Absence, engagement, and the mass exodus from schools

Staffordshire County Council

Salford City Council

WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST

Wiltshire Council

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PRINCIPAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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Why are we talking about this?

Persistent absence rates hit 22.3% for academic year 22-23 (DfE data indicates this has doubled since the pandemic)
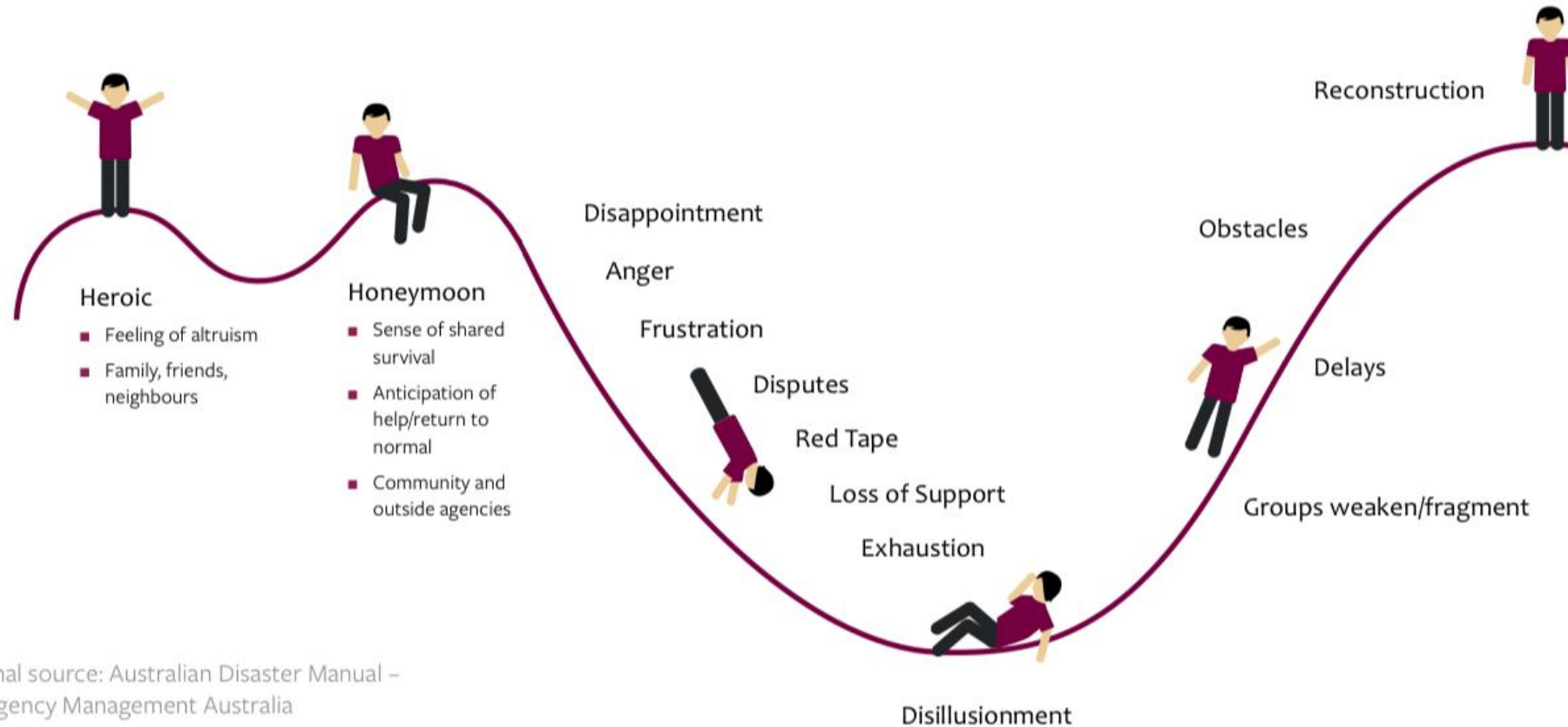
Persistent absence in secondary schools for this period was at 28.3%

37.9% of disadvantaged pupils persistently absent

Local authorities are reporting dramatic rise in young people struggling to attend for reasons of emotional wellbeing/mental health

Young people with ND, Mental Health needs, or SEND are disproportionately vulnerable.

How did we get here?

Heroic
- Feeling of altruism
- Family, friends, neighbours

Honeymoon
- Sense of shared survival
- Anticipation of help/return to normal
- Community and outside agencies

Disappointment

Anger

Frustration

Disputes

Red Tape

Loss of Support

Exhaustion

Disillusionment

Obstacles

Delays

Groups weaken/fragment

Reconstruction

Original source: Australian Disaster Manual – Emergency Management Australia

From: Global Disaster Preparedness Centre (2015) Leading in Disaster Recovery: a Companion Through the Chaos

How did we get here?

Covid context

An increasingly narrow curriculum

Rigid approaches to behaviour and inclusion

Teacher Stress

The rise of Mental Health needs in the school population

Breakdown of home-school relationship/contract

We might have expected recovery, but the data isn't showing this.
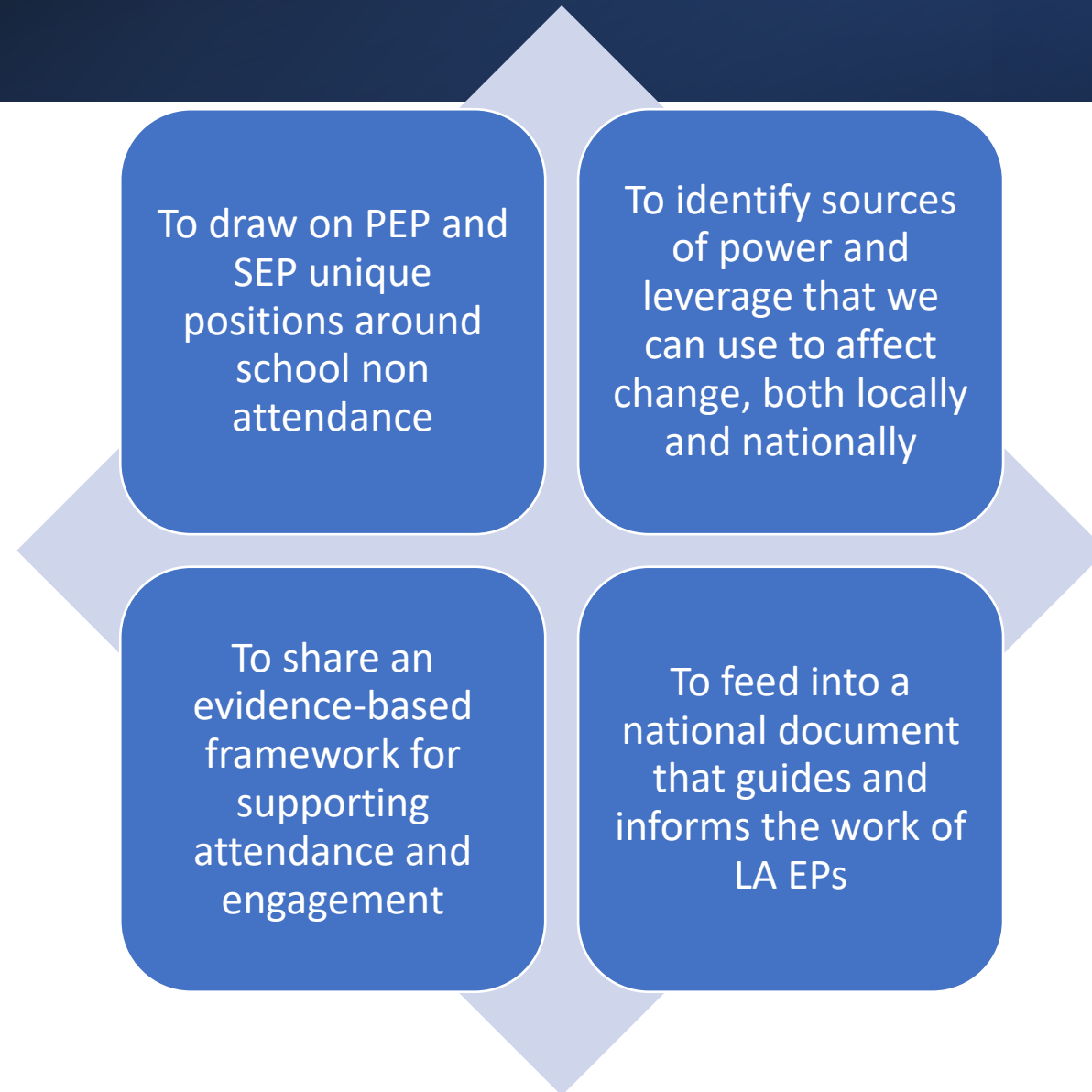
The DfE response

Working together to improve school attendance

Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities

The DfE response

- Improving attendance needs to be a key feature of all frontline council services that work with children and families, but especially services that focus on education or safeguarding or promoting the welfare of children including, early help, statutory social care, and the Virtual School.

- A senior attendance champion on SLT

- Put formal support in place – attendance contracts and education supervision orders and issue Notice to Improve and or penalty notice where support is not appropriate, not successful or not engaged with

- Additional support for children absent because of ill health and/or SEND

- Woking in partnership with families to remove barriers to attendance

The purpose of this session

To draw on PEP and SEP unique positions around school non attendance

To identify sources of power and leverage that we can use to affect change, both locally and nationally

To share an evidence-based framework for supporting attendance and engagement

To feed into a national document that guides and informs the work of LA EPs

Sharing good practice

Activity 1: what is going well?

Think about the work in your local area. What activity is happening under the following broad headings?

- Wellbeing
- Affirmative Practice
- Relational Approaches
- Mutual understanding and partnership working
- Timely Response to need
- Holistic Support for Young People

Barriers to Education

An Evidence Based Approach

OVERVIEW

- We started this project as a way to find a solution to a gap we were experiencing in our work with children and families, as the current guidance did not appear to be meeting their needs (entrenched/ extended non-attendance and primarily neurodivergent young people).

- Overtime there has been a growing parent/ carer voice (online, books), new academic research and increased media interest; attendance is currently a top priority for the DfE (and therefore schools).

- We recognise the complexities and competing demands this raises, and the reduced funding/ capacity within education and public sector services currently.

- Our aim is to collaboratively build a toolkit that is supportive for families, schools and services that is aspirational and practical .

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Evolving terminology

Many terms associated with low attendance, e.g.:

- EBSA, EBBSA, EBSNA, EBSR

- School refusal

- School phobia

- Truancy

- Separation anxiety
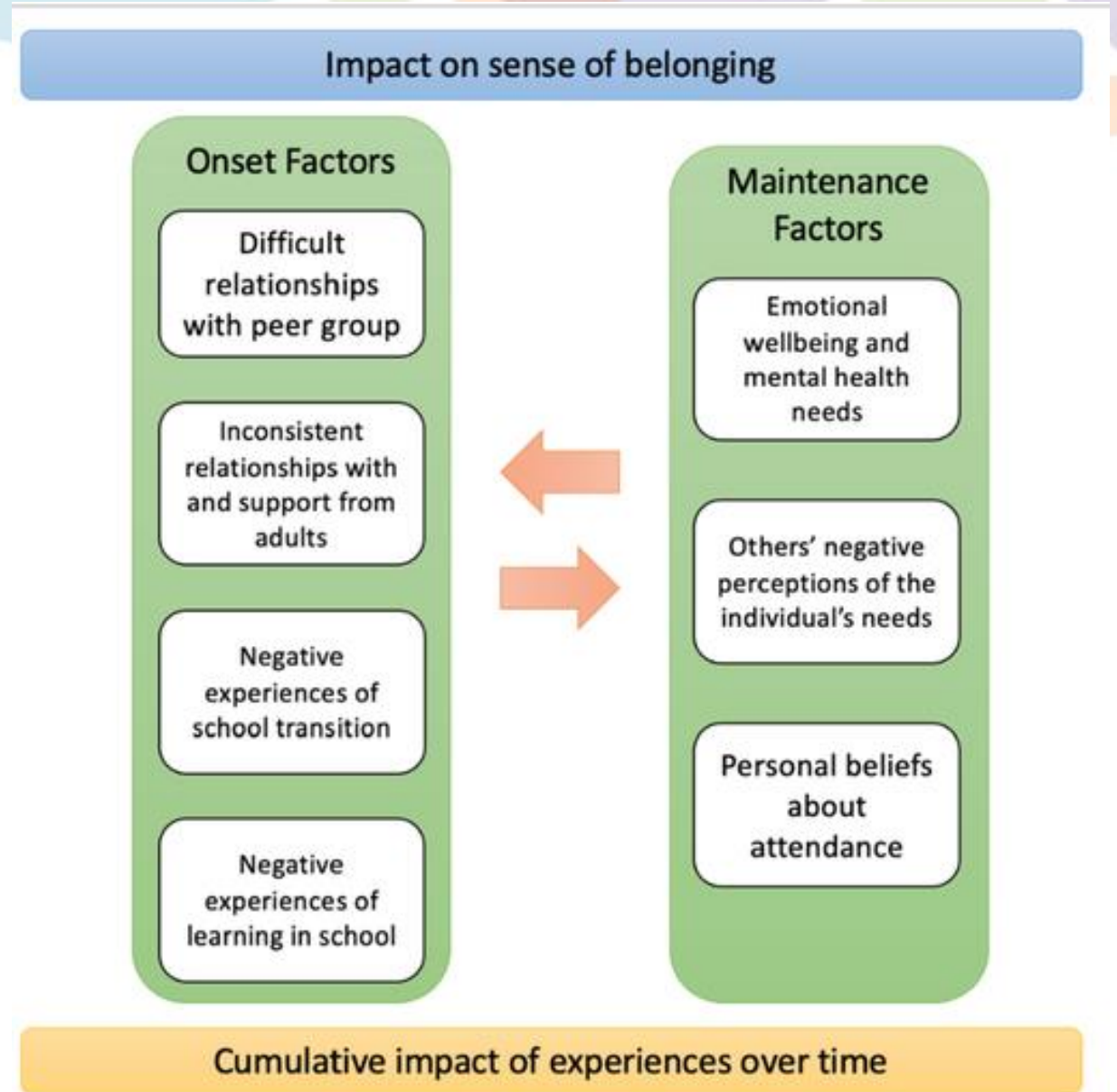
- Persistent / severe absenteeism

Greater Manchester project to radically re-write the EBSA Guidance:

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

[Barriers to Education (padlet.com)](padlet.com)

Children tell us important information and try solve their problems through their behaviour → we need to listen.

- Young people describe their non-attendance as a logical and understandable response to the situation.

- They want to be at school and have tried hard to be, but without changes to the environment it becomes too hard → not going to school is a last resort.

- Difficulties tend to start gradually and help early on, as soon as issues are raised, is important.

- Their wellbeing is impacted by not going to school.

Impact on sense of belonging

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

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

Cumulative impact of experiences over time

Young people's experiences of extended school non-attendance (Corcoran & Kelly, 2022)

HOLISTIC

Attendance has always been a symptom rather than a cause, a manifestation of complex issues across the education system and beyond. This research covers many of these issues; from teacher retention and recruitment to healthcare provision, from mental health to poverty, parents have sought to highlight the interconnected nature of the challenges they experience.
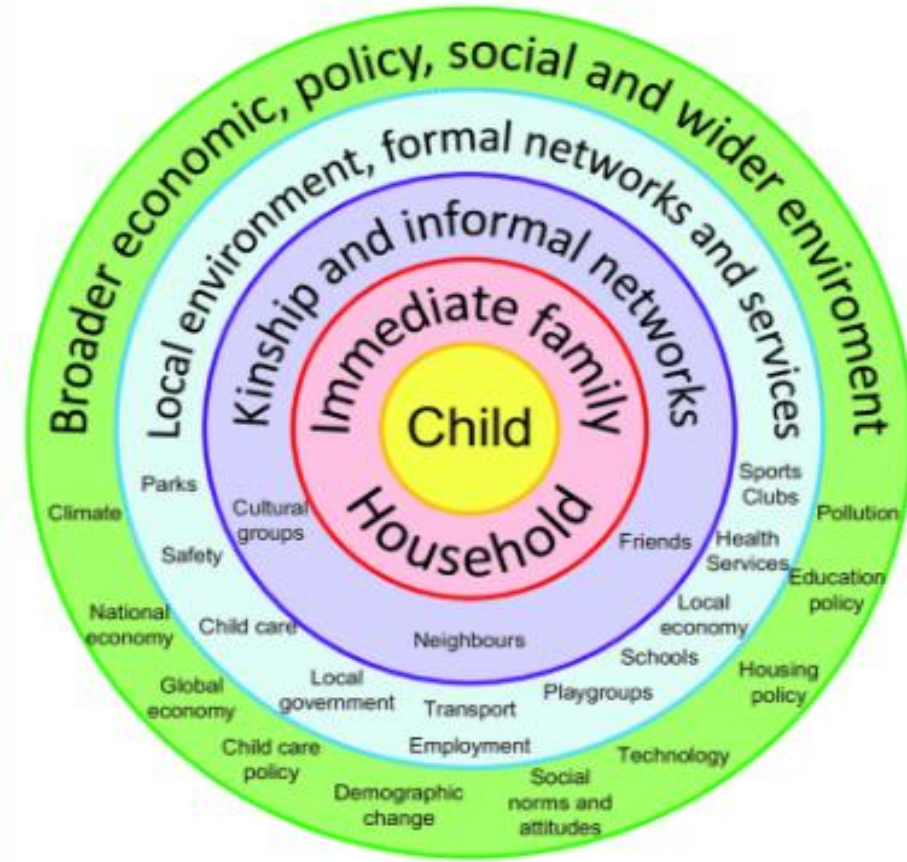
4. Better joined up working and signposting to the appropriate agencies would ensure that those best placed to offer support were doing so.

Schools are often blamed by parents for failures in other areas of the system, including CAMHS, the NHS, housing support and the welfare system. Better join up between these different agencies to holistically address the wider challenges that impact attendance would enable schools to focus on providing the educational support they have expertise in.

Burtonshaw & Dorrell (2023) - Listening to, and learning from, parents in the attendance crisis

ATTENDANCE DRIVERS ARE INTERSECTIONAL

(IMPACTED EVALUATION, 2024)

Ofsted (2022) – school leaders who have improved attendance have seldom focused on attendance in isolation

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Understanding Attendance:
Findings on the drivers of pupil absence from over 30,000 young people in England

IMPACTED EVALUATION

BELONGING

. **Sense of school belonging** is a key driver of attendance across all contexts. This may be particularly important for females and is closely linked with **feeling safe** at school.

Y7-Y8

Challenge of a '**second transition**' from Year 7 to Year 8 is particularly pronounced for Pupil Premium pupils with SEND. **Sense of belonging** appears to be particularly associated with likelihood of attendance for Year 8 pupils.
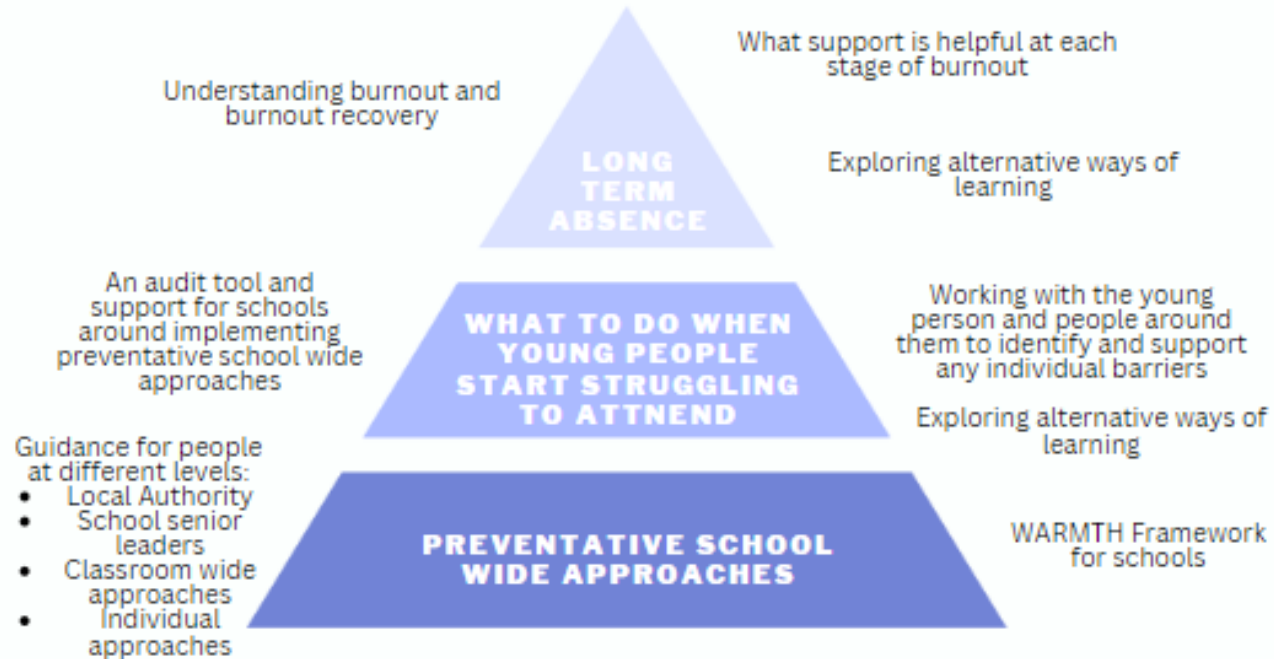
INTERSECTIONAL

Attendance drivers are intersectional. School leaders should avoid considering demographic factors in isolation. Female pupils who are eligible for Pupil Premium and have a special educational need are particularly likely to be low attending.

RELATIONSHIPS

Awareness of sanctions and consequences isn't strongly linked to improved attendance. **Understanding of the importance of school** and **relationships with peers and teachers** were more strongly associated with attendance.

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New GM-led Guidance

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION WEBSITE

What support is helpful at each stage of burnout

Understanding burnout and burnout recovery

LONG TERM ABSENCE

Exploring alternative ways of learning

An audit tool and support for schools around implementing preventative school wide approaches

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE START STRUGGLING TO ATTNEND

Working with the young person and people around them to identify and support any individual barriers

Exploring alternative ways of learning

Guidance for people at different levels:
- Local Authority
- School senior leaders
- Classroom wide approaches
- Individual approaches

PREVENTATIVE SCHOOL WIDE APPROACHES

WARMTH Framework for schools

Website features:

The website will give different information depending on your remit so it isn't too overwhelming

Accompanying handouts to share with parents/ services/ supporting professionals

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

- **W** Wellbeing First
- **A** Affirming Practice
- **R** Relational Approach
- **M** Mutual Understanding & Partnership
- **T** Timely Response
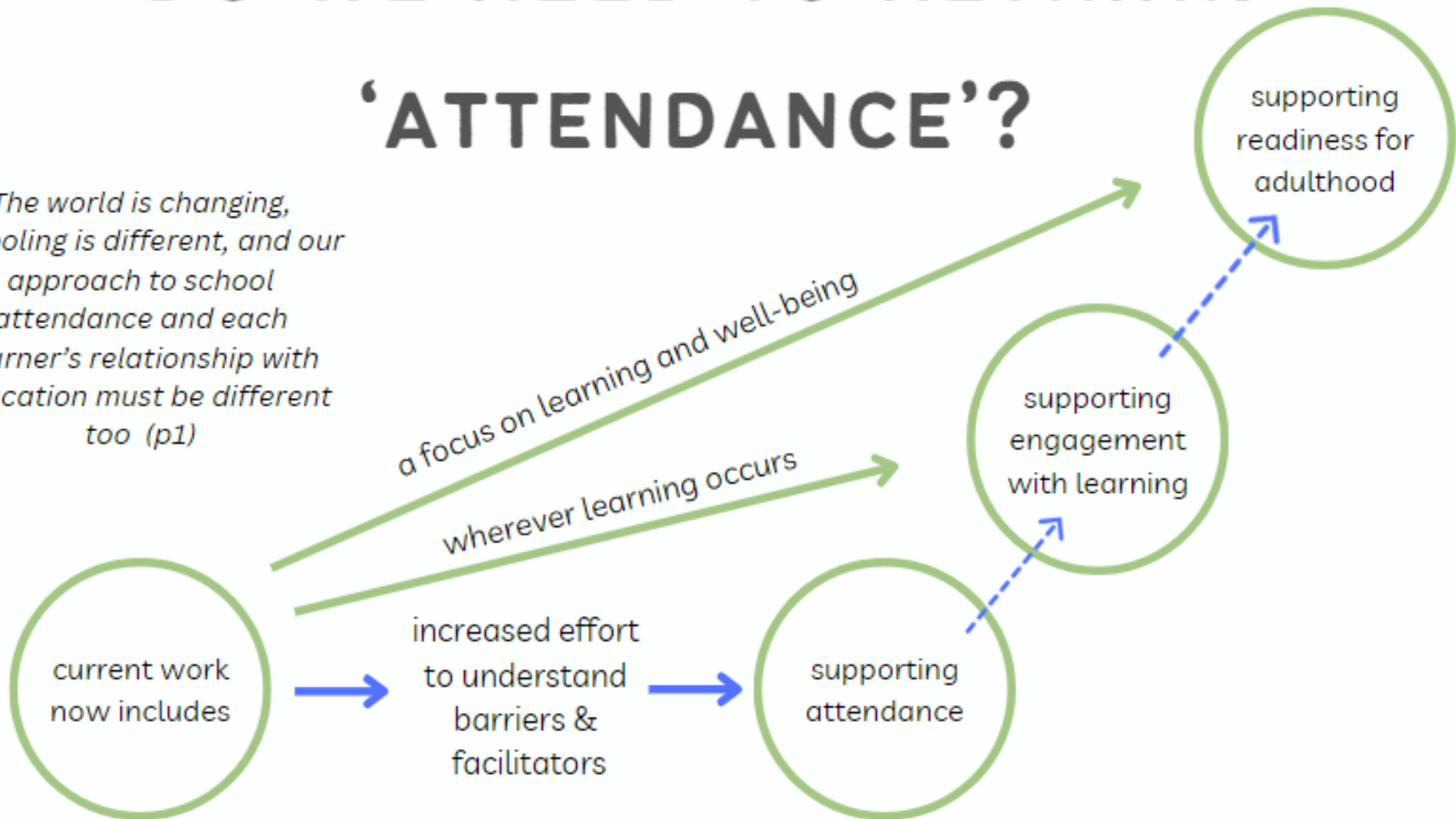- **H** Holistic Support

Do we need to rethink 'attendance'?

The world is changing, schooling is different, and our approach to school attendance and each learner's relationship with education must be different too (p1)

a focus on learning and well-being

wherever learning occurs

current work now includes

increased effort to understand barriers & facilitators

supporting attendance

supporting engagement with learning

supporting readiness for adulthood

Heyne D, Gentle-Genitty C, Melvin GA, Keppens G, O'Toole C and McKay-Brown L (2024) Embracing change: from recalibration to radical overhaul for the field of school attendance. Front. Educ. 8:1251223. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2023.1251223

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So, why a Local Authority Approach?

A strategic and consistent approach across the organisation allowed misconceptions about attendance to be identified and challenged, and promoted earlier identification and intervention for attendance difficulties through organisational culture shifts and evidence-informed practice (Corcoran, Kelly, Bond and Knox, 2023).

So, why not a GM or National approach?

Harnessing our collective influence

Activity 2: The unique role of PEPs and SEPs

On your tables, discuss:

- How do we take forward what we know works?

- how do we leverage collective power in this space around school nonattendance **locally**? How do we do it **nationally**?

- Mapping: who do we do it with, who do we include? What are our channels for reaching them? Give contact details where you can

To wrap up

Following today

1. Feedback to PEPs and services from today

2. PEPs to identify service leads and representation at Regional groups to disseminate learning and discuss the implementation of the WARMTH framework in the local area

3. Regional groups to feed back to NAPEP and Steering group

4. Co-construction of a national position paper outlining effective and evidence-based practice for Eps and networks

Here and Now:

- Expressions of interest for regional groups

References

- Global Disaster Preparedness Centre (2015) Leading in Disaster Recovery: a Companion Through the Chaos

- Young people's experiences of extended school non-attendance (Corcoran & Kelly, 2022)

- Attendance Report | Listening To & Learning From Parents In The Attendance Crisis (Burtonshaw & Dorrell, 2023)

- Understanding Attendance (ImpactEd, 2024)

- Embracing change: from recalibration to radical overhaul for the field of school attendance (Heyne, Gentle-Genitty, Melvin, Keppens, O'Toole, MacKay-Brown, 2024)

- Emotionally based school non-attendance: Development of a local authority, multi-agency approach to supporting regular attendance (Corcoran, Kelly, Bond, & Knox, 2023)