THE HAVEN

Operated by the Autistic Girls Network charity — 1196655 (England and Wales), SC054837 (Scotland)

Children Missing from Education Policy

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1. Purpose and statement of intent

Every child is entitled to a full-time education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs. A child who is missing from education is at greater risk of underachievement, of not being in education, employment or training later in life, and of harm. *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026* (KCSIE) is clear that a child going missing from education, particularly repeatedly, can be a warning sign of a range of safeguarding concerns, including abuse, neglect, exploitation and risk of harm.

The legal duty to identify children missing education and return them to suitable education sits with the local authority (Education Act 1996, section 436A). This policy sets out how The Haven supports that duty: by noticing quickly when a learner is not engaging, by making prompt and proportionate enquiries, and by reporting without delay to the people who hold the statutory duties.

This policy covers learners who are missing from education or whose whereabouts are not known. Learners who are on roll with The Haven and attending irregularly are covered by the Attendance & Engagement v01.26 policy. The two are read together, because persistent non-engagement is often the route by which a child becomes missing.

2. The Haven's position

The Haven is a specialist online education provision operated by the Autistic Girls Network charity. It is not a DfE-registered independent school and it has no premises. This matters for children missing education because the statutory duties are built around registered schools and local authorities:

- **The Haven does not hold an admission register** in the sense of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. The duties in those Regulations to maintain the register, to notify the local authority of additions and deletions, and to make joint reasonable enquiries before deleting a pupil, sit with the school at which the learner is registered or with the placing local authority.
- **Most learners are placed with The Haven by a commissioning school or local authority.** For those learners the commissioner remains the body with the statutory duty. The Haven's duty is to keep an accurate attendance record for every session it provides, and to report absence and non-engagement promptly so the commissioner can act.
- **Some learners are electively home educated** and their parents have chosen The Haven to provide part of that education. For those learners the parent is responsible for the child's education and the home local authority holds the oversight duty. The Haven is a supplementary provider, not the primary institution, and reports concerns to the home local authority.

Where this policy refers to "the commissioner", it means the commissioning school or local authority, or, for an electively home-educated learner, the home local authority.

3. Legal and statutory framework

This policy has regard to:

- Education Act 1996 (in particular section 436A), Education Act 2002, Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004
- *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026* (DfE, in force 1 September 2026)
- *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026* (DfE)
- *Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities* (DfE, 2016, updated 2024)
- *Working together to improve school attendance* (DfE, August 2024, statutory)
- *Elective home education: departmental guidance for local authorities* (DfE)
- Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, as amended, as they apply to the registered school or placing authority

It operates alongside the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy v10.26, the Attendance & Engagement v01.26 policy, the Referrals and Admissions Policy and Withdrawal from The Haven v10.25.

4. Definitions

- **Child missing education (CME):** a child of compulsory school age who is not registered at a school, is not placed in alternative provision by a local authority, and is not receiving a suitable education otherwise than at school. This includes a child who is receiving some education but not an education that is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and needs.

- **Absent from education:** a learner who is on roll (with The Haven or with the commissioning school) and is not attending regularly. This is managed under the Attendance & Engagement policy, and escalated under this policy where contact is lost or the learner's whereabouts become unknown.
- **On roll with The Haven:** a learner who has an agreed timetable of Haven sessions, whether placed by a commissioner or enrolled directly by a parent.
- **Community-based early help** is the universal and targeted support available to families in their local area. **Targeted Family Help** is the multi-agency tier described in *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026*, delivered through local Family Help services and reached through the home local authority's published threshold document. KCSIE 2026 distinguishes the two, and this policy does the same.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The Head is accountable for this policy, for the accuracy of The Haven's attendance records, and for the reporting arrangements with each commissioner.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) leads the response where non-engagement or loss of contact raises a safeguarding concern, decides whether a referral to Family Help, children's social care or the police is needed, and holds the contact details for each learner's social worker and Virtual School Head where these apply. At The Haven the Head is also the DSL.

Educators and mentors take the register for every live session, follow up a first unexplained absence on the day, record what they find, and tell the DSL on the same day where contact cannot be made or where anything about the absence causes concern.

The Proprietor and governing body make sure that The Haven holds more than one emergency contact for each learner wherever reasonably possible, review attendance and non-engagement patterns at each safeguarding meeting, and receive an annual report on how this policy has operated.

Commissioners hold the statutory duties described in section 2, agree with The Haven how and how often absence is reported, and tell The Haven if a learner has a social worker or is looked after.

Parents and carers make sure their child receives a suitable full-time education, tell The Haven about absences and about any change of address, school, contact details or educational arrangements, and, where they home educate, understand that enrolling their child with The Haven does not transfer their responsibility for the child's education.

6. Children at particular risk of missing education

The Haven uses professional judgement in every case, and is alert to groups that statutory guidance identifies as being at higher risk:

- children with a social worker, children in need, and children on a child protection plan
- looked-after and previously looked-after children (see section 9)
- children with special educational needs or disabilities, including those with an education, health and care plan, where provision has broken down
- children who have stopped attending a school without a known destination, including after a managed move, exclusion or off-rolling
- children who are electively home educated, particularly where the arrangement followed a crisis in school

- children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, children of service personnel, and children of families who have recently arrived in the United Kingdom or moved between local authority areas
- children known to the youth justice system
- children who are young carers
- children who have gone missing from home or care

Repeated or unexplained absence can also be an indicator of abuse, neglect, child sexual or criminal exploitation (including county lines), so-called honour-based abuse including female genital mutilation and forced marriage, mental ill health, substance misuse, or radicalisation. Where any of these is suspected, the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy v10.26 applies.

7. What The Haven does when a learner does not attend

The steps below describe The Haven's response. They run alongside, not instead of, the commissioner's own procedures.

On the day of a first unexplained absence - The educator or mentor records the absence and contacts the parent or carer using the agreed contact route. - If no explanation is received by the end of the day, the mentor tells the DSL and the absence is logged.

By the third consecutive session missed, or earlier where there is any concern - The DSL reviews the learner's record, including any known vulnerability, and decides whether a welfare check or a safeguarding referral is needed now. - The commissioner is informed in writing. - For a learner with a social worker, the social worker is informed on the same day.

Where contact cannot be made - The Haven makes reasonable enquiries: contacting all emergency contacts held, checking with the commissioner and, where known, the learner's school, social worker or other professionals, and asking the home local authority whether the family is known to them. The Haven does not visit the home. - The DSL records each enquiry, its date and its result. - If The Haven cannot establish that the learner is safe and receiving education, the DSL reports the learner to the home local authority's children missing education officer and, where there is a risk of harm, to children's social care or the police. The Haven does not wait for a fixed number of days where it has reason to be concerned.

Where a pattern of non-engagement emerges without loss of contact - The mentor, the DSL and the family review the learner's timetable and support plan under the Attendance & Engagement policy. - The DSL considers with the commissioner whether community-based early help or a targeted Family Help referral is appropriate, using the home local authority's published threshold document. - A reduced timetable agreed with the family and commissioner, with a review date, is a support plan and is recorded as such; it is not treated as absence.

Records - Attendance for every live session is recorded in The Haven's register. Safeguarding concerns and the actions taken are recorded in TutorCruncher, The Haven's safeguarding record system. Patterns are reviewed weekly at the safeguarding meeting and the review is minuted.

8. Early help and Family Help

The Haven's learners live in many local authority areas, so there is no single referral route. For each learner the DSL uses the published threshold document and referral route for the learner's home authority. The DSL knows the difference between a request for community-based early help, a referral for targeted Family Help, and a referral for a child protection enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, and makes the referral

that the circumstances call for. Where the DSL is unsure, the DSL seeks advice from the home local authority's front door service and records the advice given.

9. Looked-after children and Virtual School Heads

Where a learner is looked after by a local authority, the authority's **Virtual School Head** has a statutory duty to promote that child's educational achievement, including attendance, and KCSIE 2026 highlights the Virtual School Head's role in the attendance of looked-after children. For every looked-after learner the DSL holds the contact details of the Virtual School Head and the social worker, informs both of unexplained absence or non-engagement promptly, and involves the Virtual School Head in any review of the learner's timetable or placement. For previously looked-after children, and for children with a social worker where the Virtual School Head offers advice and information, the DSL makes contact where this would help the learner.

10. Learners who leave The Haven

The Haven does not hold a statutory admission register, so it does not "delete" a learner in the regulatory sense. When a learner's placement ends, whether planned or because the learner has stopped engaging, The Haven:

- confirms the end date in writing with the commissioner and the family;
- asks the commissioner or parent to confirm the learner's onward educational arrangements and records the answer;
- where the onward arrangements are not known, or where the learner is electively home educated and the parent does not confirm continuing education, tells the home local authority so that it can consider whether the child is missing education;
- for a learner with a social worker or a Virtual School Head, tells them;
- transfers the learner's safeguarding file in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy v10.26 and confirms receipt.

The planned process for ending a placement is in Withdrawal from The Haven v10.25.

11. Attendance codes and reporting to commissioners

Commissioning schools record a learner's attendance at The Haven in their own registers. Under *Working together to improve school attendance* (August 2024), attendance at provision arranged by the school is recorded with code B and attendance at provision arranged by a local authority with code K, and the school must be satisfied that the provision is suitable, that safeguarding arrangements are in place and that the provider reports absences. The Haven therefore:

- keeps a session-by-session register for each learner;
- reports absence to the commissioner at the frequency agreed in the placement agreement, and on the same day where the absence is unexplained and contact cannot be made;
- provides an attendance summary for every placement review and on request.

12. Induction and training

The response to children missing education is covered in every member of staff's safeguarding induction and in the annual safeguarding refresher, including the warning signs in section 6, the steps in section 7, the

difference between community-based early help and targeted Family Help, and the role of the Virtual School Head. Staff who work with electively home-educated learners are briefed on the respective responsibilities of parents, the local authority and The Haven.

13. Working with others and information sharing

The Haven shares information with commissioners, local authorities, social workers, Virtual School Heads and other agencies where this is necessary to safeguard a child or to support their education. Sharing follows the Data Protection (UK GDPR), Confidentiality and Privacy Policy and the information-sharing principles in *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026*: fears about sharing information must not stand in the way of keeping a child safe. Where a family moves between local authority areas, The Haven tells both the authority the family is leaving and the one it is moving to, where these are known.

14. Monitoring and review

The Head and the DSL review the operation of this policy each term through the safeguarding meeting record, and report annually to the Proprietor on the number of learners reported as missing or at risk of missing education, the time taken to report, and any lessons learned. The policy is reviewed annually, each September when *Keeping Children Safe in Education* is reissued, and whenever the statutory guidance on children missing education or attendance changes.

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