Missing Child and Child Missing from Education Policy

Document Control

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1. Purpose

This policy sets out the procedure South Cumbria Skills Exchange (SCSE), operated by Whamos Training and Development CIC, follows when a learner placed with us does not arrive when expected, leaves the provision without permission, or otherwise becomes missing during a session. It also covers our role in safeguarding learners who are at risk of becoming Children Missing from Education (CME).

This policy reflects the duties in Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE 2024) and the DfE's statutory guidance on Children Missing Education (2016). It is consistent with Cumberland Council's local CME procedures.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all learners placed with SCSE by a commissioning school or local authority, and to any learner attending an SCSE session.

It covers four distinct scenarios:

- A learner does not arrive at SCSE when expected (non-arrival)
- A learner leaves SCSE without permission during a session (unauthorised departure)
- A learner cannot be located during a session despite being known to be on site (missing on site)
- A learner is identified as at risk of becoming, or already, Missing from Education

3. Why this matters

Children who are missing from education are at significant risk of harm. Patterns of non-arrival, persistent unexplained absence, or unauthorised departures can be indicators of:

- Child sexual or criminal exploitation (including county lines)
- Domestic abuse, neglect or abuse at home
- Mental health crisis or self-harm
- Gang involvement
- Radicalisation
- Forced marriage or honour-based abuse
- Trafficking or modern slavery

For these reasons, every instance of a learner not being where they should be is treated as a potential safeguarding concern.

4. Attendance recording and the trigger point

SCSE takes a register at the start of every session. The register is reviewed by the session lead. If a learner does not arrive within the expected window, the procedure below is initiated immediately — non-arrival is never treated as routine.

The trigger point for action is **30 minutes after the expected arrival time**, or sooner if there are heightened concerns (e.g. the learner has previously gone missing, has a known vulnerability, or has expressed distress).

5. Procedure: non-arrival

When a learner does not arrive at SCSE as expected:

Within 30 minutes of expected arrival: - The session lead attempts to contact the learner by phone or text, using the contact details held on file with consent. - The session lead notifies the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) — Elizabeth Amos-Milburn — or in her absence the Deputy DSL — Alexandra Gager-Liebhart.

Within 60 minutes of expected arrival: - The DSL contacts the parent or carer to confirm whether the learner is at home, ill, or otherwise accounted for. - The DSL contacts the commissioning school's DSL (or the placing local authority's case worker) and informs them the learner has not arrived. This is required regardless of whether the parent has been reached.

If the learner cannot be accounted for within 90 minutes: - The DSL coordinates a wider check with all known points of contact (parents/carers, foster carers, social worker, mentor at the commissioning school). - The DSL escalates to police as a "missing from home / missing from care" concern by calling 101, providing the learner's name, age, last known location, what they were wearing if known, and any known risks. Where there is immediate concern for life or safety, call 999.

All actions are recorded contemporaneously in the SCSE safeguarding log.

6. Procedure: unauthorised departure during a session

If a learner leaves the SCSE premises without permission during a session:

Immediately: - The session lead, where it is safe to do so, calls the learner back or attempts to follow at a safe distance to observe the direction of travel. Staff do not physically restrain a learner from leaving. - Another member of staff notifies the DSL. - The DSL contacts the parent or carer and the commissioning school's DSL to inform them and confirm whether the learner has arrived home.

Within 30 minutes of departure: - If the learner cannot be confirmed safe, the DSL escalates to police on 101 (or 999 if there is immediate risk). - The DSL coordinates with the parent, commissioning school, and social worker (if applicable) on next steps.

After the incident: - A debrief takes place with the learner once they are safe and well, focused on understanding what triggered the departure and how to support them. - A learner-specific risk assessment is updated or created to identify changes needed before the next session.

7. Procedure: missing on site

If a learner is known to be on site but cannot be located:

- Staff conduct an immediate, coordinated search of the premises (learning spaces, toilets, kitchen, store rooms, outside areas).
- One member of staff is designated to remain with the rest of the cohort to maintain safety.
- The DSL is notified at the start of the search and updates the parent and commissioning school if the learner is not located within 15 minutes.
- If the learner has left the premises unobserved, the unauthorised-departure procedure (Section 6) applies.

8. Children Missing from Education (CME)

CME is the legal status applied to a child of compulsory school age who is not registered at any educational provision and is not receiving suitable home education. SCSE plays a role in identifying CME concerns in two ways:

Learners placed with us: Where a learner placed with SCSE is on a roll at a commissioning school but is consistently failing to attend their main school or any other provision, this is reported to the commissioning DSL and may meet the threshold for a CME referral by the school.

Learners we are concerned about: Where SCSE becomes aware that a learner is not on the roll of any school and is not in suitable alternative provision, the DSL makes a referral to Cumberland Council's CME team.

CME referral routes:

- **Cumberland Council CME / Education Welfare Service** — via the council's switchboard on 0300 373 3730. Email contact via cumberland.gov.uk/contact
- **Cumberland Safeguarding Hub (Children)** — 0333 240 1727 (24 hours) — for any case where there is also a safeguarding concern

9. Records and information sharing

For every missing-child incident, SCSE maintains:

- The time of expected arrival and the time of identified non-arrival or departure
- The full sequence of contacts made, by whom, and the responses received
- The identity of staff involved
- The outcome (e.g. learner located, returned home, returned to provision, escalated to police)
- Any actions agreed with the commissioning school, parent, or external agencies
- A timestamped review of whether the procedure was followed correctly

This record is held in the learner's secure safeguarding file and shared with the commissioning school's DSL.

10. Special considerations for vulnerable learners

For learners with any of the following circumstances, the DSL agrees with the commissioning school at the start of placement what additional checks or rapid escalation steps apply:

- Looked-after children
- Care leavers
- Learners subject to a Child Protection Plan
- Learners known to have been at risk of CSE, criminal exploitation, or county lines
- Learners with EHCPs that include any social, emotional or mental health (SEMH) need linked to flight risk
- Learners with significant neurodivergence where sudden departures may indicate sensory overload rather than a safeguarding concern

In all cases the same baseline procedure applies; the variable is the speed of escalation and which external agencies are contacted first.

11. Learners who repeatedly go missing

Where a learner repeatedly goes missing from SCSE or from their commissioning school, the DSL convenes a planning meeting with the commissioning school, parent or carer, social worker (if applicable), and any other relevant professionals. The meeting agrees:

- The underlying drivers and any contributing risk factors
- A revised safety plan
- Whether the placement at SCSE is still appropriate or needs adjustment
- The escalation timeline to be used in future incidents

12. Confidentiality and the police

Information shared with the police as part of a missing-child report is shared lawfully in the vital interests of the child. SCSE will share what is necessary to enable police to locate the learner safely. SCSE does not need

consent from the parent or learner to share information for this purpose, but parents and carers are kept informed of actions taken in the interests of safeguarding.

13. Related policies

This policy should be read alongside:

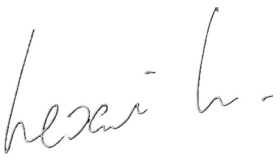
- Safeguarding Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Mental Health Policy
- Secure Data Handling and Data Protection Policy

14. Policy review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Directors, or sooner following any serious incident or change in statutory guidance.

Approval & Review

This policy has been approved on behalf of the Directors:

Elizabeth Amos-Milburn *Co-Director*	**Alexandra Gager-Liebhart** *Co-Director*
	

Date of approval: 18th May 2026

Next review: 18th May 2027

Schedule 1 — Record of Changes

Version	Date	Nature of Change
001	18th May 2026	Initial published version included in the Combined Policies and Procedures 2026 edition.