

WHINFELL SCHOOL

Safeguarding Policy – Children Absent/Missing from Education Policy



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Introduction

This policy is written in line with the following statutory guidance:

- [Working together to improve school attendance 2024](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education 2025](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children 2023](#)
- [Children Missing Education - Guidance for Local authorities](#)

Wider Policies support this Policy and are outlined below.

1. The Role of the DSL Policy
2. Child Protection Policy
3. Child on Child Abuse Policy
4. Filtering and Monitoring Policy
5. Missing From Education
6. Absent from Education Policy
7. Schools Safer Recruitment Policy
8. Managing Contextual Risks to Children
9. Safeguarding Over 18s Policy
10. Remote Learning Policy
11. Online Safety Policy
12. Whistleblowing Policy
13. Behaviour Policy
14. PREVENT Policy
15. Physical Intervention Policy
16. SEND Policy
17. Staff Behaviour Policy/Code of Conduct
18. Absent from Education Policy

This policy should also be read alongside the school's Attendance Policy.

Aims of this policy

The aim of this policy is to ensure that staff understand:

- What does children absent from education mean from a safeguarding perspective?
- How to respond and monitor children's absence

Children Absent/Missing from Education

While children/students may be absent from education due to illness, holiday or a family emergency, our staff are aware of any patterns of absence and use their curiosity to consider whether any safeguarding concerns could also be a reason.

Our staff are aware that children/students being absent from our school/college, particularly repeatedly and/or for prolonged periods, can be a warning sign of potential safeguarding risks.

Our staff are aware that absence may also be linked to online harms, including grooming, exposure to harmful content, or coercion via digital platforms.

Our school/college regularly analyses attendance and absence data to identify students where safeguarding issues may be prevalent and puts effective strategies in place as in line with our Safeguarding/Child Protection process and/or Early Help process.

Our school/college ensures that attendance monitoring systems are integrated with safeguarding alerts, enabling DSLs to receive automatic notifications when thresholds of concern are met.

Our school/college uses digital attendance tracking tools and predictive analytics to identify students at risk of persistent absence.

Children/students who are absent from education may be experiencing abuse and neglect such as sexual abuse or exploitation or may be victim to criminal exploitation including involvement in county lines. Periods of absence may also indicate mental health problems, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation, so called 'honour'-based abuse or risk of forced marriage.

Children/students who are persistently absent may also be at risk of online radicalisation, exposure to extremist content, or recruitment into harmful online communities.

Other factors that can impact attendance include:

- involvement in the youth justice system
- coming from a newly migrant background
- those whose parents are service personnel
- coming from a Gypsy, Roma or Travelling (GRT) background
- children/students with neurodiverse conditions, where attendance barriers may be linked to sensory processing, anxiety, or lack of appropriate support
- children/students who are young carers, particularly where responsibilities increase unpredictably or are hidden from professionals

Close monitoring, early intervention, a multi-agency approach and where necessary the implementation of the Safeguarding/Child Protection process are essential when identifying the existence of any underlying safeguarding risks.

All actions and decisions regarding children/students absent from education are clearly documented, including contact attempts, risk assessments, and safeguarding actions taken. These records are stored securely and are available for review if necessary.

The DSL and staff considerations:

Our DSL and staff consider the following when children/students are absent from education:

- Are there patterns in the lessons that are being missed?
- Is this more than avoidance of a subject or a teacher?
- Does the child remain on the school site or are they absent from the site?
- Is the child/student being exploited during this time?
- Are they late because of a caring responsibility?
- Have they been directly or indirectly affected by substance misuse?
- Are other students routinely missing the same lessons and does this raise other risks or concerns such as sexual violence/sexual harm between children/students, exploitation, gang behaviour or substance misuse?
- Is the lesson being missed one that would cause bruising or injuries to become visible?

Single missing days:

- Is there a pattern in the day missed?
- Is it before or after the weekend suggesting the child/students is away from the area?
- Are there specific lessons or members of staff on these days?
- Is the parent/carer informing the school of the absence on the day (for those under 18 years)?
- Are missing days reported back to parents/carers to confirm their awareness (for those under 18 years)?
- Is the child/student being sexually exploited during this day?
- Is the child/student avoiding abusive behaviour from peers or staff on this day?
- Do the parents/carers appear to be aware and are they condoning the behaviour?
- Are peers making comments or suggestions as to where the child/student is?
- Can the parent/student be contacted and made aware (for those under 18)?

Continuous missing days:

- Has the school been able to contact the parent/carer (for those under 18 years)?
- Is medical evidence being provided?
- Are siblings attending school/college (either our or local schools)?

- Did we have any concerns about radicalisation, FGM, forced marriage, honour-based violence, sexual exploitation?
- Have we had any concerns about physical or sexual abuse?
- Does the parent have any known medical needs? Is the child/student safe?
- If a child has been missing from education for 10 consecutive days, the local authority are immediately informed and a formal "Safe and Well" check is undertaken

Our school carries out welfare follow-ups (phone calls, emails or, where agreed in local protocols, home-visits by pastoral staff) to try to re-engage the child/student as in line with the Attendance Policy and Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024 Guidance. All attempts are recorded and concerns are escalated to the DSL who cooperates fully with the local authority or police when they step in to complete a formal safe-and-well check.

Our school/college ensures that safeguarding responses to continuous absence include consideration of digital footprints, including social media activity, online gaming interactions, and use of encrypted messaging apps.

Our DSLs liaise with online safety leads to assess whether absence correlates with increased online vulnerability.

Our school/college views repeated absence as both a safeguarding issue and an educational outcomes issue. We may take steps that could result in legal action for attendance (for those under 18 years) and/or a referral to children's/adults' social care, or both.

Children Missing from Home or Care

It is known that children/students who go missing are at risk of suffering significant harm, and there are specific risks around children/students running away and the risk of sexual exploitation.

The Police, as the lead agency for investigating and finding missing children/students, will respond to them going missing based on on-going risk assessments in line with current guidance.

The police definition of 'missing' is:

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

Various categories of risk should be considered and Local Safeguarding Children's and Adults Partnerships provides further guidance:

Local authorities have safeguarding duties in relation to children/students missing from home and should work with the police to risk assess and analyse data for patterns that indicate particular concerns and risks.

Our school ensures the mapping of local risk zones and sharing of intelligence to proactively safeguard children/students vulnerable to exploitation. Our DSLs are included in local multiagency forums where such data is reviewed.

The police prioritise all incidents of missing children/students as medium or high risk. Where a child/student is recorded as being absent, the details are recorded by the police, who agree review times and any on-going actions with the person reporting.

A missing child/student incident would be prioritised as 'high risk' where:

- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child/student is in danger through their own vulnerability; or
- the child/student may have been the victim of a serious crime; or
- the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.

The high-risk category requires the immediate deployment of police resources.

Authorities need to be alert to the risk of sexual exploitation or involvement in drugs, gangs, criminal activity, trafficking and to be aware of local "hot spots", as well as concerns about any individuals with whom children/students might run away with.

Child protection/Adult Safeguarding procedures are initiated in collaboration with children's/adults' social care services whenever there are concerns that a child/student who is missing may be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Push and Pull factors include:

Within any case of children/students who are missing both push and pull factors will need to be considered.

Push factors include:

- Poor relationships with staff or peers
- Feeling unsafe
- Bullying
- Lack of support for additional needs
- Unidentified or unsupported mental health needs
- Exposure to violence or abuse on site
- Inadequate digital safety measures leading to online harassment or exposure to harmful content during school hours

Pull factors include:

These are reasons why a child/student may be pulled away from our school/college:

- Grooming
- Exploitation
- Gang involvement
- Substance misuse
- Online coercion or radicalisation
- Incentives offered by exploiters, such as money, status, or digital rewards (e.g., gaming credits)
- Manipulation via encrypted messaging platforms or anonymous social media accounts

Our staff use curiosity and safeguarding knowledge to identify these factors and respond appropriately. Our school/college ensures that safeguarding and attendance staff work collaboratively to address these risks.

Parental Notification and Police Involvement

We will inform all parents of children/students who are absent (unless the parent has informed us and if the individual is under 18 years). If the parent/carer is also unaware of the location of their child, and the definition of missing is met, we will either support the parent/carer to contact the police to inform them or do so ourselves with urgency.

Returning home from care

While this is a positive experience for many children/students who have returned to their families, for some there are different challenges and stresses in this process with children/students often returning to environments fraught with conflict, poverty and violence.

When a child/student returns home from care, our school/college ensures safeguarding measures are in place to support their reintegration and monitor their wellbeing.

Our DSLs liaise with social workers, carers, and other professionals to:

- Understand the reasons for the child/student's return
- Assess any ongoing risks or vulnerabilities
- Ensure that the child/student feels safe and supported

- Monitor attendance and engagement closely
- Provide additional pastoral or mental health support where needed

Our school/college implements a reintegration plan that includes digital safety checks, ensuring the child/student's online activity is monitored for signs of distress or exploitation.

Our staff remain alert to other signs that the child/student may be struggling or at risk following their return home. This includes changes in behaviour, attendance patterns, or peer relationships.

The role of the staff

Our staff play a vital role in identifying and responding to children/students absent from education and do the following:

- Monitor attendance daily and report concerns to the DSL
- Use curiosity to explore reasons for absence
- Record and report patterns of absence
- Engage with children/students to understand their experiences
- Work with families to support attendance
- Refer to Early Help or Social Care where appropriate

Our staff receive training on digital attendance systems and safeguarding alerts. Our staff understand how to use predictive analytics tools to identify students at risk of persistent absence.

Review History

A review will be undertaken annually as a minimum. However, subject to a significant safeguarding concern this policy and all other attached policies will be reviewed and monitored as part of a lessons learned review.

This policy was reviewed in August 2025 by Laura Dickie (Head of Policy), Jo Dunn (Director of Compliance, Quality and Regulation - Children), Lindsey Appleby-Flynn (Head of Learning and Development), the DSL of the School and agreed by the Head of the Governance Board.

Next Review – September 2026