

Missing Child Policy 2026

Last Review April 2026	Next Review April 2028	Review Frequency Every 2 years	Coordinator Director	Nominated Trustees EC&T Committee
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Introduction

This policy follows the statutory guidance *Children Who Run Away or Go Missing From Home or Care* (DfE, January 2014) and Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP) multi-agency safeguarding procedures.

Local Runaway and Missing From Home and Care (RMFHC) arrangements, agreed with Thames Valley Police and Oxfordshire County Council Children's Services, will be followed.

Where a child or young person is identified as being at risk of going missing, the Thames Valley Police Philomena Protocol will be used to support information-sharing, prevention, and an appropriate safeguarding response should a child go missing.

Definition of missing and absent

- **missing:** anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another
- **absent:** a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

The following set of principles provide the guidance to be followed in the event of children going missing/absent from the school and establish common procedures to manage these situations. They will minimise risk and set out when it is appropriate to involve the police.

These guidelines are to provide some structure to support the thinking at times when anxiety levels can be very high. They are not to be interpreted so that they stop any thinking.

It is important to remember that repeat episodes of a child going missing can indicate sexual exploitation and should not be viewed as a normal pattern of behaviour.

Procedures

School Search co-ordinators:

During the weekdays (8.30am – 5.00pm)

- A senior member of staff will be informed and then a decision will be taken about who is the most appropriate member of staff to coordinate.

Evening & Early Morning

- A senior staff member should be informed and asked to coordinate.

Weekends

- A senior staff member should be asked to coordinate, on-call should be contacted.

Night Times

- All sleeping in staff should be informed and on-call contacted. A staff member should be identified to coordinate until on-call is able to support.
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If a child/ren runs off, the staff member should follow and keep the child/ren in sight. At this time all staff must be undertaking dynamic risk assessments, but they should be very aware of any imminent dangers to the child and try to warn them verbally.

In dynamically assessing risk, staff members should consider the following before leaving the site:

- Have other staff members been informed (see below).
- Has a co-ordinator been identified?
- Has a strategy been agreed?
- Do the staff who are searching have access to a mobile phone, either their own, a house phone, an 'on call' phone or an 'offsite' phone. If it is night time do staff have torches?

1. Assess risk

Teams should regularly review the levels of risk all children within their group pose to themselves and others, and this informed view should assist the decision-making process. Where a child frequently goes missing, areas they are known to frequent should be recorded on their risk assessment.

Staff members must make judgements at the time and with colleagues to determine whether/when to contact the police but **this should not be longer than 1 hour after last being sighted.**

This decision must refer to:

- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child is in danger through their own vulnerability
- the child may have 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.

The level of risk the child or children pose to themselves and others is informed by the knowledge and understanding that we have of them. This should be based on, amongst other things:

- The personalities involved and the combined dynamic
- The emotional and chronological age and stage of the child/children.
- The context of the running off, e.g. premeditated; result of an incident/crisis within the school or family.
- The time of the incident and weather conditions e.g. day/night, warm/cold, wet/dry etc.
- The health of the child, e.g. whether the child is receiving treatment for a medical condition.

2. Searching

A senior member of staff should coordinate a search, to include:

- A thorough search of the site, to include the houses, buildings and grounds (if the police are called they will want to know that a very thorough search of the site has been carried out but may also want to search the site themselves)
- An offsite search of the immediate vicinity and wider locality (risk assessments should be consulted for any favourite destination or route).

3. Contacting the police

The police should be contacted:

No later than 1 hour from the time the child/ren was last sighted

Contact the Thames Valley Police on 101. (They will want to take detailed information about the child/ren, including a missing child report for each child. This information then remains on their database for any future contact. All the necessary information is in the child's placement plan and front sheet of their file).

Consideration should be given to the following guidelines when assessing the level of risk and when police involvement is required:	
Risk Level	Response
<u>High risk</u> (e.g. new child, chaotic and un-integrated, night, cold and wet)	Call Police during the first hour
<u>Medium Risk</u> (e.g. child at school 2 years, chaotic but able to think, early evening, dry)	Call Police during the first hour
<u>Lower Risk</u> (e.g. child been at school for more than 2 years, mature and sensible, daytime, dry)	Call Police after no longer than 1 hour

Thought should be given during the event to the management of the child/ren on their return. Plans should be made to welcome the children back and how best to support and debrief them in order to support their learning about the dangers of their actions, with the aim of encouraging them not to repeat the behaviour. This response should relate to the child's age, emotional stage and level of confusion or distress.

Where a child is missing and reported to the police the child's referring authority (Social Worker, Emergency Duty Team, EDT) must also be informed and kept up to date with developments. Agreed communication protocols for families and carers should be followed. At the end of the incident it is important that **all** those who have been involved are aware of the outcome.

The incident should be recorded on Clear Care.

An '**Absence Return Form for Child**' should also be completed with the child. It will include each child's account of why they went missing and anything that happened during this period of time. It will also explore options to prevent a child going missing again. There is also a section to confirm that the child has been given the opportunity to phone their SW or Parent/Carer on return to the school.

It may also be appropriate to talk with children who were aware of the missing episode or may have been a trigger for it. Notes of these conversations should also be recorded.

Each child will have the opportunity to have an independent return interview with Coram Voice advocacy service, within 72 hours of their return.

Where a child repeatedly goes missing or it is suspected that the child is involved in or subject to child sexual exploitation Ofsted need to be notified under regulation 40 of The Children's Homes (England) Regulations.

Useful Information:

Thames Valley Police on 101

Post Office: 01865 300201

Lincoln Farm Park: 01865 300239

Hardwick Park: 01865 300501/841

Coram Voice: 01793 487 490

Absent Without Permission

Identify a coordinator who should sit in the GLM office, if between 8.30am and 4.00pm inform reception. If after 4.00pm the external phone should be diverted to GLM office (ext. 246).

1. Follow children calmly and keep in sight if at all possible (you do not need to stop them if not safe). Staff need to judge whether it is better to get a mobile phone or otherwise communicate with others or to keep a child in sight. Remember that some children will instinctively flee if chased.
2. If in sight organise the right people and vehicle and pick up safely - if not out of sight for more than 10 minutes this can be recorded as a normal incident 'out of bounds' and no further action is needed.
3. If children have gone out of sight for more than 10 minutes inform 'on call' and make sure someone from each house is aware.
4. Organise a search party with as many people as can be spared. Ideally a vehicle and on foot. Previous incidents should be looked at (Absence forms on Clear Care and resulting entries on Positive Handling plans / Risk

Assessments) to ascertain previous patterns and prioritise where to look. All groups should have phones and be aware of where the coordinator is situated (ext. 246).

5. Keep a record of when children went out of sight and with 'on call' assess risk in terms of how long to wait before calling police (see policy on guidance on this) but no later than 1 hour after last seen.
6. Organise search of site all houses and grounds, keep searching village and surrounding area.
7. Calling the Police - use 101, you will need dates of births, descriptions and clothing. At the point where emergency services are contacted, the Registered Manager must be informed. The Registered Manager will then inform the Director. If no manager is on site, an appropriate person will be called in by 'on call' to be on site and liaise with external services.
8. Plan for children's return -Who will receive them and where? Return to site interviews (record on "Missing/Absent without permission debrief" on Clear Care) need to be done if possible and at the very least children need to be given the opportunity to call home or SW.
9. Communication with networks - judgements should be made with treatment teams / managers / 'on call' regarding when parents and carers are contacted, and these will be specific to each case. Be sure to communicate what info has been passed on and what still needs to be done including Return to Site interviews (Absence Return Form for Child) which are a legal requirement.
10. Someone will need to do paperwork with Police - anyone with access to the child's file / ITPs can do this and it can take up to an hour. Access to prepopulated Philomena Protocol forms can be found in the Child's on-line files.