

# Case Study

Student: **Sarah Thompson**

Year Group: **9**

School: **Greenfield Academy**

Issue: **School refusal due to historic bullying**



## Introduction:

Sarah Thompson is a year 9 student at Greenfield Academy who has been refusing to attend school for the past three months. Previously, Sarah was a bright and enthusiastic student who had settled well into her secondary school despite some initial concerns about making new friends. Sarah was supported by the secondary school SEND department who offered all pupils with a diagnosis of autism an invitation to attend a friendship group in year 7. Sarah successfully attended the friendship group and established a trusting relationship with the SENCo (Ms Johnson) and LSA called Mrs Khan, who she would regularly speak to when struggling with aspects of school that conflicted with her diagnosis of autism. Sarah is also on the caseload to the Autism Outreach Team and developed a trusting relationship with the practitioner Tina Smith who still checks-in with her each term, and helped to capture her voice when her attendance initially began to dip.

Sarah previously had good attendance to school, where she enjoyed all her lessons - in particular Maths and the sciences as she has ambitions to become a Marine Biologist. Sarah also enjoyed attending her tutor group and had a very good relationship with her tutor, Mr Peterson who shares her passion for animals, their pet dogs, and travelling the world. Additionally, Sarah participated in lots of the extracurricular activities, including netball and STEM club. Sarah was also a very keen reader and volunteered as a library assistant after school on a Friday where she was mentored by the school librarian who had buddied her up with another pupil and got her involved in fundraising, which boosted her confidence and social skills.

However, Sarah's attendance began to decline significantly after experiencing prolonged bullying towards the latter part of year 8.

### **Historical Context:**

Sarah's bullying began towards the end of year 8, primarily by a group of peers in the same year group who targeted her with verbal abuse, social exclusion, and cyberbullying. Despite multiple reports to the school administration, the bullying persisted. Sarah's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, noticed changes in her behaviour, including increased anxiety, withdrawal from social activities, and a decline in academic performance. Efforts by the school to address the bullying were insufficient, and so Sarah continued to feel unsafe.

### **Current Situation:**

By the beginning of year 9, Sarah's anxiety about attending school had reached a peak, resulting in her complete inability to attend. Sarah spends long periods of time in her bedroom watching Anime cartoons and reading Manga. Sarah has a fascination for Japanese culture, which includes, the food, clothes, music and language, which she has been using a mobile phone app to learn.

Sarah has 4 younger siblings – 3 brothers and a sister who she struggles to get along with because she finds them loud and immature. Sarah regularly tells her mum that when she leaves home, she is going to live in a remote rural setting with two dogs and that she doesn't want a partner.

Sarah has a very small circle of friends and one trusted friend who will occasionally go over to her house, so that they can practise speaking Japanese together, which is supported and encouraged by her parents.

Mr and Mrs Thompson are also both very keen to support Sarah back into education, which they are currently struggling to do as Sarah has formed a very negative view of school and believes that all the teachers and pupils dislike her.

## Sarah's Voice

**Ms. Johnson (School SENCO):** Hello Sarah. Thank you for meeting with me. As always, I'm here to listen to you and try to make things better. Can you start by telling me a bit about what's been going on and why you don't want to come back to school?

**Sarah (Pupil):** .....just... I can't do it anymore. The thought of going to school makes me feel sick. The teachers don't get me, and the other kids are always picking on me. It's just too much.

**Ms. Johnson (School SENCO):** Thank you for sharing that, Sarah. It sounds like you're dealing with a lot. Can you tell me more about what happens when you feel like this? What makes school feel so overwhelming?

**Sarah (Pupil):** Well, it's the constant pressure. The teachers expect so much, and if I don't keep up, I get called out in front of everyone. And the bullying... it's like no one even notices or cares. I feel completely alone.

**Ms. Johnson (School SENCO):** I'm really sorry to hear that, Sarah. We definitely don't want you to feel that way. Can you give me some examples of what's been happening in class that makes you feel singled out?

**Sarah (Pupil):** It's like when I don't understand something right away. A teacher will ask me to answer a question, and when I get it wrong, everyone laughs. Or when I don't have my homework done, teachers get mad. It feels like the teachers are always watching, and waiting for me to mess up.

**Ms. Johnson (School SENCO):** This is important feedback, Sarah. What about the bullying? Can you tell me who is involved and where it happens most often?"

**Sarah (Pupil):** It's mostly during lunch and between classes. There's this group that always makes fun of my clothes and calls me names. I've told teachers before, but nothing really changes.

**Ms. Johnson (School SENCO):** Let's talk about what you enjoy, Sarah. What are some activities or subjects you like? Maybe we can incorporate more of these into your school day to make it more enjoyable.

**Sarah (Pupil):** I really like Science and PE. They help me relax and forget about the other stuff for a while.

**Ms. Johnson (School SENCO):** Thank you for being so open with me, which I really appreciate. I think the bell is about to go, so we need to take you back to your mum whilst the corridors are still quiet – is that okay?

**Sarah (Pupil):** Yes – thank you for listening to me. I really helps when I talk to someone like this.

# Group Task

## Questions



Using the case study to respond to explore the following:

1. Using the case study to respond to explore the following:
2. 10 things that might form part of Sarah's '**Vision**' – what do you imagine are her best hopes?
3. What do you imagine might be '**Positive and Possible**' for Sarah looking into the future one year from now – can you list 10?
4. What is happening to Sarah '**Now**' – what are the facts and figures? This is the only section where we can include negatives but remember it's building blocks for change, we're seeking.
5. Who might Sarah need on her journey? Can you name at least 6 people we could '**Enrol**' on Sarah's journey?
6. What might Sarah notice herself doing that shows she is **staying strong** in pursuit of her Positives and Possibles/long-term Vision – list 5.
7. What '**Actions**' might be achieved in a week to months' time?

You have **40 minutes** to explore the above steps of a PATH.