

**Identifying and Maintaining Contact with
Children Missing or At Risk of Going Missing
from Education**

Process Steps

Good Practice Guide

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	3
Background	3 – 4
Implementing Change	4
Evaluating progress	4
Why children go missing from education	5 – 6
Reducing the risk of children going missing from education	6
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>	
<u>Process Steps</u>	7
Receive contact	8 – 10
Identify child as missing from education	11 – 12
Identify child at risk of going missing from education	13 – 15
Log child's details on database	16 – 17
Locate child	18
Determine child's needs	19 – 20
Identify available provision and places	21
Access appropriate provision	22 – 23
Monitor attendance for all provision	24 – 26
Track and reconcile movements	27 – 30
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>	
Annex A – Legislation and related guidance	31 – 32
Annex B – Progress Checklist: Self Evaluation	33 – 34

Introduction

This guidance provides a practical model of process steps to help Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in their implementation of effective systems for identifying and maintaining contact with children missing, or at risk of going missing, from education. This guidance applies to England only.

Children (child) missing from education in this document, refers to all children of compulsory school age who are not on a school role, nor being educated otherwise (e.g. privately or in alternative provision) and who have been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time (usually agreed as four weeks or more).

Adopting the process steps in this guidance will help LEAs meet statutory duties, relating to the provision of education and the safeguarding of the welfare of children, which may be relevant to children missing education (as detailed in Annex A, “Legislation” and “Related Guidance” pages 31-34). This guidance should be read in conjunction with current legislation and guidance listed in Annex A.

These process steps will also help LEAs meet Ofsted’s recommendation, given in their Key Stage 4 report *towards a flexible curriculum*, which urges LEAs to improve systems for tracking pupils who are missing from school roles.

We are very grateful to the LEAs who have generously contributed to the production of this guidance, through sharing examples of local practice and in shaping its format and content.

Background

In 2002, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) set a target in its strategic framework document, that: “By 2005, ensure that robust multi-agency systems are in place in each local authority to identify and track children missing education or at risk of doing so”.

In June 2003, Ofsted published the report *Key Stage 4: towards a more flexible curriculum* which highlighted the large proportion of unsatisfactory provision for pupils who were not at school. The report recommended that the exchange of information on the attainment and needs of pupils involved in alternative programmes out of school should be improved to secure better monitoring of and accountability for their progress. It also recommended that better systems for tracking pupils missing from school rolls should be put in place and maintained.

In September 2003, the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* set out the Government’s aim to ensure that every child and young person has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and no child slips through the net. The Green Paper set out five outcomes which services working with children, young people and families should work towards: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic well-being.

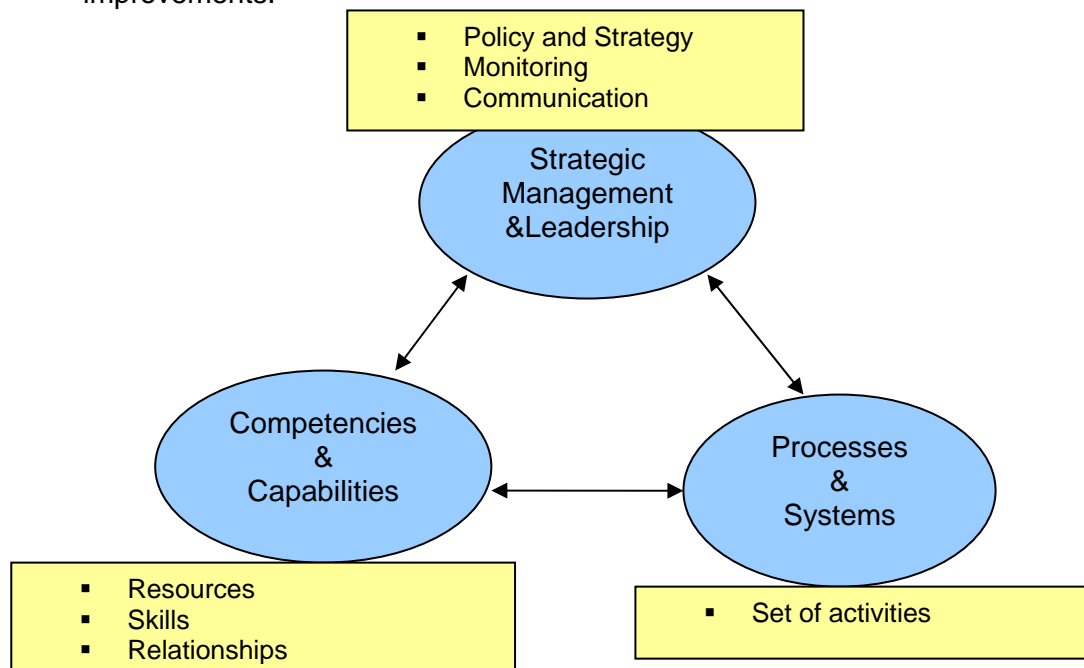
In contributing to the agenda outlined above, this guidance is intended to highlight good practice which already exists in LEAs for identifying children missing from education, plus those at risk of going missing, helping them move back into education (or alternative provision) and maintaining contact to prevent them slipping through the net again. This will help ensure all children and young people receive the universal services they are entitled to.

Other sources of information on where to look for advice about missing children are also available via some non-Government organisations, for example: the National Missing Person's Helpline (their "Education" section on their website www.missingpersons.org contains information which may be useful); also the Parents and Abducted Children Together (PACT) website www.pact-online.org contains some useful advice.

Implementing change

The model below provides a high level summary of the issues that LEAs should consider when planning and implementing improvements to their systems for identifying and maintaining contact with children missing or those at risk of going missing from education. The model identifies the need to:

- provide clear *leadership* and a well communicated strategy, linking up with developments arising from the Children Bill;
- implement effective *processes and systems*; and
- develop the *competences and capabilities* needed to support these improvements.



Evaluating progress

Changes in five areas of work were recognised as necessary to achieve a robust system to identify and maintain contact with children missing or at risk of going missing from education:

- Strategic Management & Leadership
- Networks & Points of Contact
- Information Systems
- Provision Brokering Services
- Effective Pupil Tracking Systems

A self evaluation checklist is attached at Annex B to help LEAs assess their progress in these five areas.

Why children go missing from education

We can explain the primary ways in which children can go missing from education using the illustration below of a simplified model of an educational career. A child would typically start school (or an appropriate alternative form of educational provision) rising 5 or on entry to the country. The child would then attend school or Education Otherwise, with periodic moves of school (e.g. from primary to secondary, or due to a move of home) until finishing mandatory education at age 16, or until leaving the country.

Children fall out of the education system because they:

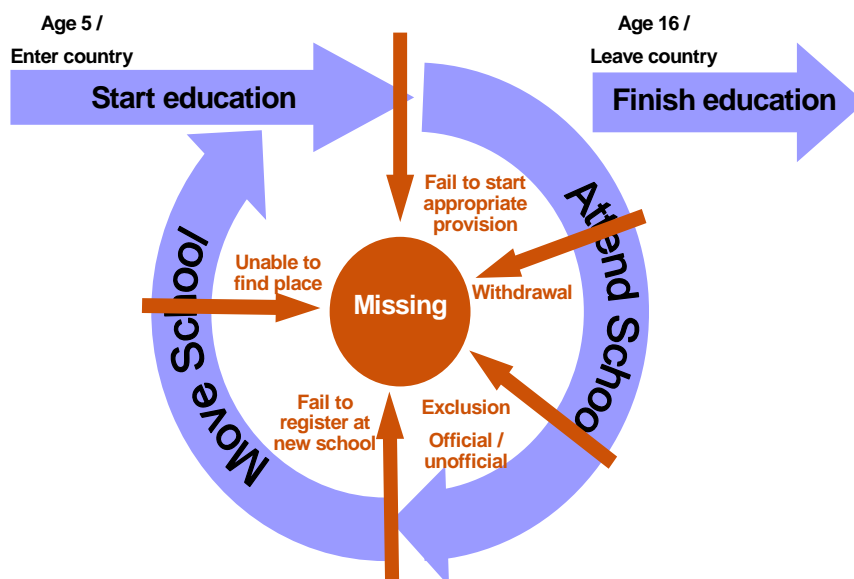
- fail to start appropriate provision and hence never enter the system;
- cease to attend, due to exclusion (e.g. illegal unofficial exclusions) or withdrawal; or
- fail to complete a transition between providers (e.g. being unable to find a suitable school place after moving to a new LEA).

Their personal circumstances or those of their families may contribute to the withdrawal process and the failure to make a transition.

Children go missing when they fall out of the education system and there is no systematic process in place to:

- identify those children; and
- ensure that they re-engage with appropriate provision (which may include services outside of school to meet their needs).

The following diagram illustrates the main ways in which a child can fall out of educational provision and hence become missing:



There are also other circumstances by which a child could go missing. Most cases are relatively minor whereby the child returns home quickly or is not believed to be in

any serious danger even if they are found or do not return. However, there are cases more serious, particularly where children are concerned, including where a child may become a victim of crime, such as being abducted by his/her parent, abduction by a stranger or abduction by a stranger that later results in homicide. It is therefore essential that when a child goes missing from education, that these cases are approached in a sensitive manner.

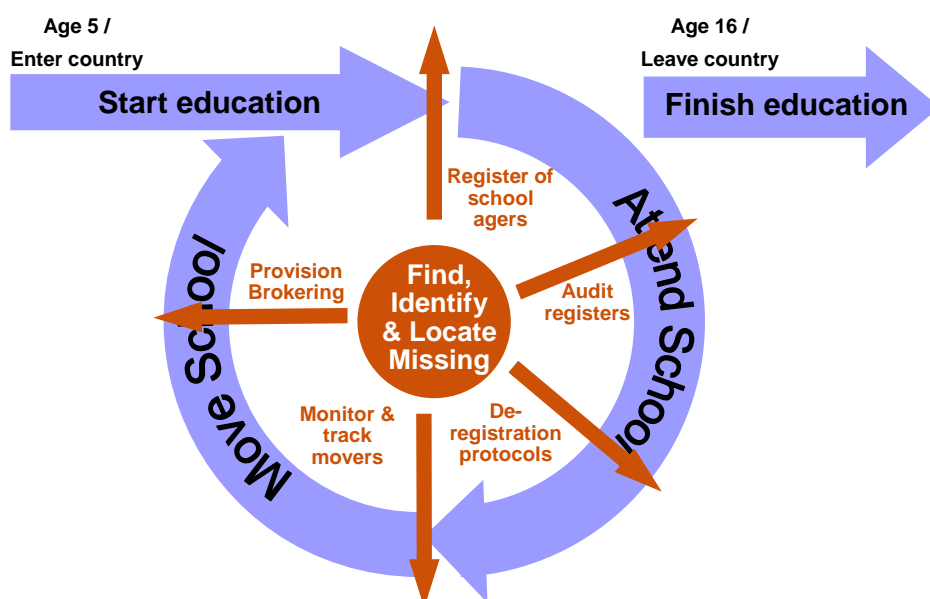
Reducing the Risk of Children Going Missing from Education

We have identified a range of systems, processes and procedures currently used by LEAs to reduce the risk that children fall out of the education system and go missing. Existing good practice broadly falls into three categories:

- measures to reduce the likelihood that children fall out of the education system, such as audits of the rolls and registers of schools;
- measures to identify and locate children missing education, such as truancy sweeps and the provision of named points of contact to receive notification of children from other agencies; and
- measures to re-engage the missing with appropriate educational provision, such as multi-agency panels to broker admissions.

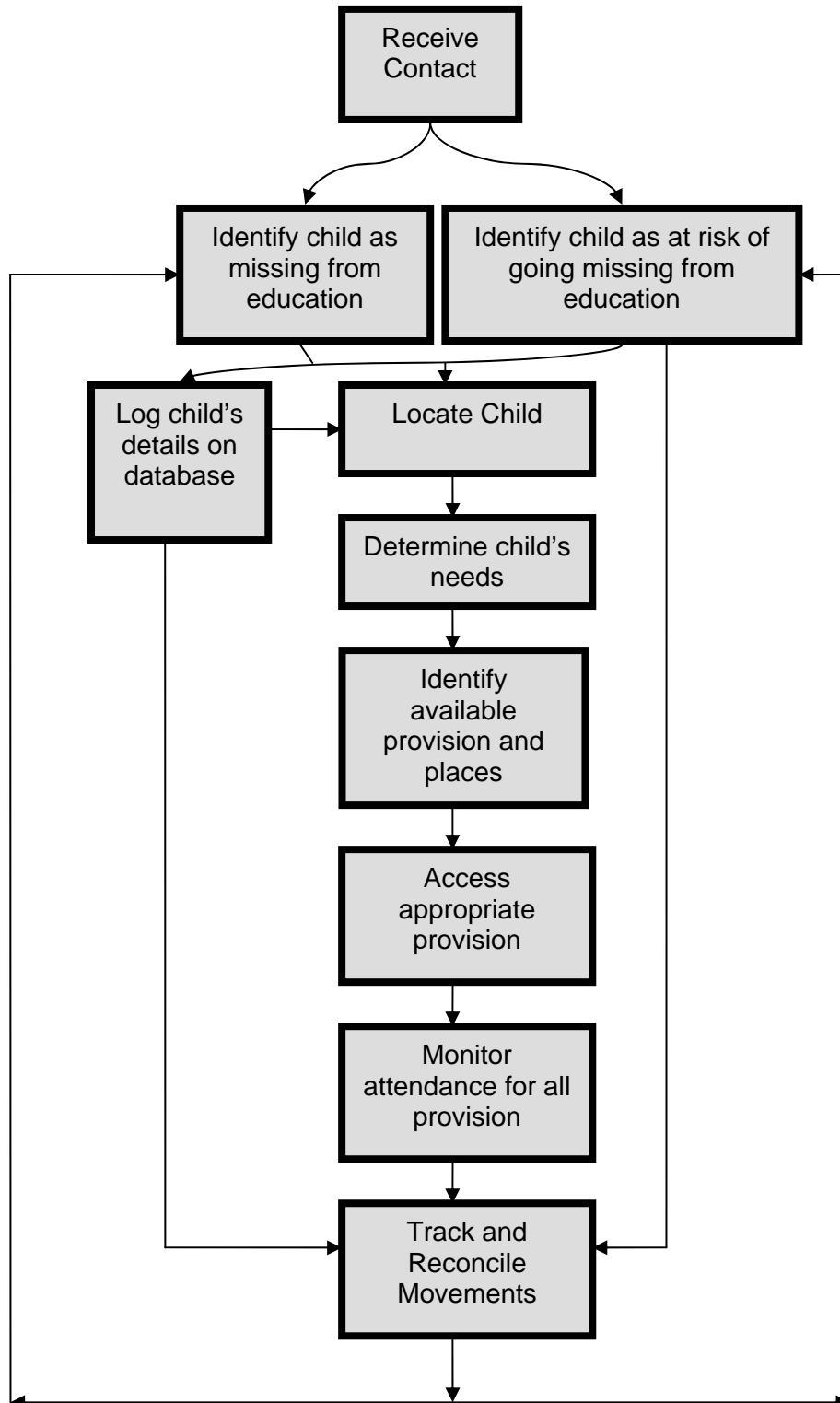
Although the main focus of this document is on processes and systems within LEAs, the work should be seen within the context of the wider remit of the Local Authority to safeguard the welfare of all children.

The following diagram shows how some of the key features of good practice identified can help reduce the likelihood that children will fall out of the system and, when they do, that they will go missing:



Process Steps

The process steps are based on those identified in consultation with LEAs about why children go missing from education and how to reduce the risk that they will. The process steps are:



Receive Contact:

The process by which the LEA is notified about a child missing or at risk of going missing from education

Enabling Factors:

- **Named person or person(s) to whom notifications are made**
- **Clear responsibilities on named person(s) for appropriate action**
- **Stakeholders and partner agencies understand who and how to notify**

Named person

The Identification, Referral and Tracking (IRT) Guidance (August 2003) required all Local Authorities to have:

“A named individual responsible for receiving details of children found missing from education, and for brokering support for them through the most appropriate agencies.”

Notifications can be received both from within the Local Authority boundaries, from colleagues within the LEA and other agencies. Another source of notification is other LEAs around the country. LEAs have chosen to name individuals in different roles for this responsibility depending on local circumstance. In some cases a role has been created which specifically addresses the issue of notifications from within and without the Local Authority, for example:

Sheffield - The Registration and Monitoring Officer (RMO) receives information concerning children known not to be in Educational provision, or who have left local provision with no known destination. In the team are also an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and Senior Inclusion Officer (SIO). A direct link via Sheffield IRT computer system (Safetynet) enables practitioners from health, social services and education to refer directly to the Missing Pupil team. Any practitioner checking a child's details will be notified automatically if the child does not appear on a school roll (Education Management System) and asked if they wish to make an online referral. The referral form will be held in a secure location in Safetynet to be accessed by the RMO or Missing Pupil team. They are in the process of discussing the development of protocols with homeless section, domestic violence forums, and other statutory/voluntary organisations.

Knowsley - The Pupil Mobility Co-ordinator is the named individual and is the point of contact across the Borough for missing pupils.

Blackpool - The Blackpool procedures have been collected together in a Handbook which has been forwarded to all LEAs in hard copy version and is available on the Camdengrid via the Information Sharing and Assessment Project Managers and includes the Registration and Monitoring Officer role and job description.

In other Local Authorities the individual named is in a more senior role and will therefore be delegating the work to other individuals, for example:

Kent - The named individual is the Head of Attendance and Behaviour. He has six officers who manage the process in different districts.

In other Local Authorities a number of officers may receive notifications from different sources.

Clear Responsibilities

Whichever route is adopted, the work progresses more effectively when there are clear responsibilities for each process step. A number of LEAs consulted also emphasised the importance of monitoring by Senior Management. In several cases Council Members had taken an interest and this was seen as a positive development.

Identifying and Engaging Stakeholders

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.**"

The recommendation was accepted in *Keeping Children Safe*, the Government's response to the *Victoria Climbié Inquiry* and the Joint Chief Inspectors' Report *Safeguarding Children* (September 2003).

It is necessary to raise awareness amongst Stakeholders about how to inform the LEA about children missing from education, in order to ensure that agencies employ this route consistently and whenever necessary. It will often be the case that another agency is aware of the arrival or existence of a child, living in an LEA but not in education, before the LEA is aware.

The first step is to identify all possible stakeholders for example: School secretaries/administrators, Housing Departments, Homeless Hostels, Accident and Emergency, NHS Walk-in services, Social Services Department, Police, Health Visitors, Education Welfare Officers (Education Social Workers) local and national, General Public (LEA switchboard), SEN caseworkers, Connexions.

Southampton - Data sharing protocols with the Health Authority. The LEA is given a list of 2/3/4 year old children living in Southampton. In exchange, the LEA shares which schools/pre-school settings children are attending in Southampton. This is currently in an electronic format and the protocols are being reviewed in the light of the enhancements of the School2School site.

Obtaining this data prior to compulsory school age gives the LEA some of the information needed to identify those children who may be missing from education provision.

Notification Routes

Possible notification routes:

- Circulate the name of the named individual with telephone number and email address
- Online or hard copy form.

Solihull - A memo has been sent to all agencies working with children to raise awareness of the list of missing children. The memo reminds agencies of the need to notify the LEA (via an online referral form) if they suspect a child is missing from education. This helps to identify children at risk who may have entered Solihull.

One way the LEA may receive notification about a child will be through Truancy Sweeps run by Education Welfare Services or Education Social Work Services in conjunction with the Police.

Blackpool – The Education Social Workers and the Police have a copy of the “Out of School Register” so that they can check if a child is already known to the LEA if they present as not being on a school roll. If the child is not in receipt of education and unknown they notify the Registration and Monitoring Officer.

Stakeholders need to be informed of the notification routes, for example by:

- Entry in Directory of Services (see IRT Guidance August 2003);
- Stakeholder events;
- School Secretaries' Conferences;
- Leaflets, etc.

This is a process which will need to be repeated on a regular basis because of inevitable staffing changes.

Identify child as missing from education:

The process by which the LEA determines that the notified child is not registered with an educational provider

Enabling Factors:

- **Access to rolls for all providers – including the LEAs central database for children educated otherwise than at school (see below and in Log child's details on database)**

Education Provider Rolls

If there is minimum information it may be necessary to check the child's name and other details, if available, against all educational provider rolls in the local area.

One way to achieve this is to have all names of school aged children kept on a central database which is frequently updated and can be checked by the staff members whose role requires access.

Blackpool & Knowsley - There is a centrally held database - Education Management Systems (EMS) (Capita system) - and a download of information from school via SIMS every month which ensures the information held is reasonably current. The Registration and Monitoring Officer/ Pupil Mobility Co-ordinator checks any names notified against the data held in EMS.

Following the publication of the Green paper *Every Child Matters* and building on the work of the IRT Trailblazers, the Government is committed to the development of improved information sharing systems. The child's education provision will be one element of data held on these systems.

In the meantime another way to check a child's name and other details would be via communication links with all educational providers, i.e. all schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and other providers of alternative provision to check if the child is registered with them. If email is used then consideration should be given to what information is sent via a relatively insecure medium - in the last section of this guide the School2School site is described in which a secure messaging system is available.

Parents choose to provide suitable education

Parents have a duty to ensure that their children receive a suitable full time education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise (under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996). Some parents decide, as they are entitled, to provide suitable education by educating their children at home.

When parents withdraw their child from school to do this, and the child is of compulsory school age, the name of the child can only be deleted from the admissions register of the school where the parents inform the school in writing as provided by the *Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 under Regulation 9(1)(c)*: "that he has ceased to attend the school and the proprietor has received written notification from the parent that the pupil is receiving education otherwise than at school".

It is then the duty of the proprietor of the school to inform the LEA within 10 working days *under Regulation 13 (3)*: “ when the name of a pupil has been deleted from the admission register in accordance with regulation 9(1)(c) the proprietor shall make a return to the local education authority giving the full name and address of that pupil within the ten school days immediately following the date on which the pupil's name was so deleted”.

Although children and young people with statements of special educational needs can be home educated, the LEA remains responsible for ensuring that the education the child receives is suitable. The statement must stay in force and the LEA must ensure that parents can make suitable provision, including providing for their child's special educational needs. If the parent's arrangements are suitable, the LEA is relieved of their duty to arrange the provision directly, but it still remains the LEA's duty to ensure the child's needs are met.

In order to be able to check if a child is already known to be receiving education at home the LEA should keep a list of children known to be educated otherwise.

The parent does not have to inform anyone if their child never starts school. If the child's name is provided to the LEA as a child who may be missing education, then the LEA should contact the parents to find out if the child is receiving an education. It is in the interests of the child, parents and the LEA if the initial contact is clear, but not threatening. A collaborative partnership between parents and the LEA will be more effective for the child than one that is based on mutual mistrust.

LEAs can intervene if they have reason to believe that parents are not providing a suitable education and may issue a School Attendance Order (SAO) (under section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996). Further, LEAs may apply to court for a child assessment order under s.43 of the Children Act 1989 if they have reasonable cause to do so (which will only be where there is a risk of significant harm to the child).

For more information:

http://www.dfes.gov.uk/exclusions/related_policies/home_education.cfm
<http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk/index.cfm>

Identify child at risk of going missing from education:

The process by which the LEA determines that the notified child is registered with an educational provider but is at risk of going missing

Enabling Factors:

- **Access to registers (attendance records) for all providers including Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)**
- **Agreed multi-agency thresholds concerning at risk of going missing from education**

Attendance Registers

Regular screenings of registers provides backup to any local agreements between Education Welfare/Education Social Work Services concerning improving attendance, for example:

Hertfordshire - Children out of School Survey: Each term, there is a survey of children who are out of school for 50% or more during the survey period. The survey includes all children and therefore also includes children who are absent from school for legitimate reasons such as illness.

Multi-agency thresholds

The decision as to whether a child is 'at risk of going missing from education' will be determined to some extent by local circumstances. Far fewer children will be at risk of going missing in a Local Authority where processes and systems identified in this guidance have been adopted.

There is general agreement that some children who have experienced certain life events are more at risk of going missing from education. These include:

- young people who have committed offences;
- children living in women's refuges;
- children of homeless families perhaps living in temporary accommodation, house of multiple occupancy or Bed and Breakfast;
- young runaways;
- children with long term medical or emotional problems;
- unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees or children of asylum seeking families;
- looked after children;
- children with a Gypsy/Traveller background;
- young carers;
- children from transient families;
- teenage mothers;
- children who are permanently excluded from school.

Children who are excluded from schools should not miss education. Pupils excluded for a fixed period return to their school at the end of their exclusion. All LEAs are committed to providing full time education to all permanently excluded pupils. Some

pupils are unofficially excluded by schools. This is illegal and should be challenged when identified by the LEA. An unofficial exclusion increases the risk that a child may go missing from education.

When a child is registered with a provider there are, in addition to the above, particular patterns of behaviour which should alert the provider that the child may have potential needs and there is a possibility that they will go missing from education unless they are provided with the necessary support, e.g. chronic truants and children with a previous history of mobility leading to extended gaps in their education.

Local agreements between the LEA and education providers to ensure processes to track the children and appropriate actions at an early stage will help to prevent the child going missing from education.

Looked After Children

The recent Social Exclusion Unit report - *A better education for children in care* - identified that young children in care spend too much time out of school or other place of learning - i.e. missing education. As these young people are in the care of the Local Authority, it is imperative that the authority has systems in place that can quickly deal with any issues around education placement for looked after children. Authorities are under a statutory duty to ensure that an educational placement is secured prior to any change in care placement, including when a young person is moved from a care placement in one Local Authority to one in another Local Authority, or, if placed in an emergency, that an educational placement is secured within twenty school days.

All schools will have a designated teacher for looked after children. These teachers are ideally placed to assist when identifying those looked after children currently in school who may be at greater risk of going missing from education.

Children included on the Child Protection Register and "Children in Need"

If a child or young person is at risk of going missing from education and they have also been included on the Child Protection Register, or where children have been assessed by Social Services as being 'in need' and their families are working with Social Services, or if a child is looked after, then processes within education need to take this into account.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (1999) issued jointly by Department of Health, Home Office and Department for Education and Employment states:

"Children and Families Who Go Missing

6.50 Local agencies and professionals should bear in mind when working with children and families where there are outstanding child protection concerns (including where the concerns are about an unborn child who may be at future risk of significant harm) that a series of missed appointments or abortive home visits may indicate that the family have suddenly and unexpectedly moved out of the area. Social services and the police should be informed immediately such concerns arise.

6.51 Particular consideration needs to be given to appropriate legal interventions, where it appears that a child, for whom there are outstanding child protection concerns, may be removed from the UK by his/her family in

order to evade the involvement of agencies with safeguarding responsibilities.”

This extract from Bedfordshire LEA demonstrates how advice can be given to schools about procedures:

1) Should a child leave a Bedfordshire school:

- without the school being advised by the parent which new school the child is to attend, or
- when the child is believed to have gone on an extended holiday,
- when a child has not returned from an extended holiday when expected,

the school should promptly take reasonable steps to contact the parents.

Should the child be on the Child Protection Register or should the school have particular child protection concerns about the child, the school should immediately notify the local social services duty team.

What to do if you're worried a Child Is Being Abused (2003) contains guidance on what actions an individual should take to safeguard a child about whom there are concerns. This will be supported by a comprehensive training resource. It is essential that professionals working with children take a consistent approach when children, where there are child protection concerns, go missing from school.

Social Services have responsibility for children on the Child Protection Register. If a child on the Child Protection Register goes missing, the relevant Social Services Department would take steps to locate the child. This may involve contacting Child Protection Register Custodians in other local authorities.

Blackpool - The Registration and Monitoring Officer and the Child Protection Register Custodian have put processes in place to notify each other with information concerning missing children.

If a looked after child goes missing from their care placement, the relevant Social Services Department will follow the guidance set out in *Children Missing from Care and Home - A Guide to Good Practice* issued in November 2002. This requires them to liaise with the police in the area from where the child went missing to agree the strategy for finding the child and providing them with any necessary support. Protocols for responding to missing from care incidents should be agreed between local police forces and councils with social services responsibility in their areas. These should be approved by local Area Child Protection Committees.

Stability of schooling is essential for children who are looked after by local authorities. Where children go missing from their care placement, they are rarely absent for long. It will be important that their school place is kept open until there is agreement between the school and the authority with responsibility for their care that this place is no longer necessary.

Log child's details on database:

The process by which the LEA records the details of the identified child to enable subsequent monitoring of their status

Enabling Factors:

- **Single shared database with clear protocols for access by appropriate professionals**
- **Regular management monitoring of status of children on the database**

Database and Monitoring

At present different LEAs are holding databases of different populations. The following guidance was given in *Circular No. 11/99 Social Inclusion: the LEA role in Pupil Support*: "a central register of children who are out of school for any reason will help the LEA to ensure that vulnerable groups do not become lost in the system between education and employment."

As mentioned before, monitoring by Senior Management is considered to be an essential component of effective systems. Consideration should be given to the form in which data is held. Also to monitor the speed with which children progress into provision after being found, it will be necessary to record the appropriate dates:

- date referred in;
- date of assessment, if necessary;
- date form of provision determined;
- date moved into provision.

In order to monitor the patterns in the previous history of the children then both date and location of last known educational placement would be useful, as well as form of provision recommended and accessed.

All the databases in the following examples of good practice include, as a subgroup, all those living in their authority but not in educational provision. The other information allows the LEAs to monitor the educational status and progress of recognised vulnerable groups.

Knowsley - The Pupil Mobility Coordinator maintains a database which records the educational status of all the children and young people included on it. The children and young people included are all those in locally agreed vulnerable categories.

Kent - There is a single database which can be accessed by appropriate officers across the county holding the details of children not currently in receipt of education. It includes other data which allows the monitoring of particular vulnerable groups. The database is monitored by Senior Management.

Blackpool - The status of children on the Out of School Register and Missing Children In and Out Registers is reviewed at a monthly multi-agency Panel, which also brokers support for the children.

Solihull - Children and Young Person's names will remain on the missing from education list until they have been accepted by a school. The list contains more detailed information and indicates where children are on the CPR and LAC as well as children who are at risk of being excluded from school, action taken/required and, a column which identifies a named person who is responsible for brokering support for the child/young person.

Sheffield - Currently there are many agencies which are holding data on excel, access and other systems. The aim is to co-ordinate this by using a single CSS module on EMS.

Hertfordshire - Children Out of School Database. The details of all children who are out of school are provided on a specified date each term by EWOs, Education Support Centres (ESCs), and the Youth Programmes Unit and entered on the COS database.

Children who are 'out of school' are defined as:

- Those who do not have a school place.
- Those who have a school place but have not attended during the survey period.
- Those who have a school place but have attended less than 50% during the survey period.

The COS database is registered under the terms of the Data Protection Act. The registration covers the purpose, classes, sources and disclosures of the information recorded on the database. The data must not be used for any other purpose.

Locate child:

The process by which the LEA determines the child's address, parent or legal guardian and establishes communication with the child and guardian OR refers the contact to the LEA in which the child is resident

Enabling Factors:

- **Access to status information including through partner agencies**
- **Procedure and systems for checking identified child against information sources**
- **Information sharing with partner agencies**

Information Sharing

In order to locate children and young people when it is believed they are resident in your LEA, it is necessary to have a network of agencies with which information can be shared. Agencies will include many who are already notifying the LEA when they encounter a child missing from education.

Each local area needs to be clear under what legislation they are entitled to share information. The current work being carried out by the Information Sharing and Assessment Division will encourage the development of clear protocols and an understanding of the appropriate legislation.

It is to be remembered that children who are both missing from education provision and whose current residential whereabouts are unknown are likely to be deemed vulnerable.

Partner agencies might include Health, the Housing Department and Social Services. It is in the interests of other agencies for children to be enrolled in education and attending regularly, not only because of the welfare of the child but also in order that the agency can fulfil their duties.

Knowsley - Has a Pupil Mobility Management Group which involves managers from child focused education services, Housing, Leisure & Community Services, Health, Youth Offending Team (YOT), Social Services, Young Carers, CiPC Education Officer and Early Years. This group meets monthly to share information regarding pupils on the out of school database who are missing or unplaced and track their progress.

Determine child's needs:

The process by which the LEA ensures an assessment is made of the child's educational needs and that a determination is made on appropriate forms of provision

Enabling Factors:

- **Procedure to identify key worker/lead professional**
- **Process to identify child's needs**
- **Clear eligibility criteria for admission to provision or allocation of service**

Key worker/Lead Professional

The allocation of a Key Worker/Lead Professional helps to ensure that a child will not be lost again while the process of accessing provision takes place.

Kent - At District Forums appropriate key workers are allocated according to the child's history in order to progress placement in educational provision.

Process to identify needs

If a child has been found missing from education, it is important that any process to access education is as speedy as possible. The ideal is to re-engage children with mainstream provision and for many children this will be the correct option. Parental and child preference should be taken into account.

In order to ensure a successful return to education, an assessment and intervention plan that takes into account the reasons the child or young person has become disengaged from education will assist the process of successful reengagement.

Common Assessment Framework

A Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is being developed¹ to help in assessing needs and improving services to children, young people and families. The CAF will enable a child's needs to be assessed in a holistic way, to decide what, if any, response was needed. If a response was required, it will be likely to be of a lower order than if the issue had been allowed to escalate.

The CAF will enable practitioners to join up with any other professional who might have already completed an assessment for the child and share concerns with them. This will enable professionals from different agencies to work more effectively together, build up a picture of a child's needs over time and develop a more appropriate response.

¹ The CAF (framework and implementation plan) is expected to be published at the end of December 2004

Blackpool - Registration Monitoring Officer allocates an appropriate key worker who uses a set of pre-determined criteria, parental and child preference and professional judgement to form an opinion concerning the appropriate provision to access.

Croydon LEA states that although it has robust systems in place for identifying pupils who are missing from education; the LEA found it difficult to access mainstream secondary places for pupils who were out of school for a variety of reasons – including significant pressure on school places. The LEA determined to be proactive and in particular to provide schools with accurate and up to date information on which to base their admission decisions. The LEA established the Bridge to School PRU which was initially a small resource to which pupils from Years 7-11 without a school place could be referred. They would be offered a 10 week intervention during which time baseline academic and emotional, social and behavioural baselines would be carried out. More in depth Educational Psychology or SEN assessments could be carried out if required. Work would be done with the pupils and parents/carers to identify a suitable school and Bridge to School would broker the place and provide reintegration support.

The PRU has now expanded and offers 3 distinct provisions:

- Year 7-10 assessment places as detailed above
- Year 11 nearly full time course based largely in a local FE College for year 11 pupils who do not have a mainstream place and are unlikely to benefit from a GCSE programme. (The Bridge Group)
- Year 11 refugee, asylum seeker and other EAL pupils who are offered a specially tailored language course again largely based at the local FE College (The Link Group)

The PRU is now developing further specific courses to meet the needs of identified groups who are out of school – for example a transition course in conjunction with Connexions and the YOT for year 11s referred after February and a 'Bridge to Bridge' group for Year 10s who would prefer to access the bridge course in year 11.

Since the first pupils started at Bridge to School in March 2002 out of 89:

15 have been reintegrated into school

14 into college

9 into special schools or other specialist provision

2 into home tuition

6 have moved out of area

7 dropped out or withdrawn

3 referred to EWO

2 into work

and currently on roll - 31.

Eligibility Criteria

The Service Directory required by the IRT Guidance (August 2003) should include details about criteria for services.

Identify available provision and places:

The process by which the LEA locates an available place in provision appropriate for the child

Enabling Factors:

- **Access to current information about availability of school places**
- **Directory of alternative provision including eligibility criteria**

Current Information about places

If the process is to progress efficiently, then information about available places is best held centrally, if at all possible. In areas with high transience, turnover in schools will be high and therefore school places will come and go rapidly.

Blackpool - A record of available places is maintained centrally by Admissions Section (Education Dept), facilitated by the monthly download from schools of pupil's departures and arrivals. The Admissions Section provide information to parents, who are supported by the relevant key worker to make an approach to a school and if necessary to appeal.

Knowsley - There is close communication between the Pupil Mobility Coordinator and Admissions Manager, who negotiates provision. The Pupil Mobility Coordinator is able to arrange temporary provision for children with Special Educational Needs & CiPC within Knowsley's Open School.

Access appropriate provision:

The process by which the LEA brokers access to the identified place

Enabling Factors:

- **Schools admissions procedures exist and are clear**
- **Locally agreed policy exists for admissions in special circumstances**
- **Respective roles and responsibilities of LEA, school, parent understood**
- **Multi-agency panel to broker access to alternative provision**

School Admissions Procedures

School admissions are governed by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and in order to improve the admissions framework for the benefit of parents and children, a number of important changes were introduced to this regime by the Education Act 2002. The School Admissions Code of Practice (2003) takes account of those changes, and of associated regulations.

Local Admission Policies in special circumstances

The Education Act 2002 made Admission Forums mandatory, to promote local discussion between all those with an interest in admissions. Forums will have an important advisory role. They will consider how well admission arrangements serve the interests of local parents and children, including vulnerable and challenging children and children whose parents move to the area and apply after the normal allocation of places. They will aim to reach local consensus on how best to meet the needs of all those seeking a place in their area, so that all pupils have a fair opportunity to realise their potential. They will consider proposed co-ordinated admission schemes and draft admissions literature for parents. The Code gives guidance on the constitution and the role of Admission Forums.

One important role of Admission Forums is to agree a coordinated approach to dealing with vulnerable children to ensure that potentially vulnerable children, such as those who have been excluded from school, are effectively provided for in admission arrangements to mainstream schools. It is desirable that such local approaches are communicated to all interested groups, including parents and guardians. Arrangements should take account of parental preferences in all cases, although the legal requirement to comply with parental preference does not apply to parents of children who have been permanently excluded from two or more schools, for a period of two years following the second exclusion. All arrangements should be designed to secure the rapid reintegration into an alternative school, wherever possible, of pupils who have been excluded from other schools. Admissions Forums are also encouraged to broker agreements on protocols which ensure that all mainstream schools play their part in the education of such pupils.

In **Surrey** the Admissions Forum (formed in March 2003) has reached an agreement on a points weighted system that will identify which school is next in line to accept a pupil, which has been in operation since 2003/2004.

Birmingham - A dedicated team called Pupil Connect is responsible for identifying, tracing, and tracking all young people disconnected and lost from education. Education and Connexions Learning Mentors in the team broker places for or approach providers directly for young people in Key Stage 4. Pupils in Key Stages 1 to 3 are linked by the team to appropriate Key workers in the Education Welfare or Admissions Services and progress is tracked with the aim of ensuring appropriate placement within 20 days.

Multi-agency Panels

Kent - The District & Out-of-School Coordinators chair district multi-agency panels which place children in provision.

Solihull - In order to make sure that there is a robust system for brokering support for the children/young people on the list a "hard to place panel" has been set up and this panel tracks progress and alerts the Inclusion and Access Group (of Managers) if there are concerns about delay or inability to meet the child/young person's needs.

Hertfordshire - Information from the COS database is provided to the Children Out of School Management Groups (COS Groups). These groups are responsible for monitoring the progress of individual children who are out of school and ensuring that appropriate action is taken to return them to full-time education. The objective for children who are 'out of school' is to ensure their speedy return to mainstream provision. While they are 'out of school' they will attend other provision according to their particular needs. In most cases this provision will be temporary until a suitable placement is found for the child in a mainstream or special school, or until they are able to return to full attendance at the school at which they are on roll. There is a range of support and provision for children who are out of school in Hertfordshire. This includes both preventative support for those at risk of becoming out of school and alternative provision for children who are out of school.

Monitor attendance for all provision:

The process by which the LEA maintains visibility of children who may cease to attend or who may cease to be registered with the provider

Enabling Factors:

- **Regular register audits for all provision**
- **Procedure exists by which schools, PRUs and external providers notify LEA about attendance problems**
- **Agreed protocol between schools, PRUs, external providers and LEA concerning de-registration procedures**

Audit Registers

It has been identified both in the consultation exercise to produce this document and in the Ofsted Report: *Key Stage 4: towards a more flexible curriculum* (2003) that children go missing from alternative provision. This indicates the need to audit registers of all provision.

Guidance for LEAs for schools on monitoring attendance is contained within www.dfes.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance/.

New guidance will also be issued on "Guidance for LEAs - PRUs and Alternative Provision" including a paper on "Commissioning Alternative Provision - the Role of the LEA". This guidance is currently the subject of a consultation exercise which will end on 12 August 2004. The consultation is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations

Knowsley - There are termly register audits by the School Attendance Service. The alternative providers submit registers to the Pupil Mobility Coordinator. Education School Attendance Improvement Officers go online to access live register data from secondary schools.

Blackpool - There is a monthly electronic transfer of data from SIMS to EMS. Alternative provision registers are screened manually monthly.

De-registration Protocols

If Protocols between LEAs and schools concerning de-registration of pupils are agreed, it will be less likely that a child or young person goes missing from education, as action can be taken earlier to prevent this happening.

Deletions from the admission register are provided by the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/2089), as amended by the Education (Pupil Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997/2624) and the Education (Pupil Registration) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2001 (SI 2001/2802) and the name of a pupil of compulsory school age may only be deleted from the attendance register on the grounds prescribed by these regulations.

This means that:

- Where a pupil has been continuously absent from school for a period of four weeks his name may not be deleted from the admission register until both the school and the LEA have failed, after reasonable enquiry, to locate the pupil. This is a joint process between the school and the LEA.
- Where a head teacher/proprietor of a school has been notified by a parent that a pupil is receiving education otherwise than at school, and has deleted that pupil's name from the register in accordance with regulations, a return must be made to the LEA within the ten school days immediately following that deletion.

In line with the proposed duty on all children's services to safeguard the welfare of children, the expectation is that both the school and the LEA service will put in place procedures designed to track the whereabouts of the child and to record that they have completed these procedures. The type of procedures could include checking with relatives, neighbours, private or public landlords and other local stakeholders who are involved with the notification of children missing from education. If there is reason to believe the child/young person is at risk of significant harm then action in line with child protection procedures should be taken:

- If the child/young person is located and the current school is still the appropriate school then steps should be taken to engage the child/young person and the parent to improve attendance.
- If the child/young person is located, but has moved, and a new school is necessary but in the same LEA, the necessary steps should be taken to access a new school as previously mentioned and steps taken to transfer the Common Transfer File (CTF) see next section.
- If there strong evidence to suggest the child/young person has moved to a different LEA then contact should be made with the Named Individual in the new authority.
- In the absence of the location of the child/young person being found these procedures will also prompt reference to the transfer of information to the Police and Social Services and the transfer of information via school2school (s2s) and the Lost Pupil Database see next section. **Until a child/young person is located the LEA should maintain a record of their details.**

Procedures in Bedfordshire (extract)

1) Should a child leave a Bedfordshire school:

- without the school being advised by the parent which new school the child is to attend or
- when the child is believed to have gone on an extended holiday
- when a child has not returned from an extended holiday when expected

the school should promptly take reasonable steps to contact the parents.

Should the child be on the Child Protection Register or should the school have particular child protection concerns about the child, the school should immediately notify the local social services duty team.

After 10 days of non school attendance and after the school has been unable to

contact parents, the school should refer to their Education Welfare Officer using the Missing Child Referral form.

2) The Education Welfare Service will then make reasonable efforts to try and identify the child's current whereabouts/destination. This will include:

- home visiting;
- contacting extended family and neighbours;
- contacting other involved agencies;
- making enquires with the local Benefits Agency;
- checking with Bedfordshire LEA "IDEAR" Database;
- contacting the Registration Manager of the 'Practitioner Services Unit which supports the three Primary Care Trusts (PCT's) in Bedfordshire

3) After four weeks of non attendance, should such efforts prove unsuccessful, then the Education Welfare Service will advise the school to remove the child's name from its roll. The school should then create a "lost pupil" common transfer file (CTF) with XXXXXXX as the destination. This CTF should be immediately uploaded onto the DfES School2School secure site where it will be held in the Lost Pupils Database.

Track and Reconcile Movements:

The process by which the LEA maintains visibility of children who have ceased to be registered with a provider until they are registered with a new provider

Enabling Factors:

- **Effective use of available inter-LEA exchange of Information**
- **Maintaining a database of child/young person who move without a known destination**

Monitoring at the transfer between Key Stage 2 and 3 is vital. LEAs will need to develop protocols with their schools to ensure that all children leaving a primary school are subsequently registered at a new provider.

All 33 London Boroughs, and eight surrounding authorities Essex, Surrey, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough and Thurrock, have agreed a new co-ordinating system for admissions for Key Stage 2-3 transition which is due to begin in September 2004. For those children who do not receive an offer or who miss the deadline for the coordinated approach it will be up to the child's home LEA to ensure they are offered a place.

There are particular challenges in areas where children leave the maintained sector for the independent sector in high numbers, in areas where children commonly cross boundaries to attend schools in other authorities and in areas of high transience. Particularly if children leave schools at other than normal ages of transfer.

Within the 33 London Authorities there is small group who have the brief to look specifically at Children Missing Education and they are working with the London IRT Trailblazers to monitor the numbers and develop systems.

Surrey has a post entitled Pupil Tracking Officer part of whose role is to track pupils leaving Surrey schools at other than normal ages of transfer. Data collected since 1999/2000 has shown a steady rise in the percentage of children monitored into new provision.

The final piece in the jigsaw is to ensure a national understanding around the transfer of information about children moving from one LEA to another. This is also relevant for an LEA when a child who lives in their area is in receipt of education in another LEA.

Transfer of Information

The DfES has developed a secure internet site for the transfer of information Common Transfer File (CTF) from School to School (s2s) when a child moves school. On the home page for s2s www.teachernet.gov.uk/s2s there is description of the processes. There is also a publication for schools which LEAs can order and distribute.

s2s provides a facility for secure messaging which can be used for targeted emails

about specific children. The practice of “Blanket” e-mails is unpopular with many LEAs who find that they have the potential to inhibit effective tracking of pupils.

Legislation

The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000/297) (as amended by SI 2001/1212 and SI 2002/1680) govern the transfer of information from school to school when a child moves school. In particular, regulation 10(3) provides that: “The head teacher of the pupil's old school shall send the information (the common transfer information and educational records) within fifteen school days of the pupil's ceasing to be registered at the school” (see links to Statutory Instruments below).

<http://www.legislation.hmsso.gov.uk/si/si2000/20000297.htm>

<http://www.legislation.hmsso.gov.uk/si/si2001/20011212.htm>

<http://www.legislation.hmsso.gov.uk/si/si2002/20021680.htm>

Lost pupil database

If the school does not know the child's destination the CTF can be downloaded to the Lost Pupil Database (LPD)

The LEA will have named individuals who can search the LPD if a child arrives at a school and for some reason is not able to give accurate details about their educational history.

Recent enhancements will ensure that the LEA will be informed about the names of children in their area whose files have been downloaded to the LPD and when another LEA uploads one of their files they will receive a report. This will complete the circle. It is intended that the usage of this facility by LEAs will be monitored.

<p>Cambridgeshire - The LEA has issued guidance to their schools in order to ensure that procedures are followed in using the s2s and Lost Pupil Database included below.</p>
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Procedures in Cambridgeshire

1) Should a child leave a Cambridgeshire school without notice being given by the parent or without the school being advised by the parent which new school the child is to attend - that is, should the child go "missing" or become "lost" - the school should promptly notify the Education Welfare Service. (Should the child be on the Child Protection Register or should the school have particular child protection concerns about the child the school should first immediately notify the local social services team.)

2) The Education Welfare Service will then work with the school and make reasonable efforts to try and identify the child's current whereabouts/destination.

3) After four weeks should such efforts prove unsuccessful then the school should remove the child's name from its roll and create a "lost" common transfer file (CTF) with XXXXXXX as the destination. This lost CTF should be immediately uploaded onto the DfES's s2s secure site where it will be held in the Lost Pupils Database.

4) Should a pupil join a Cambridgeshire school without that school receiving a CTF from the child's previous school then the receiving school should contact the LEA's School Improvement Resource Team (SIRT) on telephone number...../ at e-mail address.....and request that a search be made of the Lost Pupils Database for a matching record using names or former names, date of birth or gender.

5) Should a Cambridgeshire school which has previously sent a lost child CTF to the Lost Pupils Database be subsequently contacted by a school at which the lost child has subsequently registered then either:

- the school which sent the CTF to the Lost Pupils Database should create a new CTF file and send this to the receiving school and request the LEA SIRT to download the original CTF from the Lost Pupils Database and delete it; or
- the receiving school should request its own LEA to download the original CTF from the Lost Pupils Database.

Cambridgeshire LEA recognises that these procedures will only function effectively if all Cambridgeshire schools are committed to adhering to the principle that:

WHENEVER A PUPIL JOINS OR LEAVES A SCHOOL THEN A COMMON TRANSFER FILE MUST ACCOMPANY HIM/HER

The LEA will therefore ensure that all Cambridgeshire schools:

- are made fully aware of their responsibilities in relation to missing/lost pupils and
- are properly supported to meet these responsibilities.

The LEA will closely monitor the operation of its missing/lost children procedures in order to ensure best practice with regard to child protection.

In Camden letters have been sent to Head teachers of both Primary and Secondary Schools referring to the statutory responsibility placed on governors and teachers for the management of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children from June 2004. This is underpinned by a statutory responsibility to use an electronic common transfer form to send information to the receiving school and to collect it from the sending school via the Teachernet secure School to School Data Transfer website (s2s).

Legislation

There are various statutory duties upon LEAs and parents (supplemented by guidance) relating to the provision of education and the safeguarding of the welfare of children and which may be relevant to children missing education. The principal provisions are as follows:

Section 14(1) of the 1996 Education Act provides that a local education authority must make sure there are sufficient schools for providing education in their area. For these purposes, the schools must be sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide all pupils with the opportunity of appropriate education (s. 14(2)). “Appropriate education” means, broadly education which is desirable in view of the pupils’ different ages, abilities and aptitudes and the different periods for which they may be expected to remain at school (s. 14(3)).

Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act provides that the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

Furthermore **Section 437 (1) of the 1996 Education Act** provides that if it appears to a local education authority that a child of compulsory school age in their area is not receiving suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, they must serve a notice in writing on the parent (“a school attendance order”) requiring him to satisfy them within the period specified in the notice that the child is receiving such education.

Section 19 (1) of the 1996 Education Act requires every local education authority to make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school for those children of compulsory school age who by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them. For these purposes, “suitable” education is defined as “efficient education suitable to the age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs the child (or young person) may have.” (s. 19(6)).

Moreover, section **19(4A) of the 1996 Education Act** provides:

“In determining what arrangements to make under subsection (1) in the case of any child or pupil, a local education authority shall have regard to guidance given from time to time by the Secretary of State.”

s. 175 of the Education Act 2002 (which came into force on June 1 2004) imposes a duty upon LEAs and governing bodies to exercise their functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. For these purposes, “functions” includes the powers and duties of LEAs and governing bodies.

Related Guidance

Guidance of the LEA responsibility for arranging education outside of school is set out in **Circular No. 11/99 Social Inclusion: the LEA role in Pupil Support**: LEAs decide what is suitable education out of school for a particular child, in consultation with parents, in line with their own policies, the efficient use of resources and having regard to this guidance. LEAs cannot decide not to arrange any education, to make arrangements which do not provide suitable education for that child.

Guidance for LEAs for schools on monitoring attendance is contained within www.dfes.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance/.

Good practice for Gypsy/Traveller Achievement and for Supporting Asylum Seeking and Refugee children which are part of the Department's Aiming High strategy to raise Minority Ethnic Achievement: Aiming High: Guidance on Supporting the Education of Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children - A Guide to Good Practice Ref: DfES/0287/2004 (Issued April 2004); Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Gypsy/Traveller pupils - A Guide to Good Practice Ref: DfES/0443/2003 (Issued July 2003). Details of how to obtain copies of these publications can be found on: www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities

New guidance will soon be issued on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children to coincide with the introduction of section 175 of the Education Act 2002. The guidance aims to: explain the effect of section 175 and the responsibilities it gives LEAs, and the Governing bodies of schools and FE institutions in regard to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

New guidance will also be issued on "Guidance for LEAs - PRUs and Alternative Provision" including a paper on "Commissioning Alternative Provision - the Role of the LEA". This guidance is currently the subject of a consultation exercise which will end on 12 August 2004. The consultation is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations

The Children Bill 2004 is in the process of going through Parliament. The current draft includes various provisions relating to safeguarding and promotion of welfare of children, including:

- (a) a duty upon each children's services authority to promote co-operation between it and various other bodies to improve the well-being of children so far as relating to (amongst other things) education and training;
- (b) a duty upon various bodies (including children's services authorities) to make arrangements for ensuring that their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children; and
- (c) provision for the Secretary of State to put into place information databases for the purposes of arrangements under s.175 of the Education Act 2002 or (a) and (b) above, and a framework for the sharing of information contained in such databases for such purposes.

Children Missing Education Progress Checklist: Self Evaluation

Use the following categories to rate the LEA:

▪ **Working Towards: W**

(Discussions have taken place and a plan has been produced)

▪ **Achieved: A**

(The LEA can provide evidence to support positive responses to the questions below)

▪ **Embedded: E**

(The LEA can demonstrate that the policy/processes/systems have been in place for a period of time and have been reviewed)

	W, A or E
Strategic Management & Leadership	
1. Does the LEA have a written policy concerning children missing education?	
2. Has the LEA identified the main ways that children become "missing" in their authority and put in place procedures designed to close gaps?	
3. Is there regular monitoring of the processes/numbers by Senior Management and Elected Members?	
Networks & Points of Contact	
1. Has the LEA identified the key stakeholders to provide information about children/young people without educational provision in your area?	
2. Has the LEA provided and publicised notification routes for all key stakeholders?	
3. Does the LEA have a named contact point to receive details about children missing education?	
4. Are there clear responsibilities for this role or those to whom the duties are delegated?	
Information Systems	
1. Does the LEA maintain a database of children not currently in education?	
2. If so does the database include fields such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Date child/young person notified; ▪ Date form of provision determined; ▪ Date accessed provision? 	
3. Does the LEA monitor the numbers of children/young people in the authority who are not receiving an education?	
4. Does the LEA have processes in place to monitor the educational status of children in recognised vulnerable groups?	
5. Are there clear access rules and procedures to ensure fair/safe data processing?	
Provision Brokering Services	
1. Does the LEA have clear processes for securing the support of other agencies where it is needed e.g. for welfare reasons.	
2. Does the LEA have an agreed process for securing educational provision for children once found?	
3. Does the LEA monitor the pace they move into provision?	

4. Does the LEA have the information systems in place to allow access to up to date information concerning availability of school places and availability of places with alternative providers?	
Effective Pupil Tracking Systems	
1. Does the LEA keep a record of children who have left educational providers (school and alternative provision) without a known destination?	
2. Does the LEA follow up children at regular intervals until they are registered with a new provider?	
3. Does the LEA have an agreed system with schools concerning children leaving provision?	
4. Does the LEA support and encourage schools to transfer files via s2s?	
5. Does the LEA have an identified officer as database administrator for s2s with responsibility for the Lost Pupil Database?	
6. Does the LEA upload to and download from the Lost Pupil Database?	