

Safeguarding children who are not in school



Reference guide for practitioners

Learning for practitioners about the potential risks for children who are not attending school or another education setting, or who are not receiving suitable education at home.



Why this matters

Schools and other education settings are often a protective factor for vulnerable children experiencing abuse and neglect.

Local authorities



- Identify and track children missing education and at risk of severe absence by proactively monitoring attendance data
- Share information across children's social care, children missing education (CME) and elective home education (EHE) teams
- Review known vulnerabilities, including previous social care involvement, and offer safe opportunities for private conversations with children so they can be seen and heard
- Make regular enquiries to ensure that home education is suitable and engage early with vulnerable families known to services who are considering EHE
- Intervene decisively where concerns arise. This could include providing early help, considering statutory social care responses and securing suitable education through School Attendance Orders where appropriate

Education



- Assess vulnerabilities and identify risks (e.g. exploitation or neglect) in response to persistent low attendance or at the point of removal for elective home education
- Identify and act on attendance concerns quickly, using attendance data to target support for vulnerable pupils
- Work with families and partners to remove barriers before absence becomes persistent or severe
- Following withdrawal for EHE, schools must submit a deletion return to the local authority and notify the pupil's social worker and/or Youth Offending Team worker (where applicable)

Police



- When engaging with children or when called to an incident (e.g. about domestic abuse), ask if there are children in the family and what their education arrangements are
- Share prompt notifications when you come into contact with vulnerable children who are CME, home educated or have low attendance who are at risk of harm
- Consider joint visits with partners where risk factors are present (e.g. domestic abuse or exploitation)
- If there are concerns about a child who is being sexually or criminally exploited, share information and check their education status

Health



- Routinely ask about education arrangements and wellbeing when children present in any health setting
- Record non-attendance at health checks and escalate repeat missed appointments in line with Trust policy
- Review missed appointments and parental factors, including mental health
- Identify unmet need and share concerns with safeguarding partners
- Recognise poor mental health as a driver for non-attendance and ensure appropriate support

Housing

- Identify vulnerable families and refer concerns



Voluntary sector

- Provide early help, encourage engagement and act on concerns



Youth justice and probation

- Assess risk and vulnerability, share safeguarding information and support engagement with services



All professionals should:

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|  take active steps to understand the child's lived experience |  assess attendance concerns alongside any other known vulnerabilities |
|  share information and work collaboratively with other agencies |  ensure the child is seen and heard |
|  consider the child's wider circumstances and cumulative harm |  treat persistent, unexplained or recurring absence as a potential indicator of safeguarding concerns |
|  maintain professional curiosity | |

Children who are not in school may become less visible to services. Effective safeguarding relies on professional curiosity, information sharing and understanding the child's lived experience.



Access the full range of Safeguarding children who are not in school resources

Visit our Learning Hub for:

- thematic learning and key findings
- downloadable resources and tools
- webinar recordings and presentations
- further reading and practice guidance

Scan the QR code or visit:

childsafeguarding.independent-panel.uk/hub-topic/safeguarding-children-not-in-school/