

St. Elizabeth's School and Children's Home

Policy for Missing Child / Young Person "Our community is together to live and learn together"

Definitions:

Missing Child: A child is missing when no staff member is aware of their whereabouts and the child / student is known to be / or thought to be unsupervised by a staff member.

Unauthorised Absence: Where a child's whereabouts is known or thought to be unconfirmed, they are not missing and may be considered as absent without authorisation from their placement. (Protocol for Children Missing from Care or Home: Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board). **Due to the vulnerable nature of the children at St Elizabeth's, it is unlikely that any incident of a missing child will be treated as 'Unauthorised Absence'. The only exception to this rule is when a risk assessment and written agreement exists between the school, young person, family and responsible authority.

Underpinning Ethos and practice

- Safety and welfare of children is paramount and everything possible must be done to deter children from going missing.
- Key work sessions and House Meetings should be undertaken to help children gain awareness of the risks and dangers of going missing
- Staff meetings should be used to discuss any concerns about any children going missing.
- In some instances running away can be prevented by staff adopting a positive approach. Staff should be acutely aware of individual triggers and group dynamics and recognise the benefits of using activities to positively engage children.
- The policy is written in line with The Hertfordshire Protocol for Children Missing From Care or Home. A copy is kept in the Person In Charge Folder / Duty manager Folder.
- This policy is shared with Herts. police.

Overview:

Due to the vulnerability and complexity of needs of the children placed at St Elizabeth's an immediate search will commence when any child becomes missing.

This policy applies to all children and young people at St Elizabeth's School and Children's Home including those that are aged over 18.

This policy provides guidance for staff for use during incidents of missing children / students and preventative measures. It provides a framework to work within. Every situation is different and staff managing the situation must consider individual aspects of the current event whilst decision making.

Time Frames are for guidance and the Person In Charge may decide to request external support from the police at an earlier stage. Decisions to lengthen the time frames must be justifiable.

Aims:

- All staff are aware of the correct procedure to follow when a child / young person goes missing.
- Staff are aware of individual care plan supervision requirements.
- Staff are aware of Individual guidelines for children / students known to abscond
- Keep individual records of all incidents of missing children
- The school will report all incidents of missing children to the family and responsible authority.
- Following any incidents of missing children, the risk assessment, care plan and guidance in place for the child will be reviewed and necessary adjustments made.

Guidance:

CARE PLANS

Staff supervision is high at St Elizabeth's School and Children's Home. Many of the children and students require this due to the complex nature of their learning, health or social needs.

Where children and students have agreed higher levels of independence, staff should be aware of their whereabouts and return times.

Individual care plans will indicate the amount of support each child/student requires. Some pupils/students are likely to 'wander', others may walk/run off when they are distressed, confused or angry. This must all be well documented in the individual care plan.

Staff will document the supervision requirements (Care Plan Page 14) for every child. Within this section of the Care Pan, staff will document:

- The level of supervision / support required by the child (if this changes in relation to specific times of day, activities, places – this will be documented).
- The likelihood of the child going missing and/or absconding from the staff / site.
- The level of risk and vulnerability presented if the child goes missing.

- The child's view (if appropriate). Staff will discuss this protocol with children and young people for whom that would be useful so that they understand the actions of staff members.
- Strategies to prevent reoccurrence.

Some children / students will have an individual plan for when they abscond from staff / the site. These should be included in the Care Plan, mentioned under supervision requirements and kept immediately accessible for use during incidents. These type of guidelines will be in place for any child /student known to abscond from the site.

STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET

Every child / student has a Student Information Sheet. Every residential house keeps a file of these on the house and there is a file of all children in the residential duty office.

The Student Information sheet provides details that include:

Name, Preferred name, Photo, Communication needs, Behaviour Presentations, Health Needs, Supervision requirements, Self care skills, Dietary information, Allergies. Height, Weight.

There is an empty box ready to be filled in if the child goes missing that covers

Description, Clothing, Time and Location last seen.

The Student Information sheet will be passed to any additional staff that assist in a search and external agencies involved in a search e.g. police.

PREVENTATIVE ACTION – ‘KNOWN RUNNERS’

A number the children and students at St Elizabeth's may run off from staff or an area either during health or behaviour episodes. This will be identified in their Individual Risk Assessments. When children who are known 'runners', leave staff or the activity and start to run, staff should use the bleep immediately to request help or to pre-warn responders and senior staff that the child has started to run. Staff must give the exact location and the direction that the child is running in to enable the best response possible.

These events are not Missing Child events unless the child's location becomes unknown.

EQUIPMENT

Torches to use during searches are available in each Individual House, School Duty Office and Head of Care Office. During the night, torches are also available in the night room.

High Visibility Jackets are available in the houses and school duty office.

Emergency Vehicle (Red Car) is parked at the front of the main building outside the Rainbow Centre. Keys are in top right drawer in School Duty Office.

Local Maps with coloured and numbered routes are available in all houses, school duty office, night rooms, classrooms and all vehicles. These are also available electronically on the system.

CHILD MISSING – STAFF ACTION

As soon as staff realise that a child/student is missing, they will alert senior staff and response staff by using the Emergency Bleep facility. Staff should be clear when they make the call in regards to the last sighting, frame of mind of child, clothing if known and whether they have the use of a bike. If the staff member suspects that the missing child is intending to leave the site they must make this clear in their original message.

When staff are unsure if a child is missing or is with another member of staff, the bleep system should be used to check the location of the pupil with other staff. If in any doubt, staff should alert senior staff.

1. For children/young people who are judged to have low capacity to fend for themselves:

On receiving the 'bleep alert' which will have alerted all senior staff on site, establish when, where and by whom the child/student was last seen.

Free as many staff from all houses and / or classes as it is safe to do, and organise a search in and out of the building, known favourite spots and routes.

If this does not locate the child/student quickly and if:

- It is unusual for the child/student
- It is dark outside
- It is very cold
- The child/student has an attraction to vehicles
- The child/student is overdue medication

Notify the Police (see CALLING THE POLICE)

If the child/student has a history of hiding/wandering and returning safely, and there is no indication to presume the disappearance is epilepsy related, a longer period may be given to trying to locate the child. The police must be contacted no later than after a 20 minute period.

NB: The length of time since the last sighting will influence your judgement on this time scale.

Once the child/student has been returned to school or found:

- Re-contact the police if they have not arrived
- Alert the police search party
- Make sure that all is well with the child/student
- Ask the nurse on duty to check the child/student

Write up a report of the incident (see Recording)

Organise informing parents and local authority.

Parents will be notified as soon as reasonably practical. This would usually once the child is found and safe. However, if the incident is lengthy (the police and staff are unable to find the child after a thorough search), senior staff will notify parents.

2. Children who are more able and / or independent:

As soon as the bleep alert is given, organise a group of staff to search the site inside and outside.

Meanwhile ascertain:

By whom, where and when they were last seen

If there are any reasons for the child/student to be upset

If they have had any recent seizure activity and when they are due medication

Has the child/student done or threatened similar in the past and with what results

If more than one child/student is involved

How much cash they have available to them

Details of what they were wearing

Whether they have their own mobile phone with them.

Any known contacts in the area they may go to

The answers to the above will help you to plan the course of action.

In any instance the Police must be informed after 30 minutes. In some cases the Police will be involved before this.

When the police have been informed the parents (or the person with parental responsibility) must be notified as soon as reasonably practical. . This would usually once the child is found and safe. However, if the incident is lengthy (the police and staff are unable to find the child after a thorough search), senior staff will notify parents.

Once the child/student has been returned to school or found:

Re-contact the police if they have not arrived

Alert the police search party

Make sure that all is well with the child/student

Write up a report of the incident (see reporting)

3. Child Missing During an Off Site Activity

All staff should be aware of the children they are responsible for during off site activities. There must be a risk assessment in place for every off site activity. Communication between staff is key, especially when the group is being split. Two mobile phones must be taken on any off site trip.

As soon as staff realise a child is missing, the group leader must be informed immediately.

An immediate search of the area will be undertaken which may include retracing steps.

A member of staff must remain in the location where the child was last seen.

The safety of the rest of the group must be considered during all actions. If at all possible, the rest of the group should return to the vehicle with a staff member.

If the group is visiting a venue who have their own staff (theme park, zoo, etc) they should be alerted and requested to help with the search.

Depending on the child's needs and level of independence, state of mind and the off site location, the group leader will need to make the decision on when to call the police. For less able children, this will never be more than 15 minutes and for many would be less. For more independent children, this will never be longer than 30 minutes but depending on circumstances may be less.

As soon as reasonably practical, a staff member should contact the senior staff on site to inform them of the situation, and assistance needed (if possible). It may be possible to collect the other children and escort them back to the site.

Recording and Reporting procedures for off site incidents will be the same as above.

The off site trip (location, group, staff ratio, vehicles) should be re-evaluated and re-risk assessed to avoid future incidents and / or reconsider the suitability of the outing.

4. Child Missing During the Night (10pm – 7am).

The building is secure at night. The waking night staff do a locking up check at the 10pm round. Any concerns will be reported to Number 1 night duty cover.

All residential houses are covered by movement sensors during the night.

Most children and students are monitored by the listening in system and have door contacts on their bedroom doors (unless there is a risk assessment to say that this should not be in place).

Night staff do an hourly round to check the majority of children. Some have less frequent checks.

If at any time during the night, night staff realise a child is missing (not in their bedroom, toilet or house), they should immediately call Number 1 senior cover. Night staff will inform No.1 cover of the last time and location that the child was seen. No.1 cover will get to the night station as soon as possible.

Night staff will free as many staff as possible to carry out an initial search of the immediate accessible areas. All doors, windows and possible points of exit should be checked. Any developments will be immediately reported to No. 1 cover as they happen.

If the child is not located in the initial search, No.1 cover will make a decision to call extra sleep in staff to search the grounds in a vehicle and with torches. Support from night teams in the home and college will be requested.

If the search of the site and building does not locate the child, the No.1 cover will make the decision to call the police. This will be no longer than 20 minutes after the child was reported as missing and may be sooner depending on the child, individual circumstances and weather.

Reporting and Recording of these incidents will be the same as above. Parents will not be contacted in the middle of the night unless absolutely necessary and the police may be able to support with this. No.1 cover will organise this if necessary.

Parents will be informed as soon as possible at a reasonable hour. Local Authorities will ordinarily be informed on the following day (following working day for authorities).

CALLING THE POLICE

The police will request the following information when a report of a missing child is initially made to them:

- Name
- Age
- Description of the child and their clothing
- Address (may request school address and family address),

- Location missing from
- Circumstances under which the child is missing
- Is the behaviour out of character
- Name, address and telephone number of person reporting
- Enquiries and searches that have taken place to establish the whereabouts of the child.

The staff member calling the police must ensure that they explain the child's additional needs and vulnerability clearly and early on in the call e.g. level of understanding, epilepsy, attraction to or lack of awareness of danger etc. Local police have been provided with names and information regarding who will potentially run off.

RETURNING TO SCHOOL / MOVING FORWARD

If a child / student has left the site and has been located by the police or a member of the public, 2 staff (one being a senior member of staff) will immediately go to collect the child and bring them back to school.

The child / student will need to be de-briefed at a time and a level that is appropriate to their level of need and understanding. It may be useful to ask the Speech and Language therapist to help. Remember – the time frame for this depends on the emotional state and the ability of the child. This work may be immediate and/or long term.

If a child has been missing and has left the site, their individual risk assessment needs to be reviewed by the multi disciplinary team in order to prevent a similar occurrence. Parents and Placing authorities need to be consulted and in agreement with the risk assessment. It may be necessary to discuss future plans with the local police so that everyone is working towards the same protocol and they are aware of a known risk.

Following a significant event of a missing child who has left the site, individual guidelines additional to the risk assessment should be compiled. These will provide a step by step guide for staff to keep the child safe and how to act in the event of the child absconding / going missing.

INDEPENDENT RETURN INTERVIEW

Children must feel welcomed back into the home following a period of being missing. They must see that staff are relieved they are back and keen to ensure they are safe and well, and that they react swiftly to any medical attention.

When a child returns, they must be offered an independent return interview. These provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing and from risk factors in the home.

The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of returning home. Children must have the opportunity to speak to someone independent of their care, to ensure they are self and well and procedures have been followed.

The statutory guidance on children who runaway or go missing from home or care issued by the DFE in January 2014 states that the person conducting the interview should usually be independent of the child's placement and of the responsible local authority.; an exception may be where a child has a strong relationship with a carer or social worker.

It is recognised that the children living at St. Elizabeth's may need support with these meetings, or feel unsure/ unsafe with an unknown face. In this case, staff should consider the keyworker or a familiar staff member to accompany.

If the child refuses, then this **MUST** be recorded and a keywork session completed, covering-

- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away
- Help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of then running away

RECORDING

In all cases of a missing child, the central log and an Individual Missing From Home record will be completed. These will be completed **IN ALL CASES** – even if the child was only missing for a short while. Details will include a log of when bleeps calls were made, staff were allocated to search and calls to external agencies were made (both to request assistance and to report events). This form will be completed by a member of the school senior team (duty manager, person in charge, school academic manager, leadership team member). This allows for the incident to be properly reviewed, required changes to practice and risk assessments highlighted and reflective learning to take place.

The incident may also need to be recorded on a Reveal report. If not, a School Incident Reporting will need to be completed. This can be brief and attached to the individual record for more detail.

MONITORING/REVIEW OF ALL CHILDREN WHO RUN AWAY/GO MISSING

- Staff ensure the central log and individual records are complete and held on the children's file
- Debriefs will be recorded.
- Monthly and quarterly monitoring of individual children will be assessed and risk assessments/strategies reviewed.

NOTIFICATION / REPORTING

When a child / student has been missing and the police have been called to assist the school, the following agencies should be notified:

- Placing Authority
- OFSTED
- Chair of Governors

This is the responsibility of the school leadership team, residential management team or the Person In Charge. This task can be delegated to senior residential team, senior residential staff, senior academic staff.

Parents will be notified as soon as practically possible and preferably once the child has been located and confirmed as safe. If it becomes necessary to report a missing child to a parents whilst the child remains missing, this will be the responsibility of the most senior member of staff on site to make the call or delegate to the most appropriate person.

STUDENTS WITH GREATER INDEPENDENCE

Occasionally, older students at St Elizabeth's are judged as being able to have lower staff supervision than is usual, or may be able to leave the Centre unsupervised. Any such circumstances will be agreed with the student, family and local authority after a clear risk assessing process. Mobile phones and / or walkie talkies have been useful tools to support this in the past.

HERTFORDSHIRE POLICY

A copy of the **Hertfordshire Protocol for Children Missing From Care Or Home** is kept in the Registered Manager's Office and Person In Charge File. St Elizabeth's School and Home works with many different local authorities. The school will liaise with Hertfordshire CSF, Hertfordshire police, the referring authority and family where there is a pattern of a pupil/student absconding or missing from school.

- This policy will be shared with all parents / families / carers on admission.
- The policy will be sent to all referring local authorities for their agreement.
- The policy will be ratified by Hertfordshire Police

APPENDICES

- 1. Individual Missing From Home Record
(Central Log found in Duty Managers Office)**