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Department for Education

Statutory guidance

Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools

Updated 8 September 2025

Applies to England

Contents

Who are children missing education

General Principles

Parents' responsibilities

Local authorities' responsibilities

Schools' responsibilities

Cohorts of children who may be at greater risk of becoming CME

Using Get Information About a Pupil and School to School to ascertain if a CME is on a school admission register elsewhere

Footnotes

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This publication is available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education/children-missing-education-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities-and-schools

This guidance is statutory for local authorities in England and is intended to help them fulfil their legal duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to identify, as far as it is possible to do so, children missing education (CME). This guidance is also statutory for academy trusts, governing bodies, management committees and proprietors who must have regard to it as part of their efforts to promote the welfare of children.

Local authorities and schools should be able to demonstrate that they have considered this statutory guidance and where it is not followed, they should have reasonable grounds for not doing so. This advice is not exhaustive, and the circumstances of individual cases will need to be considered.

This guidance should be read alongside the statutory guidance documents on:

- Working together to improve school attendance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)
- Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3)
- Suspension and permanent exclusions (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion)
- Alternative provision (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision)
- Elective home education (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education)
- Keeping children safe in education (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2)

This guidance makes reference to the following:

- section 436A of the Education Act 1996 (added by section 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006)
- Education Act 1996 (sections 7, 8, 14 and 19)
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
- section 175(4) of the Education Act 2002 (all chapters)
- paragraph 7 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (chapters 1 and 2)
- paragraph 3a of the Schedule to the Non-Maintained Special Schools (England) Regulations 2015 (chapters 1 and 2)

Who are children missing education

CME are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school[footnote 1].

CME includes children who:

- are in the process of applying for a school place
- have been offered a school place for a future date but have not yet started
- are receiving elective home education (EHE) that has been assessed as unsuitable
- have been recorded as CME for an extended period, for example where their whereabouts is unclear or unknown

CME are not children who:

- are receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school (for example, pupils who are electively home educated or attending alternative provision) which is suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have
- are EHE but the local authority has not had an opportunity to assess whether the education being provided is suitable
- are registered at a school, even if they are persistently or severely absent from that school

The importance of identifying and supporting children missing education

Regardless of their circumstances, the law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education which is suitable to their:

- age
- ability
- aptitude
- any special educational needs they may have

This may include suitable education through regular attendance at school, alternative provision or otherwise (for example, EHE).

CME are at significant risk of underachieving, having poorer health outcomes, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) later in life.

No single individual at a school, local authority or related service can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances. If children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action to help in the identification and support of CME.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all individuals involved in identifying and supporting CME should make sure their approach is child centred.

This guidance has been developed to support individuals working in local authorities and schools, alongside related agencies and organisations, to be clear about their own and each other's roles and responsibilities, and how they work together to identify and support CME.

Words used in this guidance

Where the words 'must' and 'must not' are used, they represent a statutory requirement. Where the word 'should' is used, it represents something that local authorities and/or the proprietors of schools (as the case may be) ought to do or something that is considered good practice but is not a mandatory requirement.

The word 'reasonable' is used throughout this guidance. Local authorities must act reasonably in the performance of their functions. Whether an action is reasonable may vary according to the circumstances in which it is being considered and local authorities will need to use their judgement. In general, they must seek to act in a way that is fair and rational and takes into account relevant factors. They should also seek to act in a way that is support focused.

Where this guidance refers to a parent, the school and/or local authority will need to decide which adult is most appropriate to work with. Generally, parents include:

- all natural parents, whether they are married or not

- all those who have parental responsibility for a child of compulsory school age
- those who have day-to-day care of the child (for example, lives with and looks after the child)

All references to a ‘child’ or ‘children’ and ‘pupil’ throughout this document should be taken in relation to children of compulsory school age only.

What are the main changes from September 2025

The Department conducted a call for evidence from 18 May to 20 July 2023 on improving support for children missing education (https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-support-for-children-missing-education) to understand the sector’s current approach to identifying and supporting CME, and to inform any changes that would help us to improve this support. As a result, this version of the guidance has been updated to provide further clarity and to address key challenges raised in response to the call for evidence.

The following sections have been added to the guidance:

- who are children missing education
- general principles
- legal duties
- information sharing (local)
- information sharing (national)
- children at risk of harm
- children in temporary accommodation
- school attendance orders (SAOs)
- admissions
- use of data
- accountability for CME
- removing names from the admission register
- adding names to the admission register
- using Get Information About a Pupil (GIAP) and School to School (S2S) to ascertain if a CME is on a school admission register elsewhere

General Principles

Data reported by local authorities (https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-missing-education) shows that, since DfE's aggregate data collection began in 2022, the number of CME identified has increased. There are a range of circumstances where a child may be missing education, so it is vital that local authorities make judgements on a case-by-case basis. Some of the main drivers of CME include:

- routine movement into and out of the country
- awaiting school application outcomes
- movement between local authority areas

National data shows that CME are more likely to be of secondary school age and when compared to the overall pupil population, CME are also more likely to have a child protection plan or be looked after children.

Regular school attendance can be an important protective factor against wider harms, particularly for the most vulnerable children, and provides the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided. For these children, additional support might be required. A small number of CME are at significant risk of being victims of harm, exploitation (including sexual and criminal exploitation) and radicalisation. Research has also shown associations between regular absence from school and a number of extra familial harms, including crime. Local authorities should focus their resources effectively to intervene early in the lives of vulnerable children to help prevent poor outcomes.

Refer to cohorts of children who may be at greater risk of becoming CME for further information on support that should be provided for these more vulnerable children so that they receive suitable full-time education.

Parents' responsibilities

Parents have a duty under section 7 of the Education Act 1996 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/7) to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are receiving suitable full-time education.

If parents are proposing to withdraw their child from school, it is important that they supply information to the school about how their child will be

continuing to receive suitable education, for example providing the name and address of the new school the child will be attending. Where this information is not yet available, parents are asked to inform the school of the location where their child will reside.

Some parents may elect to educate their children at home and, unless registered at a special school under arrangements made by the local authority, may usually withdraw them from school at any time to do so. Home educating parents devote time, financial resources and dedication to the education of their children and educating children at home works well when it is a positive, informed and dedicated choice. More information on EHE can be found in the department's elective home education guidance for parents and local authorities (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education).

As outlined in the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 under regulation 9(1)(f), where a parent notifies a school in writing that their child will no longer attend the school after a certain day and will receive education otherwise than at a school (for example, EHE) and that day has passed, the school must delete the child's name from the admission register (unless a school attendance order (SAO) is in place) and inform the local authority. If a parent's notification to withdraw the child does not satisfy the criteria for deletion (for example, it is not provided in writing or does not specify the date), this may trigger the school to notify the local authority. Notifying the local authority will prompt them to conduct their own informal enquiries alongside the school.

Under section 436A of the Education Act 1996, local authorities must make arrangements to try to identify children of compulsory school age not registered at a school or receiving suitable education otherwise. Under section 437 of that Act, local authorities must make informal enquiries with parents whose children are not registered at school (for example, electively home educating parents) to establish what education is being provided if they do not already know. Parents are strongly encouraged to co-operate with local authorities during these informal enquiries. If parents do not co-operate, usually (see admissions for circumstances where this may not apply) local authorities must begin the SAO process which begins with a formal written notice to parents under section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996.

Local authorities' responsibilities

Prompt action and early intervention are crucial to discharging local authority duties under Section 436A (to seek to identify children of compulsory school age not registered at a school or receiving suitable

education otherwise) to effectively ensure that children are safe and receiving suitable education.

Supported by schools, local authorities are expected to ensure time spent out of suitable education is kept to an absolute minimum and work to prevent repeated instances of children becoming CME, for example by effective and supportive reintegration into school or by supporting into education otherwise than at school if this is more appropriate for the child's needs.

Successfully identifying, supporting and preventing CME requires local authorities to follow certain work practices.

Have a clear response framework:

- ensuring the definition of CME is well understood by all services in the area (for example, schools and wider services such as health and children's social care)
- having effective processes in place for identification of CME and supporting them into suitable education
- regularly raising awareness of policies and referral mechanisms with partners and taking prompt action if there is risk to a child's safety or wellbeing
- having clear accountability processes in place across the local authority

Work in partnership to:

- ensure local partners such as schools (including independent schools) know and follow local processes for identification (for example, making a CME referral) and reintegration
- foster close working relationships between relevant services and organisations to ensure they, other local authorities and the public know where to refer suspected CME cases
- ensure schools conduct effective and rapid reasonable enquiries to identify the whereabouts of suspected CME and that the criteria for removal from roll are clearly understood, including when an investigation is completed by a home local authority but the child attends school in a different local authority's area
- ensure CME processes are embedded into other local authority functions

Share information:

- use data from a wide range of services, other local authorities and national agencies to identify CME
- support schools to work closely with their local authority to support early identification and tracking of CME and enable them to continue to share

updates, including after they have notified the local authority of a suspected CME

- document action taken on individual cases
- regularly identify ways to improve information sharing which might include working with other local authorities to share best practice

Engage families:

- work closely with families, adapting the communication style, if necessary, to understand why a child has become CME, using this understanding to move forward and work in partnership with the family to successfully support them into full-time suitable education

Be preventative:

- take steps to help prevent CME cases, for example working closely with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and early years services, as well as targeted work ahead of school transition points and work with EHE teams

Review regularly:

- have regular points where processes, procedures and outcomes for CME are reviewed and improved, ensuring feedback from wider services, organisations and families are also included

Legal duties

Arrangements made under section 436A also play an important role in fulfilling local authorities' wider safeguarding duties. This duty should therefore be viewed alongside these wider duties and local initiatives that aim to promote the safeguarding of children. The statutory guidance on working together to safeguard children (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2) provides advice on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Local authorities have other duties, powers and expectations that further support their work to prevent, identify and support CME. These include:

- safeguarding children's welfare, and their duty to cooperate with other agencies in improving children's wellbeing, including protection from harm and neglect (section 10 of the Children Act 2004 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/section/10))

- arranging suitable full-time education for permanently excluded children from the sixth school day of exclusion (The Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) Regulations 2007 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/1870/made))
- arranging suitable education for children out of school due to exclusion, illness, or other reasons, if they would not receive it otherwise – this duty covers all compulsory school-age children in the local authority's area, regardless of school type or whether they are on a school's admissions register (section 19(1) of the Education Act 1996 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/19))
- carrying out the expectations of local authority School Attendance Support Teams set out in the statutory guidance on working together to improve school attendance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2)
- serving notice on parents requiring them to satisfy the local authority that a child is receiving suitable education, when it comes to the local authority's attention that the child might not be receiving such education (section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/437))
- issuing SAOs to parents who fail to satisfy the local authority that their child is receiving suitable education, if the local authority deems it is appropriate that the child should attend school (section 437(3) of the Education Act 1996 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/437))
- in cases where parents do not comply with an SAO, prosecuting parents (section 443 of the Education Act 1996 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/443))
- where parents fail to ensure their school-registered child attends school regularly, prosecuting or issuing penalty notices (section 444 of the Education Act 1996 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/444) and section 23 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/38/section/23))
- applying to court for an Education Supervision Order for a child to support them to go to school (section 447 of the Education Act 1996 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/447))

Children with education, health and care (EHC) plans can be home educated. Local authorities should review the Department's elective home education guidance for local authorities (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education) for more information on their legal duties for home-educated children with special educational needs.

Effective processes

Local authorities should have robust written policies and procedures in place to enable them to meet their duty in relation to CME. This includes:

- ensuring that there are effective tracking and enquiry systems in place
- appointing a named person and enquiry or referral point (for example, a contact email address) whom schools and other agencies can inform and share details of suspected CME (such as making a CME referral)
- recording the steps taken to identify and support each CME
- have a policy in place setting expectations for referral response times and follow this policy to respond to CME referrals promptly
- maintain an active ‘CME list’ recording the details of suspected and confirmed CME in their area

When developing policies and procedures local authorities should consider the reasons for CME and the circumstances that can lead to this happening, and therefore how systems should be designed to successfully identify and support them. Local authorities should undertake regular reviews and evaluate their policies and procedures to ensure that these continue to be fit for purpose in identifying CME in their area.

Making reasonable enquiries

When the whereabouts and circumstances of a child are unclear or unknown, local authorities and schools (where that child has previously been registered at a school) should work together to make enquiries that enable them to, as far as reasonably possible, identify the location of suspected CME and any provision of education they are receiving. This activity is called making reasonable enquiries. Once CME have been identified, the local authority can then take steps to support them into suitable education.

In line with their duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996, local authorities should make clear to schools in their local area the expectation for them to support with conducting reasonable enquiries. This should include how reasonable enquiry responsibilities are allocated, conducted and completed promptly between local authorities and schools, as well as the importance of effective working and communication related to CME. The term ‘reasonable’ also makes clear that enquiries should be proportionate to the situation (for example, risk involved). It is essential for both parties to

collaborate and determine what can be realistically achieved when it comes to joint reasonable enquiries for CME.

Conducting enquiries

If a child who is on a school roll is absent from school and this absence is unexplained, the school should immediately make enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts. The school should ensure that they have in place arrangements whereby all unexpected and unexplained absences are promptly enquired about. If there is reason to believe a child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, a referral should be made to children's social care (and the police if appropriate).

If enquiries lead the school to reasonably believe that the child will no longer be attending the school and the parent has not provided the school with written notice that the child will be attending another school or that education provision otherwise than at a school will be provided, they should make a referral to the child's home local authority CME team as soon as possible. Schools should continue to undertake reasonable enquiries to identify the whereabouts of the child during this time, and regular communication between the school and the local authority carrying out these enquiries should continue until it is mutually agreed that enquiries have concluded or that there are no further actions the school can take.

Local authorities and schools should jointly conduct reasonable enquiries immediately upon identifying a CME. These enquiries must be thorough and collaborative where possible, ensuring that decisions regarding necessary, relevant and appropriate actions are made based on the specifics of each case and the evidence available. Local authorities and schools are expected to exercise careful judgement in determining the sequence and nature of actions, taking into account all pertinent facts. With the child's welfare as the paramount concern, it is imperative that actions are taken without delay. These actions may include, but are not limited to:

- making contact with the parent using known contact details
- checking with agencies known to be involved with the family
- checking with siblings' schools whether they have contact with the parents (if applicable)
- where the child had previously moved or changed school, check with the local authority and school from which the child moved originally, if known
- checking with the local authority or school to which a child may have moved

- checking with the local authority for the area where the child lives, if different from where the school is
- speaking to landlords if appropriate (private, social or temporary housing providers)
- referring to databases within the local authority where possible (for example, admissions or children's social care)
- establishing and following local information sharing arrangements (where needed) to access and check databases of external agencies (housing providers, health services, police, refuge, youth justice services, and council tax)
- checking S2S
- checking Get Information About a Pupil (GIAP)
- checking with national databases (such as Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Border Force, UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI), Ministry of Defence (MoD), Health)
- home visits made by the appropriate team, following local guidance concerning risk assessment
- making contact with relatives and neighbours, if appropriate, using known contact details

This list is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list of actions. The type of reasonable enquiries required to try to locate a child and establish their circumstances will differ from case to case and additional enquiries to those suggested in this section may be necessary.

Making reasonable enquiries may not always lead to establishing the location or circumstances of a child, but will provide a steer on what action should be taken next, for example contacting the police, children's social care and, in cases where there may be concerns for the safety of a child who has travelled abroad, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Information sharing (local)

Effective information sharing between parents, schools and local authorities is critical for ensuring that all children of compulsory school age are safe and in receipt of a suitable education.

Local authorities should regularly raise awareness of their CME policies and procedures and notification routes with all schools in their area, and with local partners and agencies working with children and families. This can include:

- health professionals (including GPs)
- integrated care boards (ICBs)
- police and other emergency services
- housing agencies
- children's homes
- statutory and voluntary youth services
- voluntary and community organisations
- Youth Offending Teams

This should also include independent schools in their area and others outside the area with whom they develop links, to enable the quick identification of children who may have moved to an independent school from a maintained one. Close working relationships with local authority teams leading on safeguarding, admissions, EHE and inclusion are also essential. Where shared information systems exist across services within a local authority, information sharing to identify and support CME can become much more efficient.

Local authorities should also have in place arrangements for joint working and information sharing with other local authorities and agencies. These partners and agencies may become aware of the arrival or existence of a child living in the area who is not receiving suitable education, before the local authority does (for example, children of migrant worker families). They may also hold crucial safeguarding or welfare information about a child, and local authorities should identify all likely routes of information and consider involving them when making CME enquiries.

The Department's information sharing advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice) sets out further information on how to do this.

The Department's statutory guidance on working together to safeguard children (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2) provides advice on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It sets out that local practitioners should be sharing information as early as possible for the identification of a child at risk of being CME. The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) supports the sharing of relevant information for the purposes of keeping children safe.

Local authorities should have a specific webpage outlining their CME policies and procedures along with the contact email address of the CME team.

Information sharing (national)

Local authorities should have links to national organisations, such as the DWP, Border Force, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and health services, to assist them in identifying CME. There may be other relevant organisations, including those regarding health, depending on your local circumstances.

Department for Work and Pensions
CME teams should establish strong information sharing relationships with the relevant team within their authority, including those who may hold information on benefits and revenues, and to promote awareness for information sharing to locate CME on safeguarding grounds. The DWP and local authority teams responsible for benefits and child allowance may hold information on the most recent address for CME.

HMRC
HMRC teams with access to relevant information will help establish relationships with the relevant teams within local authorities. HMRC will work with each local authority to complete the necessary data governance in support of CME on safeguarding grounds. HMRC's team with responsibility for the administration of child benefit are most likely to hold information relevant for CME.

If you are not aware of the process, please contact riskteam.chb@hmrc.gov.uk to request this.

Border Force
Where a local authority suspects that a child might have moved abroad, local authorities should either seek proof of a travel ticket or make an information request from Border Force to help ascertain whether the child still resides in the country. The Department has shared the steps for making a Border Force information sharing request with the identified point of contact for CME in each local authority in England.

If you are not aware of the process, please contact DfE at school.attendance@education.gov.uk to request this. CME officers will need to make clear in their request to Border Force the safeguarding implications of being unable to ascertain the whereabouts of the child.

Health
CME teams should also establish relationships with national and local health services, including GPs, school nursing providers or their local NHS ICB, to facilitate information sharing for locating CME on safeguarding grounds. Teams should work with their local safeguarding partners, where

applicable, to identify where information sharing relationships within health may be established.

Working with other local authorities

Strong working relationships with other local authorities are essential for conducting CME enquiries. This includes through neighbouring and regional networks, as well as awareness of CME contacts across the country. In some cases, strong working relationships with local authorities in the devolved nations (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) may also be important.

If there is evidence to suggest a child has moved to a different local authority area, contact should be made with the named person in the new authority using secure communication methods. Further advice on secure communication is available in the Department's information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice) guidance. The new local authority should respond to CME referrals as soon as possible to enable appropriate CME procedures to take place.

If the receiving local authority confirms they are aware of the child in their area, that local authority should add the child to their CME list until it is confirmed they are on a school register or in receipt of suitable education otherwise. The previous local authority should not remove the child's name from their CME list until the receiving local authority confirms receipt of the referral.

If a child is added to the admission register of a school within a different local authority to their home local authority and they have reason to believe the home authority has not been informed, the local authority the school is located in should proactively inform the child's home local authority that the child is receiving a suitable education.

Families moving between local authority areas or into the country for the first time can sometimes lead to a child's circumstances being unknown to a local authority. Where the destination of a child is unknown, local authorities should as far as possible identify potentially relevant local authorities, either regionally or nationally, and check with them to ascertain whether the child has moved there. Local authorities should avoid making enquiries to a large number of local authorities, as this is not a secure method of sharing personal information. The Department-maintained CME contact list is circulated regularly to local authority CME teams and can be used to identify a named contact in the relevant area.

If a child has not been located through working with other local authorities, a local authority should not remove a child from their CME list until they have exhausted all other reasonable enquiries. A record of the child's details should be maintained elsewhere by the local authority until they are located or attain school leaving age.

Children at risk of harm

Education is essential for children's progress, wellbeing and wider development, and being in school is a protective factor against wider harms, including exploitation. Where children are not receiving suitable education, such as in the case of CME, this could be a possible indicator of neglect, abuse or exploitation (including sexual and criminal exploitation) or could in itself constitute neglect in severe and sustained cases.

As set out in the statutory guidance on working together to safeguard children (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2), local safeguarding partners should publish a threshold document[footnote 2], which sets out the local criteria for action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare in a way that:

- is transparent
- makes clear the evidence-base for the criteria set
- is accessible and easily understood

In addition, safeguarding partners should agree with their relevant agencies the criteria for different levels of assessment to inform which services are commissioned and delivered in their local area, and ensure that the right help is given to children at the right time. This should include services for children who have suffered or are likely to suffer abuse, neglect and exploitation whether from within or outside the home.

Where there is a concern that a child's safety or wellbeing is at risk, it is essential to take action without delay. Where designated safeguarding leads or any staff within local authorities have concerns about a child's welfare, they should immediately consider whether a referral needs to be made to local authority children's social care, and if appropriate, contact the police, particularly if there is a concern that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

When practitioners refer a child to children's social care, they should include any information they have on the child's developmental needs, the capacity of the child's parents, carers or family network to meet those needs and any external factors that may be undermining their capacity to parent. This information may be included in any assessment, including an early help

assessment, which may have been carried out prior to a referral into local authority children's social care. An early help assessment is not a prerequisite for a referral but where one has been undertaken, it should be used to support the referral.

Where safeguarding concerns have been raised about a child identified as CME, local authority officers responsible for CME should check that a referral has been made, and if not, they should alert children's social care. If there is reason to suspect a crime has been committed, the police should also be involved.

The Department's statutory guidance on keeping children safe in education (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2) provides further advice for schools and colleges on safeguarding children, alongside statutory guidance on working together to safeguard children (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2) which applies to all organisations and agencies who have functions relating to children.

Children in temporary accommodation

Children in temporary accommodation may face additional barriers to accessing suitable education. Even if a child is only temporarily in the area, local authorities are still required to identify those children not registered at school or receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. When these children have been identified, they should be added to the CME list and supported into receiving a suitable education.

The same processes for reasonable enquires to locate a suspected CME apply. The temporary local authority, however, should also be included in the discussion. Where the pupil's name is deleted from the admission register, it would be the temporary local authority's responsibility to investigate whether the child is missing education.

When an accompanied asylum-seeking or refugee child is temporarily housed by the Home Office, the temporary local authority assumes CME responsibilities. Local authorities should build strong relationships with housing providers to ensure prompt notification (using the local authority's published CME contact details) when a child moves in or out of temporary accommodation.

Local authorities should give the providers the necessary reassurance, if required, that the sharing of relevant information is essential to keep children safe. Where reasonably practicable, housing providers should facilitate the sharing of information regarding a child's education and the receiving local authority if a child moves out of the area. This information is

critical for the local authority CME team, as it supports them to assess the suitability of the child's education.

More information on supporting school attendance for children in temporary accommodation can be found in the guidance on working together to improve school attendance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance).

School Attendance Orders

Where suspected CME are identified, a local authority should make informal enquiries to determine whether the child is receiving a suitable education either at school or otherwise. Where informal enquiries have not led the local authority to conclude that suitable education is being provided to the suspected CME, the local authority must begin the SAO process in line with sections 437 to 442 of the Education Act 1996. The local authority will serve a notice under section 437(1), requiring the parent to prove the child is receiving suitable education within a time set out in the notice (at least 15 days). Local authorities may seek to confirm that the parent has received the notice, however this should not prevent them progressing with the next steps.

If the local authority has validly served the notice under section 437(1) and the parent fails to prove the child is receiving suitable education within the specified time, and the local authority believe it is expedient that the child should attend school, an SAO must be served. Service is valid if:

- the parent physically receives the notice
- the notice is dropped off at the parent's usual or last known home
- the notice is posted in a prepaid envelope addressed to the parent's usual or last known home
- the parent has previously agreed to receive this kind of document by an electronic method, such as e-mail or text message, and has agreed a specific electronic address or number for such documents to be sent to, and the notice is sent to that address or number and they receive it

Identifying a school for a proposed SAO

If a child does not have an EHC plan, the local authority must identify one or more schools with available spaces that they think might be appropriate for the child, ensuring it is within reasonable distance of the child's home, such as one where the child's home falls within that school's catchment area. If the school or one of the schools identified is a maintained school (other than a hospital school), local authorities can choose to name it if:

- they are the admission authority for the school
- they are not the school's admission authority, but the school chosen could admit the child without exceeding its published admission number for the child's age group in the year of the child's admission (published admission numbers are explained in the School admissions code (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2))

If those criteria rule out all the maintained schools in the local authority's area that are a reasonable distance to the child's home, the local authority may choose a school that does not meet those previous criteria, as long as the school satisfies the following conditions:

- the school must be within a reasonable distance of the child's home
- the school must not be one from which the child is permanently excluded
- the school must be able to admit the child without breaching the infant class size limit or having to take disproportionate steps to avoid breaching the limit

If proposing to name a maintained school the child previously attended, the local authority should consider the child's past experience at that school to help them to decide whether returning to the school would be an appropriate choice for the child and their family's needs.

If the child does have an EHC plan and the plan names a school, then the local authority must name the same school in the SAO. If the child has an EHC plan but the plan does not name the school, then the local authority must go through the process under the Children and Families Act 2014 to amend the plan so that it does name a school (as described in the SEND code of practice (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-guide-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings)). Once this action is complete, the local authority must then name the same school in the SAO.

The school consultation process

The process of consulting with a school a local authority is seeking to name on a proposed SAO differs depending on whether the school is a maintained school or not. In the SAO process, 'maintained school' means a community, foundation or voluntary school, or a community or foundation special school that is not established in a hospital. There is no statutory duty on the proprietor of a school that is not a maintained school to admit the child, in comparison to a maintained school where a statutory duty does apply.

Note that this section does not apply at all if the child has a named school within an EHC plan. In that case, the SAO must name the school that is named in the plan.

Maintained schools

Before a local authority informs a parent that they are considering naming a maintained school in the school attendance order that they are going to serve, the local authority must consult the school's governing body and, if another local authority is responsible for deciding the school's admission arrangements, that local authority should also be consulted. This is usually communicated by email. The local authority should set ambitious but reasonable response timelines to avoid delays in serving a notice under section 438(2).

Local authorities should always address both maintained schools' and other schools' concerns during the naming process to reach a quick agreement, and the Department expects that the local authority and school will work together to come to an agreement to ensure the proposed admission of the child.

If no agreement is reached but the local authority decides to proceed with naming a maintained school (other than a hospital school) in the notice to the child's parent under section 438(2), they must first serve a written notice on the governing body, head teacher and, if another local authority is responsible for deciding the school's admission arrangements, that local authority. The governing body or other local authority has the right to appeal the decision of the local authority that served the notice by requesting a direction from the Secretary of State.

If a maintained school disagrees with being named in an order, it has 15 days to seek a direction from the Secretary of State from the day the notice was received. The school must inform the local authority if it seeks a direction. If the Secretary of State directs that the school not be named on the SAO, the Secretary of State may specify a school, or the local authority may need to select an alternative. If the Secretary of State declines to make a direction or directs that the school be named, the local authority must name the school in the notice it sends to the parent.

Schools that are not maintained schools

Where a local authority intends to name a school that is not maintained by the local authority, or a hospital school that is a maintained school, in a notice under section 438(2), they should seek its agreement in writing. This agreement should usually be sought by consulting the academy headteacher and Board of Trustees by email.

If the school disagrees with being named, the local authority can still name it in the notice, as long as it is reasonable to do so. If the local authority names an academy school in a SAO and the academy trust refuses to admit the child, the local authority can ask the Secretary of State to direct the trust to admit the child under its funding agreement. If a direction is made, the academy must admit the child. If not, the SAO will need to be varied to name an alternative school as quickly as possible. The local authority should inform the academy if it seeks a direction.

School attendance order directions

All school attendance order directions should be sought from the Secretary of State via DfE's customer help portal (https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/). It is important to clearly set out the reasons for applying for a direction to enable the Secretary of State to make a decision. No further action is required on the part of the local authority issuing the SAO or the school named in the SAO until the Secretary of State returns their decision regarding the direction.

Local authorities should consider developing a policy for serving SAOs, including how they will manage any appeals where an agreement has not been reached.

Serving a school attendance order

Once a school has been specified under Section 439, as set out in Section 438, a local authority must serve the SAO notice to the parent in writing, informing them of their intention to serve the order.

The notice must specify the school they intend to name in the order and, if they think fit, one or more other schools which they regard as suitable alternatives. Where one or more schools have been specified on the notice, the notice must also make clear that the parent has 15 days beginning with the day on which the notice was served to select one of those schools to be named on the order and the effect of subsections (3) to (6) of section 438.

During the 15 day time period, the parent can choose to apply to the school or one of the schools intended to be named. The parent can also apply to another school of their choice, as long as the local authority agrees the school is suitable to their age, ability and aptitude, and any special educational needs they may have. The school selected by the parent and agreed by the local authority will be the school named on the SAO.

Further support

Where EHE has been assessed as unsuitable, more advice on SAOs for both local authorities and parents can be found in the Department's elective home education guidance for local authorities and parents (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education).

Admissions

Some children who are missing education can be identified and supported into education quickly. Other children who have experienced more complex problems might face increased barriers to accessing suitable education, or may require alternative arrangements to be made for them under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 because of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise.

Once CME have been identified, the home local authority should work with the parents of the child to understand the child's needs. The parent should complete a school application at the earliest possible stage. Local authorities are required by law to provide advice and assistance to parents living in their area when they are deciding which schools to apply for, and to provide information about which schools in the area have places available. Where an application is being made outside the normal admissions round, local authorities should also discuss admissions with the schools being considered for the child[footnote 3].

Schools and local authorities should work together to help to minimise the time a child spends out of education by cooperating with each other to provide a school place for all children of compulsory age, where suitable. If a place is provided, the school and local authority should work together to ensure the child begins their education at the school at the earliest opportunity.

Where the local authority coordinates in-year admissions for schools in their area, they must also set out on their website by 31 August how in-year applications will be handled, and they must provide a suitable application form for parents to complete. Where the local authority is not the admissions authority for the school, they must also set out contact details for any admission authority that manages its own in-year admissions.

Where schools manage their own in-year admissions, they must also set out on their website by 31 August how in-year applications will be handled. This must include how parents can apply for a school place and provide a suitable application form for parents to complete. Where a school receives an in-year application, they must inform the local authority, including the outcome of the application, to ensure the local authority is aware of any children who may not have a school place.

Parents must be informed about the outcome of an in-year application in writing within 15 school days of the application being received. Where an applicant is offered a school place following an in-year application and the offer is accepted, arrangements should be made for the child's name to be added to the admission register on their agreed starting day and for the child to start school as soon as possible, particularly where the child is out of school.

Where an admission authority is dealing with multiple in-year admissions and does not have sufficient places for every child who has applied for one, they must allocate places on the basis of the oversubscription criteria in their determined admission arrangements only. Admission authorities should include information on over-subscription criteria as well as the relevant admissions policy on their websites.

Admission authorities must not refuse to admit a child on behavioural grounds in the normal admissions round or at any point in the normal year

of entry, except where a child has been permanently excluded from 2 or more schools. Where an admission authority receives an in-year application for a year group that is not the normal point of entry and it does not wish to admit the child because it has good reason to believe that the child may display challenging behaviour, it may refuse admission and refer the child to the fair access protocol.

Each local authority must have a fair access protocol to ensure that unplaced and vulnerable children, and those who are having difficulty securing a school place in-year, are allocated a school place as quickly as possible. All admission authorities must comply with their local fair access protocol – this includes admitted children allocated to their school by the protocol.

The school admissions code (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2) sets out the categories of children who are eligible to be placed by the fair access protocol. This includes children who have been out of education for 4 or more weeks, where it can be demonstrated that there are no places available at any school within a reasonable distance of their home.

Where the child is not admitted to a school quickly, or it is identified that a school would not meet the needs of the child, the local authority should then consider if an alternative arrangement should be put in place, either as an interim measure while a school place is found or as the most appropriate route for the child.

Use of data

The Department collects data on CME from local authorities on a termly basis. This is a mandatory data collection that requires local authorities to provide aggregate data. The Department's guidance on submitting EHE and CME data (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/elective-home-education-and-children-missing-education-submit-your-data) sets out how local authorities must share data with the Department on CME. The data collected on CME is published annually by the Department, and local authorities should use this publication to compare their CME data to the national average as well as to other local authorities.

Local authorities should track patterns or changes in data over time, to inform local strategies to minimise missed education. Working closely with EHE, SEND and early years teams or services to spot children at risk can also help to prevent instances of children either receiving unsuitable or no education. Similarly, targeted preventative work ahead of school transition points, including into reception, can help to support children at risk of not making a successful transition to a new school.

Accountability for CME

The Ofsted framework for inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS) sets out that inspectors will evaluate the experiences of children who are missing education. Local authorities are assessed against the expectations set out in this statutory guidance. Local authorities should have a rigorous strategy and process in place to support CME, as well as maintain a record of the actions taken to assist with these inspections. Further information on the scope and focus of these inspections can be found in Ofsted's published ILACS framework (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018/b3edac72-cb9e-413b-b8d5-f2a5c23900cc#scope).

In addition to being subject to Ofsted inspection, local authorities should have in place strong internal accountability mechanisms for CME practices, with oversight from senior leadership. This oversight should be in line with the oversight they have of wider local authority functions. It should include senior leaders monitoring data, practices and service performance. Senior leaders should also provide support where necessary to enable CME teams to carry out their duties as effectively as possible.

Schools' responsibilities

Schools must monitor pupils' attendance daily through their attendance register, and should take proactive steps to address poor or irregular attendance to prevent children becoming CME. It is essential that pupils' poor attendance is referred to the relevant local authority by an attendance return. Where a child resides in a different local authority area from the one in which their school is located, the school should notify and work with that area's local authority. Both local authorities should work together to enable effective joint working between all involved partners. Each local authority should agree with the schools in their area the intervals at which these schools should make attendance returns to highlight the children with poor or irregular attendance. The law also allows local authority officers to access the attendance and admission registers of all types of school to carry out their functions under the education acts. Officers are permitted to take digital or physical extracts of the registers.

Where there is a concern that a child's safety or well-being is at risk, it is essential to take action without delay. If school staff have safeguarding concerns about a child, they should take immediate action, following their child protection policy and involving their designated safeguarding lead.

Where designated safeguarding leads or any staff in schools or local authorities have concerns about a child's welfare, they should immediately consider whether a referral needs to be made to local authority children's social care and, if appropriate, whether to call the police, particularly if there is a concern that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

Further information about schools' safeguarding responsibilities can be found in the statutory guidance on keeping children safe in education (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2).

Schools should:

- maintain accurate admission registers and take a proactive approach to monitoring pupils' attendance in line with chapter 2 of Working together to improve school attendance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)
- do their own initial proactive work to locate a child at risk of becoming a CME, before working jointly with their local authority to conduct further reasonable enquiries to identify their whereabouts – schools should also continue to play their role in conducting joint reasonable enquiries even after they have submitted a CME referral to the local authority (refer to making reasonable enquiries)
- work collaboratively with their local authority to return CME in their local area into education – this might also involve working with a child's home local authority, if different
- offer appropriate support to successfully integrate children into their school, including having efficient decision making processes for admissions in place to prevent delays
- carefully follow guidance on removing or adding pupils' names from or to the admission register, which in some specific cases will involve joint actions to be undertaken between the school and local authority before this decision can be made

Maintaining accurate admission registers

The definition of a pupil is set out in section 3 of the Education Act 1996 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/3). Schools must enter pupils' names on the admission register on the first day that the school and a person with control of the pupil's attendance have agreed that the pupil will attend the school. This means a school being named on an EHC plan alone does not automatically mean that the child is, or should be, on the school admission register.

It is important that a school's admission register is accurate and kept up to date. Schools should regularly encourage parents, through existing communication channels such as regular emails and newsletters, to inform them of any changes to their child's personal details and education arrangements whenever they occur. Local authorities can also encourage parents to inform their schools of any changes, either via the local authority website or when in direct communication with parents. This will have the benefit of assisting both the school and local authority when making enquiries to locate CME.

Where a parent notifies a school that a pupil will normally live at another address, whether in addition to or instead of their current address, all schools are required to record in the admission register:

- the address
- the full name of each parent the pupil will normally live with
- the date when the pupil will start normally living there

To support effective CME processes, schools have a duty to make a return to the local authority in line with regulation 13 of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 whenever a pupil's name is added to or removed from the admission register outside of standard transition times. Local authorities can extend this to include standard transition times, if they wish to do so. For full details, see paragraphs 211 and 219 of Working together to improve school attendance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance).

Removing names from the admission register

Where one of the grounds for deleting a pupil's name from the admission register is met, as set out in regulation 9 of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/208/made), the pupil's name must immediately be deleted. A school cannot retrospectively delete a pupil's name from the admission register. The decision to delete a pupil's name is for the individual school in line with the regulations. Schools must ensure all requirements under the relevant ground are met before the pupil's name is deleted.

For grounds H and I (this is where a pupil has not returned within 10 school days following a leave of absence, or has been continually absent for 20 school days unauthorised), joint reasonable enquires between the school and local authority to locate the pupil and find out their circumstances are required before a pupil's name can be deleted. When a pupil is located and

their circumstances established, before their name is deleted, both parties must agree there are no reasonable grounds to believe the pupil will attend the school again.

For ground G, if a pupil no longer normally lives a reasonable distance from the school, and the school does not have reasonable grounds to believe the pupil will attend the school again, the pupil's name must be deleted from the admission register even when a new school place has not yet been secured.

When making a deletion return to the local authority, schools must provide the local authority with the following information from the admission register:

- the full name of the pupil
- current address
- the full name and address of any parent the pupil normally lives with
- at least one telephone number by which any parent the pupil normally lives with can be contacted in an emergency
- if applicable, the pupil's future address, the full name and address of the parent who the pupil is going to live with, and the date the pupil will start living there
- if applicable, the name of the pupil's new school and when the pupil began or will begin to attend
- the reason set out in regulation 9 under which the pupils name has been deleted

More information on the requirements for each ground can be found in the Department's guidance on working together to improve school attendance (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf).

Off rolling

Off rolling is a form of gaming as defined by Ofsted, where a school prevents a pupil from attending school normally or removes a pupil's name from the school roll without a formal permanent exclusion, or by encouraging a parent to remove their child from the school to EHE. This is done in the interests of the school rather than the best interests of the pupil. The practice of off rolling is unacceptable, regardless of whether the removal from the register occurs with the agreement of parents or carers.

The correct removal of names from the register supports lawful exclusions, effective monitoring of pupil movements, and reduces the risk of off rolling

which puts children at further risk of missing education.

Adding names to the admission register

Schools must enter pupils' names on the admission register on the first day that the school and a person with control of the pupil's attendance have agreed that the pupil will attend the school. If the school has a duty to admit the pupil, the name must be added on the first day a person with control of the pupil's attendance has told the school that the pupil will attend. If no date has been agreed or notified, the pupil's name must be entered on the first day they attend the school. Names must be entered from the beginning of the first session. If a pupil fails to attend on the agreed date, the school should undertake reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts.

All schools must also make a return to the local authority within 5 days when a pupil's name is added to the admission register (a 'new pupil return'). Schools will need to provide the local authority with all the information held within the admission register about the pupil. This duty only applies at non-standard transition points, unless the local authority has asked for such information.

Cohorts of children who may be at greater risk of becoming CME

Pupils at risk of harm or neglect

Children may be missing education due to abuse, neglect and exploitation. Where this is suspected, schools should follow local child protection procedures. If a child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, an immediate referral should be made to children's social care, and the police should also be contacted if appropriate.

Where harm or neglect is suspected in relation to a CME, local authority officers responsible for CME should check that a referral has been made, and if not, they should alert children's social care. The Department's statutory guidance on working together to safeguard children (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2) provides further safeguarding advice.

Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families

Although many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) families are settled, some move regularly, and their children can be at increased risk of becoming CME. For GRT families who want their children to attend school, effective communication between local authorities and schools is essential to minimise this risk.

Local authority and school engagement with GRT families should include appropriate assessment of the cultural background of each of these communities to ensure communication is tailored to address the individual needs of GRT families.

Traveller Education Services, or a named CME officer within the local authority, can advise schools on the best strategies to reduce disruption to GRT pupils' education, for example agreeing to dual registration arrangements when parents enrol their child at another school, or electronic or distance learning packages if these are available.

Schools should also inform the local authority when a GRT pupil leaves without identifying a new destination school, especially during transitions between primary and secondary school, to help maintain educational continuity. For GRT families who want to electively home educate their children, effective communication between the family and the local authority's EHE team is essential to minimise the risk of CME.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children of new migrant families

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are likely to have faced significant difficulties and will need to be cared for while in the UK. Local authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in need, ensuring that there are enough schools available for their areas and offering additional support for looked after migrant children and UASC. There can be additional challenges and complex barriers for local authorities to overcome to carry out their CME duty, which can include unsettled, often temporary housing situations, unreported arrivals or sudden moves between authorities' areas. Looked after migrant children, including UASC who need to be offered support, will be accommodated by the local authority.

Local authorities should work with the housing providers of temporary accommodation to strengthen information sharing that can bolster support for children of new migrant families and UASC.

Children who go missing from home or care

Children who go missing or run away from home or care are vulnerable to serious dangers and harm outside the home, including sexual and criminal exploitation and abduction, as well as missing education. Multi-agency working is essential for assessing cases of children missing from home or care, and for analysing data for patterns that indicate concerns and risks. Authorities should consider whether CME may also be unreported missing children.

Local authorities and the police should take proactive steps to support these children, particularly in communities where underreporting is more likely due to mistrust of statutory services. Local authorities should refer to the statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care) for more information and support on prevention and protection of this vulnerable cohort of children.

Children with SEND whose needs are not being adequately supported

Where parents are not satisfied that the needs of a pupil with SEND are being met adequately in school, this may lead to lower attendance and ultimately parents taking their child out of school. Schools should work closely with the pupil and their parents to put appropriate support in place and to keep this under regular review. If a child with an EHC plan has significant levels of unmet need, the school should also liaise with the local authority about whether an early review of the plan is needed.

Children who are excluded from school

It is important for schools to help minimise the disruption that a suspension or permanent exclusion can cause to a pupil's education. All maintained schools, academy schools (including free schools), alternative provision academies (including alternative provision free schools), and pupil referral

units must inform a local authority when a pupil has been suspended or permanently excluded regardless of length, without delay.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to arrange suitable full-time education starting from the sixth day (or earlier) of a permanent exclusion. Informal or unofficial suspensions and permanent exclusions are unlawful, regardless of whether they occur with the agreement of parents or carers. This is also defined by Ofsted as a form of off rolling. Department guidance on school suspensions and permanent exclusions (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion) details the legal responsibilities for those who suspend (fixed period exclusion) and permanently exclude pupils.

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. Youth offending teams (https://www.gov.uk/youth-offending-team) (YOTs) are responsible for supervising those young people (aged 10 to 18) and should work with the local authority CME officer and schools to ensure that children are receiving, or return to, appropriate full-time education.

Working together to improve school attendance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance) sets out how schools and local authorities should work together with YOTs with regard to the relevant regulations.

Children of service personnel

Families of service personnel are likely to move frequently, both in the UK and overseas, and often at short notice. Schools and local authorities should contact the Ministry of Defence (MoD) Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS) (https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/the-childrens-education-advisory-service-ceas) by email RC-DCS-HQ-CEAS@mod.gov.uk for advice on making arrangements to ensure continuity of education for service children when their family moves, including guidance and support relating to service children with a SEND.

Children attending unregistered independent schools

There are a number of settings operating unlawfully outside the regulatory regime as unregistered independent educational institutions. Those conducting these settings are committing a criminal offence and may be putting children at risk of harm, denying them a suitable education and limiting their life chances. Children attending unregistered educational institutions should be treated in a similar way to CME. As outlined in the Department's unregistered independent schools and out of school settings (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unregistered-independent-schools-and-out-of-school-settings) advice document, local authorities can play an important role in identifying unsafe and unlawful education settings, while also supporting and protecting children and families using them. Additionally, to protect children that attend these unlawful settings, anybody can make a referral to Ofsted (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-an-unregistered-school).

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 educate their child at home or that a child can no longer attend because of physical or mental health needs that cannot be met by the school, and instead, support from wider services or alternative provision needs to be provided.

If the reason for a child's non-attendance is not known, the local authority should work with the school the child most recently attended to investigate the case, and the child should be offered support to help them attend school regularly. Where this does not succeed and child is not on a school register, the local authority will need to provide additional support to integrate into school or otherwise ensure that the child is receiving suitable education.

Home educated children who are not receiving suitable full-time education

Parents have a right to educate their children at home, and the government wants the many parents who do it well to be supported. Educating children at home works well when it is a positive, informed and dedicated choice.

However, home educated children who are not receiving a suitable, full-time education are CME.

Local authorities have a duty under section 436A of the 1996 Education Act to make arrangements to identify so far as possible children not registered at school in their areas who are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than at school (CME). Home educated children who are not known to the local authority, or whose parents have not responded to the local authority's enquires about the education being provided to the child, could be at risk of being CME. If the local authority is unable to gather enough information on a home educated child's education to judge that the education being received by the child is suitable, then this requires action under education law as outlined in the Department's elective home education guidance for local authorities (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education).

Using Get Information About a Pupil and School to School to ascertain if a CME is on a school admission register elsewhere

Get Information About a Pupil

The Department's GIAP system, the replacement of Key to Success, allows local authorities and schools to access the National Pupil Database to retrieve pupil-level census data. Local authorities can search the system to establish if a child, who they consider CME, is on a school roll elsewhere.

The system provides the ability to download important data to help identify a child, using their unique pupil number (UPN) or other identifying characteristics, which can then be saved and revisited. Local authorities are strongly encouraged to create a custom list of their CME and regularly check the system to identify if they are on a school roll elsewhere.

The GIAP system can be accessed using your DfE sign-in (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-information-about-pupil-giap).

School to School

The Department provides a secure internet system, S2S, to enable schools to transfer pupil information to another school when the child moves. This is transferred through a common transfer file (CTF). All schools maintained by a local authority in England are required, when a pupil ceases to be registered at their school and becomes a registered pupil at another school in England or Wales, to send a CTF to the new school. More information on the requirements around CTFs can be found in the CTF guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/common-transfer-file).

S2S also contains a searchable area, known colloquially as the lost pupil database. Although not a database in the technical sense, schools can upload CTFs of pupils who have left but their next school is unknown, or the child has moved abroad (all information sharing should be considered in line with the Department's information sharing: advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66320b06c084007696fca731/Info_sharing_advice_content_May_2024.pdf)).

If a pupil arrives in a school without a CTF transferred alongside them, schools are strongly encouraged to contact their local authority who will be able to search the database for that child's CTF. When the child's CTF is downloaded, the original school should receive a notification of this by email with the identification of the school who downloaded the file. It is important for schools and local authorities to ensure the contact details on S2S are kept up to date.

The Department has provided guidance for local authorities and schools on using S2S (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-to-school-guides-for-schools-and-local-authorities).

Footnotes

1. A child reaches compulsory school age on or after their fifth birthday. If they turn 5 between 1 January and 31 March, then they are of compulsory school age on 31 March. If they turn 5 between 1 April and 31 August, then they are of compulsory school age on 31 August. If they turn 5 between 1 September and 31 December, then they are of compulsory school age on 31 December. A child continues to be of compulsory school age until the last Friday of June in the school year that they reach 16.
2. A threshold document is sometimes referred to as a threshold of needs document which is for everyone working with children, young people and their families in an organisation. These documents explain how professionals can work together, share information and focus on the level of need and intervention to help ensure a consistent approach to

safeguarding across agencies, including when to refer a child or young person to children's social care or other services.

3. The "normal admissions round" covers applications for admission in a relevant age group, which are made in time for the local authority to offer a school place on National Offer Day. The deadline for submitting applications to be allocated on National Offer Day is 31 October for secondary school and 15 January for primary school.

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