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Missing Child Policy and Procedure

The safety of pupils at Ringwood Waldorf School is paramount, and given the highest priority at all times both on and off the school premises.

Every attempt is made to ensure the security of pupils is maintained at all times throughout the school day through the implementation of the following:

- Registration procedures
- Pupil absence monitoring procedures
- Entrance/exit procedures at the beginning and end of the school day
- Off-site educational visits policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

This policy refers to pupils who register at school in the morning and then go missing during the school day.

Definitions

Missing: When a pupil's whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be the subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

Ringwood Waldorf School has separate procedures for pupils who fail to register. Please refer to the *RWS Attendance and Punctuality Policy*, and if there are concerns about the level of attendance the Enforcement Guidance will be used.

A separate procedure exists for Children Missing Education. The Department for Education (DfE) defines a child missing education as a child who is not on a school roll and has been out of education for more than 4 school weeks. The term Children Missing from Education (CME) therefore refers to all children of compulsory school age who are neither registered at a school nor educated otherwise (i.e. home educated or privately educated.) This procedure is laid out in the *RWS Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy*.

Is the pupil at significant risk?

A pupil missing during schools hours incident would be prioritised as 'significant risk' where:

- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child/young person is in danger through their own vulnerability.
- Vulnerability characteristics may include;
 - Children on a plan (Early Help, Child in Need, Looked After or Child Protection Plan)
 - A disability and/or special educational needs
 - Substance misuse

- Education health care plan
- The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.
- There are indications that the child/young person has already come to harm (CSE, grooming, radicalisation etc.)

Other contributory factors should be taken into consideration when determining if the pupil is at significant risk, for example;

- Have there been past concerns about this child and family which together with the sudden disappearance are worrying?
- Is there any known history of drug or alcohol dependency within the family?
- Is there any known history of domestic violence?
- Is there concern about the parent/carer's ability to protect the child from harm?
- Is this very sudden and unexpected behaviour?
- Have there been any past concerns about the child associating with significantly older young people or adults?
- Was there any significant incident prior to the child's unexplained absence?
- Has the child been a victim of bullying?
- Are there health reasons to believe that the child is at risk? e.g. does the child need essential medication or health care?
- Was the child noted to be depressed prior to the child's unexplained absence?
- Are there religious or cultural reasons to believe that the child is at risk? e.g. rites of passage, female genital mutilation or forced marriage planned for the child?

Missing Child Procedure

If at any time during the school day a child is noticed as missing, the following procedure will take place:

- As soon as a pupil is identified as missing by any member of school staff, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed. The DSL will, together with the class teacher, assess the child's vulnerability as above and use professional judgement and risk assess the urgency of the situation to help inform the timeframe required in establishing the pupils' whereabouts before notifying the Police.
- Senior staff and any other available staff will carry out a thorough search of the school buildings, playground, courtyard and other outdoor areas including the field and out of bounds areas.
- The registers will be checked to ensure no other child is missing.
- External doors and gates are checked to establish whether there has been a breach of security.
- The parent/guardian is contacted to establish whether the pupil has gone home, and attempts will be made to contact the pupil via their mobile phone if known.
- If the child is not found, the missing child is reported to the police.

The Police will need to know:

1. Where you are
2. The child's name/s; date of birth; status (e.g. looked after child, medical history if relevant)
3. The child's next of kin/s
4. A detailed description of the child (going from head to toe, clothing, bags etc)
5. Child's mobile phone number, if known
6. Where and when they were first noticed missing
7. Where and when they were last seen
8. Previous missing episodes and where they went;
9. Circumstances of the disappearance (any trigger, arguments etc); relevant safeguarding info.
10. Details of family, friends and associates
11. Who is looking for the child at the moment, where they are and their mobile phone numbers.

Whilst the search is ongoing, the school will continue to liaise with the police and act in accordance with police instructions.

Child located:

- If the child is found before the Police have arrived, then they must be informed and own school follow-up procedures need to be followed.
- If the child returns to school of their own volition, then the Police must be informed and own school follow-up procedures need to be followed.
- If the Police locate the child and bring them back to the school the Police will conduct the 'safe and well interview' and the school will follow school follow-up procedures.
- In all cases, where a pupil has a known risk of being missing, a risk assessment for the pupil will be written and put into place.

Follow-up to the incident

When the child is found, their needs and those of the parents are paramount. Emotions are likely running high, and this should be considered when trying to establish what happened immediately before the child went missing.

- It should be established whether the child is injured or has been harmed in any way, and the appropriate action taken.
- After the search, there will be a need to meet with staff to reassure them and take the opportunity to debrief.
- An incident report must be completed by the person coordinating the search and given to the DSL.
- A risk assessment review will take place in the area from which the child went missing, within three days of the incident. Any identified security improvements should be put into place as soon as possible.
- A meeting will be held with both parent and child to establish how the incident occurred, and what actions or support will be necessary to prevent such an incident from happening again in the future. This may include:
 - Pupil Support
 - An individual risk assessment being reviewed or put in place
 - A behaviour or learning support plan being reviewed or put in place
 - A 'check-in' system being established

- Potential referral to an external agency where pupil's safety, mental or emotional health and well-being are felt to be at risk
- The incident should be discussed at the next SMT meeting and any recommendations for improvements in the procedure should be made to the Board of Trustees.

Missing Child Procedure (Off-Site School Visits)

If a child goes missing from an educational visit where parents are not attending and responsible for their own child, the following procedure applies:

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, staff on the visit ask children to stand with their designated person and carry out a headcount to ensure that no other child has gone astray
- One staff member will search the immediate vicinity but not beyond
- If in an indoor venue, the staff contact the venue's security staff who will handle the search and contact the police if the child is not found.
- The staff contact the police using a mobile phone and report the child as missing
- The School Office is informed, who will then liaise with the police and contact the family.
- If appropriate, members of SMT will make their way to the venue to aid the search and be the point of contact for the police as well as support for the staff.

Related Policies and Documents

RWS Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

RWS Site Security Policy

RWS Behaviour Policy

RWS Attendance and Punctuality Policy

RWS SEND Policy

RWS Educational Visits Policy

KG Lost Child Policy

KG Off-Site Walks Policy