



ABSCONDERS / MISSING PUPIL POLICY

2026-2027

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Everything Education School

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1.0 PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

Everything Education School is committed to safeguarding pupils at all times. A pupil who leaves the school site, a supervised activity or an agreed area without permission may be exposed to increased risk, and repeated incidents may indicate an unmet need or an underlying safeguarding concern.

This policy sets out a calm, proportionate and child-centred response. The priority is to establish the pupil's safety, assess risk quickly, share information appropriately and take action that reflects the individual circumstances. The school will avoid language or responses that criminalise a pupil for leaving site and will focus on safety, welfare and prevention.

For continuity with existing school records, this document retains the term "absconders" in its title. Within the policy, the preferred terms are "pupil who has left site without permission", "missing pupil" or "pupil whose whereabouts are unknown".

2.0 LEGAL AND GUIDANCE FRAMEWORK

This policy has regard to relevant legislation and national guidance, including:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children;
- Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools (DfE, updated September 2025);
- Working together to improve school attendance (DfE statutory guidance, updated July 2026);
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, where applicable;
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, including the safeguarding and welfare standards;
- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004;
- Equality Act 2010; and
- the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection, Attendance, Behaviour and Risk Assessment arrangements.

3.0 SCOPE AND TERMINOLOGY

This policy applies to all pupils attending Everything Education School and to all staff, agency staff, contractors and volunteers with responsibilities for pupils. It applies during the school day, transitions, breaks, educational visits, community activities and other school-supervised off-site activity.

A pupil is treated as missing for the purposes of this procedure when their whereabouts cannot be established and staff cannot confirm that they are safe. A pupil may also leave a supervised area without permission while their location remains known. Both situations require a proportionate response, but the level of escalation will depend on the assessed risk.

Children missing education (CME) has a separate statutory meaning: children of compulsory school age who are not registered at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise. A pupil temporarily missing from the school site is not automatically CME, although persistent absence or loss of contact may engage attendance and CME procedures.

4.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The proprietor body has overall responsibility for ensuring appropriate safeguarding arrangements. The Headteacher is responsible for implementing this policy, ensuring staff understand the procedure and making sure incidents are reviewed.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or a deputy DSL when necessary, will coordinate safeguarding decisions, risk assessment, information sharing and referrals to children's social care or other agencies. The DSL must be informed promptly of any incident where a pupil's whereabouts are unknown or where leaving site creates a safeguarding concern.

All staff must maintain appropriate awareness of pupil whereabouts, follow supervision arrangements, act immediately when a pupil is missing or leaves without permission, record relevant information and follow instructions from the DSL/Headteacher.

Parents/carers should keep emergency contact details current and share relevant information that may affect the pupil's safety, likely destinations or risk of leaving. The school will normally seek more than one emergency contact number for each pupil where possible.

5.0 PREVENTION AND INDIVIDUAL RISK PLANNING

Prevention should be based on understanding the pupil rather than relying only on physical control. Staff should consider known triggers, communication needs, sensory needs, trauma, conflict, peer relationships, transport arrangements, transition points and any previous pattern of leaving.

Where a pupil is known to be at increased risk of leaving, an individual risk plan should be developed and shared with relevant staff. It should identify likely triggers and destinations, warning signs, de-escalation strategies, supervision arrangements, communication methods, key contacts and actions if the pupil leaves.

Reasonable adjustments should be made for pupils with SEND or disabilities. Risk controls must be proportionate and should not unnecessarily restrict a pupil's dignity, independence or access to education.

6.0 IMMEDIATE RESPONSE - PUPIL LEAVES SITE OR IS MISSING

When a pupil leaves without permission or cannot be located, staff must act immediately. The first member of staff aware of the incident should alert the Headteacher/DSL or nominated senior lead and give the pupil's name, last known location, time last seen, direction of travel if known and any immediate risk information.

The senior lead will coordinate the response. Actions should include, as appropriate:

- confirming whether the pupil may still be on site and checking likely safe locations without leaving other pupils inadequately supervised;
- checking attendance, handover and sign-out information to rule out an authorised movement;
- using known and approved contact methods to try to establish the pupil's location and safety;
- reviewing the individual risk plan, known destinations, transport routes, family information and current safeguarding concerns;
- contacting parents/carers promptly unless doing so would increase risk or conflict with safeguarding advice;
- informing the commissioning/referring authority or key professional where required by the placement arrangements;
- preserving appropriate staff supervision for pupils remaining at school; and
- keeping a contemporaneous log of key times, decisions, calls and information received.

Staff must not place themselves or other pupils at unreasonable risk by pursuing a pupil into traffic, unsafe premises, water, railway areas or other hazardous locations. Any decision for a member of staff to follow at a safe distance must be based on immediate risk, staff competence, communication capability and the need to maintain safe supervision at school.

Physical intervention must not be used simply to prevent a pupil leaving because staff disagree with the decision. Any restrictive intervention must be lawful, necessary, proportionate and consistent with the school's Behaviour Policy and restrictive-intervention arrangements.

7.0 POLICE AND EMERGENCY ESCALATION

There is no fixed waiting period before contacting the police. The decision must be based on the pupil's vulnerability, the circumstances and the immediacy of the risk.

Call 999 where there is an immediate threat to life or serious harm, for example where a pupil is in or moving towards a dangerous situation, is believed to be at immediate risk of exploitation or violence, or requires urgent emergency assistance.

Where the pupil's whereabouts are unknown and there is a safeguarding or welfare risk that requires police assistance, the school should contact the police promptly using the appropriate route. Staff should provide an accurate description, clothing, recent photograph if available and lawful to share, last known location, known risks, likely destinations and contact details.

Factors indicating increased vulnerability may include:

- age, developmental understanding or communication needs;
- SEND, disability or inability to recognise danger;
- being looked after or otherwise known to children's social care;
- known or suspected exploitation, criminal involvement, trafficking or serious violence risk;
- significant emotional distress, self-harm or suicide risk;
- need for medication or urgent healthcare;
- the incident being out of character or following a serious conflict or disclosure;
- weather, darkness, traffic, railway, water or other environmental hazards; and
- a pattern of repeated missing episodes or a history of being harmed while missing.

The DSL should consider whether children's social care, the local authority or another safeguarding partner must also be contacted. Police involvement does not replace the school's own safeguarding responsibilities.

8.0 WHEN THE PUPIL IS LOCATED OR RETURNS

When the pupil is located, staff should first establish immediate safety and welfare. Medical attention should be obtained where needed. Parents/carers, police and other agencies that were contacted should be updated promptly so that the incident can be closed or further action agreed.

The pupil should be welcomed back calmly. Staff should avoid an immediate punitive response to the act of going missing itself. A suitable member of staff should offer a return conversation at an appropriate time to understand what happened, where the pupil went, whether they experienced harm, what prompted the incident and what might reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

Any disclosure or indicator of abuse, exploitation, neglect, self-harm, bullying, peer conflict or other safeguarding concern must be reported to the DSL immediately and managed under safeguarding procedures.

The DSL/Headteacher should review the incident, update the pupil's risk assessment and support plan, consider changes to supervision or timetable arrangements, and agree any appropriate restorative or behavioural response to conduct that occurred before, during or after the incident.

9.0 OFF-SITE ACTIVITIES AND TRANSPORT

The same principles apply during trips, community activities and transport arrangements. Visit leaders must know how to respond if a pupil becomes separated from the group or leaves without permission, and this should be addressed within visit planning and risk assessment.

Staff should establish a safe meeting point, maintain supervision of the rest of the group, contact the school emergency lead and escalate to parents/carers, police or emergency services according to risk. The school's Trips and Visits Policy must be followed.

10.0 ATTENDANCE AND CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION

Unauthorised absence, repeated non-attendance and loss of contact must be managed through the school's Attendance Policy and safeguarding procedures. Patterns of absence may be an indicator of safeguarding concerns and should not be viewed only as a behaviour issue.

Where the school has reason to believe a child may no longer be receiving suitable education, or where statutory criteria for children missing education may be engaged, the school will work with the relevant local authority and follow current statutory guidance. A pupil must not be removed from the admission register except in accordance with the applicable legal requirements.

11.0 RECORDING, INFORMATION SHARING AND DATA PROTECTION

All significant incidents must be recorded on the appropriate safeguarding and/or behaviour system. Records should include the time the pupil was last seen, when the absence was discovered, actions taken, risk decisions, contacts made, return time, welfare information, follow-up actions and any referrals.

Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis to safeguard the pupil. Staff should not delay necessary safeguarding information sharing because of uncertainty about data protection. Information shared with police, children's social care, local authorities, parents/carers or commissioners must be relevant, proportionate and recorded.

Where a photograph is provided to police or another agency to help locate a missing pupil, it should be a recent and appropriate image and the disclosure should be recorded. Personal information must be handled in line with the school's Data Management Policy.

12.0 TRAINING, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Staff will receive appropriate information and training on supervision, missing-pupil procedures, safeguarding escalation, recording and individual risk plans. New staff should be introduced to the procedure during induction.

The Headteacher and DSL will monitor incidents for patterns, repeated triggers, locations, times, pupils or system weaknesses. Repeated incidents will trigger a review of the pupil's plan and may require multi-agency discussion.

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where legislation or guidance changes, following a serious incident, or where monitoring identifies a need to amend practice.

RELATED POLICIES

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Safeguarding Statement of Intent
- Attendance Policy

- Behaviour Policy
- Trips and Visits Policy
- Risk Assessment Policy
- SEND Policy
- First Aid / Medical arrangements
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Data Management Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

APPENDIX 1 - IMMEDIATE ACTION CHECKLIST

Step	Action
1	Alert the Headteacher/DSL or nominated senior lead immediately.
2	Confirm last known location, time last seen, direction of travel and immediate risk factors.
3	Check likely on-site locations and attendance/handover information without compromising supervision.
4	Use approved contact methods and known information to try to establish the pupil's location and safety.
5	Review the pupil's individual risk plan and known safeguarding concerns.
6	Contact parents/carers promptly unless safeguarding circumstances indicate otherwise.
7	Call 999 for immediate danger or serious harm; otherwise contact police promptly where whereabouts are unknown and risk requires police assistance.
8	Inform the referrer/commissioner or children's social care where required.
9	Record all key times, calls, decisions and information received.
10	On return, complete a welfare check, return conversation and safeguarding/risk-plan review.

APPENDIX 2 - INDIVIDUAL MISSING-PUPIL RISK PLAN

Area	Record / Consider
Pupil details	Name, year group, placement/referrer, parent/carer contacts.
Known risks	Safeguarding concerns, SEND/communication needs, medical needs, vulnerability factors.
Triggers / warning signs	Events, demands, transitions, peers, locations or behaviours linked to leaving.
Likely destinations	Home, relatives, shops, parks, transport hubs or other known locations.
Protective strategies	Trusted adults, regulation strategies, safe spaces, reduced demands, planned check-ins.
Supervision	High-risk times/locations, transition arrangements, staff responsibilities.
Contact approach	Approved pupil contact method, wording likely to help, people most likely to engage the pupil.
Escalation	When to contact parents/carers, police, social care, commissioner/referrer and emergency services.
Return plan	Welfare check, return conversation, debrief and review of support/risk controls.
Review	Named lead, review date and changes after any incident.