

CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL STRATEGY



AUTUMN 2005

1. Scope

This strategy sets out the Councils arrangements for pupils who need school places as well as those at risk of dropping out of the education system and becoming missing.

Key to ensuring that the risk of pupils going missing from education is minimised, is a clear understanding of which agency takes the lead responsibility for monitoring such children, and taking the initial steps to refer such cases for further action. Key agencies include:

- The Children's Services directorate of the council – who have the responsibility for providing full time appropriate education provision for all children, including for those excluded for more than 15 school days, and for enforcing attendance arrangements, and who have the lead child protection responsibility, and are also responsible for co-ordinating PEPs for looked after children
- Schools – who have the responsibility for providing school places quickly, monitoring the attendance of all pupils regularly, identifying pupils at risk of exclusion and supporting them via PSPs, and having robust systems in place for monitoring pupils in off-site provision
- Housing Services – who have the responsibility for considering education placements for families moved in an emergency (e.g. those at risk of domestic violence)
- Connexions – who have the responsibility for supporting children at risk of going missing from the education system
- Police – who have responsibility for identifying children who may be missing from the education system (by, for example, picking up pupils who may be questioned/arrested)
- Youth Offending Team – who have the responsibility for co-ordinating the arrangements for pupils requiring educational placements following periods in secure accommodation as well as supporting those at risk of going missing from education missing
- Medway Young Carers Project – who have responsibility for supporting the interests of young carers, and their families whilst engaged in full time education, to ensure that they receive the same equal educational opportunities as pupils from non-caring backgrounds.

1.1 *Pupils requiring a school place*

Pupils requiring a school place other than at a normal point of transfer (into year R, year 3 in Junior schools or year 7) are defined as a casual admission. For pupils in the primary phase, places are sought directly by parents with the support of the admissions team in the nearest school with a place. In the secondary phase, agreement has been reached with secondary schools to ensure that, wherever possible, pupils with challenging behaviour are equally

distributed among all schools. To do this, a process has been devised involving a placement panel. Further details can be found in section 2.3.

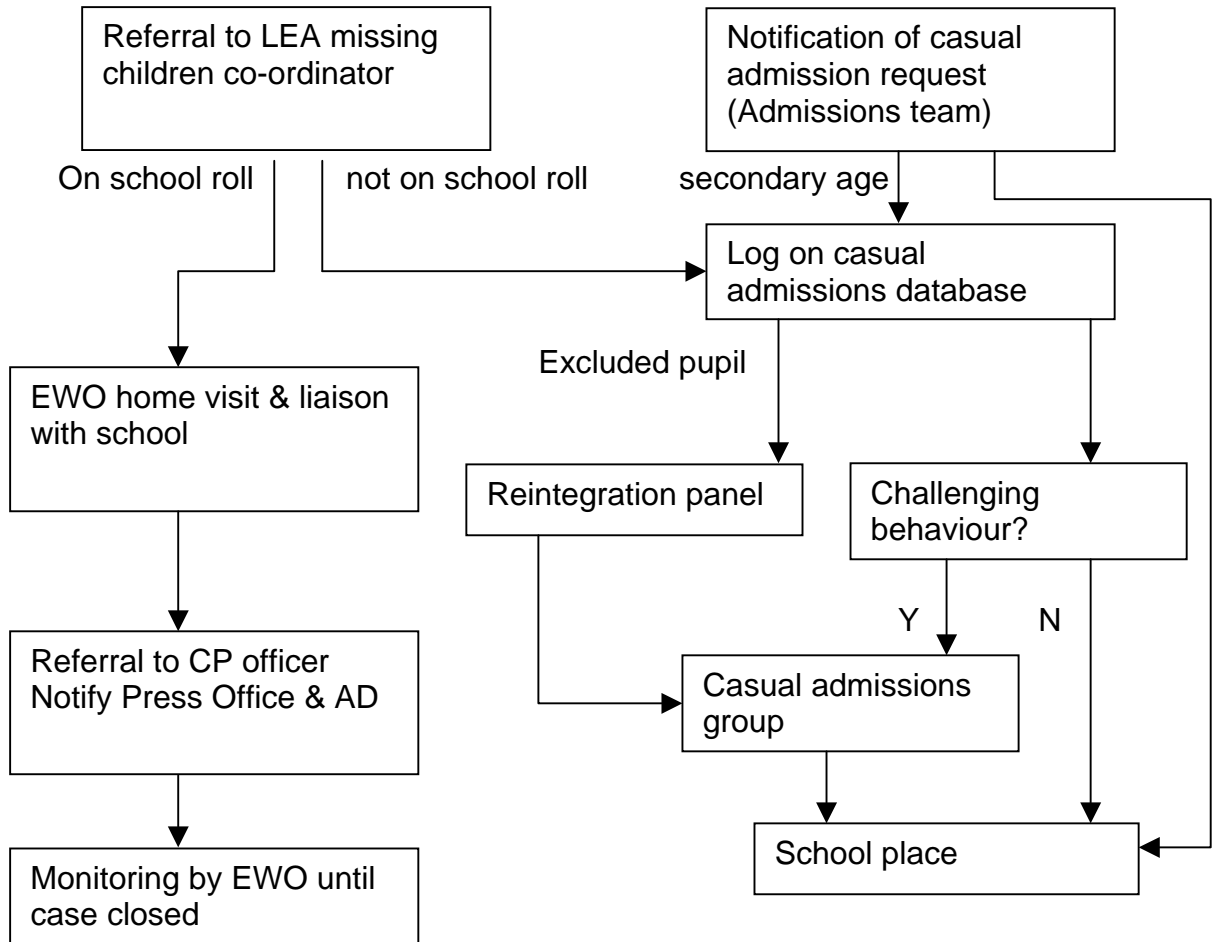
1.2 Pupils at risk of going missing

Some pupils may be on the roll of a school or in an approved educational provision, but may be at risk of going missing through their circumstances. These can be defined as:

- Pupils who have been excluded, either officially or unofficially, whether permanently or for a fixed period
- Pupils who truant and those with poor attendance
- Pupils who are reported to be changing school
- Pupils who are remanded in secure accommodation
- Pupils who are housed in temporary accommodation
- Pupils educated at home
- Pupils educated in off-site locations
- Pupils at the point of secondary transfer
- Pupils transferring from a school to a PRU
- Pupils of travelling families
- Young carers
- Teenage mothers
- Young people in public care

1.3 Overview

The summary process for co-ordinating missing children is set out below.



2. ***Pupils without/requiring a school place***

For pupils not on the roll of a school or an approved establishment the following arrangements apply.

2.1 ***Pupils permanently excluded***

- The LEA has a statutory duty to ensure that all pupils excluded for more than 15 days (including those excluded permanently) receive suitable full time education.

Action by schools

Dfes circular 10/99 (as amended) sets out the procedures that schools should follow when excluding a pupil permanently, including:

- making arrangements for work to be set and marked immediately following the exclusion, including up until the end of the appeal process (if relevant).

Pupils should not be taken off roll until;

- the result of the appeal against permanent exclusion is known, or;
- the end of the time period allowed for appeals (15 days) has elapsed, or;
- the pupil is admitted to the roll of another school, or;
- the parents/carers confirm in writing to the Inclusion Officer that they waive their right of appeal.

Action taken by the Council

Inclusion Team – following the meeting of the Discipline Committee, the Inclusion Manager will refer the case to the Reintegration Panel.

Reintegration Panel – every pupil that has been permanently excluded will be discussed at a Reintegration Panel. This is a multi agency meeting where information has been gathered regarding the pupil e.g. level of education, reason for the permanent exclusion, patterns of behaviour and information from parents/carers and any other appropriate information. Each student is looked at on an individual basis and decide if a student requires support from one of the PRUs or the Assessment and Tuition Service (ATS) or if they are able to return immediately to mainstream school. If they require support from a PRU or ATS, a referral will be made by the Inclusion Team to the appropriate service.

After the Reintegration Panel all students that require a mainstream school for immediate reintegration or a 'Named school' to work towards while attending a Pru or ATS will be taken by the Inclusion Manager to the Casual Admissions Group for a school to be found.

If the excluded pupil has a statement then they will be discussed at the Reintegration Panel and referred to SEN to find suitable provision.

Excluded Primary Pupils:

If a primary school pupil has been permanently excluded then the Inclusion Manager will contact the primary school that is at the top of the cluster group list to accept the excluded pupil. All Primary excluded pupils should be integrated back into mainstream school with outreach support from Redvers.

2.2 Pupils who are reported to be changing school

Arrangements are in place for pupils who wish to change schools. Parents can obtain a transfer form from their current school or from the admissions team. Reasons for the change in placements are sought from the parents and the current school is invited to comment on the proposed move.

Action taken by schools

The 'current' school should check with the reported 'new' school to ensure that the pupil has a place at the new school and can be admitted without any problems. If the 'current' school is suspicious about the transfer, it should refer the pupil to their Education Welfare Officer.

Pupils should only be taken off roll when the 'new' school has placed the pupil on their roll

Action taken by the Council

Integrated teams – the relevant Education Welfare Officer will make a home visit to confirm that appropriate arrangements have been made. Where appropriate arrangements have not been made, the case will be treated as 'failure to secure education' as in section 2.5.

2.3 Pupils who are recent arrivals into the area

Action taken by schools

Primary Schools – where a school is approached by a prospective parent, and the required place(s) exist, the school should ensure that the pupil(s) are admitted to school with the absolute minimum of delay. It is not necessary for the receiving school to have the full range of information it requires before the pupil(s) commence(s) education at the school. If the school is approached by a prospective parent for a place for a pupil who has been permanently excluded (either from another Medway school or from a school outside of Medway), a referral should be made to the Inclusions Officer in order to ensure that education is secured via the Reintegration Panel.

Secondary Schools – all direct approaches to secondary schools from parents should be directed to the admissions team.

Action taken by the Council

Admissions Team - arrangements are in place to co-ordinate casual admissions in secondary schools. Parents should complete a casual admissions application form, available from the admissions team. For straightforward applications, parents will be offered a place at the nearest appropriate school with a space.

The Council aims to ensure that pupils with challenging behaviour are distributed equitably amongst all secondary schools, including those that are oversubscribed. Where the Admissions Manager believes that a pupil may have challenging behaviour, a referral will be made to the Casual Admissions Group, who will make a placement after considering any parental preference and the number of pupils with challenging behaviour admitted to each school during the course of the year.

If a pupil has been permanently excluded from another school and not been in a mainstream school since that exclusion, a referral will be made to the Inclusion Manager for the case to be considered by the Reintegration Panel.

The Education Welfare Officers will undertake home visits to ascertain more information and underline the importance of regular school attendance where appropriate.

2.4 *Pupils at the point of secondary transfer*

Action taken by schools

Schools should notify the Admissions Section of any pupil at the point of secondary transfer who has not been allocated a place at a secondary school.

Action taken by the Council

Admissions Team – the Admissions Team will process all applications for secondary transfer. Where possible, and in line with the Council Admissions Policy, allocations will be made in line with parental preference. Where a pupil has not been successful in being allocated their chosen school, the Admissions Team will seek an alternative preference where vacancies exist. If a parent refuses to make an alternative choice, they will be allocated a school by the Admissions Team.

At the start of each academic year, the Admissions Team will receive a return from secondary schools identifying the individual pupils that have started at school. The Admissions Team will contact the parents of pupils who fail to start at their allocated school, to ascertain the pupil's whereabouts and details of the school which they have enrolled at. If the pupil has failed to enrol at another school, a referral will be made to the Education Welfare Service.

Education Welfare Officers – will make a home visit and follow up as outlined in 'failure to secure education'. In addition, Education Welfare Officers compile lists of year 6 pupils with under 90% attendance to ensure that secondary

schools are aware of pupils likely to have low attendance being admitted to year 7.

2.5 Failure to secure education

Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act places a legal responsibility on parent to secure appropriate full time education for every child of compulsory school age. Where parents do not seek appropriate education, they are deemed to have failed to secure education.

Action taken by schools

If a school becomes aware of a pupil who is not enrolled in appropriate education provision, the Education Welfare Service must be contacted immediately.

Action taken by the Council

Education Welfare Officers – the service receives a number of referrals from partner agencies (e.g. from the Police, children's homes) via the on-line referral form). Where referrals are received without details of a school place, a home visit will be made. Where appropriate, parents will be supported to ensure that their child is enrolled at school. Where parents refuse to make the necessary arrangements to secure education, they will receive a warning about the consequences of failing to ensure that their child attends school, and ultimately, a school attendance order will be sought.

3. ***Pupils at risk of going missing from the education system***

Some children are at risk of missing out of education because of poor school attendance. These pupils can become disaffected and are vulnerable to opting out of education all together and going missing. To prevent this, each school has an allocated Education Welfare Officer to offer support to schools and pupils. The Education Welfare Officers make regular school visits and termly register checks to monitor the attendance of all pupils and the deletion of pupils from the school roll. Pupils who are identified as having poor attendance will be referred to the Education Welfare Officer.

All referrals must be investigated and usually visited at home. Measures to improve attendance are put in place and the progress of the case is monitored carefully. Once the issues are identified relevant meetings are convened and referrals are made to the appropriate agencies. Pupils who are identified as having health issues, either physical or mental, such as school phobias, are referred to the Consultant Paediatrician at Medway hospital or the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team.

Improvement must be secured for the case to be closed, and the Education Welfare Officers have a duty to pursue poor school attendance, using Education legislation against parents where necessary.

For some pupils, whilst they may be on the roll of a school or attending an approved establishment, they are at risk of going missing due to their circumstances. For such pupils, the following arrangements will apply.

3.1 ***Pupils excluded for a fixed term***

- The LEA has a statutory duty to ensure that all pupils excluded for more than 15 days receive suitable full time education.

Action by schools

Schools will need to ensure that they follow guidance Circular 10/99 (as amended):

- making arrangements for work to be set and marked for pupils who are excluded for more than a day
- for pupils excluded for a single block of more than 15 days in a term, planning to enable the pupil to continue their education, how to use the time to address the pupil's problems and what educational arrangements will best help the pupil reintegrate back into school following the exclusion

Should a pupil fail to return to school following a fixed period exclusion, schools will need to follow their attendance policy, following up the absence in the usual way.

Pupils remain on roll

Action taken by the Council

Inclusion Team – support to schools is available in planning how to address the needs of pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour through the Inclusion Manager.

3.2 *Pupils who cease to attend*

The term “ceases to attend” is defined as:

“...the pupil has been continuously absent from school for a period of not less than four weeks and both the Headteacher of the school and the Local Education Authority have failed, after reasonable enquiry, to locate the pupil...” (The Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995)

Action taken by schools

Schools should follow up absences promptly and in line with established school policy. The Education Welfare code of practice contains guidance on dealing with absences. Where the implementation of the school’s policy fails to improve a pupil’s absence, the school should make a referral to the Education Welfare Service.

Pupils should only be taken off roll once the Education Welfare Service has failed to trace the pupil after appropriate enquiries.
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Action taken by the Council

Education Welfare Officers – once schools have followed their absence procedures and attempted to contact the parents, the Education Welfare Officers will make a home visit to ascertain the whereabouts of the pupil. Where contact is made with the parents, they will receive a warning about the consequences of failing to ensure that their child attends school, and ultimately, a school attendance order will be sought. Where the parents and pupil cannot be traced, they will be deemed as ceasing to attend and agreement will be given for them to be taken off the school roll. Where the Education Welfare Officer has some knowledge that the pupil has moved to another area, a referral will be made to the appropriate council via the School 2 School secure website.

Education Welfare Officers will maintain a list of all pupils that have been removed from the roll of a Medway school deemed ceasing to attend.

3.3 Pupils who truant following registration

Action taken by schools

Schools should follow their established policy and procedures for dealing with truancy. Guidance on tackling truancy can be found in the Education Welfare Service code of practice.

Pupils remain on roll

Action taken by the Council

Integrated teams - support to schools is available in planning how to address pupils' problems through the Education Welfare Officers.

Education Welfare Officers – to support the drive to combat truancy, the Education Welfare Service will co-ordinate regular truancy patrols. Patrols under section 16 of the Crime and Disorder Act, giving police the power to remove truants back to school or to a place of safety, will take place termly. In addition to the termly section 16 patrols, the Education Welfare Service will run regular patrols staffed by Education Welfare Officers.

3.4 Pupils who are remanded in secure accommodation and those subject to a custodial sentence

Some pupils remanded in secure accommodation may be released swiftly back into the community after having been found not guilty at trial or given a community sentence. Careful consideration should be given to each case before removing a pupil from the school roll. Similarly, some custodial sentences are relatively short, with pupils only missing a couple of months of education. Further advice should be sought from the Youth Offending Team.

Action taken by schools

Schools should consider each case carefully before removing a pupil from the school roll. Where a pupil remains on roll, their absence is authorised.

Where pupils are reintegrated back into a school, the school would be expected to implement a pastoral support programme for the pupil to ensure the best chance of successful reintegration.

Action taken by the Council

Youth Offending Team – the pupil's allocated worker will check to ensure that the pupil is attending the appropriate educational placement will liase with the placement where problems are evident.

Where a pupil has been removed from a school roll for the duration of a sentence, and needs reintegrating into a different school following the

sentence, the Youth Offending Team will liaise with the Admissions Team to find another school. The Admissions Team will find a place for the pupil in accordance with the policy for admitting pupils with challenging behaviour.

3.5 Pupils housed in temporary accommodation

Action taken by schools

Where schools have pupils on their roll who are housed in temporary accommodation, and are aware of an impending move and are uncertain of the pupil's plans for future education, a referral should be made to the Education Welfare Service immediately, rather than waiting until the pupils ceases to attend.

Pupils should only be taken off roll once they have been placed on the roll of a new school

Action for the Council

Housing – it is likely that families accommodated in temporarily will, at some stage, be moved, possibly to another area, from which travel to the same school may prove to be difficult. As a consequence, where families are about to be re-housed, the Housing department will ascertain the plans about future education. If there is a concern that education plans have not been made or acted upon, the Housing Officer will notify the Education Welfare Service.

Education Welfare Officers – will, if deemed necessary by the Housing Officer, make a home visit to assist in securing appropriate education.

3.6 Pupils educated at home

Action taken by schools

In the event of a parent indicating to a school that they wish to educate their child at home, the school should make the parent aware that they will be expected to be able to provide their child with the education appropriate to their age and ability. Parents wishing to proceed should be referred to the Inclusions Manager.

Pupils should remain on roll until it has been confirmed in writing that the parent wishes to home educate. If no letter is received, schools should follow their agreed absence policy.

Action taken by the Council

Education Welfare Officers – will undertake an initial home visit to ensure that parents understand their responsibilities for providing education.

Inclusion Team – will undertake the administration role in all cases.

Advisory Service – will undertake an initial visit to assess the quality of provision. Where the provision is satisfactory, regular visits will be undertaken to continually monitor the quality of the provision. Where provision is deemed unsatisfactory, a referral will be made to the Education Welfare Service who will make a home visit to support the parents in accessing a school place, or seek a school attendance order if appropriate.

3.7 Pupils educated in colleges

Action taken by schools

The National Curriculum allows secondary schools considerable flexibility at Key Stage 4 and some secondary schools may choose to use college placements to more effectively meet some pupils' needs. Where this is the case, schools should ensure that:

- any necessary disapplication of the curriculum takes place in accordance with Dfes guidelines
- any qualifications and associated syllabuses offered by such placements are approved by the Dfes

Pupils remain on the roll of the school. Furthermore, the school remains ultimately responsible for the conduct and welfare of any pupils attending college via the school. The school also remains responsible for ensuring regular attendance and following up any non-attendance.

Action taken by the Council

The Advisory service – will not normally approve individual applications by parents for pupils to attend college at Key Stage 4 made directly, even where parents are able to fund this privately. The Service maintains the view that only schools have the level of knowledge about individual pupils to make an informed judgement about the appropriateness of such provision. The exception to this is where consent has been previously given to educate at home. The Advisory Service will be in a position to make a judgement and give consent, if appropriate, although there will be no individual funding for such pupils.

3.8 Pupils transferring from school to the Pupil Referral Unit

Pupils are admitted to the Pupil Referral unit in accordance with published criteria.

Action taken by schools

Pupils who are referred to the Pupil Referral Unit may be refused on the grounds that they do not meet the criteria, accepted onto the roll, or accepted onto the roll when a suitable vacancy occurs, effectively placing them on a

'waiting list'. If accepted, the school remains responsible for the welfare and attendance of the pupil until the agreed date of transfer.

Schools should work closely with the Pupil Referral Unit and make the necessary arrangements to reintegrate pupils at the agreed time.

Where the Pupil Referral Unit accepts a referral, it will normally be for an agreed period of time. Dual registration will therefore apply. Pupils should not be removed from the school roll without the agreement of the Pupil Referral Unit.

Action taken by the Council

Pupil Referral Unit – will be responsible for the attendance and welfare of pupils from the agreed date of transfer. In cases of non-attendance, the absence procedures will apply, including intervention from the dedicated Education Welfare Officer where appropriate.

3.9 Pupils of travelling families

Some Traveller families follow a highly mobile lifestyle. Their children experience a variety of educational settings as a result. The law, whilst expecting good attendance from all pupils, nevertheless recognises that the nature of the family business may prevent pupils from attending school regularly. For this reason, the school year for pupils of highly mobile traveller families is given as 20 weeks.

Other Traveller families may be less mobile, living in homes on established sites or accommodated in housing. These families may continue to live by a Traveller lifestyle. Their children would only be the cause of a summons to their parents if their attendance was less than 80% of 20 weeks.

Action taken by schools

Schools should take particular care to ensure that pupils from Traveller families are enrolled as quickly as possible. An Education Welfare Officer with discrete responsibility for co-ordinating the admission and attendance of Traveller children, is available for schools to consult with. If a school admits a pupil from a Traveller family they should notify the Traveller Education Welfare Officer so that data on Medway's service to Traveller families can be kept up to date. A specialist teacher also offers advice to schools on education for Traveller children.

Children must not be removed from the school roll without agreement of the Traveller Education Welfare Officer.

Action taken by the Council

The Traveller Education Welfare Officer will monitor the attendance of all Traveller children on roll at Medway schools, and liaise with families to encourage good attendance. Where attendance becomes an issue of concern, the EWO will facilitate meetings and mediate between Traveller families and schools.

The Traveller Enforcement Officer informs the Traveller EWO immediately a new family arrives in the Authority and contact is made to secure a place at school as soon as possible. A data- base is kept of all Travellers moving into and out of the area and shows the education provided.

3.10 Young Carers

A young carer can be defined as "...a child or young person under 18 years of age whose life is significantly affected by the need to take responsibility for practical and/or emotional support of a parent, sibling or other family member who is ill, has a physical or sensory disability, is experiencing mental distress or is affected by substance misuse or HIV/AIDS..."

It should be recognised that young carers' physical and mental health can suffer as a result of the extra domestic and caring tasks that they have to undertake. Many have problems keeping up with school work, attending school regularly and punctually, and some of their parents need help to support their children's education.

The Medway Young Carers Project is working with schools/colleges in order not only to provide support to Young Carers and their families but also to ensure that all educational professionals and related agencies can respond sympathetically to the needs of these young people.

Action taken by schools

Young carers need help to access the advice and support to which they are entitled. It is important, therefore, that schools seek to identify young carers in a supportive manner and inform Social Services.

Pupils should not be taken off roll

Action taken by the Council

Medway Council recognises that within its schools and colleges there are a significant number of students who can be defined as young carers. It further believes that all educational establishments should work with the "Medway Young Carers Project" in order to provide additional support to this group.

Education Welfare Officers – will normally take a supportive view where a pupil is caring for a parent and will act on each case according to its merits. The service will not take such a view where pupils are caring for siblings in the

place of the parent, where the parent is able to do so. Such cases will be treated as 'failure to secure education'.

3.11 Pupils of refugee families

Action taken by schools

All children of statutory school age have a right to access education and schools are therefore advised to admit pupils irrespective of their status.

Action taken by the Council

Admissions team – can offer further help and advice on individual cases.

3.12 Teenage Mothers

Action taken by schools

Schools should refer all cases of pregnant pupils to the Reintegration Officer for teenage pregnancy. Schools should also pay particular attention to the protocol for teenage mothers which states that:

- pupils should not be excluded, either formally or informally for being pregnant
- pupils should be supported to remain in school for the longest possible period (this may necessitate additional health & safety support such as allowing pupils to and from lessons at different times to other pupils)
- ensuring that pupils can be reintegrated back into the school at the earliest opportunity following the birth

Further advice is available to schools from the Education Welfare Service, the Connexions service and the Health Promotion Team. Pupils may be referred to the Rivermead school for further support.

Pupils should not be taken off roll. Pupils are entitled to no more than 18 of authorised absence. Any further absence should be regarded as unauthorised

Action taken by the Council

Children's Services – further advice to schools is available in the policy document "Supporting pregnant and school-age parents in Medway".

3.13 Young people in public care

The Council has a statutory responsibility to secure suitable education for young people taken into public care within 20 school days of a care order being granted.

Action taken by schools

Schools should react swiftly to enrol pupils taken into public care both by Medway and other Councils. Schools should also ensure that they have a designated teacher with responsibility for pupils in public care at all times.

Pupils should not be taken off roll without the agreement of the designated Social Worker

Action taken by the Council

Children's Care – will produce a care plan for all young people taken into public care, including arrangements for securing an appropriate education. In some cases, it may be appropriate for the pupil to continue attending the same school. Where this is not appropriate, the designated Social Worker will liaise with the Admissions Team to secure a place in a suitable school.

4. Information sharing

All agencies are actively encouraged to share information on children that they suspect are not accessing education. This can be done using the on-line referral form:

https://www.medway.gov.uk/forms/serveform.asp?formName=parental-and-other-agency-referral_app.xft

Alternatively, a telephone referral can be made to the Senior Education Welfare Officer with responsibility for children out of school on 331134

5. Monitoring

Monitoring group

To monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this strategy, a monitoring group has been established. Membership is:

Pupil & Governor Services Manager – Lead strategic officer
Integrated Team Manager (with Education Welfare responsibility)
Police Constable with responsibility for missing people
Inclusion Manager

This group will receive monthly reports on the number of children not in education and the average time taken to secure education provision.

Targets

The implementation of this strategy aims to ensure that:

- appropriate education is secured for all missing children within a maximum of 20 working days from the date of application to the first day of education

In most cases, education should be secured within 20 days.

Reporting on progress

Termly reports will be submitted to the Children's Services Management Team, detailing progress with implementing this strategy and the numbers of children out of school, together with the average time taken to secure an educational placement.

Reports will also be taken to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.