

# Heathlands School

## Missing and Absent Child Procedures

**Approved by Governors July 2017**

**Review due July 2019**

## 1. Aims

1.1 Heathlands School takes its responsibilities towards the care of pupils very seriously and seeks to protect the children whilst at the same time allowing them age appropriate independence.

1.2 We will ensure that the case of each child/young person who goes missing or absent will be given serious consideration to ensure their ongoing safety. This will include good information sharing and liaison with parents/carers, relevant professionals and referral as necessary to Children's Services teams.

1.3 We will act within the statutory guidance (***Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care January 2014***) in taking action to safeguard children.

1.4 This policy takes note of HCC Missing and Vulnerable Children Procedure 2015; the multi-agency procedure for children missing from care or home.

## 2. Definitions

2.1 A **missing** child /young person is : A child/young person under the age of 18 who has run away from home or placement, or feels forced or lured to leave, or whose whereabouts is unknown.

2.2 An **absent** child/young person is: A child /young person under the age of 18 who is not at the place they are expected or required to be but whose whereabouts are known.

## 3. Principles

3.1 The following principles must be considered as part of our work with children and young people:

- A child/young person who repeatedly goes missing is more vulnerable.
- A child/young person should be reported missing to the police when appropriate, not as a behaviour management tool.
- It is important not to dismiss the significance of multiple episodes of running away or going missing by a child/young person:
- Children/young people may be enticed away from their placements or home by activities that they see as exciting or by predatory influences and subjected to child sexual exploitation (CSE).
- Some short or single absences may be as risky as lengthy ones.
- Those aged 16/17 who run away are no less vulnerable or at risk than younger children/young people.
- The individual circumstances for each child/young person should be kept under review and a judgement made about the level of risk to inform the decision as to whether to inform the police.

3.2 The following may also be indicators of children/young people who go missing or are absent:

- Female Genital Mutilation
- Bullying
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children /Young People
- Forced Marriage

## 4. Staff responsibilities

4.1 School staff seek to establish positive and appropriate relationships with children/young people.

4.2 School staff should consider any special vulnerability related to individual children/ young people and be aware that research indicates the risks of running away are higher in children/ young people with disabilities and conduct disorders.

4.3 School staff should be especially alert to the needs of children/young people who are looked after by the local authority and may not have developed strong, long standing attachments with their carers.

4.4 School staff should if necessary draft an individual risk management plan for any child/ young person who is at risk of going missing

4.5 School staff should be alert to the link between those children/young people who repeatedly go missing and the potential link with serious safeguarding concerns e.g. child sexual exploitation (CSE), child trafficking.

4.6 School staff have a responsibility to inform the police if a child/ young person is missing. They also have a responsibility to inform the parent of the child/ young person.

4.7 School staff will ensure any documentation shared electronically is done so securely e.g. password protected.

## **5. Risk Factors**

5.1 School staff should take note of the following risk factors which may precede a missing or absent incident:

- arguments and conflicts
- poor family relationships
- physical and emotional abuse including domestic violence
- step-parent issues
- boundaries and control issues.

5.2 School staff must also take notes of the additional risks which are associated with going missing:

- no means of support or income leading to high risk activities
- involvement in criminal activities
- becoming a victim of crime including CSE and violence
- alcohol and substance misuse
- deterioration of physical and mental health
- disengagement from education
- increased vulnerability linking with other vulnerable young people and gangs
- trafficking
- homelessness

## **6. Procedures for day pupils**

6.1 Day pupils will be registered on arrival at school and absences followed up. If there is no reasonable explanation for the absence of the pupil and their whereabouts cannot be established e.g. with parents or taxi companies further action will be taken to establish the child's safety e.g. informing the police and/or designated emergency contact.

Day pupils should not be off site during the school day unless it is as part of an organised school activity.

6.2 Occasionally child/young person may go missing or absent without authority during the school day. This may be truancy or could be a response to an argument or upset in school. Pupils are formally registered at the start of each day and after lunch. Additionally at the start of each lesson staff will

check on any missing pupils and if not satisfied that the absences are valid will initiate the missing child procedures.

### **6.3 If a child/ young person is missing or absent during the school day staff will**

- Try to establish the facts e.g. time of leaving school, when last seen etc.
- Search the school building and grounds
- Request information from other pupils
- Drive out and check the surrounding areas focusing on known and favoured places e.g. sweet shop/park/train station
- Attempt to contact the pupil on their mobile phone
- Inform a member of senior staff

6.4 Using the above information senior staff will undertake an immediate risk assessment giving consideration to the child/ young person's age, abilities, known issues e.g. have they experienced upset or trauma. Senior Staff will establish whether or not the child/young person's whereabouts are known i.e. the child/young person is absent without authority or missing.

6.5 If the child/young person is missing or thought to be at risk, and cannot be found after a search of the premise and grounds the police will be informed immediately and their advice followed. The police will be supplied with a picture of the child/young person and their assistance with a more extensive search may be requested.

6.6 In all cases when children/ young people are absent or missing their parents/carers will be informed.

## **7. Procedures for Residential Children/ young people**

7.1 All residential children/ young people are prepared for being out in the community without adult supervision including a free walking programme, road safety and personal safety training. Risk assessments have been undertaken for free walking activities.

7.2 If Young people have specific permission from staff they can go into town in groups of no less than two. Young people must inform staff where they are going and must sign out and sign in again on their return to Heath House. Young people must take a mobile phone with them which has the Heath House duty mobile number on it. Heath House staff will ensure they have their duty phone on until "free –walkers" have returned.

7.3 Young people must return to Heath House at the agreed time and no later than 30 minutes before their bedtimes.

7.4 It is recognised that some young people may stay out longer than agreed for various reasons such as: on purpose to test boundaries, running away after a dispute, failing to return on time. showing his or her disagreement with aspects of their placement. This is normally considered absent without consent.

### **7.5 If a child/ young person is missing or absent from Heath House staff will**

- Try to establish the facts e.g. time of leaving school site, when last seen etc.
- Search the school building and grounds
- Request information from other pupils
- Drive out and check the surrounding areas focusing on known and favoured places e.g. sweet shop/park/train station
- Attempt to contact the pupil on their mobile phone
- Inform the on-call member of senior staff

7.6 Using the above information senior staff will undertake an immediate risk assessment giving consideration to the child/ Young person's age, abilities, known issues e.g. have they experienced upset or trauma, time of day. Senior staff will establish:

- is the child late returning from an approved off site free-walking activity
- are the child /young person's whereabouts known i.e. the child is absent without authority
- is the child/ young person missing.

7.7 If a young person has free walking permission and the risk assessment indicates no risk factors other than they are late returning staff will wait 15 minutes then follow either 7.8 or 7.9 below.

7.8 If a young person is absent without authority but their whereabouts are known staff will take immediate action to ensure their safety or safe return to Heath House. Depending on the individual circumstances of each case this may involve going to collect the young person, involving parent/carers, contacting the safeguarding out of hours service (SOOHS) or the police.

### **Safeguarding out of hours service (SOOHS) – 0300 123 4043**

7.9 If the child or young person is missing or thought to be at risk, and cannot be found after a search of the premise and grounds the police will be informed immediately and their advice followed. The police will be supplied with a picture of the pupil and their assistance with a more extensive search may be requested.

7.10 In all cases when children/ young people are absent or missing from Heath House their parents/carers will be informed.

## **8. Follow Up**

8.1 On return to school or Heath House staff will check the well-being of the child/ young person; ensuring they are not hurt and attending to basic needs.

8.2 The missing incident will be recorded in the child/ young person's individual file including all action taken by staff, any reasons given by the child for going missing along with any follow up action or sanction.

8.3 Should the child/young person say they went missing because of abuse appropriate C.P. procedures will be followed.

8.4 School staff will work with other agencies e.g. police and social care in facilitating "safe and well" interviews

8.5 School staff will review their care planning arrangements for each child who goes missing and consider if a risk management plan is required.

8.6 School staff will complete any Ofsted notification if required.

## **9. Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan**

9.1 A Risk Assessment will be undertaken when the likelihood of a child/young person going missing is identified. It enables staff/carers to be clear what the risks are for the particular child/young person e.g. CSE.

9.2 The risk assessment will also consider the risks the child/ young person's behaviour, if a regular occurrence, poses to others e.g. the pressure on safe staffing levels within the small Heath House team

9.3 The risk assessment will identify if it is necessary to refer on to any other supportive agencies.

9.4 The risk assessment will be used as a guide, to help bring together information, identify the level of risk and develop a robust risk management plan.