



Whitley Abbey Primary School

Missing Child Policy

Approved by:	R Walker	Date: July 2022
Last reviewed on:	July 2022	
Next review due by:	July 2023	

1. Introduction

This policy supports collaborative working between agencies and ensure an effective multi agency safeguarding response to missing children. For the purposes of this document a child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

The response to missing children is a key safeguarding issue for the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and all its partners. A robust response is required by all agencies. This policy provides guidance for managing the risk of children missing from home, care and education.

This policy should be used in conjunction with **Missing Child Procedure**, which sets out the actions required to locate the child, to affect their return and to identify the issues which caused, and may continue to cause, the child to go missing.

This guidance is based on the following:

- Guidance issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities in exercising their social services functions, to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State. Local authorities should comply with this guidance when exercising these functions, unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons that justify a variation;
- Children Missing Education: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (Department for Education, 2015);
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2016);
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) and related statutory guidance.

2. Principles

The LSCB recognise that children who go missing become vulnerable. There are links between children missing from education, home and care and therefore the production of a combined policy seeks to recognise this and mitigate the risks to young people. The following safeguarding principles should be adopted by Coventry LSCB and its partner agencies in relation to identifying and locating children who go missing:

- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount;
- Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective;
- Child protection procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child, who is missing, may have suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 Local Authority

The local authority is expected to act in their capacity as a 'good parent' in relation to all looked after children, including those that go missing. They also have a duty to work together with other agencies, share information and take appropriate actions where there are safeguarding concerns about a child, including those in connection with a missing episode.

The local authority has a duty to make arrangements to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children in their area who are of compulsory school age and not receiving a suitable education. This duty applies to any child who is not registered at an educational establishment suitable for their age and educational needs.

3.2 Schools

We have a duty to ensure that children who have a school place attend school. Schools must monitor attendance and to take action, involving other agencies where appropriate, to respond to a child not attending school.

3.3 Police

The Police are the lead agency for the investigation of missing children. They remain responsible for assessing the risk to each missing child reported to them and ensuring appropriate enquiries are made. They also have a duty to work together with other agencies, share information and take appropriate actions where there are safeguarding concerns about a child, including those in connection with a missing episode.

4. Definitions

4.1 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 crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

4.2 Absent

Any person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

4.3 Away from Placement without Authorisation

A looked after child whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the Police.

It is important to note that when a child meets these criteria, the same procedures should be followed as if they were missing.

4.4 Missing From Education

All children of compulsory school age (5-16yrs):

- Who are not on a school roll or receiving suitable education otherwise than at school (e.g. privately or in an alternative provision);
- Registered at a Coventry school but their family has moved without providing a forward address or details of a new school;
- Who are registered at a school but for a substantial period of time (usually agreed as ten days or more), have not attended school or alternative education without provision of reasonable explanation).

5. Risks of Children Missing from School, Care or Education

5.1 Generic Risk

Research has shown that every year approximately 77,000 under 16 year olds go missing overnight in England. Peak ages for going missing are between 13 and 16 years old and a quarter are under 11 years old (Children's Society, Still Running 1999 / Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), 2002).

Missing children are at significant immediate and long term risk.

Immediate Risks	Long Term Risks
No means of support or legitimate income - leading to high risk activities	Homelessness
Involvement in criminal activities	Criminal record
Victim of abuse or crime	Victim of child sexual exploitation
Missing out on schooling and education	Disengagement from education
Alcohol or substance misuse	Long-term drug dependency / alcohol dependency
Deterioration of physical and mental health	Poor physical and/or mental health
Exposure to radicalising processes	Involvement in extremist activities or support to extremism
Increased vulnerability	

In addition to reducing the risks facing missing children, all agencies need to be able to recognise and respond to risk factors that could lead to missing incidents. Children can go missing for any one of a number of reasons. The following section considers some of these factors in more detail.

5.2 Specific Risks

Child Abduction

Where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence, this is a 'crime in action' and should be reported to the Police immediately.

Forced Marriage

Some young people run away because they are at risk of abuse. Forced marriage in particular can lead to young people running away from home. Further guidance and information can be found in *the **Forced Marriage Procedure***.

Grooming for Potential Sexual Exploitation

In some cases, children may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually. Evidence suggests that 90% of children subjected to sexual grooming go missing at some point.

The supply of drugs and alcohol or the offering of gifts may be used to entice and coerce children into associations with inappropriate adults. Both girls and boys are at risk of sexual exploitation. Looked-after children may also be targeted by those wishing to abuse and sexually exploit them, and encouraging these children to run in order to disrupt their placement is often part of this abuse. Young people living within

residential care units are particularly vulnerable to being directly targeted in this way. Further guidance and information can be found in the ***Child Sexual Exploitation Procedure***.

Grooming for gang related activity/involvement in crime

The LSCB recognise that young people who go missing can be being groomed by adults for the purposes of gang related activity or crime. Young people can be attracted to these activities or compelled to undertake them and may go missing in order to partake in them.

Asylum Seeking Children and Child Trafficking

The response to a child seeking asylum going missing should be exactly the same as for all other children. There are complex issues facing children seeking asylum. Information about the location of some children is not always accurate due to transient accommodation arrangements. There is also a significant risk that some children who claim asylum are trafficked into, within and out of the UK. Often these children remain under the influence of their traffickers. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum seeker children, who go missing immediately after becoming looked after, should be considered to have been at risk of trafficking. Further guidance and information can be found in *the **Trafficked Children Procedure***.

Radicalisation

It is possible that, children may run away or go missing following grooming, either on-line or through local contacts, which results in radicalisation. Radicalisation is a process where a person, often from a vulnerable background begins to adopt extreme political, religious, or social view(s) and, through these, engage in extremist activity. If there is any concern that a missing child has been exposed to radicalisation and may try to leave the country an immediate response may be required. This may involve referral to the Channel Panel for multi-agency review of the risk and the need for preventative interventions.

School Attendance

Systems and procedures for encouraging regular attendance should be clearly set out in each school's Attendance Policy and make clear links with the CAF / Early Help Assessment windscreen, Curriculum, Behaviour, Health, Anti-bullying and Emotional Wellbeing Policies. The Attendance Policy should identify how individual cases are managed, how the school works proactively with parents and pupils to ensure that they understand why attendance is important, as well as include an escalation of interventions that will be used.

6. Missing from Home

When a child goes missing parents and carers are expected to undertake basic attempts to locate their child, if it is safe to do so. This could include searching the home and, contact friends and relatives, or visiting locations the child may frequent. If the child is not found there is an expectation that parents and/or guardians will report the episode to the Police.

The Police will assess the risk presented in each individual report of a missing child and will conduct appropriate enquiries. Where necessary these may be in conjunction with other agencies. The Police notify all missing episodes via the Police COMPACT (missing person's case management system) to the local authority children missing team.

When a missing child is located or returns home, it is expected that the Police will conduct a safe and well check. The Police will notify the local authority children missing team of those who have been found. The missing children team will allocate a worker to undertake the return home interview and any subsequent interventions.

In responding to a report of a missing child, all agencies should be alert to the potential significance of repeat missing episodes by a child. Children who repeatedly go missing should not be viewed as problem children. It is imperative that consideration is given to the reason why the child is repeatedly going missing and appropriate referrals made, so that additional support can be given.

Children and young people, who go missing under the age of 16 are not legally considered as being able to live independently away from home. Once located it is expected that they will return home, if it is safe for them to do so. Where a missing child is aged 16 – 17, consideration should be given to their physical and emotional needs when making a judgment as to whether they can live independently away from home.

Where a child who has gone missing has a Child Protection Plan or is subject to a Section 47 enquiry there are additional responsibilities. The Police and local authority need to work closely together, with all other relevant agencies. The procedure to be followed is clearly outlined in the ***Missing Child Procedure***.

7. Missing from Care

Research shows that children looked after by the Local Authority are over-represented in the cohort of children who go missing on repeat occasions. Local authorities have a duty to place a looked after child in the most appropriate placement to safeguard the child and minimise the risk of the child running away. Care plans and placement plans should include details of arrangements of risk assessment on the child going missing and actions that need to be in place to minimise the risk.

Care providers, both local authority and private sector, should inform the local Police force of any new Children's Homes being established to enable local procedures to be prepared should children subsequently be reported missing from such an address.

When a child or young person is reported missing, the local authority and the Police have a joint responsibility for protecting the well-being of the individual. When a child or young person goes missing from care it is expected that their carer(s) will act in their capacity as a 'good parent'. This means that every reasonable effort will be made to locate the child prior to them being reported to the Police and throughout the length of the enquiry. This should include local searches, and making

early contact with family and friends to establish his/her location. Children/young people must not be reported missing as part of a strategy to manage behaviour. Once it is apparent that a looked after child has gone missing the episode should be reported to the Police. The approach taken by residential or foster carers to the child will be the same regardless of the Police categorisation of risk. As with non LAC children, the Police will notify the local authority children missing team who will arrange and facilitate a return home interview, once found.

8. Missing from Education

All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to a full time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have. Local authorities have a duty to establish, as far as it is possible to do so, the identity of children of compulsory school age who are missing education in their area.

Children missing from education includes anyone:

- Who has been excluded from school and is not yet receiving full-time education;
- Who is out of school pending a managed move;
- Is on a part-time timetable;
- Newly arrived in the City and does not as yet have a school place;
- Has been withdrawn from school by their guardian but have not informed the Local Authority of an intention to electively home educate and have not had this agreed as appropriate;
- Is of statutory school age but has not been registered for a reception class entry;
- Has come to the end of a phase of education (e.g. primary) and has not registered for a secondary school placement;
- Has been detained, released and does not have or is not accessing a school placement or appropriate full-time alternative provision option.

This policy does not address children who are registered at a school who are not attending regularly. Schools already have a duty to monitor attendance and to take action, involving other agencies where appropriate.

As a result of daily registration, schools, including academies and free schools, are particularly well placed to notice when a child has gone missing. The law requires all schools to have an admission register and an attendance register. All pupils must be placed on both registers. Schools must monitor pupils' attendance through their daily register.

School staff should follow the school's procedures for dealing with children that go missing from education to help identify the risk of abuse and neglect, including sexual exploitation, and to help prevent the risks of their going missing in future. They should put in place appropriate safeguarding policies, procedures and responses for children who go missing from education, particularly on repeat occasions. It is essential that all staff are alert to signs to look out for and the individual triggers to be aware of when considering the risks of potential safeguarding concerns such as travelling to conflict zones, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

During a normal transition phase (e.g. reception, primary to secondary), a child becomes the responsibility of the new school when the child has been 'allocated' a place. All schools need to adopt this principle to prevent children from 'falling through the net' and becoming missing/lost.

Once a child has ceased to attend school, the school should make all reasonable enquiries to try and ascertain the child's whereabouts, before making a referral to the Children and Families First Service. These include:

- Make telephone enquiries to the parent/carer/relatives;
- Write to the parents/carers/relatives;
- Visit the home of the child/relatives;
- Speak to the child friends to ascertain their whereabouts.

Where contact is successfully made with parents/carers but a pupil's attendance continues to cause concern i.e. below 85%, normal protocol to support attendance should follow.

After a maximum of 10 days if the whereabouts of the child and family are still not known following these checks, the school should complete the ***Children Missing from Education (CME) Referral Form***.

9. Missing Child Investigations

9.1 General Investigations

In all cases, the Police are lead agency for the investigation of missing children.

The local authority is responsible for children in their care at all times. This responsibility continues when a looked after child is reported missing to the Police. There should be regular communication between the Police and relevant local authorities during the investigation of a missing looked after child.

When reporting a missing child to the Police the person making the referral should provide to the Police as much information as possible.

The ***Children Missing from Education (CME) Referral Form*** contains details of the investigation process and the information required by the Police to conduct an initial risk assessment.

There is an expectation that all agencies and members of the public will assist the Police with their enquiries to locate a missing child. Deliberately withholding information, which results in a child under sixteen being taken or detained without lawful authority, may lead to prosecution under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984.

9.2 Location and Return Planning

When a child is missing the Police, parents or carers and any professionals involved should commence contingency planning for when the child is located. Consideration should be given to establishing

- Whether it is safe and appropriate for them to return to their home or care placement;
- How they can be collected and transported safely;
- The local authority children missing team will arrange and facilitate the return home interview as appropriate.

9.3 Return Interviews

When a missing child is found their parents and carers must be informed immediately.

The agency that locates a missing child is responsible for ensuring:

- That the child's medical condition is discussed and any necessary medical attention is arranged;

- The child understands that the Police will conduct a safe and well check.

In all cases, the Police will conduct a safe and well check for all returned missing children. The purpose of the check is to establish the child's wellbeing and whether they have been a victim of crime. The Police will take all appropriate action to investigate any disclosure and will make any necessary referrals to other agencies, including Children's Social Care.

The return interview is a key element to the effective safeguarding of children. It should be carried out by someone independent of the child's parents or carers.

Where it is practicable, the interview should take place within 72 hours of receipt of notification that the child has returned, while recognising that this may be influenced by the child or young person's wishes. The purpose of the interview is to understand and address the reasons the child went missing, and to identify what action could be taken to prevent a reoccurrence. Intelligence from return home interviews should be used to identify risk areas and individuals.

9.4 Publicity

As the lead agency in the investigation of a missing child, the Police will take a lead role in advising and information the media regarding any missing child or young person.

When a child is missing from home, the parents and the Police will liaise with the child's parents about informing the press.

When a child is missing from care, the decisions to inform the media will be taken at a senior level by the Police together with Children's Social Care. The media should only be informed when all inquiries have been exhausted and following an updated risk assessment determining the level of risk as being high.

10 Monitoring Missing Children

10.1 Multi-Agency Triage Panel

A multi agency triage panel meets monthly to consider information gained from all return home interviews and safe and well checks. The Panel is made up of representatives from the Police, Children's Social Care, youth services, education and the youth offending service. Following the triage process, children that are deemed to be at risk of CSE in relation to missing, will be progressed to Children Missing Operational Group (CMOG), which meets monthly. Children about whom there are concerns in relation to missing, but no immediate indication of cse involvement will be progressed to a monthly Missing Operational Group (MOG) meeting. This is comprised of Children's Social Care, youth services, education and youth offending services in order to identify and respond to the presenting needs of these young people. The role of the panel is to identify additional support for children that have been missing and to monitor the effectiveness of any referrals and recommendations it makes.

10.2 Children's Social Care

Managers of children's residential units, foster carers and social workers are expected to maintain records of each occasion when a looked after child is missing or is absent without consent.

10.3 Coventry Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

As part of their safeguarding role the LSCB will receive regular reports about children and young people who go missing in the city. It will monitor the responses to missing children, and the outcomes for this vulnerable group.

