

Southampton City Council

Inclusion Services

**Children Missing Education (CME) Policy
2024\2025**



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Children Missing Education (CME) Policy 2024\2025			
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Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to clarify Southampton City Council's children missing education (CME) procedures and the joint responsibilities of all agencies, schools (including their governing bodies) and the local authority.

Children missing education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, sexual abuse and child sexual and criminal exploitation (Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024)

Scope

This policy applies to all children of compulsory school age who reside within the Southampton City Council boundary and to all schools and voluntary and community organisations.

The government defines CME as:

Children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school.

This does not include:

- Children who are receiving tuition provided by the local authority (known as Education Otherwise Than at School or EOTAS).
- Children who are registered at an education provision but not attending regularly.
- Children who are being electively home educated i.e. parents have taken responsibility for education provision.

However, until the local authority is satisfied that a home-educated child is receiving a suitable full-time education, a child being educated at home is potentially in scope of the CME (s436a) duty.

Every child believed to be a Southampton resident who has attended pre-school provision in the city, or who has a record on the education database as a result of an involvement with professionals, or data sharing agreements in place, will be captured as part of our CME process.

Alongside the local authority, the biggest stakeholders in the CME process are schools. It is schools who remove children from roll, not the local authority, but we will support schools to ensure that removals from roll are lawful and a robust audit trail exists where pupils are removed from roll. The 2024 Southampton City Council document Children Missing Education: Guidance for Schools provides detailed operational advice and guidance on the steps that should be taken, prior to removal from roll, to locate the whereabouts of a pupil.

Everyone who is involved with children and families has a role to play in CME. The Children Act 2004 places a duty on all agencies to work together to promote the welfare of children and to share information. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 states that fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare and safety of children. These principles underpin this policy and there is an expectation that all agencies will work together to ensure CME are identified and safely enrolled in school.

Legislative Context and other Related Documents

Education Act 1996

- Section 436a requires local authorities to make arrangements to establish, as far as it is possible to do so, the identities of children who are not receiving a suitable education.
- Section 7 requires parents of all children of compulsory school age to ensure that their child receives an efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude and to any special education needs he may have.

Children Missing Education, Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2016

- States that all children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to an efficient, full-time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have.
- Affirms that schools and local authorities must work together to establish the whereabouts of a child prior to removal from roll.

Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024

- Emphasises that improving school attendance is everyone's business, as it is the essential foundation to positive outcomes for all pupils.
- Expects schools and local authorities to work together to overcome barriers to attendance.
- Clarifies that the local authority where a pupil attends school should normally take the lead in any action to improve attendance.

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024

Outlines the duties of schools in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

The School Attendance (Pupil Registration)(England) Regulations 2024

Define the grounds under which a child can be removed from a school's admissions register.

The Children Act 2004

Places a duty on all agencies to work together to promote the welfare of children and to share information.

SCC Children Missing Education Guidance for Schools (2024)

Provides operational guidance to schools around children missing education and related matters.

SCC Fair Access Protocol

The requirement for local authorities to have a Fair Access Protocol is contained in the School Admissions Code 2021. Southampton City Council will operate a protocol in line with the code.

Policy Commitments

Principles

A proactive approach is needed to ensure that no child is denied their right to education.

We will work to achieve this by

- Tracking children from early years provision to the end of compulsory school age.
- Gatekeeping removal from roll. Advising on lawful removal and providing challenge where removal does not comply with the regulations.
- Coordinating the process of building the Reception cohort each year.
- Coordinating efforts to secure as many on-time applications as possible for the Reception intake each year.
- Working closely with the School Admissions Team to identify cases where school places have not been taken up.

- Providing advice on the UK Education system for families new to the UK which is available on the SCC website and has been issued to all schools.
- Working with independent schools educating Southampton resident children to gather pupil data.
- Upon notification from housing colleagues, passing on changes of address to schools where this information does not appear to be known.

Best practice is needed from all schools to prevent children becoming CME.

- Encouraging schools to follow our operational advice which is updated annually to promote consistency.
- Visiting schools when new staff have been appointed, where resources allow, to provide advice and support where it is apparent that our processes are not being followed, or their statutory duties are not being met.

Collaborative working with colleagues and stakeholders will improve outcomes for children.

- Updating the LA database, ensuring that all CME involvements and communications are accurately recorded.
- Providing easy access referral forms on the SCC website.
- Prioritising the most vulnerable children, where that information is made available to us.
- Contributing to safeguarding training for DSLs in the city.
- Prioritising attendance at CP and CIN meetings when the Senior CME Officer has been invited.
- Identifying children who may be missing education through collaboration with the Children's Resource Service.
- Acting upon information contained in Hampshire Constabulary PPNs to identify CME
- Receiving updates from Health colleagues when children have moved into the city and registered for services in the area.
- Notifying schools of the relevant procedure to follow when children have not taken up their allocated school places.
- Alerting colleagues who work with families of the transfer group deadlines so that they can proactively support families.
- Ensuring that colleagues, with a legal basis to do so, have access to the education database so they can appropriately assess potential risks in their own service area.
- Collaborating with partner agencies. Southampton City Council has signed up to an Information Sharing Agreement with Portsmouth CC, Hampshire CC and IOW Council.

Policy Statement

Southampton City Council acknowledges that education is a protective factor and the best way for us to ensure the welfare of children is to ensure that they are on a school roll or in receipt of suitable education otherwise than at school and that when pupils are removed from roll, it is done so lawfully. Safeguarding procedures should be followed if and when necessary.

Roles and responsibilities

Children Not in School Manager

- Holds a strategic lead responsibility for CME.
- Reviews and reissues policy and guidance documents on an annual basis.
- Provides operational support each Autumn Term until census.
- Supports schools in response to national changes\expectations that impact upon CME.
- Reviews national consultations, research papers, guidance, briefings, investigative reports etc to identify where our practice could be more robust.
- Produces tracking data at the end of every month, other than July, August and September for the education leadership team.
- Works with organisations to agree information sharing protocols.
- Sets up interrogation routines of the education database to ensure no child falls through any gaps due to data quality issues.

SCC Senior CME Officer

- Is the named point of referral for CME in Southampton.
- Works with all schools\agencies\services to coordinate or advise upon actions to be taken in respect of CME cases.
- Undertakes casework to secure enrolment in school or to track CME to new destinations.
- Utilises all data sources available to support the tracking of CME.
- Works closely with the School Admissions Team to ensure that all school places offered are taken up.
- Represents SCC at regional meetings of CME professionals.
- Works to raise the profile of CME by participating in regular training for Designated Safeguarding Leads as part of the citywide training programme.
- Instigates legal proceedings to secure school enrolment.

Schools and academies

- Hold a statutory duty to provide the LA with specific information about all leavers, no later than the time at which the pupil's name is removed from the register.
- Hold a statutory duty to notify the local authority within five days of adding a pupil's name to the admission register.
- Act as first responders to children who are missing from education because a timely and appropriate response is critical.
- Have a key role to play in early identification of potential CME and should follow established safeguarding referral procedures, as appropriate.

Poor attenders and school refusers are not CME and the established referral process to access the Education Welfare Service should be followed.

School Attendance and Support Team

- Schools in Southampton have a named or link Education Welfare Officer (EWO).
- The service works alongside the Senior CME Officer and can provide support in cases where they are involved or have previously been involved in CME or potential CME cases.
- Where pupils are persistent or severely absent, schools work with the local authority to put additional targeted support in place on a termly basis.

Social care professionals

- Our Children's Resource Service is a 'front door' to Children's Services and they manage all safeguarding referrals and early intervention requests for support.
- As potentially a first point of contact, the Children's Resource Service will alert the Senior CME Officer to all cases where a child of compulsory school age does not have a record on the Capita ONE system (education database), or, where a record is held but no education provision is recorded.

- Social Workers will ensure that the Senior CME Officer is invited to child protection and child in need meetings where the child meets the CME definition.
- Social Workers should notify the Senior CME Officer if a child they are working with, of compulsory school age, leaves the city or country and provide the forwarding destination, wherever possible.

Partner agencies

It is the responsibility of all professionals working with families to notify the Senior CME Officer if they become aware of a child of compulsory school age who is not enrolled in a school and is not receiving education otherwise than at school or at home. Information sharing is vital for early intervention.

An electronic [referral form for professionals](#) is on our website which provides agencies with the ability to refer to us, without time restrictions, in a secure way.

Key external partners who may directly engage with children missing education include:

- Schools and academies.
- Health professionals.
- Voluntary & Community Organisations.
- Police.
- Refuges.
- Other local authorities.

Off Rolling

Ofsted defines off rolling as:

“The practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child from the school roll, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil.”

Off-rolling allegations made to the local authority will be recorded and reported to Headteachers who will be given a right of reply. Evidence will be requested so that the local authority can investigate the allegation. Evidence could include records of meetings, CPOMS logs, details of SEN support, IEPs, behaviour support plans etc.

Ways in which a child can fall out of the education system

The diagram below depicts the ways in which a child could fall out of the education system and become CME. In all of these scenarios the LA may need to consider issue of a School Attendance Order to ensure that no child is denied their right to education.



Starting education

The start of our process is that the Senior CME Officer works with School Admissions colleagues to ‘build’ our Reception cohort each year using datasets on children:

- Who are Looked After to Southampton City Council.

- Open to Children's Services.
- Known to Southern Health.
- Who are attending, or have attended, funded Early Years provision in the city.
- Where we have an existing surname match at the same address.
- Open to adoption Services, to ensure that we do not capture children inappropriately.

Once we have carried out the above checks we will, as resources allow, check Revenues & Benefits records to identify children who are believed to be currently in the city, adding them to the education database so they are then tracked.

We take a proactive approach and include in our transfer group vulnerable children named on Police PPN1 reports in the preceding months.

We continue with a proactive 'watch list' approach identifying vulnerable children for whom we have received multiple PPN1 reports in the preceding months and therefore wish to adopt an even more targeted approach to securing on time applications for school places.

During the Autumn term SCC practitioners, including social workers, early years providers, education teams and Surestart colleagues, are also notified of the relevant date of birth range, along with key application dates and asked to be pro-active in encouraging parents to make an on-time application for a school place.

At the start of the Spring Term a multi-service effort is made to identify children for whom no application has been made with a focus on children who are subject to CP, CIN or open to Children and Families First, contacting as many parents as possible with the objective of securing the highest number of completed applications before the 15th January. This is the national closing date for on-time applications.

Early Years providers can access the SCC online portal to view in 'real-time' when applications have been submitted for children at their settings. This enables them to follow up with parents who have not submitted an application.

All children known to us, with a record on our education database, who do not start school are captured as part of our CME procedures once they reach compulsory school age. The possible outcomes for these children are they are enrolled in school, tracked to their forwarding destination, categorised as CME and relevant intervention action undertaken, or recorded as EHE.

Phase transfer

During the Summer term\holidays the Senior CME Officer and School Admissions Team are proactive in identifying children who have no junior or secondary school place for the following September and the following actions may be taken:

- Where no information is held to explain why an application has not been submitted, the School Admissions Team will allocate a place at the closest school with a place available.
- Where parents have refused all offers, their child remains without a school place and we have no indication of what the provision will be in the Autumn Term, the School Admissions Team will allocate a place at the closest school with a place available.
- Contact will be made with parents to ask for clarity on what arrangements they will be making when the new academic year begins and to provide advice and support, despite the children not meeting the CME definition at this stage.

Ultimately it is the responsibility of parents to secure education provision for their child but the Senior CME Officer will specifically monitor these cohorts of children in the Autumn Term.

Some Southampton resident school-aged children receive education in Hampshire County Council schools, or in the independent sector and processes are in place to collect this information so that we can fulfil our statutory CME duty.

Mid-year leavers

The SCC CME Guidance for Schools gives operational guidance on dealing with cases where a pupil has ceased accessing education provision.

CME reports are also in place that interrogate the education database and can identify children who have been removed from roll, along with the reason and a forwarding destination. Schools are now required by law to provide the LA with this information and the Senior CME Officer follows up cases directly with schools when sufficient information has not been provided to satisfy us that the child has been removed from roll lawfully, or their forwarding destination is not known.

Permanent Exclusions

Schools have a responsibility to arrange full-time education for excluded pupils from the sixth day of their suspension. The local authority are required to provide full-time education to pupils who have been permanently excluded from the sixth school day of exclusion. The Exclusions and Reintegration Officer monitors that this process is followed and that any child without provision following the permanent exclusion is included in the monthly CME data.

Failing to register at a new school

The CME Guidance for Schools provides an overview of the actions that schools should take when an expected pupil fails to enrol.

At the start of the Autumn Term it should be possible for the LA to identify children who have not made a phase transfer, however, in reality this is a lengthy process that requires all data returns to be up to date from Southampton schools, enrolment data to have been collected from all independent schools and collaboration with Hampshire schools.

For children expected to take up school places as mid-year admissions, the Senior CME Officer produces a regular report of children who have not accessed the places offered by the School Admissions Team. This report is passed to Admissions colleagues because they hold the responsibility for offering school places and authority to withdraw those offers. Admissions Officers therefore make the initial contact with parents to explore any obstacles to enrolment and cases that cannot be progressed are then discussed with the Senior CME Officer.

As this is an area of increasing concern for us we have produced an overview of the UK education system, which includes expectations of parents. Taking up the school place offered is one of those expectations. This document has been translated into several languages and will be issued to parents new to the UK, where the home language is known, to inform and support parents. It is also available on the SCC website where parents must submit applications for a school place.

Parents are unable to find a school place

The School Admissions Team are required to comply with the School Admissions Code when processing applications for schools places. The code has the force of law. They will offer a place at the closest school to a home address with a place available (in accordance with the Admission Policy of individual schools), but this may not be a parental preference school. These are often cases that require further intervention from the School Admissions Team and Senior CME Officer to secure enrolment of the child.

There are also occasions when, following a house move within the city, the closest school to a new address may still be the original school. In these cases, the School Admissions Team will advise parents that the child must remain enrolled at their current school.

Changes made to the School Admissions Code, from September 2021 have helped to expedite the enrolment of children without a school place:

- Parents must not be refused the opportunity to make an application or be told that they can only be placed on a waiting list rather than make a formal application.
- Upon receipt of an in-year application, the admission authority, or the LA if it is co-ordinating the admissions authority's in-year admissions, should aim to notify the parents of the outcome of their application in writing within 10 school days, but they must be notified in writing within 15 school days.
- Where an application is refused, the admission authority must also set out the reason for refusal and information about the right to appeal.
- Where an admission authority manages its own in-year admissions, it must also notify the LA of every application and its outcome as soon as reasonably practicable, but should aim to be within two school days, to allow the LA to keep up to date figures on the availability of places in the area and to ensure they are aware of any children who may not have a school place.

In addition, each local authority must have a Fair Access Protocol to ensure that unplaced and vulnerable children, and those who are having difficulty in securing a school place in-year, are allocated a school place as quickly as possible

Children who are at risk of missing education

There is general agreement that certain groups of children may be at a higher risk of becoming children missing education.

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 outlines in detail expectations upon schools and states that appropriate safeguarding responses should be in place to children who go missing from education, particularly on repeat occasions, to help identify the risk of abuse and neglect.

Routes into education for children of compulsory school age

- Via the normal School Admissions process which is compliant with the School Admissions Code.
- Where children have met the Fair Access Protocol criteria and subsequently been offered a place through this route.
- Via the statutory assessment process for children with SEND.
- Via direct applications to Own Admission Authority (OOA) schools who have a duty under the School Admissions Code to make the LA aware of direct applications.
- Via the SCC Virtual School secure school places for Looked After Children.
- Via applications made to neighbouring local authorities.

Collaboration with other services

Children's Resource Service

The CME Guidance for Schools makes clear that if a pupil is open to Children's Services and has an allocated caseworker, the school should notify the caseworker **within the first 24 hours** of the unauthorised absence if no contact can be made.

Where it is otherwise suspected or known that a pupil is at potential risk of harm, or where the school has information or reason to suspect the child has been a victim of criminal activity, the school should notify the Children's Resource Service and the Police immediately. The Education Welfare Officer or Senior CME Officer should be notified as soon as possible afterwards.

Police

There may be occasions when a child not enrolled or in receipt of other education provision may be the victim of a crime e.g. if there was a significant incident prior to the unexplained absence, or if

there have been previous suspicions about the child and/or their family which, alongside a sudden disappearance, are worrying. In these instances, it may be necessary for schools or professionals to contact the Police.

Professional meetings

In addition to meetings relating to CP and CIN Planning, other meetings such as Professional Meetings, Team round the Family etc should be used proactively to address or challenge obstacles to a child receiving the right to an education.

Children we have failed to track

There are circumstances in which we may fail to track a child and the duty placed on local authorities is to carry out enquiries **as far as it is possible to do so**.

In the absence of any evidence of safeguarding concerns, once the steps listed below have been taken (as appropriate to each case) the records of these children will be made inactive:

- Enquiries of last provision.
- Enquiries of Child Health.
- Home visit to the last known address
- Checks of DfE Lost Pupil Database.
- Checks of EWS records.
- Enquiries of last known LA.
- Enquiries of YOS.
- Enquiries of involved agencies/services.
- Checks of 192.com
- Checks of Care Director.
- Checks of Revenues & Benefits database.
- Postcode checks on education database.
- Checks of Get Information About Pupils.
- Checks of Admissions module on ONE.
- Enquiries of UK Visas and Immigration if known child protection issues.
- Message all LAs via DfE Lost Pupil Database.

An *alert* will then be added to records on the education database to indicate that the child is classed as CME, asking that if the child becomes known in the future to any colleagues, the Senior CME Officer be alerted.

A referral will also be made to the Children's Resource Service which will appear on the child's record, indicating they are CME. Where no record exists, one will be created so that if any future referrals or information is received, colleagues will be aware that the child is classed as CME. We are no longer able to add similar flags to Health databases.

Any additional national data sources available to us will also be used to try and track this cohort of children as new datasets become available.

Contacts

Children Not in School Manager	Eliza Johnson	023 8083 3889
Senior Children Missing Education Officer	Kelly Ward	023 8083 3666
Service Manager for Inclusion	Bryn Roberts	023 8083 3094
Exclusions and Reintegration Officer	Sara Smith	078 8783 0485

Governance

This policy will be delivered by:

- Schools.
- SCC Education and Learning teams.
- Children's Services professionals.
- Partner agencies.

Substantive changes 2024

- Reference to the SCC leavers form has been replaced with a link to the online leavers form.
- The CME Referral form has been removed. This can be now be accessed via the SCC website: [Children missing education \(CME\) \(southampton.gov.uk\)](https://www.southampton.gov.uk/children-missing-education-cme)

APPENDIX 1: CME PROCESS – REMOVAL FROM ROLL

SCHOOLS: Pupil 'located' because:

Steps in the operational CME guidance document were followed.

- The child has been confirmed as having moved overseas.
- The new school have confirmed enrolment.
- The new LA has confirmed their awareness of the child.
- School have received a parental deregistration letter for EHE.
- Conditions listed in the removal from roll checklist (contained in the CME Guidance for Schools) have been met.

PUPIL MAY BE REMOVED FROM ROLL and forwarding details recorded in SIMS or other information management system.

SCHOOLS: Pupil cannot be 'located' (Pupil **STILL ON ROLL**)

As long as a home visit has been carried out and our CME Guidance for Schools followed, consult the Senior CME Officer who can:

- Check the ONE system (education database) for previous involvements, siblings, admissions information, carry out checks on the postcode.
- Check data sources available to us such as Care Director (social care database), Revenues & Benefits etc.
- Make enquiries of Child Health.

Established safeguarding referral procedures should be followed where necessary.

LAWFUL REMOVAL FROM ROLL AGREED

by Senior CME Officer who will now hold the case.

Schools to update their information management system with forwarding

Removal from roll not lawful.
PUPIL REMAINS ON ROLL.

LA: The Senior CME Officer can:

- Ask Housing colleagues to put a flag on their database, if appropriate.
- Notify Information Officers to update Care Director (adding the child to Care Director if no record exists).
- Consider whether a safeguarding referral should be made (to Children's Resource Service or Police).
- Complete the [failed to track](#) checklist of actions agreed to fulfil our CME duty to carry out "all reasonable enquiries"
- Close the case to CME and flag the child's record on ONE as 'CME- Failed to Track'.
- Liaise with School Admissions to ensure the child is not captured as part of their processes.
- On an annual basis check the child against datasets available to us as and when new datasets