



Missing and Absent from Education Heathlands School



Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed in full by the Governing Board.

The policy was agreed by the PWC Committee on 10.6.26

Next Review due June 2028

Co-Headteachers Signature:		Date: 10.6.26
Governor Signature:		Date: 10.6.26

Aims

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.

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.

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.

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

Legal framework

This policy has due regard to legislation and statutory guidance, including, but not limited to, the following:

- DfE (2026) 'Working together to safeguard children'
- DfE (2026) 'Keeping children safe in education'
- DfE (2025) 'Children missing education'
- DfE (2024) 'School attendance'
- Education Act 2011
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
- The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005 (as amended in 2018)
- The School Information (England) Regulations 2008 (as amended in 2025)
- The Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended in 2014)

Definitions

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.

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.

Principles

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 exploitation (gangs and county lines) and / or sexual exploitation (CSE).
- Some short or single absences are 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.

Why children miss education

There are a number of reasons as to why children miss school, including the following:

- Failing to be registered at a school at the age of five
- Failing to make a successful transition
- Exclusion
- Mid-year transfer of school
- Families moving into a new area

Aside from these reasons, if a child is missing from school, particularly repeatedly, this can act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding concerns, such as the following:

- Abuse and neglect – including child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE), potentially involving county lines
- So-called 'honour-based' abuse – including risk of FGM or risk of forced marriage
- Mental health issues – such as risk of substance abuse
- Risk of travelling to conflict zones

Children at particular risks of missing education

As there could be many reasons for a child to be missing from education, the LA will make a judgement on a case-by-case basis. The following list indicates pupils who are most at risk of missing education:

- **Pupils at risk of harm or neglect** – where this is suspected, local child protection procedures will be followed; however, if a child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, a referral will be made immediately to children's social care (and the police if appropriate). The LA officers responsible for CME will check whether a referral has been made and will contact children's social care if this is not the case. Should there be a reason to suspect a crime has been committed or the child's safety is at risk, the LA will contact the police.
- Children of homeless families, living in temporary accommodation, multiple occupancy or bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Families fleeing domestic violence.
- **Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) families** – when a GRT pupil leaves the school without naming their next destination school, the school will contact the LA. If necessary, the school will consult the LA Traveller Education Support Services or named CME officer for advice on the best strategies to ensure minimal disruption to the GRT pupil's education.
- **Children of service personnel** – the school will contact the Ministry of Defence Children's Education Advisory Service for advice to ensure continuity of education for these children.
- **Missing children and runaways** – should the school suspect a child has gone missing or run away, an appropriate staff member will consult the DfE for advice on missing children.

- **Children and young people supervised by the Youth Justice System** – in this case, LA youth offending teams are responsible for supervising children (aged 8 to 18). Where a young person is registered at the school prior to custody, the school will keep the place open for their return.
- Children with long term medical or emotional health problems.
- Children in private fostering arrangements.
- School aged parents.
- **Children who cease to attend school** – where the reason for a child who has stopped attending a school is not known, the LA will investigate the situation.
- **Children of migrant families** – there is an increased risk of a child missing education if they are part of a new migrant family who may not yet have settled into a fixed address, or may have arrived into an LA area without the authority becoming aware.

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

Roles and responsibilities

The school

Heathlands will enter pupils on the admissions register at the beginning of the first day on which it has been agreed by the school, or the day that the school has been notified, that the pupil will attend the school. In the event that a pupil fails to attend the school on the agreed or notified date, the school will undertake reasonable enquiries to establish the reason for this absence and will consider notifying the LA at the earliest opportunity.

The school will aim to hold more than one emergency contact number for each pupil.

The school will keep an accurate and up-to-date admissions register by encouraging parents to inform them of any changes.

The school will monitor pupils' attendance through a daily register.

The school will agree with the LA what intervals are best to inform them of pupils who are regularly absent from school, or who have missed 10 school days or more without permission.

The school will notify the LA if any pupil is to be deleted from the admission register in the circumstance outlined in [Regulation 8](#) of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended in 2016).

Pupils who remain on the school roll are not necessarily missing education but will be monitored and their attendance will be addressed when it is poor.

The school will arrange full-time education for excluded pupils from the sixth school day of a fixed-period exclusion.

The school will provide information to the LA regarding standard transitions, if requested to do so by the LA.

Staff members

Heathlands school staff seek to establish positive and appropriate relationships with children/young people.

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.

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 careers.

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

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 exploitation and sexual exploitation (CSE), child trafficking.

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.

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

All staff will be alert to the potential need to implement early help for a pupil who is frequently missing or goes missing from care or home.

All staff will be aware of the school's unauthorised absence and children missing from education procedures.

Where staff have concerns about pupils relating to CME, staff will use their professional judgement and knowledge of individual pupils to inform their decision as to whether welfare concerns should be escalated to the DSP.

Risk Factors

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.

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

Procedures for day pupils

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 (Year 1 – 11) should not be off site during the school day unless it is as part of an organised school activity.

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.

In upper school, where different classes are taught throughout the day, each class must be registered on Arbor, students who are not in school and who are therefore not expected in a lesson will already be recorded as absent.

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

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

- Inform a member of senior staff immediately
- Note the time of the report of missing and begin to time 10 minutes to conduct a search.
- 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
- After 10 minutes has been passed and the pupil has not been located SLT will 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 (if number is known)
- After 20 minutes upper school or 10 minutes lower school SLT to report to the police and parents
- Any individual plans will be actioned as per the agreed actions (pre agreed with parents)

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.

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.

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

Procedures for Residential Children/ young people

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.

Heath House staff will draft an individual risk management plan for any child/ young person who is at risk of going missing.

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.

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

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.

If a child/ young person is missing or absent from Heath House staff will:

- Inform a member of senior staff immediately
- Note the time of the report of missing and begin to time 10 minutes to conduct a search.
- 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

- After 10 minutes has been passed and the pupil has not been located SLT will 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
- After 20 minutes upper school or 10 minutes lower school SLT to report to the police and parents
- Any individual plans will be actioned as per the agreed actions (pre agreed with parents)

Using the above information senior staff will undertake and 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.

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 the missing child procedure indicated above.

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

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.

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

Follow Up

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.

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.

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

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

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

School staff will complete any Ofsted notification if required.

Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan

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.

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 teaching and small Heath House team

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

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.