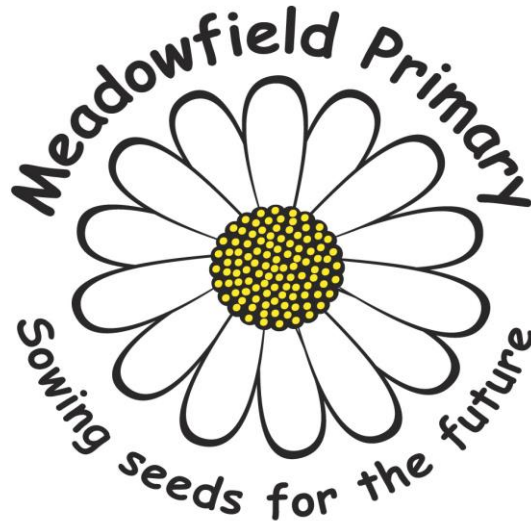




Meadowfield Primary School

Pupils at risk of absconding policy

October 2025

VISION 'today we create, tomorrow we achieve, forever we learn

Guidance on dealing with children who abscond

1. Introduction

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/centre at all times throughout the school day and during school led activities.

2. Definition.

To abscond is to 'leave without permission'.

Internal Absconding	External Absconding
Internal absconding - where the pupil leaves the care of the responsible person without permission but remains on the school site.	External absconding - where a pupil leaves the school site without permission.
Where a pupil leaves a lesson without permission but remains on the school site.	Where a pupil leaves an offsite provision without permission. E.g. swimming, alternate education provision, etc.
Where a pupil leaves a club run on behalf of the school without permission but remains on the site.	Where a pupil leaves a defined area or supervision of the responsible adult without permission. E.g. when on an educational visit.
Where a pupil leaves extended services provision without permission but remains on the site.	Where a pupil leaves the designated transport provided for them without permission, E.g. transport between split sites, to and from specialist provision.

3. Control measures and procedures to prevent absconding.

In order to prevent a child from absconding from the site, the following control measures are in place.

Site security

- The site has a secure perimeter and gates which can be locked.
- Gates/doors are secured outside of drop off and pick up times, in this case after 9.10 am until 3.05 pm.
- Doors into school are locked from the outside with key coded access.

- There are high handles and keypads on doors with access to/from Reception and Nursery. There are also high level bolts and a robust system for counting children in and out

Effective supervision

- Effective supervision is dependent on a number of factors including
 - Age of the pupils
 - Ability of the pupils
 - Number of the pupils
 - Activities being undertaken
 - Pupil behaviour
 - Site layout and security
 - Specific identified risks e.g. pupils with history of absconding, building work, etc.
- Regular head counts take place through the school day with younger children counted in and out at break times.
- There is a robust system in place for pupils to be handed over to their parents, especially in Early Years and KS1 where children are only handed over to known parent/carers.
- There is a clear system in place for pupils who need to leave the school grounds with permission during the school day, e.g. lunchtimes, medical appointments with a signing in and out book.
- There is a clear system for handing pupils over to before/after school clubs with registers taken.

Information to pupils.

- School rules and expectations are clearly displayed and reinforced throughout the school year.
- There is a clear and consistent reward and sanction system in school which covers absconding pupils.
- Absconding and the school's procedures for dealing with it are referenced in the home/school agreement.

Behaviour Individual Pupil Risk Assessments.

- Where there is a foreseeable risk of absconding, there is a BIPRA in place for that child in the prescribed format.
- The BIPRA clearly details the individual control measures required to reduce the risk of absconding. These are also shared with parent/carers.
- A Positive Handling Plan (PHP) has been drawn up for a child who is at risk of absconding. These are also shared with parent/carers.

External visits/sites.

- On an Educational Visit the security of the venue/location is assessed and supervision levels altered accordingly.
- There are robust systems in place so that each group has specified members and leaders, and regular head counts occur throughout the visit.
- In the planning for an educational visit the risks of absconding is clearly assessed, particularly in the case where known absconders are in attendance. This includes transport.
- Communication between the groups and robust emergency procedures are in place.

4. Actions to be taken in the event of a child absconding.

- A member of the SLT is notified immediately.
- There is a procedure for securing and systematically searching the site in the event of a child absconding and their whereabouts being unknown (see appendix A)
- There is a system for notifying the parents/carers and the police if a child is known to have left the school site, or they cannot be found (see appendix A)
- Once a child has been found, the incident is reviewed with the child and parent/carers to reduce future risk.
- The systems above cover educational visits and transport where relevant.

The decision on whether or not to follow a child out of school or initiate a search out of school is made in consultation with SLT and is based on a dynamic risk assessment. This will depend on the child's needs and age and state of regulation.

In some circumstances it may be appropriate to use reasonable physical interventions to prevent a child from putting themselves at risk. School has a Physical Intervention policy in place, which provides more detail. Paperwork for restraints are kept and LA, RKLIT and Governors are informed

Appendix 1 - Absconding Policy

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

Where a pupil, present at formal registration, is found to be absent from school without authorisation the following procedures should be followed:

- Member of staff to inform a member of SLT, pastoral office and main office.
- SLT member organises search of buildings and known places that the pupil may have gone to.
- If the pupil is not found then all available staff to complete a more thorough sweep of the school and check the perimeter of the grounds. SLT to take school mobile phone with them
- School office to phone the police immediately when the area has been fully checked if the child is not found.
- School office to contact parents/carers and inform them of the situation.
- Consideration will be given to whether the search should be extended beyond the school perimeter. This decision will be based on staff's 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 to take mobile phone to contact school.
- Once a pupil has been found then the lead SLT member 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.
- Member of SLT to brief police and parents.

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

- Staff must follow the student to the perimeter fence or gate and must try to persuade the student to stay in the school.

- If a student is deemed to be a high risk to himself or other people then staff should adhere to the Care and Control Policy with reference to holding the student, if appropriate.
- At all times staff must be aware that active pursuit may encourage the student to leave the immediate vicinity of the school and may also cause the pupil to panic, possibly putting him or herself at risk by running onto a busy road, for example.
- If the student has left the immediate vicinity of the school the school office and SLT members must be contacted immediately and the lead person will direct the course of action. If the whereabouts of the child are not known, the school office must inform the police immediately.
- Staff will follow the student and engage in a local search, following the student at a safe distance if in view. Staff leaving the site will need a mobile phone with them.
- The SLT lead may direct additional staff to join the search in a vehicle, taking a mobile phone to contact school.
- The school office will contact the student's parents/carers.
- If the searching staff lose sight of the student they must contact the school office giving details of their location and the clothes which the student is wearing. The police will be called at this stage.

When contacting the police, the following information will need to be ready.

- Personal details, family contact details, time/date/location of last sighting and a clothing description
- Any previous history of absconding, any known associates and push/pull factors
- Any child protection concerns/social care involvement/identifiable risks
- Details of search carried out so far and which family members have been notified
- A current photograph if available

If the pupil(s) has left the immediate vicinity of the school grounds and is no longer visible then the SLT will make a decision as to how to take matters further which will take into account the age of the student, the prevailing weather conditions, the nature of the incident which led to the pupil absconding, the pupil's previous history of being involved in episodes of absconding and their outcomes. If the student 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 student is calm, the student must be seen by the SLT 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 written report will be filed on the incident. This will be shared with parents.

Appendix 2 - Example School Procedure if a child is missing / absconds.

Staff member informs SLT / Head that pupil is possibly missing / absconding

Staff check location of pupil / if pupil still on premises by :

- Asking site staff to check CCTV
- Staff check last known location, known hiding points / calm down areas / areas pupil may regularly go to if absconding
- Staff members man any points of easy exit from school grounds / building whilst others sweep building / grounds

