

Pathways School

Missing Child / Absconding Policy and Procedure

Policy Monitoring

Date policy last reviewed: October 2025

Signed by:

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Date: October 2025

Saima Ali Chair of governors

Date: October 2025

Date of next review: October 2026

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and following any concerns and/or updates to national/local guidance or procedure.

Missing Child / Absconding Policy and Procedure

1. Purpose and Scope

This policy sets out the procedures to be followed when a pupil is missing from supervision or absconds from the school site.

It applies to all staff, volunteers, and visitors and should be read alongside the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Behaviour Policy, Risk Assessment procedures, and Health & Safety arrangements.

The policy aims to:

- Safeguard pupils and reduce risk of harm
- Ensure a rapid, proportionate, and well-coordinated response
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Ensure compliance with statutory duties, including Ofsted serious incident notification requirements

2. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

Missing pupil:

A pupil whose whereabouts are unknown and who cannot be located when they should be under supervision.

Absconding:

A pupil who deliberately leaves the school site or supervision without permission during the school day.

All absconding incidents are treated as safeguarding concerns regardless of duration, supervision arrangements, or outcome.

3. Principles

- The safety of the pupil is the overriding priority
- Risk is assessed dynamically based on the individual pupil
- Speed of response is critical
- Clear leadership and communication are essential
- All incidents are recorded, reviewed, and learned from

4. Immediate Actions – All Staff

If a pupil is missing or absconds, staff must:

1. Raise the alarm immediately by informing the DSL or the most senior staff member on site.
2. Maintain appropriate supervision of other pupils.
3. Provide clear information: pupil name, last known location, time last seen, and known risks.
4. Do not delay escalation to search or investigate independently beyond immediate checks.

5. Senior Leader / DSL Actions

The DSL or senior leader will:

- Take overall control of the response
- Conduct a dynamic risk assessment considering:
 - age and vulnerability of the pupil
 - known absconding risk
 - medical, sensory, or behavioural needs
 - weather, traffic, and environmental risks
- Coordinate a systematic site search
- Allocate staff roles clearly
- Decide on emergency service involvement

6. Contacting Emergency Services

Police must be contacted immediately if:

- There is immediate risk of serious harm
- The pupil cannot be located promptly
- The pupil is known to place themselves at risk in the community
- The pupil is very young or highly vulnerable

The decision and rationale must be recorded.

7. Parental / Carer Notification

Parents or carers must be informed without delay once immediate safeguarding actions are underway.

Communication should be factual, calm, and recorded, including:

- time and method of contact

- information shared
- parental response

8. Ofsted Notification – Serious Incident Category 6.7

Any absconding incident meets the threshold for Ofsted notification under Serious Incident Category 6.7.

Notification must be made without delay by the Headteacher or Proprietor, regardless of:

- duration of absence
- supervision in place
- absence of injury or harm

Failure to notify is a compliance issue and must be avoided through adherence to this procedure.

9. Return of the Pupil

When the pupil is located and returned:

- A welfare check must be completed
- Medical attention sought if required
- Emotional reassurance provided
- Parents updated
- The incident formally closed by a senior leader

10. Recording and Documentation

All incidents must be fully documented, including:

- chronology of events
- actions taken and by whom
- decisions and rationale
- notifications made
- follow-up actions

11. Post-Incident Review

Following any absconding incident, the school will:

- Review and update individual risk assessments
- Review supervision and staffing arrangements
- Review site security and access controls
- Provide staff supervision and support

- Identify learning and system improvements

12. Governance and Oversight

All absconding incidents are reported through safeguarding governance arrangements. Themes and patterns are monitored and reported to governors to ensure effective oversight and continuous improvement.

13. Training and Awareness

All staff receive training on this procedure as part of safeguarding induction and refresher training.

DSLs and senior leaders receive additional training on Ofsted notification thresholds.

14. Statutory Framework and References

- Independent School Standards (Part 3 – Welfare, Health and Safety)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Ofsted Serious Incident Notification Guidance
- Local Authority Safeguarding Procedures