



# Uncollected Children Protocol

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## Contents

Introduction	3
Protocol	3
Procedures	3
Collection	3
Uncollected children	4
After School Activities/Care	4
Children with SEN who are Transported from School to Home	5
Responsibilities of Parent/Carers	5
Pupils Whose Parent/Carer Refuses to Comply with a School Exclusion	5
Action by the school by the Safeguarding Lead and Senior Leadership Team	6
Escalation	6

## Introduction

This protocol should be used whenever a child, who ordinarily does not make their own way home, has not been collected from school at the end of the day or from after school clubs and activities, and it has not been possible to contact their parents or carers. This policy should also be used when children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), who are transported home from school, cannot be left at home due to the absence of a parent or carer.

The majority of these cases will arise because there has been a misunderstanding between parents and carers about collection or an unexpected difficulty preventing parents and carers from reaching the school. Although these are time consuming for the school and upsetting for the child, they usually result in the child being collected late.

Where children are collected late from school on a regular basis, the school can make a referral to the school's Family Services Team and the matter will be followed up with a face to face meeting with the parent/carers.

There will be occasions when parents and carers fail to collect a child due to an accident, illness or other emergencies which will result in the child not being able to go home at the end of the day. On these occasions, it is important that these procedures are followed so that the child can be looked after in a safe and welcoming environment.

This protocol has been developed in consultation with the Family Services Team and in line with the Local Authority's Safeguarding Procedures.

## Protocol

The Local Authority works to the London Safeguarding Children Board child protection procedures which allow school staff to make alternative arrangements for the child's care. If there are no immediate child protection issues, teachers should:

- Establish the child's understanding of the whereabouts of the parent or responsible person and of the arrangements made;
- If the parent can be located, reunite parent and child and ensure adequate arrangements are in place in future;
- If the parent or responsible person seems likely to return shortly, wait with the child.

If the parent or responsible adult has not arrived within 30 minutes, the school should contact the child's emergency contact person and arrange for the child to go to them. If this is not possible, the relevant Children's and Young People's Services (CYPS) should be contacted by 4.30pm to agree upon a timescale for further actions and ultimate hand-over of the children, as appropriate. In the instance that the child has an allocated social worker, the school will contact them.

## Procedures

### Collection

At the end of each school day children are escorted to the school playgrounds to be dismissed into the care of a known adult by their class teacher/ teaching assistant.

Once a child has been dismissed to his/her carer or parent the responsibility for that child's welfare becomes theirs.

Elm Wood Primary School has an expectation that children in Nursery, Reception, YR1, YR2 will not be sent to or collected from school without a responsible adult.

Elm Wood Primary School has an expectation that children in YR3 & YR4 will not be sent to or collected from school by anyone under the age of 16 years. These children remain the responsibility of their

parents/carers if their child is sent to or collected from school by someone between the age of 16 and 18 years.

Elm Wood Primary School will not release a child into the care of an unrecognised adult without specific written or telephoned permission from a known parent/carer. 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.

When a carer is late collecting a child from school, there is an expectation that the school will be contacted in advance so that necessary arrangements can be made for the care of the child.

### Uncollected children

1. In the event that an authorised adult does not collect a child, the school puts into practice agreed procedures.
2. If a child has not been collected, the school should make every possible attempt to contact the parents, carers or another family member. The child may be able to indicate if there is something out of the ordinary. On some occasions another parent may offer to take a child home with them. Schools should never release a child into the care of another adult who is not a family member or the child's emergency contact person without the consent of the parent or carer, and members of staff should not take children home with them.
3. A member of the Senior Leadership Team or a Designated Safeguarding Lead should be informed immediately of any uncollected child.
4. If no contact has been made and no one has arrived to collect the child, then the duty social worker at the relevant CYPS office should be contacted at 4.30 p.m. Referrals should be made to the child's residing borough. Please refer to the contact details in the Safeguarding Policy.
5. The duty social worker will agree a timetable for further actions, should the child remain uncollected and deemed to have been abandoned.
6. It may be necessary for the child to be taken from the school to a CYPS office. Staff are not to transport children alone. Arrangements should be made to transport the child by taxi or mini cab. Two members of staff will be needed to accommodate transport to the relevant CYPS office.
7. There may be occasions when a school building is locked up whilst staff are waiting for someone to arrive to collect the child. A public building should be sought as a place to wait and the parent/carer should be informed of the arrangements.
8. A child should never be sent to a play centre or after school care/activity if the parents or carers have not arrived. It is the responsibility of the school to try to contact the parent or pass the matter on to a member of Senior Leadership Team or a Designated Safeguarding Lead.
9. The duty social worker will ensure that the school has a contact number for them beyond normal office hours.
10. Once the child is in the care of CYPS, they will take the responsibility for tracing the parents or carers. The duty social worker will make arrangements for the child to be looked after until the parents or carers can be traced. The duty manager will liaise with the Emergency Duty Social Worker or police service as appropriate regarding possible follow-up contact with parents/carers out of office hours.
11. Duty managers will consider the need for follow-up investigations where the failure to collect a child indicates ongoing parenting concerns.

### After School Activities/Care

Where a child, who is normally collected at the end of the club or session, is not collected by a named 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 4.45pm for activities that are scheduled to end at 4.30pm) and the alternative carer is not available, the club/care staff will inform the Extended Services Manager, SLT and/or the Designated Safeguarding Lead, who will contact the relevant local authority. For sessions/care that ends after 5pm, the contact will be the Emergency Duty Social Worker.

## Children with SEN who are Transported from School to Home

Procedures require escorts/drivers to notify the child'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 relevant local authority 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 child.

The driver/escort will then be asked to return the child to the school, unless agreement has been reached in the meantime for the pupil to be taken to the relevant local authority building.

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

## Responsibilities of Parent/Carers

An absent person is: 'A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be'.

Parents of children starting the school are asked to provide specific information which is recorded on our Registration Form. It is the responsibility of parents and carers throughout their child's time at our schools to:

1. Keep the office updated with home address and telephone number
2. Inform the office of any change to mobile numbers
3. Inform the office of any change place of work, address and telephone number (if applicable)
4. Keep up-to-date the Names, addresses, telephone numbers and signatures of adults who are authorised by the parents to collect their child from school, for example a child minder or grandparent and emergency contacts.
5. Provide information about any person who does not have legal access to the child.
6. Provide information about any person who has parental responsibility for the child.

## 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 the exclusion and continues to send the child 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 that 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.

## Action by the school by the Safeguarding Lead and Senior Leadership Team

If parents or carers are persistently late to collect their child, a meeting will be arranged together with a member of the Senior Leadership Team or a Designated Safeguarding Lead. They will:

- Inform parents/carers of the importance of collecting their child/ren on time and of the expectation that they should contact the school as soon as it appears that they may have a problem.
- Offer advice and support to parents and carers who repeatedly arrive late to collect their child/ren before escalating the matter as a safeguarding concern.

It is anticipated that these guidelines will be used infrequently. However, on the occasions when they are necessary, it is anticipated that they will enable a school to deal effectively with an uncollected child in co-operation with the relevant local authority.

## Escalation

School staff will make all efforts to contact parents and carers, such as putting a note through the door of the home address, leaving messages on answer-phones or with relatives and neighbours giving details of where to collect their child.

However, if necessary, social care will be contacted. In these circumstances, a referral will be made in writing to the relevant duty manager explaining the situation so that in the event that parents come forward out of hours, the allocated social worker can take any necessary action to re-unite the child with their parent or carer.

The standard School Safeguarding/Child Protection escalation procedures will apply where disputes arise in respect of individual cases.