

## Children missing education:

All children between the age of 5 & 16 years must be in full time education, suitable to their age, ability, aptitude & special educational needs.

Local authorities identify children living in their area who are not on a school roll, being suitably educated at home, privately or in alternative provision.

Staff should be aware of safeguarding concerns linked to missing children such as exploitation, travel to conflict zones, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

Some circumstances can leave children at greater risk of missing education, including those who are:

- In Gypsy, Roma, & Traveller communities
- Involved in the youth justice system
- Living in a refuge or fleeing domestic abuse
- Part of a homeless family
- Young runaways or missing children
- Asylum seekers, refugees, new migrant families
- Teenage mothers
- Excluded from or not attending school
- Known to early intervention service

## Ofsted recommends that all schools should:

- Keep travellers on roll at their 'base school' whilst travelling
- Follow agreed procedures for exclusions
- Communicate with the Local Authority about absence, exclusion & removing pupils from role
- Have safeguarding policies that emphasise missing children and their potential vulnerability
- NOT advise pupils to stay home without official exclusion - it is unlawful & places the pupil at risk

## Children Missing from Education Team

Level 5 West Wing, Moorfoot, S1 4PL

Tel: 0114 2736462 Fax: 0114 2735470

Email: [ed-missingchildren@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:ed-missingchildren@sheffield.gov.uk)

- Identify, monitor & locate all school-aged children & young people not on a school roll
- Work with all agencies to ensure that missing pupils are promptly re-engaged with education
- Implement procedures to locate pupils who leave the city with an unknown destination

**Schools **must** inform the local authority of any pupil who fails to attend school regularly or has been absent without permission for 10 school days or more, see:**

[Children Missing from Education, DfE 2016](#)

## Mid-year starters & leavers:

All schools must inform the local authority of children who start or leave the school mid-year. This must be done via Anycomms+ (secure email) in Sheffield.

Schools **must** send a Children Missing Education Team (CMET) Referral Form if they intend to remove a pupil from their admission register and obtain written confirmation from CMET before this is done.

Pupils can only be removed if they meet one of the 15 prescribed grounds by the DfE, which include:

- Registered at another school
- Subject to a school attendance order that has been changed or revoked
- Taken out of school for home education
- Moved too far away to travel to school
- Had more than 20 days unauthorised absence or not returned following agreed leave of absence, & the school/Local Authority cannot locate them
- Health problems that prevent attendance whilst of compulsory school age or they have died
- Had a custodial sentence of over 4 months
- Permanently excluded

## Missing from education, home, care resources:

- [Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, DfE 2014](#)
- [South Yorkshire Missing from Home or Care Protocol 2020](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education, DfE 2022](#)
- [Referring a Safeguarding Concern to Childrens Social Care](#)
- [SCSP Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures Manual 3.7.1 Children Missing Education \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

## Elective Home Education (EHE):

Where a parent/carer intends to remove a child from school to educate at home, the Local Authority, school, & other key professionals must work with parents/carers to ensure they have considered what is in the best interests of the child.

This is particularly important where a child has SEND, is vulnerable, and/or has a social worker, see [Elective home education, DfE 2019](#)

In Sheffield you should contact your link Attendance and Inclusion Officer to discuss this further & ensure parents are making an informed decision for their child. Alternatively you can securely email: [sheffieldinclusion&attendance@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:sheffieldinclusion&attendance@sheffield.gov.uk)

## Missing Children definition (DfE, 2014):

**Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement or feels they have been forced or lured to leave

**Missing child:** a child reported as **missing** to the police by their family or carers

Around 100,000 children go missing each year in the UK & 25% are thought to be at risk of harm, e.g.:

- Running from e.g. abuse or neglect
- Going somewhere they want to be
- Coerced to run by someone else
- Criminal and/or sexual exploitation
- Drug and alcohol misuse

Although 'looked after children' are particularly vulnerable, most children go missing from their family home & the same measures are required to protect both groups of children.

### Police definitions:

**Missing:** whereabouts unknown, out of character, may be subject of crime or risk of harm to themselves or another; risk levels:

- **high** = immediate risk, child or public in danger through vulnerability or serious crime, immediate deployment of resources
- **medium** = risk/threat to themselves or others; active, measured response to trace & support

**Absent:** whereabouts known but not where expected/required to be; low risk, Police record details, regularly review, agree ongoing actions

**In South Yorkshire no child or young person will be defined by Police as 'absent' & low risk.**

It is rare for a child to go missing for long - they can be considered missing after e.g. 10 minutes, as this all it takes to be exploited online.

Parents & carers may not report their child as missing due to fear of social care or police involvement or they may feel judged and blamed.

The [South Yorkshire Missing from Home or Care Protocol 2020](#) explains what agencies must do when a child goes missing, independent return home interviews and strategy meetings.

The Sheffield Children Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) ensures that agencies work effectively together to assess & respond to risk, & monitor the local protocol, agency reports & data analysis.

**If a child is missing ring The Sheffield Safeguarding Hub 0114 2734855 immediately**

## When a child is found:

- Be supportive, actively listen, respond to needs
- Police Prevention Interview (previously called safe and well checks) - has child suffered harm, where & who they have been with, disclosure of offending by or against them
- Independent return interview within 72 hours - identify, understand & address harm, reasons for going missing, help feel safe, provide information

## Assessment:

- individual & family circumstances
- motivation for running away
- potential destinations and associates
- circumstances of being found or returned
- individual vulnerabilities
- frequency of episodes & pattern of absence
- hurt or harm while missing
- known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking, involvement in criminal activity or drugs
- contact with people posing risk to children

If a child is taken into police protection, they must be moved as soon as possible into local authority accommodation.

## 16- and 17-year olds:

- Are no less vulnerable & are equally at risk, particularly of sexual exploitation & gangs
- If they present as homeless, local authority children's services must assess their needs & provide accommodation as needed.

## Children who repeatedly go missing:

- Not 'normal' - could indicate abuse or exploitation
- Offer further support and guidance
- Review previous actions
- Consider alternative strategies
- Local longer-term help & support including while child away from home or care if appropriate
- Information sharing essential between agencies

### Useful resources on the Safeguarding Sheffield Children website:

- [Missing children & young people](#)
- [Contextual safeguarding](#)
- [The Amber Service](#)
- [Referring a safeguarding concern to Children's Social Care](#)