



Community Services: Education

Argyll House
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To: Heads of all Educational Establishments

Dear Colleague

Children missing from education (Scotland)

1 Introduction

The Scottish Executive's *Vision for Scotland's Children* states that in order to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens, all Scotland's children and young people need to be nurtured, safe, active, healthy, achieving, included, respected and responsible.

To support this vision the Executive has embarked on a major initiative to ensure that Scotland's children and young people are afforded maximum protection by all professional services and agencies. To promote effective practice in child safety for education staff, the Scottish Executive has produced the folder *Safe and Well*. Included in this folder is information on the issue of children missing from education.

The purpose of this education management circular is to emphasise the responsibility of staff in schools and other establishments in the matter of missing children and to describe the procedures for dealing with it. The circular should be read in conjunction with the guidance on *Children Missing from Education within the Safe and Well Handbook*.

2 Who are children missing from education?

Children 'missing from education' (CME) are children and young people of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll and are not being educated otherwise, ie at home, privately or in an alternative provision. They have usually not attended school for a substantial period of time (usually agreed at 4 weeks, or considerably less for more vulnerable children).

Consequently children missing from education:

- may be in need of help or support but are unable to access it; children not in school may not have had their needs identified and there may be no-one actively connecting them to services;
- may be missing important experiences and opportunities to gain knowledge and skills; schools provide more than subjects; they provide social opportunities, practical skills and practice for life;
- may be isolated from other children and adults who can help them.

3 The role of the school

Effective practice to prevent children from becoming missing from education involves both pro-active and reactive procedures. In the first instance, schools must ensure that all necessary information is received when a pupil transfers into an establishment and conversely must ensure that all necessary information is passed on when a child or young person transfers out of their establishment. Where a child does not attend school and is deemed 'missing', then schools must follow the set authority procedures; see below.

Children who are transferring between schools

Children and young people may transfer school for a variety of reasons such as families moving house, parental choice etc. For most families these are planned events and information should be gathered regarding the proposed change to ensure:

- the child's smooth transition to his/her new school;
- transfer of the child's or young person's progress record.

Head teachers/campus principals should ensure that the child or young person progress record is received within 2 weeks of transfer.

The attached *Pupil transfer form* in appendix 1 may be a useful tool in tracking a child's transfer especially in the minority of cases where families have a history of regular school/house/area moves.

If a child transfers into a school with incomplete information and, despite enquiries, this is still unattainable, the *Information tracing request form* in appendix 2 should be completed and forwarded to your nominated authority CME contact.

Children who have become missing from education

Children and young people can be missing from education for a variety of reasons, eg families fleeing from domestic violence/abuse, families who have become homeless. In all cases it is therefore vital that contact is re-established as soon as possible. Effective procedures to support this are:

- (a) Diligent monitoring of absence in accordance with the authority guidance contained in education management circular 3.03 School attendance and absence and Paper 4, *School Attendance*, within Section J of *Supporting Children, Supporting Effective Learning*.
- (b) Timeous contact with the authority's designated CME contact. *Request for national search* form in appendix 3 should be completed following the steps outlined in the *Local search checklist* in appendix 4 and e-mailed to the authority CME contact.

3 The role of the education authority

Children have a right to education and the authority has a duty to provide education for all children in its area and to plan and provide support for vulnerable children. It is therefore essential that the authority strives to maintain contact and trace children missing education whenever necessary.

The authority will:

- (a) ensure establishments are informed of the authority designated CME contact;
- (b) assist schools in accessing detailed pupil information;
- (c) liaise with schools to undertake local searches for children missing through Click & Go management information system, records of children educated at home and designated contacts within housing and social work;
- (d) undertake national searches as necessary through CME (Scotland);
- (e) maintain recording system of children missing from education and progress of searches; this system acts as a 'virtual school' list and allows head teachers/campus principals to record the missing child as 'left' on Click & Go;
- (f) feedback outcome of searches to head teachers/campus principals.

When a CME request is received by the authority CME contact, the following administrative procedures will be followed.

Following notification from an authority school/establishment of a child or young person missing from education:

- a record will be created in the central database;
- a referral form will be e-mailed to the referring school for completion by the head teacher/campus principal;
- the central database will be updated in light of information contained in the completed referral form;
- a search of other authority schools/establishments is undertaken by school support (Argyll House);

- contacts in social work and housing are requested to undertake a search of their management information systems;
- if the child cannot be traced by school support, social work or housing, the referral will be passed to the Children Missing from Education Scotland Service who will conduct a national search.

4 The role of Children Missing from Education Scotland Service

CME Scotland are part of a national project and consist of a small team of staff who liaise with local authorities and independent school staff to:

- promote the use of systematic procedures in schools and education;
- provide support to develop effective practice in responding to children who become missing from education
- promote consistent practice to locate and re-engage children;
- co-ordinate searches across authorities and borders;
- support with information transfer;
- provide a national picture of pupil mobility;
- establish close links with other agencies.

The authority will contact CME Scotland when a search for a child or young person missing from education within the local authority area has provided no results.

When a response has been received from CME Scotland, the outcome will be passed to the original referrer.

It is essential that all CME Scotland search requests are administered centrally through school support. Schools are instructed not to contact CME Scotland directly with a referral.

5 Follow-up procedures

When the whereabouts of a child missing education is identified within the authority boundaries, every effort will be taken to support the child's return to school. If it is established that a child has not been enrolled in a school in his/her appropriate catchment area the authority will:

- request the attendance officer to undertake a home visit;
- contact the parent /carer to establish if a placing request is required;
- offer guidance in respect of clothing grants, free school meal entitlement and transport.

6 Useful contacts

Authority CME contact Mr Chris Shirley, Quality Standards Manager
Argyll House, Alexandra Parade, Dunoon PA23 8AJ
Telephone 01369 708528

School support Ms Maggie McLay
Argyll House, Alexandra Parade, Dunoon PA23 8AJ
Telephone 01369 708508

7 Publications

Safe And Well - a handbook for staff, schools and education authorities, Scottish Executive (2005)

Child Protection Guidelines in Supporting Children: Supporting Effective Learning, Section G, Argyll and Bute Council (2007)

Yours sincerely

Executive Director of Community Services
March 2010

Appendix 1: Child and young person transfer form

Current school details			
School name		Stage/class	

Child or young person details			
Name		DoB	Gender
Current address			
Telephone number		Mobile number	
Destination home		Destination school	
Address		Name and address of school	
Telephone number		Telephone number	

Interim contact details (eg relative)			
Name			
Address			
Telephone number			
Parent/carer signature		Date	
Head Teacher/campus principal signature		Date	

Child or young person record sent	Y / N	Date		If no give reason	
Address sent to					
Receipt of delivery	Y / N	Date			

Signed		Designation	
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Appendix 2: Information tracing request form - children arriving at school

Personal details					
Full name		DoB		Gender	
Name known as		UPI			
Current address					
Telephone number		Mobile number			
Other family names					

Details given/known					
Child protection register	Y / N		Traveller family	Y / N	
Additional support needs	Y / N		Educated at home	Y / N	
Child protection investigation	Y / N		History of exclusions	Y / N	
Looked after child	Y / N		Medical issues	Y / N	
Cultural issues	Y / N		History of long holidays	Y / N	
Previous school					
Other agency involvement (past and present)					
Other information/concerns					
Schools details					
School to be enrolled into					
Date					

Details of referrer			
Name		Designation	
Organisation/ local authority			
Date			
Contact telephone		Email	

Appendix 3 - Request for national search: Children Missing from Education (Scotland)

Personal details					
Full name		DoB		Gender	M / F
Siblings					
1					
2					
3					
4					
SCN (Scotland)		UPI (outside Scotland)			
Last known address					
Ethnic background					
Telephone number		Mobile number(s)			
Other family names					
Mother's first and maiden name (if known)			DoB		
Father's name			DoB		
Other known family whereabouts and telephone number(s)					
Emergency contact		Tel no			

School details			
Last school attended (inc SEED or school code)			
Year group/class			
Date of enrolment		Date of last day	
Name of head teacher/campus principal			
Other schools attended and dates			

Further details				
Child protection register	Y / N		Traveller family	Y / N
Child protection investigation	Y / N		Educated at home	Y / N
Additional support needs	Y / N		History of exclusions	Y / N
Looked after child	Y / N		Medical issues	Y / N
Cultural issues	Y / N		History of long holidays	Y / N
History of erratic attendance	Y / N			
Explain details answered 'Y' and any other related concern				
Details of local investigation including other agencies involved with child/family				
Date of local investigation				

Details of referrer to local authority designated officer			
Name			
Designation			
School			
Contact telephone		Email	
<i>CME (Scotland) will usually contact this person for further information</i>			

Details of local authority designated officer			
Name			
Designation			
Local authority			
Contact telephone		Email	
Date			
Education authority designated officers send to: Children Missing from Education (Scotland), Scottish Government, Support for Learning Division, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ Telephone 0131-244 1510; fax 0131-244 7943; email cmescotland@scotland.gsi.gov.uk			

Guidance notes for completing request form for national search

- 1 Prior to completing the application form the following must be checked:
 - a home visit has concluded that the child is not there;
 - friends/relatives have been asked;
 - other schools in the local authority confirm the child has not transferred;
 - the housing department confirm that the family have left/been evicted/ been re-housed;

See CME (Scotland) guidelines within *Safe and Well* for a more extensive list of actions prior to referral.
- 2 The form should have full and accurate details. Incomplete forms may be returned to the referrer.
- 3 Hand written forms should be legible and completed in black ink.
- 4 Children withdrawn for home education should only be referred if they are on the child protection register or there has been a child protection investigation carried out or pending.
- 5 Gypsy/traveller children should only be referred if there are care and welfare or child protection concerns. See guidance issued by CME (Scotland).
- 6 Other agencies involved with the child have been checked for information and such information included in this form.
- 7 Staff can become concerned about children's safety and wellbeing for many reasons, from 'gut feeling' to full disclosure. Staff should follow their instinct and take action if they feel a child may be vulnerable. **It is better to refer than not to!**
- 8 CME Scotland will receive referrals after a local search, as early as is considered necessary by the local authority, depending on their assessment of risk. However, in all circumstances action should be taken within 20 days of a child being 'missing' from education.
- 9 If a local authority has information about a specific address in another local authority there is no need to refer to CME (Scotland) in the first instance. Contact can be made with the new local authority directly. If the child is not located this way then referral to CME (Scotland) should be made.

Appendix 4 - Checklist - local search - general guide

- tick what you have done

- Take care to record all of the steps you take to find a child - the date and time, and who was involved. Record what happens at each stage and encourage staff to put their 'thinking' on paper about possible leads and where to find further information. This helps continuity if different staff are involved.
- Identify a lead person at school level and at local authority level to co-ordinate information and recording.
- Try to record information in ways that enable you to pass your search information on to other services to assist with searching in other areas.
- Assess the risks and vulnerability of the child involved. Use this as a guide to judge the appropriateness of steps suggested below and to set a timescale for each step.

Steps that schools may take

- Ask other children in the class/school (consider also confidentiality and sensitivity).
- Check what other staff know.
- Phone home.
- Visit home.
- Write home (recorded delivery).
- Contact the child's named emergency contacts.
- Check with the parents'/carers' employers.
- Review records held on the child and discuss with support staff/class teacher.
- Liaise with other agencies involved with the child/family (health, social work, voluntary agencies, police)

Steps that authorities may take

- Review the record of local search activities.
- Clarify local intelligence to identify any other areas in the UK where there may be a family connection or reason to relocate.
- Agree with local staff the level of risk/vulnerability of the child.
- Call CME Scotland and email all relevant documents/information.

Follow up

- Keep a copy of all records until a search provides information on where the child is.
- Maintain search records on children who have been found locally or nationally.

- Children in mobile or vulnerable families may disappear from view again, and information from previous searches may be helpful.
- As with all children and young people's records, keep data safely and confidentially.

Remember

- If a child goes missing before a school holiday, if it is not known that a family holiday was planned, and there is a level of concern for the child, it is important that the search process is continued during the holiday.
- Staff who have built up a relationship with children or their families are a key resource in seeking families; they may be staff from any service in the community. These staff may not have the time to co-ordinate a local search, but their insight is invaluable and should be used.