



DASH

*Mental Health
Wellbeing & Behaviour*
Support and Education

END OF SUPPORT REPORT:
ADDRESSING AND PROVIDING SUPPORT TO
PUPILS AFFECTED BY AND AT RISK OF
EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE
AT COLEG CYMUNEDOL Y DDERWEN.
SEPTEMBER 2022 - JULY 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen (CCYD) is a large English-medium comprehensive school serving the Garw and Ogmore valleys in Bridgend. At the end of the 2023-24 academic year, there were 1268 pupils on roll aged between 11-18, according to the school's ClassChart data. In the 2022-23 academic year, the school had an average attendance of 86.2%, with 28.7% of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) (My Local School, 2023). The attendance was lower than the Welsh average of 88.5% (Welsh Gov, 2023) for the same year, with a higher rate of eFSM pupils than the Welsh average for secondary schools of 21.2% (Stats Wales, 2023). In September 2022, the Deputy Head asked whether we were able to support a cohort of learners who were unable to attend CCYD due to emotional factors and reasons, often referred to as Emotionally Based School Avoidance. We were already present at the school, providing targeted psychoeducation support to Looked After Children (LAC).

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is “a broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school.” (Wessex County Borough Council, 2023). The terminology covers School Avoidance, Truancy, School Withdrawal, Non-attendance and Anxiety-related non-attendance. When we consider children and young people and the impact EBSA has on them, we need to broaden our understanding of what could be at play for them. Berg et al. (1969) stated that EBSA criteria includes difficulties in attending school, emotional distress, staying at home with the knowledge of parents, carers and school staff, and the absence of anti-social behaviours. It is important to consider that, “School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull’ factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance” (Thambirajah et al., p. 33). EBSA takes into consideration the child’s attendance, patterns in attendance and presentation at school, as well as transition points between home and school. It can also be seen as inconsistent attendance to school and not just complete withdrawal. According to Gulliford and Miller (2015), it affects roughly 1-2% of school-aged children. It has also been reported to be equally common in males and females with little evidence of a link to socioeconomic status (King & Bernstein, 2001).

In the current academic year for Wales, 31.9% of pupils met the persistent absence threshold of 10% of sessions missed, down from 32.5% over the same period in the 2022/23 academic year. This was higher for eFSM pupils (52.1%) than non-eFSM (26.1%).

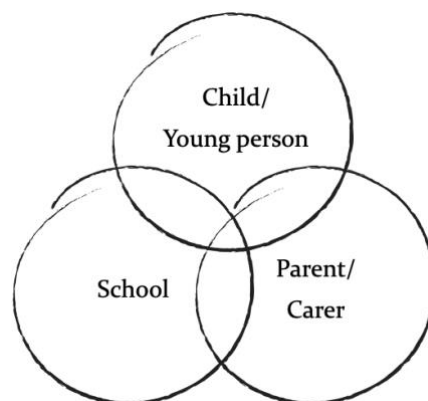
Attendance in Wales on average increased from the 22-23 academic year, from 88.5% to 89%. Across the school years, attendance on average peaks at Year 3 (92.5%) but during secondary school, it drops from 90.2% in Year 7 to 76.1% in Year 11. Attendance across all school years has increased over the past three years, apart from Year 11 which has dropped year on year, from 77.4% in 2022 and 76.4% in 2023. It is also important to note that authorised absences were recorded at 17.6%, with “Illness” being the most common reason for absence, making up 40.2% of all recorded absences (Welsh Gov, 2022; 2023; 2024).

OBJECTIVES

We were provided with an initial list of 14 pupils, between Years 8 and 11. From here, the plan was to reach out to the parent/carer of the pupil, meet with the pupil to gain an understanding of needs, provide suitable, individualised support for their needs and support movement towards reintegration with school through various methods, described below. Some of these pupils had previously or were actively open to CAMHS and Early Help Support within Bridgend Council. Over the course of the two academic years, the depth of assessment, support and understanding changed due to increased understanding and adaptations to meet the specific needs of the pupils, families and school. The support also followed the NEST/NYTH Framework (Welsh Gov, 2023) and the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing (Welsh Gov, 2021).

Methods:

The support was looked at from three perspectives:



The Pupil:

The pupil, or child, is the core of the need for support. Due to their ongoing needs, issues and challenges, their ability to actively participate and attend school regularly was hindered. With any child, the specific reasons were broad and complex. Some pupils may have specific learning difficulties, might be seen as neurodivergent or have a mental health concern. Some of these needs may fall under the ALN Act 2018 (Welsh Gov, 2021) which could entitle them to an Individual Development Plan (IDP) that would outline specific interventions and support for the pupil when in school. As mentioned, a majority of these pupils were unable to attend, so being able to access school-based supports and interventions would be difficult. Due to this, support was provided at the home of the pupil as part of the progression towards attending school. As per the Welsh Government Guidance on attendance, when school avoidance is seen as the reason for absences, then support should be implemented and not taking legal action through fines (Welsh Gov, 2023).

The Family:

The majority of the families that are going through these challenges are trying to navigate systems that are possibly alien to them. This might be the support available and policies within

the school, the support systems of the Local Authority, or the NHS CAMHS service. A few of the families may also be unsure when it comes to supporting their child, meeting their specific needs and ensuring their safety. Support and advice were given to the families to help them with this. This allowed for consistency between external support and home support.

The School:

The School has many support structures in place that have been devised by the Education Department of the Welsh Government. They can employ whichever they deem to be necessary and suitable to the needs of the learner. This includes, but is not limited to; Phased returns, reduced timetables, Pastoral Support Plans (PSPs), Individual Development Plans (IDPs), Emotional Literacy Support (ELSA), Thrive and School Based Counselling. They can also refer families and pupils to Local Authority services through Early Help, as well as referring to the Neurodevelopmental Pathway if necessary. With the school, advice was provided for the individuals met to ensure that they got the suitable support necessary for their needs, whilst also continually liaising with the Heads of Year, Pastoral Team and Wellbeing Centre of the school. This also ensures that there was consistency in the support provided, information shared and approaches towards the pupils' needs.

Approach:

As with any multifaceted approach to support, there were occasional setbacks, challenges, and discussions regarding the best methods of providing assistance, addressing needs, and establishing pathways for the child's return to education. To increase the likelihood of success, it is crucial that the support remains consistent both at home and in school. Research highlights the importance of maintaining consistent interventions across these environments to ensure a cohesive and effective support system for the child (Kearney, 2018).

To increase the likelihood of success, support needs to be consistent from home and in school. As highlighted by Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model¹ (1977), it shows the importance of how various systems around a child can support their development. By ensuring collaboration between the child, home, school, and, when necessary, other relevant professionals, we can create a cohesive network of support that addresses their needs across multiple contexts. Epstein (2018) highlights the important roles of school, family, and community partnerships working in collaborative efforts to foster child development and ensure a well-rounded approach to support. This collaborative approach ensures that interventions are coordinated, consistent, and tailored to the child's unique circumstances, resulting in more effective outcomes. Research has shown that effective collaboration within systems of intervention is key to achieving successful, individualised support for children (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). Through ongoing communication and cooperation, we can leverage the strengths of each system to provide the child with comprehensive support that promotes their wellbeing and success.

When initially meeting the child at home, or sometimes in school, the first action was to gain an understanding of the child. This included finding out what they like and enjoy, as well as other hobbies or interests that they have. From here, a foundation is laid for developing a rapport with the young person. Empathy is central to this process, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the child's emotions and concerns. As Rogers (1951) emphasised, employing

empathy, truly understanding the child's fears, anxieties, and feelings about attending school, can facilitate a more tailored and effective approach to support. By promoting feelings of being heard and understood, empathy helps to develop a trusting relationship. Once the child is comfortable, the conversation can then move towards identifying the difficulties they might be facing. Often, the child may downplay what is happening to them, and this is where the parent or carer can offer valuable insights.

Some of the families were asked to complete a set of questionnaires, to further explore the needs of the child as well as what functions could be at play. The parents completed the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (SRAS-R P) (Kearney & Silverman, 1993) and the Risk and Resilience Profiles 1 & 2 (Holder, 2022). The children completed the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (SRAS-R C), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 2001) and the PERMAH questionnaire (Butler & Kern, 2015) based on the Positive Psychology ideas of Martin Seligman (2013). These questionnaires were used more in the second year of support and predominantly with some of the later referrals where there were differences in opinion between the child, family and school.

With the children who were at home, visits were carried out on a fortnightly basis. This was due to the number of pupils being supported as well as leaving space in their week to access any other support that they were receiving. We did not want to overwhelm them with too much. During these visits, rapport was continued to be built upon, with questions moving towards what they have been doing to support themselves with their needs. For those who have been out of education for a prolonged period of time, we need to consider where they are with their own thoughts and opinions about attending school. This could be seen as 'Entrenched EBSA'. When addressing Entrenched EBSA, it's crucial to consider the "Cycle of Change"² (EdPsychEd, 2022), as outlined in the Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska, 1994), and utilise Motivational Interviewing techniques (Miller & Rollnick, 2013) to support them in acknowledging and possibly overcoming their avoidance behaviours. Motivational Interviewing could support in exploring their reasons and understanding why they are having difficulties in attending school, identifying the negative consequences of continued avoidance, and building motivation for change. This support looked at exploring ambivalence, setting goals, and coping strategies. The idea would be to develop their Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2017), GRIT (Duckworth, 2016) and other motivations, particularly using Ryan & Deci's Self Determination Theory (2000) and also Locke & Latham's Goal Setting Theory (1990).

When visiting the pupils, they were encouraged to participate in activities outside of school that fostered competence and a sense of belonging, as these experiences are crucial for building resilience and motivation. Engaging in hobbies and community activities can help them develop a sense of mastery and connectedness, which are important for their overall wellbeing (Masten, 2001; Fredrickson, 2001). This could be seen as them developing and improving their sense of engagement, meaning and accomplishment, as set out in the PERMA model by Seligman (2013). From the home, we looked at how we could further support this by looking at the accomplishments the child makes on a daily basis. Whilst the child is trying to attend school, if the focus is moved to what they are achieving; getting up, dressed travelling to school etc., rather than what was not achieved; they can see how they are making progress, rather than seeing the failures. This can further support the development of a

Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2017). Furthermore, reinforcing positive experiences and strengths within the family environment will foster the child's resilience and bolster their ability to cope with challenges.

A lot of what is mentioned above is also completed with the parents, so they can try and support what has been suggested. Guidance was provided around various local authority support systems, as well as what could be available in school. A minority of parents also asked questions about various policies and guidance in schools, such as reduced timetables, smaller classes and the ALN Act (Welsh Gov, 2021). Some families also asked questions about the possibility of the child being neurodivergent and how to access a referral to the Neurodevelopmental Pathway. The parents were also given support around low arousal demands, setting boundaries and understanding other elements of their child's mental wellbeing, such as ACEs, Trauma, Attachment and Anxiety and supportive methods such as self and co-regulation, mindfulness activities and other strategies to support reappraisal of difficult situations, both for themselves and their child.

For the pupils making progress towards school reintegration, we utilised the Phoenix Wellbeing room at the school. This space proved beneficial as it allowed pupils to enter the school through a side entrance, bypassing the rest of the building, and to leave when necessary, helping to manage anxiety and school avoidance behaviours (Thambirajah et al., 2008). It also allowed the pupils to build a rapport with a key member of staff who is consistently present. To support sustaining attendance in school, we must first ensure that the environments are conducive to their academic and wellbeing needs and that staff members are able to provide the pupil with appropriate guidance and support with their needs, and also help develop their sense of belonging within the school. Building a trusting relationship also requires congruence, or genuineness, where the staff member is open and transparent in their interactions. This aligns with Rogers' (1961) emphasis on the importance of being genuine in a relationship. When staff members and other professionals are authentic, the pupil is more likely to feel comfortable and engage more openly in conversations about their school-related challenges. Unconditional Positive Regard, to have the attitude of accepting and supporting someone without judgment, regardless of their behaviour or what they say or do (Rogers, 1961) is also critical here, as it helps foster an environment where the pupil feels valued and accepted, creating a safe space for them to express their fears and concerns.

For pupils ready to return, implementing a graduated reintegration process is essential. This approach allows pupils to gradually adjust to the school environment while effectively managing their anxieties. A carefully structured, stepwise reintegration provides pupils with a sense of control and predictability, which can significantly reduce anxiety (Kearney, 2018). It is critical that the process is paced appropriately, as moving too quickly may lead to emotional flooding, where pupils feel overwhelmed by anxiety, potentially undermining their resilience and increasing the risk of disengagement from school (Maynard et al., 2018). Research by Kearney and Graczyk (2014) underscores the importance of this gradual approach, noting that it fosters sustained attendance by allowing pupils to build confidence and coping skills incrementally. Similarly, Heyne et al. (2001) highlight that a well-paced reintegration process is crucial for long-term success, helping to maintain engagement and reduce the likelihood of repeated absenteeism.

Adequate time and flexibility are needed to provide the emotional support necessary for success. When done appropriately, this process enables the pupil to form positive relationships with teachers, enhancing their sense of belonging, which aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs³ (Maslow, 1943). This gradual approach also promotes the development of accomplishment and self-confidence.

Tailored reintegration strategies are supported by research, allowing for incremental increases in attendance, which reduces the risk of overwhelming the pupil (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). A reduced timetable as part of a Pastoral Support Plan (PSP), for example, enables pupils to attend specific lessons on designated days, helping them to rebuild confidence and reestablish a school routine (Welsh Gov, 2023). This method not only supports routine development but also reduces the chances of a relapse into avoidance behaviours (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). McShane et al. (2004) further support the use of a stepwise approach to effectively manage anxiety.

As the pupil achieves and sustains a suitable level of attendance, ongoing in-school support is crucial to maintain engagement. This support might include interventions such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA), Thrive, counselling, and other available therapies. Durlak et al. (2011) found that social-emotional learning programmes significantly improve pupils' social-emotional skills, behaviour, and academic performance. Such interventions help create a supportive school environment, which is vital for pupils adjusting to school after absences.

Regular reviews, typically conducted on a fortnightly basis, offer the opportunity to assess progress and make necessary adjustments. This stepwise approach allows the pupil to gradually increase their time in school at a pace that suits their needs (McShane et al., 2004). Throughout this process, collaboration with resources such as the Phoenix Wellbeing Room, the pastoral team, and the head of year is vital to ensure comprehensive support and continuity of care. Roffey (2012) highlights the importance of creating a positive school climate that supports both pupil and teacher wellbeing, reinforcing the need for a collaborative approach in managing reintegration.

KEY FINDINGS

“We seem to prefer spending more money and effort on dealing with the results of our emotional problems rather than trying to prevent them”

– Marc Brackett, *Permission to Feel*

The findings will be broken down into two parts: 2022-23 Academic Year and the 2023-24 Academic Year.

2022-23 Academic Year

Initially, 14 pupils were put forward for EBSA support across four school years, Years 8 – 11. Of these 14 pupils, six were Year 11. I mention this as the previous two academic years, 2019-20 and 2020-21 were severely interrupted due to COVID-19 lockdowns and guidance. These Year 11 pupils would have been in Year 9 when these started and were also affected in their first year of GCSEs.

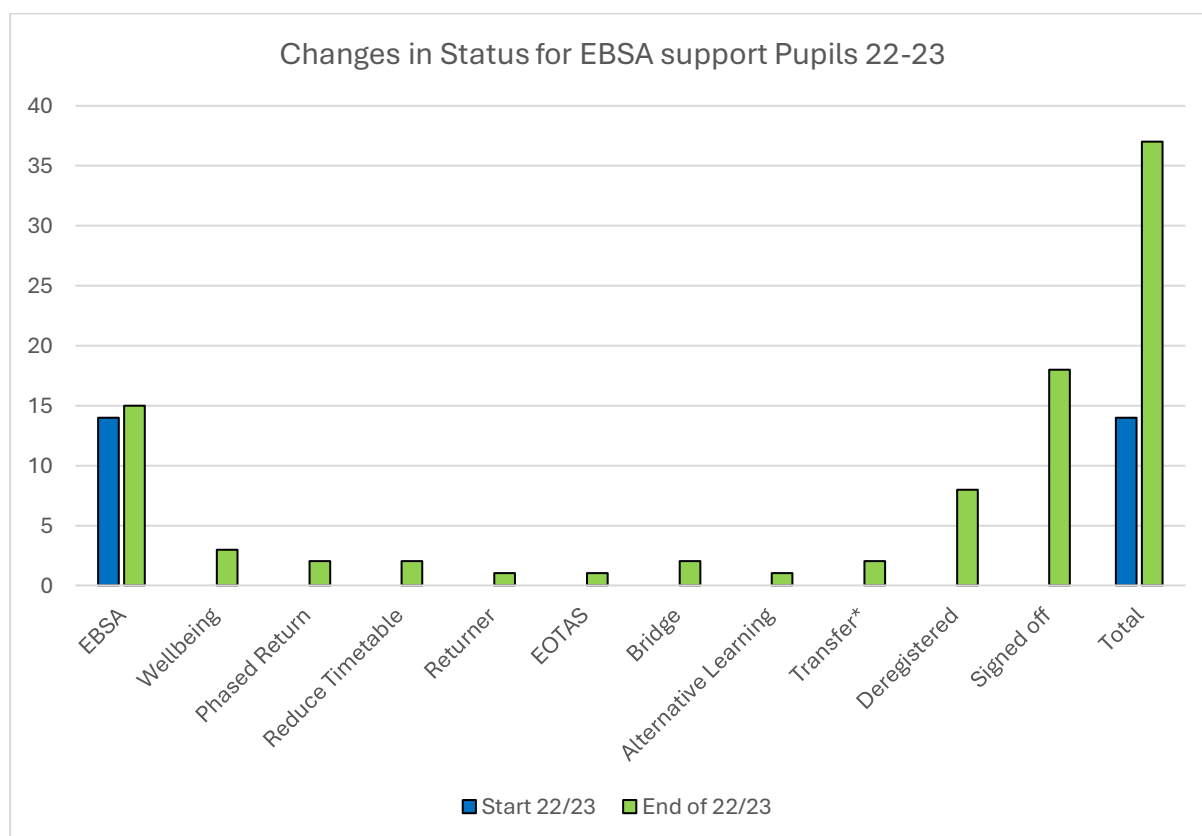


Chart 1

We can see from Chart 1 that 14 EBSA students were initially put forward for support. As the academic year progressed, we can see that the number of individual pupils referred for support reached 37. The chart also shows that, at the end of the 22-23 academic year, the number of EBSA pupils had increased to 15. With this in mind, some learners made various

returns to school. Three were attending the Phoenix Wellbeing Centre within the school, with two pupils working on a phased return. Two further pupils were on reduced timetables and one learner had made a complete return to school.

With that being said, one pupil ended the year as EOTAS (Education Other Than At School), two had been referred to, and accepted at The Bridge PRU, and two pupils transferred, one to another school and the other to a specialised Autism Unit, Ysgol Bryn Castell (YBC). During the course of the year, eight pupils were de-registered from Education. By the end of the academic year, 19 of the 37 pupils were signed off from support due to them coming to a natural conclusion of support.

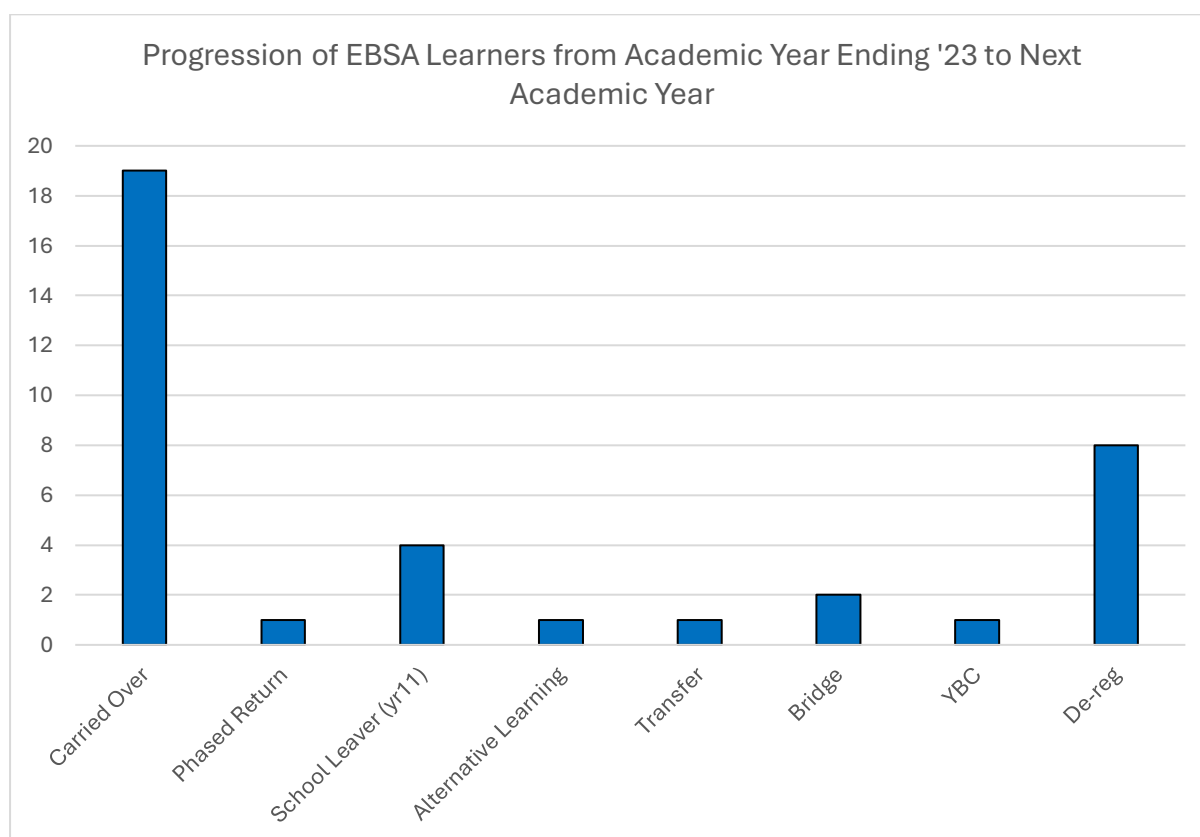


Chart 2

In Chart 2 we can see how the 37 pupils progressed. 19 were carried over for the next academic year. That was made up of 12 EBSA pupils, three wellbeing pupils, two on reduced timetables, one returner, and one EOTAS pupil. Even though some of these pupils were regularly attending school, they were kept on in preparation for the next academic year. If support was needed upon their return in September, it was there ready for them. Of the remaining 18, one returned on a phased return which the school took over due to medical reasons, four were school leavers, having finished Year 11, one was in an alternative learning setting, one transferred to a new school, one moved to YBC, two were accepted to The Bridge PRU and eight were de-registered. All of these pupils were signed off from support.

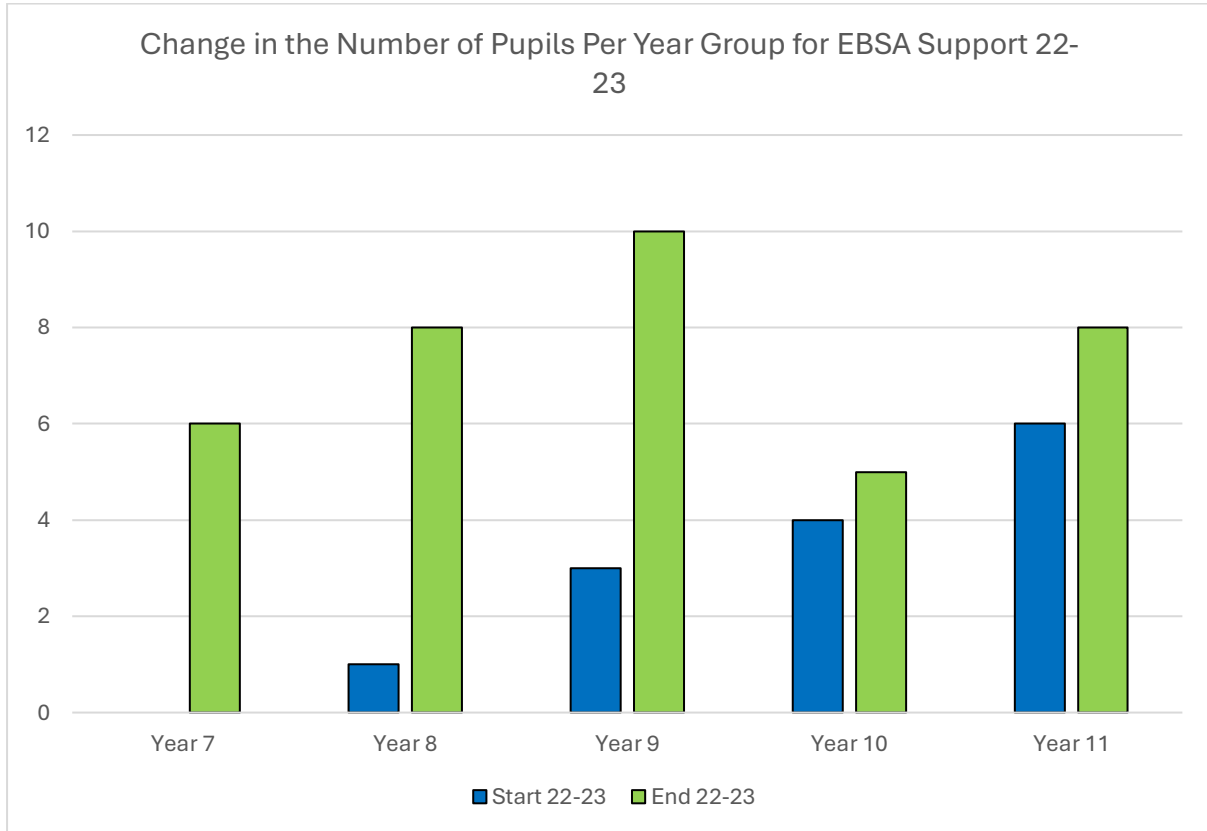


Chart 3

Chart 3 shows us the change in the year groups of the pupils referred for support. We can see that between the start of the academic year and the end, six year 7's, seven Year 8's, six Year 9's, one year 10 and two Year 11s, were referred for support. Of the total of 37 pupils, 18 were Male, 18 were Female and one specified their gender as non-binary. The 37 students made up 3% of the overall school population of 1316 (My Local School, 2023).

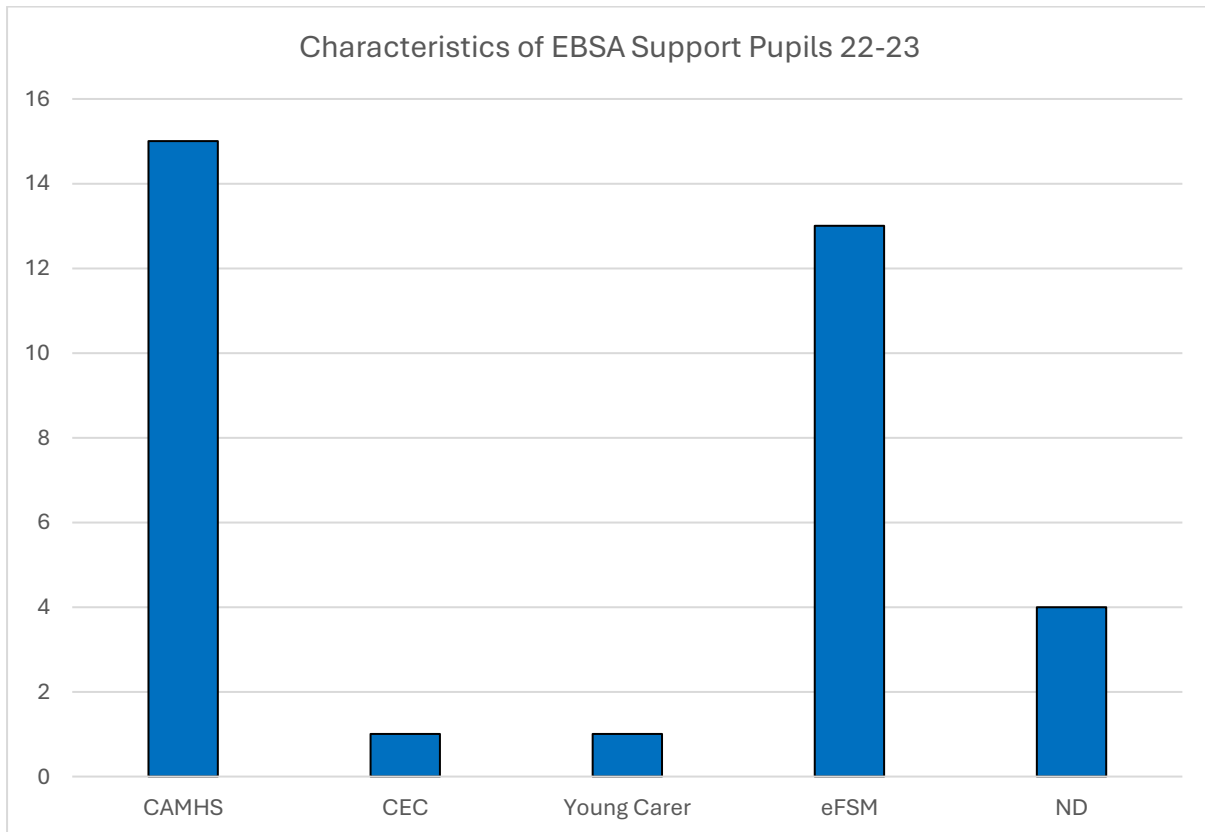


Chart 4

When considering the characteristics of the pupils referred for support, we can see that they are quite broad. 15 were under CAMHS, whilst one was Care Experienced (CEC). One was a Young Carer and 13 were eFSM pupils. Four were diagnosed Neurodivergent.

All of the pupils referred in the 2022-23 Academic year were met with and were provided with some level of support, depending on their needs. Some of the pupils, or the families, did not actively take up the support due to them considering and then de-registering the pupil or due to the pupil having a specific educational outcome, such as Alternative Learning or YBC.

2023-24 Academic Year

Following on from the previous academic year, two new referrals meant that the new academic year started with 21 pupils, incorporating the 19 carried over.

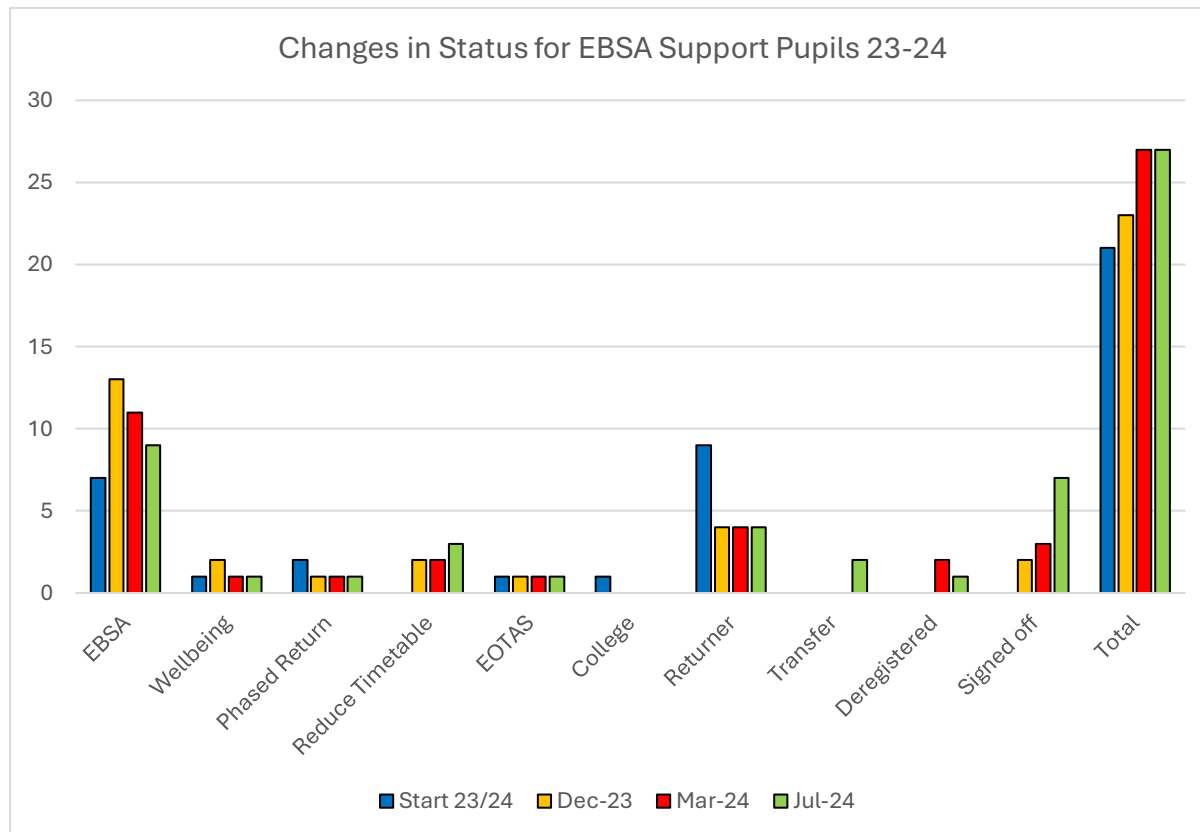


Chart 5

Chart 5 gives us the breakdown of the changes across the 23-24 academic year by term. At the end of each term, Autumn (Dec 23), Spring (Mar 24) and Summer (Jul 24) a snapshot was taken of the current cohort of learners receiving support and where they were on their journey.

As we can see from Chart 5, the number of pupils who started the year as EBSA had reduced from 12 to five. This was due to some of them seeing the new academic year as a fresh start. This can be seen by the number of returns being nine at the start of the 23-24 academic year, where the previous year had one returner. Two of the pupils who were attending wellbeing also made a return to education, whilst one of the pupils who was on a reduced timetable started to attend College instead of school. This pupil unfortunately encountered some challenges in College and returned to EBSA status. The EOTAS pupil was kept on for support due to them not being able to engage with the EOTAS provision being offered.

The chart also shows us that over the academic year, the number of pupils who were seen as EBSA decreased each term after initially rising in the first term of school. The total number of

pupils referred for support was 27 for the whole academic year. This made up 2% of the 1268 school population for the 23-24 academic year.

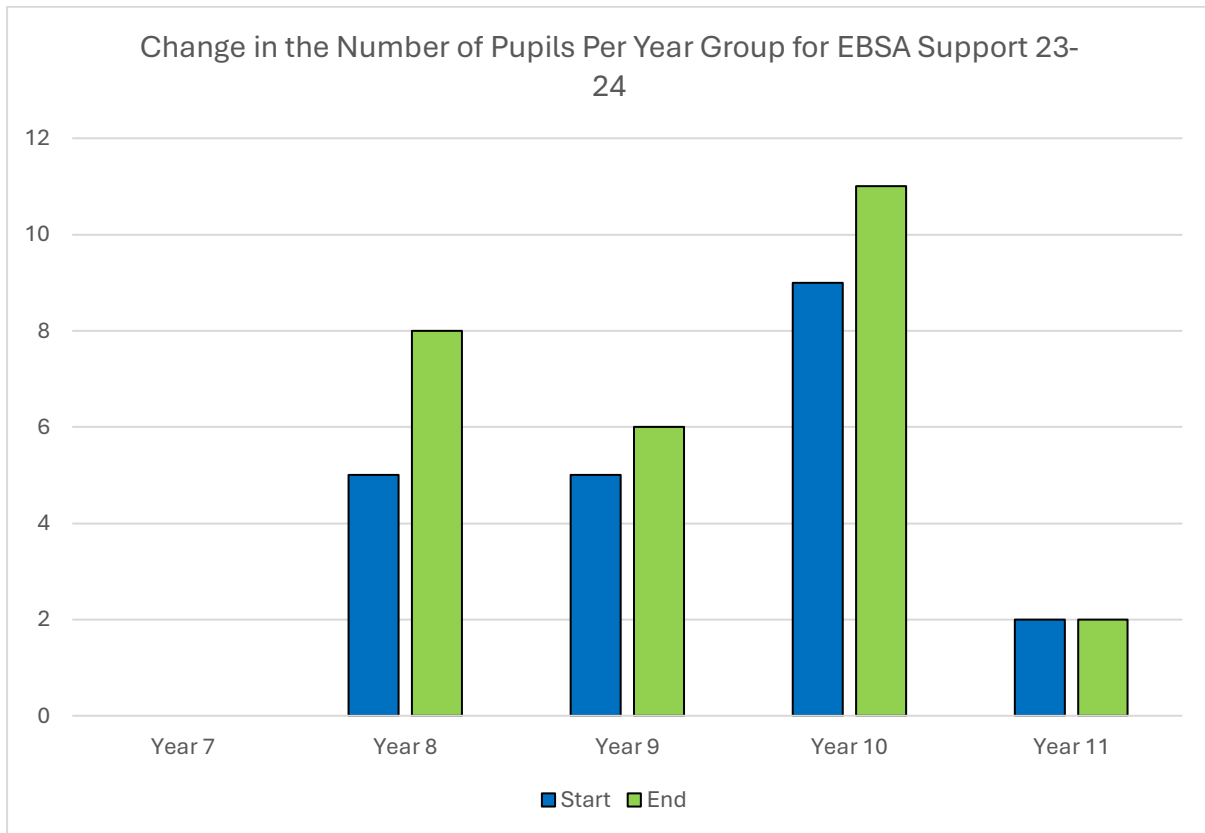


Chart 6

Chart 6 shows us the change in the number of pupils per year group for EBSA support. No Year 7's were referred for support, and no additional Year 11's were referred. Years 8, 9 and 10 all referred additional pupils.

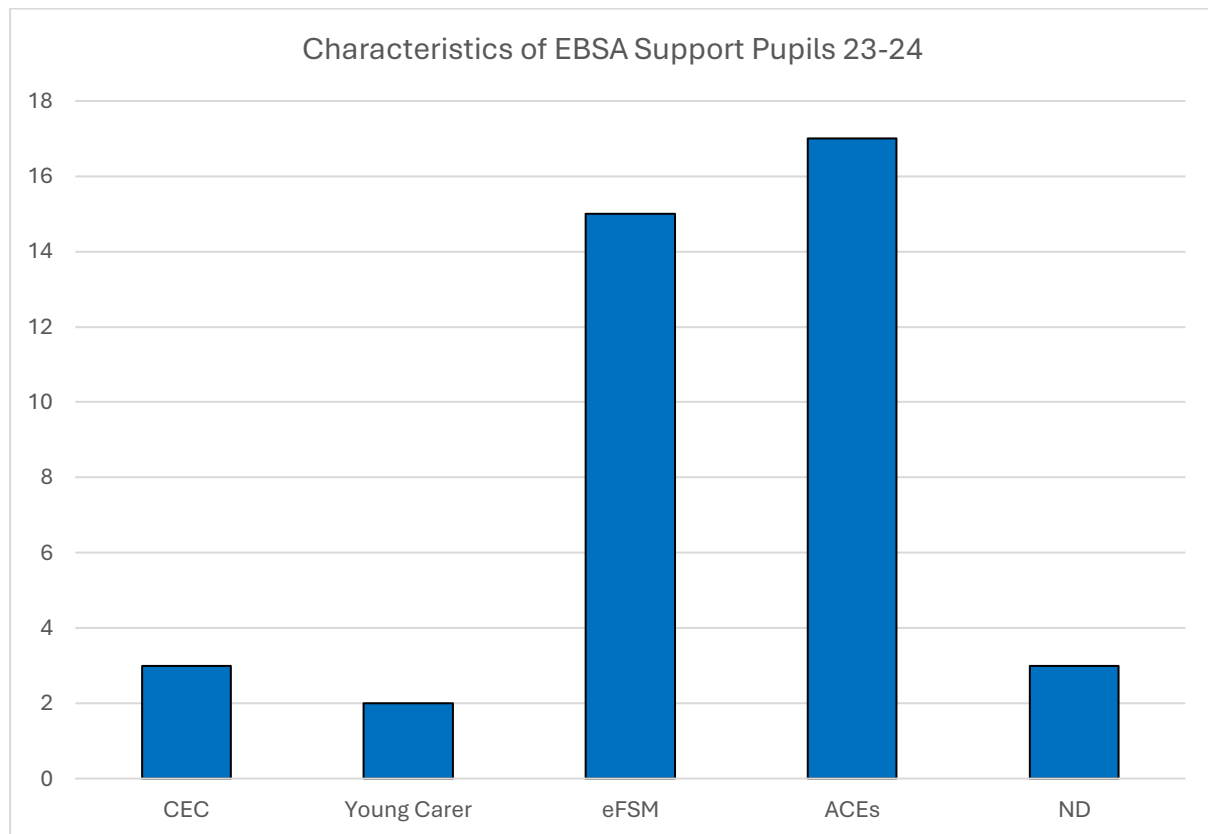


Chart 7

We can see in Chart 7 the various characteristics of the pupils who had been referred for EBSA support. Further from the information gathered the year before, an additional characteristic of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as described by Felitti (1998) was added, as there appeared to be some correlation between those pupils who have an ACE and being affected by EBSA. The chart shows that it is likely that a pupil who is eFSM or has ACEs has a greater chance of being impacted by attendance difficulties. The number of pupils who are Neurodivergent is lower than what some of the literature states for those pupils affected by EBSA, being on three of 27 pupils, 11%. Most recently, Mullally et al. (2023) found that 92.1% of pupils who were affected by school attendance difficulties were Neurodivergent. It is worth noting that during the academic year, the parents/carers of nine of the pupils questioned possible Neurodivergence and some requested that their child be seen and/or referred to the Neurodevelopmental Pathway. Of those requested, some were told no due to the non-attendance, whereas two were told there was not enough evidence to complete a referral. One learner is currently having the paperwork completed for the Neurodevelopmental Pathway.

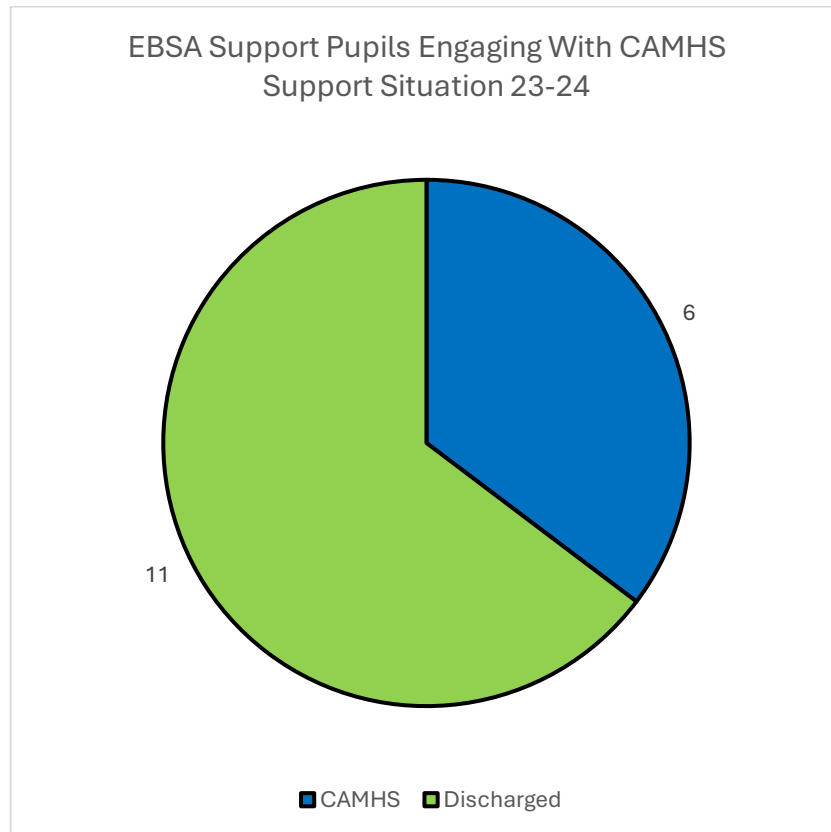


Chart 8

Some of the EBSA Support Pupils were also referred to CAMHS, either prior to or while receiving support. Of the 17 that initially met with CAMHS, 11 were discharged for a number of reasons. Two of the pupils also completed the ACEs Recovery Course with CAMHS, one of which has now been discharged. A common reason for discharge was suspected Neurodivergence being the cause of the emotional distress and difficulties impacting the pupil.

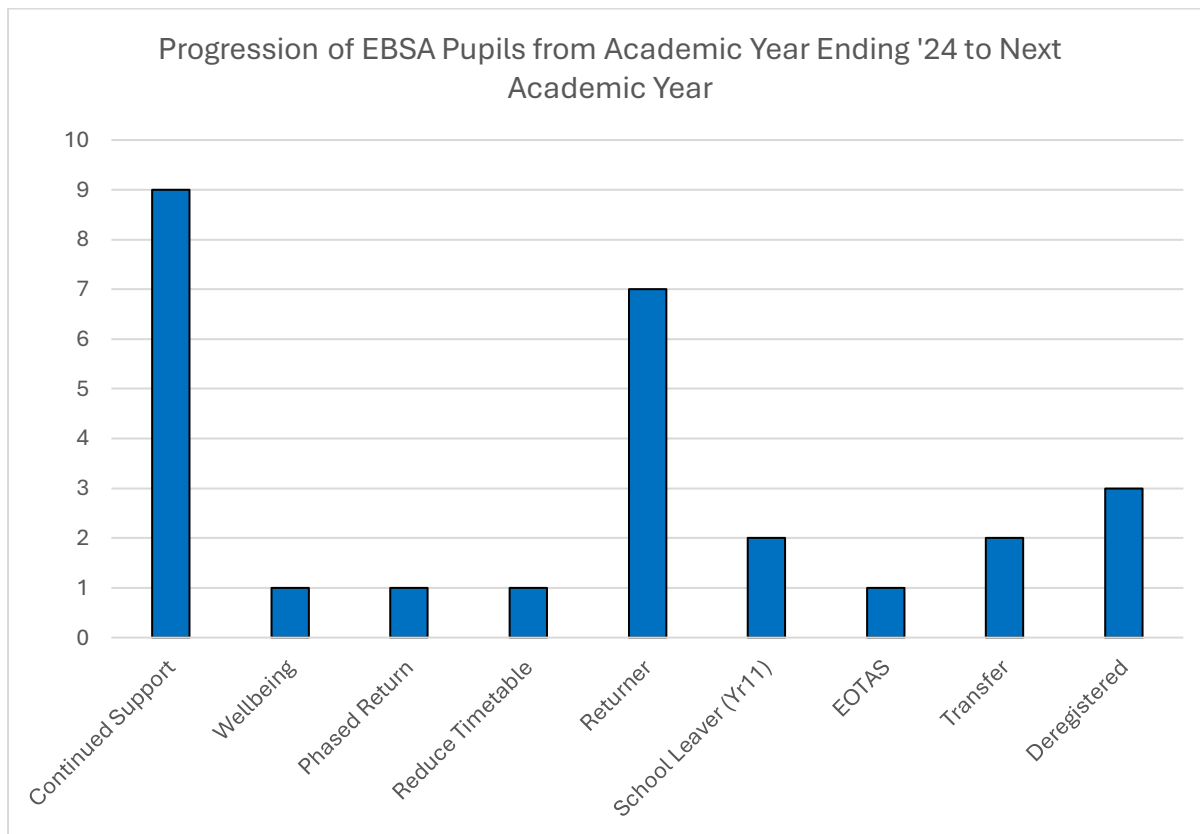


Chart 9

Chart 9 shows us where the most recent cohort of EBSA Support Pupils are, in preparation for the next academic year. We can see that nine pupils are still in need of support. Of those nine, seven are currently still not attending school whilst two finished the year working on reduced timetables. This information has been passed over to the pastoral team and Head of Years. We can see that two pupils have left the school as school leavers, and during the year one was EOTAS, two have transferred and three deregistered. Of the remaining ten pupils, they have already been signed off and are back in school working on various support plans being overseen by the pastoral team and Head of Years.

Comparisons Between Academic Years 22-23 and 23-24

From the information obtained over the two academic years, we are able to draw some comparisons between the two years to see what was successful and where there could have been improvements.

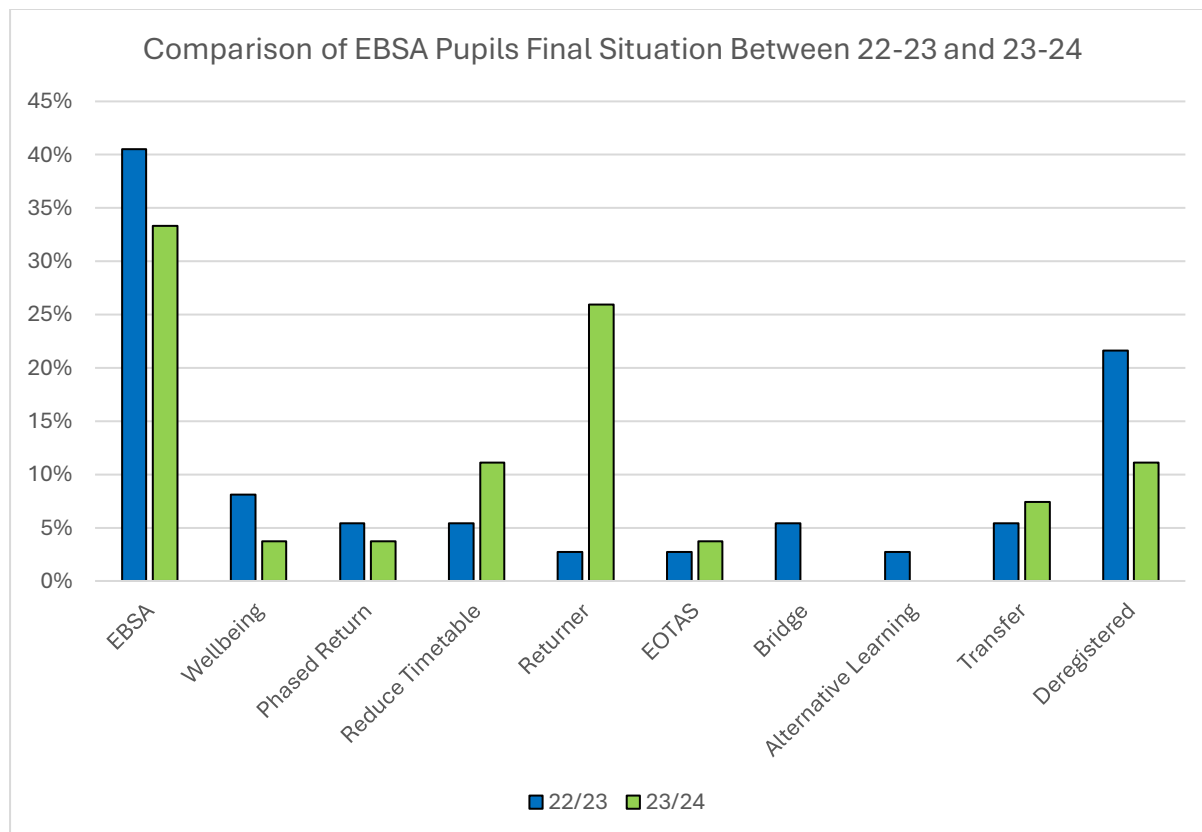


Chart 10

Chart 10 is showing us, as a percentage, the final situations of EBSA pupils. Percentage was used to draw comparisons due to 37 pupils being supported in 22-23 and 27 in 23-24. We can see from the chart that the endpoint for pupils still being affected by EBSA dropped in the second year, the same as those in Wellbeing and on Phased Returns. The number of pupils who returned to school in a more sustained pattern increased, whilst the number of pupils who deregistered also decreased.

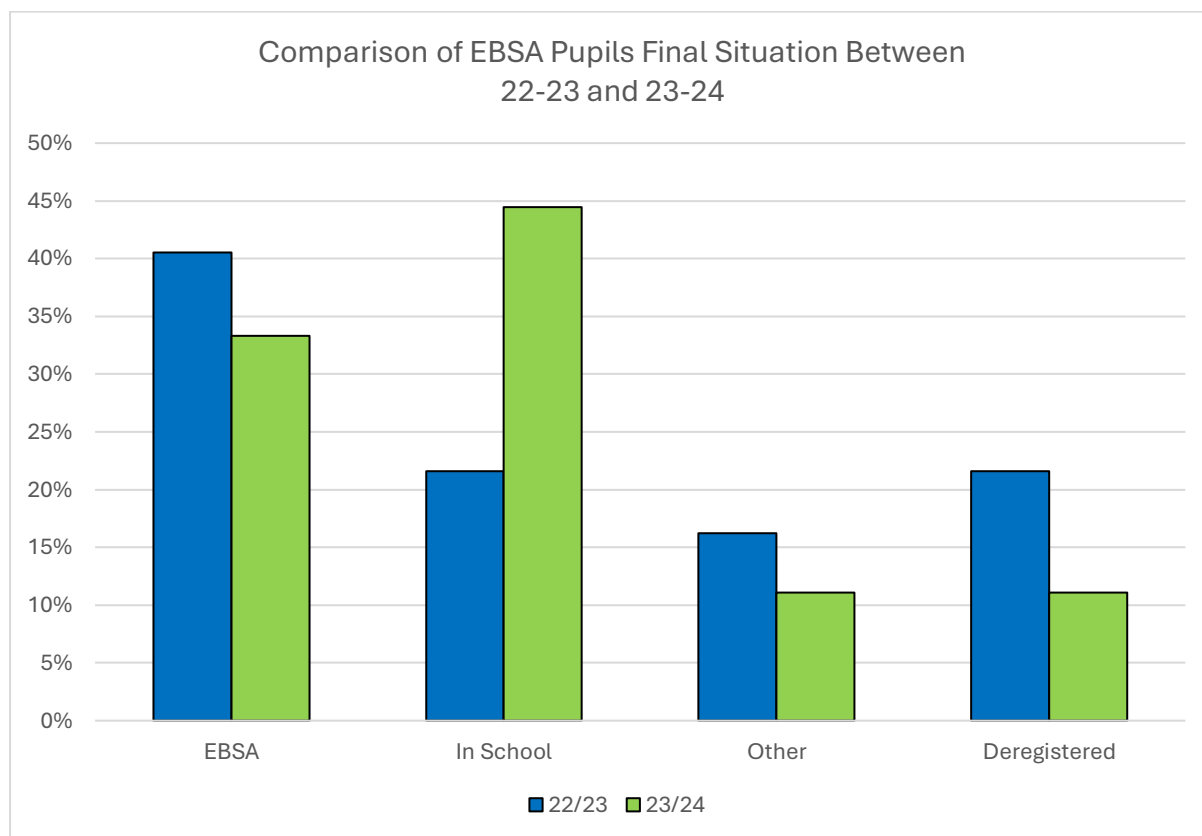


Chart 11

Chart 11 has taken that breakdown of final situations and grouped them into four categories: EBSA, In School, Other and Deregistered. The percentage of pupils who were still seen as EBSA, meaning that they were still not engaging with any school attendance decreased in the second year of support, going from 41% of pupils to 33%. The number that was In School, so attending Wellbeing, on Phased Returns, Reduced Timetables or a complete return increased from 22% to 44%. The number of pupils who were in other situations, such as YBC, Bridge, Alternative Learning or Transferred only slightly dropped, from 16% to 11%. The percentage of pupils who ended up being deregistered from school dropped from 22% to 11%.

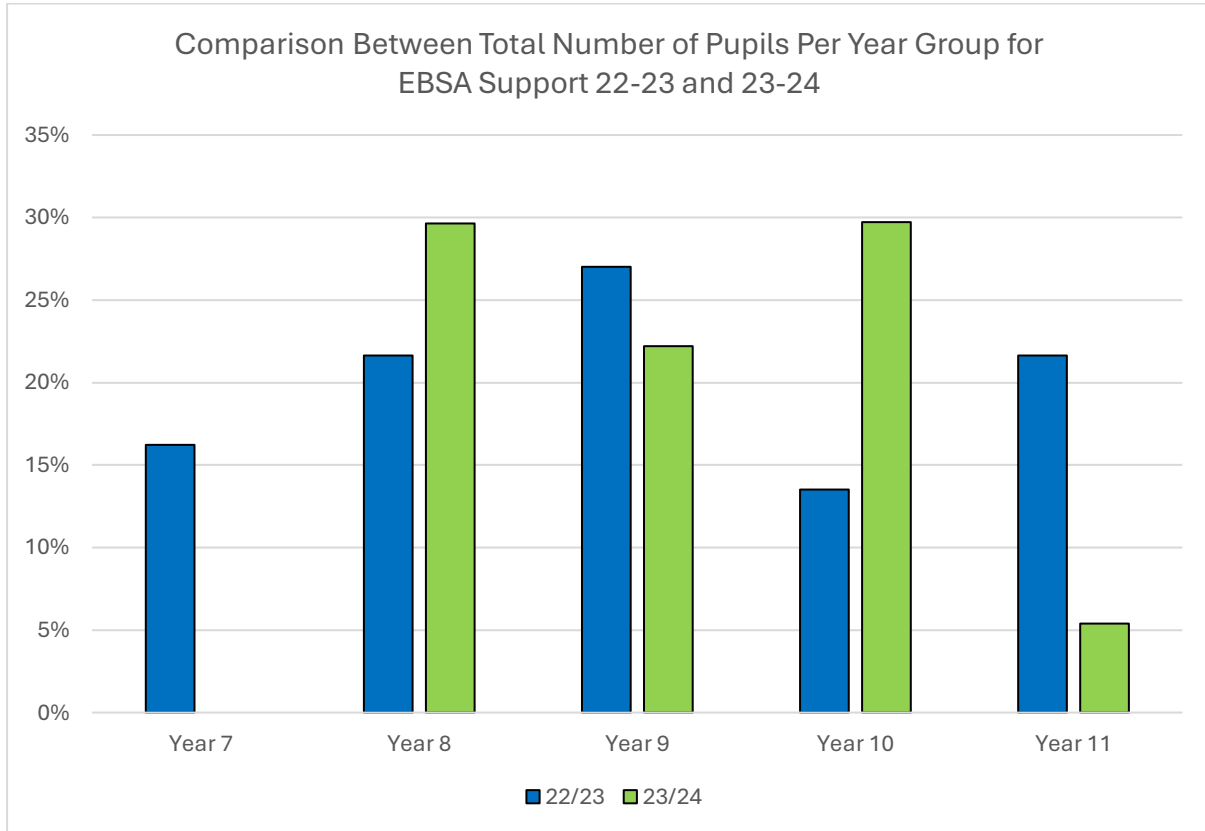


Chart 12

Chart 12 is showing us the difference in the year group the EBSA pupils were referred from. We can see that in the second year, 23-24, no Year 7's were referred. During the 22-23 academic year, there were more pupils in Years 9 and 11 in comparison to the 23-24 academic year. During the 23-24 academic year, there were more pupils in years 8 and 10. A reason for this would be the learners from the Year 7 and Year 9 22-23 cohort progressing up to the next school year, whilst still in need of support.

OUTCOMES

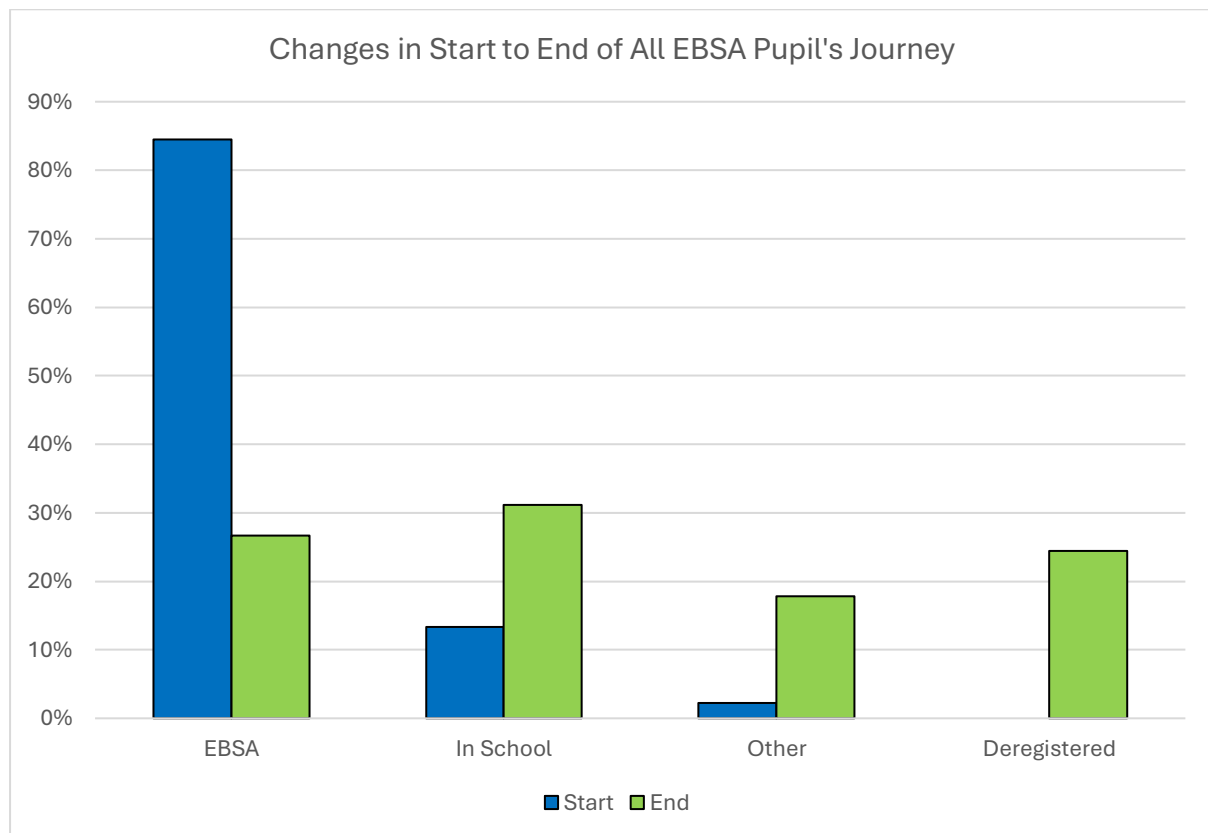


Chart 13

If we look at the EBSA Support as a whole over the two academic years, 45 pupils were referred for the specific support, with 19 being over both years. Of the 45 pupils, 84% were seen as EBSA when first referred; at the end of the support that number reduced to 27%. 13% of the pupils were in school in some form but were showing signs of difficulties, or struggles, or were at risk of non-attending school.

By the end of the support, the number of pupils in school, whether attending Wellbeing, on Phased Returns, Reduced Timetables, or back in class, was 31%. Not all pupils will have the same journey when it comes to education and making a return, 24% of the pupils who were referred deregistered from school. Whilst one learner was already on their journey to a new educational establishment when first referred, the percentage of pupils who took a different route for their education, such as transferring school, attending the Bridge PRU or another Alternative Learning provision rose to 18%.

The results also show us that in total 42% of the pupils moved on to another school or educational provision, or deregistered education altogether. Questions could be asked over what could have been done differently or better for them, if possible.

CHALLENGES

Some of the challenges were predominantly around the development of rapport with the pupil and family. What we found was, that the more we engaged with the child and family, the more often they would turn to us to continue with support even when trying to create a handover and build relationships with the school. This was seen with the pupils seeking us out when they were in school but needed someone to talk to, the child wanting to only meet with us when trying their graduated response and the family only wanting to speak to us when it came to describing any issues that they were having at home.

Occasionally some parents would not respond to messages about arranging home visits, so the consistency of seeing the child would be disrupted. There were also occasions when the pupil would not be present during the visit as they would be sleeping or not want to exit their bedroom. Additional challenges were also seen when trying to complete a graduated response, phased returns and reduced timetables and the parent had work commitments that would not allow the flexibility that is often needed when dropping off and collecting the pupil from school at the agreed times.

It was also difficult to maintain consistency over the duration of the project due to the changes in agreed working hours. When the support began in September 2022, we were working with the school for 25 hours, 1 day of Psychoeducation for LAC and 4 days for EBSA. In March 2023, due to budget cuts, this was reduced to 10 hours for just EBSA. In March 2024, this was further reduced to 6 hours for EBSA support.

As the support has come to an end, a new challenge will be faced by those pupils and families who are still in need of specific and targeted support. The school may also be challenged with finding the staff, capacity and resources to support these children as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Early Identification and Intervention

When the attendance of a child becomes a concern, early identification of patterns in attendance, disengagement and changes in behaviours is needed. Children who are currently attending school may also be facing challenges that if not supported may turn into prolonged absences from school. The sooner support is implemented the better chance for success. Understanding the home dynamics can also help build a picture of the needs and ensure that there is a complete picture in place before passing judgment. Refer to Early Help, with reference to the Youth Emotional Health Team, or Psychology Support. Suggest to parents to go to the GP and seek a CAMHS referral if needed.

Individualised Support Plans

Each pupil and family will need their own support plan. They can be based on a template but need to be individually tailored to the needs. The plans need to be flexible in the approaches, timeframe and development. Making them timebound and causing unnecessary stress if outcomes are not achieved which can lead to disengagement. Ensure that they are pupil-centred and needs-led. If the pupil informs you that they would like to speak with a specific teacher, or not, then those needs should be accommodated if possible. Some of these learners may also be entitled to PSPs and IDPs, as per the ALN Act 2018 (Welsh Gov, 2021). As part of the descriptors of the pupil having a learning difficulty, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are mentioned. Their difficulty in attending is going to have an impact on their learning, regardless of their academic ability. Consider whether the child might be neurodivergent. High levels of masking might have caused emotional distress which in turn is affecting their ability to attend school. They may also be coping in school but struggling when at home. Just because the behaviours are not seen in school, doesn't mean that they don't exist. Regular reviews would be needed to ensure that the plan is being followed and whether any alterations or adjustments are needed.

Emotional Wellbeing

Having suitable designated safe spaces for pupils to access when in need. The Phoenix Wellbeing Centre is doing a great job with the referral and drop-in systems in place. Other spaces can also be considered off individual needs. This can include but is not limited to the Library and even music proactive rooms, which have been incorporated in the past. The safe space is what is safe for the child. Continue to promote the importance of good emotional wellbeing being across the school and provide opportunities for conversations and other emotion-based interventions including ELSA, Thrive and other external interventions. Might be beneficial to create a peer mentoring program where older learners can support younger learners around their emotional health and build it into their Welsh Bacc.

Staff Training and Awareness.

Provide staff with training around EBSA, being trauma-informed, as well as other emotional needs. Whilst it is understandable that teachers already have a lot on their plates with the duties and expectations around attainment, their interactions with pupils can have an effect on the pupil's overall wellbeing. Training may also help staff members in noticing the signs of

need that are obvious, leading to better intervention when needed. It is important to build this into the culture of the school. Whilst training is great for gaining insight and information, it is redundant if not put into practice consistently. All too often, if no changes are seen, practices stop. Even when it comes to school behaviours, if no changes are being seen in those who are in need, what is being done to support them? If nothing, then what can be done differently?

Curriculum

The new Curriculum for Wales has Health and Wellbeing within it. This needs to be strongly utilised to not just raise awareness among pupils around their emotional wellbeing and mental health, but also, "... recognise when and where to seek help and support; to develop awareness of mental health issues and are able to advocate on behalf of others. By learning how to communicate their feelings, learners will be better placed to create a culture where talking about mental health and emotional well-being is normalised." (Welsh Gov, 2022) through appropriate education and support. There are also possibilities here for pupils to develop a growth mindset, GRIT, and improve their motivation and resilience when it comes to challenges that they might be facing and may face. Raising their awareness levels without suitable knowledge of self-regulation or coping strategies can only create more difficulties and challenges for the child. Providing those who need it targeted one-on-one support is also important. There is evidence that young people may get worse after certain mental health interventions (Foulkes, 2024).

It is also important to consider the academic expectations on the child, especially if they are close to doing their GCSEs. When certain GCSE targets are set, but the child has had other challenges around their education, their educational journey has changed, and to be expected to achieve what was once their targets may set them up for future failure and distress. Finding alternatives in their curriculum may be beneficial, especially incorporating a SWEET qualification as an alternative if and when possible or needed. This also goes for utilising vocational opportunities, such as Junior Apprenticeships. An example of how this can be successful can be seen at Brynmawr Foundation School (Wales Online, 2024).

Reintegration and Transition Support

Understand that a child who has been out of school for a period of time will need time to be able to return. Where a graduated response is put in place, there needs to be appropriate support from a safe, key member of staff. When integration is ongoing, incorporating low arousal, low-stress activities and developing their sense of accomplishment, engagement and meaning can help support their overall wellbeing. Even when moving from one member of staff to another, a gradual changeover should happen to not overwhelm to child. If a certain plan is put in place, then that is what needs to be done. Sudden and unexpected changes should never happen, and changes should only take place after a discussion with those involved and agreement on all sides. It's important to build support around the pupil to manage their own needs.

Crisis Management Plans

If a child is still working on their overall wellbeing and needs, then specific protocols in to be put in place in case of emergencies or challenges. This includes putting a failsafe in place in

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case they are not able to do something on a certain day when expected to. This can include going to Wellbeing, their safe space or having some time out to regulate themselves. As much as gentle encouragement might support the child to make forward progress, overwhelming them could have a negative impact on possible future outcomes.



CONCLUSION

Supporting the pupils and families has been a welcome challenge, which has yielded some positive outcomes for certain learners. Some of the learners are still in need of more specific and targeted support, but breakdowns in relationships between home and school have hindered progression towards a return to school. Listening to the needs of the child is imperative when it comes to supporting them, as well as helping them manage their own emotions, behaviours and expectations. Continual conversation with home, listening to what is happening and providing suitable safe spaces to foster stronger relationships can help bridge the gap between home and school. Creating a culture of openness around mental health and wellbeing can aid those to speak up when needing to and provide an environment that is supportive of their needs. This goes for staff and students. This will help develop preventative measures that could lower the need for interventions.

Look at supporting beyond the behaviours and support the child in recognising, understanding and managing their needs so that they can thrive in whatever way they can.



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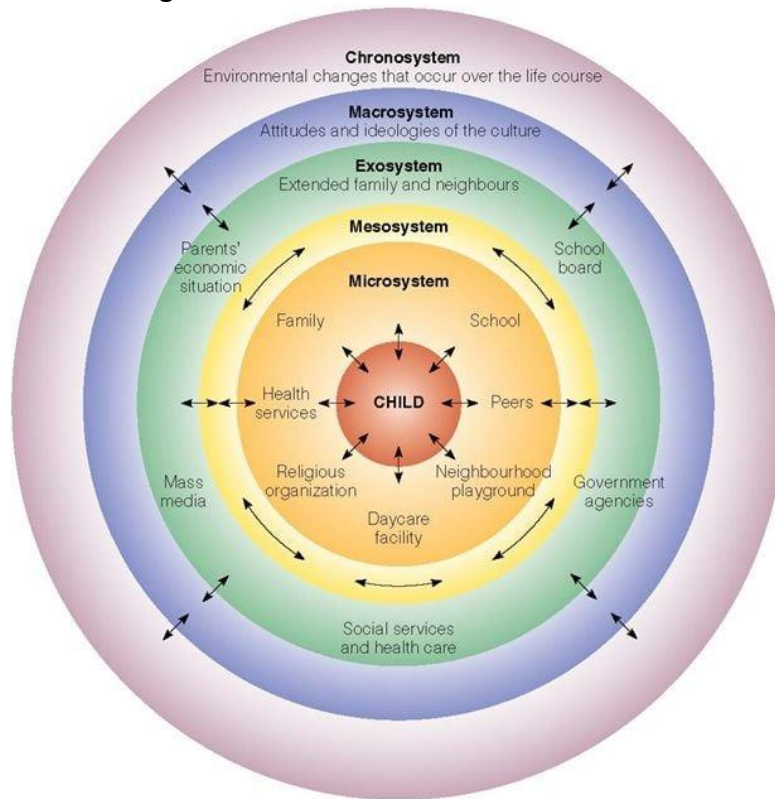
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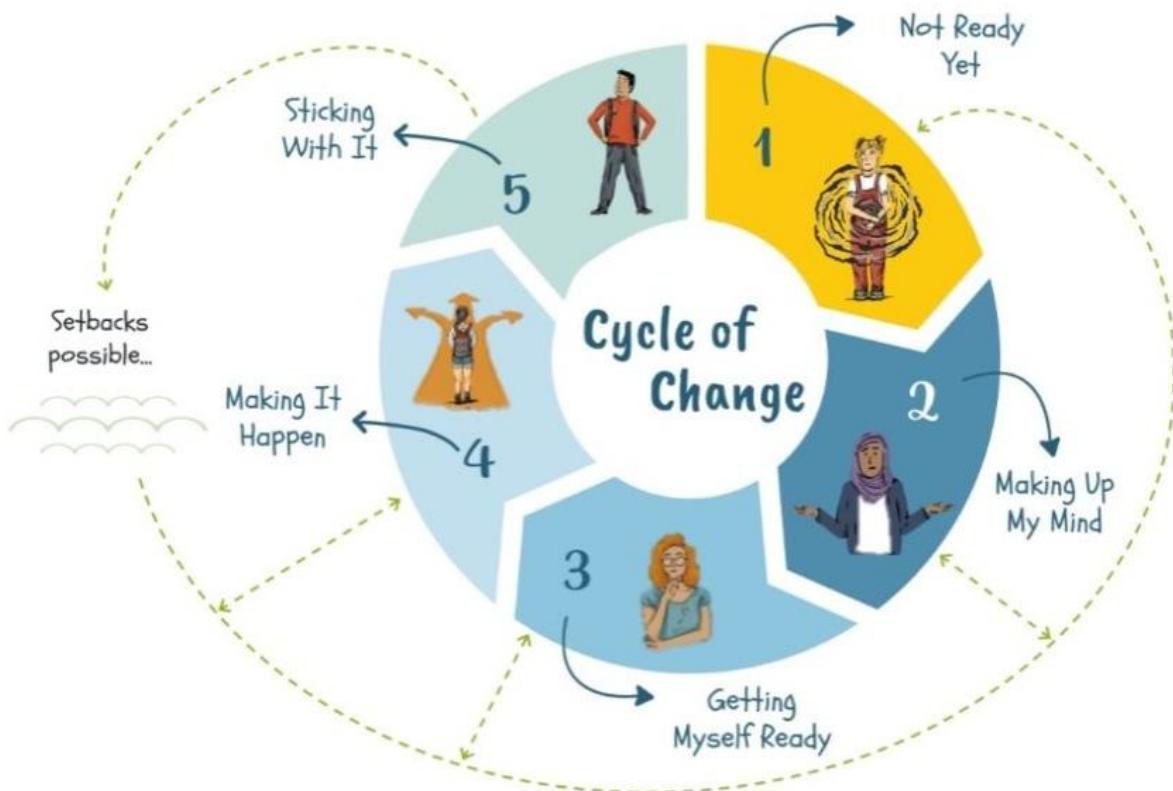
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Appendix:

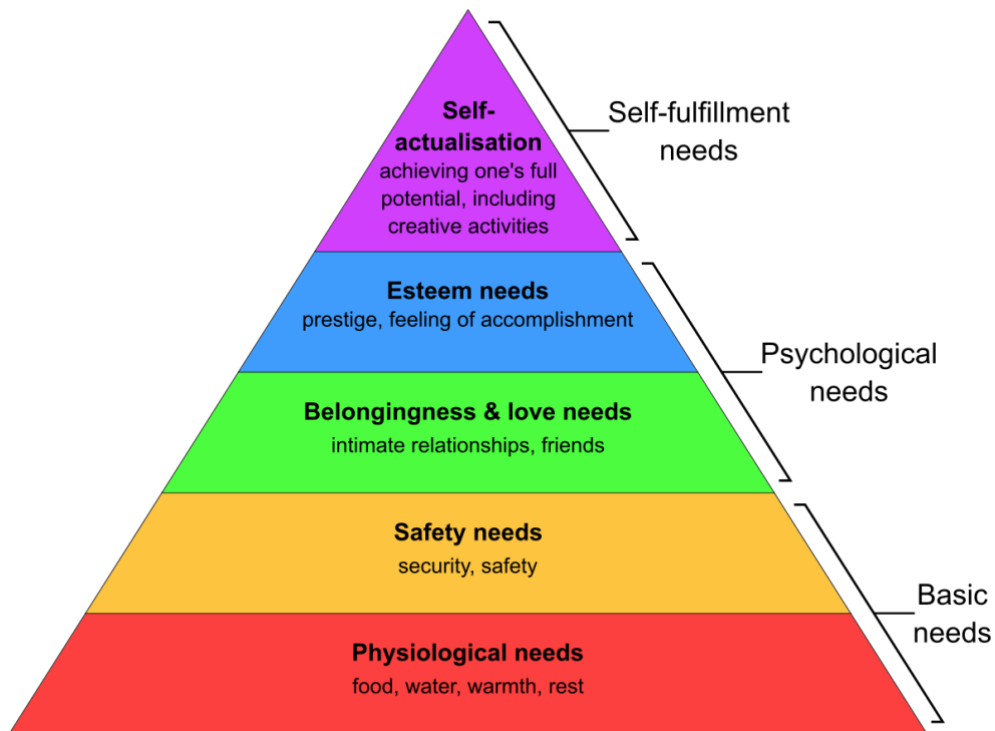
1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



2. Cycle of Change



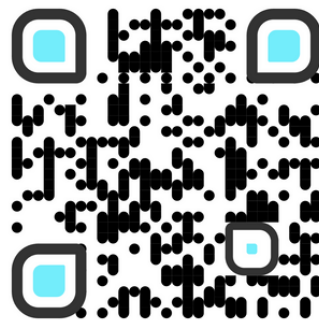
3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs





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