



DAWN HOUSE SCHOOL – STAFF HANDBOOK	
Policy Title: Pupils who run away or go missing from Home, Education, Care	
Section: 4	Policy No: 4.5
Version Date: December 2018	Review Date: December 2019
Name of Originator: JMC	Designation: Principal

This policy has been informed by:

DfE Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275701/Statutory_guidance_missing-children.pdf

Nottingham & Nottinghamshire’s Safeguarding Children Board’s Interagency Practice Guidance: Local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Joint Protocol (September 2014)

http://nottinghamshirescb.proceduresonline.com/files/ch_miss_home_care_jt_prot.pdf

Keeping Children safe in education (statutory guidance for schools and colleges) September 2018

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

When a child goes missing or runs away, they are at risk. Therefore, safeguarding children includes protecting them from this risk. At Dawn House, we accept our responsibility for protecting children whether they go missing from the family home or from the residential care setting.

The school acknowledges going missing can be a symptom of something going wrong in a child or young person’s life.

Staff are made aware:

- Pupils may be 'pushed' away from their home or 'pulled' away to something outside of their home or a combination of both, known as 'push/pull factors'.
- Issues often relate to relationship or boundary difficulties with parents or carers, placement quality or being placed too far away from home.
- It can be about peer and friendship relationship issues, conflict or bullying, or because of difficulties within school.
- Pupils may be harmed in a number of tangible or intangible ways.
- Children may have been coerced to run away by someone else.

Children who go missing for the first time or for short periods of time, can still face a number of risks and dangers which can impact on their life. For example:

- Be sexually exploited (CSE) or become involved in gangs.
- Become a victim or perpetrator of crime or financially exploited.
- Homelessness.
- Impact on education.
- Loss of or deterioration of social and family relationships.
- Involvement in drugs.
- Impact of physical, emotional or mental health.
- Trafficking.

Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol abuse.

The communication difficulties of our children make them even more vulnerable as they may have limited understanding of risks posed by others.

The following four concerns raised in the Ofsted 'Missing Children' (Feb 13) report have influenced school procedures to minimise the risks of children running away by adopting a preventative approach:

- Risk management plans for individual children were often not developed or acted on.
- Placement instability was a key feature of Looked After Children who ran away.
- Reports about Looked After Children missing from care placement were not routinely provided to Senior Managers in Local Authorities.
- There was little evidence that safe and well checks or return interviews were taking place.

This has been achieved by:

- Ensuring risk assessments are in place for pupils at Dawn House.
- Placement meetings and regular reviews scheduled to identify any risks to the stability of the placement and to ensure issues are resolved as speedily as possible.
- Encouraging children to keep in touch with friends and family whilst in residence.
- Ensuring Senior Leaders are made aware of all incidents of missing children following the guidance within this policy.
- Ensuring children are safe and well on their return and have the opportunity to meet with their Tutor, RCCO or Senior Leader or other trusted adult.

By adopting these procedures, we aim to follow the practice guidance and protocol implementing robust responses to children who go missing; the primary aim being to prevent the child suffering harm and recovering them to a place they are safe as soon as possible. The school is aware children who are missing from home may be at risk of harm as a consequence of their basic need for food, safety and shelter and/or from the people with whom they may come into contact.

Risks can include physical harm, sexual exploitation, drug abuse and involvement in a range of other criminal activities. The additional vulnerability due to their age, communication difficulties, level of understanding, or the significance and seriousness of the circumstances that led to the missing episode, may also be present.

Definitions

Since April 2013, police forces have been rolling out new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' in relation to children and adults reported as missing to the police.

These are:

- **Missing:** anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where circumstances may be out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime, or at risk to themselves or another.
- **Absent:** a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be. Note that 'absent' within this definition would not include those defined as 'away from placement without authorisation'; a child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either missing or absent under police definitions.

A **missing child** would be prioritised as 'high risk' where:

- A risk posed is immediate and there are substantial ground for believing that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability.
- A child has been the victim of a serious crime.
- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

A **missing child** incident would be prioritised as 'medium risk' where:

- The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger.
- They are a threat to themselves or others.

Where a child is categorised as 'absent', details will be recorded by the police and subject to constant review.

Procedure for Staff at Dawn House School

Rationale

Appropriate supervision is planned across both school and residential settings for individuals and groups of pupils. However, there are occasions when pupils may absent themselves from lessons or from the school site. This policy outlines how the school will respond to such situations.

Background

Teachers are responsible for all pupils in the classes or groups they are timetabled to teach. RCCOs are responsible for the pupils in their residential houses or pupils designated to be in their care for activities. However, on occasions, supervision may be delegated to other appropriate staff, e.g. Teaching Assistants (see Supervision Policy). The closeness of the supervision will depend on the number, age and aptitude, experience of the pupils and nature of the activity.

Responsibilities of Teachers and RCCOs

Staff should ensure that pupils arrive at their lessons/activity at the required time and that they remain in the appropriate place. If pupils need to leave the activity, they should do so only with the permission of the person responsible after due consideration of the reason for leaving and any risk that might be involved.

Should a pupil or pupils not arrive, or leave without permission, the person responsible at the time should initiate enquiries as to their whereabouts and initiate a search if no satisfactory and reliable reason is established. Adequate supervision of remaining pupils must also be ensured.

If staffing resources do not allow for this to happen, the member of staff responsible should inform the Vice principal (or if not available, other member of the SLG) in school or the Head of Care/Team Leader in the care setting.

As a general guideline, if pupil(s) cannot be located within fifteen minutes, the Vice Principal or Head of Care/Team Leader must be informed and he/she will determine any further action which needs to be taken. Such action will include informing the senior leader on call if it is in the evening. The senior leader will determine at what point parents and/or police or other agencies need to be involved.

However, it is important to note that this is a **general guideline** only and staff must make a professional judgement taking into account numbers, age, aptitude, experience and previous history, as well as local conditions (e.g. weather) in determining all decisions about handling students absconding from school. There will be occasions when it is necessary to involve the senior leader immediately.

Responsibilities of the Senior Leader

When a child cannot be located or is known or presumed to be offsite without permission, the Senior Leader should take all reasonable steps to locate the missing child and ascertain their safety before reporting the child, whose whereabouts become unknown, to the Police.

The Senior Leader will coordinate the response of staff, who are expected to undertake the following basic measures to try and locate the missing child, if safe to do so:

- Make efforts to contact the pupil.
- Contact known friends or relatives where the pupil may be or consult with other members of the care staff.
- Seek information from any social media used by the pupil, their friends or associates.
- Visit locations that the pupil is known to frequent, or where they have previously been found.

The Senior Leader will:

- Initiate a search, calling on sufficient numbers of staff to complete a thorough search of the buildings and grounds in a short timeframe.
- Extend the search into the immediate locality of the school, including Helmsley Road, the bypass, Rainworth Village etc.
- Ensure staff going out of school on a search take a school mobile phone. Which are kept in the main admin office.
The school office MUST have the phone number to reach the member of staff when necessary.
- Remind staff when the child is located, the member of staff should, if necessary, contact school for advice and support in approaching and returning the child.
- Inform the police without delay once the basic measures are completed.

Throughout the process, it is imperative that supervision of the remaining pupils is maintained.

If there is any serious concerns for the safety of the child at any stage, the Senior Leader will inform the Police immediately.

When a child runs away

The Senior Leader on duty is responsible for ensuring the following individuals and agencies are informed within the timescales set out in the local Safeguarding Board's joint protocol:

http://nottinghamshirescb.proceduresonline.com/files/ch_miss_home_care_jt_prot.pdf

- The local Police.
- The LA responsible for the child's placement.
- Parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable, or to do so would be inconsistent with the child's welfare.

See Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from care. Flowchart to accompany statutory guidance by following link below:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271820/Flowchart_when_a_child_goes_missing_from_care.pdf

Contacting parents

Decisions about contacting parents will be taken by the Senior Leader.

If the child is not located **within an hour (maximum)**, parents **must be informed immediately**.

However, there are occasions when it would be necessary to inform parents as soon as the pupil is missing.

Parents will always be informed at an appropriate time when a child has been offsite without permission but has been returned safely and in a reasonable timeframe.

In accordance with the Department for Education and ACPO guidance, staff **should not** give parents the impression that they should not 'bother' the Police or other professionals, if their child goes missing regularly.

Repeatedly going missing can indicate, for example, sexual exploitation.

Contacting the Police

Police will be contacted **after a period of two hours** if a pupil is missing. This may be actioned earlier, depending on the circumstances or if parents request it.

Police Officers recognise that children with disabilities are additionally vulnerable when they go missing and, as such, an appreciation of their level of understanding of risks should be considered and responded to appropriately.

When referring to the Police, any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, in particular:

- The pupil's Residential Care Plan, which includes a recent photograph, a profile of the pupil's needs, effective strategies when responding to the pupil etc.

In addition, the following information should be provided:

- Description of the pupil, including their clothing.
- Details of where the pupil was last seen and with whom.
- Relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented.
- Previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found.
- Circumstances under which the pupil is absent.
- Any factors that increase the risk to the pupil.

The Senior Leader will contact the Police to confirm a pupil has returned to the school.

Action on the pupil's return to school

When a young person frequently goes missing from care in a short period of time, e.g., several times in one day, it may not be possible, or appropriate, for Police Officers to undertake a safe and well check on every occasion. In these cases, Officers can take a full telephone debrief from the Senior Leader.

However, Senior Leaders are mindful that this may not be appropriate if there is any suggestion that the child is running away from something that is occurring within the care setting. In such cases, they should request the involvement of another agency to undertake the safe and well check.

When should a return interview be undertaken?

A return interview will usually be undertaken when a pupil:

- Has been reported missing or absent on two or more occasions in a 90 day period.
- Is frequently away from placement without authorisation, i.e. away for more than 72 hours from the placement or for three or more occasions in a 90 day period and then at periodic intervals if the absence continues.
- Has been missing or absent for 72 hours or more.
- Has been hurt or harmed while they have been missing.
- Is at known or suspected risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking.
- Is at known or suspected risk of involvement in criminal activity or drugs.
- Has contact with people posing a risk to children and/or has been engaged (or is believed to have engaged) in criminal activities while missing.
- Has been missing or absent for the first time with the above concerns or risks are identified and there are particular vulnerabilities due to age, mental health, disability etc.
- When a young person who is suspected or confirmed to have been missing or absent and not reported to the authorities ('hidden missing') comes to the attention of services.

In addition to the criteria outlined above, when determining whether or not a return interview or a multi-agency meeting is required, consideration should also be given to the risk of a child or young person going missing again and be based on available information about:

- Their individual circumstances.
- Their motivation for running away.
- Their potential destinations and associates.
- Their recent pattern of absences.
- The circumstances in which they were found previously.
- Their individual characteristics and risk factors, such as whether a child has learning difficulties, mental health issues or other vulnerabilities.

Who should undertake the return interview?

In such cases, the return interviews will be undertaken by an independent person who has sufficient knowledge and skill. It **should not** be someone involved in caring for the child. Therefore, senior leaders, residential care staff or school staff do not undertake the return interview.

Multi-Agency Meeting (MAM)

Following the incident, a multi-agency meeting may be called. This is an opportunity for agencies, including health and education, to come together to try and understand why the young person has gone missing and to plan to reduce or stop the missing notifications and the level of risk.

A multi-agency meeting will generally be held when:

- A child has been missing or absent three times in 90 days.
- A child has been missing or absent for 72 hours but has returned.
- There is other information to suggest there is a high level of risk or professional information sharing and coordination is required.
- Where the young person continues to be away from their placement without authorisation.

These meetings would be chaired by a Social Worker or Team Manager depending on the level of concern or complexity and a brief summary of the meeting and actions required along with a record of who attended the meeting will be recorded on the child's case file.

In other 'one-off' instances, mindful of The Children's Rights Director (2012) report: 'one of the major influences of them running away is having a sense that they are being listened to and taken seriously', on return to the school, the child will be seen wherever possible by a senior member of staff and/or the person responsible for their pastoral care to check whether they are safe and well.

Staff should be aware of the need to provide a warm and genuine welcome to the pupil making them aware that staff have been concerned for them. Whilst making sure that there is no urgent health or other immediate needs, it is not best practice to immediately start questioning the young person. Adopting a non-judgemental approach is helpful to young people. They should be offered something to eat and drink and allowed sleep and space if they wish.

A supportive approach, including actively listening and responding to the child's needs, will be adopted as this will have a greater chance of preventing the child from going missing again and safeguarding them against other risks. Any reasons given will be considered in relation to how the child is cared for in future and the school's care practice.

Running away should not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished.

In addition to providing the child with the opportunity to raise issues of concern, the purpose of the check is to identify any indications of harm, where and with whom they have been, and give the child the opportunity to disclose any offending against them.

If there is any concern that the pupil has been the victim of a crime, or they are at risk arising from them being missing, then the DSL/Senior Leader will follow child protection procedures by informing the police and the MASH team immediately. It will be the responsibility of the police to instigate further enquiries, for example take clothing, mobile phones or trace evidence.

Following the meeting, the child's risk assessment will be reviewed and amended accordingly to minimise a repeat of running away.

A written record will be completed in the form of an incident report which should be forwarded to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (Jenny McConnell). The incident report will detail:

- The length of time missing.
- Whereabouts of child when missing.
- Any known associates.
- Risk factors.

The DSL will scrutinise the reports identifying patterns and trends over time, in particular frequency of such incidents as there is an established link between frequent missing episodes and serious harm, which could include gang involvement, forced marriage, bullying and sexual exploitation (p. 14 DfE Statutory Guidance Jan 14).

When the monitoring demonstrates:

- reported missing on two or more occasions;
- frequently away from residential care without authorisation

the Nottinghamshire Children Missing Officer (Glen Scruby) should be informed to seek further advice and guidance (glen.scruby@nottscc.gcsx.gov.uk, 01623 433169).

Meetings with Independent Advocates

All pupils are offered the opportunity to meet with an independent advocate and David Braybrook (Standard 20 unannounced visitor) who regularly visits the school.

The meeting will be held in a place the child feels safe and provides the opportunity for the child to discuss the reasons why they went missing and to understand the risks and issues faced by the child while missing. This will help to build up a picture of why the child has run away, identify additional support and inform future planning.

An assessment of whether a child might run away again should be based on information about:

- Individual circumstances.
- Motivation for running away.
- Potential destinations/associates.
- Recent patterns of absence.
- Circumstances in which the child was found/returned.
- Risk factors, such as mental health issues/depression/other vulnerabilities.

If the child prefers not to engage in an independent interview, parents/carers will be offered the opportunity to provide any relevant information.

When older students run away or go missing, the school acknowledges they are no less vulnerable and are equally at risk, particularly of sexual exploitation. Repeatedly going missing will not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaving. The school is aware that repeat episodes can indicate sexual exploitation.

The school acknowledges the importance of early and effective sharing of information between professionals. Information to be shared will include duration of missing episodes; information from returned meetings; absence data which will help authorities to identify the risks in areas such as exploitation, gangs or other crime-related activity.

In addition to placing Local Authorities and Nottinghamshire County Council, Governors will also receive anonymised reports on missing children.

Children Missing Education

The school has a strong reputation of working effectively with young people and families with a history of school refusal. However, we are aware of the potential of such children falling through the net and that not knowing of their whereabouts may result in serious safeguarding incidents.

To support our work in this area, the school employs a Family Liaison Officer who checks registers on a daily basis, making first contact with families when children are recorded as absent.

Following NCC guidance, all communication is logged in a timely fashion on staffcommon/pupil placement/communication with parents.

Absence is tracked closely and where persistent, the support of other agencies such as Targeted Support/Early Help Unit/CAHMS is sought.

On the 10th day, if whereabouts remain unknown despite all efforts to contact the family, a referral is to be made to the Children Missing Officer of the appropriate LA, who will conduct further checks.

If in doubt, further advice/guidance should be sought from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education>

The Nottinghamshire Children Missing Officer (Glen Scruby)
(glen.scruby@nottscc.gcsx.gov.uk 01623 433169).

Children are **NEVER** to be removed from roll, unless one of the following can be evidenced:

- A new destination school and the pupil file has been forwarded.
- Referred to the appropriate service (Children Missing Officer/Elective Home Education).
- Approval from the placing Local Authority.

The Hidden Missing

The school is aware that it should be alert and respond to situations where pupils who go missing but are not actually reported to the police.

When staff become aware that a child is still missing and not reported to the police, they should advise the parents or carers of the need to do so and that, as professionals, they have a duty to follow this up (which they must do).

If the pupil has returned but was not reported as missing to the police, staff should inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead, who should ensure that the Nottinghamshire Children Missing Officer (Glen Scruby – 01623 433169) is aware of the young person and the suspected or confirmed missing incident.

Associated policies and procedures:

Child Protection.

Attendance.

Supervision.

Behaviour Management.

Physical Intervention and Restraint.

Involvement of the Police and Notification of Significant Events.

Incident Monitoring.

Risk Assessment.

Revised: December 2016

Next Review: Autumn Term 2017

Associated Resources

DfE Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (September 2016)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275701/statutory_guidance_missing-children.pdf

DfE Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care – Flowchart showing Roles and Responsibilities (September 2016)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271820/flowchart_when_a_child_goes_missing_from_care.pdf

Nottingham & Nottinghamshire's Safeguarding Children Board's Interagency Practice Guidance: Local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Joint Protocol (September 2014)

http://nottinghamshirescb.proceduresonline.com/files/ch_miss_home_care_jt_prot.pdf

Contact Numbers:

Glen Scruby (Children Missing Officer)

Glen.scruby@nottscgcsx.gov.uk

Tel: 01623 433169

Police:

Emma Laughton (Missing Persons Manager)

Crime and Justice, Public Protection

Emma.laughton@nottinghamshire.pnn.police.uk

Tel: 101 extn 817 4087

Nottinghamshire County:

Terri Johnson (Service Manager Safeguarding Children (Strategic))

Terri.johnson@nottscg.gov.uk

Tel: 0115 977 3921

In the absence of any named officer dealing with a young person, child specific intelligence can be shared through:

Missingpersons@nottinghamshire.pnn.police.uk

Resources and Guidance

All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry on Children who go Missing from Care (2012)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175563/report - children who go missing from care.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175563/report_-_children_who_go_missing_from_care.pdf)

The Children's Society – Lessons to Learn 2012

Exploring the links between running away and absence from school

http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/lessons-to-learn_final.pdf

CEOP resources area for child sexual exploitation

<http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

Children's Society – 'Still Running' report

http://childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/still_running_3_full_report_final.pdf

Ofsted report on CSE and missing

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-children-and-young-people-who-go-missing-and-child-sexual-exploitation-partne>

Ofsted thematic inspection (2013)

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/missing-children>