Diocese of Chelmsford
Vine Schools Trust

Child Going Missing or Absconding Policy

This is a model policy for all Vine schools that has been reviewed and adapted for St Andrew's C of E Primary school.

Policy Reference:	S010
Approved by Vine Schools Trust on:	Summer 23
Adopted by this school on:	Summer 23
Next review:	Summer 24

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit

JOHN 15:5

Vision & Values

V	**Valuing every person**
I	**Inspiring great teaching**
N	**Nurturing academic excellence and Christian Character**
E	**Excelling, unlocking great potential**

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Please note – this is NOT a policy for Children Missing Education (CME).
For CME guidance and procedures, Essex VST Schools should go to Essex Schools Infolink
https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/education_compliance/Pages/children_missing_education.aspx
VST Thurrock schools should go to
https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/children-missingeducation/overview

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school Child Protection Policy and in particular Appendix C – Missing Child Protocol.

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1. Overview

This policy is put in place to ensure that every action possible is taken to secure the quick and safe return of a child if they go missing or abscond from school.

2. Objectives

- To locate any missing child quickly.
- To ensure that children who leave school during the school day only do so with the head teacher's, teachers or office staff's permission and that they are accompanied by an authorised adult.
- To ensure that the building, grounds and play areas are safe and secure during school hours.
- To ensure that staff **always** keep children under proper supervision.
- To ensure that if a child 'goes missing' during the school day, he/she is located quickly and returned safely to school.

3. Immediate Actions

- If a child cannot be found when they should be in school, the head teacher or 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.
- Members of staff who are not supervising children, **must** conduct an urgent and thorough search of the immediate vicinity where the child was last seen.
- The remaining children must 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 etc.
- If the child is not found within a short period of time, the head teacher or deputy head teacher will advise that the parents/carers **must** be called.
- Where there is a Social Worker allocated to the child, they should also be informed.
- Under direction of the head teacher or deputy head teacher, the parents/carers will be notified that their child is missing.
- 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 has gone missing at the end of the school day, (and does not have written permission to walk home), the same procedures are undertaken but in addition, a member of staff may take the most appropriate route home to look for the child. They should 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. **NB. These actions must not delay the parents/carers being informed that the child is missing.**
- 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 the other staff and adults. The teacher in charge must also inform the headteacher, immediately, and the rest of this policy will be applied.
- If the child is not quickly found the head teacher or deputy head teacher, must take swift action and notify the police.
- Once the active steps to locate the child have been taken, for example, searching the premises and surrounding areas, contacting the child by phone, text and social media, and contacting their parents/carers. If none of these actions locate the child, then they must be reported missing to the Police by dialling 101, **or 999 if there is a belief that the child is immediately at risk or**

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suffering significant harm. It is important that the police are informed of any checks already completed as it may save time and prevent duplication of tasks set by the police to locate a child.

- After a child has been reported missing, any further information should be communicated to the police by telephoning 101 and quoting the incident number that the police would have provided following the initial report. Further information must be passed to the police as soon as possible, as officers will continue to search for the child until informed of their return.
- 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, including staff training, meetings or risk assessments as appropriate.

4. Children who run

- If staff fear that a child is likely to run out of the school grounds, a swift and urgent check must be made to ensure exit routes are secure – e.g. gates around drop off and pick up time.
- If a child does manage to leave the school site and is in the eye line of adults, the adult should seek other adult assistance and call after the child or try and talk to the child to try and get them to come back.
- The member of staff will alert other members of staff and search the immediate vicinity, taking a mobile phones/walkie talkie with them. One member of staff alerts the head teacher or deputy head teacher. The head teacher or deputy head teacher, will then advise of the appropriate actions and will advise that the parents/carers **must** be called.
- 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.
- The head teacher or deputy head teacher will investigate how the incident occurred and will take every appropriate action to mitigate against similar events happening again. This may include an individual risk assessment.
- The school will offer a meeting with the parents/carers of any children who run from school. The school must also consider contacting the police or completing a 'Request for Support' to the Children and Families Hub if:
  - This is uncharacteristic behaviour for the pupil.
  - The child was under a large amount of stress.
  - The school believes the child to be at risk of harm.

5. Looking for the pupil – Further considerations:

- It is recommended to send teachers or members of staff who know the child well to look for the missing child if possible.
- The school may know of particular places the child likes or feels comfortable in. For example, where they may feel safe. This could be family friend or a particular friend's house where they feel comfortable.
- It is also possible that, having run away, the child will not know where to go. It is therefore worth looking for them near the school.

6. When a child is found.

If the child is found by educational setting staff, or if the child returns to the premises of their own accord, the police must be notified immediately by dialling 101 or 999 if the matter is an emergency. It is important that this action is prioritised, as the child will remain classified as a missing person until seen by the police.

7. Essex Police

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On receiving a report of a missing child, Essex Police will classify the child as missing and will respond based on the level of risk involved.

Essex Police will conduct a vulnerability interview for all children who have been missing and have returned. It may be that the child refuses to engage or speak with police. On these occasions the parents/carers can assist by reporting to officers their observations on the child's return, e.g. did the child shower, have gifts, appear unwell or under the influence of any substance etc. The setting may also be able to contribute to this process and should provide the police with any relevant information or observations.

Each child that returns from missing will be offered a 'missing chat' (an independent return from missing interview) by a person not involved in their care. This will be facilitated by the Local Authority with responsibility for the child. Missing chats are offered to all children from Essex who go missing.

Useful contacts:

Shane Thomson, ECC Missing Co-ordinator: shane.thomson@essex.gov.uk
Lucy Stovell, ECC Missing Chats: lucy.stovell@essex.gov.uk

Further Support

Once the immediate safeguarding actions have been undertaken and recorded on CPOMs the focus must be on establishing why the child decided to leave the school site.

Staff should:

- Seek to explain clearly to the child, in an age-appropriate way, why their behaviour left them unsafe.
- Seek to understand why the child took this action. Was it because of something that happened in school? Was it because of something happening outside of school?
- Establish whether the child feels safe in school.
- School should then consider ways of ensuring the child does not repeat this action.
- This might involve looking at behaviour strategies for coping with stress. For example, school might provide a 'safe place' the child can go to for 'time out'.
- School might also encourage the child to speak to a particular member of staff if he/she begins to feel upset, angry or stressed.
- A risk assessment may be undertaken to reduce further incidents.
- A meeting with parents/carers (social worker) or an 'Early Help' meeting may be undertaken.
- Following discussion it may be that a safeguarding concern needs to be recorded on CPOMs and assigned to a DSL for a 'Request for Support' or further exploration.

8. What if the pupil has SEN?

If the child that has gone missing or absconder has special education needs (SEN), the behaviour may be associated with his/her learning difficulties. Strategies to support the child in managing this behaviour should be identified and shared with all staff involved with the child. This may form part of the 'One Planning' or EHCP process or require a specific risk assessment.

9. Questions to consider in understanding why the child has run away

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It is important to establish why the child might have become dysregulated or run away. This will help it to decide how to deal with the situation. Some questions, for the school and parents/carers, to help identify the cause are:

- Does the child have a relevant special educational need that might contribute to his/her decision to run away?
- Has something happened in the child's life outside school that might affect his/her behaviour in school?
- Is there a specific place or person at the school that has prompted this behaviour?
- Has the child experienced acute stress at school for any reason?
- Are they a victim of bullying?
- Has this happened before?

10. 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.

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RISK ASSESSMENT (example)

School:		**Activity:**	Child Leaving the School Grounds without Permission		
Assessment carried out by:		**Date:**		**Date of Review:**	

What are the Hazards	Who might be harmed and how?	Existing Control Measures What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by who?	Action by when?	Completed
Child Leaving the School Grounds without Permission.	Pupils/Staff - Injury when climbing fence - Road Traffic Collision -Abduction	• Door access systems on required doors • Monitoring doors • Staff Vigilance • One to one Classroom Assistant • Children with history of running from school grounds are supervised closely when playing in outdoor play area. • High levels of supervisors in high-risk areas – especially with older children with history of running. • Emergency procedures that can be activated quickly when a child has left the play area. • Staff aware of any potential triggers for pupils. You may have other existing precautions you may wish to add	• Emergency procedures that can be activated quickly when a child has left the site. • Improving door access control in school building • School site security Risk Assessment carried out taking into consideration issues of child leaving site – Improvements to site security. You may have other further actions that you may wish to add	Name of person responsible to be added here	Realistic time frame to be added here	Sign and date when further actions have been completed