



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Lost or Missing Children (Absconded) Policy

APPROVED BY: SENIOR LEADERSHIP

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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 schools and staff have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn. (Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2024)

Working Together 2023 outlines the key safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children as:

- protecting children from maltreatment.
- preventing the impairment of children's mental and physical health or development.
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the **provision of safe and effective care.**
- promoting the upbringing of children with their birth parents, or otherwise their family network through a kinship care arrangement, whenever possible and where this is in the best interest of the children and
- 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 policy 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 Learning Standards & Effectiveness Team at the Local Authority as soon as possible.

The Executive Headteacher and the Head of is the 'responsible person' for ensuring the policy is adopted and implemented and understood by all staff.

Definition of children missing/absconding/truanting:

The purpose of this non-statutory document is to set out the procedures for all stakeholders should a child leave the school without permission.

To abscond is to 'leave without permission.'

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.

Truancy vs absconding

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.

Pupils who return to school after absconding

Pupils who abscond may do so as a result of a specific incident which may have taken place at school, at home or on the way to school. For early years children, this may be about opportunity created by ineffective supervision or an unsecured perimeter.

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.

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.

Children Missing Education (CME):

'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 must be followed.

Details of children missing on Doncaster procedures online can be found here:

<https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/schools/children-missing-education>

https://doncasterscb.proceduresonline.com/p_ch_fam_go_missing.html

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>

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.

Missing child: a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.

Non-Negotiables

Attendance and registers are important in keeping children/ young people safe:

- Ensure all registers are kept up to date daily both am and pm.
- Any no-authorised attendance is dealt with swiftly and immediately to ensure compliance with the regulations and is recorded.
- Ensure the pupil records of the missing child and 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 etc.) are recorded.

Site security is secure, ensure:

- Single point of entry for all visitors and staff.
- Appropriate fencing and gates to protect school perimeter.
- Monitoring of children's entry and exit points at arrival and departure times.
- Locking entrance points after each arrival and departure time.
- Suitable supervision at exit points during break times.
- Ensure all contractors and visitors are aware of safeguarding and appropriate risk assessments are carried out to promote safety of all children whilst on site and any works being carried out.
- Have a suitable and sufficient site security risk assessment or policy in place.
- Responsible person (caretaker, site supervisor, building manager) to undertake routine monitoring of the site security safety measures e.g. perimeter fences and gates, etc. for potential breaches in security. These checks should be documented for future reference.

Staff and visitors are screened at point of entry:

- Registration of all visitors to the school including visitor ID with photo ID and up to date DBS.
- A safeguarding leaflet detailing the core safeguarding responsibilities is available.

Collection and handover arrangements of children at school

- Breakfast and After school clubs need to be considered in these arrangements.
- Secure passwords set up for other people collecting children from schools other than regular parent or carers. Arrangements need to take into account a system if someone different arrives to pick up the child who is not authorized or on the occasion when no

one arrives to collect the child.

External visits off site with children.

- Consider the ratio of staff to children on external visits. Further guidance on child ratios in the children's workforce can be found here:

[OEAP National Guidance on Group Management and Supervision](#)

[OEAP National Guidance on Ratios and Effective Supervision](#)

[Recommended adult to child ratios for working with children | NSPCC Learning](#)

[Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage for group and school providers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

First Aiders and/or suitable staff must be present for any medical intervention requirements.

Contact arrangements are in place to contact parents, local authority/children's social care if child is looked after or on a child protection plan and Police, within 10 minutes of child missing or immediately if a child with special educational needs or child under the age of 5. Police refer to the golden hour rule where they have a higher chance of locating the child within the first hour of them going missing.

- Identify who within the school is responsible for contacting the parents and keeping other children safe whilst relevant checks and contacts are made to establish the location of missing child etc.
- School mobile phones (if available) are taken on every school visit and contact numbers are left at the school/setting office. If staff need to use personal phones to communicate during a visit, the staff code of conduct should be adhered to regarding the use of personal technology.

Children's safety is maintained as the highest priority at all times both on and off the premises. Every attempt should be made through carrying out the external visits procedure and the exit/entrance procedure to ensure the security of the children is maintained at all times. In the unlikely event of a child/young person going missing, including near misses, the missing child procedure should be followed. See appendix 1

Roles and responsibilities:

Children missing whilst in your care:

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:

- Alerting the relevant Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and the Executive Headteacher
- 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 the signing out book for all children.
- Review any CCTV footage.
- 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.
- 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:

- Special Education needs and disabilities (SEND)
 - Learning disabilities
 - Association with gangs or anti-social behaviour
 - Risk of any form of exploitation to child sexual exploitation (CSE), radicalisation, modern day slavery
 - A young carer
 - Frequently going missing from home or care
 - Misusing drugs and alcohol
 - Returned to family home after being in care
 - Privately fostered children
 - Parental toxic trio prevalent in family home
- The Executive Headteacher and/or the DSL should inform the Learning Standards and Effectiveness team who will inform the Director of Children, Young People and Families at City of Doncaster Council, and Children's Social Care (if appropriate) of any child missing or any near misses.
 - The school would cooperate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by Children's Social Care at City of Doncaster Council if the child is not found. The school governing body should also be notified.
 - If the child is not located within a short space of time the school should inform:
 - The Chair of Governors
 - The school's insurers
 - If the child is injured, a report should be made under RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) to the HSE (Health and Safety Executive).
 - If a child in the Early Years Foundation Stage goes missing, then Ofsted must be notified within 14 days (statutory framework 3.63) of a child missing even if the child is found within that period. [Childcare: significant events to notify Ofsted about - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childcare-significant-events-to-notify-ofsted-about)
 - Completing accurate records with a clear chronology of times the various actions taken and who was involved.

Child goes missing during an external visit:

- During a trip there must be a sufficient number of competent adults (teachers/TAs/parent volunteers) to each have a small group to supervise, thus minimizing the possibility of a child becoming lost and/or missing.
- A risk assessment must be completed by the visit leader prior to the visit taking place to ensure that appropriate measures are in place to reduce the risk of any young person becoming lost or going missing. This risk assessment must include control measures relating to group management, the specific requirements of any group members with pre-existing needs and the venue(s) and activities being undertaken. The contents of the risk assessment and the plan for the visit must be shared with relevant adults on the visits so that all adults are fully aware of their responsibilities with fulfilling the duty of care owed to all participants.
- Where appropriate children should be dressed in their uniform so are easily identifiable. Where this is not possible, consider the use of hi-vis vests/jackets.
- Headcounts and name checks must be carried out on a regular basis throughout the visit and before any departure points.
- Alert the staff on the trip and if necessary, alert the police. Keep the other children safe and with responsible adults.
- Alerting the relevant DSL and the Executive Headteacher
- Notify the parents/carer and social care if child on CPP or CLA
- The Executive Headteacher or the DSL should inform the Education Safeguarding Officer at City of Doncaster Council (who may report to the Director of CYPF at City of Doncaster Council)
- The school should cooperate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by Social Care.
- If the child was not quickly found the school should also inform:
 - The Chair of Governors
 - The school's insurers
 - 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 14 days of the child missing even if child is found within that period.
- Completing accurate records with a clear chronology of times the various actions took place.

Action when the child is found:

- Talk to child calmly and offer reassurance so they feel supported.
- Notify the relevant person – DSL and Executive Headteacher
- Advise other staff who may be part of the search the child has been found.
- Notify the police and parents know 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 Executive Headteacher and should include all concerned written statements, if appropriate involving other agencies such as the Learning Standards and Effectiveness team, police, City of Doncaster Council using the SIRF (appendix 2).
- 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. Schools should also flag to the Education Safeguarding Officer who will share with

appropriate LA officers.

- If providers have 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.

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 Executive Headteacher together with the chair or representative from the governing body or owner 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 breach of security 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 Executive Headteacher
- The incident should be reported to Corporate Safety & Training team or your school's source of competent health & safety advice. The Corporate Safety and Training Team will determine if the incident is reportable under RIDDOR arrangements and make the RIDDOR report on behalf of schools that buy back the service of the Corporate Safety & Training team. If the Corporate Safety & Training team receives reports from schools that don't buy back their services, the school would be informed that they should consult their provider of competent health & safety advice.
- If the incident is reportable under RIDDOR arrangements (see the Reporting of Accidents and Incidents policy); the school may wish to contact the local authority Corporate Safety & Training team for support during any investigation by police (this is more likely when there is an injury to a pupil whilst they are absent from the school site). The police may pass on the findings of any investigation to the HSE for prosecution.
- In the event of disciplinary action needing to be taken Ofsted should be informed accordingly.
- The insurance provider is informed.

Contact with South Yorkshire Police (SYP) – *please note this is in line with SYP Right Care Right Person (RCRP) strategy.*

It is recommended that missing people are reported to police by agencies using the SYP phone lines. However, children who are absent from school are not necessarily always missing people who require police intervention.

Where a person is reported to have left school premises without the permissions of staff at that location, or failed to attend at school as planned, they will not be recorded as a missing person or require a police deployment unless any of the following apply:

- It is considered that there is an immediate, real, and substantial risk that the child will suffer significant harm/and or cause serious harm to any other person if they are not found.
- Where there is an agreement in place between the school and the police that the young person should be treated as missing immediately in all circumstances.

If a report is made in relation to a truant child, then SYP will:

- Record an incident.
- The informant should be told that no deployment will occur at this time until a review of the incident has taken place by an Inspector. The Inspector will confirm the risk, agree to deploy if appropriate and the school will be recontacted with a decision.
- The school would be asked whether a welfare check has already been conducted and if not why.
- The incident will be passed to a District Inspector for a review.
- If the Inspector agrees that there is an immediate, real, and substantial risk, the school will be re-contacted and informed that the police will deploy.
- If the Inspector does not agree that there is an immediate and real risk, the Inspector will contact the informant and discuss the risk. The decision of the Inspector is final, but they must ensure the school is aware of their decision.

Actions when a Child has been found.

When the child has been located staff should promptly inform the child's social worker, independent reviewing officer, police, and parents that the child has returned.

The police will inform social care if a child goes missing from a setting as a follow up action. Arrangements will be made for Safe and Well checks and Independent Return home Review interviews for all children (aged 11+) as a matter of course under the 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care.'

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

Appendix 1: Flowchart for raising alerts of a serious incident of child absconding from Early Years and Primary Phases

Staff member becomes aware that a child is missing from a school setting.



All other staff (not supervising students) will conduct a thorough search of all exits including classrooms, play areas, storage areas, toilets and school grounds to ensure all gates/doors were locked/ bolted and there are no other ways a pupil could have left the school.
Undertake a dynamic risk assessment to ascertain possible reasons for absconding (breach in site security, and/or child involved in a serious incident)

All school gates/exit points must be secured and your own internal lock down procedures should be initiated to make site secure to keep all other children safe on site.

Your individual 'lockdown procedures' may mean an alarm is sounded and all pupils kept in classroom with staff and doors



Immediately alert the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Executive Headteacher within the school or early years setting.
Time is of the essence.



If child is not located after the search of the site, the **police on 101** must be notified immediately by a senior member of the school/setting. They must include a description of child and if possible, a photograph of missing child.



A member of the Senior Leadership team (SLT) should notify parents immediately. **Children's Social Care 01302 737777** should be contacted if the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan. If the child is a 'Child Looked After' the setting should contact **Head of Virtual School 01302 737880 - This must happen on the**



Child Found (Alert resolved)

Notify the Police, parents and child's Social Worker and/or The Virtual School (if appropriate), school governors and the Learning Standards Effectiveness Team on



Child not found

Work closely with investigation bodies Police and Children's Social Care). Alert the Learning Standards Effectiveness Team on

educationstandardsandeffectiveness@doncaster.gov

School/Setting to undertake a **return to school** meeting to risk assess and determine additional support for child and family.



1. If a child in your Early Years goes missing, Ofsted should be notified within 14 days of the incident by filling out the significant events form online. [Childcare: significant events to notify Ofsted about - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/childcare-significant-events-to-notify-ofsted)
2. **Internal investigation** to be completed by Executive Headteacher and/or, Head of School, and learning outcomes to be shared with wider workforce and Governing body.
3. Complete the Serious Incident Referral form (SIRF) and notify the Local Authority (LA) using **Evotix Assure within 24 hours**

Independent LA investigation if required to be completed by an appropriate Officer and shared with Director of Children's Services (DCS) and School including recommendations for future safety and if notification to Ofsted if appropriate. Wider anonymized information

Appendix 2: Serious Incident Referral form (SIRF)

Report sent to:							
CC report: (Executive Headteacher, DSL, Governor, Education Safeguarding Officer, Early Years manager)							
Author of report:							
Name of School:							
Is child Safe now? Where is he/she?		Yes: please provide details			No: please provide further details		
Date and time of detection of incident							
Name of Child:							
Address of Child:							
Date of birth:							
Known to Social Care:		Yes		No			
		If case is open: Please include name of Social Worker					
Name of staff involved:							
Context and background:							
Details of incident:							
Chronology of events <i>Please list in date and time order of the incident.</i>		1.					
Who has been notified?	Police	Parents	Social Care – SCST (if known)	Director of Children, Young People and Families (CDC)	Ofsted (if child in Early Years setting)	Governor	DfE

What action has been taken?

To assess the immediate impact and to prevent a repeat incident?
Lessons learnt.

All completed forms must be returned within 24 hours of incident occurring to
educationstandardsandeffectiveness@doncaster.gov.uk

Appendix 3: Definitions

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 are set out as follows:

- **Away from placement without authorisation:** a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place, they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.
- **Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989.
- **Care leavers** cover young people from aged 16-24.
- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' and 'young people' are used throughout this guidance to refer to anyone under the age of 18.
- **Host local authority:** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.
- **Looked after child:** a child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- **Missing:** anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.
- **Missing from care:** a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts is not known.
- **Missing child:** a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
- **Responsible local authority:** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.
- **Young runaway:** a child who has run away from their home or care placement or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.

For the purpose of this guidance, the definition of missing is that used by Police and issued by Association of Chief of Police Officers (ACPO) in April 2013 and is also the definition used throughout the Department of Education Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or go Missing from Home.

Glossary

CME	Children missing education
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CPP	Child Protection Plan
CLA	Child Looked after
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Officer
DCS	Director of Children's Services
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
LSCB	Local Children's Safeguarding Board
RIDDOR	Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations
SIRF	Serious Incident Referral Form