**CHILDREN WHO ABSCOND FROM SCHOOL**

This document will form part of the school’s Emergency Plan. It has been drawn from various sources to create a practical working protocol in the event of child leaving school premises. It operates principally under the framework of the Local Authority’s document – Children Who Abscond From School May 1997. It is informed by the common-law understanding of ‘in loco parentis’ and the teacher’s Duty of Care -Children’s Act 1989, Health & Safety at Work Act 1974.

**Background**

Appropriate supervision is planned across school for individuals and groups of pupils. However, there are occasions when pupils may absent themselves from lessons or from the school site. This policy outlines how the school will respond to such situations.

**Supervision During School Session**

Teachers are responsible for all pupils in the classes or groups they are timetabled to teach. However, on occasions, supervision is often delegated to other appropriate staff, e.g. Teaching Assistants, Mid-days, Students, Senior Leaders. The closeness of the supervision will depend on the number, age and aptitude, experience of the pupils and nature of the activity.

**Before and After School Supervision**

The school provides appropriate levels of supervision before and after school according to the ages and needs of the children in its care. Until the children are registered for the session, when the school assumes loco-parentis, this supervision is a duty of care in partnership with parents. For instance, we open the school site 15 minutes before the main school session starts to enable an orderly start to the day, a Senior Leader supervises the playground and has a duty of care for the children that come onto site, but we do not register them at this point and are not therefore fully responsible for them. Some will be with parents and some will have come to school independently. Some parents will hand over and supervise the direct handover to teachers in lining up. Others will have dropped their child off at the We expect children to stay where they have been told to be. It is a parents’ responsibility to work with the school in a partnership as to what is appropriate for their child to access.

Pupils who abscond before the end of the registration period

Schools are required to register their pupils at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session. This should take place within a period, of not less than 15 minutes, set aside when the register is open. At Sir Edmund Hillary, in practice however, our registers are open between 8.45 and 8.55 to minimise the amount of time a child may be missing for.

We expect parents to contact school prior to 8.45 if the child is not expected to be in that day. Ie: before the register is taken.

If a pupil absconds from the school during the period of registration, the class register should show the pupil as being absent. Should the pupil return to school after the end of the registration period, the class register should be amended to indicate a late arrival.

**Pupils who abscond after registration**

Once a pupil has been registered as present, the registration period has ended and the class register closed, the school is "in loco parentis".  
Should a pupil abscond after the end of the registration period, the school, technically, remains "in loco parentis".  
Every attempt should be made to contact the parents/carers to advise them that their child has absconded from school. When parents/carers are contacted, it should be made clear that the responsibility for their child is being passed back to them.

**Responsibilities of Teachers**

Staff should ensure that pupils arrive at their lessons/activity at the required time and that they remain in the appropriate place. If pupils need to leave the activity, they should do so only with the permission of the person responsible after due consideration of the reason for leaving and any risk that might be involved.

Should a pupil or pupils not arrive, or leave without permission, the person responsible at the time should initiate enquiries as to their whereabouts and initiate a search if no satisfactory and reliable reason is established. Adequate supervision of remaining pupils must also be ensured.

If staffing resources do not allow for this to happen, the member of staff responsible should inform the Head or Deputy Head Teacher.

**A: Strategies when children abscond or absent themselves**

* + If the child has gone missing at **the end of the school day** members of staff may take the most appropriate route home to look for the child. They would also enquire whether the child is likely to have gone to a relative’s house, an after-school club or a friend’s house and explore these routes as well.
  + If a child goes missing **during an outing or school visit**, the teacher in charge must ensure that the remaining children are safely cared for by other staff and adults, before acting in loco-parentis to either delegate the search for the child and to open lines of communication back at school, with a view to also needing to contact parents.
  + If a child cannot be found by his/her teacher, teaching assistant or learning support assistant **in the school day,** the head teacher or a deputy head teacher must be notified immediately and told when and where the child was last seen. Time is of the essence and prompt actions must be taken by all.
  + The remaining children will be left safe in the care of suitable staff. All other available staff will conduct a thorough search of the child’s classroom, play areas, storage areas, toilets, the school building and the school grounds.
  + *As a general rule staff should not pursue a child beyond the school boundary. Instead they should report to the Head Teacher where they last saw the child and the direction the child was heading so that this information can be communicated to the parents or police as appropriate. The member of staff should then return to their normal duties unless directed otherwise by the Head Teacher.*
  + In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the member of staff to go beyond the school boundary, e.g. to retrieve a child who has accidentally wandered out of an open gate, or to follow/retrieve a child with special needs who has deliberately left the premises but in doing so does not understand the gravity of their action or has gone to try and find their parent. Staff are expected to use their professional discretion in deciding whether or not it is appropriate to go beyond the school boundary in pursuance of such children. If a child is followed beyond the school boundary the member of staff must behave in a manner that is not threatening to the child. They must consider that running after the child may cause the child to run into a dangerous situation, e.g. the child might run into a road without looking out for traffic in an attempt to evade the pursuing, running adult.
  + In exceptional circumstances where a child is known to be liable to run off the premises, the school may prepare and enact contingency search plans that exist as part of a behavioural risk assessment, involving named staff. When enacting these plans staff should be mindful not to put themselves or the child at risk.
  + If the child is not found within a short period of time the presumption must be that they may be off site. There may already be some knowledge that a child is off site without permission. In these circumstances the Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher will advise that the parents must be called immediately to enquire if they have returned home.
  + If the child is not at home the Head Teacher will, in consultation with the parents, begin a search outside of the school premises. They may consider with the parent the need to If the parents cannot be contacted the Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher may authorise an Off-site search. This may include a visit to the child’s home if this is near the school.

**B: Searching for Children Offsite**

When it is agreed by a member of the Senior Leadership Team that an Off-site search should take place, the Office Manager will become the centre of communications and take out the Child Absconding Checklist (appendix A). This is because SLT may be the people available to conduct the search. A brief discussion will take place, preferably with teachers or other members of staff who know the pupil well and may know any personal issues relating to the child.

The discussion should ascertain where the child lives, particular places the pupil likes or feels comfortable in. For example, the pupil may feel safe and comfortable at a particular friend’s house. It is also possible that, having run away, the pupil will not know where to go. It is therefore worth looking for him/her near the school.

The Office Manager will record which staff are going off site and which directions they will go in.

* + Members of staff, who are not supervising children, will be sent, preferably in pairs, with their mobile phones to search the area in the immediate vicinity of the school.
  + An urgent but thorough search should be made of the immediate vicinity and if the child is not found quickly the head teacher must be notified.
  + If a member of staff finds the child, the Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher must be told at once. They will ensure that relevant parties are notified
  + If the child is not found within 45 minutes and the parents still cannot be raised, then the Head Teacher (or other staff if so directed by the Head Teacher) will inform the police and, as appropriate, the social services and the Chair of Governors of the child’s disappearance. Thereafter the Head Teacher will follow the instructions of the police regarding the continuation of the search for the child.

The head teacher or deputy head teacher will investigate how the incident occurred and will take appropriate action to ensure that similar events do not happen again.

**Calling the Police**

Police will be contacted no later than a period of one hour if a pupil is missing. This may be actioned earlier, depending on the circumstances or if parents request it.

Police Officers recognise that children with disabilities are additionally vulnerable when they go missing and, as such, an appreciation of their level of understanding of risks should be considered and responded to appropriately.

When referring to the Police, any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, in particular:

a profile of the pupil’s needs,

In addition, the following information should be provided:

* + Description of the pupil, including their clothing.
  + Details of where the pupil was last seen and with whom.
  + Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented.
  + Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found.
  + Circumstances under which the pupil is absent.
  + Any factors that increase the risk to the pupil.
  + Effective strategies when responding to the pupil etc.

The Senior Leader will contact the Police to confirm a pupil has returned to the school.

**C: Action on the pupil’s return to school**

When the pupil is found and returned to school, it would not be advisable to immediately discipline him/her. Instead, before deciding on any action, school should establish why the pupil decided to run away.

It should:

* + Seek to show the pupil that his/her behaviour was dangerous
  + Seek to understand why he/she decided to run away. Was it because of something that happened in school? Was it because of something happening outside of school?
  + Ask the pupil whether he/she feels safe in school

School should then consider ways of ensuring the pupil does not run away again. This might involve looking at behaviour strategies for coping with stress. For example, school might provide a ‘safe place’ the pupil can go to for ‘time out’. School might also encourage the pupil to speak to a particular member of staff if he/she begins to feel upset, angry or stressed.

**What if the pupil has SEN?**

The school should establish whether or not the pupil is prone to this sort of behaviour. If the pupil has special education needs (SEN), the behaviour may be associated with his/her learning difficulties. There may be strategies for dealing with the behaviour, so this should be reflected on straight away.

**Understanding why the pupil has run away**

It is important for school to establish why the pupil might have run away. This will help it to decide how to deal with the situation. Some questions to help identify the cause are:

* + Does the pupil have a relevant special educational need that might contribute to his/her decision to run away?
  + Has something happened in the pupil’s life outside school that might affect his/her behaviour in school?
  + Is there a specific place or person at the school that might prompt this behaviour?
  + Has the pupil experienced acute stress at school for any reason?
  + Is he/she a victim of bullying?
  + Does he/she have a record of running away?

**Outcomes**

The safety of all children will be given our highest priority. A missing child should be an extremely rare happening. This policy is designed to put into place swift and effective actions to locate any missing child and to notify and involve parents and relevant parties at every appropriate point.

Appendix A

**Checklist for Offsite Search Child Absconding from School**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Action | Time | Comment |
| Member of SLT confirms child has gone missing |  |  |
| Strategy Discussion of pupil |  |  |
| Ringing Parent-  Delegated to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  ascertain if child has gone home  search being organised – where? |  |  |
| Continue search of premises |  |  |
| Staff going off site **and** general or specific direction they will go.  Ensure staff have Office Manager’s personal mobile (so as to maintain school phone number being open) |  | Names: |
| Ring Police  After 45 minutes, if parent has not been contacted and child still missing.   * Description of the pupil, including their clothing. * Details of where the pupil was last seen and with whom. * Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented. * Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found. * Circumstances under which the pupil is absent. * Any factors that increase the risk to the pupil. * Effective strategies when responding to the pupil etc |  |  |
| Re-ring parent and ascertain if they have manage to locate child, wish to contact police. |  |  |
| If police have been called, inform Chair of Governors. |  |  |
|  |  |  |