

Guidance for schools where pupils absent themselves during the school day:

Schools must take the attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. On each occasion they must record whether every pupil is:

- Present
- Attending an approved educational activity
- Absent or:
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Where pupils absent themselves from school following registration, they may be exposing themselves to potential risk, including physical harm, sexual exploitation or engaging in criminal activity. A recent Serious Case Review and subsequent thematic reviews identified that victims of CSE had gone missing from school after registration.

Schools should consider whether systems within school are sufficiently robust to be able to identify when pupils have made themselves absent following registration. Whilst this may be more readily identified at primary level, this may be more difficult in secondary schools where pupils move around the school between lessons.

Schools are asked to consider the following in relation to their policies and procedures and consider how these might be addressed to both identify a potential problem and determine any underlying reasons behind the post-registration absenteeism:

- A registration system within school able to identify where pupils have absented themselves from school after registration (and perhaps reappeared at the end of the school day);
- A system in place to record all incidents of such absences to map problems and patterns;
- A follow up system to try and help understand the reasons for the post-registration absenteeism, particularly where patterns are emerging and/or this is becoming persistent. This should include the views of the pupil, their parent/carer and any professional involved with the child or family. A single assessment should always be considered for pupils with unmet needs who may require support from other services. Schools should also be mindful of Safeguarding procedures;
- Assurance is required that schools should make themselves sufficiently aware of children who are at risk of harm either as a Child in need or Child protection in order that any incident of absence can be notified to the relevant agency. Relevant recording of risks known to be associated with a child or young person will allow for informed decision making in respect of the incidents of absence.

Schools should have in place arrangements for informing the Police if the pupil's whereabouts are unknown and all lines of reasonable enquiry have been exhausted. (Emergency Contact and First Day Calling Procedures).

Schools should take the following into consideration in determining when to report a pupil as missing or absent to the Police if they go missing from school:

- The age and gender of the child
- Any special educational needs which make the child more vulnerable
- Health/mental wellbeing of the child. Does the child need essential medication? Was the child noted as appearing depressed prior to the unexplained absence?
- Was there a significant incident prior to leaving school (e.g. issue with other pupils or a member of staff)?
- Is this very sudden and unexpected behaviour?
- Has the child been a victim of bullying?
- Are there any current concerns or have there been any past concerns about the child associating with significantly older young people or adults?
- Is there any specific information relating to the child leaving school which is a cause for concern e.g. being met/collected/taken away in a car outside of the school premises by a person(s) unknown?
- Are there any religious or cultural reasons to believe that the child is at risk? E.g. rites of passage or forced marriage?
- Are there, or have there been any concerns about this child and family which together with the sudden disappearance are worrying? E.g.
 - Is there any known history of drug or alcohol dependency within the family?
 - Is there any known history of domestic violence?
 - Is there concern about the parent/carer's ability to protect the child from harm?

This list is not exhaustive and schools may be aware of specific circumstances relating to the child and/or family which they believe makes them more vulnerable or 'at risk'.

Advice when reporting a pupil as absent or missing to the Police:

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.'

Absent:

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

At the point of the initial report, it is necessary for the call taker to determine whether the person is missing or absent. The following set of questions can be used to assist this decision making:

- What is the specific concern in this instance?
- What has been done so far to trace this individual?

- Is this significantly out of character?
- Are there any specific medical needs?
- Are they likely to be subjected to crime?
- Are they likely to be the victim of abuse?
- Are they currently at risk of sexual exploitation?
- Is there a risk that they might attempt to self-harm or attempt suicide?
- Do they pose a danger to other people?
- Is there any other information relevant to their absence?

If the school are in any doubt about the welfare and/or safety of a pupil or, having informed parents/carers they are concerned that the parent may not subsequently act in the best interests of their child and may not subsequently report an ongoing absence to the Police, then they should contact the Police to report the absence. In all cases whereby there is an allocated Social Worker and/or any Social Care intervention, it is appropriate to inform the lead/key worker to share the information.

If the Police are notified of a child's absence, the details will be recorded, and Police will agree review times and any on-going actions with the child's family or carer. Any safeguarding concerns should be reported to Children's Social Care by the Police. If the child does not return and is not located as expected, or the risk increases, the parent/carers should notify the Police and report the child as 'Missing'.

Where the school are made aware that the pupil has returned to school or they have arrived at home or another address and are safe and well then the Police should be notified and the incident logged in the pupil's records at school.

Where it is determined that a child is 'Missing' the Police will put into place a series of actions. If initial enquiries fail to locate the child a formal investigation will commence. All agencies will be expected to work cooperatively with the Police during this investigation.