Children Missing Education Policy

St Mary's Church of England Primary School keeps children safe by ensuring and promoting the safeguarding and welfare of all children in its care: all policies support the most current "Keeping Children Safe in Education Guidance" and "Safeguarding Policy", are fully consistent with the "Every Child Matters" agenda, and fully support the principles of equal opportunities for all.

Definition of Children Missing Education

In Children Missing Education - Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (2025), children missing education are defined as those who are not on a school roll or receiving suitable education otherwise than at school. Those who are regularly absent or have missed 10 school days or more without permission may be at risk of becoming 'children missing education'.

There will not always be a safeguarding concern for children and young people who are missing education. Most children and young people are moving schools supported by their parents/carers, schools and local authority admissions services. A smaller number, however, are at risk of dropping out or disengaging from education and, being out of school, they are at risk of exploitation, going missing and significant harm.

Risks

These 'missing' children can be vulnerable; it is essential that all services work together to identify and re-engage these children back into appropriate education provision as quickly as possible. It is important to establish, at the earliest possible stage, the reasons for the child being missing. Possible reasons that should be considered include:

- Failure to start appropriate provision and never enter the system;
- Stopped attending, due to illegal exclusion or withdrawal by parent/carers;
- Failure to complete a transition between schools;
- Children from refugee and asylum -seeking families;
- Children from families who are highly mobile;
- Children at risk of a forced marriage;
- Children experiencing abuse and neglect;
- Children supervised by the Youth Justice System.

Children who remain disengaged from education are potentially exposed to higher degrees of risk such as anti-social behaviour and/or sexual exploitation.

Families moving between local authority areas can sometimes lead to a child becoming 'lost' in the system and consequently missing education. When a child has moved, local authorities should check with other local authorities, either regionally or nationally, and share information to ascertain where the child is living. Once the location of the child is established, the relevant local authority must ensure that the child is receiving an education either by attending a school or otherwise.

Recognition

Schools

As a result of daily registration, schools are particularly well placed to notice when a child has gone missing. If a member of school staff becomes aware that a child may have run away or gone missing, they should try to establish with the parents/carers, what has happened. If this is not possible, or the child is missing, the designated safeguarding teacher lead should, together with the class teacher, assess the child's vulnerability. Enquiries into the circumstances surrounding a child who is missing from school can be effectively supported by schools adopting an admissions procedure which requires a parent/carer to provide documentary evidence of their own and the child's identity, their status in the UK, and the address at which they are residing. Schools should ensure that a family's contact details are regularly updated. These checks, however, should not become delaying factors in the admissions process. In the circumstances of a child going missing who is not known to any other agencies, the Headteacher should inform the Children Missing Education (CME) Officer of any child who has not attended for 10 consecutive school days without provision of reasonable explanation. Prior to doing so, the school should have made enquiries to ascertain whether the child is still residing at the home address and is not attending or whether the child is missing.

Other Agencies

Where any agency in contact with children and families believes that a child is not on the roll of a school or receiving education otherwise, this information should be passed to the CME Officer with any details they have of the child in question.

Response

From the first day that a child does not attend school and there is no explanation or authorisation of the absence, the following steps should be taken:

• A staff member will contact the parents/carers (person with parental responsibility for the child) to seek reassurance that the child is safe at home;

• The outcome of the contact should be assessed and if there are any concerns a consultation with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead should take place to consider the child's vulnerability.

In the following circumstances a referral to children's social care and /or the police should always be made promptly:

• The child may be the victim of a crime;

• The child is the subject of a Child Protection plan;

• The child is the subject of section 47 enquiries;

• The child is looked after;

• There is a known person posing a risk to children in the household or in contact with the household;

The answers to further questions could assist a judgement whether or not to inform children's social care and the police:

• In which age range is the child?

• Is this very sudden and unexpected behaviour?

• Have there been any past concerns about the child associating with significantly older young people or adults?

• Was there a significant incident prior to the child's unexplained absence?

• Has the child been a victim of bullying?

• Are there health reasons to believe that the child is at risk? e.g.: Does the child need essential medication or health care?

• Was the child noted to be depressed prior to their unexplained absence?

• Are there religious or cultural reasons to believe that the child is at risk? e.g.: Rites of passage, female genital mutilation or forced marriage planned for the child?

• Has the child a disability and/or special educational needs?

• Have there been past concerns about this child and family which together with the sudden disappearance are worrying? e.g.

- Is there any known history of drug or alcohol dependency within the family?
- Is there any known history of domestic violence?
- Is there concern about the parent/carer's ability to protect the child from harm?
- Is there any concern about extremist views?

Children missing from education but not missing from home

The length of time that a child remains out of school could, of itself, be an alerting factor of risk of harm to the child. A judgement as to timeliness is required in respect of the referral to the local authority. This timeliness should be on a case by case basis.

In exceptional circumstances, a leave of absence can be authorised by the Headteacher, at which point a return date is set. In these cases, the time line for enquiries starts from when the child does not attend school on the expected return date, not from the day the authorised leave started.

Notifications and Actions for Children Missing from Education where there are Safeguarding Concerns.

If the answers to any of the points set out in the previous section indicate that there are concerns about the child's safety then a referral should be made to Children's Social Care and the Police on day one.

Children's social care, who must be contacted as soon as possible in these circumstances, will also liaise with the Police in order to identify, and act upon, any suspicion of child abuse or child related crime.

The school should work in collaboration with children's social care and the police and the Designated Safeguarding Lead should participate in any strategy discussions, section 47 enquiries and child protection conferences which may arise.

Reasonable enquiry:

If the judgement reached on day one is that there is no reason to believe that the child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, then the school should delay making a referral to allow them to make further reasonable enquiries. Reasonable enquiries include staff checking with all members of staff with whom the child may have had contact, with the pupil's friends and their parents, siblings and known relatives at school, and others. The speed at which these reasonable enquiries are made will depend upon any known or concerning factors that may arise through the enquiry process. School staff should also make telephone calls to any numbers held on record or identified and send a letter to the last known address. Home visits can be made by school based staff in consultation with local authority staff.

Further Actions: If the above response is unsuccessful, the school should contact the relevant EWO Officer, referring the child as missing in education and providing the details of the completed enquiries made by the school. The local authority should make enquiries by visiting the child's home and asking for information from the family's neighbours and their local community - a risk assessment of this activity will be needed along with a decision about whether this is appropriate. The EWO Officer should also check databases within the local authority, use agreed protocols to check local databases, e.g. housing, health and the police; check with agencies known to be involved with the family, with any local authority the child may have moved from originally, and with any local authority to which the child may have moved. The child's circumstances and vulnerability should be reviewed and reassessed regularly and jointly by the EWO Officer in consultation with children's social care and the police, as appropriate.

Children missing education are vulnerable and, when reviewed, plans should be put in place to proactively find children. As time progresses, missing education will become a more significant factor as well as needing to be considered alongside any other known factors that were already present.

Child missing from school for more than four weeks

A child may not be removed from the school roll before the end of four weeks, unless located in an alternative educational provision. After 4 weeks the child's Common Transfer File should be uploaded to the Department for Education secure site for the transfer of pupil information when a pupil moves between schools. The CME Officer will inform the school when they can remove from roll.

Transfer of information when a pupil changes school

The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000/297) (as amended by SI 2001 /1212 and SI 2002/1680) governs the transfer of information between schools.

• Regulation 10(3) states that 'The headteacher of the pupil's old school shall send the information within fifteen school days of the pupil's ceasing to be registered at the school'.

• However, Regulation 10 (4) states that 'This regulation does not apply where it is not reasonably practicable for the headteacher of the old school to ascertain the pupil's new school, or where the pupil was registered at his old school for less than four weeks'.
If the CME Officer or any other agency becomes aware the child has moved to another school the service should ensure all relevant agencies are informed so that arrangements can be made to forward records from the previous school.
Changes to the Children Missing Education statutory regulations in September 2016 require that all schools must report all starters and leavers to the local authority. This includes starters, no shows, and leavers that are outside of normal transition rounds, following the local authority's processes.

Children who are Foreign Nationals and go missing

Definitions

PLEASE NOTE: This section applies to children who are 'subject to restriction'. i.e. who have:
• Proceeded through immigration control without obtaining leave to enter; or
• Left the border control area Border Force accommodation without permission; or
• Been granted temporary admission; or
• Been granted temporary release or bail; or
• Released on a restriction order; or
• Served with a 'notice of liability to deport' or is the dependant of a foreign national offender whose status in the UK is under consideration by criminal casework - these dependants could be British Citizens or have extant leave.

Action and Responsibilities when the whereabouts of a Child 'subject to restrictions' is not known

A missing person's referral must be made by Home Office staff to the police, the UK Missing Person Bureau and the local authority children's social care in certain circumstances including
• When a child 'subject to restriction' is identified as having run away from their parents;
• Where they are looked after and have gone missing from their placement;
• Where they are being hidden by their parents and where there is concern for the child's safety because they are being hidden by, or have gone missing with, their family.
A copy of the missing persons notification form must be faxed or emailed to the local authority duty desk and the UK MPB.
If it is believed by Home Office staff that a child is being coerced to abscond or go missing, this must be reported to the local police and children's social care services, as a concern that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.
Notifications will also be made where a missing child is found by Home Office staff. See Home Office Guidance: Missing Children and Vulnerable Adults Guidance.
Local Authorities and Health agencies are responsible for:
• Reporting any missing child who is in their care to the police;
• Notifying the Home Office when a child is reported missing to the police or is found.
The police are responsible for:
• Investigating all children reported missing by the Home Office – following receipt of a missing person's notification;
• Conducting joint investigations with the Home Office where necessary;
• Circulating a missing child on the Police National Computer (PNC).
The local authority will also notify the Home Office Evidence and Enquiry Unit when a child in their care goes missing or when a missing child returns or is found. The Home Office must maintain regular weekly contact with the local authority and the police until the child is found, and record all contact with the police and local authority.

Action when the Child 'subject to restriction' is found:

Found by Home Office Staff

The local police and local authority must be informed immediately. In consultation with the local police and local authority children's social care, a decision will be made as to where the child is to be taken, if they are not to be left at the address where they are encountered. The Home Office must follow up enquires with the local police and children/adult services in order to identify if there are any safeguarding issues.

Found by the police or local authority

The Home Office Command and Control Unit [1] will be the single point of contact for the local

police and the Evidence and Enquiry Unit [2] will be the single point of contact for local authorities to notify the Home Office that a child has been found.

Data on looked after children who go missing or are away from placement without authorisation

The Department of Education Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014) states the following:

Local authorities should collect data on children reported missing from care including repeat episodes of missing from care, unauthorised absences from care placements, and other relevant data and should regularly analyse this in order to map problems and patterns. Looked after children who go missing, or who are away from placement without authorisation, can be at increased risk of sexual or other forms of exploitation or of involvement in drugs, gangs, criminal activity or trafficking. Attention should be paid to repeat episodes. This should include identifying patterns of sexual and other exploitation. Regular reports on this data should be provided to council members (including the Corporate Parenting Board for the responsible local authority).

Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation is reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority (through their annual data returns on looked after children as part of the annual data collection). Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of risky behaviour. This may be used to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify 'hotspots' of activity in a local area.

Data analysis

Good practice suggests that the following data should be collected and analysed by a multi professional group:

- Demographics of all children who are missing, or away from placement without authorisation;
- Associates of the above;
- The legal status of the children;
- Episodes, and length of episode by child;
- Numbers and themes from safe and well checks;
- Numbers and themes from Independent Return Interviews;

Cross match data with local information about gangs, CSE lists, home educated and missing from education lists, including information about children who go missing for part of the school day;

Consideration should be given to analysing where the child is found as this information could help identify links between missing children and criminal groups.

Analyse data by establishment and geographical area

Data about children and young people who go missing from home, education or care should be included in regular reports to Council members, especially to the Lead Member for Children's Services.

When the local authorities and the WM Police analyse trends and patterns in relation to children, who run away or go missing from home, attention should be paid to repeat 'missing 'episodes. Agencies need to be alert to the risk of sexual exploitation or involvement in drugs, gangs or criminal activity such as trafficking and to be aware of local "hot spots" as well as concerns about any individuals, who children runaway to be with.

The local authority should also consider the 'hidden missing', who are children who have not been reported missing to the police, but have come to an agency's attention after accessing other services. There may also be trafficked children who have not previously come to the attention of children's services or the police. Research demonstrates that children from black and minority ethnic groups, and children who go missing from education are less likely to be reported as missing.