

# Child Missing or Absconds Policy

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## 1.0 Policy statement

- 1.1 Dixons Academies Trust takes seriously its duty to safeguard all children in its care. Children's safety is our highest priority, both on and off the premises. Every attempt is made to ensure the security and safety of children is maintained at all times, through rigorous reporting of absence and early response, carrying out the educational visits procedure (risk assessment), lesson by lesson registration and exit / entrance procedures. As a result of our vigilance, it is very rare for a child to go missing or to abscond; however, we have clear procedures to follow if this should happen and they are listed in this policy.

## 2.0 Scope and purpose

- 2.1 To ensure all staff understand the procedures for managing an emergency situation when a child in our care go missing, or absconds, from the building or on a school trip.
- 2.2 To contribute to the wider safeguarding portfolio of policies.

## 3.0 Child going missing (or absconds) on the premises

- 3.1 As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the staff member alerts the Principal and the DSL through the most expedient means of communication.
- 3.2 The Principal or member of the senior Leadership Team calls the police and reports the child as missing and then calls the parent.
- 3.3 The Principal and other members of senior staff carry out a thorough search of the building and outdoor spaces.
- 3.4 The register is checked to make sure no other child has also gone missing.
- 3.5 Friends of the child may be asked when they last saw them.
- 3.6 Designated site staff to check doors and gates to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out or an intruder could access.
- 3.7 The Principal talks to the staff to find out when and where the child was last seen and recorded.
- 3.8 The Principal contacts the Chair of Governors and Executive Principal and reports the incident. An investigation will be carried out immediately.
- 3.9 If the Principal is not on site, the next most senior member of staff should carry out their role with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

## 4.0 Child going missing on an outing / residential

- 4.1 As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, staff on the outing ask children to stand with their designated staff member and carry out a headcount to ensure that no other child has gone astray. One staff member searches the immediate vicinity, but does not search beyond that.
- 4.2 The Principal is contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident is recorded.
- 4.3 The Principal contacts the police and reports the child as missing.
- 4.4 The Principal contacts the parent.
- 4.5 If necessary and possible, staff to take the remaining children back to the setting.
- 4.6 In an indoor venue, the staff contact the venue's security who will handle the search and contact the police if the child is not found.
- 4.7 The Principal contacts the Chair of Governors and Executive Principal and reports the incident.
- 4.8 The Principal carries out a thorough investigation to establish the facts.

## 5.0 The investigation

- 5.1 Staff keep calm and do not let the other children become anxious or worried.
- 5.2 The Principal speaks with the parent(s).
- 5.3 The Principal and Executive Principal carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all the staff in the room or who were on the outing.
- 5.4 The trip leader writes an incident report detailing:
- the date and time of the report
  - what staff / children were in the group / outing and the name of the staff designated responsible for the missing child
  - when the child was last seen in the group / outing
  - what has taken place in the group or outing since the child went missing
  - the time it is estimated that the child went missing
  - the risk assessment must be provided

- 5.5 A conclusion is drawn as to how the breach of security happened.
- 5.6 If the incident warrants a police investigation, all staff co-operate fully. In this case, the police will handle all aspects of the investigation, including interviewing staff. Children's Social Care may be involved if it seems likely that there is a child protection issue to address.
- 5.7 The incident is reported under RIDDOR arrangements (see the Reporting of Accidents and Incidents policy); the Health and Safety Officer may want to investigate and will decide if there is a case for prosecution.
- 5.8 In the event of disciplinary action needing to be taken, Ofsted and / or the Teacher Regulation Agency is informed.
- 5.9 The insurance provider is informed.

## **6.0 Managing people**

- 6.1 Missing child incidents are very worrying for all concerned. Part of managing the incident is to try to keep everyone as calm as possible.
- 6.2 The staff will feel worried about the child, especially the teacher and group leader responsible for the safety of that child for the outing. They may blame themselves and their feelings of anxiety and distress will rise as the length of time the child is missing increases.
- 6.3 Staff may be the understandable target of parental anger and they may be afraid. The Principal needs to ensure that staff under investigation are not only fairly treated, but receive support while feeling vulnerable.
- 6.4 When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff; one of whom is the Principal and the other should be a senior member of staff or member of the Governing Body. No matter how understandable the parents anger may be, aggression or threats against staff are not tolerated and the police should be called.
- 6.5 The other children are also sensitive to what is going on around them; they too may be worried. The remaining staff caring for them need to be focused on their needs and must not discuss the incident in front of them. They should answer children's questions honestly, but also reassure them.
- 6.6 In accordance with the severity of the final outcome, staff may need counselling and support. If a child is not found, or is injured, or worse, this will be a very difficult time. The Governing Body will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
- 6.7 Staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press without taking advice.

