

Children Missing Education.

Best practice guidance 2026



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Legal context

Every child of compulsory school age is entitled to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs (SEN) they may have.

Parents are legally required (Section 7 of the Education Act 1996) to ensure their child receives a suitable full-time education.

Who are children missing education

Children missing education (CME) are those of compulsory school age who

- are not registered pupils at a school, **and**
- are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.

CME includes children who:

- are in the process of applying for a school place
- have been offered a school place for a future date but have not yet started
- are receiving elective home education (EHE) that has been assessed as unsuitable
- have been recorded as CME for an extended period (e.g. whereabouts unknown)

CME does not include children who:

- are receiving suitable education otherwise than at school (e.g. EHE or alternative provision) appropriate to their needs
- are home educated pending an initial suitability assessment, unless there is evidence that they are not receiving education
- are registered at a school, even if persistently or severely absent

Early identification and support

- CME can arise from routine moves, delays in school application, or moves between local authorities
- Regular school attendance is a protective factor, especially for vulnerable children
- Schools are expected to:
 - monitor attendance daily
 - respond to unexplained absence immediately
 - notify the local authority where concerns persist or escalate

Children missing education are at increased risk of underachievement, neglect, exploitation and becoming NEET (not in education, employment, or training).

Who is at risk

Children may become CME due to:

- Failure to secure or start a school place
- Exclusion or withdrawal from school

Additional risk factors include:

- Children suffering from abuse or neglect.
- Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) families can become disengaged from education, particularly during the secondary school phase.
- Children from Armed Forces families who move frequently. Schools should contact the MoD Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS) on 01908 618244 for advice
- Children missing from home or care

- Children who have offended or are at risk of offending. The local authority Youth Offending Team (YOT) are responsible for supervising these children (aged 8 to 18). Further information is available at: [Youth Offending Team | MKCC](#)
- Children with unexplained non-attendance. An investigation should be done to ensure the child has access to full time suitable education. Further information is available at: [Early Help Advisors and Assessment | MKCC](#)
- Children of new migrant families without a fixed address
- Children in temporary accommodation, including hostels, refuges, or emergency housing may be at increased risk of missing education due to instability

Local Authority duties

- **Early Identification** (Section 436A, Education Act 1996):
Local authorities must identify children who are not receiving suitable education.
- **Monitoring and Support:**
Local authorities are expected to track and support CME, in line with the [Inspecting Local authority children's services guidance](#)
- **Timely Intervention** (Sections 437 to 442, Education Act 1996):
Where parents do not engage and a child is not receiving suitable education, the local authority is legally required to intervene by way of a School Attendance Order. This order requires the parent to register their child at a named school, typically identified through the local Fair Access Policy.

Safeguarding responsibilities

- Education is essential for children's wellbeing and wider development.
- Visibility is key safeguarding factor. CME may indicate neglect, abuse, or exploitation

Safeguarding issues should be referred to MASH: [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub \(MASH\)](#) and police where appropriate

Joint Reasonable Enquiries

If a child's whereabouts are unknown, reasonable enquiries should be undertaken promptly and normally completed within 10 school days, unless safeguarding concerns require immediate escalation:

- Schools should contact parents, relatives, neighbours, involved agencies, previous/potential schools, and conduct home visits
- **If still unlocated, refer to the CME Team [CME | MKCC](#) to carry out checks on wider databases, and liaise with other authorities**

Next steps

- If the child is found in Milton Keynes, parents will be supported to apply for a new school, if current school is inaccessible
- If the child is out of area, the new local authority will be notified
- If unlocated, school will be advised to refer to MASH and possibly the police.

- Once all steps are complete, schools will receive confirmation to remove the pupil from roll and must upload the Common Transfer File (CTF) to the School2School (S2S) system.

Lawful reasons for removal from roll

Children must not be removed from roll to resolve attendance, behaviour, or safeguarding concerns.

A pupil can only be deleted where a lawful ground [Regulation 9 \(2024\)](#) is fully met. Schools must notify the local authority of all deletions from roll within 5 days.

Removal from roll is only permissible where one of the following applies:

- Registration at another school
- Withdrawal for elective home education (**Ground F**) [Home Education MKCC](#)
- Child no longer lives within reasonable distance from the school, and there are no reasonable grounds to believe they will attend again (**Ground G**). Reasonable distance would be considered to fall within Milton Keynes and is based on where the child would 'normally' live. School must be satisfied that all requirements are met before deletion, otherwise a CME referral should be submitted.
- Leave of absence and no return on expected date, and there are no reasonable grounds to believe the child's absence is due to sickness or unavoidable cause (**Ground H**). To be agreed by local authority.
- Child's whereabouts are unknown and joint enquires have been completed, and there are no reasonable grounds to believe the child will attend school again (**Ground I**). To be agreed by local authority.
- Custodial sentence for more than four months (**Ground J**).
- Death (**Ground K**).
- Permanent exclusion (**Ground O**) [School Exclusions MKCC](#)
- Another school named on attendance order
- The pupil is above compulsory school age

Health needs and Section 19

Children must not be removed from roll due to health needs alone.

Pupils should normally remain on roll at their home school, and the following should be considered:

- Provide support (e.g. reasonable adjustments, part-time timetable, remote learning)
- Gather medical evidence and work with professionals
- Review provision regularly

Where absence reaches (or is likely to reach) 15 days or more, and the school cannot provide a suitable or accessible education, a Section 19 referral must be made: [Section 19 local policy](#)

Relevant statutory guidance

This guidance should be read alongside relevant statutory guidance:

- [Working together to safeguard children](#) Statutory guidance (DfE, 2026)
- [Children missing education](#) Statutory guidance (DfE, 2025)
- [Keeping children safe in education](#): Statutory guidance (DfE, 2025)
- [Elective home education](#): Statutory guidance (DfE, 2004)
- [Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school](#): Statutory guidance (DfE, 2017)
- [Working together to improve school attendance](#): Statutory guidance (DfE, 2024)
- [School suspensions and permanent exclusions](#): Statutory guidance (DfE, 2024)
- [Alternative provision](#): Statutory guidance (DfE, 2025)
- [The School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#)

Key contacts

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