

# Students Who Go Missing Policy

West Heath School



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Copies of this policy are available on the School Website -  
[http://www.westheathschool.com/ Staff matters - Policies](http://www.westheathschool.com/Staff%20matters%20-%20Policies) or as a hard copy on request  
from the School Office.

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## 1. Aims

This policy aims to:

## 2. Legislation and Guidance

- Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014)  
[http://www.kscb.org.uk/pdf/Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or c....pdf](http://www.kscb.org.uk/pdf/Statutory_guidance_on_children_who_run_away_or_go_missing_from_home_or_c....pdf)
- Residential Special Schools, National Minimum Standards September 2022.
- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1161320/Residential special schools national minimum standards.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1161320/Residential_special_schools_national_minimum_standards.pdf)
- Children Missing from Home and Care Procedures  
[https://www.kscmp.org.uk/\\_data/assets/word\\_doc/0006/119760/Kent-Children-Missing-from-Home-and-Care-Procedures-March-2020-Final.docx](https://www.kscmp.org.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0006/119760/Kent-Children-Missing-from-Home-and-Care-Procedures-March-2020-Final.docx)

## 3. Key Definitions/Terms

- Missing Child: a child/young person under 18, reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
- Child: anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this guidance.
- Missing students – refers to all students regardless of age

## 4. Rationale

This policy is designed to ensure all staff can safeguard our students, by knowing what to do if a child is absent without authority or missing.

## 5. Introduction

Statutory guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care (January 2014), contains detailed information relating to children who are at risk of going missing or running away.

Children Missing from Home or Care (KSCMP, March 2020) summarises the safeguarding concern associated with going missing:

'Children who are missing may be at greater risk of harm as a consequence of their basic need for food, safety, shelter, and/or from the people whom they may come into contact with. Risks can include physical harm, sexual exploitation, self-harm, substance abuse, radicalisation, criminal exploitation, and involvement in a range of other criminal activities. Additional susceptibility due to their age, level of understanding, or the significance and seriousness of the circumstances that led to the missing episode may also be present'.

A child/young person who goes missing just once, faces the same immediate risks as faced by a child/young person who regularly goes missing. However, children who go missing when they are young (and/or with greater frequency) are more likely to face longer-term problems.'

The immediate risks associated with a child going missing potentially include:

- No means of support or legitimate income – leading to high risk activities
- Involvement in criminal activities
- Victim of abuse
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation
- Alcohol/substance misuse
- Deterioration of physical and mental health
- Missing out on schooling and education
- Increased susceptibility.

Longer term risks potentially include:

- Long term drug /alcohol dependency
- Crime
- Homelessness
- Disengagement from education
- Child sexual exploitation
- Poor physical and/or mental health
- Learnt behaviour patterns and increased risk taking leading to consideration of Secure placement

As stated in the Kent Police, West Division Local Agreement, Children and young people who run away or go missing from Care it is the responsibility of childrens social care to advise the police of LAC who are placed in care at our school.

When a student is reported missing to the Police, the students allocated social worker, regardless of their status as a LAC should be informed as soon as possible. If the student goes missing outside of office hours (9-5pm), out of hours social services must be contacted:

**Out of hours Social Services:**

**03000 41 41 41**

## **6. Procedures and Practices**

### **Care Planning, Risk Assessment and Information Sharing**

Where it is known or becomes evident that a student is at risk of going missing or running away, this needs to be recorded in their care plan (if a residential student) and their individual risk assessment.

Where a child has frequently gone missing, the school will consider completing The Kent Police COMPACT missing persons form to aid effective and efficient information sharing to support keeping the child safe.

#### **1. Defining a student as missing**

The decision to report a student as missing to the police will be informed by the following definition

**Definition: Missing child**

***Where a child's location or reason for absence is unknown and/or there is concern for the child because of their susceptibility, or there is a potential danger to the public, the child shall be deemed to be missing and the police informed immediately.***

The decision to report a student missing should only be made by the Principal, Deputy Principal, Head of Care and Safeguarding, Residential Care Manager and Heads of School. This includes when a child walks off site.

Considerations:

- The circumstances of the absence
- The child's care plan
- The age of the child
- The maturity of the child
- Any physical or cognitive disability of the child
- Any continuing or urgent need for the child to have medication or other medical treatment
- The legal status of the child
- Previous behaviour and history of the child
- Danger posed by the child to themselves or others
- General susceptibility of the child
- The child's tendency to drug/substance abuse
- Whether the child is perceived as running to, or running from, someone or something
- Any circumstances within the placement that may be relevant to the absence, distance from home for example
- The risk of offending
- The influence of peer groups, families or friends

- Predatory influences on the child. These may relate to others wanting to use the child for crime, sex or drugs and may not be recognised or accepted as risks by the child
- Any known risk of abduction
- Environmental factors including weather, time of year, community events or tensions

## 2. Initial actions

A number of basic actions should be carried-out, when there is a concern a student is missing. These will be based upon the circumstances of each child, and particularly any previous incidents of the child going missing. The following list should be considered purely as a guide:

- Contact the Network Manager or Principal to check CCTV cameras
- Use the radios to ask other staff if they know where the student is
- Search the school and grounds
- Contact peer group/other residents to ascertain any reasons or likely locations where the child may be found
- Physically look for the child, including;
- Locations where previously found
- Locations likely to be found e.g. safe places
- Conduct telephone enquiries, including friends, family and to the child themselves
- Consider students care plan (if residential) and risk assessment

The child's care plan and risk assessment should be considered to determine whether any risk factors are immediately obvious. In assessing the significance of a child's absence, consideration must be given to the guidance already agreed on and incorporated into the child's care plan and risk assessment.

**The maximum time to wait, when a child is absent without authority, before reporting them to the police missing is 1 hours.** This is the maximum amount of time to wait and reporting may well be sooner due to the typical susceptibility of our students. When either Principal, Deputy Principal, Head of Care and Safeguarding, Residential Care Manager and Heads of School has made the decision to report the student missing, the local police should be contacted on: -

**Local police: 101 or 999 if urgent**

### 1.) Initial report to the police

The police will request the following information when a report of a missing child is initially made to them:

In incidences where a child has been established as missing please report the matter to the Police. If you think a child is in immediate danger, please call the police on 999. For all non-emergency issues, please dial 101.

The following information is expected to be provided to the Police:

- Child/young person's full name and previous names

- Age and date of birth
- Gender
- Legal status
- Details of current address/family addresses
- Any mobile phone numbers and landline phone number
- Physical description including build, height, weight, hair, skin, eye colour, clothing etc.
- Medical condition/medicine required and when
- Any warnings such as violent, depressed, on bail, suicidal etc.
- Access to money, bus passes, transport, passport
- Time and location last seen and by whom
- Details of friends and associates
- Circumstances of going missing
- Situation immediately prior to the child/young person going missing
- Is this incident out of character?
- Social authority and social worker details
- Next of Kin details
- Susceptibility factors which increase risk to the child/young person- e.g. disability, mental health issues
- Likely locations / associates / family members – Do any of these persons pose a risk to the Missing Child (Sexual exploitations, gangs, abuse, criminal activity and violence)
- An up to date photograph will need to be provided to the Police as soon as possible

*Accurate information is essential to ensure the police place the correct priority on the incident. Any factor that may indicate an increased risk to the child, or public, must be communicated to the police immediately.*

*A record of the police incident number needs to be taken and recorded.*

## **2.) Missing during external activity of a residential home or residential special school**

If a child becomes absent whilst on an external activity, the member of staff in charge will:

- Arrange an initial search in the area the child went absent
- Contact the school to consult with the Principal, Deputy Principal, Head of Care and Safeguarding, Residential Care Manager and Heads of School to decide what action is required in the context of this procedure.

## **3.) Informing parents, other agencies and children**

When a child is reported missing to the police the school will always inform parents, unless there are contact restrictions the school are aware of. If a student has an allocated social worker he/she will be informed.

Should a child's absence continue after the matter has been reported to the police, arrangements should be made to inform other children if that is in their best interests and would help reduce anxiety and distress.

#### **4.) Return of a missing child**

If the student returns to school after being reported missing the following should happen:

- Police and parents should be informed immediately that the student is no longer missing
- The Police are required to undertake safe and well checks
- Children's Social Care direct the independent return interview in the context of their guidance
- The relevant Head of School is notified and in turn the Vice Principal and Principal
- The student meets with the Principal, Deputy Principal, Head of Care and Safeguarding, Residential Care Manager and Heads of School along with other staff as required, to discuss the reasons for his or her absence and discuss ways of supporting the student to avoid absconding in the future
- Amend the students care plan and risk assessment as necessary
- All the necessary recording is undertaken as specified below

#### **5.) Recording**

When it is discovered that a child is missing, a record should be made on the School Behaviour Watch portal of

- 
- The time the child went missing
- Where the child was last seen
- The child's description – any identifiable features
- What the child was wearing
- The reasons given by the child for running away from the school
- Any action taken in the light of those reasons
- Who was informed (where appropriate include the Police Incident Number)
- Circumstances of the child's return
- Time child returned to school
- Who was notified of the child's return
- Who the child met with on their return

### **13. Links with other Policies**

**This policy should be read alongside:**

- *Child and Adult Safeguarding Policy*

### **14. Consultation**

**Persons with particular responsibilities**

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Head of Care and Safeguarding
- Senior Management Team
- Student Services Committee

**Other Participants & Stakeholders**

- Kent Police
- Kent Safeguarding Children's Multi-Agency Partnership

**Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- SMT
- Student Services Committee
- Trustees