

Children Missing from Education (CME)

Date: May 2021

A child who is missing from an education setting is a potential indicator of abuse and neglect. Meadowpark School will put in place appropriate safeguarding responses if children are missing from school. We will follow-up unexplained absences of any student with a telephone call from the school office on the morning of the first day of absence and priority will be given to vulnerable children especially those on a Child Protection Plan. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) will notify social services if there is an unexplained absence of more than two days of a student who is on the student safeguarding register. Meadowpark School works within the WSVPP details and as such, access the services for Children Missing Education within the Wiltshire. The school will follow the protocol to identify children missing from education. This applies to all starters and leavers at non-standard transition points. Any changes to our admission register will trigger notification to our Single Point of Contact (SPOC) at Wiltshire: Pupil Move (Pupilmove@wiltshire.gov.uk).

The school will view absence as both a safeguarding issue and an educational issue. The school office will inform the Headteacher of any pupil who has been absent without the school's permission for 10 continuous school days. Additionally, the school will notify Pupil Move of any student who is going to be deleted from the admissions register where the student:

- has been taken out of school by his/her parents and is being educated outside the school system e.g. elective home education; has ceased to attend Meadowpark School and no longer lives within reasonable distance;
- has been permanently excluded;
- has been removed from the admissions register at non-standard transitions i.e. where a child leaves Meadowpark School before completing Year 6.

Requests for special leave

Parents requesting special leave must do so in writing to the Head. The absence may be declared authorised or may be refused. If leave is refused and the parents then take the child out of school, this becomes an unauthorised absence. The school will be mindful of risks to children including FGM and travelling to conflict zones.

Absence after a holiday

After every holiday, including half term, the parents of any absent children are immediately contacted to ensure that the children have not gone on unauthorised extended leave. Any requests for extended leave in school time are refused unless parents can provide evidence of an emergency e.g. sickness, bereavement etc. In all cases parents are asked to provide a return date.

Patterns of children missing education can be an indicator of either abuse or safeguarding risks. A relatively short period a child is missing does not reduce the risk of harm to that child, and all absence or non-attendance should be considered with other known factors or concerns.

Designated Safeguard Leads (DSLs) and staff should consider:

Single missing days:

- Is there a pattern in the day missed?
- Is it before or after the weekend suggesting the child is away from the area?
- Are there specific lessons or members of staff on these days?
- Is the parent informing the school of the absence on the day?
- Are missing days reported back to parents to confirm their awareness?
- Is the child being sexually exploited during this day? Do the parents appear to be aware?
- Are the pupil's peers making comments or suggestions as to where the pupil is?

Continuous missing days:

- Has the school been able to make contact with the parents? Is medical evidence being provided?
- Are any siblings attending school (either our or local schools)?
- Did we have any concerns about radicalisation, FGM, forced marriage, honour-based violence or sexual exploitation?
- Have we had any concerns about physical or sexual abuse?

Children Missing from Home or Care

Children who run away from home or from care provide a clear behavioural indication that they are either unhappy or do not feel safe in the place that they are living. Research shows that children run away from conflict, neglect, abuse, problems at home or school, or because children are being groomed by predatory individuals who seek to exploit them.

The association of chief police officers has provided the following definitions and guidance.

A "Missing" person is: 'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.'

An "Absent" person is: 'A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.'

All cases classified as Missing by the police will receive an active police response - such as deployment of police officers to locate a child. Cases where the child is classified as Absent will be recorded by the police and risk assessed regularly but no active response will be deployed. The Absent case will be resolved when a young person returns or new information comes to light suggesting that he/she is at risk. In the latter instance, the case is upgraded to Missing.

Within any case of children who are missing both push and pull factors will need to be considered.

Push factors include:

- Conflict with parents/carers;
- Feeling powerless;
- Being bullied/abused;
- Being unhappy/not being listened to;
- The Toxic Trio (domestic violence, mental ill-health and drug/alcohol misuse (as defined by Ofsted)). Working Together notes these issues rarely exist in isolation. There is a complex interaction between the three issues.

Pull factors include:

- Wanting to be with family/friends;
- Drugs, money and any exchangeable item;
- Peer pressure;
- For those who have been trafficked into the United Kingdom as unaccompanied asylum seeking children there will be pressure to make contact with their trafficker.

As a school we will inform all parents of children who are absent (unless the parent has informed us). If the parent is also unaware of the location of their child, and the definition of Missing is met, we will either support the parent to/directly contact the police to inform them.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Sexual exploitation of children is not limited by the age of consent and can occur up until the age of 18. CSE involves children being in situations, contexts or relationships where they (or a third person) receive 'something' as a result of them performing sexual activities. The something can include food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, or money. Child sexual exploitation can happen via technology without the child being aware; for example, being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability. CSE can happen to a child of any age, gender, ability or social status. Often the victim of CSE is not aware that they are being exploited and do not see themselves as a victim.

Characteristics of Child Sexual Exploitation and abuse

It is often planned and systematic—people do not sexually abuse children by accident, though sexual abuse can be opportunistic; grooming the child—people who abuse children take care to choose a vulnerable child and often spend time making them dependent; grooming the child's environment—abusers try to ensure that potential adult protectors (parents and other carers especially) are not suspicious of their motives.

Indicators of sexual abuses, one of the following signs may be behavioural indicators of sexual exploitation:

Children who:

- appear with unexplained gifts or new possessions;
- associate with other young people involved in exploitation;
- have older boyfriends or girlfriends;
- suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant;
- suffer from changes in emotional well-being;
- go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late;
- regularly miss school or education or do not take part in education;
- stay away from certain people or avoid being alone with someone;
- display sexual behaviour that is inappropriate for their age;
- an unwillingness to remove clothes when changing for PE

Students being withdrawn from school

If a pupil is withdrawn from Meadowpark School, Wiltshire LA, will be notified so that all reasonable efforts can be made to confirm the school to which the pupil is being admitted; their confidential educational and student protection records will be sent separately. Educational records sent to our school concerning a student who is not registered by the parents will be returned and the school advised to refer to their Local Authority Education Welfare Service.

Approval and Review

The policy was approved by the Headteacher on 12th May 2021.
The renewal date is annually or earlier if there is a change in legislation.