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St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Missing Child Policy

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Learn together and grow in God's love

Aspiration - Compassion - Community - Faith - Respect – Responsibility

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Section 1: Rationale

At St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, the safety and wellbeing of every child is our highest priority. We have a duty of care to know where every child is at all times while they are in our care, including at the start and end of the school day and when they are off site on educational visits.

Safeguarding children and keeping them safe is **everyone's responsibility**. Every member of our school community – all staff, volunteers, governors, parents and carers – has a part to play in making sure that children are safe and supervised, and in acting quickly if a child cannot be found.

This policy sets out the measures we take to prevent a child from going missing, and the clear, calm and immediate action that all staff will take if a child is missing or unaccounted for – whether a child has run out of school, cannot be found on the school site, has not been collected safely, or has become separated from their group on a trip.

This policy should be read alongside our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. A child going missing, or repeatedly attempting to leave the school site, can be an indicator of a safeguarding concern and will always be treated as such.

Section 2: Aims

Through this policy we aim to:

- Keep children safe by making sure they are supervised at all times and cannot leave the school site without an authorised adult
- Make sure every member of staff knows exactly what to do if a child is missing, so that no time is lost
- Make sure the search for a missing child is quick, organised and thorough
- Make sure parents/carers and, where necessary, the police are informed without delay
- Support the child when they are found, and understand why they went missing
- Learn from every incident so that our procedures continue to improve

Section 3: Definitions

In this policy, a **missing child** is any child who is in the care of the school and whose whereabouts are unknown. This includes a child who:

- Has left, or is believed to have left, the school site without permission (sometimes known as absconding or running off)
- Cannot be found on the school site during the school day
- Is unaccounted for at the start or end of the school day, after being dropped off or before being collected
- Has become separated from their group, or cannot be found, during an educational visit or off-site activity

Children who are not collected at the end of the day are covered by our procedures for non-collection of children, which are set out in Appendix 4 of our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. Children who are absent from school without explanation are covered by our Attendance Policy.

Section 4: Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 The headteacher

The headteacher (Miss Suzanne Long) is responsible for making sure this policy is followed, that staff are trained in it, and that the school site is kept secure. In the event of a missing child, the headteacher (or the most senior member of staff available) will take overall charge of the incident, including the decision to contact the police.

4.2 The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSLs

Our DSL is Ms Judith Harvey. Our deputy DSLs are Miss Suzanne Long (Headteacher), Miss Katherine Maciejewski and Miss Laurina Cafun. The DSL, or a deputy DSL in her absence, will be informed of every missing child incident. The DSL will consider any safeguarding concerns connected with the incident, decide whether a referral to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is needed, and make sure the incident is recorded on CPOMS.

4.3 The school office

The school office controls the electronic main gate, back gate and car park exit gate. Office staff will:

- Only open a gate once they are satisfied, using the camera, that it is safe to do so and that no child is leaving unaccompanied
- Check that children are with an authorised adult before letting them out of the main gate during the school day
- Make sure all visitors sign in and out
- In the event of a missing child, keep all gates closed and act as the central point of contact for the search

4.4 All staff

All staff, including teachers, support staff, lunchtime supervisors and volunteers, will:

- Know where the children in their care are at all times, and carry out headcounts at key transition points
- Never leave a class or group of children unsupervised
- Never allow a child to leave the classroom or playground without the knowledge of an adult
- Make sure gates close fully behind them and never hold a gate open for, or allow, anyone to “follow them through” (tailgating)
- Report immediately to the office any concern about the security of the site, such as a gate that is not closing properly or a gap in the fencing
- Raise the alarm immediately if they cannot account for a child

4.5 Parents and carers

We ask parents and carers to:

- Make sure the school always has up-to-date contact details and emergency contacts for their child
- Tell the school in advance about any change to who will be collecting their child
- Hand their child directly to a member of staff, or see them safely through the gate, at the start of the day
- Keep the gates closed behind them and never let a child through a gate who is not in their care
- Tell the school if their child has ever run away, or if they are worried that their child might try to leave school

Section 5: Keeping Our Site Secure

Our site has been set up to reduce the risk of a child leaving without an adult. We regularly review these arrangements.

5.1 The main gate

The main gate is the main entrance to the school. It is used by children, parents and carers, visitors, the postman and deliveries, and by staff, parents and carers leaving during the day (for example, staff going out at lunchtime, part-time staff, or parents dropping off or collecting children during the day).

- The gate is open for arrival between 8.40am and 8.50am, when it is supervised by 2 members of the senior leadership team
- At all other times, the gate is electronic and is controlled by the school office. Staff can enter using a fob, and the office opens the gate for others using a button, after checking who is at the

gate on the camera

- Children arriving after the gate has closed are let in by the office and signed in as late
- Office staff will check on the camera that no child is leaving unaccompanied whenever the gate is opened to let someone out
- Anyone leaving by the main gate should check that no child is following them out and make sure the gate has closed fully behind them

5.2 The back gate and staff and visitor car park

- The back gate leads to the staff and visitor car park. It is mainly used by staff, and by some visitors who park in the car park
- The gate can be opened with a fob or code, or by the office using the camera and a button
- Codes must not be shared with children or with anyone who is not authorised to have them, and will be changed regularly and whenever there is a concern
- Children must not use the back gate or be in the car park unless they are with a member of staff

5.3 The car park exit gate

- The car park has a separate exit gate for cars, which can be opened by a car, by a button or by the office
- Drivers leaving the car park should check that no child is in the car park and wait until the gate has closed behind them
- Staff will be especially vigilant at busy times, such as the end of the school day, when cars are leaving

5.4 Fences and boundaries

- The school is fenced all the way around, with bushes and shrubbery along the fence line
- Because shrubbery can hide gaps in the fencing and can also be used by children to hide, the site manager will carry out regular checks of the whole boundary for gaps, damage or areas where a child could climb or squeeze through, and report and repair any problems promptly
- Staff supervising the playground will be aware of the areas along the fence line and shrubbery, and will make sure children are not playing out of sight

5.5 Supervision and registers

- Registers are taken promptly at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions, and any child who is not present is followed up in line with our Attendance Policy
- Headcounts are carried out when children move around the school or between activities, and after break and lunchtime
- Playgrounds are supervised at all times by an appropriate number of staff
- Children who need to leave the classroom (for example, to go to the toilet or on an errand) will only do so with the teacher's permission, and staff will be aware of how long they have been gone
- Children who leave school during the day (for example, for an appointment) must be collected from the office by an authorised adult and signed out

5.6 Children who are at risk of running

Some children may be more likely to try to leave the classroom or the school site – for example, because of their special educational needs, or when they are feeling distressed or dysregulated. For these children, we will:

- Put in place an individual risk assessment and support plan, agreed with parents/carers and shared with all staff who work with the child
- Make sure staff know the child's triggers, and the strategies that help them to regulate (including the Zones of Regulation)
- Agree safe spaces in school where the child can go to calm down, with an adult
- Make sure staff supervising the gates at the start and end of the day know who these children

are (see Section 7.3)

- Make sure staff know that, if a child runs, they should follow at a safe distance and keep the child in sight where it is safe to do so, while calling for help, rather than chasing the child, which may make them run further or into danger

Section 6: If a Child is Missing During the School Day

If any member of staff cannot account for a child, they must act **immediately**. It is always better to raise the alarm and find that the child is safe than to wait.

6.1 Immediate action (the first few minutes)

- **Raise the alarm.** The member of staff who notices that a child is missing will immediately alert the school office, the senior leadership team (SLT) and the DSL (or a deputy DSL if the DSL is not available), giving the child's name, class, a description of what they are wearing, and when and where they were last seen
- **Keep all other children safe.** The member of staff will stay with the rest of the class or group, and a register or headcount will be taken to check that no other child is missing
- **Close the site.** The office will keep the main gate, back gate and car park exit gate closed, and will not open any gate without first checking that the missing child is not trying to leave
- **Check the last known location.** A member of staff will immediately check the place where the child was last seen, and the area around it
- **Check the child is not simply elsewhere in school.** The office will check whether the child has been collected, signed out, or is with another member of staff (for example, at an intervention, with the school counsellor or in the medical room)

6.2 Organising the search

The headteacher, or the most senior member of staff available, will take charge. They will:

- Gather available staff and give each one a specific area of the school to search, so that every area is searched quickly and nothing is missed
- Make sure the search covers all classrooms, toilets, cloakrooms, the hall, the Eden room, library, offices, cupboards and store rooms, the playgrounds, the areas of bushes and shrubbery along the fence line, the car park and both gates
- Allocate a member of staff to check the CCTV at the main gate and the back gate, to see whether the child has left the site and, if so, when and in which direction
- Make sure staff searching keep in contact with the office (for example, by phone), and report back as soon as each area has been checked

6.3 If the child has not been found

If the child has not been found on the school site within **10 minutes** of the alarm being raised – or **immediately** if the child has been seen leaving the site, or if there is any reason to think the child is in danger – the headteacher (or senior member of staff in charge) will:

- **Call the police on 999**, giving the child's name, age, a description of the child and their clothing, when and where they were last seen, and any relevant information about the child's needs or vulnerabilities
- **Call the child's parents/carers**, and then further emergency contacts if they cannot be reached. Parents/carers will be asked to let the school know immediately if the child arrives home
- **Check the local vicinity.** Where it is safe to do so and enough staff are available, send pairs of staff (with mobile phones) to check the streets immediately around the school and the child's likely route home, while making sure the other children remain safely supervised
- **Extend the search area** as needed, in line with advice from the police

Staff will follow the instructions of the police once they arrive, and will give them all the information they need, including a recent photograph of the child where possible. A member of staff who knows the child will be available to support the police and the family.

6.4 If a child is seen leaving the site

If a member of staff sees a child leaving the site, they should raise the alarm immediately and, if it is safe to do so, follow the child at a safe distance to keep them in sight, without chasing them. They should keep in contact with the office by phone. The office will call the police on 999 and the child's parents/carers straight away.

Section 7: At the Beginning and End of the School Day

7.1 The beginning of the day

- Two members of SLT supervise the main gate between 8.40am and 8.50am. Children are expected to go straight to their class or line, and must not leave the site once they have come through the gate
- Class teachers will take the register promptly. If a child is marked absent but a parent/carer or member of staff reports that the child was dropped off or was seen on the school site, this will be treated as a missing child and staff will follow Section 6 immediately
- Where a child is absent without a reason having been given, the office will contact parents/carers on the first day of absence, in line with our Attendance Policy

7.2 The end of the day

- Children will only be released to their parent/carer or another adult who has been authorised by the parent/carer. If staff are unsure, the child will be kept in school until the arrangement has been checked
- Class teachers will dismiss children one at a time, making sure that each child is seen going to their authorised adult
- Children who are not collected will be brought back into school and supervised by a member of staff, and our procedures for non-collection of children will be followed
- If a child cannot be found at the end of the day – for example, if a parent/carer arrives to collect a child and the child cannot be found – staff will follow Section 6 immediately. While the search begins, the office will check whether the child may have left with another parent/carer or family member, or gone to an after-school club

7.3 Children at risk of running at the start and end of the day

The start and end of the school day are times of increased risk, because the gates are open and there is direct access to the street. Staff supervising the gates will be aware of the children who have an individual risk assessment for running.

If a member of the senior leadership team notices that one of these children is showing signs that they may try to run – for example, becoming distressed, dysregulated or moving towards the gate without their adult – they will close one of the open gates. This narrows the exit to the street and reduces the risk of the child leaving the site. The gate will remain closed until the child is settled and safely supervised, or has been handed to their parent/carer.

Staff will also follow the child's individual support plan, and the procedures in Section 6 if the child leaves the site.

Section 8: Educational Visits and Off-Site Activities

8.1 Before the visit

- Every visit will have a risk assessment, approved by the headteacher, which includes the risk of a child becoming separated or lost and the arrangements for preventing this
- Staffing ratios will be appropriate to the age and needs of the children and the nature of the visit. Children at risk of running will have an individual plan for the visit
- Each adult will be given a named group of children, and a list of those children
- The visit leader will carry a list of all children and adults, emergency contact details for every child, relevant medical information and a fully charged mobile phone, and will leave a copy of

these details with the school office

- Where possible, children will wear school uniform or something that makes them easy to identify, such as a school t-shirt, cap or high-visibility vest
- Children will be told, in an age-appropriate way, what to do if they get lost: to stay where they are, and to ask a member of staff at the venue or a police officer for help

8.2 During the visit

- Headcounts will be carried out regularly – in particular when leaving school, when getting on and off transport, when arriving at and leaving each area of the venue, before and after lunch, and before leaving the venue
- Children will stay with their named adult at all times
- Staff will agree a clear meeting point with the children at the start of the visit

8.3 If a child goes missing on a visit

- The adult responsible will immediately inform the visit leader
- The visit leader will make sure that all other children are gathered together, counted and kept safe with the remaining staff
- Venue staff or security will be informed straight away, and asked to help with the search and to watch the exits
- Available staff will search the area where the child was last seen, and the agreed meeting point
- The visit leader will contact the school, and the headteacher (or senior member of staff) will contact the child's parents/carers
- If the child has not been found within **10 minutes** – or **immediately** in a large, busy public place, near roads or water, or where there is any reason to think the child is in danger – the visit leader will **call the police on 999**
- The visit will not continue until the child has been found, and staff will follow the instructions of the police and the headteacher

Section 9: When the Child is Found

- Stop the search and tell everyone involved – including the office, the police (if they have been called) and the parents/carers – that the child has been found
- Make sure the child is safe, reassure them and check whether they need any first aid or medical attention
- Talk to the child calmly, when they are ready, to understand why they left or went missing and where they went. The child should not be made to feel that they are in trouble
- Speak to the parents/carers about what happened
- The DSL (or a deputy DSL) will consider whether there are any safeguarding concerns connected with the incident – for example, what the child says about why they left, or whether the child has gone missing before – and will decide whether a referral to MASH (020 8921 3172) is needed

Section 10: Recording and Learning from Incidents

- Every missing child incident will be recorded on CPOMS by the member of staff in charge, as soon as possible, using the headings in Appendix 2 of this policy
- The headteacher will review every incident with the staff involved, to identify what happened, how the child was able to go missing and what can be done to prevent it happening again
- Where needed, the headteacher will update risk assessments, individual plans, site security or this policy
- The headteacher will report missing child incidents to the governing board
- Where a child has gone missing more than once, the DSL will consider this as part of their safeguarding concerns about the child

Section 11: Training

All staff, including new staff, supply staff and volunteers, will be made aware of this policy as part of their induction. The procedures in Appendix 1 will be displayed in the school office and staff room, and will be taken on every educational visit. We will practise our missing child procedures from time to time, so that all staff are confident in what to do.

Section 12: Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the headteacher and approved by the governing board. It will also be reviewed after any serious incident.

This policy links to the following policies and procedures:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy (including non-collection of children)
- Attendance Policy
- Educational Visits Policy
- Relationships and Positive Behaviour Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Restrictive Interventions and Safer Handling Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy

Appendix 1: Missing Child – Quick Reference for Staff

Act immediately. It is always better to raise the alarm and find that the child is safe than to wait.

Step	What to do
1. Raise the alarm	Tell the office, SLT and DSL (or a deputy DSL) straight away: child's name, class, clothing, when and where last seen.
2. Keep other children safe	Stay with your class or group. Take a register or headcount.
3. Close the site	Office keeps the main gate, back gate and car park exit gate closed.
4. Check	Check where the child was last seen. Office checks whether the child has been signed out or is elsewhere in school.
5. Search	Senior member of staff gives each adult an area: classrooms, toilets, cloakrooms, hall, Eden room, library, offices, cupboards, playgrounds, bushes and shrubbery by the fence, car park, gates. One person checks the CCTV.
6. Not found in 10 minutes, or seen leaving?	Call the police on 999. Call parents/carers, then emergency contacts. Check the local streets in pairs if safe. Extend the search.
7. Child found	Stop the search and tell everyone. Care for the child. Inform parents/carers. DSL (or a deputy DSL) considers safeguarding. Record on CPOMS.

On an educational visit:

Gather and count the other children. Tell the visit leader and venue staff. Search the area and the meeting point. Phone the school. If the child is not found within 10 minutes – or immediately in a busy public place, near roads or water – **call the police on 999.**

Useful numbers:

Contact	Name / number
Designated safeguarding lead (DSL)	Ms Judith Harvey
Deputy DSLs	Miss Suzanne Long (Headteacher) Miss Katherine Maciejewski Miss Laurina Cafun
Police (emergency)	999
School office	020 8858 4182
Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)	020 8921 3172
MASH consultation line	020 8921 2267

Appendix 2: Missing Child Incident Record

To be completed by the member of staff in charge as soon as possible after the incident, and uploaded to CPOMS.

Detail	Record
Child's name and class	
Date of incident	
Where the child was last seen, and by whom (time)	
Time the alarm was raised, and by whom	
Areas searched and by whom	
CCTV checked? By whom? What did it show?	
Time parents/carers contacted, and by whom	
Time police contacted (if applicable), and incident number	
Time and place the child was found, and by whom	
The child's account of what happened (in their own words)	
Condition of the child, and any first aid given	
Safeguarding considerations and action taken by the DSL (including any MASH referral)	
Lessons learned and actions agreed (e.g. changes to site security, risk assessments or individual plans)	
Completed by (name, role, signature, date)	