
  - Trafford Early Identification Tool, questionnaire developed by Trafford LA
  - Return to School Questionnaire (Salford/Bury/Tameside, based on West Sussex Version)

- School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS) Questionnaire, developed by Kearney (2001)
- CARE Schedule (Checklist Assessing Risk of Exclusion)
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
- Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS)
- Spence Children's Anxiety Scale
- Sensory audit from Autism Education Trust (AET)
- Stirling Children's well-being scale
- Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale (WEMWBS)
- Card sorts:
  - Push/pull factors card sort, e.g. ones developed by Nuttall and Woods, good examples in Staffordshire EBSA guidance doc (Sep 2020)
  - School Wellbeing Cards, card sort developed by Dr Jerricah Holder
  - School environment facilitators/barriers
  - Next Step cards (CWP)
  - Importance of providing blank cards for pupils to add their own ideas
- Conversation tools:
  - Sentence starters, can be used to structure conversations with the young person
  - Talking Mats
  - Scaling or laddering activities, including RAG rating/traffic lighting, worry thermometers, The Incredible 5 Point Scale.
  - Use TED questions: Tell me more about that. Explain the situation to me. Describe that to me.
  - Externalisation techniques, e.g. 'How does [name i.e. The Worry] get in the way of you attending school?' or 'When is [The Worry] in charge and when are you in charge?'
  - PACE approach – Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy
  - Blob Tree
- Other:
  - Ideal school/ideal safe school activity
  - Time of Day trigger tracking activity
  - Visual map of the school, including 'safe' and 'worry' zones
  - Life Graph of feelings and school experience over time
  - Coping strategies chart
  - Creative activities, e.g. draw how your body feels when you are worried
  - 5 Ps model (Presenting, Predisposing, Precipitating, Perpetuating, Protective)

Then?

Once the function/s of the young person's anxiety has been identified, the following next steps were suggested:

- **Multi-agency** meetings, including the child where possible
  - PATH meeting
  - Initial Action Plan meeting

- Co-produced plan with the young person (this is highlighted to boost progress through providing momentum and a sense of being listened to for the young person)
    - Co-produce an avoidance hierarchy
    - **Co-produce a child-friendly support plan** (example templates included in many LA guidance docs, and in Tina Rae's EBSA book)
- Set out small steps of **achievable** progress
- **Work with parents and carers** to support the young person
- Further request/referral for multi-agency support

Appendix 4.5: Card Sort Development Process

Appendix 4.6: Card Sort Screenshot

Like Me	Not Like Me

Attendance Factors

I find it difficult to leave the house in the morning.

Talk me through your morning routine.

What does that feel like for you?
Is this better/worse after weekends and holidays?
What would your ideal morning routine look like?
What would you change if you could?

The journey to/from school is difficult.

Talk me through your journey to/from school.

What modes of transport do you use? Who do you travel with? Does anything happen along the way?
What does that feel like for you? What emotions would you identify? When are these strongest?
What would your ideal journey look like?
What would you change if you could?

I have been out of school too long to go back.

How would you score your desire to go back to school (e.g. 1 – 10)?
What might make you more or less likely to want to return to school?

Appendix 4.7: Example pages from the EBSNA Guidance Document
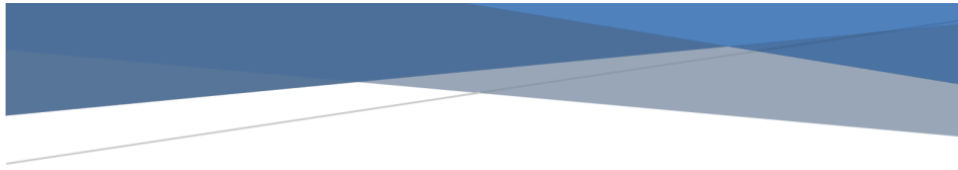
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DIFFICULTIES AND EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE

Trafford Guidance Document

This document was written with reference to West Sussex Educational Psychology Service's guidance and we would also like to extend our thanks to them.

Contents

Introduction

This guidance has been developed to provide further information and support for children and young people who are experiencing school attendance difficulties and/or Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA), and to support their families, school staff and other professionals across our Local Authority.

The link between school attendance and attainment is well evidenced; pupils with the highest attainment at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 have higher rates of attendance over the key stage compared to those with the lowest attainment.

What is Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance?

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) is a term adopted by Trafford Council and a number of authorities to describe children and young people who have significant difficulties in attending school due to a range of factors. This is distinct from other types of school non-attendance and relates specifically to the emotional distress that they experience around attending school (Thambirajah, Grandison & De-Hayes, 2008).

How does this relate to the Working Together to Improve Attendance guidance?

The Department for Education has recently released **this guidance** which sets out the roles, responsibilities and expectations for schools, academy trusts, governing bodies, local authorities, and parents in promoting and maintaining high levels of school attendance. The Government is committed to the guidance becoming statutory from September 2023. This document will include reference to how professionals working in this area can fulfil these roles and responsibilities, by working in an evidence-informed way to improve school attendance.

How can we support children and young people?

The following flow chat represents the process of support that should be followed when a child or young person is identified as experiencing difficulties attending school (or as at risk of becoming persistently absent). Further information around each area can be found by clicking on the links within the flow chart or in the information overleaf.

It is important that this cycle of support is completed **promptly**, and that the support and progress is **agreed and regularly reviewed** with the young person and their family (e.g. every 3 – 4 weeks).

Flow Chart of Support

1. **Indicators** that a child might be feeling anxious or nervous about attending school are identified by school or parents/carers (e.g. parent observations, late arrival/attendance difficulties).

2. **Meeting** between parents/carers and school staff to discuss or review attendance difficulties. You may wish to use the **Early Identification of Needs Tool**.

   Ideally include the young person in the meeting or gather their views separately and share (**See Tools to Gather Pupil Views**).

3. Use the tool and discussion to identify the **push and pull factors** contributing to the child's/young person's non-attendance/attendance.

4. Create an **individual action plan**. If an Individual Attendance Plan is in place, this should be referred to. [refer to **ideas bank** for suggested support strategies].

5. **Implement** (consider timelines/suggested)

6. **Review** with the young person and their parents/carers, celebrating any small steps of progress.

7. Attendance is increasing, continue to **support** and **monitor** as needed.

   OR

   Ongoing plan– do—review (return to 2.)

   Refer to other agencies as appropriate/needed.

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The full guidance document can be downloaded from[2]:
https://www.trafforddirectory.co.uk/kb5/trafford/fsd/advice.page?id=9NyMniioWZ8

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[2] Permission has been given by the host LA to share their identity and this guidance.

Appendix 4.8: Focus group interview schedule, 27th July 2022

Focus Group Interview Schedule

- How has the LA approach to supporting EBSNA needs developed over the last year?
  - What has gone well/helped this?
  - Have there been any barriers?
  - What could have been done differently/made it better?
- What do/will you do differently as a result?
  - What have you learnt from the process?
- What does/will your team do differently as a result?
  - What has helped/hindered to apply in practice?
- What would you like to see happen next?
- Anything else?

Appendix 4.9: Extract from focus group transcript, 27th July 2022

27.7.22 Focus Group
(45 minutes)

TEP: So the first bit that we were going to look at was that first one there, so how has the local authority approach to supporting emotionally based school non-attendance needs developed over the last year? So, what do you feel, I guess, the impact has been or what we've done over the year?

Participant: Well, I think it's been a really positive impact and it's one of the things, one of the tools, that the schools go to first and this is what we always do in our team now…it's one of the questions, you know, have you completed this tool with this family? So, it can properly focus on what the issue is. So, as we've always said, it's about drawing out…the underlying issues, it really helps with that.

TEP: Yeah, fab. That's really helpful, so it really draws out those underlying issues and helps the reflection, I suppose, it sounds like to target that support.

Participant: I think it'd be fair to say that the approach…because it says what's the local authority approach, how it's developed, is that it's…certainly in my team, so…at practitioner level, it's one of the first things that you're discussing with the school, so it's developed into…it's become top of the list as what to discuss in terms of advice and…support to a school.

TEP: Yeah, so do you mean the toolkit itself?

Participant: The toolkit, yeah.

Participant: Part of the medical education referral now, it's a standard question, have you done it. And most schools do it…that's all I'll say for now, we'll come into something about

that later. Most schools do it, which has been really positive because it does give us more information and it does make them consider and reflect…whether they could have done more.

Participant: Yeah…and I suppose from the perspective of you know educational psychology, I think what we're finding is that it's…schools are aware of it as a tool and are using it, so…you know, and that's then helpful in terms of informing our work when we become involved. I mean…and sometimes I have used it with…in case work, often it's kind of…it feels like you're kind of putting the…you know, the…it's kind of addressing it after the horse has bolted, if you like, because quite often the issues are quite entrenched then, but…it can still be helpful in trying to kind of…you know, pick through what the underlying issues are. So, you know, I think it's something that…I know other members of the team have been using as well, haven't then, [TEP]?

TEP: Yeah, definitely. And yeah, I think anecdotally, I know we had a bit of team meeting discussion around it, didn't we, a few weeks ago and I know, anecdotally, across the team then, people are definitely sort of using that, which is really good to hear.

Participant: And…

Participant: I was just going to say this is [colleague] from my team because she's actually obviously working…she's a case worker and she's gone out and used it and obviously…I was just saying when I've been in a couple of schools, I don't know how they've done it, but when I've mentioned the toolkit, they have said they've adapted it themselves, so they've made changes to it. But I'm not sure in what sense and what questions…but they've done adaptations to it.

Participant: We need to encourage them to feed into a central thing if they've got improvement suggestions, don't we?
Participant: I think maybe they've just cut it down maybe…because it is quite a long tool, isn't it? I think…my sort of…reflection on it is that some schools have been better at using it than others. Others have had to be persuaded…and I think it depends if you've gone down the sort of pastoral route or the SENCO route…and obviously the SENCO is more willing to do it than sometimes…when it's just gone through behaviour…I know that sounds terrible, but that's kind of what's happened. So they've needed more persuasion to use it than perhaps what a SENCO would have done.

Participant: And I think I agree with what [participant] said about using it once the horse had bolted.

Participant: Yeah, that's just what I was going to pick up on then, [participant], that hopefully now they're used to it, they will use it before the horse has bolted.

Participant: That's the idea, isn't it? I just wondered as well on…just…on your point there about…some schools using it…it's what you were saying about some schools using it more than…oh, the pastoral route…I just wonder whether…because, you know, when it goes down a pastoral route…whether the sense is that, you know, seeing it purely as behaviour

rather than kind of looking at those underlying kind of needs and maybe that's why that happens when it goes down that route rather than…kind of involving the SENCO and really thinking about it in that broader sense as a special educational need.

Participant: Can I jump in as well there? Because…I know…it really depends in a school…we had two referrals from one school, same month…written by different heads of year. One was brilliant and we'd had a conversation beforehand, and it was absolutely taken on board…and the whole referral was really detailed and really told us what we needed to know. The other one was as thin as anything, it was a paper exercise. So…and unfortunately, heads of year change regularly in schools as well. It might be head of the whole pastoral team doing it or it might be a head of year and it's how we reach all those people and get them on board with it really and get them to buy into it.

TEP: Yeah.

Participant: Because it does vary widely.

Participant: I was going to touch on that as well, [participant], really because it just depends on the staff who are picking it up and…in any team really and…I've found that with our team, what they've been able to do is the ones that have been reluctant to use it, on the whole, we've been able to persuade them and spend some time with that pastoral member of staff saying, 'Yes, well have you explored…you know, this part of the form?' There are so many issues to…you know, and to sort of focus on within the form. And they've gone back, and it is…I think to begin with, they sort of think, 'Oh, this is…I know what the problem is…I don't need this.' And actually, if you think, right…if you'll just be a bit patient with it and you really can find out a lot from completing that form. And the feedback that we've had is… 'Yes, we thought we knew what the issues was until we did that and now it's a whole lot clearer about what the issues are.' And sometimes it isn't…you know, they've been barking up the wrong tree and that's sort of brought them back to the central focal point of what they need to be addressing. We've had that a couple of times actually, which I think has been really positive. And even after the horse has bolted, if the staff are prepared to do that exercise, they can still identify what the issues are in time to do something about it effectively.

TEP: Yeah…So it sounds like then I suppose some of the reflection around how the tool has been embedded over the year is that maybe it's taken a bit of persuasion, a bit of selling to some of the school staff…but actually that yeah, once people get on board with it, we're noticing really successful, positive impact, better understanding of need, as you say…reframing sometimes as an educational SEN need…rather than a behavioural choice, which I know…we're having to support lots of staff to come around to…But I suppose I'm also hearing maybe that it is still being used fairly late on, maybe when the needs are more entrenched and that…maybe an area for us moving forward next year is that proactive…approach, isn't it? And maybe supporting schools to understand how to know when to use it earlier…I guess and some of that, I suppose, may come from them being more familiar with it, trying not to add too many of my own reflections here. But yeah, so it sounds like we want to get them more proactive with it then next year.

Appendix 5: Overview of training delivered about the research project at an organisational level.

Appendix 5.1: Delivered and Planned Training Log

Date	Team/Attendees	Focus of Training
25.11.21	Local Authority (LA) Virtual School Team	Introduction to school attendance difficulties, overview of Early Identification of Need Tool and how to use it. Overview of the preliminary research into successful returns to school and intervention planning within the LA.
6.12.21	Educational Psychology Service (EPS) Team Meeting	As above.
26.1.22	LA CAMHS / Thrive team	As above.
9.3.22	LA SENCo and Headteacher Forums	As above, plus initial overview of Paper One research into pupil's experiences of school attendance difficulties.
9.3.22	LA Senior Mental Health Leads training	As above.
25.3.22	University of Manchester TEP Conference Day	As above.
9.5.22	EPS Team Meeting	Update on Papers One and Two. Gathering team reflections on results and how these may inform evidence-based practice.
11.5.22	EP Designated Teacher Forum	Introduction to school attendance difficulties, overview of Early Identification of Need Tool and how to use it. Overview of the preliminary research into successful returns to school and intervention planning within

		the LA and findings of Paper One research.
11.5.22	Primary and Secondary Designated Safeguarding Leads	As above.
4.11.22	EPS Team Meeting	Introduction to new pupil views card sort and overview of guidance document progression.
25.1.23	LA CAMHS/ EMHP team	Introduction to school attendance difficulties, overview of Early Identification of Need Tool and guidance document and how to use it. Overview of the preliminary research into successful returns to school and intervention planning within the LA and findings of Paper One research.
1.2.23	LA Special Educational Needs Advisory Service (SENAS)	As above.
Planned Spring term 2023 onwards	Whole School Training offered to LA schools through traded EPS time allocation.	As above.

Appendix 5.2: Slides from University of Manchester TEP Conference Day.

Appendix 5.3: Example slides from Whole School Training.

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Objectives for the session:
o To reflect on and build on your knowledge and expertise
o To raise your awareness of academic research into school anxiety and associated school non-attendance
o To introduce you to ▨▨▨▨ approaches that will support you to support children and families and how this has been developed
o To practice using these approaches

Please complete your pre-training form if you have not already done so.

PUPIL EXPERIENCES OF EBSNA

More recent research by Corcoran and Kelly (2022) found that pupils describe the following factors as contributing to their motivation to attend.

A sense of school belonging was identified as key to promoting and maintaining regular school attendance.

Impact on sense of belonging

Onset Factors
- Difficult relationships with peer group
- Inconsistent relationships with and support from adults
- Negative experiences of school transition
- Negative experiences of learning in school

Maintenance Factors
- Emotional wellbeing and mental health needs
- Others' negative perceptions of the individual's needs
- Personal beliefs about attendance

Cumulative impact of experiences over time

◼◼◼◼ GRADUATED APPROACH

Identification of need
- Identify signs of attendance difficulties
- Meeting with parents/carers to discuss
- Meet with the child to seek their views
- EINT may support with this

Individualised Action Plan
- Analyse push/pull factors
- Plan support appropriately, with clear time frames and responsibilities
- Implement

Review
- Meet again to review the child's progress
- Celebrate any small steps of progress
- Plan next steps or onwards referrals

WHAT WORKS IN ◼◼◼◼ ?

A pilot project, conducted by Corcoran, Bond and Knox (2022), found the following key factors in successful returns to school by young people in ◼◼◼◼:

1. Effective home-school communications, to ensure parent/carer concerns are heard and support approaches are consistent.

2. Positive relationships with school staff, were noted as key for students who successfully returned to school.

3. Awareness of triggers, understanding the push and pull factors to better support the young person before, throughout and after the school day.

4. Providing an individualised approach, tailoring the intervention to the specific push and pull factors identified by the young person and those around them.

5. Engagement with other professionals, when needed, seeking further specialist support to inform the assess, plan, do, review process.

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Appendix 6: Paper Two Data Analysis Audit Trail

After multiple transcript read throughs to enable immersion, initial coding of the focus group transcript was completed using NVivo software.

Appendix 6.1: Screenshot of initial coding within NVivo
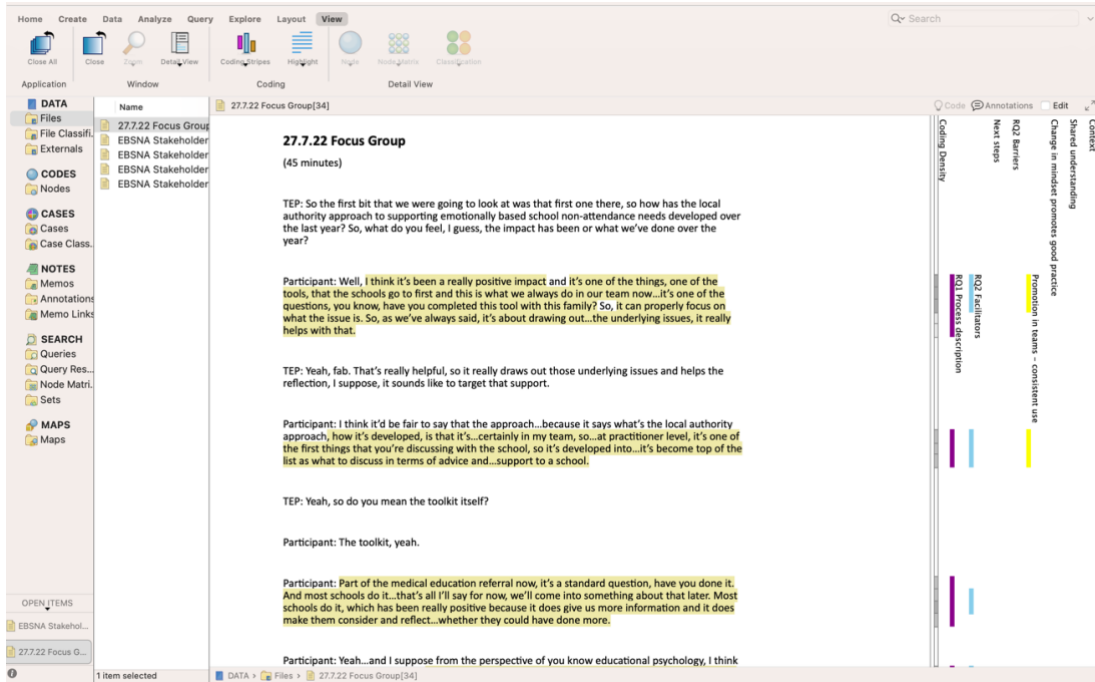
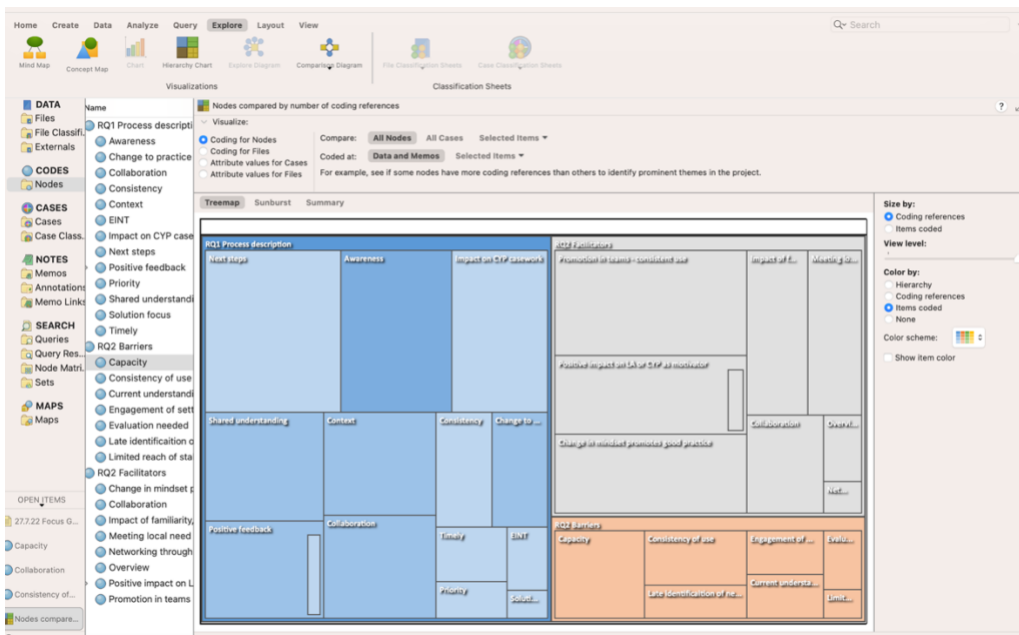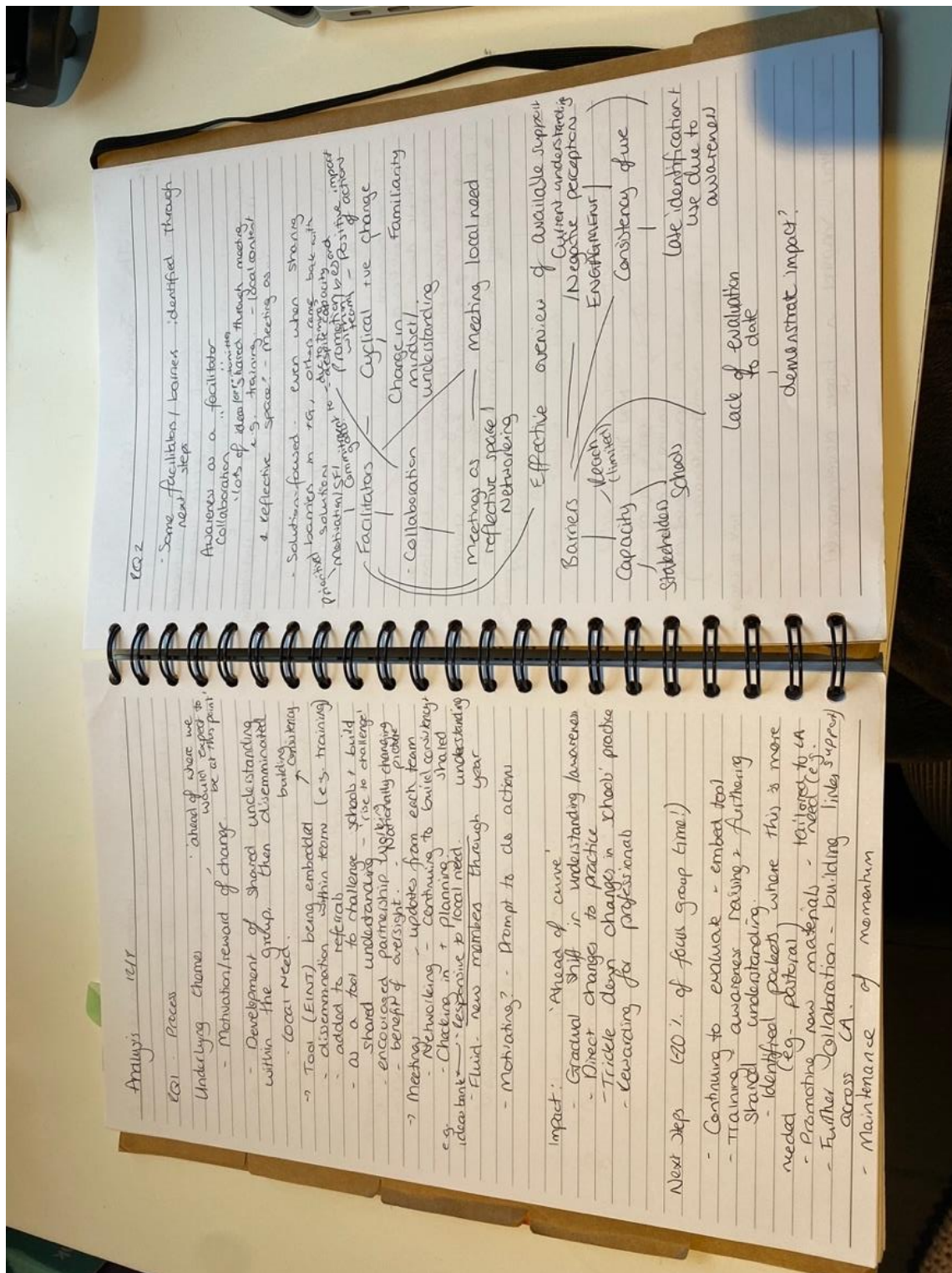The initial codes were guided and grouped by research question, taking a deductive analysis approach.
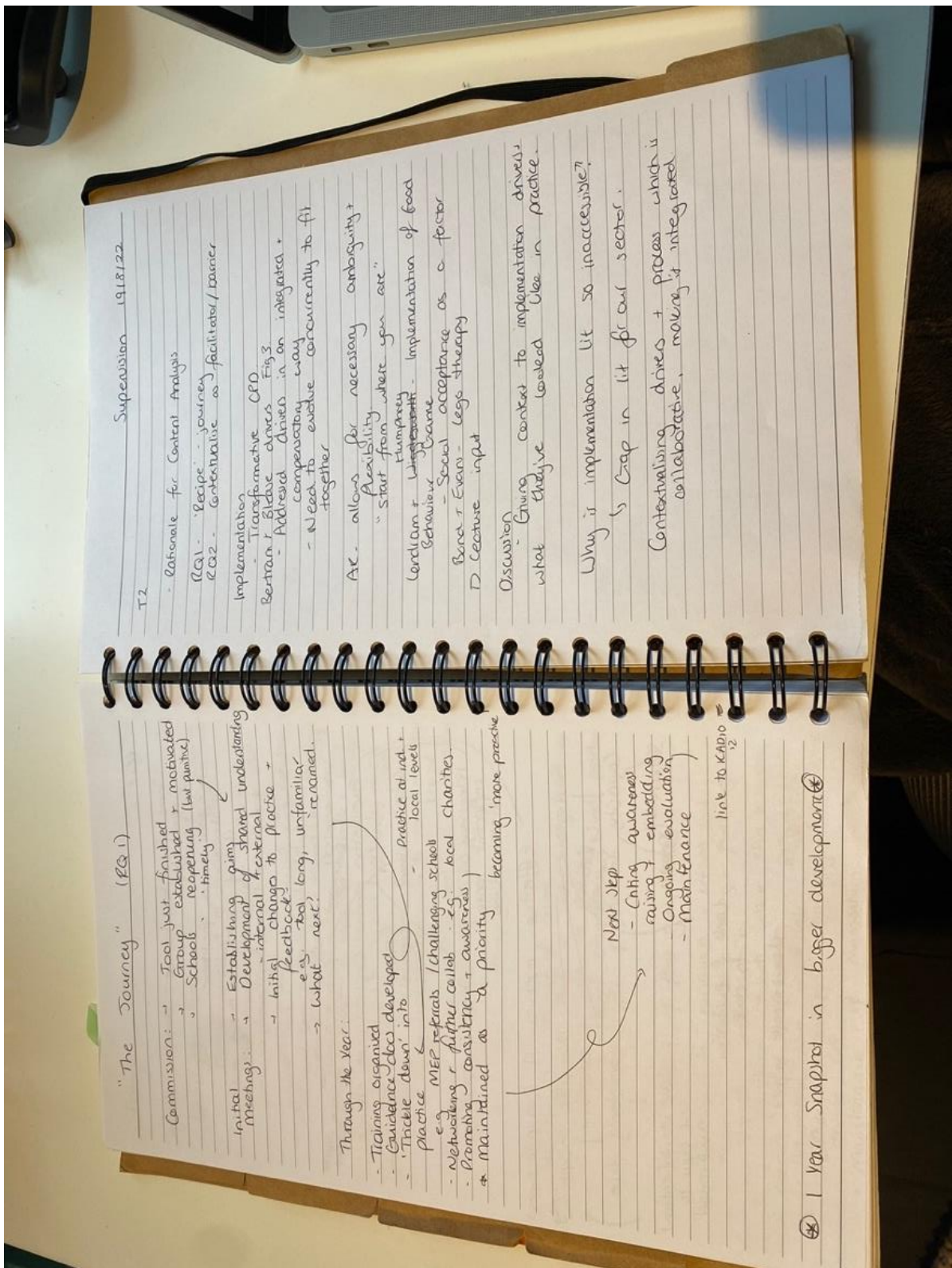
Appendix 6.2: Screenshot of initial code grouping within NVivo

Appendix 6.3: Example reflections and supervision notes within the research journal

The researcher continued to immerse themselves in the transcripts and coding, recording their reflections in their research journal. The resulting initial themes were then discussed and reflected on with the research supervisor.


RQ2
- Some facilitators/barriers identified through next step
Awareness as a facilitator
Collaboration as "dissemination"
- lots of idea/info shared through media
- reflective space - meeting as [local context]

- Solution-focused - even when strong
practical barriers in RG, often came back with motivational SFI [motivation] [positive impact] [positive action]

Facilitators — Cyclical t/e change
— Familiarity
Change in mindset/understanding
Collaboration

Meeting as reflective space/ — meeting local need
Networking

— Effective overview of available support
Barriers — Negative perception/current understanding
— Reach (limited) Engagement
Capacity — Consistency of use
Stakeholders Schools — Use identification use due to awareness

Lack of evaluation to date

demonstrate impact?

Analysis 16/5
RQ1 Process
Underlying theme
- Motivation/reward of change - 'ahead of where we would expect to be at this point'
- Development of shared understanding within the group, then disseminated - building/consultancy - local need.

→ Tool (EIAT) being embedded
- dissemination within team (e.g. training)
- added to referrals
- a tool to challenge schools + build shared understanding - rise to challenge?
- encouraged partnership working/changing practice
- benefit of oversight.

→ Meeting - updates from each team
- Networking - continuing to build consistency/shared understanding
- Creating in + planning year
e.g. idea bank - responsive to local need.
- Fluid new members through

- Motivating? - Prompt to do actions

Impact: 'Ahead of curve'
- Gradual shift in understanding/awareness
- Direct changes to practice
- Trickle down change in schools' practice - cascading for professional

Next step (20% of focus group time!)
- Continuing to evaluate + embed tool
- Training awareness raising + furthering shared understanding
- Identified pockets where this is more needed (e.g. pastoral) - tailored to LA need/context.
- Promoting new materials
- Further collaboration - building links/support across LA.
- Maintenance of momentum

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Appendix 6.4: Example data analysis notes

The resulting themes were then transferred to physical post-it notes, which enabled the researcher to physically manipulate and further explore different relationships between the

themes. Following a process of exploration and reflection, the researcher grouped the themes and recorded via flip chart paper.
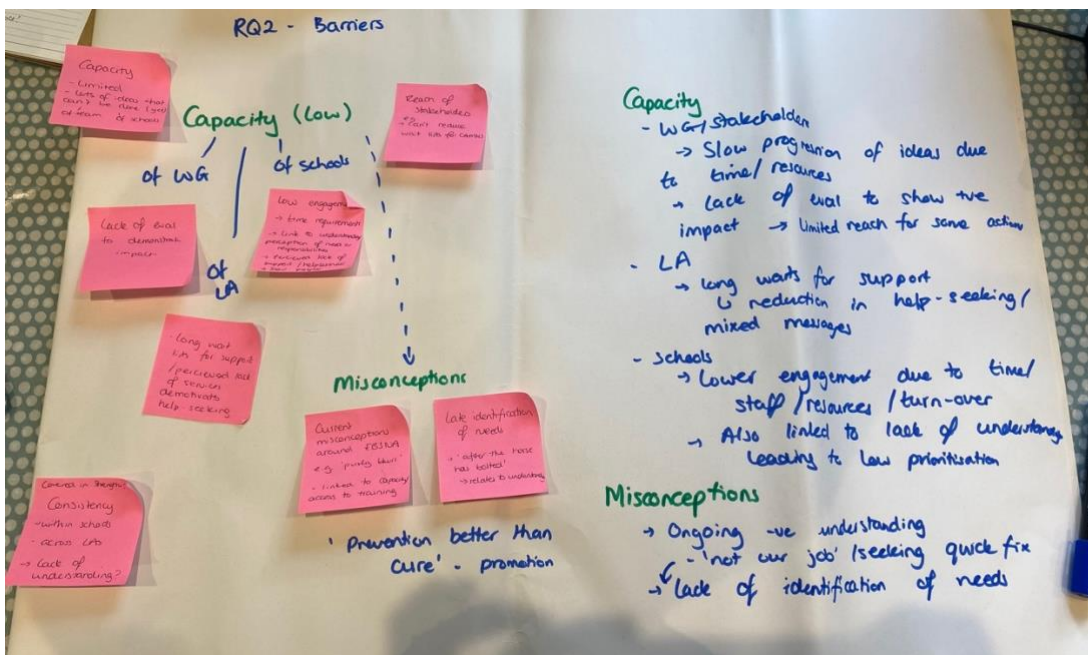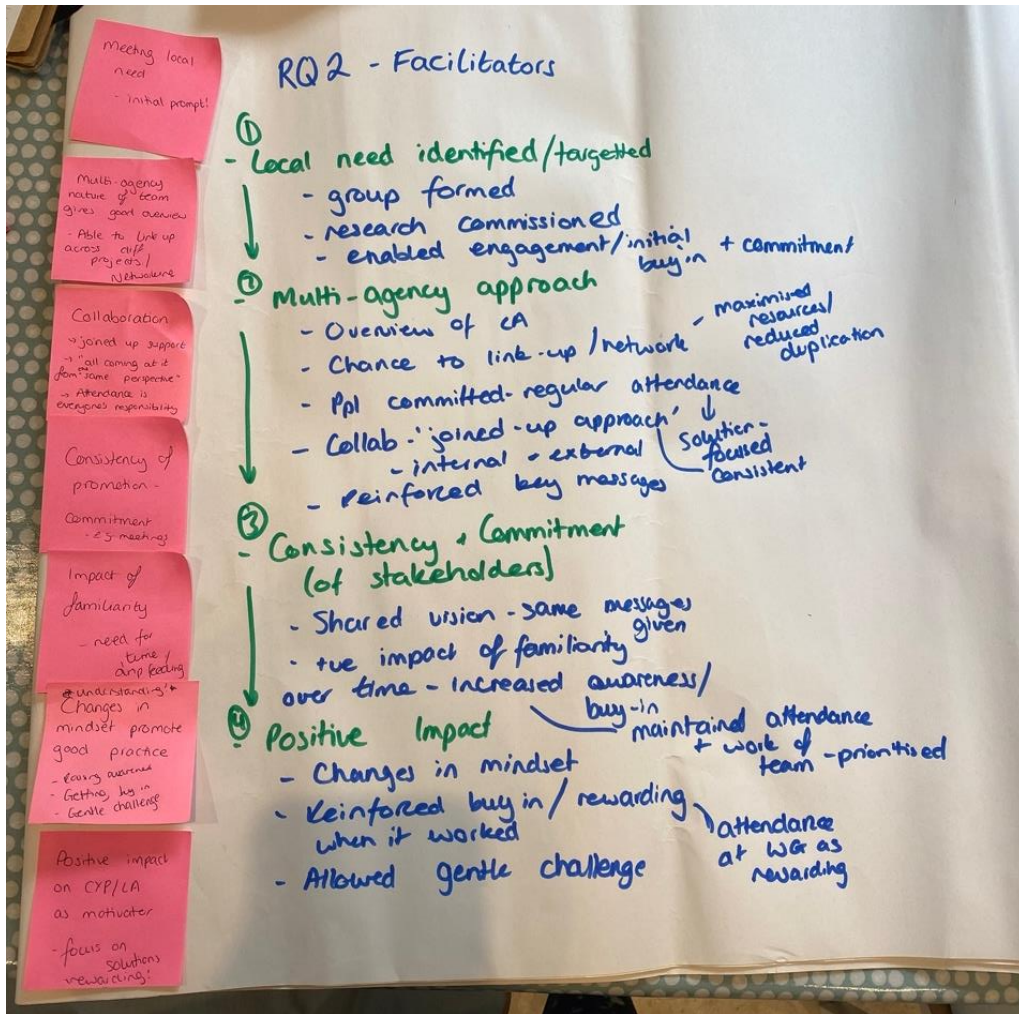
Final tweaks to the analysis were considered subsequent discussions and reflection with the research supervisor and during the write up of the research paper.

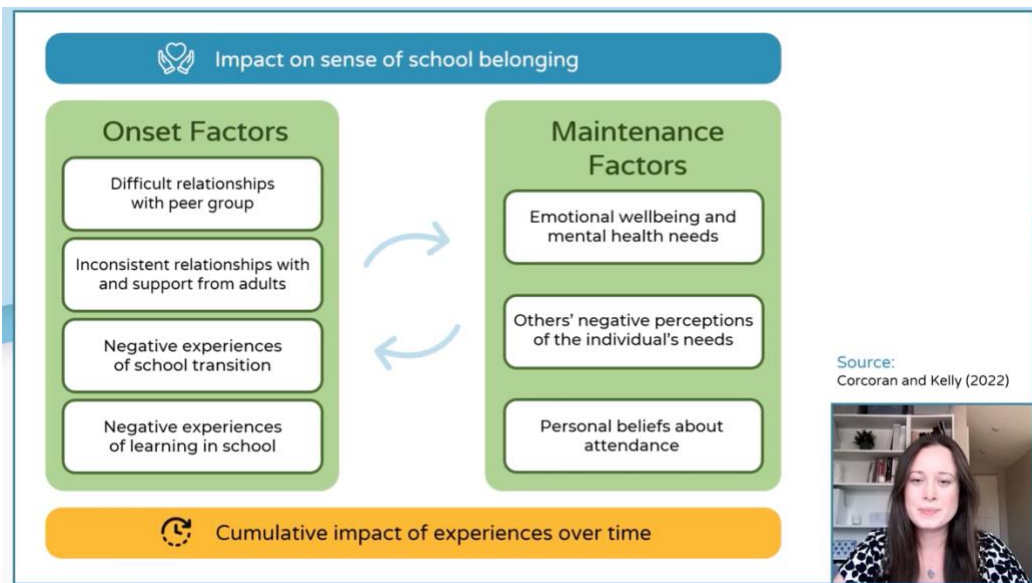## Appendix 7: Screenshot of email received from a Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist
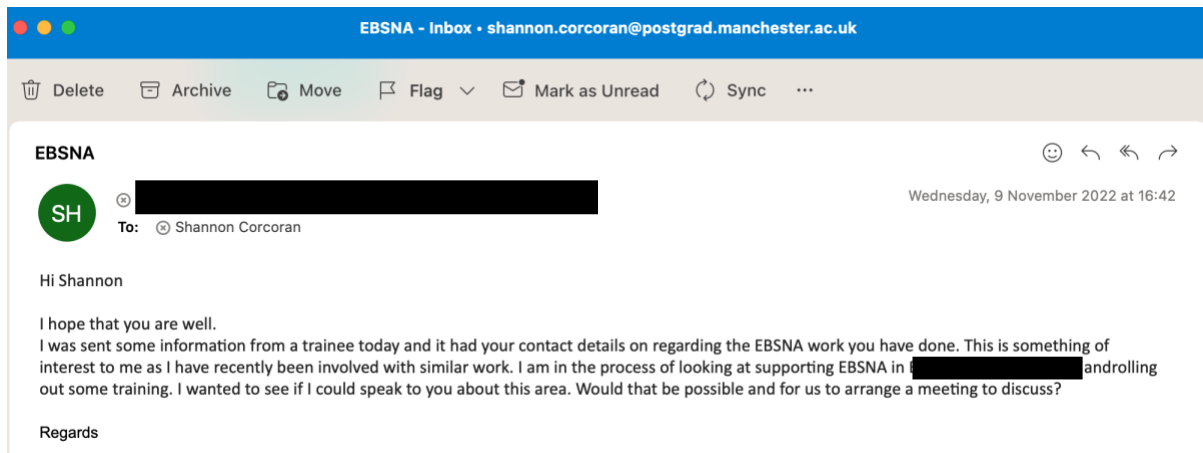
Appendix 8: Screenshot of feedback regarding Paper One, received from a Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist via Twitter
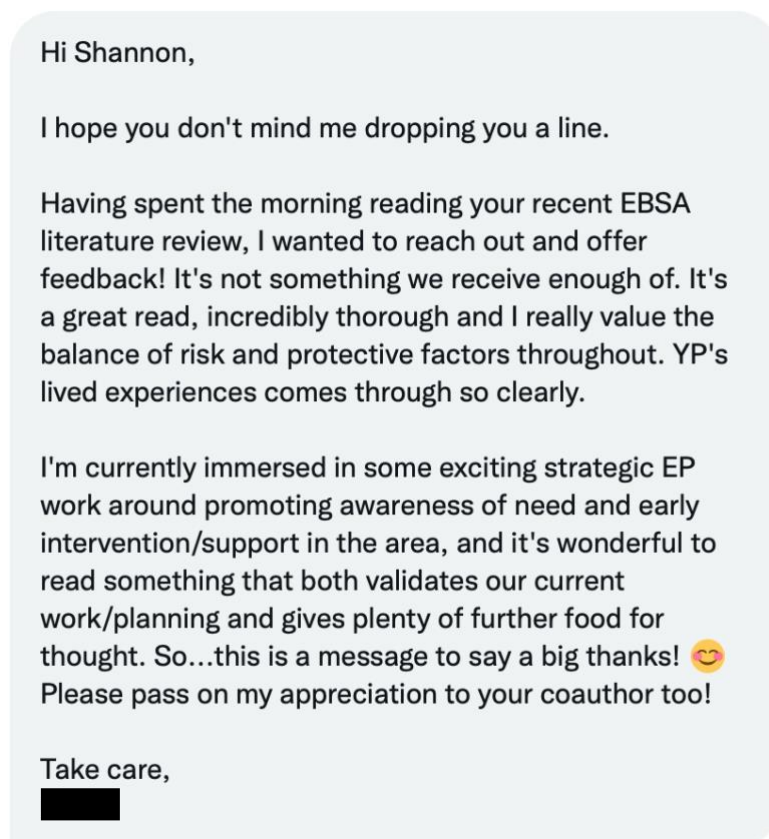
Appendix 9 Screenshots taken from EBSA Horizons online CPD course.

The full video can be viewed at:

https://livemanchesterac-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/shannon_corcoran_postgrad_manchester_ac_uk/EYUpZWQU28FAnjW-IzUONRQBEx9RDEnEU91gXFXZtyxJsA?e=9ueBvv