

Policy and practice guide for schools on absent pupils and safe and well checks

Leicester City Council – Education Welfare Service



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This is a supplementary document to support the **Guide for maintained schools on the management of pupil attendance** – available on the Schools' Extranet.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to define the agreed processes and minimum safeguarding requirements to see pupils who are on roll, but absent from school.

The process relates to pupils who have not been seen in school for 3 or more continuous days and to those whose absence is an immediate cause for concern. It is intended for use in conjunction with the risk assessment in Annex A. This document is not relevant where the police and/or social care are already involved; in these cases, the school should ensure that the relevant professionals are aware of any continuing absence.

A completed risk assessment (see Annex A) is required prior to requesting a police safe and well check. The information will need to be available to share with the police on request. All cases causing concern should be fully and continually assessed and decision making should reflect the entirety of relevant information as it is established. Assessment, decision making and actions should reflect the **Thresholds for Access to Services for Children and Families and DfE Working Together**, both are available on the [LSCP website](#). The age and vulnerability of the child will be key considerations.

Requests to the police for safe and well checks should be made by calling 101 unless the situation is serious and warrants a 999 call. A call to the police could result from the information gathered at a single home visit or, it could follow several unsuccessful home visits; each and every case will depend on the individual circumstances and the holistic risk assessment.

The response from the police will be dictated by their [Missing Persons protocol](#) and also by their [National Decision Making model](#) which are available on the College of Policing website.

These procedures do not, in any way, replace the actions a school routinely takes in the case of any pupil who is absent from school from the first day of absence where this is without notice from the parents, is out of character and the circumstances cause serious concern. In this situation, if the school is unable to confirm the child's whereabouts and wellbeing by calling one of the adult contacts the school hold for the child, the school should make a home visit on day one; action should be taken based on a holistic risk assessment from this point on. At any point, if there is an honestly held belief that that the child is at significant immediate risk, a call should be made to the police.

Section A - Sources of information about pupil safety

Professionals who may see a pupil out of school:

- Member of school staff
- Siblings' schools
- Education Welfare Officer (EWO)
- Family Support Staff
- Health Visitor / School Nurse
- Connexions PA
- Children and young people's Justice Service Officer
- Youth Worker
- MST Therapist
- Social Worker or other social care staff
- Police Officer
- Housing Officer
- Others who may see a pupil out of school including staff from private, voluntary or independent sector eg Madrassah.

In addition to the above, as per section A, information about a pupil who has not attended school regularly may also come from **emergency contacts**, other children and young people, in particular, **friends** of the pupil and other parents/carers who know the family. (A judgement will need to be made about the reliability of the information.)

In all cases of continuing absence from school where the school has established that the pupil has not been seen by a reliable person, the school should undertake a risk assessment in order to make a decision about whether a safe and well check is necessary. The following guidance is provided in order to help schools to undertake the risk assessment.

Section B - School actions when a pupil is absent with no contact from the parent

Such actions will include:

- Tel calls to parent/s and other contacts. **Schools should hold the details for three adult contacts.**
- Home visits*
- Checks with neighbours
- Checks with the child's friends
- Checks with any schools at which siblings are known to be registered
- Checks with any local school previously attended by the child – they may have detailed knowledge that would be of assistance

- Referral to named council EWO (LA maintained schools and academies who trade with the Education Welfare Service (EWS)) **or**
- Schools that undertake their own attendance work - seek advice from link EWO directly or contact EWS on 0116 454 5510

The school must have done everything in its power to contact the parent/carer to confirm the child or young person's wellbeing. Where there are no immediate safeguarding concerns, the school must also have exhausted every means of contacting the child or young person either in person or remotely prior to escalation.

Access to blocks of flats

Where it is not possible to gain access to a block of council owned flats, contact should be made with the local housing office. If necessary, a check can be made of the tenancy. Arrangements can also be made for collection of a fob to gain access to the block. If the block is owned by a private or registered provider, if not already involved, assistance will be required from EWS to identify the owner/landlord from landlord services. A request can then be made to the appropriate person or body to gain access to the block.

Section C - Situations which do not require a safe and well visit

1. **Medical absence:** where absence is authorised with the parent having supplied sufficient information to the school about the absence and where case is deemed to be low risk.
2. **Plan in place to meet and resolve cause of absence:** where reason for absence is known and plans are in place to meet with the pupil and/or parent to resolve the situation to facilitate a return to school.
3. **Continuing unauthorised absence and no reason to believe pupil is at any particular risk:** where reasons for refusal to attend have been established and attempts made to date to re-engage the pupil have failed, where no information has come to light to cause any concern beyond the concern caused by the absence. Relevant services listed in section A should be informed of the pupil's absence to facilitate the sharing of key information with the school. Where the criteria are met and referral agreed by the parent or young person, the Early Help Assessment (EHA) process should be used to coordinate services to support the young person and to continue to try to resolve the situation leading to a return to school.

Section D - Situations which do warrant a safe and well check

1. **Child thought to be at risk of significant harm (no current social care involvement):** such concerns warrant referral to social care, Duty and Assessment (DAS). DAS will make an assessment in line with the Working Together to Safeguard Children and where deemed necessary, an urgent multi agency strategy discussion should be held. Actions will be determined by the assessment by DAS and/or any strategy discussion. Liaison with the school will follow to discuss arrangements for safeguarding the child.
2. **Child thought to be at risk of significant harm (current social care involvement):** refer to allocated Social Worker
3. **First period of ten days of continuous unauthorised absence (LA maintained schools and academies who trade with EWS):** refer to EWO in line with the Guide for maintained schools on the management of pupil attendance – EWO will normally call School Attendance Panel Meeting at the school to which parent(s)/carer(s) and child will be invited to attend. Where the referral relates to a primary school age child, a home visit would usually be undertaken by the EWO prior to arranging a school attendance panel meeting in order to investigate the reasons for absence and confirm the wellbeing of the child. In the case of a secondary school age pupil, where the parent does not attend the panel meeting, or, where they fail to bring the pupil with them **and** that child is still not being seen in school, then the EWO will undertake a home visit unless another professional has seen the child and knows them to be safe. There may be occasions where another professional in the locality is better placed to seek to see the child.

It should be noted that it is good practice for a school to refer to the EWS before 10 days of continuous unauthorised absence where that is felt appropriate.

Schools who undertake their own attendance casework are recommended to follow the casework actions set out above.

4. **Continuing unauthorised absence after EWO, other professional or reliable person has seen the pupil:** a risk assessment should be carried out to make a decision about whether a further safe and well check should be made. This decision would rest on any new information that has come to light leading to concern. Where there are known risks and a child is deemed to be vulnerable, it may be necessary for repeat safe and well checks to be made for example, on a weekly basis.

Section E - Home visits by professionals where pupil is not seen

Where a home visit is undertaken by a member of school staff, an EWO or other professional and this does not lead to the pupil being seen, or where there is no answer at the address and neighbours are not able to confirm a recent sighting of the child, **and there are concerns about the pupil's wellbeing**, a card/letter (see Annex B) should be left stating that if no contact is received by the school (or the person visiting) from the home within 24 hours that provides a satisfactory explanation about the pupil confirming their safety, that they will be referred to the police and/or social care. **A card should not be left if in the professional's view, it could place the child at risk.**

Section F - Frequently asked questions

1. What should a school do where there is a new situation arising where a pupil has continuous absence of up to 3 days?

When there has been no contact from the parent and there is no response to a text or phone call from the school by the 3rd day of absence and where there is no information from other pupils/parents suggesting that the family is on holiday and this is **out of character**, a request should be made to a member of school staff with responsibility for home visiting etc to home visit. If there is no member of school staff who can visit, or if the visit is undertaken but results in the child not being seen, a referral should be made to the EWO prior to the established limit of 10 days of unauthorised absence. The EWO will then action the referral in line with D3.) above. **There will be situations where a visit on day 1 is warranted based on the child's age and/or other known vulnerabilities.**

2. Where child has sporadic absences which continuously recur? There is an allocated Social Worker but child is not subject to a CP Plan?

Social Worker/school rep and EWO (if involved) should all liaise – additional safe and well checks should not routinely be necessary in addition to the Social Worker's involvement unless explicitly agreed.

3. If a home visit has not resulted in a pupil being seen, where do police safe and well checks come in?

If it has been deemed necessary for a home visit to be undertaken by a professional (e.g., member of school staff, EWO, other professional) but it has not been possible to establish the pupil's safety, despite the fact that a card/letter has been left requesting contact and there has been no response, then a request should be made to the police and/or social care. However, a referral to the police and/or social care should follow as a result of an **honestly held belief that the child may be at risk** and on completion of the risk assessment determining the child to be at risk.

4. What should happen where a parent/carer states they do not know where their child is?

If the parent/carer doesn't know where the child is, if they left for school and didn't arrive, parent and school report child as missing to police **unless** the child has recent history of truanting and parent reports that they know where the child is likely to be and locates them. If the child is not located, parent should be informed that they must report the child missing to the police. School (or other professional who has ascertained from the parent that the child is missing) must know that the police are aware of the child being missing either by making contact with the police themselves in the parent's presence, or, by confirming the police are aware by contacting them on the same day and immediately following the contact with the parent ie the fact that the parent has contacted the police **must** be corroborated by the professional.

5. Who in Education is responsible for the pupil when they are not attending school?

Lead responsibility remains with the school. Other services who have received and accepted a request for support are also responsible.

6. What are the cross-service responsibilities regarding pupil safety updates?

- If an EHA is ongoing, the team around the family and lead professional with school.
- If child has an allocated social Worker child in need/child protection procedures should be followed.
- If neither of the above apply, unless there is specific urgent information to share, sharing should be via normal information sharing mechanisms in place between school staff and support services.

7. What should happen if a pupil is reported by friends/other adults to be living at places other than their usual home address?

- If pupil is not attending school, this should be seen as being of concern and the school should discuss the situation with the parent. Normal child protection processes should be followed (i.e. if this is a possible [private foster care arrangement](#), it must be referred to and assessed by social care)
- In terms of non-attendance, another adult who regularly has a pupil staying with them would become responsible for their non-attendance and normal attendance processes would need to be followed in respect of that adult, in addition to the mother and/or father, carer.

8. What should happen where a pupil is not attending long term alternative work placement or provision or is dual registered/a guest pupil on another school roll?

- Attendance/absence should be established on a daily basis. The school should follow the same procedures and ascertain additional information from the other school or alternative education provider as available as part of the risk assessment. First day calling procedures apply.

9. Are there different expectations where pupil turns 16?

- Schools and support services are required to continue with efforts to bring about regular attendance to the end of year 11 irrespective of age
- The same general principles apply as for under 16s.

10. What should happen where there is very poor attendance and a referral to social care results in advice to the school to start an EHA?

- The case will have been assessed by DAS and it will not have met relevant thresholds.
- The most appropriate professional should work towards engaging the parent/pupil in the EHA process.
- If concerns persist (even after the EHA process has been followed or, following parent's and/or young person's refusal to engage), escalate the case back to DAS either through a multi-agency support panel (MASP) or directly to DAS if the pupil is deemed to be at risk of significant harm.

11. Referral to social care – should this always be by the school?

- If information comes to attention of school staff first, then yes.
- If another service, if they are in school, they should report to school designated senior person (DSP) or appointed deputy.
- If out of school, agency/service should follow their own agency's procedures and report through correct structure (as per existing child protection procedures) – also, advise school of matter on a need to know basis.

12. What should a school do when a child fails to return when expected following a holiday or trip abroad?

- Schools should have a system of identifying children by day 3 at the latest of any absence following their non-return to school as expected.
- School staff should have a clear process involving telephone calls to parents/carers and if necessary, to emergency contacts, other parents etc.

- **If no information is obtained** that enables the school to establish that the pupil is safe and well and the child is still absent on day 5, a referral should then be made to the EWO. (Section 12(2b) Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 states that schools must refer children to the LA where they have been continuously absent without authorisation for a period of 'not less than 10 school days' but it is good practice to take action well before day 10.)

The risk assessment must take into consideration forced marriage and **female genital mutilation** (FGM) guidance. Schools who undertake their own attendance work will be provided with advice and a referral will be actioned by an EWO once the school has taken all possible action.

13. What should a school do when there is information which leads staff to believe that a pupil may be leaving for a limited period or permanently where concern exists about the child's safety e.g., forced marriage, FGM, radicalisation etc?

Follow child protection procedures, by referring to DAS. Follow [LSCPB procedures for practitioner disagreements](#) if advice from DAS/social care is, in the referrer's opinion, not safe.

Section G - Document references

Link to [Leicester Safeguarding Children's Board](#);

Link to [College of Policing Missing protocol](#);

Link to [College of Policing National Decision Making Protocol](#);

Link to [private foster care arrangement](#)

Link to [LSCPB procedures for practitioner disagreements](#)

If a situation leads to concerns of a child protection nature, always follow child protection procedures and refer to the police and/or social care.

Annex A - Absent pupils risk assessment

Required prior to requesting a police safe and well check

All reasonable sources of information should be considered as part of the risk assessment. The **age and vulnerability** of the child should be key considerations.

When was the pupil last seen in school?

1.) If less than 3 days, school assessment of level of risk -

Description of actions already taken by school:

Description of any known facts inc. information from staff/pupils/others:

Assess Risk: low / medium / high

If **low risk**, no further action but consider referral to EWO (as part of traded work) or attendance support colleague if not already involved.

If **high risk**, follow child protection procedures/refer to social care and/or police.

If **medium risk**, confirm if there any other professionals involved with the child. If yes, give details and advise them of pupil's absence – that professional to act in accordance with their service/agency's procedures. Ascertain if they have seen the child or if they have any safeguarding concerns. If no, refer to EWO (as part of traded work) or attendance support colleague if not already involved.

2.) If more than 3 days, school assessment of level of risk –

Description of actions already taken by school:

Description of any known facts inc info from staff/pupils/others:

Assess Risk: low / medium / high

If **low risk and between 3 - 10 days of absence**, consider referral to EWO (as part of traded work) or attendance support colleague if not already involved.

If **high risk**, follow CP procedures/refer to social care and or police.

If **medium risk**, are there any other professionals involved with the child? **If so, advise them of absence as part of normal liaison process.** Ascertain if they have seen the child or if they have any safeguarding concerns. If no, refer to EWO (as part of traded work) or attendance support colleague if not already involved.

At the point of 10 days of unauthorised absence, all schools are required to inform the LA about the child's unauthorised absence. (This requirement is fulfilled via attendance data sharing where these are in place.) Other schools (including independent schools) who undertake their own attendance work may seek advice from EWS. From this point onwards, liaise with involved professionals as part of normal procedures.

Risk level criteria

Low risk:

- School has information from the parent/carer/other that leads them to believe that pupil is safe, or
- School has information from other pupils/parents that leads them to believe that pupil is safe, or
- School has no information despite attempts to contact family/emergency contact/s, this is a pattern for the pupil and there have previously been no safeguarding concerns about the pupil

Medium risk:

- School has information from the parent/carer/other that leads them to have some concerns about the pupil, or
- School has information from other pupils/parents that leads them to have some concerns about the pupil, or
- School has no information despite attempts to contact family/emergency contact/s, this is out of character for the pupil and the parent/carer
- The known concerns do not constitute a child protection referral

High risk:

- School assessment is that child is at risk of significant harm (physical, emotional, sexual, neglect) as defined by Children Act 1989, S47.

The decision making process:

As part of the decision making process as to whether a case is low, medium or high risk, schools should refer to the guidance and procedures via the links in section G above. All decisions should reflect consideration of the 3 recurring key indicators of serious case reviews: parental substance abuse (drugs and alcohol), domestic violence and parental/carer mental illness.

Annex B Home visit 'urgent' card

Urgent

Child's name:

Your child has not been seen in school and the school is concerned about their wellbeing.

If your child is not seen in school on the next school day, the police will be asked to carry out a safe and well check. This means that the police are likely to visit this address and ask to see your child. A referral may also be made to social care.

Please contact me as a matter of urgency.

Name:

Tel:

Agency:

Date:

Time:

Annex C - Flowchart

Safe and Well Checks

Contacts
Schools should hold details of 3 emergency contacts

Unauthorised absence of 10 or more days follow advice on page 11

Alert → Questions → School actions - contacts → School actions - escalation

At any stage

