



Snowflake School

*‘Improving the quality of family life’*

# Policy for Pupils who Abscond or go Missing

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## Introduction

At Snowflake School, the safety of all children will be given the highest priority.

This policy must be read in conjunction with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Behaviour Policy, Positive Handling Policy, Health and Safety Policy and Risk Assessment Policy. All incidents of a pupil going missing or absconding must be treated as a safeguarding concern in line with KCSIE 2025 and immediately reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and recorded on the school's safeguarding system.

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 always remain within the care of the school throughout the school day and during school led activities.

The school recognises that pupils with autism and additional needs may present an increased risk of absconding or elopement due to communication differences, anxiety, sensory dysregulation, or behavioural functions such as escape or avoidance. As a specialist setting using ABA-informed practice, the school adopts a proactive, preventative and individualised approach to managing absconding risks through functional behaviour assessment, individual risk management plans and positive behaviour support.

Staff must always be very aware of the potential for children to go missing either onsite or by absconding from the school premises. For the purpose of this policy, the term '**absconding**' is used to cover incidents of pupils leaving the school grounds without permission (an adult is present but is unable to stop the pupil). '**Missing from the school site**' is used to describe a pupil who cannot be found, and it is unclear if the pupil is still onsite or have left the school grounds.

All pupils at Snowflake School have special educational needs and are extremely vulnerable. All pupils lack an understanding about their own safety, and the significance of school rules relating to attending and absconding. As a result of this, the school place high importance on awareness for staff regarding matters of safety, security and support for pupils.

All staff must be aware of the procedures to be followed if a child goes missing off the school site. This can be a very stressful time for all concerned. Every care is taken to ensure that all children are kept safe. Risk assessments are carried out to ensure that the school and setting is as safe as possible and children should never be allowed to leave the premises on their own.

It is possible, however, that despite all precautions a child cannot be accounted for and goes missing. This policy is designed to put in place swift and effective actions to locate any missing child and to notify and involve parents and the authorities at every appropriate point.

## Safeguarding Responsibilities

All missing or absconding incidents are safeguarding incidents.

- Staff must immediately inform the DSL (or DDSL) in addition to SLT.
- The DSL will assess safeguarding risk, including vulnerability, exploitation risk, and contextual safeguarding concerns.
- All incidents must be recorded on MyConcern in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- The DSL will consider whether a referral to Children's Social Care or the Police is required.

## Preventative Procedures

Systems must be in place to ensure that children do not go missing off the school site. These include:

### Site security

- Ensuring that all exits are kept closed.
- Children must be made aware of the boundaries of the school.
- Doors are activated by using a key card and should not be propped open. Pupils must not have access to the key cards, unless as part of their individualised programme, risk assessed and for internal doors only.

### Effective supervision

- Children must be supervised at all times and there will be sufficient staff available to ensure this happens.
- Head counts should take place regularly through the day and particularly when a class has been out of the classroom.
- Parents/carers must inform the school in advance if their child has an appointment which will require them to arrive at or leave school during school hours. This is logged on the system and distributed to the staff team.
- Children will not be allowed to leave the school with anyone other than the authorised persons unless the school has been informed otherwise and that alternative person is identified.
- Any visitors to school will be signed in and out. They must be let into the school by a member of staff; also seen off the premises by a member of staff to ensure that no doors are left open and the safety of the children is maintained.

### Individual Risk Management

Each pupil identified as a potential absconding risk must have:

- An individual absconding/elopement risk assessment
- A Positive Behaviour Support Plan
- Identified triggers and preventative strategies
- Appropriate staffing ratios based on risk
- Environmental adaptations where required (e.g. secure exits, visual boundaries)

These will be reviewed regularly by the multidisciplinary team and the DSL.

## Staff Guidance for Pupils Missing from the School Site (Reactive Procedures)

- If a child cannot be found, a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the DSL must be notified immediately and told when and where the child was last seen. Time is of the essence and prompt action must be taken by all. The incident must be treated as a safeguarding concern from the outset.
- The remaining children will be left in the care of a suitable adult(s). All other staff will conduct a thorough search of the premises (child's classroom, storage areas, toilets, the school building) and the school grounds, with the staff team being careful not to create an atmosphere of panic.
- SLT will nominate two staff to search the area in the immediate vicinity of the school. All staff will be extra vigilant to any potentially suspicious behaviour or persons in and around the school site.
- A dynamic risk assessment must be carried out immediately. Police (999) must be contacted without delay if the pupil is high risk, non-verbal, vulnerable, near hazards (e.g. roads), or cannot be located quickly. There should be no fixed waiting period where risk is high.
- If the child is not found in the school, the child's parents/carer will be contacted by SLT and informed of the situation.
- While waiting for the police and the parent / carer to arrive, searches for the child will continue. During this period, the other members of staff will maintain as normal a routine as possible for the rest of the children in the school.
- SLT will be responsible for meeting the police and the missing child's parent/carer. SLT will be responsible for co-ordinating any actions instructed by the police and do all they can to comfort and reassure the parents/carers
- The LA will be notified by SLT that a child is missing, so that additional support can be provided. Trustees will also be informed as soon as is practicable.
- If a member of staff finds the child, SLT must be told at once. Parents, police and other authorities will be notified.
- Once the situation has been resolved, a full written account of the incident will be recorded and held on file.
- Further risk assessments will be carried out to ensure that the incident does not happen again.

# Staff Guidance for Pupils Absconding from the School Site

- In the event of a child attempting to and/or successfully absconding from the school premises while in the presence of a staff member, the allocated staff member is to message to the whole school using the walkie talkie: “Emergency help required in the \*location\*.”
- While help is arriving, the staff member is to closely follow the pupil as best they can and provide updates for other staff members in order for them to come and help. Staff must only follow the pupil if it is safe to do so and continuing to evaluate the risks as they move away from the school premises (e.g. uneven fields).
- All available staff members to respond to urgent call for help, including the Head teacher and members of the SLT. Staff who are allocated to a pupil are to remain in school and not respond. Further assistance will be called if required.
- In the event that the pupil is moving towards a potentially life-threatening hazard (e.g. a busy road), the closest staff member is to provide the pupil with information about the situation (e.g. “you are going towards a main road where you can get<sup>1</sup> hurt”). Provide an alternative route for the young person if they need to keep moving or if there is an immediate threat to life, the member of staff will need to warn the pupil that they will need to support the young person to stop. Staff will support the pupil to stop by using what is reasonable, proportionate and necessary as outlined in Team Teach.
- Once the situation has been resolved, a full written account of the incident will be recorded and held on file.
- Further risk assessments will be carried out to ensure that the incident does not happen again.
- Staff must prioritise de-escalation, least restrictive practice and pupil safety at all times. Any physical intervention must be reasonable, proportionate and necessary and in accordance with the school’s Positive Handling Policy and Use of Reasonable Force guidance (DfE).

## Recording and Reporting

Following any missing or absconding incident:

- A safeguarding record must be completed on MyConcern
- A chronology of events must be documented

- A post-incident risk assessment and behaviour review must be completed
- The DSL must review the incident
- The DSL must consider referral to Children's Social Care
- Parents/carers must be informed in a timely manner
- Patterns and trends will be monitored by the DSL and Safeguarding Governor

## Off Site Visits

- All off-site visits involving pupils with known absconding risk must include a specific elopement risk assessment, enhanced staffing ratios and clear supervision zoning.
- When a group of children are taken out of school, risk assessments must be completed in advance by the Group Leader and checked by the Class Leader. All staff read and sign these risk assessments prior to the outing.
- A list of children must be carried by staff on the visit. ☑ Regular head counts will be undertaken by staff.
- Staff ratios during offsite visits will be based on pupil's risk assessments, i.e. 2:1, 1:1 or 1:2 in some instances
- For some pupils, it may be deemed too much of a risk for them to attend some community outings based on the possibility that they will abscond. This will be determined by their individual risk assessment and will be made a main focus on their Individual Learning Plans (IEP).
- A school mobile phone will be taken on all visits.
- If a child goes missing the other children will be gathered together and a member of staff assigned to look for the child. An urgent but thorough search should be made of the immediate vicinity.
- If in an enclosed space, the appropriate staff in that environment can be initially informed before calling the police, for instance to give a message over the tannoy.
- SLT and DSL to be informed immediately, so that the parents/carers can be informed.
- If the child is not found immediately, the police must be contacted in the area where the visit is taking place.
- If a member of staff finds the child, SLT must be informed at once. Parents, police and other authorities will be notified.
- The Senior Leadership Team will investigate how the incident occurred and will take appropriate action to ensure that similar events do not happen again.

## Post-Incident Review and Governance Oversight

After any serious absconding or missing incident, the Senior Leadership Team and DSL will conduct a formal review to identify contributing factors, safeguarding risks and required preventative actions. The Safeguarding Trustee will receive anonymised reports of incidents to monitor safeguarding effectiveness, in line with KCSIE and ISI regulatory requirements.

## Revision

Version Update	March 2026
Review due	March 2027
Reviewed By	Sumen Starr
Approved by Board of Trustees on	March 2026