

**Heart of the Forest
Community Special School**

**Policy for Pupils who Abscond or go
Missing**



Approved by:	SLT	Date:	March 2023
Last reviewed on:	Jan 2020	Next review date:	March 2025
Website:	Yes	Type:	Non statutory

INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of this policy guidance, the term ‘absconding’ is used to cover incidents of pupils or young people leaving school unaccompanied and without the prior knowledge of staff.

Principles and purpose:

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.

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. All school staff have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn. (Keeping Children Safe in Education document & Working Together to Safeguard Children)

This guidance sets out the procedures for maintaining safety and dealing with the unlikely event of a child going missing off school site promptly and efficiently.

It is the school’s responsibility to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of children whilst in our care.

All pupils at Heart of the Forest School have special needs and as such, are extremely vulnerable in terms of lack of understanding of their own safety, and the significance of school rules relating to attending and absconding.

As a direct result of this, the school place high importance on awareness for staff regarding matters of safety, security and support for pupils and young people.

Where a pupil or young person is known to present a high risk of absconding and placing themselves or others in danger the school will create an individual assessment of risk reflecting those needs and how to address these in a positive way.

In the event of a pupil absconding from Heart of the Forest School a member of the senior leadership team will become the lead person.

Staff Awareness

It is the responsibility of all staff to ensure that they follow security and safety procedures to maintain the safest possible environment for the young person.

They must familiarise themselves with the School Behaviour Policy and the individual strategies for support within each pupil's Behaviour Support Plans and Risk Assessments.

All staff are required to be vigilant in their recording of all pupils' attendance.

Control measures and procedures to prevent absconding

1. Site security

- The site has a secure perimeter and gates, which should be closed at all times, other than when operating to allow vehicles in and out of the site. During pupil drop off and collection times, vehicles are not permitted to enter or exit the site.
- Internal gates should be closed at all times and appropriate locks in place.
- Doors into school should be locked and only usable by using the key pad.

Doors that are activated by using a key pad or fob should not be propped open.

Effective supervision

- Effective supervision is dependant on a number of factors including:
 - Age of the pupils
 - Ability of the pupils
 - Number of the pupils
 - Activities being undertaken
 - Pupil behaviour

- Specific identified risks e.g. pupils with history of absconding, public rights of way through school grounds, building work, etc.
- Class staff will be allocated children each day to have ‘eyes on’ to ensure they are in sight at all times.

2. Information to pupils.

- School rules and expectations are clearly displayed and reinforced throughout the school.

Individual Pupil Risk Assessments.

- Where there is a foreseeable risk of absconding, there should be an individual risk assessment in place.
- The IPRA should clearly detail the individual control measures required to reduce the risk of absconding.

3. External visits/sites.

- On an Educational Visit the security of the venue/location should be assessed and supervision levels altered accordingly.
- Ensure that there are robust systems in place so that each class has specified members and leaders, and regular head counts occur throughout the visit.
- In the planning for an educational visit the risks of absconding must be clearly assessed, particularly in the case where known absconders are in attendance. This should include transport.

STAFF GUIDANCE FOR PUPILS ABSCONDING

In the unlikely event that a pupil or young person absconds, either intentionally or unwittingly, staff must activate the following procedure:

Where a pupil absconds the following procedures should be followed:

- Member of staff to inform a member of SLT and main office. An SLT member will become the lead person.

- The teacher/class lead will organise a search of the class and department whilst members of the leadership team sweep the remainder of the school.
- If the pupil is not found then available staff to complete a more thorough sweep of the school and check the perimeter of the grounds.
- If a pupil is not located within a reasonable timeframe (5 minutes), the lead person must contact police using 999 and advise that a pupil is missing, providing a full description, including the clothes they were wearing when last seen.
- Lead person to contact parents/carers and inform them of the situation.
- Consideration will be given to whether the search should be extended beyond the school perimeter. This decision will be based on staff's knowledge of the child and on the levels of risk, and on what action is in the child's best interests.
- Any staff who leave school grounds to take mobile phone/ walkie talkie to contact school.
- Once a pupil has been found then the lead SLT member will use their professional judgement to outline the response towards the pupil and the support the pupil will need in the future.
- A full and detailed report of the incident must be completed; this should include date, times, significant decisions made, actions taken, when and by whom i.e. police contact, parents informed external agencies etc.
- Member of SLT to brief police and parents.

Where a pupil attempts or is seen to be leaving the school premises without authorisation the following procedures should be followed:

Where a pupil or young person attempts to or is seen to leave the school premises without authority or support, the following procedures should be followed:

Inform SLT immediately and a lead person will be allocated.

Staff member should follow the pupil or young person and try to persuade them to return to school. If a pupil or young person is deemed to be of high risk to themselves or

others then staff should follow the pupil's individual Risk Assessment/Behaviour Support Plan

At all times staff must be aware that active pursuit may encourage the young person to leave the school or panic placing themselves in further danger e.g. risk of running into a busy road.

Staff should follow the young person or pupil at a safe distance keeping them in sight where possible.

The lead person may direct additional staff to join the search in a vehicle, taking a mobile phone or walkie talkie with them to ensure contact with the school.

The lead person will contact parents/ carers and where applicable other agencies.

If a pupil or young person has left the immediate vicinity and is no longer in sight then the lead person will make the decision on the next actions to be taken. They will take account of the pupil's/ young person's vulnerability, the weather conditions, the time of day, what they are wearing etc.

If a pupil is not located within a reasonable timeframe (5 minutes), the lead person must contact police using 999 and advise that a pupil is missing, providing a full description, including the clothes they were wearing when last seen.

If the pupil or young person returns of their own volition the lead member of staff will inform parents/carers, police and any other significant agencies involved.

A full and detailed report of the incident must be completed; this should include date, times, significant decisions made, actions taken, when and by whom i.e. police contact, parents informed external agencies etc.

Please note if a pupil or young person leaves the building unattended or absconds in the community and there is not an additional staff member available staff should phone 999 while searching the area.

POLICY REVIEW STATEMENT

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if operationally required

