



Somerset School

Safeguarding Policy –

(6) Children Absent from Education Policy



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Introduction

This policy is written in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) 2023 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.

Wider Policies support this Child Protection Policy. All are numbered and sit alongside to create the school safeguarding policy.

1. Child Protection Policy



2. The Role of the DSL Policy
3. Child on Child Abuse Policy
4. Filtering and Monitoring Policy
5. Managing Low Level Concerns Policy
6. Absent from Education Policy
7. Schools Safer Recruitment Policy
8. Managing Contextual Risks to Children

Aims of this policy

The aim of this policy is to ensure that staff understand:

- What does children missing from education mean?
- How to respond and monitor children's absence

Children Absent from Education

While children may miss education due to illness, holiday or a family emergency staff must be aware to patterns of children missing education and use their curiosity to consider whether any safeguarding concerns could also be a reason.

All staff should be aware that children being absent from school or college, particularly repeatedly and/or for prolonged periods, and children missing education can act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding possibilities.

These may include abuse and neglect such as sexual abuse or exploitation and can also be a sign of child criminal exploitation including involvement in county lines. It may indicate mental health problems, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation, so called 'honour'-based abuse or risk of forced marriage.

Early intervention is essential to identify the existence of any underlying safeguarding risk and to help prevent the risks of a child going missing in future.

The DSL and staff should consider the following when children miss education:

- Are there patterns in the lessons that are being missed?
- Is this more than avoidance of a subject or a teacher?
- Does the child remain on the school site or are they absent from the site?
- Is the child being exploited during this time?
- Are they late because of a caring responsibility?
- Have they been directly or indirectly affected by substance misuse?
- Are other pupils routinely missing the same lessons and does this raise other risks or concerns such as sexual violence/sexual harm between pupils, exploitation, gang behaviour or substance misuse?

- Is the lesson being missed one that would cause bruising or injuries to become visible?

Single missing days:

- Is there a pattern in the day missed?
- Is it before or after the weekend suggesting the child is away from the area?
- Are there specific lessons or members of staff on these days?
- Is the parent informing the school of the absence on the day?
- Are missing days reported back to parents to confirm their awareness?
- Is the child being sexually exploited during this day?
- Is the child avoiding abusive behaviour from peers or staff on this day?
- Do the parents appear to be aware and are they condoning the behaviour?
- Are the pupil's peers making comments or suggestions as to where the pupil is?
- Can the parent be contacted and made aware?

Continuous missing days:

- Has the school been able to contact the parent/carer?
- Is medical evidence being provided?
- Are siblings attending school (either our or local schools)?
- Did we have any concerns about radicalisation, FGM, forced marriage, honour-based violence, sexual exploitation?
- Have we had any concerns about physical or sexual abuse?
- Does the parent have any known medical needs? Is the child safe?

The school/college will view absence as both a safeguarding issue and an educational outcomes issue. The school/college may take steps that could result in legal action for attendance, or a referral to children's social care, or both.

Children Missing from Home or Care

It is known that children who go missing are at risk of suffering significant harm, and there are specific risks around children running away and the risk of sexual exploitation.

The Police, as the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children, will respond to children going missing based on on-going risk assessments in line with current guidance.

The police definition of 'missing' is:

- Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

Various categories of risk should be considered and Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership provides further guidance:

Local authorities have safeguarding duties in relation to children missing from home and should work with the police to risk assess and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks.

The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk. Where a child is recorded as being absent, the details will be recorded by the police, who will also agree review times and any on-going actions with person reporting.

A missing child incident would be prioritised as 'high risk' where:

- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability; or
- the child may have been the victim of a serious crime; or
- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

The high-risk category requires the immediate deployment of police resources.

Authorities need to be alert to the risk of sexual exploitation or involvement in drugs, gangs or criminal activity, trafficking and to be aware of local "hot spots", as well as concerns about any individuals with whom children might run away.

Child protection procedures must be initiated in collaboration with children's social care services whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Within any case of children who are missing both push and pull factors will need to be considered.

Push factors include:

- Conflict with parents/carers
- Feeling powerless
- Being bullied/abused
- Being unhappy/not being listened to
- The Trigger Trio (domestic abuse, parental mental ill health and parental substance misuse)

Pull factors include:

- Wanting to be with family/friends
- Drugs, money and any exchangeable item
- Peer pressure
- For those who have been trafficked into the United Kingdom as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, there will be pressure to contact their trafficker.

We will inform all parents of children who are absent (unless the parent has informed us). If the parent is also unaware of the location of their child, and the definition of missing is met, we will either support the parent to contact the police to inform them or do so ourselves with urgency.

Returning home from care

When children are taken into care, consideration may be given in the future to those children being returned to the care of their parents, or one of their parents. Other children are placed in care on a voluntary basis by the parents and they are able to remove their voluntary consent.

While this is a positive experience for many children who have returned to their families, for some there are different challenges and stresses in this process.

As a school, if we are aware of one of our children who is looked after is returning to their home, we will consider what support we can offer and ensure as a minimum that the child has a person, that they trust, who they can talk to or share their concerns with.

The role of the staff

The DSL should monitor behaviour watch and staff must monitor school registers to identify trends. All staff are encouraged to use their professional curiosity to ask questions when patterns emerge. For example, if a child is missing from school every Friday, could this be because of a contextual safeguarding issue? If a child is missing from care regularly but attends school, could the child be abused at home and finds school a safe place?

In each example, there is a need to include a number of agencies. Staff must bring these concerns to the DSL who can coordinate a multiagency discussion and response if required.

If agencies fail to engage in this discussion then the DSL must escalate this to the local authority safeguarding partnership.

Review

This Policy was written on 08 November 2023. A review will be annually as a minimum.

However, subject to a significant safeguarding concern this policy and all other attached policies will be reviewed and monitored as part of a lessons learned review.

Written by:

This policy was written by Matt Nicholls – Head of Policy Children’s Services, it was reviewed by Christina Leath – Group Safeguarding Director. This policy has been reviewed by the DSL of the School and agreed by the head of the Governance Board.