

The Lotus Academy Trust



Supporting children to find opportunities in every difficulty

The Damara School



Specialist SEMH Independent School

Absconding and Missing from school Policy and Procedures

Approved by: Trust Board

Initial Ratification: 31 August 2019

Review: October 2020, September 2023

Next review due by: September 2025

Vision

Our vision is to provide every pupil with safe, rewarding, personalised education and support to improve their life chances, prepare them for life and the world of work. Using therapeutic and holistic approaches to learning, our commitment is to develop new and existing skills and abilities, increase knowledge and strengthen understanding. Through mindfulness strategies, the core skill of resilience is developed, thus enabling each pupil to cope with the pressures of education and life and reach their full academic, social, emotional and spiritual potential. This commitment to our pupils is made possible through the strong partnerships we build with our families and other professionals.

Introduction and Rationale for the policy

This policy is written to guide staff in the event of a child going missing on the premises, going missing outside of the organisation or having absconded.

Staff are reminded to read the following school policies and practice guidelines in conjunction with this policy:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Site Security Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Individual Risk Assessments
- Individual Learning Plan

On the Premises

A register of pupils' attendance will be completed each morning and afternoon by staff. It is the responsibility of all staff members on site to be able to account for the whereabouts of every child.

Procedure

- Upon discovering a child is missing on site, an immediate search is to be made of the buildings with all available staff. This search should not exceed ten minutes.
- All the usual 'hiding' places for that child should be searched.
- If the child is a known absconder this should have been recorded in their individual risk assessment and should include any known 'hiding' places for that child
- contact the parents of the child who is missing and keep them updated as necessary. Inform them that the police will be contacted if after 15 minutes of further searching
- Staff should then regroup and extend the search to include the Centre grounds. This should not exceed a further fifteen minutes
- If at this stage the child has not yet been located the senior leader on site should:

- organise all available staff to search the immediate local area
- staff must take potential dangers into account and not put themselves at risk
- contact the parents of the child who is missing and keep them updated as necessary. Inform them that the police will now be contacted
- make a phone call to the local police station giving a clear description of the child and clothing being worn. Tel 101 and ask for Thetford Police Station
- not leave the premises but remain on site to co-ordinate the search, answer phone calls and provide photos and information. The police may want to visit the school
- ensure that there are adequate staff left in the building to deal with other contingencies. When searching the immediate local area on foot, remember that you may be vulnerable (use a car whenever possible)
- Following the incident, ensure appropriate recording forms are completed as soon as possible – e.g. a Major Incident record
- Arrange a meeting with child, parents and staff to discuss the circumstances of the incident and the effectiveness of the current procedures. A review must take place of the child's individual risk assessment and their ILP
- Keep all colleagues informed

Off Site Premises

- Pupils involved in an outing are recorded on the Trips and Visits register stored in the Leadership office
- When going off-site, staff are to take their ID badges
- All staff on trips and visits out should ensure they have a fully charged 'trips and visits' mobile phone with them – school telephones are kept in the Leadership office for this purpose
- A register must be taken by each trip leader prior to leaving site (car, minibus or coach), at regular intervals during the outing and on the car, minibus or coach prior to leaving the venue

Procedure

- If a child is discovered as missing, then a search (not exceeding ten minutes) of the immediate area is undertaken by all available members of staff, ensuring that all other children and young people continue to be appropriately supervised
- If the missing child is not located, then:
 - a staff member should notify the trip leader who will then notify the most senior leader at the school and act on any instructions given

- the senior leader will notify the police and provide them with as precise a description of the child as possible, the last known whereabouts of the child and any other details they may require
- notify, if appropriate, the venue that is being visited and ask them to initiate their lost child protocols
- the senior leader will notify the child's parents and keep them updated as necessary
- the member of staff initiating the search should remain in situ until the police or assistance from school arrives in case the missing child should return or be found.
- In such stressful circumstances it is important that staff remain as calm and collected as possible

Absconding

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

Procedure

- If a child absconds then:
 - where possible, a member of staff should follow the child at a safe distance and/or in response with guidance from the child's individual risk assessment
 - a senior leader at school must immediately be informed of the situation
 - where possible, the member of staff following the child should remain in contact with either the main group or the senior leader at school via a mobile phone
 - the senior leader will then, if appropriate, allocate further staff members to go and collect the child and return them either to the venue or to school
 - the senior leader will also inform the child's parents and keep them updated as necessary

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

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

- review the individual risk assessment and ILP for the child involved
- where appropriate, talk through the incident with the child involved. Ensure that a record is kept of the discussion held with the child
- complete a Major Incident form (a copy of which should be placed in the child's personal files)
- keep all colleagues informed and discuss the incident in staff meetings and/or in supervision meetings
- review procedures for the individual every half term to ensure appropriate control measures are in place and that all staff are fully informed

- inform Governors every term about any incidents of absconding

Information for the child or young person

The following information must be shared with all children and young people on entry to the school:

- What happens if you go missing?
- What is meant by “missing”? You will be considered missing if members of staff do not know where you are
- What is meant by “absconding”? You have absconded if you deliberately go away from where you should be without telling a member of staff or without a member of staff giving you permission
- What will happen if you go missing? The people looking after you have a responsibility to know where you are and to make sure you are safe. If you are ‘missing’ they will speak to your friends, teachers and family to see if they can help. If there is concern for your safety then staff will need to search for clues as to where you are. The Police may be informed that you are missing and they and the school staff will look for you
- What happens if you can’t be found? A meeting will be held between the school and the Police to plan how to search for you. Your name, description and a photograph will be given to the Police in order to help them with their search
- What happens when you are found? You will be returned to a safe place and will be asked about the reasons for you going missing. This is to try and find out if anything is troubling you and to see if anyone can help. You do not have to run away to talk to someone. If you want to talk to someone outside of the school, this can be arranged. You will also be visited by a Police Officer who will check that you are back. This is called a “Safe and Well Check”. You will be able to speak to the Police Officer without any member of staff present if you wish to do so.
- Will anything else happen? If you are injured or unwell then you will be checked by one of our staff who is First Aid trained. Your teacher or mentor will want to talk to you about going missing. If you have deliberately run away (absconded) then the people responsible for your safety will meet to discuss ways in which such incidents can be prevented by looking at the reasons for your actions. Remember - You have the right to use a telephone in private. If you are worried about something or just want to talk, the national ChildLine number is 0800 1111