Children Young People and Learning Services
Policy and Guidance

Children Missing Education

Updated: September 2015
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1 Summary

1.1 About this guidance
This guidance has been produced to help The London Borough of Sutton meet its statutory duties to make arrangements to establish the identities of children missing education within and from Sutton, and for the provision of education and the safeguarding and welfare of children. It provides an outline of Sutton’s systems for identifying and maintaining contact with children missing education, and current developments for identifying those at risk of going missing from education.

1.2 Expiry or review date
This guidance will next be updated following the proposed DfE review in September 2015.

1.3 What legislation does this guidance refer to?
• Section 436A of the Education Act 1996 (added by section 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006).
• Other related legislation is cited at the back of this document.

2. Introduction overview
2.1 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 becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) later on in life. Local authorities should have robust procedures and policies in place to enable them to meet their duty in relation to these children, including appointing a named person to whom schools and other agencies can make referrals. Sutton undertakes regular reviews and evaluates processes to ensure that these continue to be fit for purpose in identifying and dealing with CMEs within and from the local authority.

2.2 The purpose of the section 436A of the Education Act 1996 is to ensure that local authorities’ arrangements enables them to establish the identities of children in their area who are not registered pupils at a school, and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. Sutton has procedures in place to prevent children at risk of becoming CME. Those children identified as not receiving suitable education\(^1\) should be returned to full time education either at a school or in alternative provision. This duty only relates to children of compulsory school age\(^2\).

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\(^1\) ‘Suitable education’ means efficient full-time education suitable to the child’s age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs the child may have

\(^2\) A child reaches compulsory school age on or after their fifth birthday, ie. They should be in full-time education at the start of the term following their fifth birthday.
2.3 From June 2013 Ofsted implemented new joint inspections for multi-agency arrangements for the protection of children which will include CMEs.

3 Parents’ responsibilities
3.1 Parents have a duty to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are receiving efficient full-time education. Some parents may elect to educate their children at home and may withdraw them from a mainstream school at any time to do so, unless they are subject to a School Attendance Order. Where a parent notifies the school in writing of their intention to home educate, the school must inform Sutton’s children missing education officer without delay.

4 Schools’ duties
4.1 Schools, including Academies and Free Schools, must monitor pupils’ attendance through their daily register. Schools should agree with London Borough of Sutton the intervals in which they will inform the authority of the details of pupils who are regularly absent from school or have missed 10 school days or more without permission. Pupils should not be deleted from the admission register until they are confirmed to have been admitted to a new school or the school has been advised to remove them by the authority.

5 Reasonable enquiries
5.1 Schools should first make ‘reasonable enquiries’ to establish the new school and family’s contact details, e.g. a telephone call to the parent or carer’s last known contact number, or a call to any sibling’s school if known. If enquiries are unsuccessful, the school should write to the parent or carer’s last known address with a one week deadline for a response.

5.2 If, after all reasonable enquiries the school have been unable to make contact, a referral should be made to the Children Missing Education Officer and a CME form completed. The CME Officer, in conjunction with the Borough School Attendance Service, will try to contact the parents or carers and follow up any reasonable leads. If the pupil is located, the reasons for absence should be established and the child must return to school as soon as possible.

5.3 Schools also have safeguarding duties under section 175 of the Education Act 2002 in respect of their pupils, and as part of this should investigate any unexplained absences. Academies and independent schools have a similar safeguarding duty for their pupils. Any concerns regarding a pupil’s safety should be reported without delay to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which will be able to provide advice.

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3 See the Ofsted website
4 Section 7 of the Education Act 1966
5 See Sutton’s Elective Home Education advice
Children at particular risk of missing education: This list is not exhaustive and could also include young carers and teenage parents:

6.1 Pupils at risk of harm/neglect - Children may be missing from education because they are suffering from abuse or neglect. Where this is suspected schools should follow London Child Protection Procedures. The children missing education officer will check that a referral has been made and, if not, they will alert Sutton’s Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

6.2 Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Families – Research has shown that many children from these families can become disengaged from education, particularly during the secondary school phase. It is therefore vital that schools inform the LA when a GRT pupil leaves the school without identifying a new destination school, particularly in the transition from primary to secondary, so that they can attempt to facilitate continuity of the child’s education. Although many are settled, some GRT families move regularly and their children can be at increased risk of missing education. Sutton’s Traveller Education Services (TES) can advise schools on the best strategies for ensuring the minimum disruption to GRT pupils’ education, for example dual registration with other schools or the provision of electronic or distance learning packages where these are available.

6.3 Families of Armed Forces - Families of members of the Armed Forces are likely to move frequently – both in the UK and overseas and often at short notice. Schools should contact the MOD Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS) on 01980 618244 for advice on making arrangements to ensure continuity of education for those children when the family moves.

6.4 Missing children/runaways - Children who go missing or run away from home or care may be in serious danger and are vulnerable to crime, sexual exploitation or abduction as well as missing education. Any concerns regarding a pupil’s safety should be reported without delay to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which will be able to provide advice.

6.5 Children and young people supervised by the Youth Justice System - Children who have offended or are at risk of doing so are also at risk of disengaging from education. Sutton’s Youth Offending Team (YOT) is responsible for supervising those young people (aged 8 to 18). The YOT works with Sutton’s CME officer to ensure that children are receiving, or return to, appropriate full-time education. Where a young person was registered at a school prior to custody, the school may keep the place open for their return.

6.6 Children who cease to attend a school – there are many reasons why a child stops attending a school. It could be because the parent chooses to home educate their child. However, where the reason for a child who has stopped attending a school is not known, schools must contact the local authority.
7 Identifying children missing education
7.1 Key partners in Sutton are local schools, agencies working with children and families, for example, GPs and other health professionals, the local Primary Care Trust, Police, housing agencies, emergency services, voluntary groups for youth and Youth Offending Teams.

7.2 Frontline staff in each of the agencies that formally engage with families with children should ensure that, in each new contact, basic information about the child is recorded. This should include the name of the child’s school, if of compulsory school age. Professionals in all agencies providing services to children and families should be alert to parents being accompanied by their children in school hours and ask where the child is on roll at school.

8 Who can refer a child missing education?
8.1 Anyone can make a referral for a child missing education, including partner agencies, other local authorities, concerned neighbours, family members, service providers, shopkeepers and the general public.

9 How should a child be referred?
9.1 The general public can telephone 020 8288 5609 or 020 8288 5693 to report a child believed to be missing education.

10 Logging a child’s details on the Children Missing Education database
10.1 Sutton currently holds a database of children identified as missing from education. This database is proactively reviewed each month. Names remain on the database until pupils are identified as placed in a provision or until they are over statutory school age. Data is held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2003.

11 Tracking process
11.1 Sutton’s Officer for Children Missing Education has access to centrally held databases against which a child’s name can be checked to establish whether he/she is registered with an educational provider.

11.2 The DfE provides a secure internet system – school2school\(^7\) – to allow schools to transfer pupil information to another school when the child moves\(^8\).

\(^7\) School to School (s2s) advice
\(^8\) In line with The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2012
12 Contacts for children missing education

Children missing education officer
Chaucer Centre,
Canterbury Rd, Morden, SM4 6PX
Tel: +44 020 8288 5609 or 020 8288 5693
Thelma.Kingston@sutton.gov.uk

MASH
Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
Sutton Police Station.
6 Carshalton Road
Sutton
Surrey
SM1 4RF
020 8649 0418.

Admission to school
School Admissions Team,
The Grove,
Carshalton,
SM5 3AL
020 8770 6080

Borough School Attendance Service
The Grove
Carshalton
Surrey
SM5 3AL
020 8770 6605

Traveller Education Service
Chaucer House
Canterbury Road
Morden
SM4 6PX
020 8648 3267

Further sources of information are listed in the DfE Statutory guidance for local authorities: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education
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