

MARISH

Academy Trust



Children who abscond or go missing from school Policy

Introduction

Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play in safeguarding children. Children who go missing are potentially at risk of harm, and a significant number, because of their circumstances, may face the risk of sexual, criminal or economic exploitation.

Children absconding or go missing from care, home and education is a key risk factor in safeguarding children. All school and early year's staff have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn. (Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2018)

Working Together 2015 outlines the key safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children as:

- protecting children from maltreatment;
- preventing the impairment of children's health or development;
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the **provision of safe and effective care**; and
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

Definition of children missing/absconding/truancy:

The purpose of this non-statutory document is to set out the procedures for all stakeholders should a child leave the school without permission.

To abscond is to 'leave without permission'

Under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974 and in Common Law, schools and other education settings owe a duty of care towards their pupils. This duty of care requires that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that pupils are safe and remain within the care of the school at all times throughout the school day and during school led activities. The safety strategies will be dependent on school phases (ages) and vulnerability of specific individuals.

Truancy vs absconding

Truancy means missing school on a regular basis for no good reason. It is also sometimes called 'unauthorised absence'.

Truancy is any intentional, unjustified, unauthorized, or illegal absence from compulsory education. It is absence caused by students of their own free will, and usually does not refer to legitimate excused absences, such as ones related to medical conditions.

Pupils who return to school after absconding

Pupils who abscond will do so as a result of a specific incident which may have taken place at school, at home or on the way to school.

For those pupils who return to school either by their own choice, with parental support or following intervention by a member of staff, thought should be given to their welfare. They are likely to be in need of support, understanding

and perhaps some time apart from their peers and a 'return to school' meeting should be set up to discuss this support.

Parents and Carers

Parents and carers of pupils are responsible for supporting the work of the school and encouraging their children to keep to all school procedures and policies.

Once school has informed the parents that their child has absconded, parents and carers are responsible for actively supporting the school with subsequent procedures and actions. This could include coming into school to help secure the safety of their child as well as meeting with a Senior Leader in order to agree subsequent actions.

Children Missing Education:

'Missing' children can be vulnerable; it is essential that all services work together to identify and reengage children not engaging in education long term and transition back into appropriate education provision as quickly as possible. It is important to establish the reasons for the child missing and being absent from education at the earliest possible stage. If a child is missing from education then the relevant processes need to be followed.

Further national guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education>

Details of children missing on Berkshire procedures on line can be found here:

http://www.proceduresonline.com/berks/slough/p_ch_miss_care_home_ed.html

If a child who is in care goes missing these processes must also be followed:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

Slough contact for children missing education (CME) is Tony Browne, Service Lead Access and Inclusion.

Tony.browne@slough.gov.uk 01753 875717 or 07766424396.

Responsibilities

The Head teacher is the 'responsible person' for ensuring the guidance is adopted and implemented within their setting and understood by all staff. The Governing body is responsible for challenge, scrutiny, implementation and oversight of this guidance.

1. The role of registers to track attendance and keep children in the school safe is vital. School staff will ensure that:
 - a) all registers are kept up to date daily both am and pm.
 - b) any no-authorised attendance is dealt with swiftly and immediately to ensure compliance with the regulations and is recorded.
 - c) the pupil records of the missing child and for any relevant details that might have a bearing on the situation (e.g. any court orders in place against either parent, the medical condition of the child etc) are recorded.
2. **Site security** is maintained by ensuring the following is in place:
 - a) Single point of entry for all visitors, staff and children/young people.
 - b) Appropriate fencing and gates to protect school perimeter.
 - c) Monitoring of entry and exit points at arrival and departure times.
 - d) Locking entrance points after each arrival and departure time.
 - e) Suitable supervision at exit points during break times.
 - f) Ensure all contractors and visitors are aware of safeguarding and appropriate risk assessments are carried out to promote safety of all children whilst on site and any works being carried out.
3. All **staff and visitors** are screened at point of entry:
 - a) Registration of all visitors to the school including visitor ID with photo ID and up to date DBS.
 - b) A safeguarding leaflet detailing the core safeguarding responsibilities is available.
4. **Collection and handover arrangements** of children at school are established and consistently implemented:
 - a. Breakfast and Afterschool clubs ensure that parents hand over and collect children in person
 - b. When people other than the regular parent or carer collect children from the school, the parent or carer has confirmed this personally by telephone or in writing ahead of time
5. Procedures are in place to ensure the safety of children during **external visits** off site
 - a. Staff organising all external trips will ensure there is an appropriate staff to children ratio.
 - b. First Aiders and/or suitable staff must be present for any medical intervention requirements.
 - c. Contact arrangements are in place to contact parents, local authority/children's social care if child is looked after or on a child protection plan and Police, within 10 minutes of child missing or immediately if a child with special educational needs or child under the age of 5. Police refer to the golden hour rule where they have a higher chance of locating the child within the first hour of them going missing.
 - d. Office staff are responsible for contacting the parents and keeping other children safe whilst relevant checks and contacts are made to establish the location of missing child.

- e. School mobile phones are taken on every school visit and contact numbers are left at the school/setting office.

Children's safety is maintained as the highest priority at all times both on and off the premises. Every attempt is made through carrying out the external visits procedure and the exit/entrance procedure to ensure the security of the children is maintained at all times. In the unlikely event of a child/young person going missing, including near misses, the missing child procedure should be followed see appendix 1 for details of the procedure to follow.

Roles and responsibilities:

Children missing whilst in our care:

It should be noted that a missing child could potentially be at risk of abuse or neglect. If a child goes missing whilst in our care, the following procedure will be followed:

- Alerting the relevant Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and the setting manager/head teacher and/or proprietor.
- Keeping calm and undertaking a thorough search of the setting and ensuring all other children are supervised by other appropriate staff.
- Ensure all other exits are closed to ensure no further breach of security.
- Checking the register to ensure no other child is missing.
- Check the pupil records of the missing child for any relevant details that might have a bearing on the situation (e.g. any court orders in place against either parent, the medical condition of the child or learning needs of the child etc).
- Staff should check the signing out book for all children
- Review any CCTV footage.
- Check with the parents/carers, children's social care and Virtual School if child on Child Protection Plans (CPP) or Children Looked After (CLA) if they have arrived at home. If not then advise them of steps you are taking.
- Simultaneously contact the Police whilst reviewing an on going assessment of the situation. After an initial search has taken place of the school (ideally within 10 minutes or immediately if child had additional vulnerabilities). For early years and primary and special needs provision contact with the police should happen immediately.

Additional vulnerabilities may include any of the following:

Special Education needs and disabilities (SEND)

Learning disabilities
Association with gangs or anti social behaviour
Risk of any form of exploitation to child sexual exploitation (CSE) radicalisation
modern day slavery
A young carer
Frequently going missing from home or care
Misusing drugs and alcohol
Returned to family home after being in care
Privately fostered children
Parental toxic trio prevalent in family home

- The DSL would inform the Education Safeguarding Officer who will inform the Director of Children at Slough Borough Council, Children's Social Care (if appropriate) of any child missing or any near misses.
 - The School would cooperate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by Children's Social Care at Slough Children's Services Trust if child is not found. The School governing body should also be notified.
 - If the child is not located within a short space of time the School should inform:
 - The Chairman of Governors
 - The School's insurers
 - If the child is injured, a report should be made under RIDDOR to the HSE.
 - If child in an Early Years' setting goes missing, then Ofsted must be notified within 24 hours of child missing even if child is found within that period.
 - Completing accurate records with a clear chronology of times the various interventions took place and who was involved

Child goes missing during an external visit:

- During a trip there should be sufficient adults (teachers/TAs/parent volunteers) to each have a small group to look after, thus minimizing the possibility of a child becoming lost and/or missing. A risk assessment should have been carried out prior to the trip so that the potential risks/escape routes are known.
- Where possible children should be dressed in their uniform so are easily identifiable
- Headcounts should be carried out on a very regular basis.
- You should alert the staff where you are on the trip and if necessary, alert the police. Keep the other children safe and with responsible adults. Do not leave remaining children unaccompanied whilst you chase a child running away.
- Alerting the relevant DSL and the setting manager/head teacher and proprietor
- Notify the parents/carers and social care if child on CPP or CLA

- The DSL would inform the Education Safeguarding Officer at Slough Borough Council (who will report to the LSCB, Slough Children's Services Trust (if appropriate) and the DCS).
- The School would cooperate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by Social Care.
- If the child was not quickly found the School would also inform:
 - The Chairman of Governors
 - The School's insurers
 - If the child is injured, a report would be made under RIDDOR to the HSE.
- If child in an Early Years setting goes missing then Ofsted must be notified within 24 hours of child missing even if child is found within that period.
- Completing accurate records with a clear chronology of times the various interventions took place.

Action after the child is found:

- Talk to child calmly and offer reassurance so they feel supported
- Notify the relevant person - DSL and Head teacher, Proprietor and/or manager
- Advise other staff who may be part of the search the child has been found
- Notify the police and parents know and/or social care if they are known to them
- Speak to the other children to ensure they understand why they should not leave the premises/separate from a group on an outing
- Brief all staff members of incident and updates on child missing policy
- A full investigation must be undertaken by the head teacher, Proprietor and/or manager and should include all concerned written statements, if appropriate involving other agencies such as Safeguarding Education, police, Slough Children's Services Trust and LSCB using the SIRF (appendix 3).
- The report should be detailed covering: time, place, numbers of staff and children, when the child/young person was last seen, what appears to have happened, (the purpose of the outing), the length of time that the child/young person was missing and how s/he appears to have gone missing, lessons for the future. If appropriate, procedures would be adjusted. This should be shared with the Education Safeguarding Officer who will share with DCS, Slough Children's Services Trust (if appropriate) and Ofsted if appropriate within 24 hours.
- If providers have concerns about children's safety or welfare, they must notify agencies with statutory responsibilities without delay. This means the local children's social care services and, in emergencies, the police.

- Police will undertake a safe and well check with the young person to ensure they are well. Please details under Police responsibilities for further information.
- Youth Services will also complete a return home interview if a child is missing and aged 11 years and older.
- If a child is missing for more than 3 episodes in 3 months, then the child's details will be shared with SEMRAC panel to discuss the risk indicators.

Action if child is not found:

- If the incident warrants a police investigation, all staff should co-operate fully. In this case, the police will handle all aspects of the investigation, including interviewing staff. Children's Social Care may be involved if it seems likely that there is a child protection issue to address.
- The Manager, Headteacher or Proprietor together with the chairperson or representative from the management committee/governing body or owner will speak with the parent(s).
- The chair, director or owner carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff in the room or who were on the outing.
- The key person/staff member writes an incident report detailing:
 - The date and time of the report.
 - What staff/children were in the group/outing and the name of the staff designated responsible for the missing child.
 - Any previous incidents or any triggers.
- When the child was last seen in the group/outing?
 - What had taken place in the group or outing since the child went missing.
 - The time that it is estimated that the child went missing.
- A conclusion is drawn as to how the breach of security happened.

Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.

- Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press without taking advice. Any media queries should be referred to the Head teacher, Proprietor and/or manager.
- The incident is reported under RIDDOR arrangements (see the Reporting of Accidents and Incidents policy); the local authority Health and Safety Officer may want to investigate and will decide if there is a case for prosecution.
- In the event of disciplinary action needing to be taken Ofsted should be informed accordingly.

- The insurance provider is informed.

Thames Valley Police

Thames Valley Police, as the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children, will respond to children and young people going missing or being absent based on on-going risk assessments in line with current guidance. The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk.

The police definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' are:

Missing	Absent
Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.	A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be (and there is no apparent risk).

It is important to note that professionals or others reporting a child missing to the police, should not make the judgement themselves as to whether a child is missing or absent – this decision will be made by the police on the basis of the information provided.

Actions when a Child has been found

When the child has been located staff should promptly inform the child's social worker, independent reviewing officer, police and parents that the child has returned.

The police will inform social care if a child goes missing from a setting as a follow up action. Arrangements will be made for Safe and Well checks and Independent Return home Review interviews for all children (aged 11+) as a matter of course under the 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care.'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>

Safe and Well Checks

Safe and well checks are carried out by the police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

Where a child goes missing, Slough Youth Services are commissioned to undertake a return home interview within 72 hours as it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases, a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child's parent or carer with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the

established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, maltreatment or abuse at home, bullying or sexual exploitation.

If a child is missing for more than 3 episodes in 3 months, then the child's details will be shared with SEMRAC panel to discuss the risk indicators.

Why is the Local authority involved?

The local authority (LA) has a duty to ensure all children are safe in educational settings. Our aim is primarily to disseminate best practice and assist you in learning from local lessons to prevent any repeat incidents in the future.

On occasions we are required to investigate and monitor local incidents on behalf of Ofsted, the DfE and other referring bodies and feed back the outcome as the appropriate local authority.

Age and vulnerability factor also are considered as part of the LA's intervention. Different phases will determine if the child/ young person has the understanding and capacity to keep safe without adult supervision, their resilience levels and other factors such as special educational needs and/or other vulnerable children.

The local authority will be involved for the following reasons:

1. To establish the facts i.e. what happened, to whom, when, where, how and why (all pertaining to how the child left the school premises undetected).
2. To look at what improvements have been made as a result of the incident.
3. To quality assure that the school improvements made are robust and will minimise or eliminate future risk.
4. To share best practice anonymously locally to prevent repeat incidents in others settings.
5. To ensure we meet our duty of care arrangements and keep children safe in our area.

Appendix 1: Flowchart for raising alerts of a serious incident of child absconding from School

Staff member becomes aware that a child is missing from a school setting

All other staff (not supervising students) will conduct a thorough search of all exits including classrooms, play areas, storage areas, toilets and school grounds to ensure all gates/doors were locked/bolted and there are no other ways a pupil could have left the school. Undertake a dynamic risk assessment to ascertain possible reasons for absconding (breach in site security, and/or child involved in a serious incident prior to absconding)

All school gates/exit points must be secured and your own internal lock down procedures should be initiated to make site secure to keep all other children safe on site.

Your individual 'lockdown procedures' may mean an alarm is sounded and all pupils kept in classroom with staff and doors locked/barred.

Immediately alert the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Head Teacher, Head of Year, and/or the Proprietor within the school or early years setting. **Time is of the essence**

If child is not located after the search of the site the police on 101 must be notified immediately by a senior member of the school/setting. They must include a description of child and if possible of missing child.

A member of the Senior Leadership team (SLT) should notify parents immediately. **Social Care 01753 875362** should be contacted if the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan. If the child is a 'Child Looked After' the setting should contact **Head of Virtual School 01753 875920 – This must happen on the same day.**

Child Found (Alert resolved)

Notify the Police, parents and child's Social Worker and/or The Virtual School (if appropriate) and school governors.

Child not found

Work closely with investigation bodies Police and Children's Social Care (SCST). Alert the Director of Children's Services (DCS) – Cate Duffy ASAP on 01753 875751 cate.duffy@slough.gov.uk

School/Setting to undertake a return to school meeting to risk assess and determine additional support for child and family.

1. If child in your Early Years goes missing, Ofsted should be notified within 24 hours. Contact Ofsted on 0300 123 4666 (option 1, & then option 2) <https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/online-complaints>
2. Internal investigation to be completed by Head Teacher, Head of School, Proprietor, and/or setting manager and learning outcomes to be shared with wider workforce and Governing body.
3. Complete the Serious Incident Referral form (SIRF) and notify the Local Authority (LA) within 24 hours to Jatinder Matharu – Education Safeguarding Officer ASAP on 07714858213 Jatinder.matharu@slough.gcsx.gov.uk

Independent LA investigation to be completed by Education Safeguarding Officer and shared with DCS and School including recommendations for future safety and if notification to Ofsted if appropriate. Wider anonymized information may be shared with other schools/settings at learning events.

Appendix 2: Serious Incident Referral Form (SIRF)

Report sent to:							
CC report: (Head teacher, Proprietor, DSL, Governor, Education Safeguarding Officer, Early Years Manager)							
Author of report:							
Date of report:							
Name of School:							
Is child safe now? Where is he/she?		Yes; please provide details			No; please provide further details		
Date and time of detection of incident							
Name of child:							
Address of child:							
Date of birth:							
Known to Social Care:		Yes		No			
		If case is open, please include name of Social Worker					
Name of staff involved:							
Context and background:							
Details of incident:							
Chronology of events <i>Please list in date and time order of the incident.</i>		1.					
Who has been notified?	Police	Parents	Social Care – SCST (if known)	Director of Children’s Care (DCS)	Ofsted (if child in Early Years setting)	Governor	DfE

All completed forms must be returned within 24 hours of incident occurring to the Education Safeguarding Officer Jatinder.matharu@slough.gov.uk 01753 875068. Stating **What action has been taken?** To assess the immediate impact and to prevent a repeat incident? And what Lessons learnt.

Appendix 3: Definitions

Based on the 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' (DfE 2014) the definitions which should be used when working with children, young people and their families are set out as follows:

- **Away from placement without authorisation:** a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police;
- **Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989;
- **Care leavers** cover young people from aged 16-24;
- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' and 'young people' are used throughout this guidance to refer to anyone under the age of 18;
- **Host local authority:** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area;
- **Looked after child:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989;
- **Missing:** anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.
- **Missing from care:** a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts is not known;
- **Missing child:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers;
- **Responsible local authority:** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning;
- **Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave;

For the purpose of this guidance, the definition of missing is that used by Police and issued by Association of Chief of Police Officers (ACPO) in April 2013 and is also the definition used throughout the Department of Education Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or go Missing from Home;

All completed forms must be returned within 24 hours of incident occurring to the Education Safeguarding

Appendix 4: Children Missing Education – Staff Guide

Who are children missing education (CME)?

These are children of compulsory school age (5 – 16) who are:

- Not on a school roll
- Not being educated other than at school
- Identified as having been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time

Why are children missing education or at risk of missing education?

- They fail to start school
- They cease to attend school either through withdrawal or exclusion (formal or informal)
- They fail to make the transition between primary and secondary school or move into a new authority
- They may be experiencing family or personal difficulties
- They may be moved from temporary accommodation at short notice
- Their whereabouts may be unknown
- They may be unable to attend school due to medical needs
- They may be educated other than at school
- They may need a co-ordinated approach for their complex needs before they are able to start school
- They are not in receipt of full-time provision suitable to age, their needs and ability
- They fail to return from holiday or compassionate leave

The law requires all children between the ages of 5 and 16 to be in full-time education

If I come across a child missing education what should I do?

Schools

Well established procedures are already in place for pupils who are on roll at a school but absent from school or being off rolled. Schools should use the relevant form supplied by the Attendance Team to make a referral. In other circumstances schools should follow the process below.

Other Agencies

The referral procedure for children believed to be missing from education is straightforward. It must be followed by staff within CLS, Children's Services, partner agencies and schools.

Anyone who believes a child may be missing from education should refer this to pupiltracking@slough.gov.uk. If everyone follows this procedure it will enable the Local Authority to meet its statutory duties in relation to pupils missing education.

All referrals will be followed up by the Attendance Service, liaising with other agencies as necessary, to establish whether or not the child is missing from education. If the child is missing from education, the Attendance Service will ensure the details are passed to the appropriate team to secure suitable education. All children missing from education will be monitored by the Attendance Service until education is provided.

Contacts for Children Missing Education (CME)

Case queries should be sent to pupiltracking@slough.gov.uk

For service queries please contact: Attendance Team Manager: Jeannette Walker
01753 875256 jeannette.walker@slough.gov.uk

Glossary

CME	Children missing education
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CPP	Child Protection Plan
CLA	Child Looked after
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Officer
DCS	Director of Children's Services
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
LSCB	Local Children's Safeguarding Board
RIDDOR	Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations
SBC	Slough Borough Council
SCST	Slough Children's Services Trust (children's social care services)
SEMRAC	Sexual Exploitation & Missing Risk Assessment Conference
SIRF	Serious Incident Referral Form

Approval History

Version	Approved	Comments
1.0		