

Journey Independent School Absconding and Missing Children Policy

September 2025



Policy: Missing or Absconding Student

Implementation Date: September 2025

Review Date: September 2026

Date Policy Agreed: September 2025

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this policy is to establish procedures for handling situations where a student is reported as missing or has absconded from the premises. The guidelines outlined below aim to ensure the student's safety, prompt response, and effective communication with relevant parties to resolve such incidents in a timely and professional manner.

For the purpose of this policy guidance, the term 'absconding' is used to cover incidents of pupils or young people leaving the school unaccompanied and without the prior knowledge of staff.

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.

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 the school site promptly and efficiently.

It is the school's responsibility to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of children whilst in our care. All pupils at Journey Independent School have barriers and/or additional 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.

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 Journey Independent 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.

Control measures and procedures to prevent absconding

Site security

The site is shared and therefore gates are open to allow vehicles in and out of the shared site. To mitigate this, during pupil drop off and collection times, a member of staff supervises the gated entrance to receive students and at the fobbed door. This is repeated for pick up - checked into the building and checked out of the building.

The external door to the school building should be closed at all times and appropriate locks in place.

The door into the school should be locked and only usable by using the key pad.

Doors that are activated by using a key pad or fob should not be propped open.

Effective supervision

Effective supervision is dependant on a number of factors including:

- o Age of the pupils
- o Ability of the pupils
- o Number of the pupils
- o Activities being undertaken
- o Pupil behaviour
- o Specific identified risks e.g. pupils with history of absconding, public rights of way through school shared site, building work, etc.
- o Teachers and support staff will be allocated children each day to have 'eyes on' to ensure they are in sight at all times.

2. Information to pupils.

- School rules and expectations are clearly displayed and reinforced throughout the school. Individual Pupil Risk Assessments.
- Where there is a foreseeable risk of absconding, there should be an individual risk assessment [IPRA] in place.
- The IPRA should clearly detail the individual control measures required to reduce the risk of absconding.

3. External visits/sites.

- On an Educational Visit the security of the venue/location should be assessed and supervision levels altered accordingly.
- Ensure that there are robust systems in place so that each class has specified members and leaders, and regular head counts occur throughout the visit.
- In the planning for an educational visit the risks of absconding must be clearly assessed, particularly in the case where known absconders are in attendance. This should include transport.

4. 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:

Where a pupil absconds the following procedures should be followed:

Member of staff to inform a member of SLT and main office.

An SLT member will become the lead person.

The teacher will organise a search of the class and immediate surrounding area whilst members of the leadership team sweep the remainder of the school.

If the pupil is not found then available staff to complete a check of the perimeter of the outdoor site within the gates.

If a pupil is not located within a reasonable timeframe (5 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.

Lead person to contact parents/carers and inform them of the situation.

Consideration will be given to whether the search should be extended beyond the site perimeter [beyond the gate]. This decision will be based on staff's knowledge of the child and on the levels of risk, and on what action is in the child's best interests.

Any staff who leave school site to take mobile phone to contact lead person.

Once a pupil has been found then the lead SLT member will use their professional judgement to outline the response towards the pupil and the support the pupil will need in the future.

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.

Member of SLT to brief police and parents.

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:

Inform SLT immediately and a lead person will be allocated.

Staff member should follow the pupil or young person and try to persuade them to return to safe space inside the 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, site or panic, placing themselves in further danger e.g. risk of running into a busy road.

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 with them to ensure contact with the school office.

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 (5 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.

5. Debrief and Internal Investigation

An internal investigation will commence promptly to determine possible reasons and contributing factors leading to the student's absence or absconding.

The investigation team will consist of the SLT and the Designated Safeguarding Lead, and any other school personnel necessary for a comprehensive inquiry.

The investigation will involve reviewing CCTV footage, speaking to staff members, collecting witness statements, and any other relevant information.

The investigation team will document their findings and report to the Headteacher as soon as possible.

6. Preventative Measures and Continuous Improvement

The school SLT will review and evaluate its safeguarding protocols and procedures annually, or sooner if operationally required, to identify areas of improvement and implement necessary changes.

Staff training will be provided to ensure all staff members understand the procedures and are capable of handling missing or absconding incidents effectively.

Full cooperation with local authorities, relevant agencies, and other educational institutions will be pursued to enhance student safety and responses to such incidents.

7. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or as necessary, taking into account any changes in legislation or best practices related to missing or absconding students, to ensure its continuous relevance and effectiveness. This policy is implemented to provide clear guidelines for addressing incidents involving missing or absconding students in the school. The safety and welfare of our students are of paramount importance, and this policy aims to minimise risks, swiftly respond to incidents, and enhance collaboration with relevant parties to ensure the wellbeing of our students at all times.