
Children Missing Education Procedures

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Children Missing From Education

Due to the daily contact that College has with its students, we are often well-placed to notice when a child has gone missing. When a child or sibling group are withdrawn from College, or appear to have gone missing, staff should raise a concern via 'My Concern' and make every effort to trace the child as soon as it is apparent that the period of absence is unusual in any way.

Local Authorities have the lead statutory responsibility to identify, as far as possible to do so, children missing education and get them back into education.

All schools, colleges and the local authority should:

- Promote good attendance and reduce absence.
- Ensure every pupil has access to full-time education
- Act early to address patterns of absence

Parents have a duty to ensure their child of compulsory school age receives suitable full time education. Although children can leave school on the last Friday in June if they will be 16 by the end of the summer holidays, they must do one of the following until they are 18:

- Stay in full-time education, for example at a College
- Start an apprenticeship or traineeship
- Spend 20 hours or more a week working or volunteering, while in part-time education or training
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St. Brendan's Sixth Form College Responsibilities:

Just because our students are 16-19 years old and may be more independent than school children, it does not make them any less vulnerable and it should not be assumed that because of their age, they are safe.

All staff should be aware that children going missing, particularly repeatedly, can act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding possibilities. This may include abuse and neglect, which may include sexual abuse or exploitation and can also be a sign of child criminal exploitation including involvement in county lines. It may indicate mental health problems, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation or risk of forced marriage.

Early intervention is necessary to identify the existence of any underlying safeguarding risk and to help prevent the risks of a child going missing in future. Staff should be aware of the College's absence and children missing from education procedures.

If a student fails to attend College or the arranged provision, the College must establish the reason for absence and mark the register accordingly.

The college should follow up absence to:

- Ascertain and record the reason for absence
- Ensure the proper safeguarding action is taken
- Identify whether the absence is approved or not
- Enter the correct register code

Following two weeks of continuous unexplained absence with no contact received from the student or a parent or carer, staff should alert the Safeguarding Team by recording a concern in the My Concern system.

The concern should include the steps already taken to contact the child/family and any other relevant information gained to establish the reason for absence. The Safeguarding Team will then notify the Children Missing Education Service of the pupil missing education if appropriate.

Vulnerable children & young people with a history of poor attendance and/or welfare concerns should be followed up immediately by the College

Children subject to a child protection plan or children looked after

Absence for these children must be followed up and given immediate attention by the College. The Attendance Officer will run a daily absence report and will notify the allocated Keyworker so they can follow up. The unexplained, continuous absence of any child who is subject to a Child Protection Plan must be treated as the highest priority.

Children missing from home

There is an expectation that parents, carers and guardians will report to the Police if their child is missing. If a parent reports to the College that their child has gone missing, they should be advised to report this information to the police as soon as possible.

Children missing from care

Children in care depend on the Local Authority (LA) to act as a responsible corporate parent to ensure that it is discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities. The LA must:

- Assess their needs
- Ensure they receive appropriate support and services
- Enable all the children that it looks after to achieve the best possible outcomes

Where young people are missing from their residential or foster care placements it is essential that the professionals and agencies concerned are informed and that they work closely together to respond to the incident in a timely way to locate the child as quickly as possible.

It is important to recognise that given the vulnerability of some children in care, it may be necessary to take additional measures to ensure that they are effectively safeguarded and protected from exploitation.

Whenever a child runs away from a placement, the foster carer or the manager on duty in the residential care setting are responsible for ensuring that the following individuals and agencies are informed immediately:-

- The local police
- Parents and any other persons with parental responsibility
- Carers and residential staff

- Schools and colleges

Children missing from home and care is often a symptom of wider problems in a child's life, the assessment must take this view, and look at any factors which may 'push' or 'pull' a child into going missing. Our increasing knowledge and understanding of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) highlights that there is often a strong link between incidents of young people going missing and concern of CSE.

'Push' factors are things that push a child away from home. They include:

- Not feeling accepted in the environment where children should be safe and happy.
- Not feeling safe in the environment where children should be safe and happy
- Family breakdown and young people being drawn into their parents/carers conflicts are less likely to do well at school and more likely to truant or run away from home.
- Mental health problems
- Bullying (including issues of e-safety/sexting etc.)
- Drug and alcohol misuse by family members, and new stepfamilies moving in.
- Teenage pregnancy - some young women run away or are forced to leave home because they become (or fear that they may be) pregnant.
- Fear of forced marriage or Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The factors that **'pull'** young people from home can include:

- Staying out with peers, boyfriends or girlfriends
- Running to be near friends or family – especially when a young person is in care and there are problems with contact arrangements
- Becoming involved in risky behaviours such as substance or alcohol misuse, offending and anti-social
- Wanting freedom and independence
- Being made to feel special by grooming for potential sexual exploitation or child trafficking
- Fear of repercussion for self or family if they don't go

Children who run away or go missing put themselves at greater risk of harm of developing inappropriate relationships with people who may be seeking to influence their behaviour. For some young people, they may begin running away because of a 'push' factor, such as abuse within their home. However, once they regularly run away they may become involved and vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Children Missing Education Procedures

If a student is going to be absent, a parent/carer or the student themselves should notify College either by form, email or phone no later than 9am on the day of the absence.

If the student or parent/carer has notified us of the absence but there are known concerns about the student's vulnerability, concerns about the validity of the report (for example a student pretending to be a parent), or the student is on a Child Protection Plan, the Academic Mentor or Designated Keyworker should call to verify the details and check on the welfare of the student.

If a student is absent without notification:

- The Attendance Officer will send the 'Absent Today' email and request contact from the parent/carer or student. If there are known or suspected welfare concerns, the Attendance Officer will also notify the Academic Mentor/Keyworker to follow-up on the same day.
- If a student has not attended College in 3 days without notification, the Academic Mentor will be alerted by the Attendance Officer and try to make contact with the student and their parent/carer.
- If a student has not attended for 5 days without notification, a letter/email will be sent to the student and their parent/carer requesting urgent contact.
- If a student has not attended for 10 days without notification, a 'Have you Left' letter will be sent. If no response or contact has been received in this time, a 'MyConcern' should be raised, detailing the attempts already made to contact the student and their parent/carer, along with details of any welfare concerns. A member of the Safeguarding team will then follow this up and alert relevant authorities if required.

If at any stage in this process, specific safeguarding concerns are raised or suspected, staff should immediately raise this on 'MyConcern' for a member of the Safeguarding team to act on.