



## Procedures for Children who Abscond from Timeout Schools (part of the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures from September 2023)

The purpose of this non-statutory document is to set out the procedures for all staff should a child leave the school without permission.

### Aim

We actively work to provide a secure, safe environment, a school where children want to come to enjoy learning with others as part of a caring community. However, we recognise that due to the social and emotional difficulties many of our children face, the fight or flight option in reaction to certain situations, may make it likely that a child will try to take 'flight'. These procedures are in place to ensure we are ready to deal with this eventuality should it occur.

### 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 always throughout the school day and during school led activities. Although the perimeter of the site is fenced, and the school doors gates locked during the school day and the main entrance has a release system, we recognise that it is possible to circumvent these barriers.

### Where a pupil is found to be absent from school without authorisation the procedures should be as follows:

1. Staff member to inform lead teacher immediately.
2. Lead Teacher to organise a search of the building and known places that the pupil may have gone to. If the child is seen leaving the building the child must be followed immediately and kept in sight. If the child cannot be seen the home manager/parent and Head of Education must be contacted immediately.
3. If the pupil is not found, then all available staff to complete a more thorough sweep of the school and grounds.
4. If in agreement with home manager/parent Lead Teacher to phone the police when the school and yard area have been fully checked if the child is not found.
5. Staff to contact parents/carers and inform them of the situation. Every attempt to make contact to be recorded.
6. Consideration will be given as to whether the search should be extended beyond the school buildings and grounds. This decision will be based on staff knowledge of the child and levels of risk and

on what action is in the child's best interests.

7. Any staff who leave the school grounds should take a mobile phone to contact school.
8. Once a pupil has been found then the Head of Education will use their professional judgement to decide on the next immediate steps to ensure that the child remains safe.
9. A written report will be made/ incident sheet completed.
10. Carers/ parents and social workers will be informed.
11. Upon his or her return to school, and when the pupil is calm, the pupil will meet with the Lead Teacher so that the reasons for absconding may be discussed in detail. At this point a decision will be made as to the appropriateness of further actions. The Head of Education may consider a fixed term exclusion if it is felt that the child's safety is compromised by absconding.

### **Pupils who abscond from school but remain in or around the school grounds.**

In these circumstances, school staff will not pursue a pupil or force him/her back into the school building.

School staff will use their judgement, knowledge of the pupil and assessment of the pupil's safety in deciding what to do. This will include considering the pupil's age and vulnerability.

The emotional state of the pupil will need to be considered. If the pupil is upset or angry, care should be taken in approaching the child. The size of the pupil will also be considered.

In all cases, staff should not place themselves in situations of potential danger of injury.

### **Pupils who return to school after absconding**

Pupils who abscond will do so because of a specific incident which may have taken place at school, at home or on the way to school.

For those pupils who return to school either by their own choice, with support or following intervention by a member of staff, thought should be given to their welfare. They are likely to need support, understanding and perhaps some time apart from their peers.

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

1. A member of staff will alert the Lead Teacher (in their absence) The Head of Education; this lead person will direct the course of action.
2. A member of Staff who knows the pupil well and has a good relationship with the pupil will follow the pupil to the perimeter fence, exit or gate and will try to persuade the pupil to stay in the school.
3. As active pursuit may encourage a child to leave the site and may also cause the pupil to panic; possibly putting him or herself at risk by running onto a busy road, staff will not chase but will try to keep a child in sight at a distance.
4. The Lead Teacher may request additional staff to join the search in a vehicle,

- taking a mobile phone to contact the school.
5. Contact the pupil's parents/carers will be made. The call or attempted calls will be recorded. A member of the team will also call the police to log the incident and make a log of the call.
  6. If the searching staff member loses sight of the pupil they must contact the school office giving details of their location and the clothes that the pupil is wearing.
  7. If the pupil has left the immediate vicinity of the school grounds and is no longer visible then the lead will decide as to how to take matters further, which will consider the age of the pupil, the nature of the incident which led to the pupil absconding, the pupils previous history of being involved in episodes of absconding and their outcomes. If the pupil returns of their own volition, parents/carers and the police will be informed.
  8. Upon his or her return to school, and when the pupil is calm, the pupil will meet with a member of the SLT so that the reasons for absconding may be discussed in detail. At this point a decision will be made as to the appropriateness of further actions. The Head of Education may consider a fixed term exclusion.

## Parents and Carers

Parents and carers of pupils are responsible for supporting the work of the school and encouraging their children to keep to all school procedures and policies.

Once school has informed the parents that their child has absconded, parents and carers are responsible for actively supporting the school with subsequent procedures and actions. This could include coming into school to help secure the safety of their child as well as meeting with the Head of Education to agree subsequent actions.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

Each incident will be monitored and evaluated. Individual risk assessments for pupils may be appropriate.

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James Docherty (Head of Education)