

Procedure for responding if a child goes missing in the school day

This protocol refers to pupils who register at school in the morning and then go missing during the school day without a satisfactory explanation. School has separate procedures for pupils who fail to register, and a separate procedure exists for Children Missing from Education. The Department for Education (DfE) defines a child missing education as a child who is not on a school roll and has been out of education for more than 4 school weeks. The term Children Missing from Education (CME) therefore refers to all children of compulsory school age who are neither registered at a school nor educated otherwise (i.e. home educated or privately educated.)

Missing Definition:

When a pupil's whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be the subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

Is the pupil at significant risk?

A pupil missing during school hours would be prioritised as at significant risk where: ·

- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child/young person is in danger through their own vulnerability (for example due to their age) or vulnerability characteristics such as:
- The child is on a plan (Early Help, Child in Need, Looked After or Child Protection Plan)
- The child has a disability and/or special educational needs
- There is substance misuse
- The child has an education health care plan
- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.
- There are indications that the child/young person has already come to harm (CSE, grooming, radicalisation etc.)

Other contributory factors should be taken into consideration when determining if the pupil is at significant risk, for example;

- Have there been past concerns about this child and family which together with the sudden disappearance are worrying?
- 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 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 any 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 the child's 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?

Procedure:

Once a pupil is identified as missing by any member of school staff, the Designated Safeguarding Lead and SLT will be informed.

SLT will use professional judgement and risk assess the urgency of the situation to help inform the timeframe required in establishing the pupils' whereabouts before notifying the police. Timeliness should be on a case-by-case basis.

The caretaker (or a member of the office) will check that all gates are closed and supervise the main exit.

In most cases, the teaching assistant and members of the leadership team/safeguarding team will talk to the teacher and carry out a search of the school building and grounds before contacting parents and/or the police. If it is thought likely that the child has left the school grounds, the leadership team will be informed, and they will instruct the office to contact the police and parents immediately, as well as organising a search in the local area.

If a child leaves the school site, but is visible to staff, and not in immediate danger, SLT/safeguarding staff/therapeutic staff will monitor the situation and police will only be contacted if they feel unable to keep the child safe. Parents will be informed about the situation.

If there are concerns about the safety of a child, SLT will organise available staff to carry out specific roles:

- The office will contact the parents/carers (and other contacts if relevant/necessary) and alert the police
- The teaching assistant and/or pastoral staff will continue to search the building and grounds
- Members of the leadership team will look in the local area/drive towards the child's house

Notifying the Police

The information required by the police to assist in locating and returning the pupil to a safe environment is as follows: ·

- The pupil's name/s; date of birth; status (for example looked after child)
- Where and when they went missing
- Previous missing episodes and where they went
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with
- What the child was wearing plus any belongings they had with them such as bags, phone etc.; include mobile number
- Description and recent photo
- Medical history, if relevant
- Time and location last seen
- Circumstances or events around going missing with relevant safeguarding information
- Details of family, friends

- Contact details of safeguarding lead if it was after school hours.

Whilst the search is ongoing, the school will continue to liaise with the police and act in accordance with police instructions.

Option 1 – if the child is found on the school grounds, or returns before the police have arrived, the police must be informed, and own school procedures need to be followed.

Option 2 - if the police locate the child and bring them back to the school, the police will conduct the safe and well interview and the school will follow School procedure.

School will discuss any incidents of children going missing with the children and their parents/carers. Reasons for the incident will be discussed and plans put into place to prevent re-occurrence. Where a child has a known risk of going missing, a risk assessment will be written and put into place.