

# **WINDLESTONE SCHOOL**



## **STUDENTS WHO ARE IMPROPERLY ABSENT**

### **POLICY**

**into**

### **PRACTICE**



## STUDENTS WHO ARE IMPROPERLY ABSENT

### INTRODUCTION

Students at Windlestone are potentially more vulnerable than students in mainstream schools who may have absented from staff, are not at their proper place or are missing. It is, therefore, important that all involved in the processes of identifying and locating Windlestone students missing from school respond in a consistent and collaborative manner.

Although students have a right to choose where they want to be or where they want to go, this is limited by their responsibility to themselves to be safe, and to let school staff know where they are or where they are going. The competence of students to exercise rights and responsibilities in an appropriate manner develops with age, maturity and levels of understanding. SEBD students' competency to make appropriate decisions is often delayed in comparison to their peers in mainstream schools. Students leave Windlestone without permission for both bona fide and trivial reasons.

The need to secure students' safety and welfare is the primary aim of the school. Students absent into school grounds, but usually return after a period of time, and sometimes students leave the school site, but also return of their own accord within a reasonable period. On other occasions students leave the school site and their whereabouts are unknown to staff and the level of risk increases.

When a student's intent is known staff have to consider whether or not to seek to intervene. In most cases staff should seek to prevent improper absence by persuasion and dissuasion. Any use of Restrictive Physical Intervention, for example, Physical Presence, Restricting Access or Exit, and Physical Diversion needs careful consideration.

Physical controls should only be used as a last resort of preventing improper absence; if all other means have failed; and the potential risk associated with it is judged severe. Physical control should only be used as a means of preventing a student improperly absenting if:

- ❖ the student is so acutely and seriously troubled that it is clear he or she is in immediate danger of inflicting self-harm, harming others, or damaging property;
- ❖ the student is young and lesser interventions have either not been understood or successful and the student would on absconding be potentially in physical or moral danger;
- ❖ the student is older but socially immature and vulnerable and consequently potentially at physical and moral risk;
- ❖ its use is intended to return a student to a less dangerous situation;
- ❖ the student is very likely to interrupt the safe and secure learning environment of the school; or
- ❖ it is described as a course of permitted action in the student's Behaviour Support Plan.

The use of physical controls is not a substitute for using alternative strategies to thwart absconding.

Staff should exercise careful judgment in ascertaining whether or not a student is improperly absent. Within the school grounds it is usually safe to search for a student.

Searching beyond the school grounds is more problematic and potentially more dangerous and needs careful consideration. The Headteacher or his appointed deputy will authorise such searches provided that the potential risk to the student from being improperly absent is judged to exceed the potential dangers arising from searching.

## RATIONALE

Under section 3(3) of the Children Act 1989 a person who does not have parental responsibility for a child but has the care of the child, may “do what is reasonable in all circumstances of the case for the purpose of safeguarding or promoting the child’s welfare”. In order to carry out this duty properly and ensure that children are safe at all times staff need to know where students are, where they ought to be, and where they are going. Whenever students are not where they are supposed to be there is a possibility that their safety and welfare may be at risk.

It will be on these occasions that school staff need to judge how best to manage each individual situation. The purpose of this policy is to guide staff and other agency staff in the use of their judgement.

The specific purpose of this policy is to describe the processes by which Windlestone and Durham Constabulary jointly will:

- ❖ ensure an effective and consistent operational response to ensure the safety of Windlestone students when they become missing or are not at their proper place;
- ❖ when a Windlestone student is missing, to appropriately inform and involve the Police by agreement, and based on the circumstances of the individual student;
- ❖ establish a system for monitoring, reviewing and adjusting policy, practice and guidance on the basis of accurate shared operational information; and
- ❖ promote an enduring commitment to understanding the causes of the students’ behaviour, and to working with them to reduce the likelihood of their going missing or not being at their proper place.

## DEFINITIONS

There will be times when school staff believe students not being where they are supposed to be, are behaving in a way that is inconsistent with their safety and welfare. It will be on these occasions that school staff will need to judge how best to manage each individual situation. The purpose of this policy is to guide staff and other agency staff in the use of their judgement.

This policy makes a distinction between students who:

- ❖ **have absented**, whose whereabouts are known, and where circumstances suggest they are likely to be at only a low level of risk;
- ❖ **are not at their proper place**, whose whereabouts may or may not be known and where it is judged there is a low level of risk; and
- ❖ **are missing**, whose whereabouts are usually unknown, and where circumstances suggest they are likely to be at risk

For the purpose of this policy the phrase “**improperly absent**” is used to cover all terms.

## **AIM**

It is the aim of this policy to minimise the jeopardy to students' safety and welfare when they are improperly absent from school.

## **PRINCIPLES**

This policy and practice is determined by the following principles:

- ❖ Windlestone students are particularly vulnerable and over-represented in samples of missing children;
- ❖ there is a need to agree risk factors so that responses to real problems are not inadvertently downgraded;
- ❖ agencies will respond in a way that is as close as possible to that of a 'normal' parent in the community, but bearing in mind the extra responsibilities associated with 'a duty of care', the limitations imposed on them by resources, and taking into account the rights of children;
- ❖ agencies will act in accordance with the values and principles provided by the Children Act 1989, Investing in Children, the Assessing Outcomes framework and Child Protection Procedures;
- ❖ any response to students not being where they are supposed to be should begin with prevention, reducing the likelihood of students going missing by the culture of care within the school, and by conducting realistic and early risk assessments of vulnerability;
- ❖ action in relation to individual students will:
  - be guided by the individual risk assessment, Behaviour Management Planning and any Care Planning for the child;
  - demonstrate a consistent approach from all staff; and
  - show care and concern rather than an intention to control or punish.
- ❖ Windlestone and the Police will work to an agreed definition of "missing" students as defined in this policy;
- ❖ initial reporting of missing students by Windlestone will comply with jointly agreed protocols outlined in this document, and notification to the Police will only take place in clearly defined circumstances; and
- ❖ the Police will act as agreed on any report of a student missing from Windlestone.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Students** are responsible for:

- ❖ not placing themselves at risk by not being where they are supposed to be; and
- ❖ informing individuals or agencies of any reason why they do not wish to be at school.

**Parents and carers** are responsible for:

- ❖ alerting their sons to the dangers associated with not being where they are supposed to be;
- ❖ informing agencies of the known whereabouts of their sons who are supposed to be at school; and
- ❖ attempting to ascertain the cause of their sons improperly absenting.

**All School Staff** are responsible for:

- ❖ maintaining a caring, responsive and understanding environment and atmosphere that aims to reduce the need for a student to become improperly absent;
- ❖ seeking to prevent students improperly absenting;
- ❖ recording any antecedents to a student becoming improperly absent ; and
- ❖ reporting to and liaising with Senior School Staff on the improper absence of any student.

**The Leadership & Management Teams of the school** are responsible for:

- ❖ notifying and liaising with the Police (where appropriate), parents and carers of a missing student;
- ❖ attempting to ensure the speedy and safe return of improperly absent students to school;
- ❖ ensuring that all relevant documentation is completed.

**The Headteacher of the school** is responsible for:

- ❖ taking decisions on the status of any improperly absent student;
- ❖ monitoring and evaluating relevant documentation; and
- ❖ reporting to Governors incidents of improper student absence.

**Governors of the school** are responsible for:

- ❖ monitoring the incidence of improper absence; and
- ❖ ensuring the school's policies and practice are not contributing to improper absence.

**The Police** are responsible for:

- ❖ liaising with senior staff of the school, carers and parents in respect of students missing from Windlestone ; and
- ❖ contributing to the successful, speedy and safe return of the student to school.

## **ENTITLEMENTS**

**Students** are entitled to:

- ❖ voice any reason why they do not wish to be at school; and be
- ❖ be listened to.

**Parents and carers** are entitled to:

- ❖ information from the school if their son is improperly absent;
- ❖ be involved in planning to return their son to safety; and
- ❖ a review of their son's placement if they are repeatedly improperly absent

**All School Staff** are entitled to:

- ❖ assistance from the senior staff of the school and governors in establishing the type of school ethos which will minimize the incidence of improper absence;
- ❖ information that will assist them in making judgements about what steps they should take to minimise particular students being improperly absent; and
- ❖ information from parents and carers that will assist them in minimizing improper absence.

**The Leadership & Management Teams of the school** are entitled to:

- ❖ the support of all school staff and parents and carers to minimise improper absence;
- ❖ the support of all school staff and parents and carers in attempting to ensure the speedy and safe return of improperly absent students to school; and
- ❖ the support of staff in completing all relevant documentation.

**The Headteacher of the school** is entitled to:

- ❖ the support of all colleagues and parents and carers to minimise improper absence;
- ❖ the support of all school staff and parents and carers in attempting to ensure the speedy and safe return of improperly absent students to school; and
- ❖ the support of other agencies and particularly the Police when he judges a student to be missing.

**Governors of the school** are entitled to:

- ❖ their policies being adhered to and to question whether school policy and practice are contributing to improper absence; and
- ❖ regular information about improper absence.

**The Police** are entitled to:

- ❖ the support of all school staff and parents and carers in attempting to ensure the speedy and safe return of improperly absent students to school; and
- ❖ the careful consideration being given before categorizing a student as missing.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

It is a requirement that the school should reduce the likelihood of students absenting, not being at their proper place, or going missing by:

- ❖ developing a school ethos of the school which is caring, responsive and appropriate to the needs of students
- ❖ creating a culture which promote student well being rather than a regime that minimises or restricts their opportunities
- ❖ creating a 'safe' environment in which staff take responsibility for being in control, in a manner which is empathetic, concerned and responsive
- ❖ using and regularly evaluating and reviewing Risk Assessments, IEPs, Behaviour Support Plans and Care Plans
- ❖ anticipating and planning strategies to respond to individual students with the aim of safeguarding and promoting their welfare and minimising the likelihood of their being improperly absent

It is a requirement that when a student is improperly absent from school or when school staff become aware that he is not where they are supposed to be any judgement about action to be taken should be based on:

- ❖ risk assessment, the IEP, and any Behaviour Support Plan or Care Plan for the student;
- ❖ the circumstances in which the student has become improperly absent.

The Headteacher will make a decision, based on the information provided, about whether the student is:

- ❖ absenting,
- ❖ not at their proper place, or
- ❖ missing.

The decision should be based on an assessment of each individual situation, and should, where practicable be made in consultation with other people involved in the care of the student e.g. parents, others with parental responsibility and any involved social worker. Factors which should influence the decision include:

- ❖ the student's age,
- ❖ the student's maturity,
- ❖ the student's emotional state,
- ❖ the student's maturity and subsequent level of vulnerability,
- ❖ the time of day,
- ❖ weather conditions,
- ❖ the known intentions of the child,
- ❖ the length of time the student has attended the school,
- ❖ the student's personal history,
- ❖ the known antecedents, and
- ❖ any other relevant information.

A decision that a student has absented or is not at their proper place must be constantly monitored and reviewed. It may well change as more information is obtained or time passes. A student initially judged as being absent or not in their proper place, may later be judged as missing. A student absent or not in their proper place for over 3 hours will be judged missing.

When the Headteacher decides a student is absenting it is a requirement that he ensures:

- ❖ ensures that the situation is monitored;
- ❖ parents and carers, and any involved social worker is informed if the duration of the incident becomes excessive in relation to the student's age and other circumstances; and
- ❖ regularly reviews the status of improper absence of the child.

When the Headteacher decides a student is not at their proper place it is a requirement that he:

- ❖ ensure that parents and carers, and any involved social worker is informed;
- ❖ ensures a Major Incident Record is completed in accordance with the procedure described in the school's Behaviour Management Policy;

- ❖ ensures the details are recorded in the school's Absconding Book; and
- ❖ regularly reviews the status of improper absence of the child.

When the Headteacher decides a student is missing it is a requirement that he ensures:

- ❖ the Police are to be notified as soon as possible and within 30 minutes of the decision being taken and the student's details reported to the Control Room at Police Headquarters, Aykley Heads, Durham. Tel. 0191 386 4929;
- ❖ the Police are informed if the student is arrestable;
- ❖ if not already informed, the student's parents carers and any involved social worker (outside office hours EDT) must be notified as soon as possible and within 30 minutes of the decision being taken;
- ❖ the CSA, or other placing authority is notified;
- ❖ a plan is drawn up with the police in relation to the action that should be taken to locate the child;
- ❖ that where time and circumstances permit this plan should be in consultation with the student's parents or carers and others with parental responsibility;
- ❖ a Major Incident Record is completed in accordance with procedure described in the school's Behaviour Management Policy;
- ❖ Major Incident Recording includes all the details of the circumstances of the student being missing, the wishes and feelings of all the appropriate people and the decisions taken over how to locate and return the child;
- ❖ the Police and others are informed as soon as the whereabouts of the student become known.

It is a requirement that the Police to:

- ❖ co-ordinate enquires to ascertain the whereabouts of the child;
- ❖ inform the relevant person at school of the location of the student when it is known;
- ❖ ascertain that the student is in no immediate or potential danger;
- ❖ ascertain whether the student is willing to return to school.

It is acknowledged the Police can only take action to return the student to school if:

- ❖ he is arrestable;
- ❖ he is at risk of significant harm; and
- ❖ he is willing to return.

Action must be taken to return the student if he is arrestable, or if he is at risk of significant

harm.

It is a requirement that all professional staff and agencies:

- ❖ will collaborate in relation to any publicity and in working with the media.

When the student who was missing is located it is a requirement that:

- ❖ agencies liaise with each other immediately to minimise the use of Police resources;
- ❖ the school takes the lead role in informing other involved agencies and professionals;
- ❖ if not already aware the student's parents carers and any involved social worker (outside office hours EDT) must be notified as soon as possible;
- ❖ considered judgements are collectively made about the timing of a student's return to school which are dependent on the legal status of the child, their willingness to return, and their vulnerability; and
- ❖ details of how the student was located and returned to school, home or other place should be recorded on a Major Incident Record by school staff.

When a previously missing student returns to school it is a requirement that:

- ❖ school staff observe the child, provide the appropriate levels of support and assess whether further action is needed, e.g. medical treatment;
- ❖ the school, in liaison with parents and carers and any involved professionals, plan strategies to respond to the student with the aim of promoting and safeguarding his/her welfare and minimising the likelihood of him/her going missing again;
- ❖ school staff should give the student the opportunity to talk about what happened and why, remembering that rewarding the student for staying is more effective than punishing him/her for being absent; and
- ❖ students within the Looked After System are seen by their social worker, and the outcome of the interview must be recorded and shared with the Police.

After multiple Incidents of a student being reported missing it is a requirement that:

- ❖ the school holds a Multi-disciplinary Annual Review to ensure that the student's special educational needs are being met and welfare safeguarded and promoted; and
- ❖ the Multi-disciplinary Annual Review plans strategies to reduce the likelihood of him/her going missing again and considers the appropriateness of the current placement.

## **REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed as circumstances warrant it.

PM Jonson  
October 2002

Latest revision June 2006

# DURHAM CONSTABULARY

## COMMUNICATIONS FORM – CONTROL ROOM

Date	Time of origin/ dispatch	999 Internal Mess Fax	B/T Switch Radio	Serial No.
SENDER:		RECEIVER:		
POSITION No:		POSITION No:		
PNC FILE NAME				CIRCULATION
A. SURNAME/FORENAMES:				Div:
B. DATE OF BIRTH:				To:
C. SEX:				Time:
D. COLOUR:				OBSERVATIONS MESSAGE
E. HEIGHT:				Time:
F. BIRTHPLACE:				OTHER FORCES INFORMED
G. VISIBLE MARKS/SCARS				
H. WARNING SIGNALS				
L. ALIAS				
M. CLASS <b>missing</b>				
N. OFFENCE				
P. POWER OF ARREST				OTHER INFORMED
Q. INCIDENT DATE				
S. FORCE REFERENCE				
T. REPORT DATE				
U. WEED DATE				
V. TEXT Time went missing from Windlestone Hall School:		Home Address:		
Description:		Home Tel. No.		
Other Information:				
<b>SCHOOL RISK RATING FROM BEING MISSING (possibility of harm)</b>				
RATING	DESCRIPTION	PROBABLE OUTCOME	TICK	
HIGH	PROBABLE			
MEDIUM	POSSIBLE			
LOW	REMOTE			
CIRCULATION			P.N.C. LD. NUMBER:	
CANCELLATION	FROM:	TO: (Name / No.)		EXAMINING OFFICER
ESTABLISHMENT	TIME: DATE:			

