Children Missing from Education (CME)

Policy and procedures for when children go missing from school.

Guidance for:-
All Birmingham schools, including academies
Independent and free schools, and partner agencies in Birmingham

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1. Introduction

Birmingham City Council (BCC) is committed to ensuring that every child of compulsory school age is receiving an excellent full-time education which will give them the opportunity to build their own futures. Parents/carers have a duty to ensure children are receiving suitable full-time education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

If a child is not in school, they are at significant risk of underachieving, becoming victims of abuse, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later in life.

Children may not be attending or may leave school for a number of reasons, but if they are still of compulsory school age, then parents, schools and local authorities have a responsibility to ensure the continuity of their education.

The purpose of this policy is to set out clear & robust procedures. The policy is tailored towards schools, academies, independent and free schools, as well as Birmingham City Council and partner agencies to follow, in order to try and locate children who are absent from school and their family whereabouts is unknown.

2. The legal framework

The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Article 2 of protocol No 1 states:

“No person shall be denied the right to education”

Section 436A of the Education Act 1996 requires all local authorities to make arrangements to establish the identities of children of compulsory school age in their area who are not registered pupils at a school, and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.

Regulations 8(f) and 8(h) of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, as amended, place a duty on schools and local authorities to jointly carry out reasonable enquiries to try and locate pupils absent from school whose whereabouts are unknown.

Weblink below details the key changes to the guidance dated 1 September 2016:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550416/Children_Missing_Education_-_statutory_guidance.pdf

3. Definition – Children Missing from Education (CME)

This policy refers 'to any child of compulsory school age who has been registered at a formally approved education setting', e.g. school, academy, alternative provision, independent school or elective home education, and has been out of education provision for a period of time.

The Birmingham City Council Children Missing *from* Education (CME) team works jointly with schools in respect of pupils on roll at school, who are absent from school and their whereabouts is unknown'.

This might be:

- A child who is not at their last known address and:
- has 5 or more days of continuous absence from school without explanation, or:
- has left school suddenly and their destination is unknown.

This policy does not cover those children not receiving education due to a family not taking up an offer of a school place from the School Admissions Service. For such cases, please refer to Birmingham School Admissions,

Telephone: 0121 216 3621 (***for schools & professional partners only***).

Website:www.birmingham.gov.uk/schooladmissions

Email: admissions@birmingham.gov.uk

This policy does **not** refer to children who are missing from view or absent from Home or Care. When a child goes missing from the home, or from care, or where the school has significant safeguarding concerns for the child, the school must refer these children immediately to the Childrens Advice and Support Service (CASS), and/or to the Police.

There is a separate policy that outlines the procedures for Social Care practitioners.

Runaway and Missing from Home or Care Practice Guidance (January 2020)
https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms1/media/4326/runaway-and-missing-from-home-or-care-practice-guidance-210120.pdf

4. Roles and responsibilities: -

i) Parents/carers role

Parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are receiving efficient full-time education. Some parents may elect to home educate their children and may withdraw them from school at any time to do so (unless they are subject to a School Attendance Order). Where a parent notifies the school in writing of their intention to home educate, the school must inform the local authority using the Birmingham City Council EHE referral form, before deleting the child from its admission register.

Telephone: 0121 464 7215

Website: https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/home-education

Email: home.education@birmingham.gov.uk

Children with special educational needs and who have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan can be home educated. Where the EHC plan sets out special educational provision that the child should receive at home, the local authority is under a duty to arrange that provision. Where the EHC plan names a school as the place where the child should receive his or her education and the parent chooses to home educate their child, the local authority must assure itself that the provision being made by the parent is suitable to the child's special educational needs and this must be reviewed annually.

Telephone: 0121 303 1888 (select relevant option from menu)

Website: https://www.localofferbirmingham.co.uk

Email: senar@birmingham.gov.uk

Parents have a responsibility to inform the school or Local Authority of their child's new school destination and home address if they are moving to a new school, at any time during the period of statutory education.

ii) Schools' role and duties

Schools have safeguarding duties under **section 175 of the Education Act 2002** in respect of their pupils and they should investigate any unexplained absences. Academies and independent schools have the same safeguarding duty under **section 157** of the Education Act.

Schools must monitor pupil attendance through their daily register and should address poor attendance whenever this occurs. Any child whose whereabouts are known but continues to have unauthorised absences, should be assessed to determine if they have additional needs and require support such as a referral to Early Help, (ehst@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk.) or to the school nurse or CASS, etc. If there are no additional needs and the parent does not consent to additional support, or support has been put in place and it has not impacted on attendance, the school should place the child on the 'FastTrack' policy. Further information on *Fastrack to Attendance* can be accessed by contacting attendance@birmingham.gov.uk.

Weblink:
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50157/education_legal_intervention_referral/690/pupil_attendance_advice_for_schools_and_professionals

Schools must also arrange full-time education for excluded pupils from the sixth school day of a **fixed period** exclusion. If the pupil is permanently excluded, the Local Authority will arrange provision from the sixth day onwards.

Telephone: Exclusions Team 0121 303 2685
Email: exclusions@birmingham.gov.uk

If a child is absent from school and their whereabouts is unknown, schools have a duty to carry out reasonable enquiries **jointly** with the local authority to ascertain the whereabouts, which might be a result of:-

- The family moving within the city, but the parents fail to inform the school of the house move or transfer to a new school.
- The family move out of the city and relocate to a new area within the UK, but parents fail to inform the school.
- The family relocate abroad and fail to inform the school of their destination.
- The family is displaced as a result of 'crisis' e.g. domestic abuse, homelessness.
- Parent/school disagreement and parents withdraw the child from school.
- Family separation.

In these instances, all schools should ensure the following actions are taken and recorded:

- Consider the likely reason for the absence – has the family been granted leave of absence or is the school aware of an extended trip abroad; has the child been absent due to sickness or unavoidable cause? If not:
- Make a first day of absence call to the parents to establish the reason for the absence and to confirm the child's whereabouts
- Check with all members of staff who the child may have had contact with
- Check with the child's friends, siblings and known relatives at this school or other schools
- Make enquiries with other professionals who have been involved with the child
- Make telephone calls to any numbers held or identified
- Conduct a visit to the last known address of the child within the first five days of the child's absence
- If appropriate, enquire of neighbours about the location of the family
- Send a letter to the last known address and record the outcome
- If required, call the CME Team who will conduct '*background checks'* on the family
- Refer the child to the 'CME' team within the first five days of the child's absence Complete the 'Missing Pupil' referral form (Appendix B).
- Completed referral forms should be sent as an email attachment to the secure email address listed below
- Incomplete referral forms will be returned to schools for additional information
  cme@birmingham.gov.uk
  CME Officer Karen Prosser
  Telephone: - 0121 303 4983

iii) Local Authority role and duties

Birmingham City Council has procedures in place to prevent children at risk of becoming CME.

When the CME Officer receives a referral from a school, they will undertake a joint enquiry with the school to try to locate the family and ensure the child is in receipt of a suitable education.

The CME Officer will ensure the referral is checked to see if the child/family is known to Birmingham Children's Trust (BCT) by accessing the 'Eclipse' database. If known to BCT, the CME Officer will contact the named BCT officer to alert them to the child's missing education status.

The CME Officer will triage all referrals to ensure that any safeguarding concerns identified by the school are clearly noted and have been promptly referred to the CASS and/or the Police.

Any significant safeguarding concerns highlighted within the referral but not reported to CASS and/or the Police by the school or referrer will be actioned immediately and appropriately by the CME Officer and will be discussed with the Head Teacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead of the referring school to ensure that such concerns are appropriately escalated in the future.

After the initial checks have been undertaken, an acknowledgement email confirming receipt of the referral will be sent by the CME Officer to the referring school. When a dedicated CME Officer has been allocated the missing pupil case, a further email will be sent to the school to advise that any associated communications regarding the pupil can be sent to the CME inbox for the attention of the allocated CME Officer.

On completion of traces, all referrals will be flagged on BCC's Central Pupil Database, 'Impulse,' as 'child missing' and a note to this effect will be placed on the child's record (if whereabouts remain unknown). This will enable any Birmingham professional accessing the child's education record to be alerted to the child's current status and prompt them to share any appropriate intelligence on the child's current whereabouts with the CME Team.

5. Procedures following completion of joint enquiries and receipt of referral

The CME Team will complete a series of checks to try and locate the child and ensure the child is in receipt of a suitable education. These checks include:

- Checking the Central Pupil Database "Impulse" and Birmingham Children Trust database 'Eclipse' for information on the child's destination and any previous/current agency involvement.
- Checking the Birmingham City Council Data Warehouse. The Data Warehouse allows access to the Electoral Register; the list of Birmingham City Council Housing addresses; and various other Council services and will ascertain if the parent/carers are still registered at the last known address.
- Checking with the Home Office Intelligence/UK Borders Agency in respect of suspected family movements abroad where safeguarding concerns are evident.
- Checking NHS records via access to the National Health Service Spine Portal.
- Accessing DfE databases; Get Information about Pupils (GIAP, formerly known as 'Key to Success') and School to School (s2s)
- Using social networking sites such as 'Facebook' to try and locate the parents/carer of the pupil.
- Undertaking home visits to locate children and families if necessary.
- If, at any stage of the enquiry into a child's whereabouts schools or BCC have concerns for a child's safety, an immediate referral must be made to CASS by completing and submitting a 'Request for Support' referral form to:

- cass@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk (secure email)

For advice on particular cases, CASS can be contacted on 0121 303 1888 or out of hours on 0121 675 4806.

The School and the CME Team will aim to complete their joint enquiry as quickly as possible and will inform any other associated professional of the outcome within the remit of GDPR.

Upon completion of the reasonable enquiry the CME Team will confer with the child's school to confirm the outcome.

The vast majority of children are found with their families and are in receipt of suitable education. A collaborative agreement will be made between the school and the CME team on the appropriateness of removing the child from the school roll, usually in the

form of a Deletion Notice. This is essential, to safeguard against premature/illegal deletions from roll.

Where the child/family are not found, and where the three-monthly review indicates no obvious safeguarding concerns, the case will remain ‘open pending further enquiries’ in the archive system and will be systematically uploaded to the BCC Data Warehouse to alert key partners with system access, including the Police, to notify the CME team of any information which may confirm the current whereabouts of the child.

Contacts:

- CME Officer – Karen Prosser

  Telephone: 0121 303 4983

  Email: cme@birmingham.gov.uk

- CME Team (Normal office hours 08.45 – 4.00pm)

  Telephone: 0121 303 1888 for general enquiries

  Email: cme@birmingham.gov.uk

- School Admissions

  Telephone: 0121 303 1888 for general enquiries

  Email: admissions@birmingham.gov.uk

- Education Legal Intervention Team (ELITs)

  Telephone: 0121 464 8979.

  Email: attendance@birmingham.gov.uk.

- Childrens Advice and Support Service (CASS)

  Telephone: 0121 303 1888.

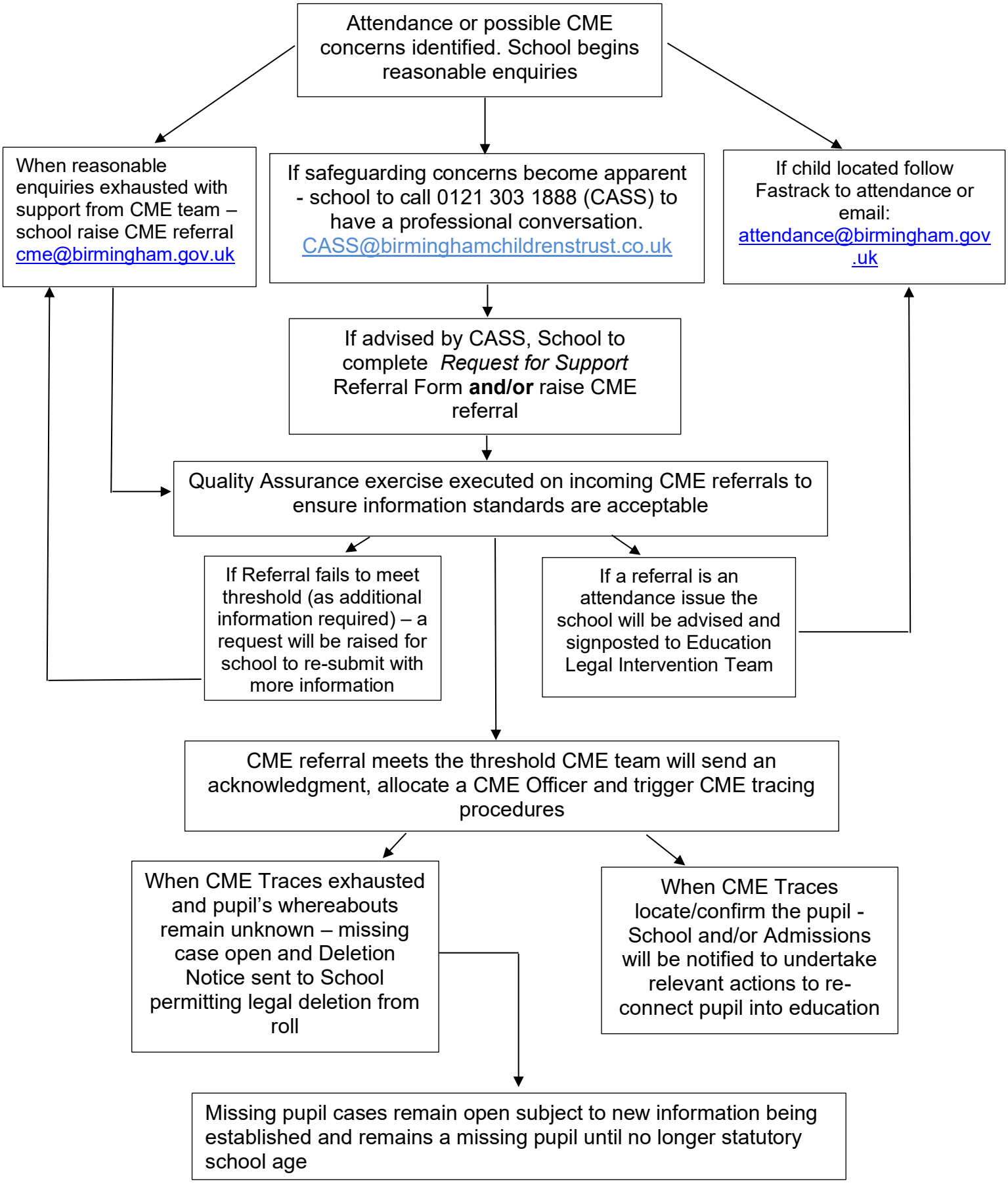
  Email: cass@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

- Special Education Needs, Assessment and Review Service (SENAR)

  Telephone: 0121 303 1888 for general enquiries

  Email: senar@birmingham.gov.uk

Children Missing Education Process Flowchart for Schools



Children most at risk of becoming CME

There are many circumstances where a child may become missing from education and the list below presents *some* of the circumstances that may lead to children becoming CME (it is not exhaustive):-

1. **Pupils at risk of harm/neglect** - Children may be missing from education because they are suffering from abuse or neglect. Where this is suspected schools should follow local safeguarding children procedures. Local authority officers responsible for CME should check that a referral has been made and, if not, they should alert children's social care. If there is reason to suspect that a crime has been committed or the child's safety is at risk, the police should also be involved.

2. **Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveler (GRT) Families** – Research has shown that many children from these families can become disengaged from education, particularly during the secondary school phase. It is therefore vital that schools inform the LA when a GRT pupil leaves the school without identifying a new destination school, particularly in the transition from primary to secondary so that they can attempt to facilitate continuity of the child's education. Although many are settled, some GRT families move regularly and their children can be at increased risk of missing education. Local authority Traveler Education Support Services (TESS), where these exist, or named CME officer within the LA, can advise schools on the best strategies for ensuring the minimum disruption to GRT pupils' education, for example dual registration with other schools or the provision of electronic or distance learning packages where these are available.

3. **Families of Armed Forces** - Families of members of the Armed Forces are likely to move frequently – both in UK and overseas and often at short notice. Schools and local authorities should contact the MOD – Directorate of Children & Young People's (DCYP) Education Advisory Service (CEAS) on 01980 618244 for advice on making arrangements to ensure continuity of education for those children when the family moves.

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childrens-education-advisory-service-ceas-further-information

Email: DYCP-CEAS-Enquiries@mod.gov.uk

4. **Missing children/runaways** - Children who go missing or run away from home or care may be in serious danger and are vulnerable to crime, sexual exploitation or abduction as well as missing education.

5. **Children and young people supervised by the Youth Justice System** - Children who have offended or are at risk of doing so are also at risk of disengaging from education. Local authority Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) are responsible for supervising those young people (aged 8 to 18). YOTs should work with the local authority CME officer to ensure that children are receiving, or return to, appropriate full-time education. Where a young person was registered at a school prior to custody, the school may keep the place open for their return.

6. **Children who cease to attend a school** – there are many reasons why a child stops attending a school. It could be because the parent chooses to home educate their child. However, where the reason for a child who has stopped attending a school is not known, the school must investigate the case and ensure the child is receiving suitable education. Once the schools have undertaken reasonable enquiries and the pupils whereabouts are still unknown, the school must refer the case to the CME officer and follow the referral procedures outlined in this policy.

Birmingham City Council

For office use only
OUR REF:

Children Missing Education Referral Form

Please complete and return this form **by email** to cme@birmingham.gov.uk with details of pupils who have unauthorised absence whose **whereabouts cannot be traced. Please contact the CME team on 0121 303 4983 for background checks before completing this form.**

This form should **not** be used for matters of persistent absence **(see guidance notes below).**

CHILD'S DETAILS

SURNAME*	
FIRST NAME*	
GENDER*	
DOB*	
YEAR GROUP	
UPN*:	
CURRENT ADDRESS* (include post code)	
PARENT'S NAME/PHONE NO*	
CURRENT/PREVIOUS SCHOOL	
DATE LAST ATTENDED:	
PUPIL STATUS* (Please tick/delete as appropriate)	Looked After Child Formerly/Currently Known to Social Services Special Education Needs Traveller
Does the child have a history of non-attendance? (Please circle as appropriate)	Yes No
Is there a pattern of unauthorised term time leave? (Please circle as appropriate)	Yes No
Is this child subject to Private Fostering? (Please circle as appropriate)	Yes No
Do you have any supporting documentation to support relocation out of Birmingham? Please attach.	

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YOUR CONTACT DETAILS

NAME	
JOB TITLE	
SCHOOL/TEAM NAME	
TEL NO	
EMAIL	
DATE	

ACTION TAKEN PRIOR TO REFERRAL (OUTCOME OF HOUSE VISIT 1)

DATE	
AM	
PM	
ADDRESS VISITED: (if different from above)	
WHO DID YOU SPEAK TO? (State relationship to the pupil as well as forename and/or surname)	

ACTION TAKEN PRIOR TO REFERRAL (OUTCOME OF HOUSE VISIT 2)

DATE	
AM	
PM	
ADDRESS VISITED: (if different from above)	
WHO DID YOU SPEAK TO? (State relationship to the pupil as well as forename and/or surname)	

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SAFEGUARDING RISK APPRAISAL (TO BE COMPLETED BY DSL)

Risk Assessment (are there any known concerns/safeguarding risks; is this child known to Children's Social Care/subject to a Child protection assessment/plan?)	
Date any concerns referred to MASH:	
Outcome of referral to MASH:	
Outline current Circumstances:	

Please return completed form to: cme@birmingham.gov.uk

DO NOT SEND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION UNSECURED. PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU USE AN ENCRYPTION SERVICE.

Birmingham City Council

GUIDANCE NOTES

- This form **should be** used for reporting pupils of statutory school age who are absent from school for no longer than 5 consecutive days without authorisation and **whose whereabouts are unknown.**
- For general reference consult the Department for Education's statutory guidance on children missing education
- Children Missing Education Statutory Guidance (PDF)
- This form **should not** be used for reporting pupils who are absent from school without authorisation but **who remain resident at their known address or have moved to another known address.**
- Pupils who leave school and transfer to another school, or who leave school to another district with a confirmed new address should be reported to the School Admissions Service via the SCHOOLS PORTAL **'In-year notification of pupil movement'.**
- Under the Education, Pupil Registration Regulations, schools and academies have a duty to carry out 'reasonable enquiries' into the whereabouts of pupils who meet the criteria for referral via this form. The enquiries schools and academies are expected to undertake are outlined in the checklist with their outcomes recorded on this form.

CHECKLIST

In most circumstances, the school's enquiries will commence **from the first day of unauthorised absence.** Have you:

- ✓ Called the CME team for background checks on the family e.g. schools attended by siblings?
- ✓ Has the DSL ensured that any safeguarding concerns have been promptly referred to the Children's Advisory Support Service (CASS) on 0121 303 1888?
- ✓ Tasked appropriate staff to check with all members of staff who the pupil may have had contact with?
- ✓ Checked with the pupil's friends, siblings and known relatives at this school or other schools?
- ✓ Tasked appropriate school staff to conduct telephone calls to ALL numbers held on the pupil file?
- ✓ Tasked appropriate staff to conduct home visit(s) to the last known address of the pupil?
- ✓ If possible, enquired of neighbours as to the location of the family?
- ✓ Sent a letter to the last known address and recorded the outcome?

ALSO:

- ✓ **If there is good reason to believe that a crime may have been committed, have you made a prompt referral to the Police? E.g. this is a very sudden, unexpected situation and/or there are particular causes of concern such as the risk of Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Criminal Exploitation, Modern Day Slavery, Child Sexual Exploitation**
- ✓ **Have there been past suspicions concerning the pupil and family which, together with the sudden disappearance, are worrying?**
- ✓ **If the pupil is subject to a Child Protection plan or investigation, has the social worker been informed of the pupil's absence?**
- ✓ **Similarly as above if the pupil is 'looked after'?**

In the three instances above, CASS should be informed immediately.