

Children Missing Education (CME) Policy

Guidance for Schools and Other Services

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1. Overview

This policy is intended to inform LA staff, all schools, headteachers, governing bodies, other agencies and the public about how the local authority manages, minimises and prevents Children Missing from Education (CME).

The statutory guidance [Children Missing Education \(August 2024\)](#) sets out the key principles to enable local authorities in England to implement their legal duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to identify, as far as it is possible to do so, children missing education (CME).

Children missing education are defined as children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. Children who are receiving education otherwise than at school, i.e. suitable Elective Home Education (EHE) are not CME.

The CME category also includes those children/young people who are on roll at a school but cease to attend and where contact cannot be made with the family/emergency contacts to establish the pupil's whereabouts/reasons for absence. It is not to be used for a child that has ceased to attend but remains at their current address, even if you can not contact family/emergency contacts for the child. Schools must follow their attendance process for these children.

Children missing education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later in life.

Although the focus of this policy is the procedure for CME in Warwickshire, the work should be seen within the wider context of the LA in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children living within the county boundaries.

Effective information sharing between parents, schools and partner agencies as well as other local authorities is critical to ensuring that all children and young people of compulsory school age are safe and receiving suitable education.

The purpose of this policy is:

- to set out clear processes and procedures for ALL schools (local authority maintained, academies, free schools, independent schools); agencies and professionals to follow with a view to ensuring all children missing from education are promptly located and returned back to suitable education as quickly as possible.

- To set out Warwickshire County Council's role and responsibilities under the section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to establish the identifies of children in their area who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following DfE guidance documents:

[Children Missing Education- Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)

[Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)

[Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

This policy applies to all children of a statutory school age (5yrs – 16yrs) regardless of education provision (mainstream school, Independent School, Alternative Provision, Specialist provision etc).

2. Children at Risk of Going Missing from Education

Children and young people who are particularly vulnerable are often at greater risk of going missing from education. These include, but are not limited to:

- those failing to start school at Reception entry, hence never entering the authority's admissions register.
- those failing to complete transition at Key Stage 1 to 2 (Infant to Junior) or Key Stage 2 to 3 (primary to secondary)
- children of homeless families living in temporary accommodation/refuges or those living in a house of multiple occupancy or bed and breakfast accommodation
- unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees or children of asylum-seeking families
- children who are affected by domestic violence
- children who are affected by substance or alcohol misuse within the family
- children that are victims of bullying or discrimination
- children who are at risk of 'honour' based violence including forced marriage
- children who are at risk of female genital mutilation
- teenage parents
- children that have parents with learning difficulties (SEN)
- children with long-term medical or emotional difficulties (SEMH)
- children who are in the care of the local authority (looked after)
- children with a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background
- children with poor attendance
- children and young people who have committed offences or are at risk of becoming involved in crime

- children who are young carers
- children who are permanently excluded

It should be noted that personal circumstances of the child, or those of their families, may contribute to the withdrawal process and the failure to make a transition, e.g. parents/carers escaping domestic violence, families moved quickly under the police witness protection scheme.

What is consistent in each of these situations is that missing education may add to the child/young person's vulnerability and there is a known link between children not in school full time and child sexual and criminal exploitation. It is therefore essential that everyone involved, including professionals, parents and carers, ensure appropriate action is taken to ensure a suitable educational placement is found.

Children missing from education are at much greater risk of:

- gaining no formal qualifications,
- missing out on learning is also linked to future unemployment,
- criminal and anti-social behaviour,
- risk of sexual/criminal exploitation,
- radicalisation,
- physical harm,
- neglect,
- drug and alcohol misuse

3. Roles and Responsibilities - Schools

All schools, including maintained schools, free schools and academies must monitor a pupil's attendance through their daily attendance register and undertake reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts if a pupil fails to attend.

Pupils who have stopped attending and there is no known reason for their absence, but they have not believed to have moved house, are to be recorded as unauthorised absence and supported as such; these are not CME. These pupils must remain on the school roll and be dealt with as per the school's Attendance Policy. Schools should work with the Warwickshire's Attendance Team in these cases and each school has a named officer to support with this.

Schools are required to liaise closely with the Local Authority if any child falls into one of the following categories:

- 20 consecutive school days of continuous unauthorised absence and where contact cannot be made with the parent/carer to establish the reason for the absence despite reasonable enquiries taking place, and the absence has not been reported (this is not for those who remain resident at their current address and are not responding to a school's communication – see paragraph above).

- A pupil has not returned from a leave of absence within 10 schools days of their expected date of return;
- A pupil has ceased to attend the school, and the forwarding address of the family is not known.
- A pupil fails to take up their place at the start of the academic year and the whereabouts of the child/young person is unknown.

Before a child can be deemed as missing, during the first 20 days of unauthorised absence, or for the first 10 days of a child not returning back to school following a leave of absence, we expect a school to have undertaken reasonable enquiries to determine whereabouts before contacting the Local Authority:

This will include (this list is a guide and not exhaustive):

1. Daily telephone calls to all known contacts whilst the child is absent
2. Recorded delivery letters to the home
3. Contact with other schools where siblings are registered
4. Frequent home visits where safe to do so (taking into account surroundings i.e. are curtain open/closed, has post been picked up, have bins been emptied, does there appear to have been movement/changes since you last visited etc) with calling card left if no answer
5. Enquiries with neighbours and friends of the child
6. Enquiries with any other agencies/services known to have involvement with the family
7. Requesting copies of flight information if it is believed the child has left the country
8. Recording all actions undertaken by way of a chronology

If a child is still unauthorised absent after 20 consecutive school days or has not returned back to school 10 days following a leave of absence, and you have still not been able to identify the whereabouts of the child having undertaken all checks above, then a referral into CME is required using the form found [here](#). This form should detail the enquiries already made by the school, along with the outcomes of these enquiries. It is imperative that the CME referral form is fully completed accurately to determine next steps for the Local Authority to initiate. Any incomplete forms will be returned and not processed.

All schools have a duty to safeguard children and this includes unexplained absences. This policy does not replace Child Protection and Safeguarding procedures in place at school.

For any urgent concerns about a child's safety or well-being or it is suspected a child has been the victim of criminal activity or at risk of any form of exploitation, schools and professionals must contact the police or the Warwickshire Family Connect on 01926 414144. Where it is suspected a child is at risk of immediate harm, the Police must be notified without delay.

If a pupil is missing from school and the child is subject to a child in need/child protection plan or is a looked after child, the school must notify their social worker **immediately** of the unauthorised absence, where contact cannot be made with the family home. For a Child in Care, the Virtual School should also be contacted on 01926 742018.

4. Procedure for submitting a CME Referral

Where a professional or member of the public is aware of a child of compulsory school age who does not appear to be on roll at a school or receiving appropriate educational provision, a referral should be sent into the CME team immediately using the form found [here](#).

Schools should refer children by day 21 of any continuous unauthorised absence or when a child has not returned back to school 10 days following a leave of absence, **and** once they have undertaken all reasonable enquiries to locate the child, and this has not been successful. A referral into CME is not required by a school if a pupil remains resident at their current address, these are to be managed via the schools Attendance Policy alongside conversations with Warwickshire Attendance Service

Please note that all referrals should be sent into the Local Authority using secure email and/or protected documentation.

Upon receipt of a referral, the CME Officer will review this and conduct any necessary investigations to establish if the child in question is 'missing from education'. The form will allow the team to utilise their full range of statutory powers where no educational provision appears to be in place.

If you know of any child who is not receiving an education, or you know of a child who has gone missing from a school, or are in any doubt please contact:

Telephone: 01926 736323

Email: cme@warwickshire.gov.uk

5. Roles and Responsibilities - Local Authority

Warwickshire County Council has effective tracking and enquiry systems in place and an appointed person (CME Casework Officer) to whom schools, other agencies and the public can make referrals regarding children who they believe are missing from education.

The primary role of CME is to establish the whereabouts of a child who is believed to be missing from education using a variety of mechanisms to confirm whether such children remain resident within Warwickshire or whether they have left the county.

CME will liaise with schools, other local authorities, other council services and use council data to identify, monitor and track children back into education.

The Local Authority will undertake checks that may include, but not limited to:

- Local checks of our safeguarding system on the child/young person and any other family members
- Get Information about a Pupil check (national census)
- Undertake an NHS check
- Attempted contact with parent/carer by way of phone call, email or letter
- Home visit / door knock
- Contact other local authorities if there is information as to the potential whereabouts of the child, asking them to make reasonable enquiries
- Search of S4S database, specifically the lost pupil section
- HMRC check (as a last resort)
- Border force check (if it is suspected the child/young person is at risk and has left the Country)

It is important to highlight that a school must continue to also make their own reasonable enquiries alongside the local authority undertaking their own checks.

If a child is located, the referring agency will be notified of this with advice provided over next steps. For schools, this will likely be one of the following:

- Child is still within the local area, or at the confirmed address therefore child to be kept on roll and school to follow their own attendance process
- Child has moved out of county / country therefore can be removed from roll
- Child cannot be located after *joint reasonable enquiries have taken place*.

Please note that the CME Casework Officer has no right of entry into homes or any right to see the child. It is also not their role to investigate safeguarding/welfare concerns that may be held in relation to the child/ren within a family – such concerns should be reported directly to Family Connect. Our primary role is to confirm the address at which a CME child/young person resides and then to either:

- make use of our statutory powers to return a child to education, where a child is deemed to be ‘missing from education’ – i.e. they do not have a school place or access to a suitable home education; or
- where the child is on roll at a school and is failing to attend, confirm the address at which the pupil is believed to be resident; and
- where applicable, report any safeguarding/welfare concerns that we note during our investigations directly to Family Connect.

6. Removing a child from the school roll

Section 436A of the Education Act 1996 requires all local authorities to make arrangements to identify children of compulsory school age (5 – 16yrs) in their area who are not registered pupils at a school, and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.

Regulations 9(h)(iii) and 9(i)(iii) of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 place a duty on schools and local authorities to **jointly** carry out reasonable enquiries to try and locate pupils absent from school.

Continually absent from schools for 20 school days (Ground I)

A child cannot be removed from the school roll until they have been continually unauthorised absent from school for at least 20 school days **and both the LA and school** have failed to, after reasonable enquiries have been concluded, to locate the pupil and their family. A joint decision is required between the school and the local authority before this ground is used.

Once the Local Authority have confirmed to a school that the child cannot be located and they can remove from roll, the school will be required to upload the pupil's CTF (Common Transfer File) to the s2s Lost Pupil Database so that the pupil file can be retrieved if they are enrolled at any other school.

All Warwickshire schools (including academies and independent schools) must notify the local authority when:

1. They are about to remove a child from the school's admissions register under any of the fourteen grounds listed in Regulation 9 of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024;
2. Work jointly with the local authority to establish the whereabouts of the child before deleting from the schools admissions register if under regulation 9(1)(f) and (h);
3. Notify the local authority within 5 working days of adding a pupil's name to the admission register at a non-standard transition point.

Data regarding in-year admissions and leavers is collected from schools through starters and leavers imports and is transferred onto the LA's database (Synergy).

All schools are required to share their attendance data. Schools who do not currently share data via data sharing agreements are expected to complete the attached form: [Warwickshire Schools starter and leaver notifications 2024.](#)

Extended Leave of Absence (Ground H)

Where a parent applies for extended leave during term time, it is at the head teacher's discretion whether the leave is granted. If a parent takes their child out of school for extended leave, it is imperative that a return date is agreed prior to the family's departure.

Schools are advised to write to the family to state whether the period of leave is authorised or unauthorised and to stipulate the date on which the pupil is expected to return to school. The letter should make clear that, if the pupil does not return to school, as at the agreed date, the pupil will risk losing their place and parents would need to reapply for a school place.

Schools must wait ten school days, following the agreed return date, before seeking to remove the pupil from roll. A joint decision is required between the school and the local authority before this ground is used.

Where a school is able to evidence that clear advice has been provided to parents regarding a removal from roll, if the pupil fails to return, the school should ensure that they notify the local authority immediately of removal from roll for this purpose.

Where a pupil fails to arrive at school and parents/carers advise that the pupil is not currently in the country, schools must ensure that they provide the parent(s)/carer(s) with every opportunity to return the pupil to school before taking a decision to remove from roll.

In such circumstances it is advised that, as a matter of urgency, contact be made in writing with parent/s (either by letter/email) and that the correspondence clearly states:

- The child/young person is required to return to the school or may risk losing their school place;
- A date by which the pupil is expected to return and clear advice that, should this deadline not be adhered to, the pupil will face removal from roll;
- Any advice that the parent may need to be aware of in respect of waiting lists and likelihood of a school place being available (e.g. if there is an active waiting list for the year group in question);
- Any application process that the parent will be required to follow.

It is essential that the parent is given an opportunity to arrange for the child/young person to return to the country and return to school, before the place is lost and allocated to another applicant. In any case, every school is expected to retain the pupil on roll for a minimum of ten school days to enable investigations to take place and contact to be made with the family, with a view to the pupil returning to the school.

Pupils Moving Abroad (Ground G)

Where a parent notifies a school that their child is to be deregistered due to a family decision to move abroad, it is essential that the school takes effective safeguarding steps to ensure that the information that has been received is a true record of what the family intend to do.

Upon receipt of such notification, schools should aim to meet with the parents and to identify how the decision to move abroad has been reached. They should seek to establish the date on which the family plan to leave the country and make a request to the parents that confirmation of flight bookings be provided as evidence of the move abroad, to enable a legitimate removal from roll to take place once the pupil has left the country. Schools should also request the address to which the family plan to move and any school which they have liaised with to secure education once the move has taken place.

It is not sufficient to accept flight quotations as evidence that the family are moving abroad. An actual booking confirmation, with details of who will be travelling, the date/time on which the travel is to take place and the departure and destination airports is the best evidence that a school can seek to obtain from a parent in these circumstances.

[Keeping children safe in education](#) (Statutory guidance for schools and colleges), provides updated guidance. The above advice in relation to pupils believed to be moving abroad aims to help schools to fulfil their safeguarding duties in line with this document. If you hold any safeguarding concerns regarding a risk to the child e.g. forced marriage, radicalisation, female genital mutilation, etc. such concerns should be referred to the Children and Families Family Connect without delay.

Elective Home Education (Ground F)

School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 9(f) specifies that before a school can remove any children from roll for the purpose of Elective Home Education, they must receive in writing from the parent/carers that the child is receiving education otherwise than at school, whether this be home education or otherwise. **Please note, without this written notification from parent, you will not be able to remove the child from your school roll.**

Where a school has received written notification from the parent, schools must notify the local authority of this removal from roll using a School Exit Form developed for this purpose which can be obtained through ehc@warwickshire.gov.uk

A completed School Exit Form and a copy of the written notification from parent, should then be sent into the Local Authority at ehc@warwickshire.gov.uk

More information on Elective Home Education and a School's responsibilities towards this can be found in the Elective Home Education Policy.

7. The Role of Key Stakeholders and other Services

Where any agency in contact with children and families believe a child is not on the roll of a school and not receiving education otherwise than at school, then this information must be shared with the CME team. If they have concerns about the welfare of a child, you should refer to Children's Social Care via Warwickshire Family Connect 01926 414144.

All services and professionals play a key role in preventing the risk of children missing education. Below is a table of services you may find helpful.

WCC Team	Roles and Responsibilities	Contact Details
CME & EHE	Children missing education, elective home education.	T: 01926 736323 cme@warwickshire.gov.uk ehe@warwickshire.gov.uk
Ethical Inclusion Team (EIT)	Primary and secondary excluded children.	fapassessmentgateway@warwickshire.gov.uk
Warwickshire Attendance Service	School attendance support	was@warwickshire.gov.uk
Admissions	Securing school places for children	School admissions – Warwickshire County Council
Ethnic Minority Traveller Service (EMTAS)	Specialist support to meet the needs of children from Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) background and for children with English as an additional language (EAL)	SEND support in mainstream education – Warwickshire County Council
Warwickshire Family Connect	Safeguarding, safety and well-being of a child or adult	Worried about a Child safeguardingwarwickshire.co.uk 01926 414144