



## Missing or Absconding Students' Policy

### **Introduction**

This policy is written to guide staff and volunteers in the event of a student going missing on the premises or having absconded.

Staff are reminded to read the following school policies and practice guidelines in conjunction with this policy –

- Health and Safety Policy
- Attendance, Behaviour and Behaviour Management Policy(ies)
- Individual Risk Assessments for students

In such stressful circumstances it is important that staff remain as calm and collected as possible.

A register of students will be completed each morning and afternoon at VLC by the Business Manager.

It is the responsibility of the senior member of staff on site (usually the Principal/Centre Leader) to be able to account for the whereabouts of every student on their site, and to liaise with the Business Manager in a timely manner in order to follow up on absences, lateness or students absconding.

### **Missing Students**

A student is deemed 'missing' if their whereabouts are unknown.

If a student is deemed missing, the following procedure should be followed:

1. An immediate search is to be made of the VLC's buildings with all available staff. This search should not exceed *five minutes*. All the usual haunts for that student should be searched. If the student is a known absconder this should have been recorded in their individual risk assessment and should include any known haunts for that student.
2. Staff should then regroup and extend the search to VLC's grounds and/or immediate surroundings. This should not exceed a further *fifteen minutes*. Staff must take potential dangers into account and not put themselves at risk.
3. At the same time, the senior member of staff (usually the Centre Leader or Business Manager) will contact the parents/carers of the student who is missing. In some cases, the parents may be able to give information about the student's current whereabouts.
4. The senior member of staff will also contact the student's school/referring agency. Where appropriate, MASH/Social Services will be contacted.
5. Following this, and if the student has not yet been found after 20 minutes, the senior member of staff will make a phone call (t - 101) to the local police station to report the student missing. They will give a clear description of the student and clothing being worn.
6. The senior member of staff should:
  - Not leave the premises but remain on site to co-ordinate the search, answer phone calls and provide photos and information. The police will want to visit VLC as part of their search and enquiries.
  - Ensure that there are adequate staff left in the building to deal with other contingencies. When searching the local community on foot, remember that you may be vulnerable (use a car).

Following the incident, ensure appropriate documents are completed as soon as possible – absconding record, incident record.

Arrange a meeting to discuss the circumstances of the incident and the effectiveness of the current procedures. A review must take place of the student's individual risk assessment.

Keep all colleagues informed.

### **Absconding Students**

A student is considered to have 'absconded' if they intentionally/knowingly leave the school site without permission.

If a student absconds then:

- Where possible, a member of staff should follow the student at a safe distance and/or respond in line with guidance from the student's individual risk assessment and VLC's Behaviour Policy.
- A senior member of staff at VLC must immediately be informed of the situation.
- Where possible, the member of staff following the student should remain in contact with VLC via a mobile phone.
- The senior member of staff will then, if appropriate, allocate further staff members to go and collect the student and return them to VLC.
- The senior member of staff will also inform the student's parents and school/referring agency and keep them updated as necessary.

If a student absconds and is then deemed to be 'missing', procedures will follow as if the student were missing - see above.

It is important that following an incident the issues that arise are addressed and staff should:

- Review the individual risk assessment for the student involved.
- Where appropriate, talk through the incident with the student involved. Ensure that a record is kept of the discussion held with the student.
- Complete an incident form and/or an absconding record (a copy of which should be placed in the student's personal files).
- Keep all colleagues informed.
- Review procedures for the individual every half term to ensure appropriate control measures are in place and that all staff are fully informed.

## **INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS What happens if you go missing?**

### **What is meant by “missing”?**

You will be considered missing if members of staff do not know where you are.

### **What is meant by “absconding”?**

You have absconded if you deliberately go away from where you should be without telling a member of staff or without a member of staff giving you permission.

### **What will happen if you go missing?**

The people looking after you have a responsibility to know where you are and to make sure you are safe. If you are ‘missing’ they will speak to your friends, teachers and family to see if they can help. If there is concern for your safety then staff will need to search for clues as to where you are. The Police may be informed that you are missing and they and the school staff will look for you.

### **What happens if you can’t be found?**

A meeting will be held between the school and the Police to plan how to search for you. Your name, description and a photograph will be given to the Police in order to help them with their search.

### **What happens when you are found?**

You will be returned to a safe place and will be asked about the reasons for you going missing. This is to try and find out if anything is troubling you and to see if anyone can help. You do not have to run away to talk to someone. If you want to talk to someone outside of the school, this can be arranged. You may also be visited by a Police Officer who will check that you are back. This is called a “Safe and Well Check”. You will be able to speak to the Police Officer without any member of staff present if you wish to do so.

### **Will anything else happen?**

If you are injured or unwell then you will be checked by a Doctor or Nurse. Your teacher or keyworker will want to talk to you about going missing. If you have deliberately run away (absconded) then the people responsible for your safety will meet to discuss ways in which such incidents can be prevented by looking at the reasons for your actions.

Remember - You have the right to use a telephone in private. If you are worried about something or just want to talk, the national ChildLine number is 0800 1111.