



The Damara School



Specialist SEMH Independent School

# Absconding and Missing from school Policy and Procedures

Approved by: Trust Board

Initial Ratification: 31 Aug 2019 Review: October 2020, September 2023, January 2026

Next review due by: January 2027

## **Vision**

Our vision is to provide every pupil with safe, rewarding, personalised education and support to improve their life chances, prepare them for life and the world of work. Using therapeutic and holistic approaches to learning, our commitment is to develop new and existing skills and abilities, increase knowledge and strengthen understanding. Through mindfulness strategies, the core skill of resilience is developed, thus enabling each pupil to cope with the pressures of education and life and reach their full academic, social, emotional and spiritual potential. This commitment to our pupils is made possible through the strong partnerships we build with our families and other professionals.

## **Introduction and Rationale for the Policy**

This policy is written to guide staff in the event of a child going missing on the premises, going missing outside of the organisation or having absconded. This policy recognises that children being absent from education for prolonged periods and/or on repeat occasions can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, child sexual and child criminal exploitation.

All staff have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at all times.

## **Statutory Framework**

This policy has been developed in accordance with:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2025
- Working Together to Safeguard Children
- Children Missing Education (DfE statutory guidance)
- The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- The Children Act 1989

## Related Policies and Documents

Staff are reminded to read the following school policies and practice guidelines in conjunction with this policy:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy (updated in line with KCSIE 2025)
- Health and Safety Policy
- Site Security Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Individual Risk Assessments
- Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

## Definitions

**Missing:** A child is considered 'missing' when members of staff do not know where they are and cannot account for their whereabouts.

**Absconding:** A child is considered to have 'absconded' if they intentionally/knowingly leave the site or the immediate area of an off-site activity without permission.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### All Staff

- Must be able to account for the whereabouts of every child at all times
- Must follow the procedures outlined in this policy if a child goes missing or absconds
- Must report all incidents to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
- Must complete required documentation following any incident

### Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

The DSL has overall responsibility for:

- Coordinating the response to missing or absconding incidents

- Ensuring appropriate information sharing with safeguarding partners and other agencies
- Maintaining detailed, accurate and secure written records of all incidents
- Identifying patterns or trends in absconding behaviour
- Reviewing individual risk assessments following incidents
- Liaising with local authority children's social care and the police as appropriate
- Ensuring parents/carers are informed and kept updated
- Reporting incidents to trustees termly

## **Senior Leaders**

- Must support the DSL in coordinating responses to incidents
- Must ensure adequate staffing levels are maintained during searches
- Must ensure all staff are trained in and understand this policy
- Must review the effectiveness of procedures following incidents

## **Trustees**

- Will receive termly reports on absconding incidents
- Will monitor the effectiveness of this policy
- Will ensure the policy is reviewed annually

## **Attendance Monitoring**

A register of pupils' attendance will be completed each morning and afternoon by staff. It is the responsibility of all staff members on site to be able to account for the whereabouts of every child throughout the school day.

Regular attendance monitoring helps identify patterns that may indicate safeguarding concerns or increased risk of absconding.

# Procedures: Child Missing on the Premises

## Immediate Response (0-10 minutes)

### 1. Initiate immediate search

- a. Upon discovering a child is missing on site, an immediate search is to be made of the buildings with all available staff
- b. This search should not exceed ten minutes
- c. All the usual 'hiding' places for that child should be searched
- d. If the child is a known absconder, refer to their individual risk assessment which should include any known 'hiding' places for that child

### 2. Notify key staff

- a. Inform the DSL or senior leader on site immediately
- b. Ensure other staff are aware a search is underway

## Extended Search (10-25 minutes)

### 3. Extend the search

- a. If the child has not been located after 10 minutes, staff should regroup and extend the search to include the school grounds
- b. This extended search should not exceed a further fifteen minutes
- c. Staff should check all outdoor areas, including boundaries and potential exit points

### 4. Contact parents/carers

- a. Contact the parents/carers of the child who is missing
- b. Inform them of the situation and that a search is underway
- c. Advise them that the police will be contacted if the child is not located within the next 15 minutes

## If Child Not Located After 25 Minutes

### 5. Contact the police

- a. Make a phone call to the police on **999** if there are immediate safety concerns, or **101** for non-emergency situations
- b. Provide a clear description of the child including:
  - i. Full name, age and date of birth
  - ii. Physical description (height, build, hair colour, eye colour, distinguishing features)

- iii. Clothing being worn
- iv. Any medical conditions or vulnerabilities
- v. Last known location and time
- vi. Photograph (if possible)
- vii. Any information about possible locations the child might go to

#### **6. Organise local area search**

- a. The senior leader on site should organise all available staff to search the immediate local area
- b. Staff must take potential dangers into account and not put themselves at risk
- c. Where possible, staff should search in pairs
- d. Staff should use vehicles when appropriate rather than searching on foot
- e. Ensure that adequate staff remain in the building to supervise other pupils and deal with other contingencies

#### **7. Coordinate from base**

- a. The DSL or senior leader should remain on site to:
  - i. Coordinate the search
  - ii. Answer phone calls
  - iii. Provide photos and additional information to police
  - iv. Receive updates from searching staff
  - v. Liaise with parents/carers
- b. The police may wish to visit the school

#### **8. Continue to update parents/carers**

- a. Keep parents/carers informed of all developments
- b. Provide reassurance that everything possible is being done to locate their child

## **Procedures: Child Missing Off-Site**

### **Preparation for Off-Site Activities**

- All pupils involved in an outing must be recorded on the Trips and Visits register stored in the Leadership office
- When going off-site, staff must take their ID badges

- All staff on trips and visits must ensure they have a fully charged 'trips and visits' mobile phone with them (school telephones are kept in the Leadership office for this purpose)
- A register must be taken by the trip leader:
  - Prior to leaving the school site (car, minibus or coach)
  - At regular intervals during the outing
  - Prior to leaving the venue to return to school
  - Upon return to school

## **If a Child Goes Missing Off-Site**

### **1. Immediate search (0-10 minutes)**

- a. If a child is discovered as missing, undertake a search (not exceeding ten minutes) of the immediate area with all available members of staff
- b. Ensure that all other children and young people continue to be appropriately supervised at all times

### **2. If child not located after 10 minutes**

- a. A staff member should notify the trip leader who will then notify the DSL or most senior leader at the school
- b. The trip leader should act on any instructions given by the DSL/senior leader

### **3. Contact emergency services and venue**

- a. The DSL/senior leader will contact the police on **999** (if immediate safety concerns) or **101** (non-emergency)
- b. Provide them with as precise a description of the child as possible, the last known whereabouts of the child and any other details they may require
- c. If appropriate, notify the venue that is being visited and ask them to initiate their lost child protocols

### **4. Notify parents/carers**

- a. The DSL/senior leader will notify the child's parents/carers
- b. Keep them updated as necessary throughout the incident

### **5. Remain in situ**

- a. The member of staff who initiated the search should remain at the location until the police or assistance from school arrives
- b. This ensures someone is present in case the missing child should return or be found
- c. In such stressful circumstances it is important that staff remain as calm and collected as possible

# Procedures: Absconding

A child is considered to have 'absconded' if they intentionally/knowingly leave the site or the immediate area of an off-site activity without permission.

## Immediate Response

### 1. Follow at a safe distance

- a. Where possible and safe to do so, a member of staff should follow the child at a safe distance
- b. Staff should respond in accordance with guidance from the child's individual risk assessment
- c. Staff must not put themselves or others at risk

### 2. Notify senior leadership

- a. A DSL or senior leader at school must immediately be informed of the situation
- b. Provide details of:
  - i. The child's identity
  - ii. Direction of travel
  - iii. What the child is wearing
  - iv. Any immediate safety concerns

### 3. Maintain contact

- a. Where possible, the member of staff following the child should remain in contact with either the main group or the DSL/senior leader at school via a mobile phone
- b. Provide regular updates on the child's location and wellbeing

### 4. Deploy additional staff

- a. The DSL/senior leader will, if appropriate, allocate further staff members to go and collect the child
- b. The aim is to return the child either to the venue or to school, depending on the circumstances and the child's emotional state

### 5. Inform parents/carers

- a. The DSL/senior leader will inform the child's parents/carers
- b. Keep them updated as necessary throughout the incident

## **If an Absconding Child Becomes 'Missing'**

If a child absconds and is then deemed to be 'missing' (i.e., staff lose sight of the child and cannot locate them), procedures will follow those outlined previously for a child missing on-site or off-site, as appropriate.

The police must be contacted if:

- The child cannot be located within a reasonable timeframe
- There are immediate safety concerns
- The child is particularly vulnerable

## **When a Child is Located or Returns**

### **Immediate Actions**

#### **1. Ensure safety and wellbeing**

- a. Check that the child is safe and unharmed
- b. If the child is injured or unwell, they should be checked by a member of staff who is First Aid trained
- c. If necessary, seek medical attention

#### **2. Notify all relevant parties**

- a. Inform the DSL/senior leader immediately
- b. Inform the police that the child has been located
- c. Inform parents/carers that the child has been found and is safe

#### **3. Police 'Safe and Well Check'**

- a. The child will be visited by a Police Officer who will conduct a 'Safe and Well Check'
- b. The child will be able to speak to the Police Officer without any member of staff present if they wish to do so

#### **4. Provide support**

- a. Ensure the child feels safe and supported
- b. Do not immediately question the child about why they went missing
- c. Allow time for the child to calm down before any discussions take place

# Post-Incident Procedures

## Recording and Documentation

Following any incident where a child has gone missing or absconded, the following must be completed **as soon as possible**:

### 1. Major Incident Record

- a. Complete a Major Incident form with full details of:
  - i. Date, time and circumstances of the incident
  - ii. Actions taken
  - iii. Staff involved
  - iv. Agencies contacted
  - v. Outcome
- b. A copy should be placed in the child's personal file

### 2. Safeguarding record

- a. The DSL must ensure the incident is recorded on the child's safeguarding file
- b. Include any information that may indicate safeguarding concerns

### 3. Communication log

- a. Record all communications with:
  - i. Parents/carers
  - ii. Police
  - iii. Other agencies
  - iv. Staff members

## Information Sharing

The DSL will ensure appropriate information sharing in accordance with:

- The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- KCSIE 2025 guidance on information sharing
- Local safeguarding partnership arrangements

Information will be shared with:

- Local authority children's social care (if safeguarding concerns are identified)
- The police (as appropriate)
- Other relevant agencies (as appropriate)

- Parents/carers (keeping them fully informed)

The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare and protect the safety of children.

## Review Meeting

Within **5 working days** of the incident, arrange a meeting with:

- The child (if appropriate and they wish to participate)
- Parents/carers
- The DSL
- Relevant staff members
- Other professionals (as appropriate)

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Discuss the circumstances of the incident
- Understand the child's perspective and any underlying issues
- Review the effectiveness of current procedures
- Review and update the child's individual risk assessment
- Review and update the child's Individual Learning Plan (ILP)
- Identify any additional support the child may need
- Agree actions to reduce the risk of future incidents

## Risk Assessment Review

The child's individual risk assessment **must** be reviewed following any missing or absconding incident. The review should consider:

- Why the incident occurred
- What triggers or warning signs were present
- Whether existing control measures were effective
- What additional measures are needed
- Whether staffing levels or supervision arrangements need to change
- Any patterns or trends in the child's behaviour

The updated risk assessment must be shared with all staff who work with the child.

## **Pattern Identification**

The DSL will:

- Monitor all missing and absconding incidents across the school
- Identify any patterns or trends
- Consider whether additional whole-school measures are needed
- Report findings to the senior leadership team and trustees

## **Staff Debrief**

Following any incident, ensure:

- All staff involved have an opportunity to debrief
- Staff welfare is considered
- Any lessons learned are shared with the wider staff team
- Staff training needs are identified

## **Reporting to Trustees**

The DSL will provide termly reports to trustees including:

- Number of missing/absconding incidents
- Patterns or trends identified
- Actions taken
- Effectiveness of procedures
- Any recommendations for policy or practice changes

# **Individual Risk Assessments**

## **Children at Higher Risk**

Some children are at higher risk of going missing or absconding. Individual risk assessments must be in place for any child who:

- Has previously gone missing or absconded

- Has expressed intentions to leave the site
- Is known to local authority children's social care
- Has experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences
- Has mental health difficulties
- Is at risk of exploitation
- Has specific triggers that may lead to absconding behaviour

## **Content of Risk Assessments**

Individual risk assessments should include:

- Known triggers for absconding behaviour
- Warning signs that the child may be about to abscond
- Known 'hiding' places or locations the child may go to
- Specific control measures and supervision arrangements
- Communication strategies
- De-escalation techniques
- Actions to take if the child goes missing or absconds
- Information about the child's vulnerabilities
- Any medical conditions or medications
- Emergency contact details

## **Review of Risk Assessments**

Risk assessments must be:

- Reviewed at least termly
- Reviewed following any missing or absconding incident
- Reviewed following any significant change in the child's circumstances
- Shared with all staff who work with the child

# Prevention Strategies

## Whole-School Approach

The school will take a proactive approach to preventing missing and absconding incidents through:

**1. Creating a safe and supportive environment**

- a. Building positive relationships with pupils
- b. Listening to pupils' views and concerns
- c. Providing appropriate support for pupils' emotional and mental health needs
- d. Implementing trauma-informed approaches

**2. Effective communication**

- a. Ensuring pupils know who they can talk to if they are worried or upset
- b. Providing multiple channels for pupils to express concerns
- c. Responding promptly and appropriately to pupils' concerns

**3. Appropriate supervision**

- a. Maintaining appropriate staff-to-pupil ratios
- b. Ensuring adequate supervision at all times, including during transitions
- c. Implementing enhanced supervision for higher-risk pupils

**4. Site security**

- a. Maintaining secure boundaries
- b. Monitoring entry and exit points
- c. Implementing appropriate access control measures
- d. Regular security audits

**5. Staff training**

- a. All staff receive training on this