



Children Missing in Education

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Halton's Children Missing Education (CME) Policy and Procedures

September 2026

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1. Overview

This policy sets out Halton Borough Council's (the Local Authority) approach and commitment to early identification, prevention and responding to Children Missing Education (CME). It applies to all schools, academies, independent schools, and partner agencies. The aim is to ensure every child of compulsory school age is receiving a suitable education and that no child is placed at increased risk due to absence from education.

Legislative Context

- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (in parliamentary passage – schools should monitor for Royal Assent and updated statutory guidance)
- [Every Child Achieving and Thriving 2026](#)
- [SEND Reform: Putting children and young people first 2026](#)
- [DfE: Keeping Children Safe in Education \(2026\)](#)
- [Children missing education 2025](#)
- [Working together to improve school attendance 2024](#)
- [Regulation 9 of the School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#)
- [Children Act 2004](#)
- [Education Act 1996, Section 7](#)
- [Education Act 1996, Section 436A](#)

2. Definitions, Thresholds and Risk Factors

Children Missing Education (CME) are children of compulsory school age who are not registered at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.

Halton recognises increased vulnerability where children experience frequent mobility, housing instability, safeguarding or exploitation risks, SEND, mental health concerns, involvement with Children's Social Care, or placement breakdown. CME activity is therefore managed through a safeguarding lens, with thresholds clearly aligned to children's social care and multi-agency safeguarding procedures.

- All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to an efficient, full-time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have;
- Children missing education are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education via other means, other than at a school. Children missing education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later in life;
- Effective information sharing between parents/carers, schools and local authorities is critical to ensuring that all children of compulsory school age are safe and receiving suitable education. Local Authorities should share information promptly to confirm a child's location and focus their resources effectively on intervening early in the lives of vulnerable children to help prevent poor outcomes.

Risk Factors

'Missing' children can be vulnerable, so all services need to work together to identify and re-engage them in appropriate education provision as quickly as possible.

Establishing the reasons for the child being missing at the earliest possible stage is essential, possible reasons that should be considered include:

- Failure to start the appropriate provision;
- Failure to complete a transition between primary and secondary schools;
- Families moving often without finding a new school;
- Parents withdrawing children, from school, for home education but failing to provide an education;
- Children from refugee and asylum-seeking families;
- Children from families who are highly mobile;
- Children at risk of a forced marriage;
- Children experiencing abuse and neglect;
- Failure to register at a school upon reaching compulsory school age makes consistent schooling difficult;
- Housing instability/homelessness
- Increased risk of health issues through, for example, missed immunisations.

Children who remain disengaged from education are potentially exposed to higher degrees of risk.

Children who go missing or run away from home or care may be in serious danger and are vulnerable to an increased risk of child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, online exploitation, County Lines, radicalisation, abuse, neglect or abduction as well as missing education.

When families move between Local Authority areas, children can become missing from education. Local Authorities should share information promptly to confirm a child's location and ensure suitable education continues. Some groups, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, Armed Forces families and children involved with Youth Offending Teams, may be at increased risk and require coordinated support to maintain continuity of education.

3. Key Responsibilities

Concerns may arise through schools, parents/carers, health, housing, police or the public. The Attendance Service complete initial checks including school attendance records, council tax records, Local Authority data bases, health records, Elective Home Education records (including those held by other Local Authorities), liaison with CME officers in other Local Authorities, DfE GIAP database and previous provision. Reasonable enquiries may include home visits and partner liaison. Where safeguarding concerns are identified, cases are referred to ICART without delay.

Education is secured promptly through school admission, alternative provision or formal review of EHE suitability. No case is closed until education is confirmed and monitoring arrangements are agreed.

Schools

Schools are well placed to identify when a child may be missing due to daily attendance monitoring, if a child is believed to be missing, schools must:

- Try to establish the situation with parents/carers/other contacts held by school;
- Ensure the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)/or Deputy DSL with relevant staff assessed the child's vulnerability and refer concerns to ICART where appropriate.

Schools must only remove a pupil from roll where one of the grounds within [Regulation 9 of the School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#) is fully met.

Schools should refer directly to the Regulations before any deletion from roll.

Unexplained non-attendance

A child missing from education is not automatically a child protection concern, as there may be a legitimate explanation. However, regular attendance is a key safeguarding measure, and unexplained absence may indicate emerging risk or vulnerability. Schools should respond by:

- **Preventing** poor attendance and truancy
- **Acting quickly** when absence occurs to check safety and support a return to school
- **Tracing** children whose whereabouts are unknown

Identifying children at potential risk

Local/national data suggests that the number of children/young people receiving home education is increasing, most parents choose it in their children's best interests, with many children thriving. However, for some home educated children they may not be receiving a suitable education and can be at risk of harm, particularly where children have complex needs or where parents/carers are unprepared to meet educational requirements. Although the Children's and Wellbeing School Act 2026 introduces a statutory register of children not in school, which is maintained by the LA, parents are not currently required to notify local authorities when home educating (although good practice would be to do so). Therefore, some children may remain unknown to services and receive little or no education, or live in unsafe environments, without intervention.

Whilst there is no evidence that home educated children are at greater risk of abuse than other children, they do lack regular professional contact that may make existing abuse or neglect harder to identify. Although some parents/carers may home educate to protect their child from school related risks, under the Education Act 1996 and their safeguarding duties local authorities must act where education is unsuitable or a child's development or welfare may be compromised or in cases of flexi schooling, where children attend school part time.

Key Actions for Schools

If a child is absent for 10 consecutive school days, without a reasonable explanation, the Head teacher must notify the Attendance Service.

All schools have a safeguarding duty to investigate unexplained absence in line with [DfE: Keeping Children Safe in Education \(2026\)](#).

Schools must notify the Local Authority within 5 days when a pupil is added to the school register at a non-standard transition point, providing full register details.

Schools must also notify the Local Authority as soon as a decision is made to remove a pupil from the school register at a non-standard transition point, and no later than removal from school roll. [Regulation 9 of the School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#)

Schools must notify the Local Authority if they believe a child has moved to another area or are believed to have moved to another country. Schools and local authorities must carry out and record reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts, working with relevant local contacts.

Schools must notify the Local Authority if they are unable to establish the whereabouts of a child.

Where there is concern that a child may be at risk of harm or immediate danger, a referral must be made to ICART (and the police where appropriate).

A Child in Care or known to social care must not be removed from the school roll without discussing this with the Virtual School Headteacher.

A Child with an EHCP must not be removed from roll without discussing this with the child's SEND caseworker. The SEND Service have a duty to share all related paperwork with any other LA for a confirmed relocated child with an EHCP. Where a child remains CME the SEND Team will work closely with the Attendance Team and CME Officer to support the process of locating the child.

Local Authority/Attendance Service

The Attendance Service has overall responsibility for:

- Tracking and tracing children missing education;
- Maintaining CME records and databases;
- Liaising with other local authorities and agencies;
- Ensuring appropriate education provision is secured;
- Taking enforcement action where required, including School Attendance Orders.

The CME Officer should ensure, that reasonable enquiries are made - e.g. home visits, liaison with ICART and/or Housing - and notify the school if it appears that the child has moved out of the area.

If no information is forthcoming within 2 days, and there are legitimate safeguarding concerns, a referral to ICART and the Police should be made.

4. Actions required for a missing child on a Child Protection Plan

Head teachers should inform the Attendance Service (CME Officer) and the child's Social Worker immediately if a child is subject to a Child Protection Plan is missing.

Attention must be given to vulnerable groups, including Children in Care, those subject to Child Protection plans, those supported through Child in Need plans, and any child known to be experiencing safeguarding vulnerabilities. For Children in Care, it is essential that the Virtual School is informed immediately of any concerns regarding absence, irregular attendance, or the potential for the child to become a child missing education (CME). For any child on a Child Protection or Child in Need plan, Social Care must be notified without delay if the child becomes a child missing education (CME) or is at risk of doing so, as this may indicate an escalation in safeguarding concerns. Any unexplained withdrawal from school or emerging pattern of nonattendance must be escalated promptly in accordance with statutory safeguarding procedures.

In the following circumstances a referral to ICART and/or the police should always be made promptly:

- The child may be the victim of a crime;
- The child is the subject of a Child Protection Plan;
- The child is the subject of Section 47 enquiries;
- The child is looked after;
- There is a known person posing a risk to children in the household or in contact with the household;
- There is a history of the family moving frequently;
- There are serious issues of attendance.

Reasonable Enquiries and Safeguarding

- Schools and Local Authorities must have **procedures for reasonable enquiries**, which may include:
 - Contacting parents/carers by phone, email and letter
 - Checking emergency contacts
 - Liaising with known agencies or professionals
 - Home visits where appropriate
 - Checking with sibling schools

All actions must be clearly recorded. If enquiries fail, escalation is required.

Records, Transfers and Notifications

- If a parent/carer notifies the school the child is being **educated otherwise than at school**:
 - The education service must be informed **within 10 school days**.
 - Records must be transferred according to local arrangements.
- When a new pupil arrives without prior records:
 - The school should contact the **previous school** or the **Admissions Team**.
- If the CME Officer becomes aware the child has moved schools:
 - All relevant agencies must be informed.
 - Records must be forwarded to the new school.

- Where a pupil is **removed from the school roll but has not been located**:
 - The child must be recorded on a centrally held register as Missing from Education (CME).
 - The Head teacher must ensure the pupil's records are retained until the child is located.
 - Records may be held centrally, in line with Local Authority arrangements.

5. Information Sharing and Partnership Working

Effective identification of CME relies on information sharing between schools, the Local Authority, and partner agencies including health, housing, social care, and police. Agencies must notify the Local Authority if they become aware of a child who may not be receiving education.

6. Governance

Halton Borough Council is committed to robust governance arrangements across all education-related policies issued by the Local Authority. Governance oversight ensures that statutory duties are discharged consistently, that data is collected, shared and reported lawfully and securely, and that appropriate scrutiny is applied at both school and Local Authority level. This includes clear lines of accountability to Governing Boards, regular reporting to relevant boards and partnerships, and mechanisms for challenge and support where practice or outcomes give cause for concern. The specific governance, monitoring and reporting arrangements for this policy are set out below.

CME data is monitored via regular audits, data checks (Aiming High) and partnership oversight, for example the Vulnerable Learners Board. This policy is reviewed annually by Halton Borough Council.

School governors are responsible for ensuring effective systems are in place to identify and support children missing education (CME). They should oversee attendance, safeguarding and pupil-tracking processes, ensure staff follow statutory guidance, and confirm that concerns are referred promptly to the Local Authority. Governors must also ensure compliance with legal requirements for admissions and removals from roll. While they do not investigate individual cases, they should provide appropriate oversight and challenge to prevent any child from disappearing from education without action being taken.

Appendix 1 - CME Process Map

The table below summarises the end-to-end process from notification through to outcome.

