

THE MOUNT SCHOOL

MISSING CHILD POLICY

2026–2027

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Policy writer	Euan Burton-Smith
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This policy retains The Mount's existing prevention, search, off-site and unauthorised-collection procedures while strengthening immediate risk assessment, safeguarding escalation, children-missing-education duties and post-incident learning.

1. Purpose and safeguarding principle

The safety of pupils at The Mount School is paramount and is given the highest priority at all times, both on and off the School premises. The School endeavours to ensure that no child goes missing and maintains measures to minimise the likelihood of this happening and to respond effectively if it does.

A missing child incident is a safeguarding incident. The response must be proportionate to the child's age, vulnerability, SEND, medical needs, known safeguarding risks, circumstances of disappearance and immediate environment. Staff must not allow a fixed search timetable to delay emergency action where risk is high.

2. Scope and important distinctions

This policy applies to pupils in the School and EYFS/Nursery, during the School day, before/after-school provision, clubs, educational visits and other School-supervised activities.

2.1 Missing from School or School supervision

A child is 'missing' for the purposes of this operational policy when their whereabouts are unexpectedly unknown and they should be under the School's supervision, including where they leave or appear to have left the premises or an educational visit without authorisation.

2.2 Children missing education (CME)

Children missing education is a separate statutory concept: children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school. A pupil absent from The Mount remains on roll and is not automatically CME. However, unexplained absence or evidence that a family has disappeared can develop into a CME concern and requires prompt School/local-authority enquiries.

The School will follow both this Missing Child Policy and, where relevant, its Attendance Policy and statutory CME procedures.

3. Statutory and guidance framework

- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026;
- Children Missing Education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools, updated September 2025;
- Working Together to Improve School Attendance, July 2026;
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024;
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and DfE Independent School Standards guidance, April 2026;
- EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers applying from 1 September 2026;
- The Mount Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy, Attendance Policy, Educational Visits/School Journeys Policy, Collection/Non-Collection procedures and Health & Safety/Risk Assessment policies.

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that repeated or prolonged absence from education and children missing education can be vital warning signs of abuse, neglect, sexual/criminal exploitation, county lines and other safeguarding risks. Early intervention is essential.

4. Prevention

- formal morning and afternoon registration procedures;
- prompt follow-up of unexpected and unexplained absence;
- appropriate supervision throughout the day, with staff aware of the location of children in their care;
- secure and routinely checked boundaries, gates and access arrangements;
- visitor registration, identification and badges;
- clear collection and non-collection procedures;
- staff challenge of unknown or unauthorised persons on site;
- regular roll calls/head counts where appropriate;

- risk assessment and supervision arrangements for educational visits;
- appropriate staffing ratios for the venue, activity and individual pupils;
- individual risk assessments/safety plans where a child has a known risk of absconding, exploitation, impulsive behaviour or leaving supervision;
- handover procedures when responsibility for a child passes between staff, clubs, transport or parents/carers; and
- up-to-date emergency contacts and collection permissions.

For EYFS children, supervision arrangements will meet the current EYFS statutory framework and staff deployment will ensure children are usually within sight and hearing, subject to the framework's specific supervision requirements.

5. Unexplained non-arrival at School

Following registration, every unexpected and unexplained absence will be identified and enquiries begun promptly that morning in accordance with the Attendance Policy.

- check whether a message, appointment, authorised absence or known alternative activity explains the absence;
- contact the parent/carer and, where necessary, additional emergency contacts;
- consider siblings and known safeguarding, SEND, health or family circumstances;
- alert the DSL immediately where the absence is unusual, unexplained or creates safeguarding concern;
- contact children's social care and/or police without delay where there is reason to believe the child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm; and
- record enquiries and the eventual reason/outcome.

Where the child is believed to have set off for School but has not arrived, the matter is treated as potentially high risk. The School will immediately involve the DSL and consider police involvement rather than waiting for routine absence contact attempts to run their course.

6. Child missing on the School site

If a child is unexpectedly missing while they should be on the School site or under School supervision, the member of staff discovering this must immediately alert the Headteacher/DSL or senior leader and the School Office. Staff should establish when and where the child was last seen and whether there is a legitimate explanation.

6.1 Immediate checks

- attendance register and any amendments;
- signing-out/collection records;
- class timetable and known room changes;
- sports/PE/swimming or other venue arrangements;
- music/peripatetic timetables;
- clubs/activity registers;
- medical room, SEND/intervention spaces and other authorised locations;
- known collection arrangements and office messages; and
- where appropriate, relevant staff and pupils who may know the child's location.

6.2 Immediate risk assessment

At the same time, the senior leader/DSL will make a rapid risk assessment. Factors include age, developmental stage, SEND, communication needs, medical conditions, emotional state, weather, clothing, traffic/water hazards, time missing, previous missing/absconding episodes, known destinations, family circumstances, exploitation risks, self-harm/suicidal risk, risk from another person and whether the child has been seen leaving the site.

If the circumstances indicate immediate danger, 999 will be called immediately. The School will not wait ten minutes simply because the previous policy used a ten-minute trigger.

6.3 Search of premises and grounds

Where an immediate emergency call is not already required, the senior leader will coordinate a rapid, systematic search while maintaining safe supervision of all other pupils.

- toilets and changing areas;
- classrooms, offices, intervention/medical spaces;
- library and hall;
- Cedar Annexe;
- main School building;
- EYFS/Nursery areas as relevant;
- trees, bushes, boundary areas and normally out-of-bounds areas;
- playgrounds, lawn, car park and other external areas; and
- other locations indicated by the child's timetable, interests or known behaviour.

Search areas should be allocated and completion reported back to the coordinating senior leader so that gaps and duplicated searching are avoided.

Evacuation can create additional movement, supervision and security risks. However, as a last resort this procedure may be used.

6.4 Police and parent notification

If the child remains missing after the immediate systematic search, the police and parents/carers will be informed without unnecessary delay. Ten minutes is an absolute maximum for a low-risk initial on-site search under the former Mount procedure, not a mandatory waiting period; higher-risk cases require earlier or immediate police contact.

The Office will make available an up-to-date photograph, physical description, clothing, medical/SEND information, contact details, known risks, likely destinations and other information requested by police. Staff will follow police directions.

7. Child seen leaving or having left the School site

If a child is seen attempting to leave, the nearest staff member should calmly attempt to prevent departure or encourage the child back to a safe area, using lawful and proportionate measures and taking account of the School's reasonable-force/restrictive-intervention procedures.

If the child has left the premises unaccompanied, a senior leader/DSL must be alerted immediately and 999 will normally be called because a primary/EYFS child unexpectedly outside School supervision may face immediate road, stranger or other hazards. Parents/carers will be contacted.

Staff must not chase in a way that increases danger. Where safe, a member of staff may maintain visual contact at a safe distance and communicate the child's direction/location to the School/police. Staff must not abandon supervision of other children or place themselves in serious danger.

Where staff use a personal phone in an emergency to maintain contact, this is an exceptional safeguarding use. No photographs or recordings should be made unless specifically necessary and lawful. The School's Mobile Phone and EYFS Mobile Devices policies otherwise apply.

8. Child removed or believed removed by an unauthorised adult

No child may leave with an adult who is not authorised to collect them unless the School has received and verified appropriate permission from a person with parental responsibility or another lawful authority.

Collection arrangements must take account of parental responsibility and any court order/restriction known to the School. The existence of family disagreement alone does not give the School power to deny collection to a person with parental responsibility; legal restrictions must be understood accurately and safeguarding advice sought where necessary.

Where a court order or safeguarding arrangement restricts contact/collection, essential information will be shared with staff who need to know and recorded securely. Photographs may be used where necessary to help staff identify a person subject to restrictions.

If a child is taken or is believed to have been taken by an unauthorised adult, 999 and the parent/carer with lawful responsibility will be contacted immediately. The DSL will consider children's social care and other safeguarding action. Staff should preserve CCTV, visitor/collection records and witness information.

9. Educational visits and off-site activities

Educational visits will have appropriate risk assessments, staffing, emergency contacts, head-count/roll-call arrangements and clear allocation of responsibility.

If a child is missing on a visit:

- alert the visit leader and other staff immediately and complete an immediate head count/roll call;
- establish the last confirmed sighting, time, clothing and circumstances;
- ensure the remaining children are safely supervised and do not allow the whole group to disperse unsafely to search;
- notify venue management/security immediately where applicable;
- undertake a rapid, coordinated search/retrace where safe;
- contact the School and DSL/senior leader;
- make an immediate risk assessment using the factors in section 6.2;
- call 999 immediately where risk is high and otherwise without unnecessary delay if the child is not found;
- inform parents/carers in coordination with the School/police; and
- follow police/venue emergency instructions.

The former ten-minute trigger is not treated as a required waiting period. The visit leader must escalate earlier where the child's age, location or vulnerability makes delay unsafe.

International/residential visits will additionally follow the specific emergency plan, travel-provider/venue procedures and local emergency-service arrangements.

10. If the child is found

- confirm the child's identity and immediate safety;
- comfort and reassure the child without blame or public criticism;
- assess for injury, illness, distress, intoxication or other immediate need;
- call 999 where emergency medical care is required;
- inform the coordinating senior leader, police and parents that the child has been located;
- do not cancel a police response without informing police;
- preserve evidence where there may have been an offence, exploitation, assault or safeguarding incident;
- ensure the child is spoken with in a safe, age-appropriate way about what happened;
- notify the DSL and consider children's social care/police referral or Family Help; and
- review whether immediate changes to supervision, collection, risk assessment or safety planning are needed.

The previous policy contained a separate instruction 'fatal outcome – call ambulance (999)'. Any unresponsive child or suspected life-threatening emergency is managed immediately under first-aid/emergency procedures: call 999, provide emergency aid within training and follow emergency-service instructions.

11. Children who repeatedly go missing or attempt to abscond

Repeated incidents are not treated simply as behaviour. The DSL and relevant leaders will seek to understand the function and context of the behaviour, including SEND, communication, sensory needs, trauma, bullying, child-on-child abuse, exploitation, family stress, mental health, avoidance of particular lessons/people, transition difficulties or unmet need.

An individual safety/risk plan may specify triggers, preventative strategies, supervision, safe spaces, communication approaches, response if the child leaves, known destinations, family/professional contacts and review dates. The child's voice and parent/carers views will be included where appropriate.

Where restrictive intervention may foreseeably be required, planning will comply with the School's policy and the Independent School Standards relating to use of force/restrictive interventions.

12. Children missing education and families whose whereabouts are unknown

If a pupil on roll is unexpectedly absent and the absence is unexplained, the School will immediately make enquiries to establish whereabouts. Where enquiries indicate that the child will no longer attend The Mount and the parent has not provided reliable written information about another school or suitable education otherwise, the School will refer to the child's home local authority CME service as soon as possible and continue reasonable enquiries.

For Kirklees, the Education Safeguarding Service accepts CME concerns/referrals. Current contact: 01484 221919; education.safeguardingservice@kirklees.gov.uk.

The School will not remove a pupil from the admission register merely because the child cannot be located or has stopped attending. Deletion will occur only where a ground in the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 is satisfied and required joint enquiries/LA notifications have been completed.

Where a child is believed to have moved, the School will seek destination-school and address information and cooperate with Kirklees/the relevant local authority. Safeguarding concerns will be referred separately and immediately; a CME referral is not a substitute for a child-protection referral.

13. EYFS and Nursery

The same immediate safeguarding principles apply to Nursery and Reception children, with a particularly low threshold for emergency escalation because of their age and vulnerability.

For a missing EYFS child, the School/Nursery will immediately establish the child's last known location, secure supervision of the remaining children, search systematically, notify the Headteacher/DSL/EYFS safeguarding lead and contact police/parents according to risk. Ratios and supervision of other children must remain safe throughout.

Where a child under compulsory school age stops attending Nursery unexpectedly and the family cannot be traced, the setting will make proportionate enquiries and may refer to Kirklees Education Safeguarding Service. Kirklees encourages referrals concerning younger children even though the statutory CME definition applies to compulsory-school-age children.

The Headteacher/EYFS leadership will consider whether the incident meets any notification duty to Ofsted or another regulator. Notification decisions will be based on the current EYFS statutory framework and the facts of the incident rather than the previous policy's generic 'if it requires reporting' wording.

14. Safeguarding referrals and external contacts

Situation	Route	Contact
Immediate danger / missing child at high risk	Police / emergency services	999
Non-emergency police matter after immediate safety addressed	Police	101
Concern child is suffering/likely to suffer harm	Kirklees Children's Social Care – Duty & Advice	01484 414960 DutyAdvice.Admin@kirklees.gov.uk
Child/family may be missing education	Kirklees Education Safeguarding Service	01484 221919 education.safeguardingservice@kirklees.gov.uk
Concern about conduct of adult in position of trust connected to incident	Kirklees LADO	01484 221126 LADO.cases@kirklees.gov.uk

15. Following up an incident

When the immediate situation has been resolved, the Headteacher and SLT will review why the incident occurred and whether systems, practice or individual support require change.

- review the incident with the DSL;
- obtain the child's account in an appropriate, non-blaming way;
- review the child's safeguarding, SEND, medical, mental-health and family context;
- review supervision, handovers, staffing and boundary/access controls;
- assess the effectiveness of relevant risk assessments;
- take written accounts from staff and relevant adult witnesses where appropriate;
- collect information from the venue/transport provider where the child was missing off site;
- preserve and review relevant CCTV/access records where lawful;
- consider whether adult conduct raises a low-level concern, allegation or LADO issue;
- consider notifications/referrals to police, children's social care, Kirklees Education Safeguarding Service, Ofsted, RIDDOR or other bodies as legally applicable;
- update the child's individual risk/safety/support plan where needed;
- inform parents/carers of findings and preventative measures, subject to safeguarding restrictions;
- review the incident through the appropriate Health & Safety/safeguarding governance route; and
- issue learning/advice to staff and implement measures to prevent recurrence.

The review must distinguish system learning from blame. Where there may be misconduct by an adult, the School will follow the safeguarding allegations/low-level concerns and HR procedures and will not conduct an internal investigation before LADO advice where the LADO threshold may be met.

16. Recording

Every significant missing-child/absconding incident will be recorded promptly. The record will include the time and place last seen, discovery time, risk assessment, searches/checks, staff involved, calls/referrals, police incident/reference number where applicable, parent communication, time/location found, child's presentation/account, injuries/medical response, safeguarding action, review findings and actions.

Records will be linked appropriately to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, accident/incident and risk-assessment systems without unnecessary duplication. Safeguarding records will be kept in accordance with the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.

17. Media and communication

The Headteacher will coordinate external communication. Staff must not post information about a missing child on personal social media or communicate with journalists.

Any public appeal will normally be led by or agreed with police. The School will not release a child's photograph or personal information publicly without considering police advice, safeguarding, parental responsibility and data protection.

18. Training and practice

Staff will be made aware of this policy through induction and safeguarding/operational updates. Staff working with children who have an identified risk of leaving supervision will be briefed on the individual plan.

Leaders will ensure that staff know how to raise the alarm, who coordinates a search, how remaining pupils are supervised, when 999 should be called, where emergency/contact information is held and how an incident is recorded.

Any drills or exercises will be planned so that they do not create unnecessary alarm, compromise safeguarding or confuse them with the fire-evacuation procedure.

19. Monitoring and review

The Headteacher/DSL and Director/Proprietor will monitor incidents and near misses for patterns, including particular pupils, locations, times, staffing, gates/doors, educational visits and repeated unexplained absence.

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner following a significant incident, near miss, change to premises/provision, safeguarding learning, statutory-guidance change or inspection finding.

Appendix A – Missing child immediate response card

- 1. ALERT: tell Headteacher/DSL/senior leader and Office immediately.
- 2. VERIFY: register, sign-out/collection, timetable, clubs/interventions, known staff.
- 3. RISK ASSESS NOW: age, SEND, medical/mental health, weather, hazards, exploitation, known destination, seen leaving.
- 4. HIGH RISK? CALL 999 IMMEDIATELY. Do not wait ten minutes.
- 5. SEARCH: allocate zones; maintain supervision of all other pupils; report zones clear.
- 6. IF NOT FOUND: police and parents without unnecessary delay; provide photo/description/risk information.
- 7. FOUND: make safe, reassure, assess medical need, notify police/parents, preserve evidence.
- 8. DSL REVIEW: safeguarding referral/risk plan/support as required.
- 9. RECORD: full chronology and actions.
- 10. LEARN: formal post-incident review and preventative action.

Appendix B – Post-incident review record

Child / year group / date:

Location/activity:

Time last confirmed seen:

Time identified missing:

Immediate risk factors:

Search/action chronology:

Police/CSC/LA/ISI/Ofsted or other referrals:

Time/location found:

Child's account and presentation:

Parent/carer communication:

Supervision/boundary/handover findings:

SEND/medical/safeguarding factors:

Adult-conduct concern identified? If yes, safeguarding route:

Risk assessment/support plan changes:

Premises/procedure/training changes:

Responsible person and completion date:

Headteacher/DSL review date: