



# Schools and Safer Schools Officers reporting Protocol: Reporting children and young people as missing or absconded during the school day.

## 1. Police Missing Person Criteria

A child or young person will be defined as missing if their whereabouts are unknown and there are reasons to believe one or more of the following applies:

- a) There are suspicious circumstances, i.e. the young person may have been the victim of a serious crime
- b) The behaviour is out of character and there is no apparent explanation for their absence
- c) There is significant concern that the young person may have suffered harm
- d) The young person is thought to be at risk of significant harm during the absence
- e) The young person is dangerous and there is a significant risk they will harm another person whilst absent.

## 2. Prior to contacting the Police

When a young person appears to have gone missing **from school**, the school should as far as practicable take all reasonable and practical steps in order to identify whether the child is a missing person by:

- a) determining the nature and reasons for absence (consider recent events or precipitating factors)
- b) ascertaining the likely intentions of the young person
- c) establishing the whereabouts and well-being of the young person

Where there is no apparent risk and the Police Missing Person Criteria (Section 1) outlined above is not met, reasonable and practical steps should be taken **before** contacting the police and include but are not limited to:

- a) Contact parent(s)/guardian(s) to update them as to the young person being absent from school and to enquire about possible triggers for the absence.
- b) Searching the schools premises, grounds and immediate locality of the school.
- c) Telephoning and sending an SMS (text) message to the young person's mobile phone and checking their Facebook page via a school Facebook account only, if this is accessible
- d) Making enquiries with the young person's friends
- e) Contact professionals who support the young person or their family (e.g. social workers, families' first workers) for further information.

### **3. Informing the police**

The Schools and Safer schools/Police Officer reporting protocol outlines the referral pathways for reporting missing episodes to the police.

The police should also be informed if the child/young person hits the criteria outlined above in **Section 1. Police Missing Person Criteria.**

### **4. Initial Reporting to Police**

Police will require the following information:

- a) Personal details, family and friends contact details, time, date and location of last sighting, a clothing description (if not in school uniform).
- b) Any previous history of missing episodes, known associates, push/pull factors.
- c) Any known child protection concerns/social care involvement/identifiable risks.
- d) Details of all enquiries to locate the young person conducted so far/individuals (parent/carer) notified.
- e) A current photograph of the missing person wherever possible.

### **5. Professional responsibilities to safeguarding children and young people who go missing during the school day**

Following any report of a missing person to police, the school should inform and update parent(s)/guardian(s) and other appropriate agencies. There is a need for all involved parties to co-operate fully and schools should work with all partners to achieve this.

Where appropriate the school will be expected to assist in finding the young person and to work co-operatively with police during any enquiry. The school should make a record of all actions taken throughout the period a young person is recorded as missing in relation to their welfare, and fully update police on those actions at the appropriate time.

The Police will investigate all cases falling within the definition of missing in accordance with the Police Missing Persons Policy and National Guidance.

On the child or young person's return the "Pupil/s Identified as Missing During School Day Incident Report Log (MA 1)" should be completed in order to ascertain the circumstances of why the pupil went missing and where they had been and what they had been involved with in the period of absence. Schools should ensure that there is an appropriate package of support and intervention in place to address any identified needs of the pupil concerned and care and control measures in place to prevent any further missing episodes.

Identified threats and risks should be discussed with the young person's parents/carers/guardian and consideration should be given to a multi-agency strategy meeting regarding the young person if appropriate.

## 6. Risk Assessments

Schools should consider preparing risk assessments for those young persons that are frequently absent from school, or those young persons that are deemed at risk should they absent themselves.

Risk assessments should consider the following elements:

1. How likely is it that the young person will go missing:
  - a) Has the young person gone absent before and if so what is the pattern of their previous absent behaviour? Consider where and when young persons have been found and their accounts regarding their absence/ known associates.
  - b) What factors or potential incidents may act as a trigger incident and lead to the young person going absent?
  - c) Are there any other circumstances, behaviour or indicators that suggest that the young person may go absent in the future?
  - d) What actions can the school take with partners, where appropriate to develop an intervention plan to reduce the likelihood of future missing episodes
  - e) Agreement regarding the child being returned to school / and how they will be responded to, if found during school hours
  - f) Does a child sexual exploitation partner checklist need to be completed? Is there a need for an early help plan and does there need to be a referral to children's social work services?
  - g) How the school will work the with independent return interview service to facilitate, where appropriate the completion of return interviews
  - h) How the school will share information /intelligence with the police and other relevant partners