Developing Effective Support Systems for Young People Experiencing Anxiety Based School Avoidance: An Exploratory Study and Good Practice Guidance for Schools

Babcock LDP Educational Psychology Service

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Anxiety Based School Avoidance: Good Practice Guidance for Schools

Contents:

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Summary of Key Findings

A key purpose of this project was to explore the factors associated with the successful inclusion of students displaying anxiety based school avoidance.

Figure One outlines the key findings in relation to this research question.

- **Flexibility of approaches, personalised to individual**
- **Student –centred approach with clear evidence of listening to pupil voice**
- **Realistic plans with small steps**

- **Good Staff Professional Development**
- **Stress Management systems for staff**
- **Supportive colleagues**

- **Genuine inclusive ethos with a desire to include all students and work towards positive outcomes**
- **Holistic view of students and good understanding of the contexts that surround behaviour**
- **Clear justification for external provision**

- **Excellent home - school communication and relationships**
- **Effective Partnership working with other agencies**

- **Feelings of safety and security**
- **Development of trusting relationships with familiar adults**
- **Feeling understood and accepted by teachers and non-teaching staff**
- **A strong sense of belonging to the school**

- **Safe base physically within the school**
- **Development of confidence**
- **Supporting and teaching students to manage emotions**

Figure One: RQ2 Factors

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Background Information

The study described here has been commissioned by Devon County Council and carried out by the Babcock LDP Educational Psychology Service. A group of Educational Psychologists have been involved with the project as part of a wider exploration of anxiety based school avoidance within Devon Local Authority. For any more information regarding this study or the attached resources, please contact tim.cockerill@babcockinternational.com. This report and the resources are also accessible at www.babcock-education.co.uk/ldp/ABSA

Introduction

There are various reasons why students do not attend school or find it hard to attend and it is important to distinguish the different reasons for this. Some students will have low attendance because of illness or truancy, but others can find attending school difficult due to finding this very anxiety provoking. Although there have been several terms used to describe this latter group of students such as school phobia and school refusal, the term used throughout this project is Anxiety Based School Avoidance (ABSA). This is different from truancy and other forms of non-attendance in that a key aspect of the avoidance stems from significant levels of anxiety. Students struggling with ABSA can find it very challenging to attend school and some do not attend at all. Others demonstrate sporadic patterns of attendance and some are able to attend successfully with modified timetables and high levels of support. It is well recognised from previous research that ABSA is caused by a complex number of factors linked to child, family context and school factors.

Although a certain level of anxiety is natural and common, young people who demonstrate ABSA can experience physiological symptoms including difficulty breathing, headaches, nausea and increased heart rate. This can be alongside a range of negative thought patterns which may be specific or more generalised. When anxiety is linked to withdrawal from school, the student can experience severe emotional distress on being faced with attending school; this can be displayed through panic symptoms, crying or complaints of feeling ill. Other behaviours include refusal to leave the house or get ready for school, or reluctance to enter the school on arrival. Some students have specific anxieties around separation from their parent or carer and others have anxieties linked to school, e.g. having to read out in class or seeing certain peers. Kearney and Silberman (1990) provide a four function taxonomy of school avoidance behaviour as either

1. Avoiding fear/anxiety linked to school
2. Avoiding anxiety provoking social situations
3. Reducing separation anxiety/ gaining of attention
4. Providing tangible reinforcement (e.g. autonomy, comfort)

Estimates in the UK literature suggest that between 1 and 2% of school-age pupils are affected, with higher prevalence among secondary school pupils (Elliot, 1999). Similar patterns of school avoidance behaviours are apparent in Australia, America and various European countries (Kearney, 2008).

Research suggests that this group of young people are at greater risk of developing mental health difficulties later in life (King & Bernstein, 2001). The educational consequences of school withdrawal are also significant and often include poor academic progress, which is linked to limiting of career and employment opportunities (Miller, 2008). These students are a vulnerable group and a high level of support is needed to support young people demonstrating ABSA, which can include those who are attending school (often with difficulties) to those who are not attending school. Avoidance of school due to anxiety can reinforce the student's anxiety and reduce feelings of coping and so it is well recognised that early identification and support is vital for this group. It is important to note that supporting an anxious child to be successful in school is likely going to have a positive impact on their resilience and ability to cope with challenges in the future. Lauchlan (2003) reviewed the research and argued that there is no single intervention or approach that should be used. Because the reasons for school avoidance are complex, each student will require a personalised assessment and support plan.

Research aims

The aim of this study was to explore individual cases related to anxiety based school avoidance, triangulating data from young people, parents and school staff to develop a comprehensive account of the relevant factors for each individual. More specifically, a key aim of this project was to identify students who were demonstrating aspects of school avoidance, but were attending school some of the time with support. It was felt that by focusing on this group of students, it would help answer the key research question regarding what factors support students to remain at school.

The following research questions were agreed for this project:

1. What are the factors that lead to school avoidance behaviours?
2. What factors are associated with the successful inclusion of young people who display anxiety based school avoidance?

Methodology and Design

The research incorporated a case study approach whilst also taking into account wider contextual factors and mechanisms that were relevant. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used with school staff, parents and the students. Full informed consent was obtained for each participant and arrangements around confidentiality, anonymity and their right to withdraw were made clear. For student participants, signed parental consent was obtained also.

The student interviews were designed in a way that would reduce levels of anxiety and so different approaches were used, meaning the student did not have to talk in detail if they did not feel comfortable. This involved use of scaling approaches and visual cues. Following the identification of a sense of belonging as an important factor for students, the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) Scale was completed with each student.

Many of the interviews were recorded and transcribed although pupil interviews were not recorded, as it was felt this would exacerbate their anxiety. Transcripts and detailed notes were analysed through a process of thematic analysis and this led to a number of factors being identified and these will be discussed in the findings section below.

Participants

The participants included six members of staff, comprised of senior management (1) and a variety of non-teaching staff (5), some who were responsible for the 'safe' area in the school and others who had a broader pastoral role in the school.

Five parents took part in an interview and four students agreed to be involved. Two of the students were in year 10 and two were in year 11 and three of these were female with one male. All four had been identified as demonstrating school avoidance behaviours linked to anxiety.

Findings

The findings are presented here in the format of the two Research Questions.

RQ1: What are the factors that lead to school avoidance behaviours?

In total, information was gained on this question from all participants, which was a total of 15 individuals. Although the experiences of individuals were unique, student's experiences were often shared at times. The findings in this section highlight the complexity of anxiety based school avoidance as for most, there were no clear or identifiable 'causes', but a complex interlinking mix of factors relating to school, family/home, out of school events and also within-person factors. The factors are presented below under three areas.

Student Factors

- Significant feelings of anxiety, often linked to feeling down and finding it hard to manage overwhelming emotions.
- Physical or hormonal changes as triggers
- Lack of confidence
- Always feeling behind in school work
- Being 'shy', 'quiet' and 'withdrawn' when younger.
- Separation anxiety from parent

Environmental (non-school) Factors

- Bereavement in family members or family friends
- Parental separation
- Environmental challenges, inc. house flooding, house moves
- Traumatic events, e.g. car accident
- Use of Social media as exacerbating anxiety
- Transport to school

School Factors

- Size of school as too big
- A perception that 'being forced' into attending school made the situation much worse and exacerbated the anxiety.
- Some teachers not identifying or understanding the anxiety in the past
- Unresolved falling out with friends at school and bullying
- High levels of pressure and performance-orientated classrooms
- Exams
- Narrowness of curriculum

Transition

With the current sample, no attendance concerns were present at primary school and no difficulties were raised in relation to the transition to secondary school. Three of the students went to a very small primary school and two students reported transitioning into year seven without primary school friends. However, all students reported very positive starts to year seven alongside feelings of enjoyment and happiness and all students and parents outlined there were no problems making new friends.

It is important to note that previous research suggests that transition is very important when considering anxiety-based school avoidance and due to the small sample size of the current study, it is important not to generalise the findings. It does however suggest that for many students experiencing ABSA at secondary school, the transition to secondary school can be very positive and for the parents and students in this sample, a difficult transition was not highlighted as a relevant causal factor in the school avoidance.

RQ2: What factors are associated with the successful inclusion of young people who display anxiety based school avoidance?

It was a central focus of the current project to gain information on the factors that support attendance and inclusion of students who display anxiety-based school avoidance behaviours. This was gained through interviews with staff, pupils and parents and there were high levels of consistency in responses given. These factors are outlined in Figure One below and then explored further with examples given.

> - **Feelings of safety and security**
> - **Development of trusting relationships with familiar adults**
> - **Feeling understood and accepted by teachers and non-teaching staff**
> - **A strong sense of belonging to the school**

Feelings of safety, security and belonging were strong in students and all reported that they had developed a good relationship with at least one member of staff who they could rely on for support. Some of the student's had a 'key worker' who would meet them in the morning to discuss any concerns or talk about the day. Adult support promoted feelings of security and there were lots of examples of adults supporting students flexibly, including in the classroom or transporting between lessons.

"Teachers here are lovely… understanding… I love school, its great" (student)

Another important factor to note is that the students to a large extent felt that all staff were 'understanding' and 'kind' and this was not isolated to the support staff or those more involved with them. They felt that on the whole, communication was good between all staff and teachers were very understanding of anxiety and responded appropriately, e.g. letting students leave the room when needed.

What factors are associated with the successful inclusion of young people who display anxiety based school avoidance?

- **Flexibility of approaches, personalised to individual**
- **Student –centred approach with clear evidence of listening to pupil voice**
- **Realistic plans with small steps**

- **Good Staff Professional Development**
- **Stress Management systems for staff**
- **Supportive colleagues**

- **Genuine inclusive ethos with a desire to include all students and work towards positive outcomes**
- **Holistic view of students and good understanding of the contexts that surround behaviour**
- **Clear justification for external provision**

- **Excellent home - school communication and relationships**
- **Effective Partnership working with other agencies**

- **Feelings of safety and security**
- **Development of trusting relationships with familiar adults**
- **Feeling understood and accepted by teachers and non-teaching staff**
- **A strong sense of belonging to the school**

- **Safe base physically within the school**
- **Development of confidence**
- **Supporting and teaching students to manage emotions**

Figure One: RQ2 Factors

PSSM analysis

The Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) Scale was carried out with the four students and this is a measure of a student's sense of belonging to their school. Scores range on a scale from one to five, where a higher number suggests a stronger sense of belonging. Generally speaking, scores above three indicate a good sense of belonging and below three suggests possible difficulties in this area, although it is important to note where on the scale the score falls.

	PSSM Score	Classification
Student A	**4.4**	**Strong sense of belonging.**
Student B	**4.4**	**Strong sense of belonging.**
Student C	**3.8**	**Good sense of belonging**
Student D	**2.8**	**Possible Concerns in relation to sense of belonging**

Students A-C demonstrated a good or strong sense of belonging and this was characterised by feeling accepted by staff and peers and not being rejected due to their difficulties. This clearly reflected the themes from the interviews, including the staff being very welcoming, friendly and understanding. Each of these students felt like they were valued, respected and reported that people noticed when they were good at something. During the student interviews, it was clear that from their perspective, these factors were essential to them being successful at the school. Student D scored a slightly lower score on the sense of belonging scale, although his perception of staff was also of them being friendly and welcoming. This student scored at a lower level due to not feeling included in normal school activities and due to some perceived difficulties with peer relationships/peer acceptance. This was likely reflected by the personalised timetable in place for the student, which would have provided limited opportunities for peer interactions and engagement in school activities. This student described himself as confident and talkative at home but wanting to be invisible at school. Research into school belonging would predict that Student D would be at higher risk of school disengagement due to the lower level of school belonging. Of the students involved, it was clear that this individual was finding attendance at school very difficult at times and success was reported to be quite tentative.

"Sometimes I get teachers getting frustrated and coming to me to say they have just seen the student sitting in the [safe area] talking to staff instead of working. They ask me what is going on and I say that I'm really pleased you have said they are talking because that means they are having a conversation and building a relationship and trust… that's why they are there" (Senior Management)

- **Flexibility of approaches, personalised to individual**
- **Student –centred approach with clear evidence of listening to pupil voice**
- **Realistic plans with small steps**

Another strong factor was the level of personalisation and planning that had gone into developing the student's timetable. There was clear evidence of listening and valuing the pupil's perspective and prioritising individual need over system processes at times. One important factor raised by students, staff and the parents was understanding the need to be realistic and build success slowly over time, rather than setting up a high expectation of reintegration for example. Each student's timetable was personalised to a high extent and there were various examples where bespoke modifications were made based on student need.

"I can go home whenever I need to - sometimes I go for an hour and then come back. They understand that I need this as an option; they know I want to be at school and wouldn't leave unless I had to. It's about trust" (Student)

"I can go to her office whenever and it's ok… even just for 5 minutes and then I feel ok to go to class" (Student)

"it is important to not make assumptions and listen most to the person it's most affecting and we have made the mistake in the past of assuming rather than listening to the student.. it's a priority" (Staff)

- **Safe base physically within the school**
- **Development of confidence**

Having a safe base within the school was extremely important to the students when they talked about their experiences. They talked about the 'safe' area as being 'welcoming', 'quiet' and 'accepting' and some students reported that without this area, they would not be in school at all. This was partly about the staff in the centre, but also the nature of this area was described as '*relaxing*' and '*less pressured*' than other aspects of the school, which allowed students to develop their confidence at their own pace.

'[Student] wouldn't be here without the [safe area]. Staff have been brilliant and supportive, helped more than anyone else… including CAMHS and private psychologists' (Parent)

- **Excellent home - school communication and relationships**
- **Effective Partnership working with other agencies**

All parents involved in the study spoke very strongly of the relationships and communication they had with school staff. For some parents, staff had been a '*lifeline for both me and [student]*' and daily communication with a familiar member of staff was common, which would have been hugely supportive in supporting the pupil. There were other examples of parental support such as parents being offered counselling, although it was also recognised that this was an area where support could be extended:

"It would be great to have someone with more time to work with parents, like a parent support worker" (Staff)

"We could do with someone with the flexibility to get out to the home, that would make a huge difference in some situations" (Staff)

It was also a theme of this research that for support to be most beneficial, school staff needed to work closely with other agencies such as social care and CAMHS where appropriate. Examples were given of this happening, to varying degrees of success but on the whole, staff felt there were good working relationships with other agencies and one parent highlighted that communication between school staff and CAMHS was good and this made things easier for the student.

- **Supporting and teaching students to manage emotions**

Some but not all of the students talked about learning to manage feelings and some spoke about strategies learnt during therapy. Many of the staff and also parents identified that the student's often found it hard to understand or manage their emotions. One parent reported that her child '*can't tell the difference between thoughts and feeling and doesn't know what she's feeling'.* Although there was some evidence of students learning to manage emotions within the school, staff highlighted this as a possible area of development and some felt a lack of professional expertise in this role, instead feeling that this was the responsibility of health services such as CAMHS.

- **Genuine inclusive ethos with a desire to include all students and work towards positive outcomes**
- **Holistic view of students and good understanding of the contexts that surround behaviour**
- **Very clear justification and reasons for using external provision**

Staff interviewed showed a genuinely positive, nurturing and inclusive ethos, including staff at all levels from support staff to senior management. There was consistent recognition of the importance of the child in a wider context and attitudes towards students were caring with a desire shown to support them in the best way possible. Discussions highlighted that use of external provision was used as a last resort and when used, school seemed to retain

ownership of students if they remained on roll, rather than seeing alternative provisions as a separate system. There was also evidence of good communication, partnership working and joint planning between the school and local alternative provision. Staff described a clear system for identification and supporting students facing challenges or not making progress. This was a whole-school system which encompassed social, emotional as well as academic concerns. There was a clear recognition of the links between these areas and there were examples where emotional wellbeing was prioritised at a whole school level and in some circumstances, this was given priority over academic tasks.

"It's my job to be there and fight for the kid, asking have we tried everything, what else can we do…. We need to look at the long term outcomes, go through what's going to happen to that kid in the future. The chances of education going down the pan is likely as well as other negative outcomes. Is there something else we can do…"
(Staff)

- **Good Staff Professional Development**
- **Stress Management systems for staff**
- **Supportive colleagues**

There was recognition from staff at all levels that training and professional development were an important part of supporting students well. There were examples of external training courses that staff had been attending on mental health and also staff had made use of in-school training/briefings where pastoral staff gave mental health awareness training to teaching staff. There was also recognition however that the impact of staff attending training events was not always clear:

'I think it's more about working alongside staff, rather than just going to a training day… you go out and get loads of stuff thrown at you but I'm not sure about the impact' (Staff)

Other members of staff also felt that more training was needed, but also indicated the importance of having a professional or a specialist to discuss concerns with if needed.

'I think there is more flexibility for training needed... self- harm… how to respond to suicidal thoughts and how to help management of anxieties… I feel out of my depth at times… it would be great to have a mental health professional in the school…' (Staff)

Linked to supporting staff in relation to their professional development was the theme of supporting staff in relation to stress management. One member of staff reported:

"We rely hugely on support staff … and we should be offering supervision for staff as we don't get any supervision. We are dealing with the social side of things a lot more and I worry about some of the staff working closely with some really challenging situations"

Other members of staff highlighted that it was important to work in a school where other staff members were understanding and supportive of each other and there were many examples of staff acting as support for each other. At other times however, there was recognition that this was not formalised and some felt there was often not enough time or space to give this the priority it needs.

Barriers to success

As well as the wide range of factors outlined above that support students, some factors were also identified that participants felt were barriers to success. There were very few of these, which was somewhat surprising as the question was asked directly to participants. This reaffirms how positive both students and parents were regarding the support offered by the school. The barriers identified were as follows:

- Late identification of need
- Misunderstanding of need and approaches used (authoritarian) - Staff not 'getting it', leading to a loss of trust which needed to be rebuilt slowly
- Pressures around exams and next steps
- The student receiving attention from teachers due to absences, making the anxiety and situation worse

Conclusions

The findings of this research project raise a number of important considerations when supporting students displaying school avoidance behaviour. The research has highlighted the complexity of reasons that surround school avoidance and this is in line with previous research on the topic. A main focus of the current study has been to explore how best to support pupils struggling with school avoidance and a wide range of important factors have been found. These factors have been combined with others found in research to develop a set of materials that can act as Good Practice Guidance. This is presented below and consists of the following:

- Appendix A: A tool to support the identification of students at risk of school avoidance which aims to identify students at an early stage to stop difficulties escalating or becoming entrenched.
- Appendix B: Developing a plan for a student avoiding school – what to consider
- Appendix C: Self-Audit tool for schools re. School avoidance Good Practice.
- Appendix D: Advice for Teachers: what works and what to avoid

Appendix A

Identification of Students at risk of Anxiety-based School Avoidance

There is a complex pattern of causes that surround school avoidance behaviour and each student will have a unique situation where support will need to be personalised. The research however indicates a number of interlinking factors that are common causes and from this, it has been possible to develop a set of statements that when looked at overall, may support thinking in relation to how at risk a student may be of school avoidance. To use this tool, look at the statements and identify whether the student is 'never', 'sometimes' or 'often' for each. High numbers of responses in the sometimes and often columns indicate a higher risk of anxiety based school avoidance.

Has the student…	Never	Sometimes	Often
Attendance			
Demonstrated a reluctance to leave the house in the mornings			
Been late for school			
Missed lessons or truanting			
Been absent for parts of the day			
Been absent for whole days			
Patterns of Work			
Appeared disengaged and or not confident with learning tasks			
Showed reluctance to contribute to class discussions			
Failed to produce homework			
Made limited progress			
Been identified as having learning difficulties			
Peer Relationships			
Fallen out with friends			
Shown poor social communication skills			
Been bullied			
Appeared isolated			
Avoided interactions with peers			
Adult Relationships			
Been unwilling to talk to adults about a problem			
Shown reluctance to engage with teacher support			
Spoken negatively about teachers in the school			
Shown a perception that they dislike most staff			
Had confrontations with school staff			
School Belonging			
A reluctance to engage with school activities			
Distanced themselves from school activities			
Expressed that they do not like school			
Reluctance to attend school trips			

Personal			
Appeared to have low confidence			
Demonstrated a low self-esteem			
Been shy, quiet or passive			
Seemed withdrawn or shown feelings of low mood			
Appeared anxious, tearful or tense			
Demonstrated aggressive outbursts			
Demonstrated obsessive behaviours (e.g. overly tidy, having set routines)			

Physical			
Had a serious illness or have a medical condition			
Complained of sickness			
Complained of headaches			
Had rapid weight gain or loss			
Had changes in eating habits			
Shown physical symptoms of anxiety (e.g. sweating, fast heart rate)			

Environmental			
Had a major transition			
Attended a small primary school			
Had a deterioration in family relationships			
Had family members avoiding school			
Illness or bereavement of friend/family member			
Been exposed to domestic violence			
Shown separation anxiety			
Been the victim of abuse			
Had a change to home circumstances			

Appendix B

Developing a plan for a student displaying anxiety based school avoidance behaviours: what to consider

When a student is identified as being 'at risk' of school avoidance or is displaying anxiety based school avoidance behaviours, it will be essential that a comprehensive plan is developed. This will need to involve key members of staff alongside parents/carers and other agencies as appropriate. In order to develop the most personalised plan, below are a number of factors that could be considered at this stage. Listening to the views of the student will be crucial when developing a support plan.

Background information
- Gather information about the child's educational history. Have there been similar issues apparent before? If so, what triggered these and what helped?
- The child's developmental history: are there any relevant health, medical, sensory or social factors that need to be considered?
- Is there a pattern to attendance difficulties? When does the student attend more and what is it about those times that make it more successful? Are they avoiding something specific?
- What is going well and what aspects of school does the student enjoy?
- Review the student's progress in learning and consider possible learning difficulties

Relationships and Belonging
- Discuss the student's friendships group with those involved – historically and currently, highlighting any changes if there are any. Is there evidence of isolation or rejection?
- Gain the student's perspective on whether they feel that they belong and fit in at school.
- Does the student have an adult in school that they can talk to if needed?
- Do they trust and like their teachers, who is their favourite teacher? Why?

Environmental Factors
- What are people's understandings of why the student is demonstrating these behaviours?
- If the student is feeling anxious, where might this be coming from?
- Have there been any adverse family experiences? Consider using the tool 'Identifying students at risk of ABSA' in this pack to explore underlying factors that may be significant.
- What does the student do when they are absent from school? Is avoidance of school reinforcing their anxiety?

Planning support
- Considering the views of all involved and the information gathered from the questions above, what is the next small step for the student, being realistic and achievable? Remember not to create plans that are unrealistic.
- If a reduced timetable is being used, what is also being done alongside this to support the student in managing their anxiety and to enhance coping skills?
- Are there difficulties leaving the house? If so, what is the morning routine and what may help?
- Is there a need for parent/carer support and how can this be coordinated and delivered?
- Does the student need support in any specific areas of understanding or managing emotions?
- Is it appropriate to involve any external support agencies?
- Consider how to increase sense of school belonging and maintain access to school activities
- In the classroom, where is the student most comfortable sitting? Does support moving between classes need consideration?
- Are there particular aspects of class that the student finds hard (e.g. reading aloud, being chosen to answer questions).

Appendix C: Good Practice when Supporting Students Displaying School Avoidance: Self-Audit Tool

	Provision currently available	In need of development ?	Next Steps/Actions
Whole-School Level			
Systems in place for the early identification of school avoidance behaviours			
Clear and consistent bullying and behaviour policies			
Is there a nominated senior member of staff responsible for the coordination and support of students in this group			
Clear and appropriate attendance policy that takes into account the nature of school avoidance			
Excellent transition arrangements for vulnerable, 'shy' students or those with risk factors of school avoidance. Support should include work with parents, staff and development of peer and adult relationships			
Social, emotional skills embedded in the curriculum			
Staff have a holistic view of students and are accepting and inclusive towards those experiencing challenges.			
Training and CPD for Staff			
Whole school awareness of key ideas surrounding mental health / anxiety / School avoidance			

More in-depth training for adults working closely with this group of students			
For specific staff, use of evidence based training models that involve a continual process of learning, application and reflection as well as attendance at events			
Professional supervision (individual or group) for specific adults supporting students in this group			
Clear protocols regarding emotional support and stress management for staff, e.g. following a disclosure or difficult situation.			
Staff given time and space to share good practice and share concerns with each other			
Supporting Parents and Carers			
A recognition that partnership working with parents is essential and needs to be prioritised.			
Ways of supporting parents to understand and manage their child's anxiety			
Identification of a key worker for the parent who can be main point of regular contact			
Flexibility for staff to do home visits when needed			
Use of programmes specifically designed to support parents in understanding their child's anxiety.			
Written materials and resources offered to parents that focus on specifically on supporting their child			

Identification and Planning			
The initiation of a problem-solving/action plan meeting rapidly following identification of student displaying ABSA			
Student views are obtained as a priority			
Parental views are heard and valued			
Thorough assessment to analyse behaviour and develop an understanding of what is causing anxieties.			
Personalised plan developed that is comprehensive and considers factors outlined in Appendix B of this resource.			
Clear review processes with key people involved in the support plan.			
All of the student's teachers made aware of pupil's circumstances and relevant aspects of the plan.			
Features of Support			
Flexibility of support, e.g. modification of environment, timetable and curriculum where necessary			
Investigation of any issues (e.g. bullying) happens quickly and effectively.			
Student is allocated a Key Worker(s) and they can 'check in' when needed.			

Allocation of a 'safe' space which is appropriate and staffed.			
Appropriate liaison and referral to external agencies, e.g. CAMHS, EPS, BST, Social Care and Education Welfare Service.			
Good partnership working arrangements with local alternative provision, ensuring coordination and joint planning, ensuring all within-school measures have been tried.			
Supporting Social, Emotional and Mental Health			
Use of social relationship interventions – e.g. Circle of Friends, buddy systems, structured provision to develop friendships.			
Access to available services that offer counselling or therapeutic support.			
Staff that can develop and deliver structured programmes of therapeutic support based on certain approaches, e.g. cognitive-behavioural approaches/ mindfulness.			
Regular links with external agencies who can train and provide guidance and supervision regarding therapeutic support offered.			
A wide range of resources and tools that can be used alongside curriculum content to support students understand and manage their anxieties.			

Appendix D

Advice for teachers when supporting a student showing anxiety based school avoidance

When teaching a student in your class who has demonstrated anxiety based school avoidance, a key step is to talk to the member(s) of staff who know the student best, which is often a member of support or pastoral staff. Each student is different and so it will be important to look at the individual's personalised plan carefully and understand what it is they find difficult and what helps them. If you have any queries, seek advice from those members of staff responsible for the plan.

Although approaches will need to be personalised to the individual, below is a list of more general strategies and things to think about that may help to support a student with anxiety based school avoidance in your class.

- Calm and positive approaches are often best, avoiding confrontation and power battles.
- Authoritarian management styles often can increase anxiety and so attempt techniques that focus on establishing a positive relationship with the student.
- Prepare work for students when not in lesson and be sure to mark and return this as it shows it is being valued.
- Be welcoming and accepting and reassure the student (at an appropriate time) that they will not have to catch up on all the work missed through absence.
- Ensure a sense of normality and consistency, avoid asking where the child has been.
- Performance-orientated classrooms can increase anxiety by creating a sense of pressure and expectation. Be aware of this and notice how the student may be feeling.
- If the student has been absent, it may be appropriate to talk to the class and tell all pupils not to ask the student where they have been. However, check with the person coordinating the support plan before doing this and someone should gain the student's view on this.
- Be aware of signs of anxiety and be flexible to respond to this. Talk to the young person about a plan if necessary, e.g. 5-minute time-out or seating arrangements.
- Consider a buddy system if appropriate and pair with a suitable student in any group situation.
- Use praise and reward but not excessively
- Work needs to be achievable and delivered at an appropriate level. Anxiety can have a dramatic impact on performance and the student's attention and speed of work may be affected. This often needs to be taken into consideration.

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May 2016