

# Children missing and missing out on education (CME)

Guidance from Northumberland County Council for schools, partner agencies, parents and carers



Reviewed September 2022

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## Children missing from education (CME) – the national context and statutory requirements

This document explains Northumberland County Council's procedures for identifying, locating and safeguarding children not in full time education, not receiving full time education in a

registered school, or who are at risk of missing out on full time education which fulfil the statutory responsibilities of the local authority and which apply to schools and other partner agencies.

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. Section 436A of the Education Act (added by section 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) requires all local authorities to establish, as far as it is possible to do so, the identity of children of compulsory school age who are missing from education in their area.

The Department for Education (DfE) defines a child missing education as *a child who is not on a school roll and has been out of education for more than 4 school weeks. The term children missing from education (CME) therefore refers to all children of compulsory school age who are neither registered at a school nor educated otherwise (i.e. home educated or privately educated.)* [CME Statutory Guidance September 2016](#)

## What is CME?

The local authority has a duty to identify and engage with pupils who are not receiving their entitlement to full time education. Full time education is defined as 25 hours per week for 39 weeks per year. These pupils are either at risk of missing out on or are **missing out on full time education**.

A child between the ages of 5 and 16 is considered to be **missing education** if:

1. They are not on a school roll and not receiving an education otherwise than at school e.g. at home or in alternative provision;
- or
2. They are on a school roll but have not attended for a period of 20 consecutive school days (recorded as unauthorised absence) or the whereabouts of the family is unknown.

Identifying, tracking and re-engaging both groups of pupils is a key safeguarding process. If a child is not in school during the hours of the school day then we must ask the question:

***where are they and are they safe?***

## Children at risk of going missing from education

There is a known link between children not in school full time and child sexual and criminal exploitation.

Children and young people who are particularly vulnerable are at greater risk of going missing from education. These include:

- failing to start school at Reception entry, hence never entering the authority's admissions register
- failing to complete transition at Key Stage 1 to 2 (first to middle) or Key Stage 2 to 3 (primary to secondary)
- children of homeless families living in temporary accommodation/refuges
- children living in a house of multiple occupancy or bed and breakfast accommodation
- unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees or children of asylum-seeking families
- children with long-term medical or emotional problems
- children who are in the care of the local authority (looked after)
- children for whom English is an additional language
- children with a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background
- children from transient families
- teenage mothers
- children with poor attendance
- children and young people who have committed offences or are at risk of becoming involved in crime
- children identified with specific child protection issues and those who are considered to be in need of a Child Protection Plan
- young people at risk of forced marriage (possible indicator of child sexual exploitation)
- young people at risk of radicalisation
- young carers
- children and young people on part time timetables or in alternative provision
- those who experience more than 6 lost sessions in one month due to fixed term exclusions or who are permanently excluded
- children and young people awaiting the allocation of a special school place
- children on whose behalf the County Council has commissioned educational placements outside the maintained school sector, either in independent or non-maintained special schools, or with education providers that are an alternative to school
- children who leave Northumberland schools to live and be educated in Scotland.

It should be noted that personal circumstances of the child, or those of their families, may contribute to the withdrawal process and the failure to make a transition, e.g. parents/carers escaping domestic violence, families moved quickly under the police witness protection scheme.

What is consistent in each of these situations is that missing education may add to the child/young person's vulnerability. It is therefore essential that everyone involved, including professionals, parents and carers, ensure appropriate action is taken to ensure a suitable educational placement is found. In some circumstances this may be elective home education.

In addition, there are more serious cases, such as being abducted by a parent, abductions by a stranger or abduction that later results in homicide. It is therefore essential that when any child goes missing from education, the case is approached in a sensitive and structured manner and where appropriate school staff or the local authority make contact with legal services and/or the police.

## Arrangements in Northumberland

- There is a named person for CME at the local authority who is a Lead Education Welfare Officer (LEWO).
- Multi agency CME tracking panels are held monthly and are chaired by the Principal Education Welfare Officer. The panels also include the named person for CME, Traveller Education Liaison Officer, Admissions and Inclusion Team Manager, Secondary School Designated Safeguarding Lead, representative from Northumberland's Inclusive Education Team ( Appendix 1, terms of reference)
- There is an Education Liaison Officer based at the front door (and multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)) who reports to the Schools' Safeguarding Team Manager. Operation Endeavour is well-embedded and consideration of CME is made at daily triage meetings so school attendance informs decision making about actions following Child Concern Notices from the Police.
- There is senior manager oversight from the Virtual School Headteacher who is managed through children's social care, reports directly to the Director of Children's Services and has strong links with elected members, the Northumberland Safeguarding Strategic Partnership (NSSP), community safety and school improvement.
- Children missing from education are reported on a continuous basis and tracked until they have enrolled in a new school or have been seen by a professional in the receiving local authority.
- The national Lost Pupil Database is used to download files related to children missing from education and a database of those referrals are kept alongside referrals directly from school and other agencies.
- The Pupil Placement Panel (fair access) allocates school places to children who are missing or at risk of missing and then found.
- Northumberland's Section 175 Safeguarding Standards Audit includes questions about children missing education and the link to child exploitation

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## The role of the Lead Education Welfare Officer (LEWO)

The LEWO in Children's Services is the 'named person' for CME.

In respect of missing children, the LEWO has four principal duties:

1. To raise awareness of CME procedures with Children's Services, the wider County Council, NSSP partners, the public and other appropriate agencies.
2. To provide a single point of focus for information relating to CME irrespective of circumstance by officers, schools, other agencies or by members of the public.
3. To maintain records of all children and young people reported as missing from education and to ensure that either:

- a. arrangements are made for the individual to re-engage with appropriate professionals within the educational system; or
  - b. following the unsuccessful conclusion of 'reasonable enquiries' the Common Transfer File (CTF) for the individual is uploaded to the national Lost Pupil Database by the school attended last\*.
4. To revise and update the CME protocol at appropriate intervals to take account of changed circumstances, such as:
- a. changes to internal processes and procedures;
  - b. changes to external relationships with partner organisations; or
  - c. changes in government policy, guidance or legislation.

Should any agency become aware that a child has either left Northumberland, or has arrived in the area, the LEWO should be notified and as much information as possible provided to assist in tracing and tracking the child. If a child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, the school must inform One Call immediately. Any concerns about child protection, sexual /criminal exploitation and trafficking should also be reported, and all services should be guided by their own procedures and ensure that their Designated Safeguarding Lead is informed.

Partner agencies who may become aware of children and young people moving into Northumberland or see evidence of non-attendance include health, children's services, benefit agencies, women's refuges, police and housing. If anyone believes they have information in relation to non-attendance, they should report this to the LEWO.

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The named person to contact in Northumberland about children missing or missing out on education is:

**DAWN WESTERBY, Lead Education Welfare Officer 01670 623027,  
Dawn.Westerby@northumberland.gov.uk**

## Reporting a child that has gone missing from education

Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child(ren) of compulsory school age are receiving a suitable education (section 444 Education Act 1996) and all schools have safeguarding duties in respect of their pupils (section 175 of the Education Act 2002).

All schools, including maintained schools, free schools, academies and Pupil Referral Units, must monitor a pupil's attendance on a daily basis and investigate any unexplained absences.

In normal cases of absence, a schools staged response should be followed and a referral for legal action should be made when parents fail to improve the attendance. These cases are not CME.

If after 10 days of continued unauthorised absence school have failed to locate the pupil, the Local Authority must be informed. This should be done by completing the Vulnerability Checklist (VCL) (Appendix 2) and submitting it to [educationwelfare@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:educationwelfare@northumberland.gov.uk).

Following receipt of the VCL, an officer from Education Welfare will then make relevant checks to try and establish the whereabouts of the child:

- If the child is located, he/she should remain on the school roll until admission to another school is confirmed;
- if after four school weeks (20 school days), should efforts to trace the child be unsuccessful, the school will be advised by a member of the Education Welfare Team that the child's name can be removed from the school roll.

When the child is removed from the school roll, the school must upload the child's Common Transfer File to the national Lost Pupil Database. ( Appendix 3, flowchart)

*For details of the school to school (S2S) website and the Lost Pupil Database, please refer to the Student Data Transfer section of your SIMS Manual or contact the Data and User Liaison Officer at County Hall for advice.*

**CME procedures do not replace any agency protocols or procedures in respect of safeguarding and as such these concerns should be reported to One Call 01670 536400 and recorded using the individual agency procedures.**

## Engaging with relevant partner agencies

It is necessary to raise awareness amongst all stakeholders about how to inform the local authority about children missing from education in order to ensure that agencies (e.g. health and housing) apply this principle consistently. It is often the case that another agency is aware of the arrival or the existence of a child living in the area but not in education, before the local authority is aware.

In paragraph 17.97 of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report, Lord Laming recommended that: "Front line staff in each of the agencies which regularly come into contact with families with children must ensure that in each new contact, basic information about the child is recorded. This must include the child's name, address, age, the name of the child's primary carer, the child's GP and the name of the child's school if the child is of school age. Gaps in this information should be passed on to the relevant authority in accordance with local arrangements".

In order to ensure all children in Northumberland are receiving a suitable and safe education, all stakeholders will benefit from regular awareness raising from the Education Welfare team to develop a sound and consistent understanding of the importance of education in safeguarding children and of the need to notify the Education Welfare team if they suspect a child is missing from education.

This guidance should be read with:

- CME statutory guidance, DfE September 2019 (due for review September 2019)
- School attendance guidance, DfE July 2019
- Guide to non-school attendance, statutory responsibilities and referral to the Education Welfare team, NCC September 2019
- EHE guidance, NCC
- 10 things you should know about children missing education

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference CME Tracking Panel

Appendix 2: Vulnerability Checklist

Appendix 3: Flowchart Children Missing Education

## Contacts

If you require further information or any clarification with regard to pupil registration or removal of pupil's names from the school roll, please contact:

Sarah Wintringham

Principal Education Welfare Officer

01670 622800

sarah.wintringham@northumberland.gov.uk



## Appendix 1

**Northumberland Children Missing from Education Tracking Panel  
Terms of Reference****Purpose**

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 exploitation and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later on in life.

In Northumberland we are ambitious for all our children and young people regardless of their additional needs or any other circumstance. All children and young people should have the opportunity to realise their full potential, be safe, feel secure and be confident. All children and young people should have every opportunity to learn and participate while contributing positively to the lives of those around them.

Northumberland County Council (NCC) is committed to ensuring children and young people can return to an appropriate form of education as quickly as possible, therefore it is imperative that all professionals who have contact with young people work together to identify these

children and collaborate to ensure they are in the most appropriate provision. In the majority of cases this should be a school.

The Children Missing Education (CME) Tracking Panel brings together managers, team managers and officers from across NCC with a focus on ensuring inclusive practice and improving outcomes for all learners in Northumberland. The group focuses on our vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, especially those children missing educational provision.

The group will:

- promote inclusive practice and improve outcomes for all learners in Northumberland with a focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners
- Ensure that the safeguarding of children missing and at risk of missing education remains a priority
- work collaboratively to ensure effective information sharing between services and schools which contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people
- recognise the vital role played by all representatives in improving school performance relating to behaviour, attendance and wellbeing of all Northumberland children and young people
- work to improve a shared understanding of current practice and the priorities for improvement.
- establish and implement a set of criteria (outlined below) to be applied to the data provided, on which decisions will be made regarding any future actions to be taken in relation to children and young people where concerns are raised  
Agreed criteria:
  - 2 consecutive months on a part time timetable
  - 2 consecutive months receiving at least 6 sessions of FTE
  - 3 consecutive months on roll at school but accessing AP
  - flexi schooling for more than 1 half term
  - dual registration review on termly basis
  - not on a school roll - monthly review
  - all SEND children meeting any of above
  - Any child placed on a remote learning package
- agree collaboratively on appropriate actions to be taken, when concerns are raised about any child or young person and ensure that the relevant provision is supported and challenged to address concerns identified. Actions will include referral to partner agencies, to include Children's Services via One Call (for either early help assessment or referral to the MASH), Youth Offending Service, Sorted and associated health services (if appropriate)
- be accountable to the Northumberland Safeguarding Strategic Partnership.
- Feedback will be sent schools/agencies informing them of any actions/ outcome of the tracking panel

**Membership of the group - job titles and teams to be confirmed at the next meeting**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Service</b>
Sarah Wintringham	Principal Education Welfare Officer	Virtual School, Children's Services
Dawn Westerby	Lead Education Welfare Officer	Virtual School, Children's Services
Angela Mitchison	EOTAS Learning Manager	Virtual School, Children's Services
Tara Prescott	Deputy Virtual School Head	Virtual School, Children's Services
Sarah Jordan	SEND Team Manager	
Jill Varney	School Admissions and Inclusion Manager	School Organisation Education and Skills Service
Ian Luke	GRT & AS Education Officer	
Andrew Elliot	Youth participation officer	Northumberland Youth Service
Emma Foote	Senior Early Help Coordinator	Children's Services
Michael Smith	School representative	Haydon Bridge High School
Fiona Tarn	NIES Service manager (HINT)	Northumberland Inclusive Education Service
Rhian Davies	Senior Primary Mental Health Work Lead	Primary Mental Health
Michelle Bouhleli	Community Clinical Manager	Northumberland Children and Young Peoples Service

**All members should have arrangements in place for another officer to attend meetings if they are unable to do so.**

The data set used in the meetings will be derived from the information submitted in the monthly returns. Monthly returns will be submitted by schools, APs, SEND team, EOTAS (health needs team), Youth Offending Service,

### **Meeting dates**

The group will meet once a month, to analyse the data submitted and agree appropriate actions, where required

### **Confidentiality and Information Sensitivity**

Attendees should assume all information is confidential unless agreement is confirmed that it may be disclosed beyond the meeting. At all times, discussion will be conducted with respect.

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Appendix 2

**NCC Vulnerability Checklist**

<b>Name:</b>		<b>School:</b>	
<b>DOB:</b>		<b>UPN:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>		<b>parent/carer</b>	

**Reason for Referral** (please tick (✓) /complete as appropriate)

Failure to take up a place (reported by School or EMS check)	
Has ceased to attend school but no details of new school	
Has been absent for more than 4 weeks without explanation	
Has failed to return to school following a holiday	
Application Form on phase transfer not returned	
Details of new school cannot be verified	
Other (please give details):	

**When initiating missing child enquiries, the following questions should be considered:**

		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1.	Is the child/young person the subject of a child protection plan (on the child protection register)?		
2.	Is the child/young person looked after by the Local Authority?		
3.	Is there current social care involvement?		
4.	Has the child gone missing without their family?		
5.	Is this sudden and/or unexpected behaviour?		
6.	Have there been suspicions in the past concerning this child/young person and family which together with the sudden disappearance are of concern?		
7.	Was there a significant incident prior to the child's unexplained		

	absence?		
8.	Have there been any past concerns about the child/young person e.g. associating with significantly older young people or adults?		
9.	Is there any health, religious or cultural reason to believe that the child/young person is at risk of harm?		

**If there are immediate safeguarding concerns the School/designated teacher for child protection/looked after children to inform northumberland children's services as a matter of urgency.**

**Signed:**

**Designation:**

**Date:**

Completed form should be sent to [educationwelfare@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:educationwelfare@northumberland.gov.uk)

Appendix 3

## NCC Children Missing Education Process



