

Missing Child Policy

Document Type	Policy
Status of document	Final
Version	3
Date ratified	February 2025
Ratified by	Chief Executive Officer
Release date	February 2025
Document owner	Educational Services
Next Review Due Date	November 2026

Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	Key Issues Regarding Learners with Autism.....	3
3	Guidance on Relevant Procedures.....	3
4	Occasions When a Learner May Go Missing.....	3
4.1	From an Indoor Lesson.....	4
4.2	From an Outdoor Lesson/Activity.....	4
4.3	Other Key Times.....	4
5	Prevention of Such a Situation Arising.....	4
6	Management of the Situation Should a Learner Go Missing.....	4
6.1	Onsite.....	4
6.2	Offsite.....	5
6.3	Absconding.....	5
7	Effective Reviewing of Situation Should a Learner Go Missing.....	6
8	Links with Other Policies.....	6
9	Monitoring & Review.....	6

1 Introduction

Doucecroft School Services aims to provide a safe and secure environment and seeks to promote the welfare of all learners, irrespective of gender, ethnic background or ability. The production of this document in no way presupposes that learners should or will go missing but rather serves to provide staff with a clearly defined strategy for managing the situation in the unlikely event of its occurrence.

This policy is written to guide staff in the event of a learner going missing on the premises, going missing when offsite on school trips, or a child/young person that has absconded from the school site.

2 Key Issues Regarding Learners with Autism

The nature of autism, with differences in the areas of communication, social interaction and creativity/flexibility and unique sensory needs, places learners in a position of vulnerability. These differences may not be outwardly apparent to others and in safeguarding each learner, significant demands are placed upon staff.

Each learner with autism is unique and therefore has different strengths, sensory needs and related issues which influence the person-centred approach and level of support leading to the provision of appropriate and meaningful experiences for each learner.

Our learners may present unpredictable, unprecedented, uninhibited and impulsive behaviour, without regard to, or understanding of, the consequences of their actions.

We aim to develop each learner's independence and self-confidence and offer opportunities for the learner to make decisions and to solve problems. An essential element of every learner's development is to be able to generalise skills and knowledge from the school to the wider community. Learners should have the opportunity to use and practice skills in real-life situations, both within and outside the education environment. Use of public facilities, services and community resources help learners to learn to transfer skills and further their independence.

Doucecroft School Services offers a high staff/learner ratio and is committed to providing a level of support appropriate to meet the needs of all learners, both within the school and during out-of-school trips. Individual risk assessments identify the potential risks and detail the controls and actions required to minimise such risks.

Learners have the right to have times of being alone and in private, and it is neither appropriate nor desirable for staff to be with the learner all the time, but they will be within discrete observation distance. Levels of support and supervision are based on individual needs as detailed in Student Support Plans (SSPs). Learners are entitled to exercise their independence and a gradual progression towards self-advocacy, self-reliance and the acquisition of life skills is promoted.

3 Guidance on Relevant Procedures

The 'Missing Child' procedure has been prepared in consideration of the following policy documents:

- The SET procedures.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education.
- Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care.

4 Occasions When a Learner May Go Missing

Staff need to be mindful that a learner can go missing at any time of the day. These times and examples of the occasions provided opportunities for a learner to go missing:

4.1 From an Indoor Lesson

This could occur when a learner is allowed to leave the classroom unaccompanied by a member of staff and fails to return, for example:

- To go to the toilet.
- Taking a movement break/time out.
- Undertaking an errand.
- Walking to or from the dining room.

4.2 From an Outdoor Lesson/Activity

This could occur when learners are outside and spread out, making it easy for a learner to wander off unnoticed, for example:

- Playtimes.
- Outdoor learning activities.
- Fire Evacuation.
- After school club.
- Residential trip.

4.3 Other Key Times

- At the start and end of school day.
- End of activities, e.g. Playtimes, PE, forest school.
- Prior to an offsite trip and returning from an offsite trip.

5 Prevention of Such a Situation Arising

A register of learners will be completed each morning and afternoon in school. It is the responsibility of the Teacher/Teachers' Assistants to complete the register in accordance with the Attendance Policy.

Some learners are given the opportunity to be independent. In these instances, staff check-in on the learners at regular opportunities, such as at five-minute intervals, to ensure that the learners are on-site and safe.

The supporting staff member to know the whereabouts of their allocated learner/s at all times. It is the responsibility of the allocated staff member to keep the learners safe, and report to class teacher and SLT if a learner goes missing.

6 Management of the Situation Should a Learner Go Missing

6.1 Onsite

Upon discovering a learner is missing on site, an immediate search is to be made of the school site with all available staff. This search should not exceed 5 minutes. Any known area that the learner is known to go to should be searched too. If the learner is a known absconder this should have been recorded on their SSP. The class/subject teacher to be informed.

If the learner is not located after 5 minutes, staff should then regroup. Inform SLT.

Extend the search to the wider school grounds. This should not exceed a further 5 minutes.

If the learner is not located during the search of the wider school grounds, then SLT/ most senior member of staff on site must contact the local Police to inform them that the learner is missing and cannot be allocated from the initial search.

SLT/the most senior staff member of site is to then contact:

- Parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the learner's welfare.

SLT/the most senior member of staff on site must then organise all available staff to search the immediate local community. This includes ensuring effective communication systems are in place to allow for clear communication between those involved in the search. It is essential that staff must take potential dangers into account and not put themselves or other learners at risk in the quest to locate the missing learner.

SLT/the most senior member of staff must not leave the premises but remain on site to co-ordinate the search, answer phone calls and provide photos and information as required. Key information available on learners' SSPs. The police may want to visit the school and agree a plan of action.

Once the learner has been located, offer comfort and reassurance. Return to school/venue. If appropriate and when the learner is ready, talk about the incident. Explore safer options that the learner can access; this may need to be presented visually.

Staff on site must ensure that the appropriate documents are completed as soon as possible. This includes the missing persons log and an incident record. A debrief must take place to discuss the circumstances of the incident and the effectiveness of the current procedures, followed by a review of the learner's SSP.

The local authority responsible for the learner's placement to be informed.

6.2 Offsite

Learners involved in an out of school activity are recorded on the out of school trips form. All staff on out of school trips must ensure they have read, signed and understood the learner's SSP. It is the responsibility of the person in charge of the trip to ensure all staff are aware of what communication systems are in place before leaving the school site.

A 'head count' of the learners should be made at regular intervals and always before a vehicle leaves a venue. If a learner is discovered as missing, then a search (not exceeding 5 minutes) of the immediate area is undertaken by all available members of staff, ensuring that all other learners continue to be appropriately supervised.

The Person Responsible must notify SLT at the school, then act on instructions given.

If the learner has not been located after 5 minutes, SLT will notify the police and provide them with as precise a description of the learner as possible, the last known whereabouts of the learner and any other details they may require. Available staff to continue with search.

The Person Responsible for the trip must notify the venue of the incident and instruct them to implement their own missing person's procedure if they have one.

SLT will notify the learner's parents and keep them updated as necessary.

The member of staff initiating the search should remain on site until the police or where possible assistance from school arrives in case the missing learner should return or be found.

6.3 Absconding

A learner is considered to have 'absconded' if they intentionally / knowingly leave the school site or the immediate area of an off-site activity without permission.

If a learner absconds then where possible, a member of staff should follow the learner at a safe distance and/or respond in line with guidance from the learner's SSP/individual risk assessment.

SLT must immediately be informed of the situation.

Where possible, the member of staff following the learner should remain in contact with either the main group or SLT via a mobile phone. SLT will, if necessary, allocate further staff members to go and collect the learner and return them either to the venue or to school. SLT will also inform the learner's parents and keep them updated as necessary.

If a learner is a known absconder, this needs to be documented on the risk assessment part of the SSP. Staff to adhere to the risk assessment and be mindful not to put themselves or the learner at risk.

7 Effective Reviewing of Situation Should a Learner Go Missing

If a learner absconds and is then deemed to be 'missing', procedures will follow those outlined previously for a learner missing off-site.

It is important that following an incident the issues that arise are addressed and staff should:

- Complete an incident form, ensuring that timescales are clear.
- Review and update the learner's SSP.
- Where appropriate, talk through the incident with the learner involved.
- Ensure that a record is kept of the discussion held with the learner.
- Hold a staff debrief to provide the opportunity for staff to discuss the incident, plan differently but also to discuss their feelings around the incident.
- Complete Missing Child log.
- Review procedures and ensure control measures are in place and that all staff are fully informed.
- Headteacher to inform Chief Executive Officer of any incidents of absconding.

8 Links with Other Policies

- Child Protection & Safeguarding.
- Attendance.
- Behaviour Management.
- Educational Visits.
- Staff Professional Conduct.
- Risk Assessment.

9 Monitoring & Review

All missing child incidents are recorded on an incident form and in the Missing Persons Log. This policy is reviewed every 2 years by the leadership team and shared with the Board of Trustees.

Appendix A: Missing Child Process Chart – Onsite



Appendix B: Missing Child Process Chart – Offsite

- A 'head count' of the learners should be made at regular intervals and always before a vehicle leaves a venue.



- If a learner is discovered as missing, then a search (*not exceeding 5 minutes*) of the immediate area is undertaken by all available members of staff, ensuring that all other learners continue to be appropriately supervised.



- If the missing learner is not located, the person responsible must notify SLT at the school.
- SLT will notify the police and provide them with as precise a description of the learner as possible, the last known whereabouts of the learner and any other details they may require.
- SLT will offer advice and instruction.



- Person Responsible for trip to inform venue that a learner has gone missing; venue to implement their own missing child policy if they have one.
- Person Responsible to be in site and available should police or additional staff from school arrive.



- SLT to inform parents.



- Once the learner has been located, offer comfort and reassurance. Return to school



- A debrief is held to explore why/how the learner went missing, to review procedures and documentation and identify learning outcomes.



- SLT to inform local authority responsible for the learner's placement, as well as key personnel such as social worker



Work with the learner at an appropriate level to support understanding regarding staying safe.

Appendix C: Missing Child Process Chart – Learner Prone Absconding / Leaving Site



Appendix D: Model Incident Report

1. Go to Eduspot to complete an incident report.
2. Select learner, subject, location, date, period and time.

The screenshot shows the top portion of an incident report form. At the top left, there is a 'Student' field with a plus icon and an information icon, followed by a dropdown menu with the text 'Please select a student'. To the right is a 'Staff' field with a dropdown menu showing 'Lawrence Samantha Jane'. Below these is a large empty text box for the 'Description'. Underneath the description box are several fields: 'Subject' with a dropdown 'Please select a subject', 'Status' with a dropdown 'Pending - In Progress', and 'Location' with a dropdown 'Admin (2)'. Below these are 'Date' (19 Feb 2025) and 'Date' (Date), 'Period' (After School Clubs), and 'Time' (3:53 pm). At the bottom is a 'CC' field with a button that says 'Click Here to Inform Others'.

3. Accurately record the description, ensuring timescales are clearly detailed.

The screenshot shows the 'Description' field of the incident report form. The text inside the field is as follows:
Learner was finding a part of her English lesson a bit overwhelming, STAFF X decided for the class to all take a movement break and go for a walk to get ice poles from Ash. Learner did not want to come and although her peers tried to encourage her, Learner pulled her chair back and away. STAFF X asked them to leave learner and give her space. I (STAFF X) then asked learner if she would like to come or would like to stay in the classroom and have some time and space and learner nodded.
At 10:45am I (STAFF X) left the classroom and shouted through to the main hub that SM was in class and just wanted some space and that I was taking pupil 1 & 2 off for a movement break.
We met STAFF Y at 10:47am at the bottom of the stairs, We went up to wellbeing and then the 2 students went on the park.
We returned to the classroom at 11:00am. The learner was not in the classroom where they were left.
We carried out a search of the building.
At 11:05am, STAFF Y requested that CCTV is checked. It was observed on CCTV that the learner left site at 10:59am. STAFF Y communicated by radio that she (SM) had left site as seen on the CCTV. STAFF X and STAFF Z left site to look for the learner.
SLT called parent to notify them at 11:07am. Another member of SLT called police at 11:06am
At 11:09, learner's mum called and said that learner had been in contact and that she was at the dentist at Eight Ash Green.

4. Accurately record the learner debrief at an appropriate time.

The screenshot shows the 'Student Debrief' section of the incident report form. It starts with a header 'Student Debrief' and a checked checkbox 'Support Provided for students with limited communication Skills observations'. Below this is a large empty text box. There are several other checkboxes, all of which are unchecked:
 Restorative Practice
 Was the student able to tell you why he/she was upset/distressed?
 If student was not able to reflect on the situation, was he/she able to do so at a later time
 If appropriate, plan together with the student what they can do differently next time
 How have relationships been restored
At the bottom of the section, there is a '4 Comments' label and a text input field with the placeholder text 'Write a comment...'.

5. Following the incident, add a comment to record how the staff debrief went