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Missing Pupils Policy

Scope and publication

This policy applies to staff (including volunteers), pupils and parents/carers. This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Looked After Children (LAC)
- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Attendance and Punctuality
- Registration of Pupils
- Staff Handbook
- Anthem Incident Matrix, reporting form and incident form

The Headteacher and the Deputy Headteacher have a wide discretion in relation to the procedures in this policy. This policy is a mandatory requirement of Keeping Children Safe in Education (Department for Education (DfE), 2021 and Working together to Safeguard Children (2018, updated 2020).

This policy is provided to all staff in the Staff Handbook. Parents/carers may request a hard copy from the school or view the policy on the school's website. This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.

Aims

Through the operation of this policy we aim to:

- protect the health and safety of pupils at the school
- ensure that school staff know how to respond if a pupil goes missing.

Responsibilities

The Trustees delegate appropriate responsibilities for the day-to-day management of the school to the Headteacher.

In practice, all members of staff, including agency staff, sports coaches and volunteers, contribute to the safety of pupils at the school by providing appropriate supervision in accordance with the directions of the Headteacher and Senior Management Team. Schools are under a general duty to supervise pupils to the standard of a prudent or careful parent. Any member of staff who notices a pupil is missing or sees a pupil in a place where the pupil should not be has a duty to inform the relevant class teacher or senior member of staff without delay.

Definitions

A missing child is a serious safeguarding matter, they could potentially be at risk of abuse or neglect.

For the purpose of this policy:

- the term ‘missing/lost child’ is defined as a child who is not present without either authorisation or explanation. When a staff member identifies a child as missing from their expected location, immediate action is required as outlined in the procedures below
- the term pupil refers to a child, pupil or student of the respective school
- the term ‘appropriate administrative support staff’ refers to office, reception, attendance, student services, welfare
- DSL refers to the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- LADO refers to the Local Authority Designated Officer

Some examples of when staff become aware that a pupil is missing:

- the teacher not being able to mark the pupil present, as they are absent from the lesson, but are known to be in school
- a pupil informing a teacher or member of staff that another pupil has been seen in school, e.g. attended the last lesson, but is not in the current lesson or has left the school site
- correspondence received from attendance to check if a pupil is in lesson
- pupil number checks on trips

This guidance does not account for children who are not attending school, please see the attendance and/or child missing from education (CME) policies for information on this.

Registration of pupils

All pupils are registered at the beginning of the school day for each lesson and again after lunch. A list of absentees is held on SIMS (or equivalent) and can be viewed by the attendance officer and other staff who have access.

Any pupils who leave the school at any stage of the day, should have written permission (provided from home countersigned by relevant staff or provided from a member of staff for a valid reason in conjunction with home) authorised by a senior member of staff. Teachers and other members of staff should not give a pupil permission to leave school, without seeking authorisation. No pupil should be allowed to leave site unless their parent/carer gives permission. Where a parent/carer does not give permission, a pupil must stay in school, until the end of the school day, or up until the time the parent/carer is expecting them to leave the building or trip location.

Procedure for pupil missing during the day

Responsible adult

Anyone who spots that a pupil is missing must report this immediately to the appropriate administrative support team who will make contact with the appropriate member of staff to act as the responsible adult for the situation: this could be a member of the on-call, pastoral, senior leadership or child protection/safeguarding teams.

The responsible adult will organise and coordinate an immediate search of the area (whether inside, outside or both).

If the pupil **is found** the adult needs to:

- inform all other staff involved
- support the pupil in situ if they refuse to return to lesson, a safe place or school
- ensure that the pupil is given all possible support, including contacting parents/carers where the pupil refuses to go back to lessons or pastoral support
- follow up with an incident report.

If the pupil **is not found** the adult will:

- inform the DSL/member of SLT that the pupil is still missing
- continue the search, widening the parameters to include outside of school (See **Appendix 1: Search protocol**)
- maintain contact with school at all times via mobile phone.

Administrative support staff (office, reception, attendance, student services, welfare)

The appropriate administrative support staff will:

- check registers, attendance logs, signing in/out books to ensure the pupil is not absent for a medical appointment/music exam/external activity
- find an up-to-date photo of the pupil
- find the home address and parental contact details
- manage any communications that come their way.

DSL/member of SLT

The DSL/member of SLT will:

- contact the parents/carers immediately, encouraging them to be at home should the pupil head there
- advise parents/carers to contact the police should the pupil not be located after their initial enquiries or within the anticipated time of them expected home – if the school has any concerns that the parents/carers would not make this call then they should make direct contact with the police
- in primary settings, it may be appropriate to contact the police as soon as it is concluded that the pupil is no longer in school (for example - 10 minutes of noting the pupil was absent; see **Appendix 2: Information to be provided to the police**) ensuring they have all the necessary information
- speak with their school safety police officer, who will assist with searches and making enquiries
- maintain contact with the searching staff and oversee the search from a central place (**Appendix 1: Search protocol**)
- if the pupil is found by a member of staff, contact everyone who has been informed, e.g. the police, parents/carers
- be available to the parents/carers should they make subsequent contact.

Headteacher

The Headteacher/their deputy will:

- be aware of proceedings at all times
- make contact with the school's Education Director should the situation escalate and require police assistance; if unavailable, then another Education Director or the CEO must be contacted.
- inform the Education Director as soon as possible after the event regardless of the situation by telephone or email

- follow the Anthem Incident Matrix (Category 1) in terms of action and reporting, including conducting a risk assessment post incident to avoid repeats where possible.

Trust

The Anthem Team will manage the incident should the pupil not be found and/or there is reputational risk/or damage for the school and the Trust.

Procedure for pupils missing during or following a journey/school trip

If a pupil is missing from a journey or has not arrived at the school following a journey, the member of staff in charge will:

- if possible, attempt to contact the pupil
- contact the school to see if they have any information and to inform the DSL.

The school will:

- contact the parent/carer for further information
- check whether there were any delays or changes to the journey
- check with other pupils, and then home to ask them if they have any knowledge of the missing pupil's whereabouts
- contact the venue or the people that the pupil had visited, if applicable
- contact the police if the child has not been found despite the above efforts.

Procedure for pupils missing during a school visit

The member of staff in charge will:

- check with all other staff that the pupil is not in their group
- alert venue staff/travel staff of a missing pupil and ascertain if they have knowledge of their whereabouts i.e. First Aid, Missing person's station
- search the immediate vicinity
- contact the school who will get in contact with the parents/carers
- the school and DSL will agree who should contact the police.

Actions to follow once a child has been found

- Reassure the pupil, showing care for their safety.
- If the pupil refuses to comply or return to school inform the school immediately, who will contact parents/carers; unless you have been having direct contact with the parents/carers yourself, in the which case you can inform them.
- Primary school pupils should not be left alone if they are outside of school and are refusing to return. Positive handling should only be used to safeguard the pupil and prevent them from harming themselves or others. Following the pupil at a safe distance is reasonable, speaking calmly, providing reassurance and clear directions.
- For secondary school pupils, if they are outside of school and are refusing to return, once parents/carers have been informed and gives permission for the pupil to make their way home, staff should return to school. **There should be insistence that the pupil or their parent/carer informs school of their safe arrival home.**

- Following the pupil at a safe distance is reasonable whilst trying to engage with them, speaking calmly, providing reassurance and clear directions. Positive handling should only be used to safeguard the pupil and prevent them from harming themselves or others.
- If necessary, speak to the other pupils to ensure they understand why they should not leave the premises/separate from a group on an outing.
- Parents/carers should be informed to discuss events and give an account of the incident (having discussed this beforehand with the LADO if necessary).
- A member of SLT will be allocated to investigate and report back to the headteacher. The investigation should involve all concerned providing written reports.
- The report should be detailed covering: time, place, numbers of staff and pupils, when the pupil was last seen, what appeared to have happened, the length of time that the pupil was missing and how s/he appeared to have gone missing, as well as lessons for the future.
- Use the information above to create a risk assessment for the pupil sharing information with relevant staff who know what to do if the pupil should go missing.
- Media queries should be referred to the Head, who will take their lead from the Trust (after discussion with the LADO if appropriate).

Missing pupil incident record

The school must keep a full written record of any incident of a missing pupil including:

- the pupil's name
- relevant dates and times (e.g. when it was first noticed that the pupil was missing)
- the action taken to find the pupil
- whether the police or children's social care were involved
- outcome or resolution of the incident
- any reasons given by the pupil for being missing
- an outline of any support to be offered to the pupil if applicable
- any concerns or complaints about the handling of the incident
- a record of the staff involved

A full written record of the incident will be kept on the pupil's file. A report should be added to CPOMS, or alternative online system.

A Risk Assessment will be undertaken of the premises and also of the risk of a further incident for the pupil.

School attendance

The attendance of pupils is closely monitored so that persistent, unusual or unexplained patterns of absence are investigated. The school strongly advocate that parents/carers ring the Reception before 9am to provide an explanation for pupil absence.

The school operate a first response system, that enables office staff to ring parents/carers of pupils who have not arrived at school after the closing of registers, and where no reason has been provided by parents/carers.

School vigilance

Pupils who are planning to or have travelled abroad, particularly to countries prone to extremism or radicalisation, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage may be particularly vulnerable. The school monitors these absences and checks the wellbeing of these pupils.

The school is vigilant to any changes of behaviour and in the case of radicalisation and forced marriage should report this to the Designated Safeguarding Lead to escalate to the local social care team. Any staff members who are suspicious that FGM may have or be about to be undertaken must report this to the police, and then the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (See Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy).

Pupils, particularly teenagers and LAC pupils who are regularly absent or go missing from schools and care homes, are vulnerable to child sexual exploitation / child criminal exploitation (CSE/CCE), therefore the school will monitor and report any concerns to social care.

Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Trust and updated as necessary.

In undertaking the review of procedures, the Headteacher will take into account any incidents in the Missing Pupil Incident Record that indicate that there may be a problem with supervision, pupil support or security at the school and any issues raised by individual members of staff, parents/carers or pupils.

Monitoring

The Education Director will monitor all incidents and provide support, guidance and accountability for the Headteacher to ensure that the risk of incidents is minimised.

Appendix 1: Search protocol

- Carry your mobile phones with you during the search to maximise communication.
- Liaise directly with the DSL/member of SLT in charge when you have any information.
- When following a pupil **do not** chase them – any incident resulting from the apparent ‘chase’ can result in you being liable for any injury or death.
- Follow/watch at a discrete distance – it does not matter if they know you are following.
- Deescalate the situation, rather than antagonise by what you say, at this point safety is the priority.
- Ensure that any unrelated phone calls are ignored so that you may be contactable by DSL/member of SLT.
- Where possible search in pairs for safety and safeguarding.
- Track the pupil’s route home if applicable, e.g. search local parks or shops en route if applicable.
- If the parents/carers are abroad, there may need to be a delay in contacting them.
- All decisions on contacting parents/carers should be made by the Headteacher/Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- A decision will be taken in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures as to whether the school should also contact children's social care in line with local procedures.

Appendix 2: Information to be provided to the police

When the school contacts the police, the following information should be provided:

- the pupil's name
- the pupil's age
- an up to date photograph if possible
- the pupil's height, physical description and any physical peculiarities
- any disability, learning difficulty or special educational needs that the pupil may have
- the pupil's home address and telephone number
- parents/carers' names (where relevant)
- a description of the clothing the pupil is thought to be wearing
- pupil's state of mind
- pupil's medical needs, if relevant, particularly any medication they might need to take
- pupil's SEND needs, if relevant
- any relevant comments made by the pupil such as 'I'm going to run away to Brighton'.
- whether this is a repeat incident and where they were discovered beforehand

The information will then be passed to relevant officers through police channels, negating the need to report the incident multiple times.

If the student is located the school must inform the police without delay, so that the search can be called off.