

# Missing Child Policy SO-0142

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## 1. Purpose of this document

This policy provides staff working at NAS Schools procedural guidance on what actions to take in circumstances where a child, in NAS(AT) education or care, goes missing or absconds.

## 2. Scope

This procedure must be followed in all circumstances at all NAS and NASAT Schools

## 3. Operational delivery

We take the safety of all our pupils very seriously and will take every precaution necessary to ensure that the children in our schools and residential services care do not leave a session or our premises unaccompanied and unauthorised. The chances of finding a missing child safe are greatest if the child's absence is soon discovered. In the unlikely event that a child is noted to be missing from school premises, our schools will put into practice agreed procedures. These ensure the most effective resolution of this potentially distressing situation. Many of our school routines and procedures are in place to contribute to the prevention of a child going missing and to ensuring the safety and security of all children at all times.

If, in the event of a member of staff not being able to account for a child's whereabouts, the following action will be taken:

### **When a child goes missing**

Each service needs to have an agreed local protocol in place as to the order of events when a child goes missing. This local protocol will indicate at which point the Police are to be alerted.

Once the service has informed the Police as appropriate, (each service should be aware of the designated person to contact), the Police should perform a risk assessment which will form the basis for their operational response.

Staff should be clear whether they are reporting the child as 'missing' or 'absent' (see section 7) as the police will respond differently according to which definition is used.

When notifying the police, the senior manager will provide as much detail as is known about the circumstances leading up to the individual being identified as missing, this should include:

- The child's name/s; date of birth; status; responsible authority;
- Where and when they went missing;
- Who, if anyone, they went missing with;
- What was the child wearing plus any belongings such as bags, phone etc.;
- Description and recent photograph;
- Medical history, if relevant;
- Time and location last seen;
- Circumstances or events around going missing;
- Details of family, friends and associates;
- Updated risk assessment

The senior manager should stress: the vulnerability of the individual; stating any specific information that will support the police in interacting with the individual once they are found. This should include any medical requirements, to ensure prompt and appropriate action is taken.

The parents/guardians, Responsible authority, Principal, Director of Education and children's services, NAS Education and Children's Services and NAS Responsible Individual should be notified as soon as possible. An up to date and easily available contact list will be kept for reference.

Where children placed out of authority go missing, the Principal/Registered Manager/Head of Care follow the local authority protocol. This is usually known as the Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (**RMFHC**) protocol. The service will also comply with any other processes required by the placing authority that are specified in the individual's care plan

Contact should be made with any other relevant bodies such as purchasers and the appropriate regulatory agency.

All media enquiries regarding the incident must be referred to the Corporate Communications Manager of the PR and Media team.

Contact numbers are 020 7903 3593 (office hours) and 07787 124792 (out of hours). The PR and Media team will be responsible for any necessary liaison with external press offices

Written notification of the incident should be submitted to OFSTED / Care Inspectorate as required.

See appendix 1 for flow chart.

### **Maintaining contact**

Regular contact with parents/guardians and the PR and media team should be maintained throughout the incident.

### **Steps to be taken when the child is found**

- When the child is found, the senior manager on duty will inform the Police, Parents/guardians, the Responsible Authority, Director of Education and Children's Services, Responsible Individual and the NAS Press Team.
- If the child is known to be particularly vulnerable, staff should summon assistance and only approach the individual in accordance with their care plan and risk assessment arrangements. Staff should offer warm and consistent care when a child returns.
- A child who has been found should be collected and supported by staff members who are familiar to them wherever possible. Police should only be asked to assist in returning the individual if police support is deemed necessary.
- On return the individual should be checked to ensure they have suffered no injury. Consideration will always be given to the need for medical examination.
- A police prevention interview (formerly known as a safe and well check) should be carried out by the Police as soon as possible after a child reported as missing has been found.
- An Independent Return Interview should be offered and provided within 72 hours of the child's return. When a looked after child is placed in a host authority the responsible authority should ensure the Independent Return Interview takes place working closely with the host authority.
- A full incident report should be completed as soon as possible following the incident. All relevant agencies such as purchasers and registration authorities should be kept informed. Records should include action taken by staff, circumstances of return, reasons for going missing and actions taken in light of the incident.
- The Responsible Authority should review whether the children's placement remains appropriate. The decision should be informed by talking to the child and staff.
- Care/Support Plans should include a strategy to minimise future risk of repeated missing episodes.
- In the case of Children's homes Independent reviewing officers (IRO's) should also be informed about missing episodes and address these in statutory reviews
- Up to date risk assessments on absconding, a current photograph and a personal detail sheet with details of favoured 'runaway' places as appropriate, for each person we support should be readily available in Services.
- If a child has run away two or more times, local authorities should ensure that a discussion is held with the child, their family or both to offer further assistance. A case conference should be called to consider cases of persistent absconding

or where an individual indicates that he/she wishes to leave the care of the school.

- Staff must not deal with an incident of a missing child alone.
- Staff should be supported by their Line Managers during and after an incident of a child going missing and a full debriefing session should take place once the child is safe.
- Reporting of incidents and review of procedures followed.

### **Planning and Placement**

The service should have procedures in place both to prevent children running away or going missing from their placement. This procedure must have regard to local protocols of the host authority. When a child is placed out of area the responsible authority must notify the host authority of the placement. Notification processes for missing episodes should be agreed between the responsible and host authorities

### **Risk assessment**

Some pupils placed in the school may have a history of going missing from school. In such cases the pupil's risk assessment should detail individual strategies to prevent and manage. All staff working with the pupil should be made aware and asked to read the risk assessment.

Schools generic risk assessments (building / rooms) and educational visit risk assessments should also take account of risks in relation to pupils absconding / going missing.

## **4. Evaluation of policy**

Principals and governors will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy. They will provide feedback which will support the annual review of this policy.

## **5. The legal framework**

Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care – January 2014 (DfE)  
Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (**RMFHC**) protocol  
Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (revised 2019)  
Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2021 (DFE )

## **6. Related policies**

Safeguarding Children Policy SO-0189  
Attendance Policy SO-0022  
Educational Visits Policy SO-0116

## 7. Definitions

NASAT - National Autistic Society Academy Trust free schools

NAS – refers to National Autistic Society Independent schools.

NAS(AT) refers to National Autistic Society Independent schools and National Autistic Society Academy Trust free schools

LGB – Local Governing Body

LA – Local Authority

MD – Managing Director, NAS Education and Children's Services and NAS Academies Trust

RI- Responsible Individual

**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.

## Appendix 1 Missing Child Procedure flow chart

