



# Policy and Practice Guide for Schools on Absent Pupils and Safe and Well Checks

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Raising Standards Together

## INDEX

		Page
	Introduction	3
Section A	Sources of information of pupil safety	3
Section B	Situations which <u>do not</u> require a safe and well visit	4
Section C	Situations which <u>do</u> warrant a safe and well check	4
Section D	Home visits by professionals where pupil is seen	5
Section E	Frequently asked questions	5
Section F	Document References	8
Annex A	Absent pupils risk assessment	9
Annex B	Home Visit 'Urgent' Card	11

**This is a supplementary document to support the Policy and Practice Guide on the Management of Pupil Attendance.**

## **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 5 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. The content has been agreed by the Attendance Strategy Executive Group.

**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 totally out of character and the circumstances cause serious concern.**

### **A. Sources of information of pupil safety**

Professionals who may see a pupil out of school:

- Member of school staff
- Education Welfare Officer/Reintegration Support Officer
- HSLO
- Health Visitor
- School Nurse
- Connexions PA
- ISH manager or other team members
- Social Worker or other Social Care staff
- Police Officer
- Others who may see a pupil out of school including staff from private, voluntary or independent sector.

In addition to the above, 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 data.)

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.

## B. 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. (NB If absence is related to a medical condition, it may be necessary to refer to the EWO to complete a referral to the Children's Hospital School (CHS) ie if pupil is likely to be off school for 15 days or more due to the condition or, if the condition is likely to recur necessitating pupil being placed on CHS's trigger system.)
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 above should be informed of the pupil's absence to facilitate the sharing of key information with the school. Where appropriate and agreed by the parent or young person, the CAF 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.

## C. Situations which **do** warrant a safe and well check

1. **Child thought to be at risk of significant harm (no current SC&S involvement):** such concerns warrant referral to SC&S, Duty & Assessment (DAS). If the case is accepted, the Social Worker will liaise with the school to discuss arrangements for safeguarding the child.
2. **Child thought to be at risk of significant harm (current SC&S involvement):** refer to allocated Social Worker
3. **First period of 10 days of continuous unauthorised absence:** refer to EWO in line with the LA Policy & Practice Guide – 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 integrated team is better placed to seek to see the young person.

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

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 police safe and well check should be requested. This decision would rest on any new information that has come to light leading to concern.

#### **D. 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 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. **NB a card should not be left if in the professional's view, it could place the child at risk.**

#### **E. 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 5 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 referral should be made to the HSLO/school mentor or other member of school staff with responsibility for home visiting etc to home visit. If there is no HSLO or 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 C3.) above.

## **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 should all liaise – additional safe and well checks should not routinely be necessary in addition to the Social Worker's involvement unless explicitly agreed between Social Worker and EWO.

## **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 (eg 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. 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.

## **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 parent reports child to be missing from home beyond that school session or day, 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 parent has done this by following up the parent's action with a call to the police themselves.

## **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 CAF is in place, TAC and Lead Professional with school.
- If child has an allocated Social Worker 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 and normal child protection processes should be followed (ie if this is a possible private foster care arrangement, it must be 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 EWS attendance processes would need to be followed in respect of that adult, in addition to the mother and/or father.

### **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 ?**

- The school should follow the same procedures and ascertain additional information from the alternative education provider if available as part of the risk assessment.

### **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 (ie to the last Friday in June of the academic year).
- The same general principles apply as for under 16s.

### **10. What should happen where there is very poor attendance and a referral to SC&S results in advice to the school to start a CAF?**

- 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 CAF process. If concerns persist (even after CAF 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 Think Family Panel or direct to DAS if the pupil continues to be deemed to be at risk of significant harm.

## **11. Referral to SC&S – 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 staff of matter.

## **12. What should a school do when a child fails to return when expected following a holiday (including extended holidays)?**

Schools should have a system of identifying children by day 2 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, a referral should be made to the EWO within 5 school days of the expected return date. (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'. In the case of failure to return from authorised leave, 5 days should be the limit applied. NB The risk assessment must take into consideration forced marriage and female genital mutilation guidance.

## **16. 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 eg forced marriage, female genital mutilation etc?**

Follow child protection procedures, by referring to DAS.

## **F. DOCUMENT REFERENCES**

Link to the Education Child Protection Procedures:

<http://schools.leicester.gov.uk/home/management/safeguarding-in-education/>

Link to LSCB: <http://www.lscb-llr.org.uk/index.htm>

Link to DfE guide on Working Together to Safeguard Children:

<http://publications.education.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/00305-2010DOM-EN.PDF>

The actions taken by Police Officers are governed by the PACE 1984

**NB 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 & SAFEGUARDING IN LINE WITH THESE PROCEDURES.**



## ANNEX A

## ABSENT PUPILS RISK ASSESSMENT

When was the pupil last seen in school?

### 1.) If less than 5 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 if not already involved. If **high risk**, follow CP procedures/refer to SC&S and or Police.

If **medium risk**, are 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 - complete usual EWS referral form – that EWO to act in accordance with EWS procedures

### 2.) If more than 5 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 5 - 10 days of absence**, consider referral to EWO if not already involved. If **high risk**, follow CP procedures/refer to SC&S 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.**

**At the point of 10 days of unauthorised absence, school must refer to EWO. From this point onwards, liaise with involved professionals as part of normal procedures.**

**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 regular 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 F of the main document. Schools will be aware that the 3 key recurring key indicators of serious case reviews are: parental substance abuse (drugs and alcohol), domestic violence and parental/carer mental illness.



U R G E N T

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 WILL VISIT THIS ADDRESS AND ASK TO SEE YOUR CHILD.

PLEASE CONTACT ME AS A MATTER OF URGENCY.

NAME: ..... TEL: .....

AGENCY: .....

DATE: .....

TIME: .....