St Mary's School
CAMBRIDGE

Missing Child Policy and Procedure

This policy is the responsibility of Head of Juniors, Deputy Head: Pastoral and Boarding and Head of Boarding

Last review: September 26

Next review: September 27

Overview

This policy is based on the following guidance documents:

Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework, updated September 2026

Keeping Children Safe in Education, DfE guidance, September 2026

Working Together to Safeguard Children, DfE guidance, December 2023, updated March 2026

Spotting the Signs of Child Abuse, NSPCC

Children Missing Education, DfE guidance, updated September 2025

Working Together to Improve School Attendance, DfE, updated July 2026

Introduction

This Policy applies to all pupils (including EYFS and those in boarding). The welfare of all pupils at St Mary's school is our paramount responsibility. A child going missing from education, particularly on repeat occasions, is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect, including child sexual and/or criminal exploitation and county lines. It may 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. Every adult who works at the school has been trained to appreciate that they have a key responsibility for helping to always keep all of the children safe. This includes the importance of effective information sharing to ensure our children are safe and receiving suitable education. Early intervention is necessary to identify the existence of any underlying safeguarding risk and to help prevent the risks of a child going missing in future. Where staff have concerns that a child is missing from school, this policy should be followed.

Every member of our staff who works with children has read at least Part 1 (including Annex) of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE). Our staffing ratios are generous and are deliberately designed to ensure that every child is safe when they are in school.

This policy was drawn up having had regard to the Independent School Regulatory Requirements (paragraph

7 and 15) and Department for Education guidance Children Missing Education (September 2025).

Information for Parents

Our *Pupil Supervision and Duty of Care Policy including Building Access* describes:

- the arrangements for children arriving at school and leaving the premises at the end of the day;
- the arrangements for supervising the children whilst they are in school;
- the arrangements for registering the children in both morning and afternoon. For day pupils in EYFS and Years 1-13 we take a register of pupils before 9am. Parents are responsible for notifying the school if their child is absent for any reason. The school will always contact the parent if the child fails to arrive at school without an explanation;
- the physical security measures which prevent unsupervised access to or exit from the building;
- the supervision of the playground and the physical barriers that separate it from the rest of the school.

The enhanced supervisory arrangements for outings involving our pupils are set out in the *Off-site Visits Policy*. This document is on our website and can be provided to parents on request.

We review all our policies regularly (at least once a year as required) in order to satisfy ourselves that they are robust and effective. All new staff receive a thorough induction into the importance of effective supervision of pupils and read at least Part 1 (including Annex) of KCSIE, or at least Annex A of KCSIE, if their role does not require them to work directly with children.

Related policies:

- *Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy*
- *Staff Behaviour Policy*
- *Off-site Visits Policy*
- *School Attendance Policy*

Action to be followed by staff if a child fails to attend first day of school

All new pupils are placed on the school's admission register at the beginning of the first day on which the school has agreed that the pupil will attend the school. If a child fails to attend on the agreed date, staff must inform Designated Safeguarding Lead without delay. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will consider notifying the local authority at the earliest opportunity.

Where there are changes affecting the child (including a change of address or school), these will be reflected in the admission register. This will assist the school and external agencies when making enquiries to locate any missing children.

Duty to Report

The school monitors attendance of its pupils closely and will take action to address poor or irregular attendance.

The school will inform the local authority of any pupil who fails to attend school regularly, or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of 10 school days where their absence has been recorded with one of more of the codes statistically classified as unauthorised (G, N, O and/or U)

and will have reference to the procedure set out in Cambridgeshire's Children Missing From Education guidance.

In the event that a pupil holding a Student or Child Student visa sponsored by the School under the Points Based System goes missing, the School will report to UKVI if the pupil misses ten consecutive expected contact points.

The school also recognises its wider reporting duties following deletions from the admission register, in accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, to help identify children who are missing education.

Missing Child Procedure: EYFS and Junior School

Pupil Registration

Form registers are taken by the form tutor twice daily at 8.35am and at 1.30pm. After morning registration, a list of absentees is compiled by the Junior School Administrator. The absence of pupils who are boarders is checked with the boarding staff.

Pupils who arrive too late for registration, for any reason, enter the school through the main entrance in Acton House. Parents are required to sign their names on the form kept there and give a reason. Should a pupil have cause to leave the school during the school day, the adult collecting the child must sign them out and leave by the same front door entrance.

Absence

Parents are requested to inform the school of their child's absence by phone or email before 8.45am on the morning of each and every day of absence. They are requested to seek prior permission for extended absence by letter from the Head of Juniors. These are noted in the register by the JS Administrator. Parents from whom no notification has been received are contacted by phone to ensure that they know the whereabouts of their child.

Information for parents

The enhanced supervisory arrangements for the EYFS detailed in the EYFS Supervision of Pupils Policy which is available on our website.

Actions to be followed by staff if a child goes missing from the EYFS or Junior school

Our procedures are designed to ensure that a missing child is found and returned to effective supervision as soon as possible and typically within 10 minutes. If a pupil is not present at any point during the day, the teacher immediately sends a message to alert the Junior School Administrator, or nearest assistant/teacher and the following checks are made:

- that the pupil has not signed out at Reception;
- that the pupil is not attending a Speech and Drama or Individual Music lesson;
- that the pupil has not been admitted to the Medical Room.

Then, each available adult searches:

- toilet areas;
- individual tuition areas;
- other classrooms in both buildings;
- all peer groups are asked when the pupil was last seen;

If the child is still missing, the following steps would be taken without delay:

- continue to search for the missing pupil
- an immediate head count would be carried out to ensure all other pupils are present;
- inform the Head of the Junior School and the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL);
- the Head of the Junior School would contact the child's parents and explain what has happened, and what steps have been set in motion. The parents are asked to come to the school at once;
- the Head of the Junior School or DSL would immediately notify the Police. Such a call would be made within 15 minutes of notification that the pupil is missing;
- the Head of the Junior School would arrange for staff to search the rest of the school premises and grounds;
- if the child's home is within walking distance, a member of staff may be asked to check to see if the child has gone home.;
- inform the Chair of Governors without delay;
- inform the School's insurers as soon as is reasonably practicable;
- the school would co-operate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by the local authority;
- if the child is injured, a report would be made under RIDDOR to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). Advice on this should be sought from the health and safety manager or Bursar.

During the course of the investigation into the missing child, the school will decide what information should be given to other parents, staff and other pupils and how press enquiries are to be dealt with.

A full record of all activities taken up to the stage at which the child was found would be made for the incident report. If appropriate, procedures would be adjusted.

The school will always consider the wider circumstances around a childing going missing from School and whether there are wider safeguarding concerns that may need to be addressed in line with the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy.

EYFS and Junior School: Procedures to be followed by staff when a child is not collected on time

- it is made clear to all parents at the start of every academic year that should they be delayed; they should email or phone the school with this information. If possible, in older years, the pupil should be told about when she is being collected;
- similarly, parents are asked to put in writing for the school at the start of each academic year the names of those they designate in their absence to collect their child. They sign that each designated adult is well known to the child;
- if the pupil is to go home with any other parent or person known to the school and the child, permission must be given in writing or in an email to the school prior to or on that day;
- at the end of the school day any pupil who is not collected is taken to Coach House Club (EYFS) or Tea (Y1-6) and then the Homework Club/Late Stay or Twilight.
- if after Twilight stay, i.e., at 6.00pm (5.00pm on Fridays) the pupil is left at School, the Twilight supervisor brings the pupil to the care of the duty member of SLT who always remains at School until the last pupil has been safely seen out with her parent/carer;

- the leader or SLT member rings the parents/carers/guardians of the pupil after 6pm. If unsuccessful the emergency contact is called;
- the child is always kept under the direct supervision of the SLT member plus a second member of staff, usually the Twilight supervisor. They will be kept occupied;
- any difficulty with connecting to the parent/carer/guardian is not communicated to the pupil.
- if there is no response after 6.30pm the SLT member will accompany the pupil to Mary Ward House so she can have an evening meal and so other adult members of staff are present to enable the SLT member to make further telephone calls;
- the SLT member will contact the Social Care Duty Officer (0345 045 5203). Social Care will make emergency arrangements for the pupil and will arrange for a visit to be made to the pupil's house and will check with the Police. The school will make a full written report of the incident;
- the advice of the Social Care Duty Officer and/or police is then followed from that point;
- the pupil remains in the care and supervision of the SLT member within the school building at all times.

We undertake to look after the pupil safely, until the child has been collected by a parent, guardian, or carer, or until appropriate, alternative care arrangements have been made with Social Care and/or the Police in order to prioritise the pupil's safety. The School's DSL will keep a record of incidents where parents/carers do not collect a pupil from school or are late for no explained or good reason, or where there are repeated incidents. If any concerns about the pupil's safety and welfare result, these will be dealt with in accordance with the School's Safeguarding and Child protection Policy.

Missing Child Procedure: Senior School and Sixth Form

Pupil Registration

Form registers are taken by the form tutor twice daily at 8.30am and at 1.45pm. After morning registration, a list of absentees is compiled by reception. The absence of pupils who are boarders is checked with the boarding staff.

Pupils who arrive too late for registration, for any reason, enter the School through the Cortile Reception door and are required to sign their names on the form kept there and give a reason. Should a pupil have cause to leave the school during the school day they must sign out and leave by the Cortile Reception door.

Absence

Parents are requested to inform the school of their child's absence by phone or email before 9.00am on the morning of each and every day of absence. They are requested to seek prior permission for extended absence via the school's online platform where it will be reviewed by the Head of Safeguarding and/or the Deputy Head (Pastoral and Boarding). These are noted in the register by Reception. Parents from whom no notification has been received are contacted by phone by the receptionist to ensure that they know the whereabouts of their child.

If there is a possibility of early or late arrival of boarders to the start or end of term the parents should seek authorisation from the Head of Boarding.

Class Registration

Pupils are registered by their class teachers on iSAMS at the beginning of each teaching session. If the absence of a pupil cannot be accounted for, the member of staff sends a message to Reception within 10 minutes. The following checks should then made by the receptionist:

- that the pupil has not signed out at Reception;
- that the pupil has not been admitted to the Wellbeing Hub;
- that the pupil is not attending a Speech and Drama or Individual Music lesson;
- that the Head of Boarding is notified;
- that one of the Deputy Heads, or a senior staff member, such as a Head of Year, is notified.

The Head of Safeguarding or Deputy Head (Pastoral and Boarding) should then:

- organise a search of the buildings and grounds paying careful attention to toilet and shower areas, common rooms, library etc;
- notify the Head who should notify the parents and if appropriate, the police, if the pupil has not been located within an hour.

Actions to be followed by staff if a child goes missing from the Senior School and Sixth Form

Our procedures are designed to ensure that a missing child is found and returned to effective supervision as soon as possible. If a child was found to be missing, we would carry out the following actions without delay:

- check with the pupil's friends to see if they know their whereabouts;
- check the Wellbeing Hub;
- check with reception who will check Inventry and the signing out record;
- inform the senior member of staff on duty;
- call the pupil's mobile telephone;
- ask all the adults and pupils calmly if they can tell us when they last remember seeing the pupil;
- occupy all the other pupils in their classroom(s);
- at the same time, arrange for one or more adults to search the school grounds;
- check the doors, gates and CCTV records for signs of entry/exit.

A record is kept by the school of any instances in which a pupil is missing from school without satisfactory permission and documentation, including the action taken and the pupil's explanation.

If the pupil is still missing when the initial search is completed, typically within 60-75 minutes, the following steps would be taken:

- inform the Head, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Head of Boarding if the pupil is a boarder;
- ask the SLT member leading the search to ring the pupil's parents and explain what has happened, and what steps have been set in motion. Ask them to come to the school at once;
- the Head or DSL would notify the Police;
- the SLT member leading the search would arrange for staff to search the rest of the school premises and grounds;
- if the pupil's home is within walking distance, a member of staff may be asked to check if the pupil has gone home
- inform the Chair of Governors without delay;
- inform the School's insurers as soon as is reasonably practicable;
- the school would co-operate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by the local authority;

- if the pupil is injured, a report would be made under RIDDOR to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). Advice on this should be sought from the health and safety manager or Bursar. If the child is injured and is taken directly from the scene of the accident to hospital for treatment a report would be made under RIDDOR to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than 15 days of the accident.

During the investigation into the missing pupil, the school will decide what information should be given to other parents, staff and other pupils and how press enquiries are to be dealt with.

A full record of all activities taken up to the stage at which the pupil was found would be made for the incident report. If appropriate, procedures would be adjusted.

The school will always consider the wider circumstances around a childing going missing from School and whether there are wider safeguarding concerns that may need to be addressed in line with the School's Child Protection policy.

Missing Child Procedure: Boarding

The Pupil Supervision and Duty of Care Policy outlines the registration and access arrangements for the Boarders living at Mary Ward House. Boarding staff should be aware of the location of Boarders even when they are not directly supervised. All Boarders are registered 5 times per day. Boarders sign in and out at reception each time they leave the building.

During the school day boarders are covered by the Senior School and Sixth Form procedure above.

Actions to be followed by staff if a child goes missing

Staff will refer to the missing boarder action plan on the noticeboard behind Mary Ward House Reception.

If a pupil is missing after school hours, at bedtime or in the early hours, or they fail to return from 'leave out' at the appointed time, we would carry out the following actions:

- check the diary, signing in/out sheets or any other information which might explain whereabouts;
- call/text the pupil's mobile phone;
- consult the senior member of boarding staff on duty (see duty rota);
- check with the pupil's friends to see if they know their whereabouts;
- check with other boarders to see if they know their whereabouts;
- carry out a thorough search of their bedroom, Mary Ward House and immediate surroundings.

If the pupil is still missing when the initial search is completed, typically within 60-75 minutes, the following steps would be taken:

- inform the Head, Head of the Juniors (if the pupil is a junior school boarder), the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Head of Boarding (if not already aware);
- the Head would ring the pupil's parents and explain what has happened, and what steps have been set in motion so far to locate them. If parents are abroad, this step may need to be delayed. All decisions on contact with parents at night should be made by the Head, as appropriate;
- the Head or DSL would notify the Police;
- the Head would arrange for staff to search the rest of the school premises and grounds;

- the school would co-operate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by the local authority;
- inform the Chair of Governors without delay;
- inform the School's insurers as soon as is reasonably practicable;
- if the pupil is injured, a report would be made under RIDDOR to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). Advice on this should be sought from the health and safety manager or Bursar. If the child is injured and is taken directly from the scene of the accident to hospital for treatment a report would be made under RIDDOR to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than 15 days of the accident.

During the course of the investigation into the missing pupil, the school will decide what information should be given to other parents, staff and other pupils and how press enquiries are to be dealt with.

A record is kept by the school of any instances in which a pupil is missing from school without satisfactory permission and documentation, including the action taken and the pupil's explanation.

A full record of all activities taken up to the stage at which the pupil was found would be made for the incident report. If appropriate, procedures would be adjusted.

The school will always consider the wider circumstances around a child going missing from School and whether there are wider safeguarding concerns that may need to be addressed in line with the School's Child Protection policy.

If a Child goes Missing on an Outing: Whole School

For procedure and policy regarding school outings please see the Off-Site Visits Policy.

Should a child go missing on an outing:

- an immediate head count would be carried out in order to ensure that all the other pupils were present;
- an adult would search the immediate vicinity;
- inform the Head/Head of Juniors, and the DSL by mobile phone;
- the remaining pupils would be taken back to school as soon as reasonably practicable;
- the Head would ring the child's parents and explain what has happened, and what steps have been set in motion. They would be asked to come to the venue/ the school at once;
- contact the venue manager and arrange a search (where relevant);
- contact the Police immediately;
- the school would cooperate fully with any Police investigation and any safeguarding investigation by the local authority;
- inform the Chair of Governors without delay;
- the school's insurers would be informed as soon as reasonably practicable;
- if the child is injured, a report would be made under RIDDOR to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). Advice on this should be sought from the health and safety manager or Bursar. If the child is injured and is taken directly from the scene of the accident to hospital for treatment a report would be made under RIDDOR to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than 15 days of the accident.

A full record of all activities taken up to the stage at which the child was found would be made for the

incident report. The school will review its procedures and, if appropriate, these would be adjusted.

Actions to be followed by staff once the child is found:

- talk to, take care of and, if necessary, comfort the child;
- speak to the other pupils to ensure they understand why they should not leave the premises/separate from a group on an outing;
- the Head / Head of Juniors will speak to the parents to discuss events and give an account of the incident;
- the Head will arrange for a full investigation;
- media queries should be referred to the Head;
- the investigation should involve all concerned providing written statements;
- the report should be detailed covering: time, place, numbers of staff and children, when the child was last seen, what appeared to have happened, the purpose of the outing, the length of time that the child was missing and how it appeared to have happened, as well as lessons for the future;
- consider whether actions need to be taken in line with the School's *Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy* where there are concerns about the welfare of the child.