

Safeguarding children who are not in school

THE CHILD SAFEGUARDING
PRACTICE REVIEW PANEL



7 MINUTE
BRIEFING

LCSPR: ALAN

This case study is about a young person who experienced significant neglect.

June 2026

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About the family

Alan is 17 years old and experienced significant neglect linked to long term disengagement from education.

Alan's family are White British and consists of his father, stepmother and several siblings and stepsiblings.

Professionals became increasingly concerned when it emerged that Alan had spent almost all of his time in his bedroom and had not attended school for nearly two years.

He presented with severe physical, emotional and nutritional neglect, including very low body weight, poor skin condition, muscle wastage and deteriorating mental health.

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Background

Alan and his family had long-term involvement with Children's Social Care.

Alan had previously been subject to child protection planning in infancy because of parental substance use, domestic abuse and siblings removed from his mother's care.

As he grew older, chronic non-attendance, deterioration in his presentation and increasing neglect continued without timely escalation.

Multiple agencies raised concerns about his hygiene, emotional wellbeing and growing social withdrawal, yet Early Help remained the lead service for extended periods.

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Patterns and practice

- Fragmented multi agency communication and repeated missed opportunities to escalate concerns.
- Threshold decisions were not sufficiently challenged, leading to drift between Early Help and Social Care and long periods without statutory oversight.
- Education Welfare focused mainly on attendance, missing signs of neglect, poor mental health and cumulative risk. As a result, the cumulative harm from isolation, neglect and disengagement from education was not identified early enough.

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Acknowledging good

- Education staff raised repeated concerns about Alan's non-attendance.
- Health services attempted to monitor his physical and emotional needs.
- Social workers persisted in trying to build a relationship despite his reluctance.
- Child protection planning brought increased structure and safeguarding oversight.

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Key learning

Chronologies and information-sharing are essential to understanding why a child has disengaged from education.

Persistent absence should always be treated as a safeguarding concern and prompt multi-agency action, not only seen as an attendance issue.

Practitioners should avoid making assumptions about a young person's capacity or willingness to engage, as these assumptions can undermine timely safeguarding action.

Adolescents who are isolated at home require persistent engagement to understand their lived experience and ensure they remain safe.

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Reflective questions

- How do you recognise when a child's persistent absence from education is no longer an attendance issue, but a safeguarding concern linked to wider neglect or unmet needs?
- When a child is not being seen regularly in school, how do you ensure their daily lived experience is understood and that risks such as isolation, deteriorating health or hidden harm are not missed?
- What processes are in place in your setting to escalate concerns when long-term non-attendance continues despite early help support, and how confident are you in using them?

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Useful resources

Find more information about safeguarding children who are not in school on the Panel's new learning hub:
<https://childsafeguarding.independent-panel.uk/>

Read the full Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review:
[Alan, Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

Further guidance:

- [Working together to improve school attendance](#)
- [Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools](#)
- [Improving the attendance of children with a social worker](#)