

Protocol for Children who are Uncollected from School (2025)

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1. Purpose

To update and agree actions that will be taken between Schools/Educational Settings and Responsibilities of MASH/Children Social Care where:

- Primary school (Key Stages 1 and 2) pupils and special school pupils who ordinarily do not make their own way home, are not collected by their parents/carers at the end of the school day or from after school clubs and activities
- Children with Special Educational Needs who are transported from school cannot be left at home due to the absence of a parent or carer (see **Section 6, Children with Special Educational Needs who are Transported from School to Home**).

2. Principles

The responsibility for children who are uncollected from school rests jointly with Children's Social Care and Head Teachers or Education Setting Managers, who will work in partnership to ensure at all times that the needs of the child are the first and paramount consideration. Children who are abandoned by their parents/carers are ultimately required to be accommodated by the Council.

The incidents of uncollected children can be minimised through up to date record keeping, clear expectations upon parents and timely and coordinated interventions

Children will only be taken to police stations where there is no other way of ensuring their welfare or safeguarding them.

3. School/Education Setting Responsibilities

Schools will ensure that they obtain detailed records of parents/carers and of emergency contacts when pupils are admitted and these will be updated at least on an annual basis. Parents/carers need clear guidance in respect of the circumstances under which pupils will make their own way home e.g. that Key Stage 1 children or pupils with high levels of additional needs or Special Educational Needs will only be released into the care of named adults.

Parents will be informed of the importance of collecting their children on time and of the expectation that they should contact the school or education setting as soon as it appears that they may have a problem.

Schools need to make sure that telephones are answered throughout the school day and whilst any uncollected pupil may be on the premises.

Schools should not release children to a person who is not known to them or acting with the parent's written authorisation. Where there is any doubt as to the identity or suitability of

such a person and there is no other way of ensuring the child's safety, this will be referred to the police as an emergency.

Schools must have arrangements in place for the proper care and supervision of uncollected children, for whom they retain a duty of care until the parent / carer has collected them or they have been transferred into the care of a Council or police officer or approved carer. In order to safeguard the child and the school, it is advisable that the school deploys at least 2 members of staff to support this function.

If a pupil remains uncollected at the end of the school day, active steps will be taken by the school to contact the parent/carer or emergency contact by telephone.

If contact cannot be established within a further 30 minutes (or by 16.30 if this is sooner), a senior member of the school staff will contact the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to agree upon a timescale for further actions and ultimate hand-over of the child, as appropriate. In the event that the child already has an allocated social worker, the school should contact that social worker and not MASH.

Initial contact with the MASH should take place no later than 16.30 - bearing in mind that referrals after 17.00 are directed to a solitary Emergency Duty Social Worker, who will have limited access to resources ordinarily available during normal office hours.

If the child is being taken to an agreed venue or foster home in preparation for their being accommodated, the school will, if practicable, leave a message at the family home about the child's whereabouts and contact numbers.

4. Responsibilities of MASH/Children Social Care

Once the request is placed by 16:30, Social Care staff will hold an advisory discussion with schools about pupils who have not been collected by their parent or carer within 60 minutes of the school day ending or by 16.30; whichever is the sooner.

They will agree a timetable for further actions that may be required to secure the care of the child, should they remain uncollected and deemed to have been abandoned.

If the child does need to be accommodated, agreement will be reached as to the most suitable arrangements for the child to be collected or transported from the school to a Council office or emergency placement.

The Social Worker will ensure that the school has a contact number for social work team involved beyond normal office hours.

The Social Care staff will notify the Emergency Duty Social Worker or police service as appropriate regarding possible follow-up contact with parents/carers and the school out of office hours.

Should the circumstances not be brought to the attention of the MASH or Social Care by 5:00 p.m., then the school would be required to contact the Emergency Out of Hours Service for further advice and support.

Social Care may request a referral to be submitted as they consider the need for follow-up investigations where the failure to collect a child indicates ongoing parenting concerns that might fall within the Section 17 / 47 responsibilities of Children's Services, i.e. which may indicate that the child is a Child in Need and that a Section 47 Enquiry is required.

5. After-School Activities

Where a child, who is normally collected at the end of the club or session, is not collected by a responsible person, contact will be made with the child's parent or carer or the emergency contact.

After-school clubs will obtain from parents the name of an alternative carer or emergency contact.

If the child remains uncollected 30 minutes after the end of the session (or by 16:45 for activities that are scheduled to end at 16:30) and the alternative carer is not available, the Head teacher or Centre Manager will contact the MASH duty service or the allocated social worker if there is one.

For sessions that end after 17:00, the contact will be the Emergency Duty Social Worker.

6. Children with Special Educational Needs who are Transported from School to Home

Established procedures require escorts/drivers to notify the pupil's school if they are unable to drop-off a pupil at their home or meeting point due to the absence of the parent or carer. The school should ensure that contact telephone numbers are staffed until the end of the transport round to facilitate this communication and to be available to parents to report a problem.

The school will then contact the MASH (or allocated social worker) to agree actions that will be taken, should the parent/carer not be at the home or meeting point when the transport makes a second attempt to deliver the pupil.

The driver/escort will then be asked to return the pupil to the school, unless agreement has been reached in the meantime for the pupil to be left at a Council office.

Repeated failure by the parents/carers to fulfil their responsibilities will be considered under the school's Child Protection Procedures.

7. Pupils whose Parent/Carer Refuses to Comply with a School Exclusion

When a school excludes a pupil, the safety and welfare of the child remains the exclusive responsibility of the parent or carer.

If a parent refuses to cooperate with an exclusion and continues to send the child to school, the school should not place an unaccompanied child at risk by refusing to allow them on site.

If the parent refuses to collect the child from school, the school may impose an internal exclusion or defer the exclusion until such time as the parent cooperates with the exclusion.

Continued refusal by the parent/carer to cooperate with the exclusion should be considered under the school's Child Protection Policy as potentially placing the child at risk of Significant Harm to their emotional or intellectual development.

8. Escalation

The Southwark Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) [escalation procedures](#) will apply where disputes arise in respect of individual cases.

End