



William Henry Smith Specialist College

Child Absenting and Missing Policy*

Policy Details

Status:	In-house
Frequency of review:	3 yearly
Lead member of staff:	Leanne Clarke
Last reviewed:	Spring 2026
Next Review Date:	Spring 2029
Policy Number:	CC3

1.0 Introduction

The College follows statutory guidance contained within Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children (2024). Staff use the College's absenting and missing protocol for guidance.

Whilst Children attending the William Henry Smith Specialist College come from a number of different local authorities we follow the joint protocol for Children Missing from Home or Care (this covers 5 of our local authorities and the protocol has been developed and agreed in conjunction with West Yorkshire Police).

It is the policy that all children who are absent without authority from the College are followed/supported as far as is possible to determine their whereabouts and safety. It is vital that children are located and helped and supported back to College as soon as possible. Children's health, safety and welfare are of paramount importance.

The College is very aware of the importance of safeguarding children and any potential child protection concerns that may arise when students leave the site without the support and supervision of staff. The location of the College itself presents risks; with a number of environmental risks, such as proximity to railway lines, main roads and the quarry. The potential in some cases for young people to run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them either criminally or sexually is of high concern. Guidance has been produced to help local agencies identify children and young people who are at risk of exploitation and the College takes action to safeguard and promote their welfare.

2.0 Definitions

2.1 Absenting – The policy refers to absenting. The William Henry Smith Specialist College considers absenting to be any instance where a child is absent from any area of the College or scheduled activity that they are meant to be in, and staff have visual contact.

2.2 Missing – The policy refers to missing. The William Henry Smith Specialist College considers missing to be any instance where a child's location is unknown (even if they remain on College property) and staff do not have visual contact.

2.3 Senior on call – The William Henry Smith Specialist College identifies senior on call as the person responsible for operations on any given day (e.g. house leads, education leads).

2.4 College – Refers to William Henry Smith Specialist College, including residential care

2.5 SLT on call – The Senior Leader on call is the senior leader that is on call at a particular time of day.

• Guidance for staff when a child absents or goes missing from College

- If a child leaves a setting (College site) staff should follow our absenting/missing protocol (see appendix 1).
- When a child leaves the College site without authority (absents) this must be reported immediately to the Senior on call (SOC) (the Rota is updated weekly and is found in the College diary). Staff must assess the child's emotional well-being/state of mind and report this and any other relevant information to the SOC.

2.3 When a child absents, the child must be followed closely and from a safe distance and priority is on supporting them to return safely to College, their classroom / planned activity as quickly as possible. Staff must maintain visual contact at all times.

2.4 The senior on call and those involved in supporting or searching for a child in the case of them being absent or missing will carry out a dynamic risk assessment considering:

- The student's One Plan including risk to self, others and vulnerabilities
- The student's state of mind
- Previous history of absenting
- Medical conditions and potential impact on health
- Age (chronological and developmental)
- SEMH / SEND
- Criminal activity
- CSE/Prevent/CP concerns
- Weather conditions
- Time of the day
- Clothing/footwear

- 2.5 Staff following a child must maintain contact with the senior on call to update on progress/risk. If visual contact is lost with the child the senior on call must be notified immediately, and the process for a child that is missing will be utilised including processes for contacting the police being followed (see appendix 1). The senior on call must notify the Senior Leader on call in this instance.
- 2.6 If a child attempts to leave the College site, staff should encourage the child to remain on the College site and should get ahead of the child to prevent them leaving if at all possible. Consideration must be given as to whether physical guidance or restrictive physical intervention is required to support the child's safety.
- 2.7 Staff should try and establish whether a child has in his possession any offending/dangerous or health risk item/substance, such as weapons, cigarettes, lighters, money, drugs etc. and secure the items and inform SOC/SLT on call as this will help the risk assessment process.
- 2.8 When a child goes missing, the SOC will contact the SLT on call and allocate someone (approved person) to view CCTV as quickly as possible to support the safe return of a child (only to support the safe return i.e. to see which direction a child may have left site).
- 2.9 Where a child has been missing for 5 minutes, the SOC will check the One Plan and determine the time frame for initiating contact with the police (this should be clearly identified on the One Plan).
- 2.10 If any child has been missing for an hour, College's procedures will include contacting the police and requesting that the British transport police also offer support; contacting the child's parents/carers; and the child's placing authority the child is a child looked after. Parental contact will be made immediately after the police are notified.
- 2.11 The West Yorkshire Police indicate that 'If the missing person is in immediate danger, is a young child or vulnerable to harm, call 999'. For the majority of children supported by The William Henry Smith Specialist College, contacting the police via 999 will be the most appropriate response as all of our children present with risks and vulnerabilities. The Senior on call will assess the age, risk and vulnerability of the child considering the points in 2.4 above alongside the location of the College / area in which they have gone missing and the environmental considerations. They will refer to the PBS plan for specific information relating to the child. They will decide whether contacting 101 is more appropriate. If upon making contact via 101, the Senior on Call is on hold or awaiting a response for more than 15 minutes, they must contact the police via 999 and document the timelines. Children's individual risks and vulnerabilities should be shared with the police upon initial contact. The police response must be logged within the missing form on SID.
- 2.12 All children who have previously absented or gone missing will have a Missing Information Form which will contain contact details of the person / people with parental/carer responsibility, details of the child's appearance, including a recent picture and information about places they have previously visited when missing/absent (see appendix 2). This is available on BROMCOM.
- 2.13 Information recording will start immediately (completed by the senior on call or an appropriate delegated person) and an on-going record of communication will be maintained via the Absenting / Missing form (currently on SID). All details around the circumstances of the absence will be recorded including the precipitating factors.
- 2.14 Additional information will be added to the absenting / missing form (SID) from staff members who go on to be involved in the incident. It is important that all details are recorded i.e. search areas/hotspots/time of searches etc.
- 2.15 If a child absents but is supported back to a safe place i.e. College and has always been in sight the absenting / missing form will still require completion.

- 2.16 The police should be contacted upon the safe return of the missing child. Parents or carers (and Social Workers and Local Authority where appropriate) must also be informed of their return.
- 2.17 Upon returning to College, it is important to ascertain the reason for the child absenting, their actions and whereabouts whilst absent and a plan of action formed for welcoming the child back into College life (this should include any actions necessary in response to the circumstances of the child absenting).
- 2.18 On return the child will be seen by a member of staff to discuss their welfare and talk about the reasons for the absence as soon as practical (normally within one hour) but always within 24 hours.
- 2.19 A return to College safe and well check (on SID) must be filled in (completed on the end of the absenting/ missing form). This would usually be done with a member of staff who has a close relationship with the child so that they feel settled and relaxed enough to discuss what happened.
- 2.20 Upon the child being returned to the College site, and the search being completed an initial debrief with all involved staff will be completed with a member of the senior leadership team.
- 2.21 The child's key worker will update the One Plan with support from the pastoral team where required.
- 2.22 Any plans and actions must be communicated to all boy contact staff by the key worker and implemented by all boy contact staff, monitored by the Learning Mentor Teams (LMT's) and overseen as to their effectiveness by Foundation Development Lead. Any new information should be included in the child's missing information document and One Plan.
- 2.23 SLT will receive regular updates around absenting/missing by the pastoral team and monitor the statistics, and action any interventions required.
- 2.24 A thorough strategic review of the incident will be undertaken by a member of the Senior Leadership Team, usually the person who oversees the child's care in liaison with other members of SLT. This will include what actions are now required.
- 2.25 Initial findings will be communicated with key staff within 72 hours
- 2.26 Consideration will be given to the completion of a high-risk review for all incidents of missing. Any action plan and findings will be shared across the College / Foundation as appropriate.

3.0 Emergency Use of Drones on College Site

- 3.1 The William Henry Smith Foundation recognises that drones (unmanned aerial vehicles) are capable of recording still images and video footage. As such, their use is subject to the same principles of privacy, safeguarding, and data protection as the Foundation's CCTV systems.
- 3.2 In exceptional safeguarding situations, such as when a student is reported missing on or near the College site, a drone may be deployed to assist in the immediate search.
 - 3.3.1 The use of drones on or above Foundation premises must be authorised in advance by a senior leader
 - 3.3.2 Drones will only be used in this context for the sole purpose of assisting in locating a missing pupil.
- 3.5 Footage captured will not be used for any other purpose unless required by the police for safeguarding or investigatory reasons.

- 3.6 Every effort will be made to limit recording to the search area and any footage inadvertently capturing individuals not involved in the incident will be treated with the same level of confidentiality and protection as CCTV recordings.
- 3.7 Recorded footage will be handled in line with the Foundations Data Protection and CCTV policies. It will be retained only as long as necessary for safeguarding or investigatory purposes and then securely deleted.
- 3.8 Drones will only be operated by a trained and authorised person, in accordance with Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) requirements.
- 3.9 Drone use must not create additional risks to students, staff, or visitors during an emergency situation.

4.0 Use of What3words

- 4.1 The College may use the what3words location referencing system to support safeguarding, health and safety, and emergency response procedures.
- 4.2 what3words may be used where a precise location is required and a full postal address is unavailable, unclear, or insufficient, for example during off-site activities, trips, or incidents on College grounds.
- 4.3 Staff may be asked to share a what3words reference to help emergency services or authorised personnel identify an exact location quickly and accurately.
- 4.4 Any use of what3words will be proportionate, limited to operational necessity, and handled in accordance with the College's data protection and safeguarding policies.



1 – Pre-occupied, Second, Fuzzy – Outside School Gate	6 – Zebra, Pram, Bounty – Gated Area before Track (traffic lights)
2 – Listed, Jumped, Broken – Top of Steps into Woods	7 – Dart, Stray, Worker – Next to Weir
3 – Stars, Tolls, Rises – Side of Quarry (half way down)	8 – Drape, Crunch, Tracks – Area of Fence previously flat
4 – Union, Knee, Work – Top of Slope leading to Tracks	9 – Swan, Animal, Moment – Fence next to track where river meets
5 – Tribes, Error, Grape – Entrance to Path to Gate	10 – Card, Liver, Insist – Top of Woods (path from track)

5.0 Guidance for staff when a child fails to attend College when expected.

- 5.1 When a child fails to return to College following an evening, weekend or holiday, their parents/carers (and social workers, where appropriate) will be contacted as soon as is possible. Staff will ascertain whether the child's whereabouts is known and if they are safe. If the child is unaccounted for staff will contact a member of the College's CP/Safeguarding team for advice and response. Consideration as to contacting Children and Young People's Social Care Services will be given as they may be able to assist the parents/carers in locating the child and checking on their safety and welfare. Staff should advise parents/carers to contact the local police if their child is missing. Where the absence remains unauthorised or there are patterns of absence the child's placing authority will be informed.
- 5.2 Staff at College will maintain daily contact and where possible conduct home visits to help return the child to College (this include family support visits).
- 5.3 When the child returns home, arrangements will be made for them to return to College at the earliest opportunity. Staff will seek to understand the child's reasons for not returning and the child's state of mind for reintegrating into College / sixth form life.
- 5.4 A decision should be made as soon as possible about any actions arising from the child's absence such as holding a team around the child meeting or requesting an early review of the EHCP. This should be discussed with the child and their parents/carers/social worker/LA.
- 5.5 When a child returns to College after a period of absence that raises concern, the local authority will be notified as appropriate.

- 5.6 Any absences must be recorded via Bromcom and the attendance policy followed.
- 5.7 Staff are expected to keep a log of all telephone calls (made and received) whilst the child is absent from College and any home visits made or attempted.

APPENDIX 1

Absenting Protocol

William Henry Smith School

01 Child absents from activity and/or classroom

- Staff member to note the time

02 Staff member to follow child safely

- Staff to maintain verbal support
- Staff to encourage child to return to their activity/classroom.
- Staff to remain within close proximity, appropriate to that individual child.

If the child does not respond to de-escalation strategies or techniques, staff must immediately contact the senior on call (602/7602).

03 Staff to contact the senior on call (602)

- The senior on call should be contacted on 602/7602 immediately and advised of the location.

Senior on call to identify additional staff to support

- The senior on call should identify staff to support and direct them to the location.

The senior on call should determine whether to contact the police and British Transport Police if there is an increased risk of danger or a threat to life.

04 If a child approaches the site boundary line and there is a concern that the child may leave the site -

- Staff should try to guide the child away from the boundary line to a safe place.
- Staff should explain that they will need to intervene if the child continues to move towards the boundary line.
- RPI (Restrictive Physical Intervention) must be considered and actioned if any attempt is made by the child to leave the site.

Missing Protocol

William Henry Smith School

01 At any time a child is not able to be located during the school day:

- The senior on call must be notified immediately.

02 Within 5 minutes:

- Senior on call (SOC) should contact the SLT on call.
- The senior on call should contact the police.
- Information relating to risk/vulnerabilities must be shared and a request for the police to inform the British Transport Police.
- Parents/carers must be notified by the senior on call following the call to the police.

03 Continue searching:

- Staff should maintain telephone contact with the senior on call (SOC).

Senior on call (SOC) to identify staff to support the search

- The senior on call should identify and direct staff to support the search for the missing child.

04 Missing form to be created on SID by the senior on site (SOS). All information and contact must be logged.

04 CCTV to be reviewed:

- Senior on call (SOC) to instruct a senior staff member to review the CCTV to identify where the child has left the school or college site.

05 Following the child being found:

- Police to be informed & parents/carers to be informed
- Pre-high risk review meeting held to debrief between SLT, senior on call (SOC) and those involved in the missing incident.
- Conduct a welfare check upon the child and staff when returning back to school site.

06 Next day actions:

- 8:00am - SLT attends morning handover
- 8:30am - SLT conducts a high-risk review meeting.

APPENDIX 2

Missing Information form:

Basic Information:	
Child's name:	
DOB:	
Age:	
Ethnicity:	
Gender:	
Residential / Day student:	
Person with parental responsibility:	
Parent / Carer contact:	
Home Address:	
Local Authority contact details:	
Professionals working with the child / family:	
General description of child's appearance:	
Height	
Weight	
Build	
Hair colour	
Eye colour	
Distinguishing feature:	

Child's picture here

Map of areas previously
absented from / to
Routes taken highlighted

Helpful and relevant information:	
Previous incidents of missing (occasions and dates):	
Places attended / found when missing:	
Medical needs:	
Known risks / vulnerabilities (including diagnosis)	

Helpful questions to consider when informing the police / parents:

What was the child wearing when they were last seen?

Where and when was the child / young person last seen?

What happened before the child went missing?

Does the young person have a mobile phone on them (if so telephone number)?

Does the young person have access to social media accounts (if so can we get details)?

Does the young person have any money on them / access to money?

Does the young person have a bus pass?

Any warning markers (CCE, Weapons, CSE, DOLs, drugs, alcohol, suicidal ideation)?

Where have we already searched for the child?

Who have we already notified?