

# Children Missing in Education Policy

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*(Reviewer: Caty Jacques, March 2024)*

A child who is missing from school due to repeated or unexplained absence, or by leaving the school unexpectedly, is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect. It may also highlight the fact that the family need additional support of some kind.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Registration and Absence Policy, the Child Protection Policy, and the Missing Children Policy.

This policy has regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education (Sept 2023) and the WSCP's guidance: School attendance, behaviour and performance <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/schools-and-colleges/school-attendance-behaviour-and-performance/>

## 1. Policy and Procedure

The school will carry out daily registration and absences will be dealt with in accordance with the school's Registration and Absence Policy.

If there is a repeated pattern of absence, the reason for absence is unclear or unexplained or a member of staff has concerns about the nature of a pupil's absence, the Designated Safeguarding Lead should be consulted. The DSL, in conjunction with the HOM, HOY or class teacher, will assess the child's vulnerability and decide on the best course of action for that child. This may involve completing a West Sussex Missing in Education Report Form or a call to the Children Missing in Education Officer (0330 222 8397), for advice. Any length of absence, over 10 school days, or more, without permission, which raises concerns will be investigated.

## 2. Recognition and 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 and make sure that the child is safe at home.
- The outcome of the contact should be assessed and, if there are any safeguarding concerns, the DSL should be contacted.
- In the following circumstances, a referral to children's social care and/or the police should always be made promptly:
  - a) The child may be the victim of a crime
  - b) The child may be the subject of a Child Protection Plan
  - c) The child may be the subject of s47 enquiries
  - d) The child is looked after
  - e) There is a known person posing a risk to children in the household or in contact with the household
  - f) There is a history of the family moving frequently
  - g) There are serious issues of attendance (especially if this is contrary to an agreed plan)

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 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?
- Has the child got 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?

### **3. 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 Attendance/Education Welfare Service. This timeliness should be on a case by case basis and always within 2 weeks. The College should make referrals to the police and L.A. Children's Social Care accordingly if a situation is not resolved within 10 days and the Pupil Entitlement Investigating Officer should be contacted. In term time, leave absence of up to 10 school days can be authorised by the Deputy Head of College, at which point a return date is set. In these cases, the timeline for enquiries starts from when the child does not attend school on the expected return date, not from the day the extended leave started.

### **4. Notifications and Actions for Children Missing from Education**

If the answers to any of the points set out in the previous section indicates that there are concerns about the child's safety, then a referral should be made to the Integrated Front Door and/or the Police on day one.