

Highwood Primary School



Promoting Resilience - Achieving Potential

Absconding Policy

Approved by: School Development Committee

April 2026

This is the policy for Highwood Primary School, which sets out the actions taken if a child absconds from school. It is set within the context of the whole school aims and mission statement: Promoting resilience, achieving potential. It reflects the school's values, philosophy and mission statement in relation to safeguarding children in our care.

To abscond is to 'leave without permission'. Under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974 and in Common Law, schools and other education settings owe a duty of care towards their pupils. This duty of care requires that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that pupils are safe and remain within the care of the school at all times throughout the school day and during school-led activities. A risk assessment will be prepared for those pupils who are at risk.

Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this non-statutory policy is to set out clearly for all stakeholders, the process that will take place should a child abscond from school.

At Highwood, our aim is to work actively to provide a secure, safe environment, a school where children want to come to enjoy learning with others as part of a caring community. We recognise that it is possible that a child will abscond from our school and this policy is written to ensure we are ready to deal with this eventuality should it occur. We cannot make the school a fortress and as it already is a secure site, the role of the Health and Safety Officer and Headteacher is to review the school regularly to consider additional measures that continue to make it even safer yet accessible for all.

Where a pupil attempts or is seen to be leaving the school premises without authorisation the following procedures should be followed:

1) Member of staff to inform Headteacher, DSL, SLT or DSP who will inform the school office to inform parents to come to school immediately.

2) Office staff to be ready to communicate and respond via walkie-talkie or telephone.

3) Headteacher, SLT or DSP to take their mobile phone and follow the child to the school fence or gate and must try to persuade the child to stay in the school.

- Be aware of the risk of fight or flight. Passive monitoring, not chasing should be carried out as this could further endanger the child. Active pursuit may encourage a child to leave the site and may also cause the child to panic, possibly putting him or herself at risk by running onto a busy road; staff will not chase but will try to keep a child in sight at a distance.
- If by leaving the school the child is known to be putting themselves in danger, adults must exercise their duty of care and stop the child, physically if necessary.
- **If the child has left the immediate vicinity of the school grounds and is no longer visible, then the police must be informed.**
- **Office staff to call the police and give brief details and the child's last known location. Provide the police with a photo of the absconding child.**
- If the child returns of their own volition, parents/carers and the police will be informed as soon as possible
- Upon his or her return to school, and when the child is calm, the child must be seen by the Headteacher, DSL and class teacher, and so that the reasons for absconding may be discussed in detail. At this point a decision will be made as to the appropriateness of further actions
- A meeting with parents/carers will be arranged using Appendix A and B which must be signed, dated and uploaded to CPOMS. A written report will be filed on the incident and recorded on CPOMS with the signed paperwork.

Where a pupil is unaccounted for on the school site the following procedures should be followed:

1) Member of staff to inform Headteacher, SLT or DSP who will inform the school office to be ready to respond via the walkie-talkie or telephone.

2) Headteacher, SLT or DSP to organise a search of buildings and known places that the pupil may have gone to within the school environment

- If the pupil is not found, then all available staff complete a more thorough sweep of the school and check the perimeter of the grounds.
- School office to phone the police when the area has been fully checked if the child is not located within twenty minutes.
- School office to contact parents/carers and inform them of the situation and ask them to come to school immediately.
- Consideration will be given to whether the search should be extended beyond the school perimeter. This decision will be based on parental knowledge of the child and on the levels of risk, and on what action is in the child's best interests. **Any staff who leave school grounds should take their mobile phone so that they can be contacted by the school.**
- Once a pupil has been found then the Headteacher, DSL and class teacher will use their professional judgement to outline the response towards the pupil and the support the pupil will need in the future.
- A written report will be filed on the incident and added to CPOMS.
- Appropriate external agency support will be sought.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Each incident will be monitored and evaluated. Risk management plans for any children believed to pose a risk of absconding will be created / updated by school with the support of staff and parents/carers. The DSL to ensure that there are protocols in place and that all staff are aware of it. Any changes to plan must be communicated to all staff.

Staff and volunteers must be made aware of; the tendency to run, the adult supervision in place to prevent absconding, any triggers, routes taken, known exit points, hiding places and the child's final destination etc.

Parents and Carers

Parents and carers of pupils are responsible for supporting the work of the school and encouraging their children to keep to all school procedures and policies. Once school has informed the parents that their child has absconded, parents and carers are responsible for actively supporting the school with subsequent procedures and actions. This could include coming into school to help secure the safety of their child as well as meeting with a Senior Leader in order to agree to the subsequent actions. **Risk management plans will be shared and signed by parents/carers.**

Next Step

The incident will be discussed with the safeguarding team to agree suitable next steps. Although not an exhaustive list, the actions that can be considered could include:

1. Individual Risk Management Plan. Plan includes how staff follow at distance and knowledge, point of leaving school and the final destination. Uploaded to CPOMS.
2. Safety & Support Plan for children/young people in education completed and sent to Hertfordshire.
3. Risk assessment of school premises to be carried out by Site Manager and School Business Manager.
4. Referral to Step2 (Early Intervention Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) by Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust.
5. Early help referral or advice sought from the consultation hub / Children's Services.
6. Personal Plan.
7. Reduced timetable.
8. Use of social stories.
9. External agency support sought - Chessbrook Education Support Centre, Primary Outreach Visit.
10. Reflect & Relaunch.
11. Home visit to start Families First Assessment.

Health and Safety Management

The Site Manager regularly checks that the perimeter fencing is at the expected height of 1.8m and that there are no holes or gaps in the hedges / fencing.

We recognise that for some children, the height of the perimeter fencing may create an even greater risk and challenge so this needs to be considered carefully and agreed by the Headteacher. There must also be consultation with the Headteacher to agree whether to cover the external gate or any access routes used as an exit with meshing or fencing.

All external gates must be shut and locked during the school day with an access system in place (apart from pick up and drop off times) and the Site Team/SLT staff must be on duty at all times when gates are open.

Regular reminders must be given to staff to be aware of and respond to door alarms sounding at exit points around the school site. Access points should be minimised for visitors and have clear signage to reception.



Absconding Pupil Incident Report
To be uploaded onto CPOMS

Name of pupil	
Date	
Time of incident	
Class	
Staff present	
An outline of the incident:	
What triggers led to this incident occurring?	
What consequence is to be put in place?	
What action will be taken to support the pupil to feel happy and safe in school?	
Next steps	

Signed by Headteacher: _____ Date: _____

Signed by Parent/Carer: _____ Date: _____



Parent / Carer Agreement

I have read the record of the absconding incident (Appendix A).

I wish to make the following comments relating to the incident (optional):

- I understand that it is always unacceptable for my child to leave the school site without permission and a repeated action of this nature might result in the school following exclusion procedures.

- I understand that the following actions have been agreed in order to help my child be happy and safe in school.

- I know my child needs to keep to the school rules and not leave the school grounds without permission.

- I understand that there are agreed actions for all parties involved.

- For my part, I will support this agreement by encouraging my child to comply.

Signed by Parent/Carer: _____

Date: _____