

Children Missing from Education (Scotland) Service Service Guidance

Author: Stewart McIntosh

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Introduction

Children and young people may disappear from the view of schools and education authorities for many reasons. **In all cases however the first and most important factor to consider is safety. Should there be any concern that the child may be at risk, it is essential that local Child Protection procedures are followed.**

All children and young people who go missing are vulnerable. Children are recognised in law as a vulnerable group in our society who require additional protection from the risks posed to them by different forms of harm, therefore a child-specific response is necessary. This is recognised by the type of action taken in a missing child incident by local services, which are generally treated as high-risk events. Therefore if there is any suspicion that the child is genuinely missing or at risk, then Police and Social Work services should be contacted.

Children have a right to education and local authorities have a duty to provide education for all children in their area, and to plan and provide support for every child if necessary. It is essential that education authorities and other services try to maintain contact with children and families, especially those who are vulnerable due to concerns about their wellbeing, and to trace them when they disappear from view. Action must be taken at school and education authority level to locate children and families who appear to be missing. and to try to re-engage them with any appropriate services. The wellbeing of a child failing to attend school will be at risk, the non-attendance may often be a sign of other issues in a child's life.

Definition

Children 'missing from education' are children and young people of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll and are not being educated otherwise (at home, privately or in an alternative provision). They have usually not attended school for a period of time.

Children missing from education will have wellbeing needs around inclusion and achievement. Consideration also needs to be given to other issues in their lives relating to non-attendance.

Children who are missing from education will be covered by local policy in line with the [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014](#). Services provided by CME(S) look to support local policy and this guide should be read in conjunction with local guidance.

Getting it right for every child

All practitioners have a role to promote, support and safeguard the wellbeing of the children and young people they serve whether they come into contact with them directly or indirectly. Children or young people who are missing from education are likely to have wellbeing needs and may well benefit from additional support. Practitioners in all relevant services must be clear in their understanding of respective roles when working together and in partnership with the child and family to identify needs, agree desired outcomes and to provide effective support that will deliver improved outcomes for the child.

The Getting it right for every child approach requires systems to be in place to support practitioners to share relevant and proportionate information where necessary in order to consider wellbeing needs and access support where required. Information sharing should be taken forward with the agreement of the child and parents in all but exceptional circumstances. When concerns arise engagement should be considered not just with those who have had very recent regular contact with the child and family but also with those who have had significant contact in the past e.g. for young children health visiting services or senior key staff in nursery may be important if a child is missing from education soon after starting primary school.

Action must be taken at school and education authority level to locate families of children missing from education and to try to re-engage them with services.

In the case of a child missing from education this will mean that senior key staff in schools (including the child's named person where one is available) may be best placed to assess any risk to the child's wellbeing, which will involve sharing concerns and eliciting further information and assistance about the child missing from education with partner services, such as Social Work and/or Police. People in these roles will liaise with CME Coordinators to ensure the child's wellbeing and reengagement with services.

Children Missing from Education (Scotland) Service:

The Children Missing from Education (Scotland) (CME(S)) Service is available to provide guidance on all aspects of children missing from education, and to facilitate agreements between local authorities, national agencies and partners to allow the effective exchange of information to locate a missing child.

The Children Missing from Education (Scotland) Service is provided by a small team of staff based within the Scottish Government. Our primary role is to:

- provide guidance and advice on good practice concerning cases of children missing from education
- check the national electronic School2School transfer system (S2S) to see if the child has enrolled at another publicly funded school in Scotland
- facilitate agreements between local authorities, national agencies and partners in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland to allow exchanges of information

- support local authorities in using these agreements

To do this we have created a [toolkit](#) which contains:

- current contacts for local authority CME co-ordinators in Scotland, combined with details of colleagues in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland
- flow diagrams and checklists which can be agreed with partner services before being distributed amongst schools
- examples of good practice as followed by the authoring local authority

It is expected that a Local Authority should have clear guidance on attendance policy and school staff should be aware of the procedures to follow when a child does not appear at school. This guidance should extend to incorporate the role of senior key staff in schools (or a named person where one is available) and CME Coordinator (or equivalent). Examples of good practice can be found on our [web pages](#).

It is important that the CME coordinator within a Local Authority can be contacted quickly. To enable this to happen, even if there is a change in personnel, it is highly recommended that all CME coordinators and relevant staff within a Local Authority have access to a generic CME mailbox (eg CME@localauthority.gov.uk)

To prevent and reduce the numbers of children missing from education, the cooperation of all local authorities across Scotland is paramount.

Searching for a child

CME(S) and the School2School register

The national School2School (S2S) register enables the secure transfer of a standard set of pupil details between publicly funded schools within Scotland. The system highlights instances of pupils who have left a school but not arrived at their expected onward destination and provides information on the reasons why pupils are transferring or leaving school. At any stage during a search for a child it is possible to contact CME(S) to conduct a search of the S2S register. CME(S) can identify if the missing child has enrolled at another publicly funded school in Scotland and will pass these details on to the party requesting the search.

CME(S) will need certain details (below) to query the S2S database which can be submitted to us in a [secure manner](#). If you already have the below details in your own form please feel free to forward this using a secure method.

Child's details needed:

- Scottish Candidate Number (where appropriate)
- Forename and surname

- Date of birth
- Current school (if missing from a Scottish school)
- School Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) code (if missing from a Scottish school)

Local searches

Education authorities and schools should follow local procedures to re-establish contact with children missing from education.

This should be a collaborative approach to sharing relevant and proportionate information with other services where necessary (for example Education, Housing, Social Work) and agencies (for example Health and Police) in line with [Child Protection](#) policy and based on the [Getting it right for every child](#) approach. Senior key staff in schools (or a named person where one is available) will be key to establishing the level of risk and making decisions about the nature of the action to be taken. Where there are significant concerns about wellbeing, the Police should always be involved in establishing the child's whereabouts.

National searches

After local searches, and based on the information gathered, the designated officer for children missing from education within the education authority may co-ordinate a wider search.

The circumstances and evidence surrounding an individual case will inform the correct course of action. Senior key staff in schools (or a named person where one is available) will be ideally placed to advise on the appropriate actions as proportionate to the child's needs. The designated CME officer can directly [contact](#) CME co-ordinators of relevant local authorities to start a search within their authority.

CME(S) are always available to support effective practice and provide guidance. We will assist in facilitating agreements for exchanging information with national organisations if required.

If a child cannot be located

The statutory responsibility remains with the local authority from which the child has gone missing from education. However, in cases where a child cannot be located it is obvious that there will be on-going concerns for their wellbeing and safety. It is essential that partner services such as Police and Social Work have been informed of these concerns and the on-going situation. Whilst the CME co-ordinator should continue to try and trace the child in conjunction with other services the police will be best placed to locate the missing child. CME(S) do not have any jurisdiction to assist in the operational search for a missing child, however we are always available to provide guidance.

Contacting CME(S)

The CME(S) [web pages](#) contains further information regarding our service.

If you need to contact us please e-mail cmescotland@gov.scot or visit our [web pages](#) for further details.

Please note, personal information should be shared securely, and we advise you to check local guidelines on data protection and information security.