



The Smith Foundation

Absenting or Missing Policy*

Policy on when a child absents or goes missing

Policy Details

Status:	In-house
Frequency of review:	3 yearly
Lead member of staff:	Damien Talbot
Last reviewed:	Autumn 2023
Next Review Date:	Autumn 2026
Policy Number:	WS29

1.0 Introduction

The school follows statutory guidance contained within Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018). Staff use the school's absenting flow chart for guidance.

Despite our children coming from 16 different local authorities, we follow the joint protocol for Children Missing from Home or Care (this covers 5 of our local authorities and the protocol has been developed and agreed in conjunction with West Yorkshire Police).

It is the policy that all children who are absent without authority from the school are followed/supported as far as is possible to determine their whereabouts and safety. It is vital that children are located and helped and supported back to school as soon as possible, their health, safety and welfare are of paramount importance.

The senior on call/on site carries out a risk assessment based on the students individual PBS plan, and a verbal report from staff carrying out the immediate search. This includes:

- The student's state of mind
- The risks to self and others
- Previous history of absenting
- Medical conditions and impact on health
- Vulnerability
- Criminal activity
- CSE/Prevent/CP
- Weather conditions
- Time of the day
- Clothing/footwear

The school is very aware of potential child protection concerns that may arise when students leave the site without the support and supervision of staff. The potential in some cases for young people to run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually is of high concern. Guidance has been produced to help local agencies identify children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and the school takes action to safeguard and promote their welfare. The supply of drugs and alcohol or the offering of gifts may be used to entice and coerce young people into associations with inappropriate adults is of concern. Looked after children may also be targeted by those wishing to abuse and sexually exploit them, and encouraging these children to run away in order to disrupt their placement is often part of this abuse.

Upon returning to school, it is important to ascertain the reason for the child absenting, their actions and whereabouts whilst absent and a plan of action formed for welcoming the child back into school life (this should include any actions necessary in response to the circumstances of the child absenting).

2.0 Guidance for staff when a child absents from school

- 2.1 If a child leaves a setting staff should follow our absenting/missing protocol (see appendix 1)
- 2.2 When a child leaves the school site without authority (absents) this must be reported immediately to the Senior on Call (the rota is updated weekly and is found in the school diary).
- 2.3 The child must be followed closely and from a safe distance and priority is on supporting them to return safely to school as quickly as possible. Staff maintain contact with school to update on progress/risk.
- 2.4 Staff must identify the child's emotional well-being/state of mind and report this and any other relevant information to the SOC.

- 2.5 Staff should try and establish whether a child has in his possession any offending/dangerous or health risk item/substance, such as weapons, cigarettes, lighters, money, drugs etc. and secure the items and inform SOC/SOS as this will help the risk assessment process.
- 2.6 Where a child has been missing for 1 hour or more, school's procedures will include contacting the police, the child's parents and the in certain cases, the child's placing authority. In some cases, this may be less (based on individual risk).
- 2.7 Missing Persons should be reported to the West Yorkshire Switchboard number 101 or in serious incidents then 999 will be considered.
- 2.8 Staff reporting the absent child will inform the Police of the risk. All our children are classed as high risk from our point of view. Identified high risks will be escalated to the police via pre-completed risk assessments.
- 2.9 Official logs will be started immediately and an on-going record of communication maintained (currently accessed through SID – Attendance/Missing Form). Where the school is concerned due to a young person's vulnerability, whether this is because of emotional state, mental health or level of maturity, the school will contact the police and raise this concern immediately.
- 2.10 In all cases parents/carers (social workers, where appropriate) will be informed.
- 2.11 Information will be recorded on SID about the circumstances of the child absenting. This will usually be done by the member of staff who was last supervising the child the best person to record will be identified where not possible. Additional information will be added to the record (SID) from staff members who go on to be involved in the incident. It is important that all details are record i.e. search areas/hotspots/time of searches etc.
- 2.12 If a child absents but is supported back to a safe place i.e. school or home and has been in sight at all times or their whereabouts are accounted for (no possible risk occurred), a serious incident report will be made on SID about the circumstances of the child absenting. This will usually be done by the member of staff who was last supervising the child (this does not constitute that the child as missing).
- 2.13 The police should be contacted upon the safe return of the Missing Person.
- 2.14 On return the child will be seen by a member of staff to talk about the reasons for the absence as soon as practical (normally within one hour) but always within 24 hours.
- 2.15 A return to school safe and well check (on SID) must be filled in (completed on the end of the incident log). This would usually be done with a member of staff who has a close relationship with the child so that he feels settled and relaxed enough to discuss the issues.
- 2.16 Parents or carers (and Social Workers and Local Authority where appropriate) must be informed of the return.
- 2.17 The child's LGT will consider whether the child is at risk of absenting again and will formulate triggers and potential diffusers in their PBS plans.
- 2.18 Any plans and actions must be implemented by all school staff, monitored by the Learning Group Teams and overseen as to their effectiveness by the SMT (School Managers Team). PBS plans must be updated where necessary and shared. New information should be included on the child's missing information document.
- 2.19 SLT will receive regular updates around absenting/missing and monitor the statistics and action any interventions required.

- 2.20 A thorough strategic review of the incident will be undertaken by the Deputy Principal or Head of Care in liaison with other members of SLT. This will include what actions are now required.

3.0 Guidance for staff when a child fails to return from weekend home leave and holidays

- 3.1 When a child fails to return following a weekend or holiday, their parents/carers (and social workers, where appropriate) will be contacted. Staff will ascertain whether the child's whereabouts is known and if they are safe. If the child is unaccounted for, staff will contact Children and Young People's Care Services and/or the child's Local Authority. They may be able to assist the parents/carers in locating the child and checking on their safety and welfare. Staff should advise parents/carers to contact the local police if their child is missing for unusual periods of time thus raising concerns for their safety and welfare. Where the absence remains unauthorised or there are patterns of absence the child's placing authority will be informed.
- 3.2 Staff at school maintain regular contact and where possible conduct home visits to help return the child to school (these include family support visits).
- 3.3 When the child returns home, arrangements will be made for him to return to school at the earliest opportunity. Staff will determine his reasons for not returning and the child's state of mind for re-integrating into school life.
- 3.4 A decision should be made as soon as possible about any actions arising from the child's absence and (this should be discussed with the child and related to his parents/carers/social worker/LA) the child's placing Authority should be informed of his return to school.
- 3.5 Any amendments to the school's register must be completed.
- 3.6 Staff are expected to keep a log of all phone calls on SID (made and received) whilst the child is absent from school.

4.0 Support by School Staff on Weekends

- 4.1 To assist with finding students who are missing at weekends; the school provides a bank of staff who can be called upon to look for the individual/s missing.
- 4.2 Senior on call will have access to the bank of staff's details to call upon.
- 4.3 A termly review or update on the staffing on the bank of staff will be completed.

APPENDIX 1

Absenting and Missing Protocol

