

Dunmow St Mary's Primary



Children Missing from Education Policy

November 2020

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. Children missing education (CME) are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of abuse, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later on in life.

The Children's Act 2004 places a duty on all agencies to work together to promote the welfare of the child and to share information to support this requirement.

Who is a Child Missing from Education?

The children missing education that are the focus of this document, are;

- Children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and who are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being at school, for example, at home, privately, or in alternative provision.
- Children of compulsory school age who are on a school roll but have not attended for a period of 20 consecutive school days (recorded as unauthorised absence) and the whereabouts of the family is unknown

Suitable education means efficient full-time education suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs the child may have. A child reaches compulsory school age on or after their fifth birthday. If they turn 5 between 1 January and 31 March they are of compulsory school age on 31 March; if they turn 5 between 1 April and 31 August they are of compulsory school age on 31 August. If they turn 5 between 1 September and 31 December, then they are of compulsory school age on 31 December. 4 The Children's Act 2004, Section 10

This document does not apply to children who are registered at a school who are not attending regularly. The school will make a referral to the MECES for irregular school attendance.

Parents' responsibilities

Parents have a duty to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are receiving an efficient full-time education. The majority of parents chose to adhere to this duty by enrolling their child at a school. However, some parents may elect to educate their children at home

Why do children go missing from education?

Children can go missing either when they fail to register with a school, or when they fall out of the education system and there is no systematic process in place to identify them and ensure they re-engage with appropriate provision. Their personal circumstances or those of

their families may contribute to the withdrawal process and the failure to make a successful transition. For example because of:

- Failure to start appropriate provision and hence never enter the system
- Inappropriate removal from roll
- Parent/Carer withdrawal from the school roll with no named destination
- Failure to find educational provision when moving to a new address within Essex or on arrival in Essex from another authority

5.Children at particular risk of missing education

There are many circumstances where a child may become missing from education, however some children living in certain circumstances are at greater risk of becoming CME. Amongst these are: (this list is not exhaustive)

- Pupils at risk of exploitation/harm/neglect - Children may be missing from education because they are suffering from abuse or neglect. Where this is suspected schools must follow the child protection procedures.
- Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Families – Research has shown that many children from these families can become disengaged from education, particularly during the secondary school phase. It is therefore vital that schools inform the LA when a GRT pupil leaves the school without identifying a new destination school, particularly in the transition from primary to secondary so that they can attempt to facilitate continuity of the child's education. Although many are settled, some GRT families move regularly and their children can be at increased risk of missing education. School should seek advice from MECES before the deletion from roll takes place to ensure the child is genuinely missing and not travelling.
- Families of Armed Forces - Families of members of the Armed Forces are likely to move frequently – both in UK and overseas and often at short notice. Missing children/runaways - Children who go missing or run away from home or care may be in serious danger and are vulnerable to crime, sexual exploitation or abduction as well as missing education.
- Children and young people supervised by the Youth Justice System - Children who have offended or are at risk of doing so are also at risk of disengaging from education.

Schools' duties

We monitor pupils' attendance through their daily register. As from 1st September 2016 all schools must notify the LA if a pupil is to be deleted from or added to the admission

register. Essex has devised an online referral form for schools to complete to assist in meeting this requirement.

If a parent advises a school they are moving abroad, the school should be satisfied this is the case and ask to see sight of flight confirmation, details of the new address and the name of the new school.

We must put the pupil on the admissions register on the first day that we expect them to attend regardless of if they actually attend. If the pupil does not arrive at school on the expected start date we must follow their absence procedures.

It is the responsibility of the parent/carer to contact the school when an application has been successful, to arrange a start date and ensure that the child is enrolled at the school. If however a place has been offered and the parent/carer does not make contact with us, we will attempt to make contact to arrange a start date. If this is unsuccessful within 10 days, and the pupil is not placed on roll, we must notify the LA that the parent has not taken up the place offered as this pupil is at risk of becoming CME.

We must provide the LA with details of pupils who have ten continuous days of unauthorised absence and cannot establish the reason for the absence and their whereabouts unknown by following the procedure below;

Action to be taken when a child is absent from school and their whereabouts is unknown;

A registered pupil is deemed to be missing when:

- a. He or she fails to attend school without any explanation and;
- b. The school has been unable to establish the reason, or locate the pupil with any of the contact names at the last known address, or from intelligence from the wider school community; or
- c. The pupil's parents/carers have not provided any information to indicate a change of education provision, unavoidable cause for the pupil's absence or that the pupil is travelling with them whilst in pursuit of their business.

Pupils deemed at high risk

If a pupil is missing from school and the child is subject to a child protection plan and/or is a looked after child, we will notify the key worker within the first 24 hours of the unauthorised absence if no home contact can be made. Where it is suspected or known that a pupil is at potential risk or harm, or where the school have information or reason to suspect the pupil has been a victim of criminal activity or at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), we will notify the Family Operations Hub and/or the Police Child Abuse Investigation unit immediately, and inform MECES as soon as possible afterwards.

Process Timeline

Days 1-5: Follow existing first day calling / contact procedures as defined by the school policy

Days 6 -10: Where a pupil has been absent for longer than 10 school days, the school must complete the actions set out on the 'Missing Pupil Checklist' (Appendix 1). If the child remains missing following these checks, notify MECES by sending a copy of the completed checklist to the relevant MECES allocation panel (not later than the 10th day of absence). Keep a copy of the completed checklist in school and continue appropriate checks on a daily basis.

Days 11-19: Continue to make efforts within the school and assist the LA Investigation Officer and other agencies in the search. If, during this time, the child is located and confirmed to be living outside of a reasonable distance to the school, LA Investigation Officer and school to agree date from which pupil may be removed from roll.

Day 20: If after 20 days of unauthorised absence the pupil remains missing from school and has not been located elsewhere within the county/out of county, the LA Investigation Officer will write to the school to advise when the pupil can be removed from roll. If a pupil is removed from roll and their destination school is not known, the school must upload the pupil's records using the statutory electronic Common Transfer File (CTF) to the 'Lost Pupils' database

CME may raise potential child protection issues and if schools believe a child or family have gone missing, the child should remain on the school roll until all enquiries have been completed by the school and LA Investigation Officer. The school and LA must record that they have completed these procedures (via Missing Pupil Checklist) before deleting them from the register.¹⁰

Schools cannot remove a pupil from the school roll until reasonable enquiries have been jointly carried out by school staff and LA staff over a period of no less than 20 days. Schools will be advised of when LA investigations have been completed in writing by the LA Investigation Officer. If this process has not been followed schools will be required, according to The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, to reinstate pupils back on their school roll.

7. The Role of MECES

The role of MECES is to ensure that all children within Essex are in receipt of a full time education. MECES will also ensure the correct procedures are followed when a pupil is removed from roll from an Essex school. MECES will;

- Monitor the number of children/young people that the authority are aware of who are not receiving a suitable education
- Receive referrals from professionals and the general public regarding children missing from education
- Receive information from schools on children who are absent from school and no contact can be made with parent/carers to establish reason for absence

- Ensure details of any Child Missing from Education (CME) are recorded on the database
- Carry out appropriate checks to trace such child and establish their educational provision
- Serve notice on parents requiring them to satisfy the LA that their child is receiving suitable education when the LA becomes aware of a child possibly not receiving a suitable education
- Take appropriate legal action in cases of non-cooperation from parents/carers

If the pupil is not traced following all reasonable checks, MECES will write to the school to advise the date they can remove from roll (not before 20 days of continuous unauthorised absence). If contact with parent/carer is made, the officer will establish the reason for absence and advise the school of the outcome, confirming if the pupil is to remain on roll, or the date the pupil can be removed from roll.

Making a CME referral

Any professional who locates a child who they believe is without suitable educational provision should notify MECES within 5 working days. It is expected that our key partners in this area of work will include:

Families moving between local authority areas can sometimes lead to a child becoming 'lost' in the system and consequently missing education. When MECES become aware of a child moving to another LA and a school has not been identified, contact will be made with the new LA and relevant information will be shared to ensure the child is receiving an education either by attending school or otherwise.

When another LA has provided an address in Essex of a child believed to be missing from education, the family will be contacted as soon as possible. Unless concerns justify an immediate visit, initial contact will be made in writing before telephone calls or visits are made.

If no address is provided but there is reasonable evidence to suggest a child/young person could have moved to the area then initial checks will be run via School Admissions, and where possible via other local databases. Whatever the result of the search, the enquiring LA will be informed.

MISSING PUPIL CHECKLIST To be completed by schools when;

- A pupil has gone missing and no contact can be made with parent/carer to establish reason for absence
- Ceased to attend the school and forwarding address of the family is not known
- When a child has not returned from holiday within 10 schools days of the expected date of return