



ST PHILIP'S SCHOOL

LOST CHILD POLICY

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Aims of this policy

- To ensure that robust procedures are in place to minimise the risk of a pupil going missing from School or a School activity.
- To establish safeguards so that a boy's absence from School (or School activity) is quickly identified.
- To outline a procedure for staff to follow in the event of a boy being or going missing, including the notification of parents and outside agencies.

Other relevant School policies

Other School policies that should be read in conjunction with this policy include:

- supervision policy;
- safeguarding and child protection policy (a missing child may be a sign of abuse - see page 32);
- educational visits policy.

Police terminology: 'absent' and 'missing'

The police use the terms 'absent' and 'missing'. An absent child is one who is not at a place where they are expected or required to be. A missing child is anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be the subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another. It will be fairly common for a child to be absent and then found soon after; it will be more rare for a child to be missing.

Safeguarding: a missing child is a child at risk

If a boy is absent or missing, the Designated Senior Lead (DSL) should always be informed. The DSL is Angela Hawtone, the Deputy Head. An incident of a missing boy is an important safeguarding concern as a missing child is a child at risk. A boy may be lost by accident – for example, in a crowded station – or may *go missing deliberately* (i.e. runaways), for example, due to bullying or abuse. They may go missing from School, from a school trip or from home. A missing child may be drawn into dangerous situations, activities and even exploitation.

Procedures for finding a missing child

The procedure for finding a missing boy will vary depending on circumstances. For example, whether the boy has gone missing from the School premises or on a School trip or whether he has gone missing on his journey home from School. What follows is general guidance to apply in various circumstances.

Procedure for a pupil absent/missing from School during the day

When a boy is noted as absent from where he is supposed to be, the first priority will be to conduct a search of the area, particularly likely places the boy may be. Actions might include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Consult other available staff – particularly the Deputy Head, his form teacher and the School secretary – and ask whether they know where he may be (he may have a legitimate and known reason to be absent).
- Check of email records.
- Seek guidance from the Deputy Head or, in their absence, another member of the SMT, phoning them if they are off-site.
- Take a register to see whether any other boys are absent (may be significant if two friends are both absent).
- Search likely locations, including the garden and boys' loos.
- It may help the search if boys remain in classrooms or located in a central place; this may also make more members of staff available.
- If the boy remains absent, consult his form and ask them whether they know where he is.
- Contact the parents/carer/nanny and explain the situation, ask whether they know where he is. (Do so calmly, remembering that they may panic or, alternatively, have collected him from School without notifying staff, in which case they need to be calmly reminded of protocol, ideally by the Deputy Head).
- If the boy is found, the Deputy Head should interview him calmly and investigate his whereabouts and whether he was at risk; the child's parents will be informed.
- If, after consulting all available staff, pupils and parents/carers/nanny, the boy is still absent, he should be considered missing and the police contacted.

Procedure for a pupil absent/ missing at collection time

A parent may come to the School to collect their son and find them absent. The following considerations should be made:

- he may be engaged in an on-site activity (check the clubs notice board and the daily diary/parents' newsletter) or an off-site activity (check the games board for games lists and return times; contact the member of staff on the fixture, or ask the School office to do so);
- he may have gone home on his own (this is permitted for those with written parental permission) or with a friend; the pupil may have been confused about that day's collection arrangements;
- if the parents are separated, he may have gone home with his other parent;
- he may have gone home with another parent as a result of miscommunication among parents.

Once these considerations have been made, the member of staff should adhere to the 'procedure for a pupil absent/missing from School during the school day', above.

Boys who travel home alone

If a boy who is permitted to travel home alone is missing from School or possibly on their journey home, the Deputy Head should consult the record of boys whose parents have given permission for independent travel. The Deputy Head should contact other available staff and pupils for information about when they were last seen and with whom. If the pupil brings a mobile phone into School then it should be checked whether it is still in the mobile phone box or whether he has collected it: this will also indicate whether the pupil is on-site or off-site. If the phone is not in the box, the phone should then be called and a message or text left.

Procedure for a pupil missing from an off-site School activity/ trip

This procedure should be followed where a pupil is missing from a School activity away from the School premises (e.g. on a School trip).

- The group leader assembles the pupils and carries out a head count (are any other pupils missing?).
- A quick check of the immediate vicinity is carried out by a staff member.
- Make contact with the venue's staff and/ or security and ask what their procedures are for a missing child, including contacting the police.
- Inform the Deputy Head, who may, if plausible, come to the location of the trip and/or handle communications with the Head Master and parents.
- Contact the parents and, if possible, ask them to come to the venue.
- Return the remaining children to School or a safe place.
- Contact the police and report the child as missing.
- Contact the Head Master and ask him to liaise with the Chair of Governors.

When the pupil is found

This procedure should be followed:

- all parties involved in the search should be notified (including parents, School staff, police);
- if possible, two members of staff should talk to the pupil;
- remain calm and do not express shock, dismay, anger or any other strong emotions;
- remember that the pupil may be unaware of the panic he has caused; alternatively, he may have been through a distressing experience and be in need of support (e.g. from staff, parents, chaplain, independent listener or external agencies such as the NSPCC);
- the rest of the group are reassured by the staff;
- safety guidance is issued to the group to avoid a recurrence;
- the events should be recorded, particularly any residual concerns that may have some future relevance.

If a child is still missing after a search

The Deputy Head should contact the police and carry out a risk assessment.

Contacting the police

If the pupil remains missing, then the Head Master and Chair of Governors should be informed. The Chair of Governors will come to School as soon as possible. Due to the

age of all boys at the School, the police should be informed at this stage: failure to contact them may prove costly. The following information should be made available:

- the pupil's name, age and date of birth;
- an up-to-date photograph;
- a physical description: height, appearance, clothes, distinguishing features;
- any disability, learning difficulty or SEN;
- the pupil's home address and telephone number;
- any relevant context (e.g. comments made by the pupil that may indicate state of mind/ whereabouts);
- any suspicion/evidence of crime or wrongdoing.

If the pupil is found after the police have been notified, it is important to tell the police.

Risk assessment

The Deputy Head should make a risk assessment, taking into account:

- possible threat factors: time of day; darkness; weather conditions; nature of the locality;
- extent of time missing/ lateness (whether an absent pupil is considered missing);
- individual circumstances: age, judgement, known personal, pastoral or disciplinary issues; mood and/ or communications prior to going missing; any track record;
- whether there are any safeguarding concerns relating to the pupil that need to be discussed with the pupil's local authority;
- any reassurances/likelihood as to their whereabouts;
- any parental indication of concern.

After the incident:

The following should take place:

- the Deputy Head meets with the group leader and the pupil's parents to establish the facts of the incident;
- if appropriate, a short letter will be sent to the other parents of pupils on the trip summarising the events and the School's response;
- liability should not be discussed until the incident has been fully investigated by the School and, if appropriate, Social Services;
- staff and parents should be asked to refer any enquiries they have or any enquiries from the media, about the incident, to the Head Master.

Formal investigation:

A formal investigation will take place as follows:

- the Chair of Governors will appoint a full investigation;
- the group leader and other accompanying staff will be asked for an incident report detailing: a timeline of events; the staff and pupils involved; what they knew or heard about the missing child's whereabouts (e.g. last sighting, estimated time that the pupil went missing);
- a conclusion is drawn as to how the breach of security happened;

- the police may carry out their own investigation, with which staff must cooperate. The Chair of Governors may ask the police to share their findings with him for the purpose of the School's own investigation and disciplinary procedures, if appropriate;
- Social Services may investigate the incident if it has safeguarding implications;
- if the child came to harm, the incident should be reported to the HSE under RIDDOR, and recorded in the incident book;
- the School's insurance company should be informed.

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