

# Children Missing from Education Policy

March 2023

## Introduction

This policy should be read in conjunction with '[Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: Promoting and Managing School Attendance](#)' originally published in 2007, and updated in June 2019.

This policy and The Scottish Government's 'Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: Promoting and Managing School Attendance' provide advice on good practice and establish requirements regarding recording pupil attendance and absence.

Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school until their child reaches school leaving age ([Section 30 Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980](#)) and robust home and school partnerships with clear school processes ensure that good attendance is promoted.

The Council will monitor pupil attendance for the purposes of ensuring the provision of an appropriate education and to maximise child safety.

The steps to be taken by the Council in the event of any failure to attend school without good reason are set out below.

This policy is also interrelated with our attendance policy, The Highland Council Child Protection Strategy, Getting it Right for Every Child, and CSE The Signs – Child Sexual Exploitation. \*All senior managers should be annually trained in attendance management/Children Missing in Education processes and procedures, Child Protection and PREVENT.

\*Senior managers in education includes all senior education officers, such as Depute Head Teacher and Head Teacher, Education Improvement Team and Managers, Area Managers and other senior education officers.

## **CHILDREN MISSING AND ‘CHILDREN MISSING FROM EDUCATION’**

All children and young people who go missing are vulnerable. Children are recognised in law as a vulnerable group in our society who require additional protection from the risks posed to them by different forms of harm, therefore a child-specific response is necessary.

This is recognised by the type of action taken in a missing child incident by local services, which are generally treated as high-risk events. Therefore, if there is any suspicion that the child is genuinely missing or subject of a possible criminal offence, [Highland Child Protection Procedures](#) should be followed, and Police and Social Work services must be contacted.

Children have a right to education and local authorities have a duty to provide education for all children in their area, and to plan and provide support for every child if necessary. It is essential that education authorities and other services must make every effort to maintain contact with children and families, especially those who are vulnerable due to concerns about their wellbeing, and to trace them when they disappear from view.

Action must be taken at school and education authority level to locate children and families who appear to be missing and to try to re-engage them with any appropriate services. These actions must be proportionate to the need / issue and in line with the guidance in the Highland Practice Model.

The wellbeing of a child failing to attend school will be at risk, the non-attendance may often be a sign of other issues in a child’s life.

Home Education procedures are not relevant to this policy.

## **ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCE MANAGEMENT**

Attendance at school by children and young people is essential in order that they receive the education to which they are entitled.

The health, safety and wellbeing of children and young people at school, and before and after school, must be protected and promoted to enable them to benefit from the educational opportunities available.

Parents/carers, schools and the Council all have a part to play in maximising attendance and health, safety and wellbeing.

Please note, children’s attendance in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings is not statutory.

## **LEAVERS**

If a child or young person is leaving the establishment the school must make a record of confirmation in SEEMiS is of received destination. Do not mark the child or young person as a leaver until you have confirmed enrolment by the receiving authority and they have acknowledged receiving the PPR.

See the Pupil Manual on the MiS Portal for further information.

## **PASTORAL SUPPORT**

All staff in school have a role to play in promoting good attendance and helping to reduce absence from school. Staff with a pastoral care responsibility should:

- Be aware of early signs or concerns which may cause absence, to allow support plans to be drawn up as appropriate.
- Ensure absence does not become a pattern or habit following a specific issue.
- Develop positive and trusting relationships with pupils and parents to prevent difficulties arising and to ensure difficulties are discussed and resolved when they do take place.
- Respond quickly to absence, to ensure children and young people are safe and well.
- Follow up on absence, to enable the school and partners can make an effective response.
- Support reintegration into learning on returning from absence.

## **PARENT / CARER RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIONS**

Parents/carers will work in partnership with the school and can be made aware of school attendance management processes and procedures and relationships and behaviour policy prior to formal enrolment, which include:

- Parents and carers will be responsible for the safety and wellbeing of their children whilst they are not in school.
- Parents and carers will be responsible for providing the school with suitable emergency contact numbers and ensure that these numbers are kept up to date (at least termly).
- Parents and carers work in partnership with the school to promote and support positive relationships, attendance, learning and achievement.

In discharging these responsibilities, parents and carers agree to the following actions as specified in the school handbook:

- To inform the establishment of any prearranged absence, e.g. attendance at a hospital appointment or other unavoidable event, prior to the absence taking place.

- To inform the establishment of their child's absence by 9:15am on the morning of the first day of absence.
  - For afternoon sessions, parents/carers must inform the establishment no later than half an hour into the session.
- To respond promptly to contacts from the school. To provide written confirmation of absence as soon as possible.

Parents/carers will note that where contact cannot be established in relation to an unexplained absence, schools may inform other relevant services, e.g. Social Work and/or Police.

## **SCHOOL AND EARLY LEARNING & CHILDCARE RESPONSIBILITIES**

Every educational establishment is required to have procedures in place which are clear and communicated to all staff, parents and pupils.

Establishments require to have a clear statement in their handbook of parents' responsibility to inform the school if their child is absent, and a statement of the procedures the school/ELC setting have in place to contact them.

The absence procedures apply to the following groups of children:

**1. *Children who are reported to have moved school but have not been registered at a new school***

“Children Missing” are children who have enrolled or who are expected to appear at a school or Early Learning and Childcare setting but do not arrive, and there has been no immediate explanation or advance warning provided by parents/carers.

**2. *Children whose absence is unexplained***

All establishments should identify a person who will collate a list of children who are absent immediately after registration, giving the name of the child/young person and reason if known.

An adequate number of staff for the size of the establishment should be identified as substitutes in case of absence through illness or other work commitments. These individuals will have responsibility to make contact with parents/carers or emergency contacts in case of unexplained absence on the first day of absence. (See [Appendix 1: Timeline / Attendance Flowchart](#)).

A record must be kept of these actions.

- If a letter or note from the parent/carer has been sent to the school, this should be noted
- Where a verbal explanation has been given by another responsible adult, this should be noted.
- If any anecdotal information is passed to a member of staff by an adult or a child, this should be noted.

It is vital that a log of action outcomes is kept on such absences in each establishment.

### ***3. Persistent non-arrivers and non-attenders***

Where children are regularly absent for a variety of reasons, schools should assess and seek to address the issues involved. This is likely to include an individual plan and coordinated activity.

Where these issues involve aspects relating to the family or community, it may be appropriate to utilise support staff from other agencies, through the normal local liaison arrangements.

If these issues are sustained over a period of time, or there are further concerns that may require broader assessments or a wider range of services, it may be necessary to hold a formal Liaison meeting which would be arranged via the Practice Lead (Schools) as per the [Highland Practice Model Guidance](#).

If there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child these should always be raised promptly with Health & Social Care colleagues.

## **Children Missing Education Process**

### **DAY 1: First day of unexplained absence of pupil**

The school will make contact by telephone, text, or email to parents, carers or emergency contacts informing them that the child is absent and requesting a reason for the absence.

If no contact can be made with the parent/carers or emergency contacts on the first day of absence, the appropriate action will be taken by the school depending on the specific situation and context. If the family is known to other agencies because of possible concerns about his/her wellbeing, then contact will be made with these agencies.

## **DAY 2: Second day of unexplained absence of pupil**

The school will make further attempts to contact a carer or family member by telephone, text or email.

If no contact can be made on the second day of absence, the appropriate action will be taken by the school depending on the specific situation and context.

## **DAY 3: Third day of unexplained absence of pupil**

Home visits should be carried out where it is practicable and safe to do so. The individual school context will be assessed by the school leader, and if it is viewed that a home visit is not possible then the education officer or area manager will be notified.

If a member of school staff is making a home visit, the [Home Visit Protocol](#) should be followed.

If the school is unable to arrange a home visit, the education officer/area manager should liaise with the school to ensure services are involved and the next level of processes are followed.

See [Appendix 1: Timeline / Attendance Flowchart](#) for further information and [Appendix 2: School CME Process](#)

## **For pupils who may be at risk**

If it is assessed that a child is at risk of immediate harm, Police Scotland should be notified immediately.

This must be based on a risk assessment using professional judgement and on the school's knowledge of family and other circumstances.

Where Health & Social Care Services are involved with the family, the appropriate team should be informed of any unexplained absence (please see [Appendix 1: Timeline / Attendance Flowchart](#))

A vulnerable child or young person\*:

- is on the child protection register (advise allocated Social Worker/Duty Worker within the appropriate team immediately)
- is the subject of a child protection investigation
- is a Looked After Child or Accommodated Child. Advise allocated Social Worker/Duty Worker within the appropriate team immediately

- has been, or is in the process of being, referred to the Children's Panel
- has significant additional support needs
- has a history of substance use personally and/or within the family
- has cultural issues
- is at risk of FGM or forced marriage (do not contact the family)
- is at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (do not contact the family). Discuss with Family Teams Practice Lead)
- is at the centre of known Court proceedings
- where they and/or their parents are experiencing poor physical or mental health
- experiencing adversities including domestic abuse and bereavement
- requiring support when they are involved in making transitions at critical stages in their lives.

\*Examples are provided in the training materials

## **CME in ELC Settings**

The Attendance Process described above also applies to ELC settings but with the following adaptation:

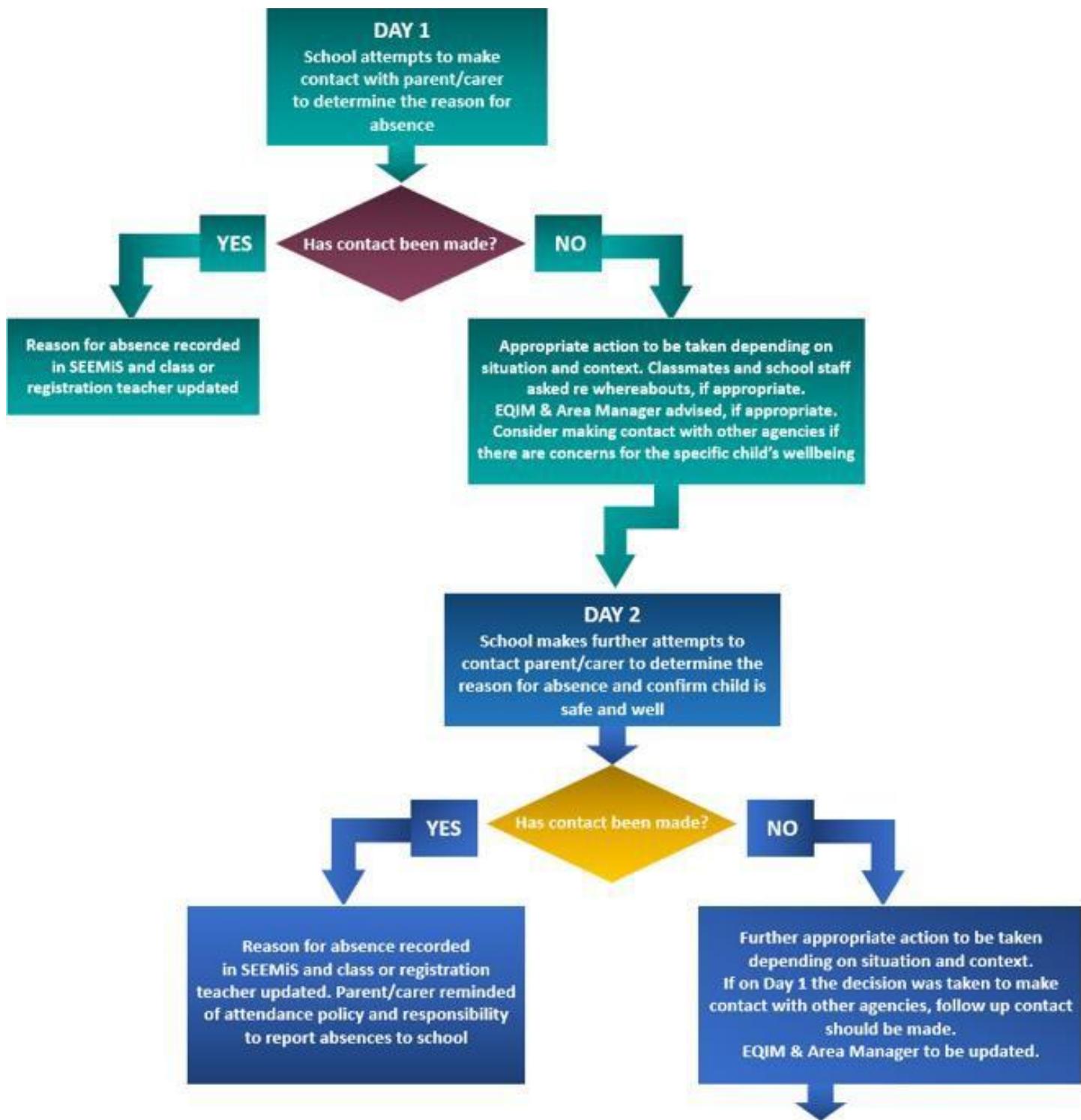
**DAY 1:** If a child is absent on the day they normally attend, parent/carer should contact the ELC setting within an hour of normal start time.

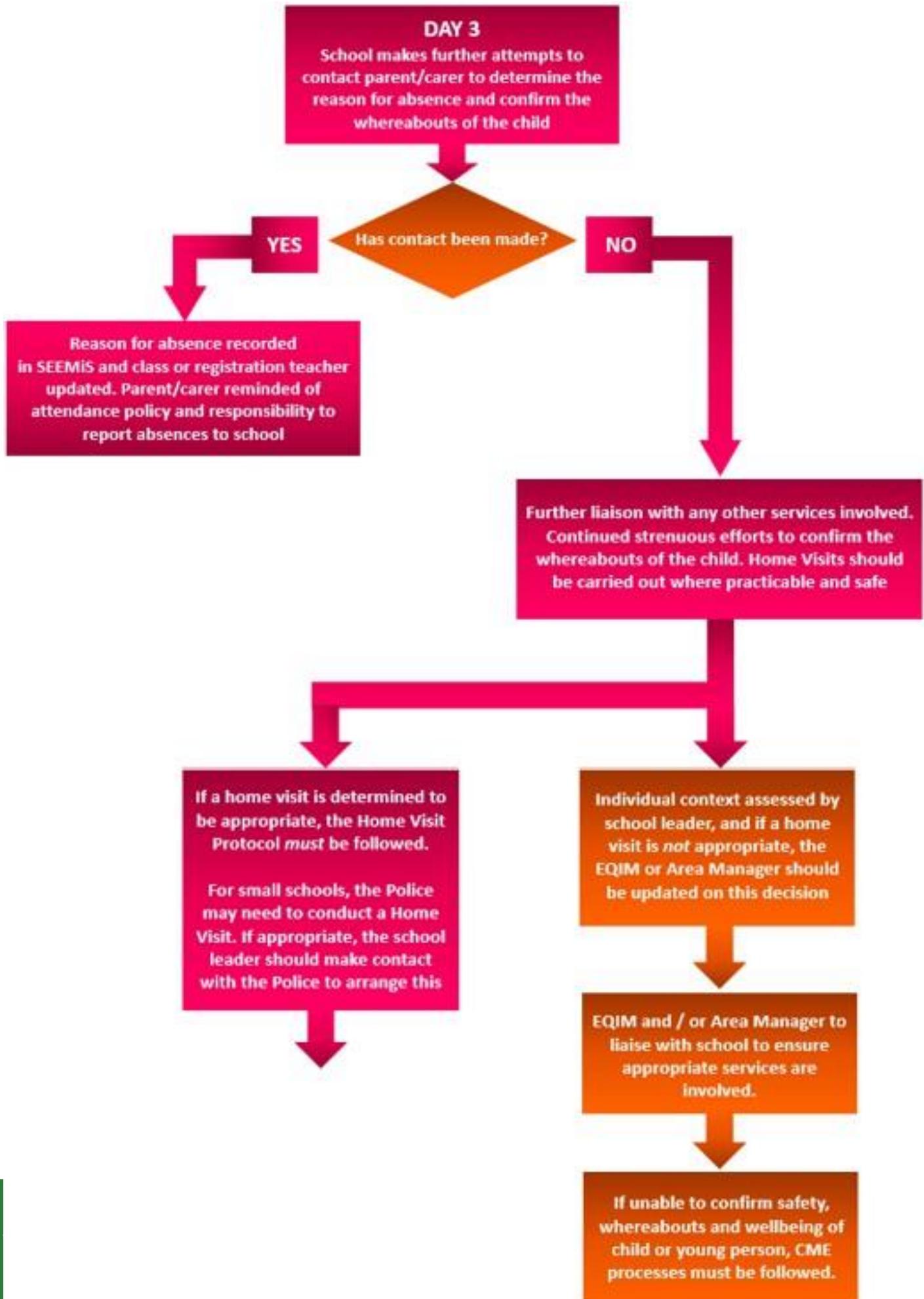
**DAY 2/3:** Following calendar day/s of first day of absence, not next day/s child attending setting.

Where a child attends an ELC Partner Centre setting or Childminder, the Health Visitor can be contacted for support around home visits.

Feedback should be given to the establishment on the outcome of any contact with parents/carers by services outwith the school.

## APPENDIX 1: Timeline / Attendance Flowchart





## APPENDIX 2: Schools' CME Process

The Children Missing from Education (CME) process detailed below outlines the procedure that schools should follow\*. The (CME) process is initiated under the following conditions:

- On the third day where a pupil has been absent from school and no contact has been made with the child's guardian
- On the third day where a pupil has been absent from school, and while contact *has* been made with the child's guardian, but there are still concerns
- On the first day of absence if the child is vulnerable

*\*Professional judgement should be used on a **case by case basis** to determine the best course of action.*

## SCHOOL

When one or more of the above criteria have been reached, schools should undertake the following:

1. Head Teacher, Depute Head Teacher or other appropriate school management delegate begins completion of the [online CME Form](#)
2. The school must carry out all the checks detailed on the checklist section of the form (where appropriate)
3. If the school has carried out all appropriate checks and the pupil has still not returned to education, then the CME form should be submitted.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Once the CME form has been submitted by the school, the following actions will be taken:

1. A CME record is automatically generated on SharePoint and the case is assigned to the appropriate area team based on the information provided in the CME online form
2. An email is automatically generated and sent to the appropriate area mailbox to notify a CME case has been submitted.

The mailbox addresses are:

- Mid – [childenquiries.mid@highland.gov.uk](mailto:childenquiries.mid@highland.gov.uk)
- North – [childenquiries.north@highland.gov.uk](mailto:childenquiries.north@highland.gov.uk)
- South – [childenquiries.south@highland.gov.uk](mailto:childenquiries.south@highland.gov.uk)
- West – [childenquiries.west@highland.gov.uk](mailto:childenquiries.west@highland.gov.uk)

3. The EQIM and/or Area Manager will receive the automated email notifying of a new CME case in their area
4. The EQIM and/or Area Manager will liaise with the school regarding the missing child(ren)
5. The EQIM and/or Area Manager will request a **local SEEMiS Search** to ascertain if the pupil in question has moved to another school in Highland. A search can be requested by emailing [Search.Request@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Search.Request@highland.gov.uk) and the following steps are taken;
  - The SEEMiS Systems Support Officers search SEEMiS for the appropriate data and record the request on the CME Search Request Register in SharePoint
  - The SEEMiS Systems Support team will pass the result to the requestor
6. The EQIM and/or Area Manager will liaise with local services to locate the child(ren). This will include (this list is not exhaustive);
  - Contact with the Head Teacher
  - Contact with the Area Children's Services Manager
  - Contact with the local Police
  - Contact with the Practice Lead (Care & Protection)

7. If the EQIM or Area Manager suspect that the pupil has moved to another school in Scotland, they can ask the SEEMiS Systems Support team to request a **Scotland-wide search** is carried out through SEEMiS. SEEMiS can identify if the missing child has enrolled at another publicly funded school in Scotland and will pass these details back to the person who initiated the search
8. If a **national search** is required, the EQIM / Area Manager will request this through the SEEMiS Systems Support team. Further information on this process can be found on the Process Register at:  
<https://highlandcouncil1.sharepoint.com/sites/CME/SitePages/Process-Register.aspx>
9. Children Missing from Education involves liaison with Police Scotland to trace individuals who may have left for the **EU**. There are some changes to the way in which information is shared in light of Brexit, however the process remains the same for all the notifications to Europol for missing people, international arrest warrants and Euro wide look out requests. Please note that in situations where a foreign translation is required, Google Translate is considered an acceptable translation tool.
10. If children or young people are missing outwith the UK or EU, Police Scotland should be notified, and an international search may be considered.
11. EQIM and/or Area Manager will update the open cases on SharePoint with the latest information as each case progresses. The EQIM and/or Area Manager will monitor these weekly, liaising with their area teams as appropriate.
12. The EQIM and/or Area Manager is responsible for closure of the CME case on SharePoint when the child or young person has returned to education.
13. Area Managers will hold a weekly meeting as an area management team to monitor cases.

In the event that the child(ren) cannot be located, the case will be escalated by the Area Manager to the Directorate for a standing agenda item of unresolved CME cases. The Directorate will be the final decision on unresolved CME cases.

The Directorate includes the Executive Chief Officer for Education and Learning, the Executive Chief Officer for Health & Social Care and the Highland Council's solicitor.

14. Policy amendments will be reviewed every six months by the strategic lead for Safeguarding in Education and the Child Protection Officer for Education.