

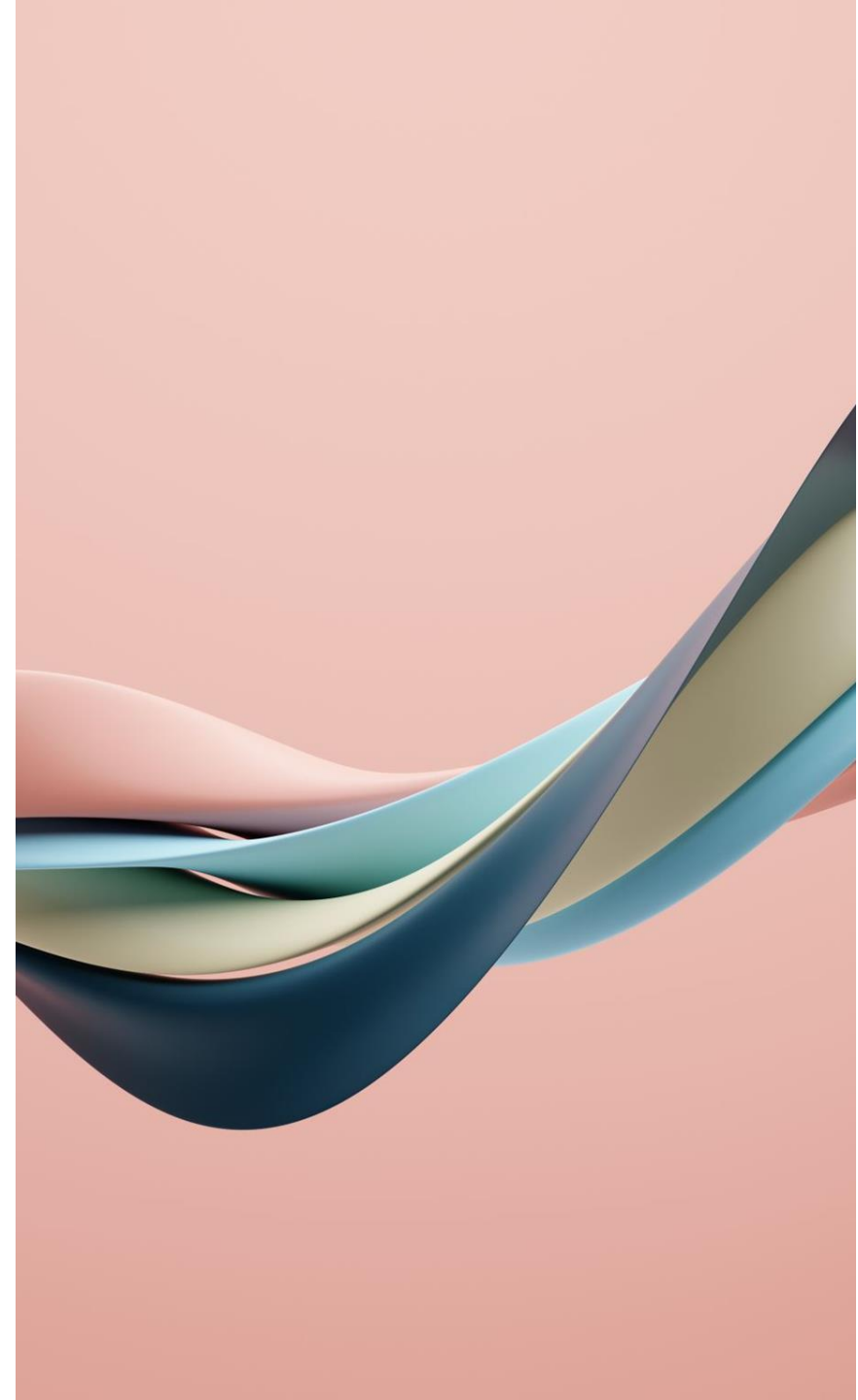
# Trafford Parent and Carer Feedback – EBSNA Guidance and Support

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# You said: “Square peg, round hole”

While we identified many specific unhelpful experiences, as well as many positive ideas and suggestions for the future, the group recognised that there are system-wide barriers to attendance at present which are outside of the control of any individual family or school. Schools are known to be under-funded and under-staffed, and unsuitable environments for many children with additional needs.

# What has not helped?

Not being listened to (repeatedly).

- Parents have “spider senses” which are often ignored by school staff - “they’re fine in school”.
- Parents shared that “teachers think they know better”, assuming things about the home experience and brushing off parental concerns.
- Some parents felt patronised by schools, especially when referred to as “Mum” or “Dad”.
- Some schools were seen as ‘gate-keepers’ to support, refusing to refer children for assessments or additional support when parents requested it.
- Repeatedly being ignored had a significant impact on parental mental health and on the relationship between home and school, and led to the child’s difficulties worsening.
- Research shows how important it is to listen to parents to ensure early intervention and support (e.g., Corcoran et al., 2022).

# What has not helped?

## Parental blame/labelling

- “Curly finger” at school, being spoken to in front of other parents or patronised by school staff.
- Intimidation in meetings (e.g., many members of staff with just one parent).
- School not accepting responsibility/role in support.
- Schools don’t signpost to peer support (e.g., STEP, TPF).
- Threats and sanctions used, e.g., fines.
- Difficulties holding down home and family life with child at home, then labelled as an “anxious parent” or told to seek own support.

# What has not helped?

School and professionals lacking knowledge and/or awareness:

- “Schools don’t know how to help” and/or are not aware of statutory guidance.
- Schools not trained or able to identify SEN, e.g., Autism or ADHD, or pathways not followed.
- School staff unaware of masking, causing them to ignore parent concerns or blame parents as a ‘home issue’.
- School’s giving advice which is not psychologically informed, e.g., make the home environment worse, bring them in whatever it takes, using bribery. Focus is on attendance rather than the need behind the difficulty.
  - Use of trauma-inducing force to get the child in.
- Schools refusing to recognise or meet needs without a formal diagnosis, or private reports not taken into account.
- Child being blamed for the behaviour and sanctioned – behaviour and non-attendance is seen as a choice.

# What has not helped?

- Lack of communication or 'inappropriate' staff members used to do this with parents. Too many people involved.
- No forward thinking (e.g., when is the best time to observe parental worries about the child).
- Lots of acronyms and jargon used.
- No support for families: "Out of sight, out of mind".
- Rigidity within provision, schools refusing to make reasonable adjustments or follow statutory guidance.
- Lack of consistency with agreed plan (e.g., toilet pass and children getting different responses with staff).
- Telling the child their parents will be fined or imprisoned if they do not attend.

# What has helped?

Reasonable adjustments in school (a legal requirement within the Equality Act, 2010):

- School being flexible, e.g., later start/uniform tweaks/finish early/drop a subject if needed etc.
- A consistent safe space for the child, and the ability to subtly leave class if they are struggling.
- A consistent adult to greet them at the door.
- Lowering demands and taking pressure off the child when needed.

# What has helped?

Compassionate professionals:

- Provide a nurturing environment with good pastoral support - really building a relationship - trusting/listening/small steps/low pressure/rapport
- Team of trusted adults to protect from staff turnover/absence
- Trusting relationships, where professionals fulfil promised actions.
- Listen to the child's voice, or their advocate. Trust and listen to parent's concerns.
- Understand the child's needs and see past the behaviour, it is not a choice ("I can see you are a good person").



# What has helped?

Knowledgeable, well-trained professionals:

- Someone from senior leadership team being aware and actively involved in the support plan.
- Professionals listen to the family, taking ownership and leadership within the support. Ensure a non-judgemental, trustworthy advocate is there for the family (may not be school staff).
- Professionals accept fault when things go wrong or do not happen.
- Staff understand SEN (with or without diagnoses) and support referrals for assessment or specialist support where needed. Have knowledge of masking and trauma-informed approaches to support families.
- Provide clear communication, including clarity around SEN processes and fulfil promises to families. Avoid using jargon and acronyms and use parents' names.
- Signpost families effectively to peer support and other services (e.g., Trafford Parent Forum, STEP, SENAS, SENDIASS).

# What has helped?

- Knowing what to do as a parent without the input of anyone else (e.g., parental EHC request).
- Receiving a diagnosis made school more understanding.
- Recognising the trauma and strain on the family (impact of difficulties on anxiety, stress, mental health).

# What do families want to see in the future?

For families:

- Trust and listen to parents. Show empathy, humility and compassion. Try to see the full picture.
- A partnership relationship with professionals, especially within decision making.
- Accurate assessment and review summary reports, these should be an easy-read, get the basic information right, use parents first names and reduce jargon.
- More signposting for parental support.
  - One suggestion was for a leaflet to be available in school reception areas for parents and for SENCOs to give this during any initial meeting
- More awareness of EBSNA nationally, e.g., a documentary on TV to tell wider society about EBSNA.
- Understanding of the issues at government level.

# What do families want to see in the future?

In LAs:

- More money for schools and services, and reduced need for private diagnosis/treatment/therapy.
- Professionals that listen and show understanding.
- Much better SEND/Autism training for SENCOs/all teachers to enable much quicker identification/reasonable adjustments.
- Ensure all schools are aware of and trained in the EINT and card sort activity.
- Better mental health support for all children.
- Focus on getting the support right, not a hurried return to full attendance.
- Clear \*no force\* policy, with wellbeing not attendance taking priority

# What do families want to see in the future?

In schools:

- More proactivity and better planning to support early identification and intervention.
- Dedicated team for children with EBSNA in each school, consistently there in an appropriate environment - always available.
- Softer start available at all schools, e.g., 'nurture group' available for 30 - 60 minutes at start of the day, consistent adult, games, toast, etc., as buffer before class.
- Gradual transitions between schools and classes.
- Smaller class sizes for those who need it.
- Social stories and other reasonable adjustments widely used.
- Allow time for support to have an impact, do not place pressure on children and families. Support should have small steps over time.

# What have we done?

- Updated the guidance document with a clear section on supporting families effectively.
- Developed a parent guide (based on Trafford guidance and Not Fine In School's advice pages for families and schools)
  - [Resources - Not Fine in School](#)
- Re-introduced the EP Service's free 30-minute consultations for parents (bookable via our Facebook page)

# What else are we going to do?

- Commissioning training for all schools in Trafford on EBSNA.
- Research support from Jayne Onslow to record and evaluate this process.
- Continue this working relationship!

# BREAK for your feedback

1. What do you think of the resources?
2. What would you like to see happen now? What would you find useful?
3. Anything else?



## How a parent informed local authority emotionally based school avoidance policy can support the needs of the whole family



My name is Jayne Onslow and I am a trainee educational psychologist at the University of Manchester.

As part of my training, I am looking at how parents are supported when their child is experiencing emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) difficulties.

Part of my research aims to explore how parents been involved in creating a local authority's EBSA guidance document and how this is being used to support the whole family when a child is experiencing EBSA difficulties.

I would like to talk to you about your experiences of working with the local authority in creating their EBSA guidance.

If you would like to be involved in my research, we will sit down together for around an hour so I can ask you about your experiences.

# Interested?

For more information about taking part in Jayne's research, please refer to the handout and then email:

[jayne.onslow@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:jayne.onslow@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk)