

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

Briefing Report to Members Scrutiny Committee March 2009

Children Missing From Education

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To review the arrangements for carrying out the Local Authority's functions and responsibilities for identifying and maintaining contact with children missing or at risk of going missing from education.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 2.1 Children go missing when they fall out of the system and there is no systematic process in place to identify them and put appropriate resources in place. Personal and family circumstances may lead to withdrawal, they may not start appropriate provision or they may fail to complete a transition between providers.

Vulnerable children have been identified as being at greater risk of going missing and the LA needs to pay particular attention to them, especially when they are moving into or out of the area.

2.2 Guidance and Legislation

The Education and Inspections Bill 2006 introduced a new statutory duty on local authorities to make arrangements to establish the identities of children missing education in their area. This new duty was implemented on 1st February 2007.

3.0 LOCAL AUTHORITY DUTY TO IDENTIFY CHILDREN NOT RECEIVING EDUCATION

- 3.1 The guidance requires all local education authorities to make arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible) the identities of the children in their area who are not receiving a suitable education. The previous definition of 'suitable education' remains unchanged.

The duty applies to those children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll and are not receiving suitable alternative provision.

The duty does not apply to children who are registered at a school but who are not attending regularly. Schools already have a duty to monitor attendance through registration.

The information contained on ContactPoint, due to be implemented in 2009, is expected to help Local Authorities to carry out this duty by recording where a child is being educated and giving access to a broader range of data. This should prove to be particularly helpful when tracking children who have moved between authorities.

- 3.2 These responsibilities are a key part of the LA's arrangements within the Every Child Matters change for children programme. LAs and their partners should place this duty as an integral part of strategic planning for carrying out their overall duties under sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004. The main focus of the current guidance is on processes and systems within local authorities, but the work should also be seen within the context of the wider remit to safeguard the welfare of all children.

4.0 PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

Five areas of work are identified in the national guidance as necessary to achieve a robust system. North Yorkshire's progress in each area is noted below.

4.1 Strategic Management and Leadership

The LA has issued procedures to all schools and education settings and is undertaking further work to agree a policy with partners and embed this within safeguarding arrangements for all groups. Work is being progressed through the multi-agency Information Governance Group to agree a Missing Children Information Sharing Protocol, covering all children, which will be embedded in the Integrated Children's Services arrangements and proposals for ContactPoint development.

4.2 Networks and Points of Contact

Key stakeholders have been identified and provided with information on the referral process with a named contact point. This has included :

- Guidance for all staff involved in locality based teams, included in the Locality Team Toolkit
- Information and publicity leaflets for practitioners and members of the public, distributed through libraries, surgeries, housing agencies and other partners
- Information for independent schools delivered through a dedicated safeguarding conference and amended procedures
- The provision of web based information including a dedicated e-mail address for the referral of any concern
cme.coordintor@northyorks.gov.uk
- A link to the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Board web-site

4.3 Information Systems

Information is held by the LA to identify children currently out of education. This includes all school aged children in the maintained sector. Children included on this system are:

- Children Missing
- REOTAS (Reintegration & Education Other Than at School) Pupils
- Inclusion and Accountability Panels Pupils(Eastern Area)
- Pupils receiving Elective Home Education (where the LA is notified by parents)
- Travellers

As noted above, there is currently no comprehensive information held, within the LA or nationally, on children who have not reached statutory school age or who are registered at independent schools. The CME

Coordinator will follow up cases notified from these groups but the gaps in the information available and absence of a database to interrogate make this less successful.

4.4 Provision of Brokering Services

The LA has up-to-date information on availability of school places and has agreed processes for securing education provision and the support of other agencies, delivered through REOTAS and Inclusion & Accountability Panels. Information on missing children is provided to the panels by Senior Education Social Workers.

Arrangements have been introduced to provide 'Choice Advice' to all families to inform decisions about school preferences and these are being coordinated by the Parent Partnership Service.

4.5 Effective Pupil Tracking Systems

The CME Coordinator monitors all children identified as having left North Yorkshire maintained educational provision without an identified destination and ensures follow up by the Education Social Work Service. In any cases where, in spite of all reasonable enquiries having been completed, it has not been possible to locate the child, the Senior Education Social Worker reviews the case to determine if there are any concerns or safeguarding considerations. This procedure includes a requirement to inform Police and Social Services if there is concern that a child may be at risk.

The LA supports and encourages schools to transfer files via s2s (secure data transfer system) and has an identified officer as database administrator for s2s.

Health information is accessed via identified contacts in the schools health services but this relates only to children of statutory school age.

5.0 MONITORING

5.1 Monitoring of children missing from education is progressing in line with the development of Inclusion & Accountability Panels and revised REOTAS arrangements, including reports to the Access and Inclusion Management Team.

Information currently provided to local education office areas will be provided to locality teams to inform integrated working and allow effective and coordinated action to be taken by practitioners.

Work to include children outside the LA maintained education sector will be reported through the Integrated Services monitoring arrangements

6.0 FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Elective Home Education

6.1 The names of those children who are home educated and known to the LA are kept on a database and the Quality & Improvement Service undertakes monitoring visits. For those children identified as not receiving appropriate provision, and about whom there are concerns, local safeguarding children procedures are followed and legal action to secure appropriate education is implemented .

A multi agency group has been established to advise on strategic work and consider any cases which give rise to concerns which may require multi-agency involvement.

The LA guidance on Home Education has been revised, with involvement from the local home educating community, and has received favourable comment both locally and nationally. A liaison group meets regularly to promote positive working relationships with home educators. It is recognised that, although a positive working relationship has been established with many families, there is an indeterminate number of families who have no contact with the LA. It is likely that these children will be identified through further developments in inter-agency information sharing. North Yorkshire was recently identified by the national organisation 'Education Otherwise' as an authority which demonstrated best practice in supporting home educated children and consequently received a fieldwork visit from the DCSF to consider local practice. A consultation and review of EHE legislation is currently underway at a national level.

6.2 Independent Schools

At present there is no data collection at national level for pupils educated in registered independent schools. The Schools Census, which collects pupil level data from schools in the maintained sector, does not extend to the independent sector, except for Academies and City Technology Colleges. Regulations made under Section 12 of the Children Act 2004, which came into force on 1 August 2007, require independent schools to provide data specifically for inclusion on ContactPoint. Recent DCSF advice proposes that the ideal solution for ContactPoint would be to identify and secure a national solution for the collection of pupil level data for independent schools rather than asking local authorities to establish collections with individual schools - which would place a considerable burden on both schools and local authorities.

Work has been undertaken by DCSF to assess the options, costs and feasibility of such a data collection. The draft feasibility report suggests that a pilot collection starting in 2010 followed by full roll-out in 2011 would be the preferred approach. This would mean that we would need to identify an interim solution for identifying children who may be missing from these schools.

There is an ongoing national debate about funding independent schools data collection which will have to be resolved before the final position is determined.

North Yorkshire has recently been asked to contribute directly to the DCSF Review of Safeguarding Arrangements for Independent Schools, having been identified by the Association of Directors of Children's Services as an authority which has demonstrated positive practice. As a result of this developmental work Sir Roger Singleton, Chair of the Review, visited the County in February 2009, following meetings with NY representatives to consider local practice.

6.3 CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE AND HOME

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Board has recently established a working group to coordinate the work of all partner agencies where children and young people go missing from home or care. This work will include further development of information sharing, risk assessment and follow-up interviews for children and young people who have been missing from home or care. The group will report to the NYSCB through the Operations

Sub-Group and will determine the procedures to be used by all staff in NYSCB partner agencies. The group includes representation from Police, Social Care, Health and Education.

COMMENTS

- 7.0 The LA has made good progress in the development of systems to track children missing from education and has extended this, as far as possible, to wider groups using currently available data. Further work is continuing, in parallel with ContactPoint development, to extend the reach of tracking systems to cover all children.
- 7.2 A number of challenges remain if the LA is to maintain the visibility of children who may be vulnerable and are no longer registered with a provider. Further data is required in order to monitor the progress in areas where children commonly cross boundaries to attend schools, children in the independent sector, early years provision and children in home education who are not known to the LA.
- 7.3 Further progress will be required in response to the developing arrangements for 'Contact Point'.

8.0 CORPORATIVE OBJECTIVES

This issue relates to the following Corporate Objectives:

Security for All – by promoting safe, healthy and sustainable communities.	X
Growing up prepared for the future – through good education and care and protection when it is needed	X
Independence – through employment, opportunity and appropriate support	X
Keeping us on the move – with good roads and a safe and reliable transport system	
Strengthening our economy – by supporting business, developing our infrastructure, investing in powerful telecommunications and helping people improve their skills	
Looking after our heritage and our environment – in our countryside and our towns and villages	
Keeping in touch – by listening to your views, planning to meet your needs and by telling you what we are doing.	

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Background Documents: None