

Children Missing and Truancy Policy

Oastlers Policy

Approved by Governing Body On	16 December 2021
To be Reviewed On	16 December 2023
Signed on Behalf of the Governing Body	 Sue Mawson

Introduction

Children who are absent from school are not necessarily always considered as missing people who require police intervention. In most cases the child or young person will return home or school (in the case of a learner leaving site during the day without permission) within a short period of time or can be easily located with some basic enquiries.

To this end, if a learner leaves our site without permission or fails to attend, he/she will not be recorded as missing or require police intervention unless:

- ✓ It is considered that there is an immediate risk of harm and that the learner will suffer **significant harm** or **cause significant harm** to another person if he/she is not found.
- ✓ There is an agreement in place between the school and the police that the learner should be treated as missing immediately in all circumstances.
- ✓ An immediate and real risk is presented at the time and not a risk which may arise at some point in the future. The risk is not just of any harm. It must be of **significant harm**. Examples of **significant harm** could be from violence, sexual offending, criminal exploitation or self-harm.

For purposes of clarity, a 'missing' person is described as:

'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed'

Significant harm is defined by the police as:

'A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible' Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006.

Being 'missing', and falling within the definitions above must not be confused with **truancy**. **Truancy being 'the action of staying away from school without good reason, sometimes known as absenteeism'**. If a learner is truanting, the police will not be informed or are required to be informed. This becomes an attendance matter and will be managed as such by the schools Education Social Worker and Child Protection Lead, Joanne Taylor, who may involve the Local Authority or other partners to work with our parents/carers to address truancy.

For some learners, being in the community may present a significant *vulnerability* and as such that child may be at risk of harm. In these cases, we would report the issue to the police immediately. When this is the decision, we follow the guidelines that have been agreed with our partners in West Yorkshire Police in respect to reporting a missing child.

However, before it comes to that we will:

- Contact you as parent/carer immediately to inform you the child has left site without permission
- We will share with you the circumstances that have arisen before the child has left site, where we can
- We will ask you if you can share with us any triggers that could have occurred at home
- We will conduct our own search in the vicinity in an attempt to locate the child
- We will ask you to provide us with details of places or people that your child may abscond to so that we can check those places
- We will ask you to help search for your child
- We will agree with you the degree of risk and best course of action, including degree of vulnerability and risk of harm
- We will maintain contact with you throughout the missing period, until the child is found

- This will be achieved by a nominated link person who will then be your single point of contact between home and school until the matter is resolved
- We will report to the police at the point of which we agree the child is a defined missing person
- We will support the police, in respect to searching, providing information and support once the child is returned home safely
- We will inform linked professionals of the missing episode

Prior to contacting the Police

When a learner leaves the site without permission, the school will take all reasonable and practical steps in order to identify whether the child is a missing person by:

- a) Determining the nature and reasons for absence
- b) Ascertaining the likely intentions of the learner
- c) Establishing the whereabouts and well-being of the learner, where possible

Unless there is an obvious, immediate and serious risk to the learner or the public, reasonable and practical steps the school will take before contacting the police include:

- a) Contact parent/carers to update them as to the learner being absent from school and to enquire about possible triggers for the absence
- b) Searching the school's premises, ground and immediate locality of the school
- c) Telephoning and sending an SMS (text) message to the learner's mobile phone and checking their social media pages if this is accessible
- d) Making enquiries with the learner's friends
- e) Checking the places frequented by the learner (eg local parks, shop fronts)
- f) Attending at addresses frequented by the learner (eg nearby relative's/friends addresses)
- g) Making enquiries with the learner's relatives
- h) Contact professionals who support the learner or their family (eg social workers, families first workers) for further information

If the whereabouts of the learner are known, or believed to be known, the school will only request police assistance to recover the learner if:

- a) There is evidence to suggest that the learner is at immediate risk of **significant harm**
- b) Police assistance is necessary to prevent a breach of the peace due to a threat of violence or disorder

Risk Assessments

Schools will consider preparing risk assessments for those learners that are frequently absent from school, or those learners that are deemed at risk should they absent themselves

Risk assessments should consider the following elements:

1. How likely is it that the learner will go missing:
 - Has the learner gone absent before and if so what is the pattern of their previous absent behaviour? Consider where and when learners have been found and their accounts regarding their absence.
 - What factors or potential incidents may act as a trigger incident and lead to the learner going absent?
 - Are there any other circumstances, behaviour or indicators that suggest that the learner may go absent in the future?
2. The risks the learner will face whilst absent. Is the learner:
 - Likely to visit a known abuser?
 - At risk of child sexual exploitation?

- At risk of criminal exploitation?
 - Likely to take drugs or alcohol?
 - Sleeping rough?
3. What action will be taken if the learner leaves site without permission:
- Determine if the learner is a missing person
 - Take initial actions to locate the learner
 - Carry out any other reasonable enquiries to determine risk or learner's locations

We will endeavour to ensure we have up to date photographs of learners, and are able to pass them to police in the event that they re reported as a missing person.

Informing the Police

If there is information relating to the risk of sexual exploitation, the police will be informed of this, and should be updated with the assessed level of risk and any supporting evidence, where possible.

Any information relating to the location of the missing person, or information that may affect the risk assessment, will be reported to police without delay.

Levels of Intervention

The level of risk the learner is likely or may be exposed to whilst absent will determine the appropriate level of intervention. There are three levels of intervention:

1. **Non Intervention:** Where the risk is low and the school tolerates the risk and waits for the learner to return on their own accord.
2. **Parental or school Intervention:** Where the risk is moderate and unacceptable to the school, and the parent or school takes responsibility for finding and returning the learner to school or home, but there is no requirement for an immediate, urgent police response.
3. **Police Intervention:** Where the risk is high and there is an immediate, urgent need for police assistance to locate the learner before they suffer **significant harm**.

Responsibilities during the absence

The Police will investigate all cases falling within the definition of missing in accordance with the Police Missing Persons Policy and National Guidance.

Where appropriate the school will assist in finding the learner and work co-operatively with police during any enquiry.

Following any report of a missing person to police, the school will inform the update parent/carers and other appropriate agencies. There is a need for all involved parties to cooperate fully and school will work to achieve this.

The school will make a record of all actions on CPOMS taken throughout the period a learner is recorded as missing in relation to their welfare, and fully update police on those actions at the appropriate time.

On the learner's return and once debriefed, school will review the risk assessment regarding the learner going missing in future, and should consider measures to prevent it from re-occurring.

Identified threats and risks will be discussed with the learner's parent/carers and consideration may be given to a multi-agency strategy meeting regarding the learner, if appropriate.