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Hassocks

Children Missing Policy and Procedure

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Policy Review Date: January 2025

Next Review due: January 2026

Policy and Procedure for children who go missing or run away.

This policy and procedure is in accordance with:

- Joint policy for children Missing in Sussex 2023
(<https://sussexchildprotection.procedures.org.uk/tkyshp/the-child-protection-plan/joint-policy-for-children-missing#:~:text=Response%20when%20a%20child%20is%20missing%20from%20Care,-8.6.6.36&text=Where%20a%20child%20%2F%20young%20person,hours%20for%20high%2Drisk%20cases.>)
- Children's Act 1989

It should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and procedure
- Health and Safety Policy
- Keeping Children Safe in Education

Introduction

There are no exact figures for the number of children who go missing or run away, but estimates suggest that the figure is in the region of 100,000 per year. Children may run away *from* a problem, such as abuse or neglect at home, or *to* somewhere they want to be. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else. Whatever the reason, it is thought that approximately 25 per cent of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol misuse. Looked after children missing from their placements are particularly vulnerable.

Children who are missing invariably place themselves at risk. The reasons for their absence are varied and complex and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances. Every 'missing' episode should attract proper attention from the professionals involved with the child and those professionals must collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is given to the child on their return and that parents and carers are supported appropriately.

Definitions

- **CHILD** - Where the policy refers to 'child' or 'children' these terms include young people under the age of 18 years. Our policy remains in force whilst our students are registered at the school which may be into their nineteenth year.
- **MISSING** - anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.
- **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN** The term "looked after children" has a specific legal meaning deriving from Children Act 1989. Under the Children Act 1989 a child is "looked after" if he or she is:
(1) provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours (Children Act 1989, Section 20 and 21) or
(2) is subject to a care order (Children Act 1989, Part 1V)
- **CHILDREN WHO BECOME LOST** - Children who because of their age or due to a degree of intellectual impairment become separated from their carers, become temporarily disorientated and become missing as a result and would wish to be found. This is clearly very frightening and upsetting for all involved
- **ABSENT** - A person not at the place where they are expected to be.

Clearly some children absent themselves for a short period and then return and their whereabouts are known. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose or accidentally and may be testing boundaries.

Children who make telephone contact and agree a time to return, but subsequently fail to do so could also fall within this definition.

This kind of boundary testing is within the range of normal teenage behaviour and not necessarily considered a risk, although a more general response such as additional support and advice may be helpful as behaviour of this nature may fall within the wider safeguarding remit.

- **Missing child:** a child reported as missing to the Police by their family or carers
- **Looked after child (child in care) :** a child who is [looked after](#) by a Local Authority because of a care order, or being accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989
- **Responsible Local Authority:** the Local Authority that is responsible for a [looked after](#) child's care and care planning
- **Host Local Authority:** the Local Authority in which a [looked after](#) child is placed when placed out of the responsible Local Authority's area
- **Care leaver:** an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989
- **Missing from Care:** a [looked after](#) child who is not at their placement, or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known
- **Away from placement without authorisation:** a [looked after](#) child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be, and the carer has concerns, or the incident has been notified to the Local Authority or the Police

RECORDING

Throughout the process identified within this policy, a full record of all actions taken and messages received and given must be kept by all agencies.

RISK ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING

RISK ASSESSMENT – PLANNING BEFORE THE EVENT

As far as possible there should be an assessment in advance of any child who is judged to be likely to go missing. In these circumstances there will be a planning meeting. This discussion should be recorded in writing using the appropriate risk assessment form.

In assessing the significance of a child's absence either before the event or once it has happened the following should be borne in mind:

- The age and level of understanding of the child
- The legal status of the child
- Previous behaviour patterns
- The emotional needs of the child e.g. whether there have been any variation in their mood or whether they have expressed any intention to harm themselves or others
- Behaviour of the child as influenced by peer groups or others
- Whether the child is perceived as running to someone/ something or running from a situation/someone
- The risk of offending
- The risk of the child being targeted for sexual exploitation
- The legal implications of the child breaking any court order by absconding
- The child's view

If appropriate, the child should have this policy explained to them so that they understand what actions will be taken if they absent themselves without permission.

Site Specific Information

At LVS Hassocks the site borders agricultural land, has two ponds within its boundaries and a bridle path running adjacent to the main school site. The school is within 5 minute walk of the A23, the main London to Brighton road. The site is therefore not suitable for children who have a known history of absconding or suicidal ideation relating to running into traffic or drowning. This is made clear in our Admission Policy.

Once a child has gone missing, staff should avoid dismissing the potential significance of repeated periods of absconding. Often such children are immediately labelled as 'the problem' and insufficient consideration is given to **why** they are persistently absenting themselves. This needs to be explored, particularly at the time of the post-return interview.

In relation to reasons for going missing, a range of 'push' and 'pull' factors have been identified. '**push factors**' may include:

- Conflict with carers/school staff, feeling powerless, bullying, being unhappy at home or in care
- Wanting attention by provoking a reaction to demonstrate that someone cares about them
- A sense of boredom and a wish to 'have fun'

Some of the '**pull factors**' identified may include:

- Wanting to be with family or friends,
- Peer pressure to conform to established patterns of behaviour
- The attractions of street life or people who may present a risk

Once a child has gone missing/frequently absent or if a high risk is identified for them it may be relevant for the DSL to refer to Early Help or contact SPOA / FDFE etc and to facilitate a Team around the Child meeting. This decision will be taken in liaison with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and the Principal.

PROCEDURES

Procedures to Prevent Missing Students

- The register is taken during each lesson during the day and absences are registered on ISAMS
- Unauthorised absences are reported to the School Office during the academic day
- Parents needing to take a student out of school during scheduled hours must seek and obtain permission in writing from the Principal.

Procedures to be followed if a student is missing: Within the School - use form Appendix 1 to log actions

In the event of a student being lost within the School, the following procedure will be implemented:

- If during school hours (Monday to Friday 9.30 a.m. to 16.00 p.m.) immediately notify the Principal or appropriate member of Leadership Team.
- Outside these hours, immediately notify the Principal.

- If during school hours, the teacher will designate one staff member to search the immediate area whilst one staff member remains with the students.
- If, after a maximum of five minutes, no trace is found, all available staff at the School are mobilized and under direction of the Principal the grounds are systematically searched using all available communication/visual aids.
- The length of time that is allowed to elapse before the Principal notifies the Police is dependent on the individual student and their age.
- When the Principal contacts the Police they will provide the following information:
 - Child's name
 - D.O.B
 - Where, when & who missing with
 - What the child was wearing
 - Description of young person
 - Recent photo
 - Medical history
 - Legal status

If after thirty minutes no trace has been found, the Principal, or appropriate member of the leadership team, will notify:

- The Director of SEN/Director of Education
- The parents/next of kin of the missing student
- Social Services
- Local Authority of the child
- When the young person is found the Principal will ensure all relevant parties are informed and ensure the student is 'de-briefed' by a key member of staff whom they trust and work well with.
- Upon conclusion of the incident, representatives of the external services (if involved) and the Leadership Team will meet and "de-brief". The lessons learnt from this incident will be noted and any changes required to the operating procedure and the student's individual risk assessment will be made.

Procedures to be followed if a student is missing: Off School Premises - use form Appendix 2 to log actions

In the event of a student being lost away from the School the following procedure will be used:

- If during school hours (Monday to Friday 09:30 a.m. to 16:00 p.m.) immediately notify the, Principal
- All remaining students are gathered together and returned to the School, under supervision. This releases staff to make a search of the immediate area and act as the focal point for the Principal and other staff members who arrive from the School as soon as possible.
- If after ten minutes no trace has been found, the Principal will notify the Police with the same information as above.
- If, after twenty minutes, no trace has been found, the Principal will notify:
 - The Director of SEN/Director of Education
 - The parents/next of kin of the missing student
 - Social Services
 - Student's Local Authority
- Operation control will then pass to the Senior Police Officer, whose point of contact within the school will be the Principal
- When the young person is found the SLT will ensure all relevant parties are informed and ensure the student is 'de-briefed' by a key member of staff whom they trust and work well with

- Upon conclusion of the incident, representatives of the external services (if involved) and the Leadership Team will meet and “de-brief”. The lessons learnt from this incident will be noted and any changes required to the operating procedure will be made.

Procedures to be followed if a student is not collected on time

If a student is not collected within 30 minutes of the agreed collection time, Reception will telephone the parents or legal guardians. If there is no answer, the Reception staff will phone the emergency numbers for that student. If the student is picked up via Taxi, then the Local Authority and Taxi Firm will be contacted.

If there is no response from the parents’ or guardians’ contact numbers or the emergency numbers within a 1 hour period, or when the premises are closing, Principal will contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead who will inform the relevant Local Authority who will make emergency arrangements for the student. The School will make a written report of the incident and submit it to West Sussex. (Integrated Front door for Families)

During this time, the School will ensure that the student is safely cared for.

Children Missing in Education

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will then inform the ‘Children Missing Education’ team of any student who is going to be deleted from the admission register where they:

- have been taken out of school by their parents and are being educated outside the school system e.g. home education;
- have ceased to attend school
- have been certified by the school medical officer as unlikely to be in a fit state of health to attend school before ceasing to be of compulsory school age, and neither he/she nor his/her parent has indicated the intention to continue to attend the school after ceasing to be of compulsory school age;
- are in custody for a period of more than four months due to a final court order and the proprietor does not reasonably believe they will be returning to the school at the end of that period;
- have not returned to school for ten days after an authorised absence or are absent from school without authorisation for twenty consecutive school days, having made reasonable enquiries to establish the whereabouts of the child. (This only applies if the school does not have reasonable grounds to believe that the student is unable to attend because of sickness or unavoidable cause);
- have been permanently excluded

LVS Hassocks Procedure for Loss of student – Within the School

Step one:

Teacher to designate staff member to search immediate area whilst another staff member stays with students. If, after **5 minutes** student has still not been found, the ‘Children Missing’ procedure will be followed. Co-ordination/completion of form below by:

Principal, Vice Principal or Deputy Head – 08:30 to 16:30,

Step two:

All available staff at the School to be mobilized in the search, taking mobile phones / walkie talkies with them to assist with communication.

Student Name/s:		Date:	
Time	Instruction	Allocated Staff Member (write staff name)	Actioned by
	Student reported missing to Principal		
	Principal to mobilise all staff to assist in search		
	Principal to allocate staff member/s to remain with other students and instigate contingency plans where necessary.		
	Search of grounds		
	Search main kitchen, dining hall and service corridor – include laundry room and garden area		
	Search all classrooms and adjacent storage areas		
	Search Buchanan Building		
	Search Sussex Centre		
	Search Admin offices		
	Search Oast/Oak Barn		
	Search of car park area (to include garages)		
	Search of orchard, chickens		
	Search of back field		
	Search of Bridle Path and Driveway		

Step three:

If after **fifteen minutes** no trace is found, the co-coordinator will notify the Police, in view of proximity of main road.

Time	Instruction	Staff Member (write staff name)	Actioned by
	Police notified with following info: Contained on updated profile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Child's name ✓ D.O.B ✓ Where, when & who missing with ✓ What the child was wearing ✓ Description of young person ✓ Recent photo ✓ Medical history ✓ Legal status 		
	Further Details:		

Step four:

If, after thirty minutes, no trace has been found, the Principal will notify:

Time	Instruction	Staff Member (write staff name)	Actioned by
	Director of SEN (07590 550005) Director of Education notified (01344 882770)		
	Parents/next of kin of missing student notified		
	Social services notified		
	Student's placing authority informed		
	ISI informed – notified by report sent		

Note any further actions or notes here:

Return to school interview

Lessons learnt:

LVS Hassocks: Procedure for loss of student – Off School Premises

Step one:

Trip Leader to designate staff member to search immediate area whilst another staff member stays with students. If, after **5 minutes** student has still not been found, the 'Children Missing' procedure will be followed. Co-ordination/completion of form below by:

Principal **or appropriate member of leadership team-9.30 to 16:30**

Step two:

If during school hours (Monday to Friday 9:30am to 16:00pm) immediately notify the Principal)

Student Name/s:		Date:	
Time	Instruction	Allocated Staff Member (write staff name)	Actioned by
	Student reported missing to Principal		
	All remaining students are gathered together and returned to school, under supervision		
	Staff remaining to make a search of the immediate area		
	Principal and other staff members arrive from the School		

Step three:

If after ten minutes no trace is found, the Principal will notify the police.

Time	Instruction	Staff Member (write staff name)	Actioned by
	Police Notified with following details: Updated profile provided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Child's name ➤ D.O.B ➤ Where, when & who missing with ➤ What the child was wearing ➤ Description of young person ➤ Recent photo ➤ Medical history ➤ Legal status 		
	Further Details:		

Step four:

If, after twenty minutes, no trace has been found, the Principal will notify:

Time	Instruction	Staff Member (write staff name)	Actioned by
	Director of SEN (07590 550005) Director of Education notified (01344 882770)		
	Parents/next of kin of missing student notified		
	Social services and placing authority notified		

Operational control will then pass to the Senior Police Officer, whose point of contact within the school will be the Principal or Deputy Head in their absence.

Note any further actions or notes here:

Return to school interview