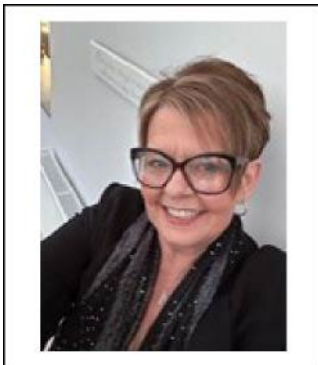




The Forum School

Safeguarding Policy –

(6) Children Absent/Missing from Education Policy



Jane Holloway - DSL



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Introduction

This policy is written in line with the following statutory guidance:

- [Keeping children safe in education 2024](#)
- [Working together to improve school attendance 2024](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children 2023](#)
- [Children Missing Education - Guidance for Local authorities](#)

Wider Policies support this Child Protection Policy. All are numbered and sit alongside to create the school safeguarding policy.

1. Child Protection Policy
2. The Role of the DSL Policy
3. Child on Child Abuse Policy
4. Filtering and Monitoring Policy
5. Managing Low Level Concerns Policy
6. Absent from Education Policy
7. Schools Safer Recruitment Policy
8. Managing Contextual Risks to Children
9. Safeguarding Over 18s

This policy should also be read alongside the school's Attendance Policy.

Aims of this policy

The aim of this policy is to ensure that staff understand:

- What does children absent from education mean from a safeguarding perspective?
- How to respond and monitor children's absence

Children Absent/Missing from Education

While children/students may be absent from education due to illness, holiday or a family emergency staff must be aware of any patterns of absence and use their curiosity to consider whether any safeguarding concerns could also be a reason.

Staff should be aware that children/students being absent from school or college, particularly repeatedly and/or for prolonged periods can be a warning sign of potential safeguarding risks.

Schools/colleges should regularly analyse attendance and absence data to identify students where safeguarding issues may be prevalent and put effective strategies in place as in line with their Safeguarding/Child Protection process and/or Early Help process.

Children/students who are absent from education may be experiencing abuse and neglect such as sexual abuse or exploitation or may be victim to criminal exploitation including involvement in county lines. Periods of absence may also indicate mental health problems, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation, so called 'honour'-based abuse or risk of forced marriage.

Other factors that can impact attendance include:

- involvement in the youth justice system
- coming from a newly migrant background
- those whose parents are service personnel
- coming from a Gypsy, Roma or Travelling (GRT) background

Close monitoring, early intervention, a multi-agency approach and where necessary the implementation of the Safeguarding/Child Protection process are essential when identifying the existence of any underlying safeguarding risks.

All actions and decisions regarding children/students absent from education must be clearly documented, including contact attempts, risk assessments, and safeguarding actions taken. These records should be stored securely and be available for review if necessary.

The DSL and staff should consider the following when children/students are absent from education:

- Are there patterns in the lessons that are being missed?
- Is this more than avoidance of a subject or a teacher?
- Does the child remain on the school site or are they absent from the site?
- Is the child/student being exploited during this time?
- Are they late because of a caring responsibility?
- Have they been directly or indirectly affected by substance misuse?
- Are other students routinely missing the same lessons and does this raise other risks or concerns such as sexual violence/sexual harm between pupils, exploitation, gang behaviour or substance misuse?
- Is the lesson being missed one that would cause bruising or injuries to become visible?

Single missing days:

- Is there a pattern in the day missed?
- Is it before or after the weekend suggesting the child/students is away from the area?
- Are there specific lessons or members of staff on these days?
- Is the parent/carer informing the school of the absence on the day (for those under 18 years)?

- Are missing days reported back to parents/carers to confirm their awareness (for those under 18 years)?
- Is the child/student being sexually exploited during this day?
- Is the child/student avoiding abusive behaviour from peers or staff on this day?
- Do the parents/carers appear to be aware and are they condoning the behaviour?
- Are peers making comments or suggestions as to where the pupil is?
- Can the parent/student be contacted and made aware (for those under 18)?

Continuous missing days:

- Has the school been able to contact the parent/carer (for those under 18 years)?
- Is medical evidence being provided?
- Are siblings attending school/college (either our or local schools)?
- Did we have any concerns about radicalisation, FGM, forced marriage, honour-based violence, sexual exploitation?
- Have we had any concerns about physical or sexual abuse?
- Does the parent have any known medical needs? Is the child/student safe?

The school/college will view repeated absence as both a safeguarding issue and an educational outcomes issue. The school/college may take steps that could result in legal action for attendance (for those under 18 years) and/or a referral to children's/adults' social care, or both.

Children Missing from Home or Care

It is known that children/students who go missing are at risk of suffering significant harm, and there are specific risks around children/students running away and the risk of sexual exploitation.

The Police, as the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children/students, will respond to them going missing based on on-going risk assessments in line with current guidance.

The police definition of 'missing' is:

- Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.

Various categories of risk should be considered and Local Safeguarding Children's and Adults Partnerships provides further guidance:

Local authorities have safeguarding duties in relation to children/students missing from home and should work with the police to risk assess and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks.

The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children/students as medium or high risk. Where a child/student is recorded as being absent, the details will be recorded by the police, who will also agree review times and any on-going actions with the person reporting.

A missing child/student incident would be prioritised as 'high risk' where:

- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child/student is in danger through their own vulnerability; or
- the child/student may have been the victim of a serious crime; or
- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

The high-risk category requires the immediate deployment of police resources.

Authorities need to be alert to the risk of sexual exploitation or involvement in drugs, gangs, criminal activity, trafficking and to be aware of local "hot spots", as well as concerns about any individuals with whom children/students might run away with.

Child protection/Adult Safeguarding procedures must be initiated in collaboration with children's/adults' social care services whenever there are concerns that a child/student who is missing may be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

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

Push factors include:

- Conflict with parents/carers/peers
- Feeling powerless
- Being bullied/abused
- Being unhappy/not being listened to
- The Trigger Trio (domestic abuse, parental mental ill health and parental substance misuse)

Pull factors include:

- Wanting to be with family/friends/boyfriend/girlfriend/partner
- Drugs, money and any exchangeable item
- Peer pressure
- For those who have been trafficked into the United Kingdom as unaccompanied asylum-seeking individual, there will be pressure to contact their trafficker
- Pursuing a sense of belonging/affection/warmth

We will inform all parents of children/students who are absent (unless the parent has informed us and if the individual is under 18 years). If the parent/carer is also unaware of the location of their child, and the definition of missing is met, we will either support the parent/carer to contact the police to inform them or do so ourselves with urgency.

Returning home from care

When children/students are taken into care, consideration may be given in the future to those individuals being returned to the care of their parents or carers. Other children/students are placed in care on a voluntary basis by their parents/carers who are able to remove their voluntary consent.

While this is a positive experience for many children/students who have returned to their families, for some there are different challenges and stresses in this process with children/students often returning to environments fraught with conflict, poverty and violence.

As a school/college, if we are aware that one of our children/students who is looked after is returning to their home, we will consider what support we can offer and ensure as a minimum that the child/student has a person, they trust, who they can talk to or share their concerns with.

The role of the staff

The DSL monitors Behaviourwatch/Databridge and staff monitor school attendance and absence data to identify trends and patterns of absence. Staff refer to the Attendance Policy in doing so.

All staff use professional curiosity to ask questions when patterns emerge. For example, if a child is missing from school every Friday, could this be because of a contextual safeguarding issue? If a child is missing from care regularly but attends school, could the child be abused at home and finds school a safe place? Are there concerns regarding online safety and the child/student being at risk of online bullying/sexual exploitation/radicalisation etc

In each example, there is a need to include a number of agencies. Staff bring these concerns to the DSL who coordinates any necessary multiagency discussions and responses. The DSL considers whether there are warning signs of potential risk such as student/child anxiety around mobile phone access or calls.

Review

This Policy was written on 08 November 2023. A review will be annually as a minimum.

However, subject to a significant safeguarding concern this policy and all other attached policies will be reviewed and monitored as part of a lessons learned review.

Written by:

This policy was written by Matt Nicholls – Head of Policy Children’s Services, it was reviewed by Christina Leath – Group Safeguarding Director. This policy has been reviewed by the DSL of the School and agreed by the Proprietor Representative.

Reviewed – January 2025 by Laura Dickie, Head of Policy

Next Review – January 2026