

SAINT NICHOLAS SCHOOL

LOST, MISSING OR UNCOLLECTED CHILD POLICY



Approved by:	 Headmaster Chair of Governors	Date: March 2023
Last reviewed on:	March 2023	
Next review by:	March 2024	

Note: This policy applies to all sections of the School including EYFS

This policy:

- Is non-contractual in nature;
- Applies to all members of staff except those who have not completed their probationary period;
- Can be adjusted by the School to suit specific circumstances;
- Can be varied unilaterally by the School.

RATIONALE

The welfare of all of our children at Saint Nicholas School is our paramount responsibility. Every adult who works at the School has been trained to appreciate that he or she has a key responsibility for helping to keep all of the children safe at all times. Our staffing ratios are generous and are deliberately designed to ensure that every child is supervised the whole time that he or she is in our care.

This policy sets out our procedures for maintaining safety and managing the unlikely event of a child going missing from school and other educational settings, hereafter referred to as educational settings.

Missing children are among the most vulnerable in our community. Sometimes children go missing from educational settings; when this occurs, it is important that action is taken quickly to address this, and in line with local procedures. This document should be read in conjunction with the School's Child Protection Policy, and the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Child Protection Procedures (SET Procedures).

A child going missing could be a 'one-off' incident that, following investigation, does not need further work. However, a child going missing frequently could be an indicator of underlying exploitation or other forms of child abuse. Educational settings should consider missing episodes like any other child protection concern and take action as appropriate, for example, by contacting parents/carers, the Children & Families Hub consultation line, and in an emergency, the priority line or the police.

It may be appropriate to use the Early Help Procedures (including holding a Team Around the Family meeting) to address the issues and prevent escalation. Advice should be sought and concerns should be escalated if there is no improvement. Where children missing frequently are open to Children's Social Care, a Missing Prevention Plan may be in place. Where this is the case, the educational setting may be set actions as part of the Missing Prevention Plan and should receive a copy if consent has been provided.

RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the Headmaster's responsibility to ensure that all relevant staff are aware of this policy, the procedures to follow and to ensure that the policy is reviewed annually. It is the responsibility of all staff to read the policy and act at all times according to its guidance.

It is the parent's responsibility to ensure that they provide correct, updated contact information and know the procedures for the handing over of their child at the beginning and end of sessions.

It is the Governors' responsibility to ensure that they are aware of the School's procedures and to challenge/support School in its review of this policy.

REDUCING RISK OF A MISSING CHILD

General procedures

The following procedures are aimed at reducing the risk of a missing child.

- Contact information for pupils' parents / guardians is kept up to date and complete. Where reasonably possible the School holds more than one emergency contact number for pupils.
- Each child's photograph is attached to their electronic pupil record for easy identification.
- Pupils are registered at the beginning and end of each day and absences are followed up by the School office. Staffing ratios are generous and are deliberately designed to ensure every child is well supervised.
- Robust risk assessments are carried out and checked before any off-site visits can go ahead.
- There are high staff to pupil ratios on off-site visits to reduce risk.

Start of the day for parents and children

Parents are fully aware of the points at which responsibility for the care of their child passes from the parents to the staff and vice versa.

There are clear procedures for welcoming pupils into school. Pupils who arrive into school before 8:30am are expected to go to Mountbatten Hall where they are supervised by a member of staff; pupils of Pre-School age are expected to go to Little Saints, where they are supervised by qualified EYFS practitioners.

At 8:30am Key Stage 1 pupils are taken to their classrooms by a member of the breakfast club staff, Key Stage 2 pupils are sent straight up to their classrooms. Middle & Upper School pupils are sent to their locker room at 8:30am and it is an expectation that they make their way to their form room in time for registration at 8:45am.

Late children are signed in at the main office; Lower School children are accompanied to their form room. Staff mark registers promptly and accurately at the beginning of the morning and at the end of the afternoon. Registers are electronic so information is received by the office quickly and absences are promptly followed up.

Outside time/lunch/playtime

When children are outside they are supervised by adults at all times.

If pupils leave the classroom to work in other parts of School, teachers ensure that adequate supervision is maintained and all pupils are accounted for on return to the classroom.

All staff members on duty have a responsibility to politely but firmly refuse entry to an adult to the school building or playground unless they are already escorted by a member of staff.

Learning times

If a child leaves the learning environment without permission, the teacher must send quickly for another adult to ensure that the child remains supervised, even if from a reasonable distance.

If an adult gives a pupil permission to leave the classroom for a short period of time it is important that the class teacher makes a mental note of the time the pupil leaves the classroom. If they are gone for a period of time longer than expected they should notify the office immediately so the pupil can be located.

Late collection

If a parent has been detained and is late to collect their child, the child should be taken to homework club by the relevant member of staff. The homework club staff will supervise the pupil who will remain in homework club until the parents can collect. There is an additional charge for this service from 4pm, which will be added to the parents' bill at the end of the term.

Pupils who have not been collected from after-school care by 6pm are brought to the SLT member on duty.

Educational Trips and Visits

Thorough risk assessments and high staff/pupil ratios are provided when pupils leave School premises. There is good communication between the party leader and school and supervising teachers keep a list of pupils/groups and medical requirements on visits.

Parents / Carers rarely accompany school trips, however if they do they are never left on their own with groups of children and should not be placed in a group with their child, unless part of a specific risk assessment.

Staff members should always take one of the school mobile 'phones on every visit and mobile contact numbers left at School.

PROCEDURES IN THE EVENT OF A CHILD GOING MISSING

When it is suspected that a child is missing from an educational setting this must be addressed immediately. Active steps to locate the child should be 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 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. Staff at the educational setting must inform the child's parents/carers that the child has been reported missing. Where there is a Social Worker allocated to the child, they should also be informed. 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.

Missing child whilst at school

- In the event of a member of staff fearing that a child has gone missing while at school, that member of staff must:
- take a register in order to ensure that all the other children are present; ask all of the adults and children calmly if they remember when they last saw the child;
- Use the red card system to alert a member of staff that help is needed
- When a member of staff arrives instruct them to cover the class,
- Go immediately to the main school office inform them that a child is missing; the office staff will inform the SLT, site staff and the most senior leader immediately; a search of the site will be coordinated
- Return to the last known place the child was seen and carry out a search of the immediate area.

The SLT member will then arrange all other available staff to conduct a thorough search of the premises and notify the member of staff if the child is found immediately. If the child remains unfound, staff will begin a search of the wider area. If the child has still not been found from the

initial report of them as missing, the police then parents must be notified. When contacting parents/carers, ask them to bring with them a recent photograph of their child; try to remember and write down a description of what the child was wearing and any distinguishing features, including if the missing child has any special medical or learning needs.

Missing child whilst off-site

If the event of a member of staff fearing that a child has gone missing while off School premises:

- An immediate head count should be carried out in order to ensure that all the other children are present;
- The party leader must stay with the main group and ensure safety of remaining pupils;
- One or more other adults should immediately start searching for the child;
- Where appropriate, a member of staff must notify the venue manager to ensure all exits are supervised or closed;
- The party leader should contact school to alert them in accordance with our Educational Trips & Visits Policy;
- If the missing child is not found, the party leader or delegated other must contact the Police.

PROCEDURES ONCE THE 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.

Actions to be followed by staff once the child is found:

- Talk to, take care of and, if necessary, comfort the child;
- The Head of Section will speak to the parents to discuss events and give an account of the incident;
- **The Head of Section will promise a full investigation (if appropriate involving Child Services, EWMHS or the Essex Safeguarding Children Board);**
- Media queries should be referred to the Headmaster;
- The investigation should involve all concerned providing written statements;
- The report should be detailed covering: time, place, numbers of staff and children, when the child was last seen, what appeared to have happened, the purpose of the outing, the length of time that the child was missing and how s/he appeared to have gone missing, lessons for the future.

Essex Police

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

UNCOLLECTED CHILD**Care of the child**

In the event that a child is not collected by an authorised adult by their expected collection time, we put agreed procedures into practice. The child will receive a high standard of care in order to cause as little distress as possible.

Informing parents of procedures

We inform parents/carers of our procedures so that, if they are unavoidably delayed, they will be reassured that their children will be properly cared for.

Procedures for a non-collected child

- If a child is not collected at their expected collection time, we follow the procedures below:
- The child's file is checked for any information about changes to the normal collection routines.
- If no information is available, parents/carers are contacted at home or at work.
- If this is unsuccessful, the adults who are authorised by the parents to collect their child - and whose telephone numbers are recorded on the Registration Form - are contacted.
- All reasonable attempts are made to contact the parents or nominated carers.
- The child does not leave the premises with anyone other than those named on the Pupil Information Form or in their file.

Failure to collect a child within 1 hour

If no-one collects the child within one hour of their expected collection time and there is no-one who can be contacted to collect the child, we apply the procedures for uncollected children.

- The Headmaster or a member of Senior Leadership Team is contacted;
- We ensure that the child is not anxious and we do not discuss our concerns in front of them;
- Under no circumstances will we go to looking for the parent, nor leave the school premises with the child;
- On advice from SLT, the Essex Safeguarding Children's Board will be contacted (Telephone: 0345 603 7627 / Out of hours service: 0345 606 1212);
- The child is cared for at the School until the child is safely collected either by the parents or by a social care worker;
- Social care will aim to find the parent or relative. If they are unable to do so, the child will become looked after by the local authority;
- A full written report of the incident is recorded in the child's file.