



Department
for Education

Summary of responsibilities for children missing education

**Statutory guidance for local authorities,
maintained schools, academies and
independent schools**

September 2025

Summary

This document summarises the responsibilities to prevent, identify and support children missing education for parents, schools, academy trusts and governing bodies, and local authorities which are outlined in the children missing education statutory guidance.

This is guidance from the Department for Education (DfE). This guidance is statutory, and local authorities, schools, trusts and governing bodies must have regard to it as part of their efforts to identify and improve support for children missing education .

The guidance should be read alongside the statutory guidance documents on Working together to improve school attendance, Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions, Suspension and permanent exclusions, Alternative provision, Elective home education and Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Main points

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 and any special educational needs they may have. This may include suitable education through regular attendance at school, alternative provision or otherwise (e.g. elective home education (EHE)). Children of compulsory school age who are not receiving suitable education either at school or otherwise than at a school are defined as Children Missing Education (CME). CME are at significant risk of underachieving, having poorer health outcomes, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) 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 support 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 centered.

This document provides a summary of the roles and expectations of parents, local authorities, schools, governing bodies and academy trustees to take action to identify and support CME. This document should not be used as a substitute for reading the full [children missing education statutory guidance](#).

All children – table 1 of 2

Parents are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:	Schools, governing bodies and academy trustees are expected to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that their children of compulsory school age are receiving suitable full-time education under section 7 of the Education Act 1996. • If proposing to withdraw their child from school, notifying the school in writing that their child will no longer attend after a certain day and 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 known. • Notify the school in writing if their child will no longer attend a school after a certain day and will receive education otherwise than at school (e.g. elective home education). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperate with other agencies in improving children's well-being, including protection from harm and neglect under Section 10 of the Children Act 2004. • Fulfil duties as set out in 'Working together to safeguard children' statutory guidance, including publishing a threshold document which sets out the local criteria for action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. • Where there is a concern that a child's safety or well-being is at risk, take action without delay, considering whether a referral needs to be made to local authority children's social care and calling the police if appropriate. • Fulfil duties to ensure pupils with an Education Health Care (EHC) plan are in receipt of the educational provision specified in the plan and where they are not, that this provision is made available to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a day-to-day basis monitor pupils' attendance through their daily attendance register, and work to address poor or irregular attendance in order to prevent children becoming CME. • Take action without delay where there is a concern that a child's safety or well-being is at risk. 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. • 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.

All children – table 2 of 2

Parents are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:	Schools, governing bodies and academy trustees are expected to:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together with schools on admissions processes to provide a school place for all children of compulsory age. Where the local authority co-ordinates 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. Over-subscription criteria and relevant admissions policies should also be shared on websites. 	

Children at risk of becoming CME or suspected CME – table 1 of 3

Parents are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:	Schools, governing bodies and academy trustees are expected to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-operate with the local authority and school's informal enquiries to satisfy them that their child is in receipt of suitable education. • Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance. • Proactively engage with the support offered to prevent the need for more formal support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promptly make enquiries in collaboration with the school that enable them to, as far as reasonably possible, identify the location of suspected CME and any provision of education they are receiving. • Implement effective tracking and enquiry systems with clear referral response times. • Appoint a designated contact for CME referrals, publishing contact details on the CME section of the local authority website. • Take steps to help prevent CME cases, for example working closely with special education needs and disability (SEND) and early years services, as well as targeted work ahead of school transition points and work with elective home education teams (EHE teams). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively use data to identify pupils at risk of becoming CME. • Ensure that they have in place arrangements whereby all unexpected and unexplained absences are promptly enquired about. • Work with each identified pupil and their parents to understand and address the reasons for absence, including any in-school barriers to attendance, as set out in the Department's Working Together to Improve School Attendance statutory guidance. • 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.

Children at risk of becoming CME or suspected CME – table 2 of 3

Parents are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:	Schools, governing bodies and academy trustees are expected to:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form strong partnerships with schools to carry out reasonable enquiries under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 and ensure they quickly identify suspected Children Missing Education (CME) and understand the criteria for removal from roll, even when investigations involve different local authorities. • Collaborate with and share information effectively using data from various services, local authorities, and national agencies to identify Children Missing Education (CME). Collaborate with other local authorities to improve information sharing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a referral to the child's home local authority CME team as soon as possible if enquiries lead them 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. • Continue to play a role in conducting joint reasonable enquiries even after they have submitted a CME referral to the local authority. • Provide the local authority with all of the information detailed in the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 when making a deletion return to the local authority.

Children at risk of becoming CME or suspected CME – table 3 of 3

Parents are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:	Schools, governing bodies and academy trustees are expected to:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange suitable education for children out of school due to exclusion, illness, or other reasons, if they would not receive it otherwise. This covers all compulsory school age children in the local authority's area, regardless of school type or whether they are on an admissions register under section 19(1) of the Education Act 1996. • Ensure elective home educating parents are providing suitable education for their children via informal enquiries. Where parents fail to satisfy that suitable education is being provided, School Attendance Orders (SAOs) can be served. Education Supervision Orders and work with School Attendance Support Teams can also be applied. 	

Children identified as CME – table 1 of 3

Parents are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:	Schools, governing bodies and academy trustees are expected to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-operate with the local authority to provide evidence of any suitable education otherwise than at school (e.g. elective home education) that will be provided. • Complete a school application at the earliest possible stage, once their child has been identified as CME,. Proactively engaging with the local to secure a place for their child. • Respond to local authority school attendance order (SAO) notices, promptly (within the set timeframe) applying for either the school/one of the schools named on the notice or a different school that will then be named on the SAO. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain an active 'CME list' recording details of both confirmed and suspected CME and keep children on this list until they have received confirmation or evidence to suggest otherwise. Document action taken on individual confirmed cases. • Ensure time out of suitable education is kept to an absolute minimum, preventing repeated instances of children becoming CME, for example, by effective and supportive reintegration into school or by receiving education otherwise than at school if more appropriate. • Document action taken on individual confirmed cases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work collaboratively with their local authority to support CME in their local area into education. This might also involve working with a child's home local authority if this is different. • Work with the local authority to provide a school place for CME at the earliest opportunity to ensure time a child spends out of education is kept to an absolute minimum. • Where schools manage their own in-year admissions, 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 to complete.

Children identified as CME – table 2 of 3

Parents are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:	Schools, governing bodies and academy trustees are expected to:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage families by adapting communication to understand why a child has become CME and working together to support their return to full-time education. • Check that a referral has been made where safeguarding concerns have been raised about a child identified as CME, and if not, alert children's social care. If there is reason to suspect a crime has been committed, the police should also be involved. • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where schools manage their own in-year admissions, 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 to complete. • Offer appropriate support to successfully integrate children into their school, including having efficient decision-making processes for admissions in place to prevent delays and following the Working Together to Improve School Attendance to reduce barriers to attendance.

Children identified as CME – table 3 of 3

Parents are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:	Schools, governing bodies and academy trustees are expected to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share data with the Department for Education on CME following the Elective home education and children missing education: submit your data guidance	



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