



# Heart of the Forest School

## **Policy guidance for children who abscond or go missing**

**This policy guidance and procedure should be read in conjunction with the, Health & Safety Policy, the Safeguarding and Child Protection/Vulnerable Adult' policy, the Behaviour Policy, Keeping Children Safe in Education documentation, Working together to Safeguard Children and individual pupil risk assessments.**

## **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.

Children absconding or go missing from care, home and education is a key risk factor in safeguarding children. 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.

This guidance is to assist you with our existing safeguarding policies and should complement and enhance the following policies already in place – i.e. safeguarding policy, behaviour policy, whistleblowing procedures, data protection, SEND policy, health and safety and first aid policy.

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.

Staff work with pupils and young people to raise their understanding of safe behaviours both in school and in the community and provide each pupil and young person with purposeful educational and community experiences which are engaging, creative and suitable to their individual need, interest and ability.

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.

## **RISK ASSESSMENTS**

The safety and welfare of our young people is paramount.

In order to ensure the continued safety of all children and young people in our establishment, individual environmental and activity risk assessments are carried out and maintained by the class teacher.

The risk assessment will detail measures and controls, which are in place to safeguard individual pupils. Class staff will be allocated children each day to have 'eyes on' to ensure they are in sight at all times.

## **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:

Alert a member of the school leadership team or main reception.

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.

The teacher must ensure that the rest of the pupils are safe and appropriately supervised.

If a pupil is not located within a reasonable timeframe (10 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.

The Headteacher will contact parents/ carers and Local Authority to inform them of the situation.

Once a pupil has been found a member of SLT will brief the police, local authority and parents as necessary.

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

## **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:**

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. A near miss form must be completed and forwarded to SLT.

If a pupil or young person has left the immediate vicinity of the school, SLT and main reception must be contacted, whereupon the lead person will direct the course of action required.

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 (10 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