



WEALD

**COMMUNITY
PRIMARY SCHOOL
1892**

Missing/Absconding Child Policy

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Safeguarding for lost or missing children

Principles and purpose:

Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play in safeguarding children. Children who go missing are potentially at risk of harm, and a significant number, because of their circumstances, may face the risk of sexual, criminal or economic exploitation.

Children absconding or go missing from care, home and education is a key risk factor in safeguarding children. All school and early year's staff have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn. Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2025 outlines the key safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children as:

- protecting children from maltreatment.
- preventing the impairment of children's health or development;
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the **provision of safe and effective care.**
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

This policy sets out the procedures for maintaining safety and dealing with the unlikely event of a child going missing off school site promptly and efficiently. The guidance aims to be as comprehensive as possible but will inevitably omit some circumstances. If you are in any doubt about the need for reporting an incident, please speak to the Education Safeguarding Officer at the Local Authority as soon as possible.

This policy references processes and strategies when a child goes missing whilst in the care of education and early year's provider settings.

For the purposes of this policy a safeguarding alert is defined as information which indicates a risk to an individual or group of children missing off school site, absconds from the school site or on an offsite external visit whilst in the care of the education provider.

It remains the school/setting's responsibility to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of children whilst in their care.

This policy works alongside other safeguarding policies. These include: safeguarding policy, behaviour policy, whistleblowing procedures, supervision policy, data protection, SEND policy, health and safety and first aid policy.

This policy is not relating to children missing education (CME) or children absent from education (CAE) which can be found in our safeguarding policy or attendance policy.

Definition of children missing/absconding/truanting:

Under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974 and in Common Law, schools and other education settings owe a duty of care towards their pupils. This duty of care

requires that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that pupils are safe and remain within the care of the school at all times throughout the school day and during school led activities. The safety strategies will be dependent on school phases (ages) and vulnerability of specific individuals. Missing child is a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.

Truancy vs absconding

Truancy means **missing school on a regular basis for no good reason**. It is also called 'unauthorised absence'. Truancy is any intentional, unjustified, unauthorised, or illegal absence from compulsory education. It is absence caused by students of their own free will, and usually does not refer to legitimate excused absences, such as ones related to medical conditions.

Abscond is **to go away suddenly and secretly in order to escape from somewhere**. Pupils who abscond will do so as a result of a specific incident which may have taken place at school, at home or on the way to school.

Every effort is made to ensure the safety of each pupil whilst they are in the school's care, be it on or off site. Every member of staff has equal responsibility in ensuring the safety of our children and knowing where they are. It is the responsibility of parents and carers alike to ensure they provide correct and updated information on a timely basis and know the procedures for handover of their child at the beginning and end of the school day. Please see Supervision Policy.

This policy sets out our procedures for dealing with the unlikely event of a child going missing.

Procedures aimed at reducing risk of a missing pupil:

Start of the day

At the start of the day, children must NOT be dropped off until a member of staff is present and until the gate has been opened.

Once the pupil is inside the Green Gate, the school is responsible for the child's welfare. If a child is late they must be signed in at the office by a parent or guardian.

Break time and lunch time supervision

Staff supervise the playgrounds at all times. No child is permitted to leave the school campus to collect balls etc, and gates must be kept locked at all times. Supervision is in place for crossing the lane onto the MUGA and field area.

End of the day

At the end of the day, parents enter the playground to pick up their child unless permission has been gained by parents/carers for pupils from years 4-6 to walk out onto the green or home. Children are supervised until the child's guardian is identified and handed over. They may only go home with an alternative adult if the school has been notified in writing of this.

Site security

All reasonable procedures should be taken to ensure the site is secure by locking gates after drop off, and ensuring boundary fences are secure. All adults who come on site should enter through the office. During class time all children are supervised by their own teachers who are responsible for their safety.

Educational visits

Staff must adhere to the Educational Visits policy at all times and act upon the guidance with regard to ratios. A mobile phone should be given to the activity leader and the school contacted in the first instance. The activity leader should carry a list of photographs for such emergencies.

Residential visits

Risk assessments and pre visit information should be held by the activity leader. The activity leader must be in direct contact with a designated member of the leadership team who will also have access to emergency procedures in the event of anyone going missing.

Roles and responsibilities

Children missing whilst in care of the school:

Parents and Carers

Parents and carers of pupils are responsible for supporting the work of the school and encouraging their children to keep to all school procedures and policies. Once school has informed the parents that their child has absconded, parents and carers are responsible for actively supporting the school with subsequent procedures and actions. This could include coming into school to help secure the safety of their child as well as meeting with a Senior Leader in order to agree subsequent actions

In the unlikely event of a child going missing, staff should do the following actions listed below. It should be noted that a missing child could potentially be at risk of abuse or neglect. If a child goes missing whilst in your care you should consider the following action:

- Staff will remain calm at all times
- The activity leader will do a thorough headcount
- The activity leader will inform the Head teacher and deploy staff appropriately in order to have maximum effect in finding the lost child (via the School Office if incident occurs on a visit).
- If a child goes missing on a visit off site, where possible, two adults will remain with the children while other staff and adults carry out a search.
- The immediate area will be searched first and then surrounding areas.
- If the child has not been found within **10 minutes**, the activity leader will inform the Police and/or the security person at the venue. The Police must be given a photo of the child which the activity leader will be holding as a matter of course when on an educational visit.

- The parent/carer will then be informed immediately, unless there are reasons connected with the child's welfare which indicate that this should not be done.
- The senior member of staff will continue to take instructions from the Police while other staff continue to search. The Head teacher will be kept informed at all times.
- Once the child has been found, a full report will be written by the activity leader and signed by all other staff present. This will then be submitted to the Head teacher who will be responsible for reviewing any relevant policies, procedures and safety issues that can be revised in order to prevent similar incidents occurring again.
- The report will form the basis of the investigation which will be carried out by the Head teacher and logged as an incident.
- Should it be found that there was a case of gross ill-discipline on the part of the child, the Head teacher must include the parents in the investigation. The school reserves the right to exclude a child on such grounds.

All staff must keep in mind and act upon at all times, the fact that the child's welfare is paramount.

- Alerting the relevant Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and the head teacher.
- Keeping calm and undertaking a thorough search of the setting and ensuring all other children are supervised by other appropriate staff.
- Ensure all other exits are closed to ensure no further breach of security.
- Checking the register to ensure no other child is missing.
- Check the pupil records of the missing child for any relevant details that might have a bearing on the situation (e.g. any court orders in place against either parent, the medical condition of the child or learning needs of the child etc).
- Staff should check they have not signed out or been taken for an appointment.
- Check with the parents/carers, children's social care and Virtual School if child on Child Protection Plans (CPP) or Children Looked After (CLA) if they have arrived at home. If not, then advise them of steps you are taking.
- Simultaneously contact the Police whilst reviewing an ongoing assessment of the situation. After an initial search has taken place of the school (ideally within 10 minutes or immediately if child had additional vulnerabilities). For early years and primary and special needs provision contact with the police should happen immediately.

Additional vulnerabilities may include any of the following:

- o Special Education needs and disabilities (SEND)
- o Learning disabilities
- o Association with gangs or anti-social behaviour
- o Risk of any form of exploitation to child sexual exploitation (CSE), radicalisation, modern day slavery
- o A young carer
- o Frequently going missing from home or care
- o Misusing drugs and alcohol
- o Returned to family home after being in care

- o Privately fostered children
- o Parental toxic trio prevalent in family home
- The School would cooperate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by Children’s Social Care. The School governing body should also be notified.
- If the child is not located within a short space of time the school should inform:
 - o The Chairman of Governors
 - o The School’s insurers
 - o If the child is injured, a report should be made under RIDDOR to the HSE.
- If child in an Early Years’ setting goes missing, then Ofsted must be notified within 24 hours of child missing even if child is found within that period.
- Completing accurate records with a clear chronology of times the various interventions took place and who was involved

Child goes missing during an external visit:

- During a trip there should be sufficient adults (teachers/TAs/parent volunteers) to each have a small group to look after, thus minimizing the possibility of a child becoming lost and/or missing. A risk assessment should have been carried out prior to the trip so that the potential risks/escape routes are known.
- Where possible children should be dressed in their uniform so are easily identifiable
- Headcounts should be carried out on a very regular basis.
- You should alert the staff where you are on the trip and if necessary, alert the police. Keep the other children safe and with responsible adults. Do not leave remaining children unaccompanied whilst you chase a child running away.
- Alert the relevant DSL and the head teacher
- Notify the parents/carer and social care if child on CPP or CLA
- The DSL would inform the Education Safeguarding Officer
- The School would cooperate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by Social Care.
- If the child was not quickly found the School would also inform:
 - o The Chairman of Governors
 - o The School’s insurers
 - o If the child is injured, a report would be made under RIDDOR to the HSE.
- If child in an Early Years setting goes missing then Ofsted must be notified within 24 hours of child missing even if child is found within that period.
- Completing accurate records with a clear chronology of times the various interventions took place.

Action after the child is found:

Pupils who return to school after absconding

For those pupils who return to school either by their own choice, with parental support or following intervention by a member of staff, thought should be given to their welfare. They are

likely to be in need of support, understanding and perhaps some time apart from their peers and a 'return to school' meeting should be set up to discuss this support.

Staff members should follow these steps once the child has been found:

- Talk to child calmly and offer reassurance so they feel supported
- Notify the relevant person - DSL and Head teacher
- Advise other staff who may be part of the search the child has been found
- Notify the police and parents and/or social care if they are known to them.
- Speak to the other children to ensure they understand why they should not leave the premises/separate from a group on an outing
- Brief all staff members of incident and updates on child missing policy
- A full investigation must be undertaken by the head teacher, and should include written statements by all concerned, if appropriate involving other agencies such as Safeguarding Education, and police.
- The report should be detailed covering: time, place, numbers of staff and children, when the child/young person was last seen, what appears to have happened, (the purpose of the outing), the length of time that the child/young person was missing and how s/he appears to have gone missing, lessons for the future. If appropriate, procedures would be adjusted. This should be shared with the Education Safeguarding Officer.
- If the school has concerns about children's safety or welfare, they must notify agencies with statutory responsibilities without delay. This means the local children's social care services and, in emergencies, the police.
- Police will undertake a safe and well check with the young person to ensure they are well. Please details under Police responsibilities for further information.
- Youth Services will also complete a return home interview if a child is missing and aged 11 years and older.

Action if child is not found:

- If the incident warrants a police investigation, all staff should co-operate fully. In this case, the police will handle all aspects of the investigation, including interviewing staff. Children's Social Care may be involved if it seems likely that there is a child protection issue to address.
- The Headteacher together with the chairperson or representative from the governing body will speak with the parent(s).
- The chair will carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff in the room or who were on the outing.
- The key person/staff member writes an incident report detailing:
 - The date and time of the report.
 - What staff/children were in the group/outing and the name of the staff designated responsible for the missing child.
 - Any previous incidents or any triggers.
 - When the child was last seen in the group/outing?
 - What had taken place in the group or outing since the child went missing.
 - The time that it is estimated that the child went missing.

- A conclusion is drawn as to how the incident happened.
- Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
- Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press without taking advice. Any media queries should be referred to the Head teacher.
- The incident is reported under RIDDOR arrangements (see the Reporting of Accidents and Incidents policy); the local authority Health and Safety Officer may want to investigate and will decide if there is a case for prosecution.
- In the event of disciplinary action needing to be taken Ofsted should be informed accordingly.

Police involvement

The police will prioritise all incidents of missing children as medium or high risk.

The police definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' are:

Missing	Absent
Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.	A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be (and there is no apparent risk).

It is important to note that those reporting a child missing to the police, should not make the judgement themselves as to whether a child is missing or absent – this decision will be made by the police on the basis of the information provided.

Safe and Well Checks

Safe and well checks are carried out by the police as soon as possible after the child has returned. Their purpose is to check for any indications that the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

Where a child goes missing, Social Services are commissioned to undertake a return home interview within 72 hours as it may not be practicable for the police to see them every time they return. In these cases, a reasonable decision should be taken in agreement between the police and the child's parent or carer with regard to the frequency of such checks bearing in mind the established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, maltreatment or abuse at home, bullying or sexual exploitation.

Local authority involvement

The local authority (LA) has a duty to ensure all children are safe in educational settings. Our aim is primarily to disseminate best practice and assist you in learning from local lessons to prevent any repeat incidents in the future.

On occasions we are required to investigate and monitor local incidents on behalf of Ofsted, the DfE and other referring bodies and feedback the outcome as the appropriate local authority.

Age and vulnerability factor also are considered as part of the LA's intervention. Different phases will determine if the child/ young person has the understanding and capacity to keep safe without adult supervision, their resilience levels and other factors such as special educational needs and/or other vulnerable children.

The local authority will be involved for the following reasons:

1. To establish the facts i.e. what happened, to whom, when, where, how and why (all pertaining to how the child left the school premises undetected).
2. To look at what improvements have been made as a result of the incident.
3. To quality assure that the school improvements made are robust and will minimise or eliminate future risk.
4. To share best practice anonymously locally to prevent repeat incidents in other settings.
5. To ensure we meet our duty of care arrangements and keep children safe in our area.

Children Missing Education:

'Missing' children can be vulnerable; it is essential that all services work together to identify and re-engage children not engaging in education long term and transition back into appropriate education provision as quickly as possible. It is important to establish the reasons for the child missing and being absent from education at the earliest possible stage. If a child is missing from education, then the relevant processes need to be followed.

Further national guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education>

If a child who is in care goes missing these processes must also be followed:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

Children missing from Care/home:

Based on the 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' (DfE 2014) the definitions which should be used when working with children, young people and their families. Children missing from care: a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be and their whereabouts is not known.

Further guidance can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>.