



# **WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## Children Missing Education Policy

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## **Executive Summary**

Wokingham Borough Council is committed to ensuring that the right of every child to a suitable full-time education is realised. This includes ensuring that robust procedures are in place to quickly identify and locate children missing from education – to guarantee that appropriate action can be taken.

Children Missing Education (CME) are recognised as a vulnerable group of children. They are defined as children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school (i.e. they are not on a school roll) and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.

Children can become missing from education for a variety of reasons and, when they do, are at significant risk of underachieving; being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation; and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). This is linked to poorer outcomes later in life – such as unemployment, homelessness and health issues.

It is vital that the importance of effective information sharing between parents, schools and Wokingham Borough Council is understood, to ensure that all children of compulsory school age are safe and in receipt of a suitable full-time education.

This policy outlines the procedure to be followed to help ensure that children identified as not receiving a suitable education are located and supported to return to full-time education as soon as possible

*Any questions or concerns about the contents of this policy should be raised with the Quality Assurance and Policy Team via email at: [ImpactAndInspectionTeam@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:ImpactAndInspectionTeam@wokingham.gov.uk).*

## Policy Context

This policy is underpinned by national legislation and guidance:

- *Children Missing Education, Department for Education Statutory Guidance (September 2016)*
- *Elective Home Education, Department for Education Guidance (April 2019)*
- *Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care, Department for Education Statutory Guidance (January 2014)*
- *Common Transfer File, Department for Education Guidance (August 2020)*
- *Education Act 1996, Sections 7, 8, 13, 19, 436A and 437*
- *Education and Inspections Act 2006, Sections 4 and 38*
- *The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006*
- *The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016*
- *Children Act 2004*
- *Education Act 2002, Section 175*
- *Every Child Matters, HM Treasury Policy Paper (2003)*

It should be read in conjunction with other local procedures:

- *Elective Home Education Policy*
- *Fair Access Protocol*
- *Permanent Exclusion and Suspension Guidance for Schools*
- *Pan Berks Child Protection Procedures*

*This policy applies to all Wokingham Borough Council staff who come into contact with children and young people of compulsory school age; all Wokingham Borough maintained schools, academies, free schools, special schools and pupil referral units; and other key partner agencies. The term 'schools' should be taken to mean the aforementioned educational settings. The term 'parents' should be taken to mean parents, carers, or those with parental responsibility for the child.*

### 1. Introduction

Wokingham Borough Council is committed to ensuring that the right of every child to a suitable full-time education is realised. This includes ensuring that robust procedures are in place to quickly identify and locate children missing from education – to guarantee that appropriate action can be taken.

Children Missing Education (CME) are recognised as a vulnerable group of children. They are defined as children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school (i.e. they are not on a school roll) and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.

Children can go missing from education for a number of reasons, including (but not limited to):

- Failure to start appropriate provision and, therefore, never enter the education system.
- Failure to return to school following a fixed term exclusion.

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- Withdrawal from school by parents.
- Failure to complete a transition between educational settings (e.g. being unable to find a suitable school place after moving to another local authority area).

CME are at significant risk of underachieving; being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation; and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). This is linked to poorer outcomes later in life – such as unemployment, homelessness and health issues.

This policy aims to:

- Set out the procedures that should be followed in order to identify Children Missing Education and take appropriate action.
- Highlight the importance of effective information sharing between parents, schools and Wokingham Borough Council to ensure that all children of compulsory school age are safe and in receipt of a suitable full-time education.

### 2. The Law

Wokingham Borough Council has a statutory duty to make arrangements to establish the identities of children of compulsory school age in its area who are not registered at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise (*Section 436A of the Education Act 1996*).

Those children identified as not receiving suitable education must be supported to return to full-time education as soon as possible.

Wokingham Borough Council fulfils its statutory duty by appointing an officer with responsibility for children missing education, the CME Officer. The CME Officer maintains a list of children known to be missing from education and takes appropriate action – working with partners where necessary.

The Council has wider safeguarding responsibilities for children in its area, which should be considered alongside its obligations in relation to CME.

### 3. Identification of CME

Children who are missing from education are usually identified in one of the following ways:

#### **Notification from an Individual or Agency**

This is where Wokingham Borough Council receives a referral from an individual or agency, advising of a child of compulsory school age who is thought to be missing education. Examples of when this type of referral may be made are:

- Notification from the Education Officer that education provided at home is not suitable or there is no evidence of education.
- Notification from another local authority of a child who has moved into Wokingham Borough.

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- Contact from a member of the public.
- Notification via the [school2school \(s2s\) system](#).

For this type of referral, the *CME and Pupil Exit Referral Form* should be completed by schools (available via the Wokingham Schools Hub). For referrals from an individual or agency outside of school, the *CME Notification Form* should be completed (available via the [Wokingham Schools Hub CME Section](#)).

### **Reports from Wokingham Borough Council's Educational Database**

This is where reports from the educational database identify children who are known to the Council, but who do not have a school place. Examples of when this type of referral may be made are:

- Identification through the transition phase (Reception) application process, or first time admissions who have not started at the allocated school.
- Where a school place has been refused and no alternative place has been requested.
- Where parents have gone to appeal for a school place and no alternative place has been sought.

### **Pupils Removed from School Roll**

This is where schools and Wokingham Borough Council's Education Welfare Service identify children who have been removed from a school roll and do not have a current educational placement.

***Schools may only remove a pupil of compulsory school age from the school roll in accordance with the grounds set out in the [Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#).***

### **School Absence**

This is where schools identify pupils who have missed 20 consecutive school days, or 10 days following an authorised absence, and the school does not have reasonable grounds to believe that the pupil is unable to attend because of sickness or another unavoidable cause. In instances where there is no justifiable reason for the pupil's absence, the school notifies Wokingham Borough Council.

## **4. Children at Particular Risk of Missing Education**

Particular care and attention should be taken in relation to certain groups of pupils considered to be at higher risk of becoming missing from education, including:

### **4.1. Pupils at Risk of Harm and/or Neglect**

Pupils may become CME because they are experiencing harm and/or neglect. Where this is suspected, schools should refer to the information in the [Pan Berks Child Protection Procedures](#). Where there are concerns about the safety of a child, the following contact details should be referred to:

Agency	Contact
<b><i>If it is suspected that there is immediate danger/risk of harm to the child dial 999.</i></b>	
Wokingham Borough Council Duty, Triage and Assessment Team	0118 908 8002 <a href="mailto:triage@wokingham.gov.uk">triage@wokingham.gov.uk</a> <i>Referrer will also need to complete a <a href="#">Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF)</a>.</i>
Wokingham Borough Council Emergency Duty Team (out of hours)	01344 786543 <i>After 5pm or on weekends and bank holidays.</i>
Thames Valley Police	0845 8505 505 <a href="http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk">www.thamesvalley.police.uk</a>
NSPCC	0808 800 5000 <i>24 hour helpline</i>
Childline	0800 1111 <i>24 hour helpline</i>

#### 4.2. Children in Care

Pupils who are Children in Care may become missing from education – or at risk of being missing from education. Where schools become aware of this, they should follow the process outlined in **Section 6.2.3**.

#### 4.3. Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Heritage

Children of GRT heritage are at higher risk of becoming disengaged from education, particularly during the transition between primary and secondary school. It is therefore vital that schools notify Wokingham Borough Council when a GRT pupil leaves the school without an identified new school, so that the Council can attempt to facilitate continuity of education.



Schools should contact [GRTEducation@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:GRTEducation@wokingham.gov.uk) for support and advice in relation to GRT pupils' education.

#### **4.4. Families of Service Personnel and Crown Servants**

Families of members of the Armed Forces are likely to move frequently, both in the UK and overseas – sometimes at short notice. Where this applies to a pupil at a Wokingham school, the school and/or Wokingham Borough Council should contact the [Ministry of Defence Children's Education Advisory Service \(CEAS\)](#) via email [DCYP-CEAS-Enquiries@mod.gov.uk](mailto:DCYP-CEAS-Enquiries@mod.gov.uk) or telephone 01908 618244 for advice on making arrangements to ensure continuity of education for pupils when the family moves.

Wokingham Borough Council's School Admissions Team and/or Education Welfare Service will support families of Service Personnel and Crown Servants to ensure access to, and continuity of, education – taking into account relevant legislation and guidance.

#### **4.5. Missing Children and Runaways**

Children who go missing or run away from home or care may be in serious danger and are vulnerable to criminal/sexual exploitation, abduction and missing education. Where schools have concerns about the safety or welfare of a pupil, they should refer to the contacts listed in **Section 4.1**.

#### **4.6. Children Supervised by the Youth Justice System**

Children who have offended, or who are at risk of offending, are also at risk of disengaging from education. Wokingham Borough Council's Youth Justice Team (YJT) is responsible for supervising those children and providing a holistic support package to help them adopt positive behaviours and fulfil their potential. Part of this involves the YJT working with the Education Welfare Service to ensure that children have access to appropriate full-time education.

The YJT has regular sight of the CME register and informs the CME Officer of any children known to not be at school or in receipt of education. A representative from the Education Welfare Service is also invited to attend the YJT's Risk Sharing Forum, as required, to aid early identification of CME.

#### **4.7. Children who Cease to Attend School**

Where the reason for a child ceasing to attend school is not known (e.g. if a parent chooses to home educate and does not inform the school and/or local authority), Wokingham Borough Council's Education Welfare Service will investigate the case to ensure that the child is receiving suitable education.

#### **4.8. Children of New Migrant Families**

Children from new migrant families may not have yet settled into a fixed address, or may have arrived into Wokingham Borough without the Council becoming aware, therefore increasing the risk of CME.

Where agencies become aware of children of new migrant families who may not be in full-time education, they should make a CME referral (*see Section 6*). This includes instances where staff from Wokingham Borough Council's Duty, Triage and Assessment (DTA) Team or the multi-agency Early Help Hub become aware of children who may not be in full-time education.

Following a CME referral, Wokingham Borough Council's Education Welfare Service will investigate the case to ensure that the child is receiving suitable education.

#### **5. Reducing Risk of CME**

In Wokingham Borough, there are a number of processes and procedures aimed at reducing the risk of children going missing from education. These include:

- Fair Access Protocol
- Regular monitoring of school attendance and audit of school registers by schools and the Education Welfare Service
- Ongoing monitoring of school suspensions
- Monitoring pupils' transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3
- Monitoring of children on the Council's Elective Home Education (EHE) database
- Monitoring of Children in Care through the Virtual School
- Multi-agency meetings to discuss pupils where there are concerns
- Links between the Education Welfare Service and the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community
- Advice to schools (e.g. when a pupil's name can be removed from the school roll)

#### **6. CME Referral Process**

Wokingham Borough Council's CME Officer is responsible for working with partner agencies and families to identify and track CME and ensure that children are receiving a suitable education – along with ensuring that the correct regulations and procedures in relation to CME are followed.

When a child of compulsory school age is identified as missing from education, schools should make a referral to the CME Officer using the *CME and Pupil Exit Referral Form* (available via the Wokingham Schools Hub). Individuals or agencies outside of school should make referrals using the *CME Notification Form* (available via the [Wokingham Schools Hub CME Section](#)).

When a referral is made, the child's name is added to the CME register, which is maintained by the CME Officer.

CME referrals are considered at half-termly CME meetings, chaired by the CME Officer. At that meeting, individual cases should be discussed and appropriate action plans agreed.

Where the location of a child is unclear or unknown, Wokingham Borough Council will make reasonable enquiries via parents; wider family, friend and community networks (which may involve home visits); and other local databases and agencies to establish the whereabouts of the child.

Where initial enquiries do not lead to establishing the location of the child, the Council will use professional judgement to agree next steps. This may include a referral to the Police, Children's Social Care, or where there is an international element, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

If there is evidence to suggest the child has moved to a different local authority area, the CME Officer will inform the officer responsible for CME in the new local authority area. Wokingham Borough Council will maintain a record of the child's details until they are either located or reach school leaving age.

### **6.1. Action**

Wokingham Borough Council is committed to identifying CME and supporting them back into full-time education. Following a CME referral, the CME Officer will consider the most appropriate course of action. This may include:

- Support for parents to make an application for a school place.
- Referral for allocation of a school place under the Fair Access Protocol.
- Referral to SEND Panel.
- Referral to the multi-agency Early Help Hub to identify wider needs of the child/family and provide support.
- Specialist educational provision via Pupil Referral Unit.
- Case escalation to Children's Services Senior Leadership Team for consideration.
- Issuing a 15 day 'notice to satisfy' to parents requiring them to provide evidence of suitable education.
- Use of enforcement measures for non-attendance at school.

### **6.2. Considerations for Vulnerable Groups of Children**

#### **6.2.1. Pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan**

Wokingham Borough Council's SEND Team works with children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families to ensure their needs are met. Where a child with SEND has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the SEND Team fulfils the Council's statutory duty to ensure that children of compulsory school age have suitable educational provision, in a timely manner.

Should a child with an EHCP become missing from education, the SEND Team should be notified by the school and/or the Council's Education Welfare Service, so that the case can be monitored and the child can transition back to full-time education as soon as possible.

### **6.2.2. Pupils who are Open to Children's Social Care**

Children's Social Care supports children, young people and families where the threshold for intervention is met. Where a child who is open to Children's Social Care becomes missing from education, the child's Social Worker should inform the CME Officer or Education Welfare Service and vice versa, depending on how this information comes to light.

Should a child who is open to Children's Social Care become missing from education, a representative from Children's Social Care (*usually the child's Social Worker*) should attend CME meetings and ensure that education is included in the child's Care Plan.

### **6.2.3. Pupils who are Children in Care**

Where a pupil is a Child in Care, schools (*particularly the Designated Teacher for Children Looked After*) must make the child's Social Worker aware of any unauthorised absence from school. If a Child in Care is at risk of becoming missing from education, or becomes missing from education, the Designated Teacher for Children Looked After must inform the child's Social Worker and the Virtual School. The Designated Teacher for Children Looked After must also make a referral to the Education Welfare Service and an urgent Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting must be convened.

## **7. Roles and Responsibilities**

### **7.1. Schools**

Schools have a statutory duty to notify Wokingham Borough Council when a pupil's name is added or removed from the admissions register at non-standard transition points.

Schools should notify the Council's School Admissions Service of starters and leavers at non-standard transition points via the school2school (s2s) system and by completing a *CME and Pupil Exit Referral Form* (available via the Wokingham Schools Hub).

*Schools must notify Wokingham Borough Council of pupils to be removed from the admission register at a non-standard transition point as soon as the ground for removal is met and no later than the time at which the pupil's name is removed from the register. The Council must be notified of pupils' names added to the admission register at non-standard transition points within 5 days of their addition.*

***Where a pupil leaves school at a non-standard transition point, schools should generate a Common Transfer File (CTF) via the s2s system within 15 days of the pupil leaving. Schools can access [information and guidance on s2s](#) via the Wokingham Schools Hub.***

Schools must monitor pupils' attendance through their daily register from the first day on which it has agreed or been notified that the pupil will attend that school - and inform the Council of pupils who fail to attend regularly, or have missed 10 days or more without permission.

Where a pupil has not returned to school for 10 days after an authorised absence or is absent from school without authorisation for 20 consecutive school days, that pupil can only be removed from the admission register after the school and Wokingham Borough Council have jointly made reasonable enquiries to establish their whereabouts. *However, this does not apply where the school has reasonable grounds to believe that the pupil is unable to attend because of sickness or another unavoidable cause.*

#### **7.1.1. Elective Home Education**

Where parents inform the school that they are removing their child to home educate, the school should contact Wokingham Borough Council's Education Officer, who will take appropriate action as set out in the Council's Elective Home Education Policy.

Education Officer	Learning & Achievement Partnership Council Offices Shute End Wokingham RG40 1BN  email: <a href="mailto:ehe@wokingham.gov.uk">ehe@wokingham.gov.uk</a>
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#### **7.1.2. Failure to Register Following Enrolment**

Where a child is expected to attend a school, either at a standard or non-standard transition point, but does not attend the school should attempt contact with parents by telephone and letter in the first instance.

If, after 5 days, no contact has been made the school should contact the Council's School Admissions Service to ascertain if the child has been registered elsewhere. Where the child has not been registered at another school and a further 5 days pass (*10 days in total since the pupil's non-attendance*) the school should inform the Council's Education Welfare Service (where Traded Service agreements exist) and CME Officer.

***The pupil should not be removed from the school roll until the CME Officer or Education Welfare Service has confirmed they can be removed.***

## **7.2. Wokingham Borough Council**

Wokingham Borough Council has a duty to make arrangements to establish the identities of children of compulsory school age across Wokingham Borough who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise.

The School Admissions Service works with relevant professionals and partners to manage the allocation of school places for children of compulsory school age across Wokingham Borough; identifies vulnerable applications; and provides support and advice to families applying for school places. The Service will also make referrals to the Education Welfare Service where it appears that a child is not receiving education.

The Council is committed to working with partner agencies and sharing information to safeguard and promote the welfare of children – including ensuring that all children across the Borough are in receipt of a suitable, full-time education. This involves maintaining the CME register, monitoring CME, attending CME meetings and taking appropriate action on a case-by-case basis.

The Education Welfare Service will follow up all referrals regarding children who may be missing from education or are failing to attend an educational placement regularly.

Where a child is recorded as missing from education, the Service will liaise with partner agencies to locate them and provide appropriate support. This includes consulting with parents to establish whether the child is receiving suitable education.

In instances where it is determined that a child is not receiving a suitable education, the Education Welfare Service will work with families to facilitate the pupil's transition back into full-time education and, where appropriate, consider the use of enforcement measures such as issuing fixed penalty notices, School Attendance Orders, or prosecution.

## **8. Risk of NEET**

The CME Officer will send an up-to-date copy of the CME register to the NEET Prevention Team on a half-termly basis. Where appropriate, a representative of the NEET Prevention Team will attend the CME meeting.

Where the NEET Prevention Team becomes aware of a child or young person of compulsory school age, but cannot locate them, they will make a referral to the Education Welfare Service to enable further investigations and intervention.

During the summer term of each school year, the CME Officer will identify any children missing education who will reach the end of their statutory schooling and refer them to the NEET Prevention Team by emailing [elevate@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:elevate@wokingham.gov.uk).

Following the referral, a member of the NEET Prevention Team will arrange an initial guidance interview with the young person to discuss options and develop plans for post-16 education, employment and/or training. If the young person is open to Children's Social Care, their

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allocated worker will be informed and a representative from Children's Social Care may be invited to attend, with the agreement of the young person.

Following the initial guidance interview, a member of the NEET Prevention Team will update the CME Officer on the progress made. A subsequent meeting to further discuss and develop plans for post-16 education, employment and/or training may be requested to include a member of the NEET Prevention Team, the CME Officer, the young person and their family – if sufficient progress is not made following the initial guidance interview. If the young person is open to Children's Social Care, a representative from Children's Social Care will be invited to attend.