

Handout - Children missing education

Who are the missing children?

Children missing education (CME) are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education elsewhere. There are many reasons why children might be CME and you may be aware from your own experience of children who have dropped out of the system.

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) has separated them into four categories:

- Where children are not in school because of their feelings and preferences, ie:
 - mental health difficulties
 - fear of school
 - past experience/trauma.
- Where children are experiencing problems in the family home, ie:
 - domestic violence
 - family breakdown
 - acting as carers
 - parents with mental health difficulties or addictions.
- Where children are experiencing problems in school itself, such as:
 - unmet SEND
 - social and/or emotional problems
 - difficulties with behaviour
 - bullying.
- Where children are experiencing problems in the wider system, eg:
 - moving schools because of a family move
 - arriving from abroad.

Children in these categories are likely to be more vulnerable than other children and may well be at risk. Children may also be in more than one category. For example, a child may be afraid to attend school because they are worried about the safety of a parent in a violent household.

What are schools required to do?

The statutory guidance states that schools:

- Must monitor pupils' attendance through daily registers.
- Should agree with their LA the intervals at which they will inform them of pupils who:
 - fail to attend regularly
 - have missed ten school days or more without permission.
- Should monitor attendance closely and address poor or irregular attendance.
- Should refer pupils' poor attendance to the LA.

Where a pupil has not returned to school for ten days after an authorised absence or is absent from school without authorisation for 20 consecutive school days, the pupil can be removed from the admission register when the school and the LA have failed, after jointly making reasonable enquiries, to establish the whereabouts of the child.

According to the latest version of *Keeping children safe in education*, where it is reasonably possible, schools should have more than one emergency contact number for their pupils and students.

What are 'reasonable enquiries'?

You will need to decide as a school what you understand by making 'reasonable enquiries'. Below are examples from Birmingham City Council's CME policy:

- Call the CME team to conduct 'background checks'.
- Consider the likely reason for the absence.
- Make a first day of absence call to the parents.
- Check with members of staff who the child may have had contact with.
- Check with the child's friends, siblings and known relatives at the school or another school.

- Make enquiries with any other professionals who have been involved with the child.
- Make telephone calls to any numbers held.
- Conduct a visit to the last known address within the first five days of the child's absence.
- If possible, enquire of neighbours about the location of the family.
- Send a letter to the last known address.
- Complete the 'missing pupil' referral form.

Every Local Authority (LA) should have a CME policy.