



## **Missing Person Policy**

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The Safeguarding Children Policy
- Kent Police Runaway and Missing from Home Procedures

Standard 12.8 Of the Residential Special Schools NMS 2015 states that: Staff working within the school know and implement the school's policy, and where relevant the local authority's policy, in relation to children going missing and their role in implementing that policy. Staff actively search for children who are missing, including working with the police where appropriate

Valence School has written this policy in conjunction with advice taken from the Kent Police and the Joint Protocol for reporting Missing Young People.

The missing person's procedure identifies the action to be taken when a young person or children are missing from the site without authority.

It is the duty of Valence School to protect all young people and recognise that young people who abscond are very vulnerable and that the level of risk increases for them during each occasion that they run away.

## **Legal Framework**

Valence School has a duty to safeguard vulnerable young people under the Care Standards Act, 2000.

Legal parameters for Missing Person's Enquiries are found in both common law and in International Law. Most specifically through the European Convention of Human Rights interpreted through the Human Rights Act, 1998.

It is important to note that the Data Protection Act, 1998, does not prevent partnership working and sharing of information to ensure the safe return of a young person.

## **Scope of the Policy**

A young person or children are identified as anyone under the age of 19 years if suffering with a disability. The policy itself covers all young people including those young people who are in the Looked After Children System and those placed in the Kent Police Authority Boundaries by any Local Authority.

In agreeing to place a young person within Valence School, placing authorities agree to adopt safeguarding policies and procedures in place within the school for the young person they are placing. This includes the unauthorised procedure which adopts advice from Kent Police for young people missing in the Kent Police Area.

Within the context of this Policy, "Looked after Children" refers to a young person accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, a young person subject

to Care Orders including Interim Care Orders, Sect 31 and 38 Children Act 1989, and a young person who are otherwise provided with accommodation by Section 21 Children Act 1989.

In addition the protocol will apply to all young people placed within the Kent Police Authority area boundaries (including those aged over 18) for whom the placing Local Authorities have continuing responsibilities under The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

## **Principles of the Policy**

- Valence School recognises that it is not able to anticipate every situation but that staff employed to care for young people accommodated within Valence School should use their professional judgement to take any action necessary to protect the safety of the young person based on a robust, detailed and current risk assessment being in place for each young person.
- The school identifies that each time a young person absconds from the school, they are missing and, as such, place themselves, and others, at risk and that EVERY missing episode is potentially very serious.
- Valence School identifies that any "missing" episode should be identified as such by the professionals involved and that all professionals and carers must effectively collaborate to ensure that a consistent and coherent response is given to the young person on their return.

## **Protocol**

- In line with the guidance from Kent Police, any young person who is at risk of going missing and each young person who is known to abscond is identified and this area is included in their risk assessment. Each young person who is at risk of going missing has a specific management programme designed to minimise the risk of them being absent without authority. The procedures detailed in these management plans are approved by the Head of Social Care and Safeguarding and may include physical restrictions on normal movement within or from the home. These are not used unless this is necessary to safeguard the young person and protect their welfare and development. Such measures are only used where agreed with the responsible authority and the parents. Such restrictions for one young person do not impose similar restrictions on other young people. Where specific measures, including electronic devices are used to monitor young person there is a written policy that sets out how they should be used, how they promote the welfare of the young person, how the young person will be informed of their use, how legitimate privacy of the young person will be protected and how the young person will be protected from potential abuse of such measures. This risk assessment and specific management programme forms part of the young person's placement plan and will identify factors which may increase the risk

of a young person going missing and risk factors when a young person is missing from site.

- Valence School maintains current information regarding each young person accommodated within the school, including a recent photograph of the young person. This is updated and changed, if necessary, at least every 12 months and the photograph is suitable for circulation or press release if necessary. Photographs of this type are usually just used by the Police, however, the consent of the person holding parental responsibility for the young person will be sought if a photograph needs to be used in the course of a missing person's investigation. If possible we will gain the young person's permission to use the photo for a missing person's investigation.
- In discussion and agreement with other professionals caring for the young person including the Speech and Language team and Psychology Department, the Head of Social Care and Safeguarding will decide whether it is appropriate to discuss running away in detail with a young person. If necessary, extra support or resources will be identified to assist in this process for example, the use of social stories.
  
- This policy identifies two categories of missing persons:
  - Absent
  - Missing Person

Staff caring for the young person need to decide which of the two categories the young person falls into when missing based on consideration of:

1. Circumstances of the absence
2. The Placement Plan
3. Age and maturity
4. Disability
5. Medication needed
6. Legal Status
7. Behaviour / History
8. Danger to themselves or others
9. Vulnerability
10. Disposition towards drug/ substance abuse
11. The young person running to/from someone/something
12. Immediate circumstances
13. Risk of offending
14. Influence of peer groups/families/friends
15. Predatory influences on the young person eg: crime/sex/drugs
16. Risk of abduction
17. The environment including weather and time of year
18. Community events

- for a young person.

In some cases if a young person is very vulnerable or has been missing for a long time it may be necessary to publicise the case via the media. This is not a routine approach and usually a response to serious concerns for a young person's safety. However, through this consideration it is essential that staff keep in mind the need to locate the young person and ensure that they are safe.

- Depending on the above considerations there will come a point at which absence will give rise to justifiable concern and will require a formal missing person's report to the Police. This point is defined in terms of time by Valence School in its unauthorised absence protocol. At this point residential staff should consult with senior staff on duty making this decision based on the best available information.
- Although Valence School recognises that the need to make a missing person's report should be decided on individual merit, formal missing person's reports need to be made to the Police after the timescale identified in the unauthorised procedure given the vulnerability of the young person accommodated within the school as short absences for the young person are as risky as lengthy ones.
- While a young person is missing they continue to remain the responsibility of Valence School and therefore staff and the social worker are responsible for liaising with the Police while continuing to make enquiries and search. Primacy over such decisions lie with the Police however a member of the Valence School Senior Management Team would be involved in the decision making process and in subsequent managing of media interest.
- On return to Valence School, the young person should be de-briefed, where appropriate to consider the reasons for them being missing. It may be necessary to conduct this de-brief with someone independent of the school or the young person, or by the young person's social worker. Any reasons for the absence given by the young person should be recorded in their records. This should be completed within 24 hours of their return.
- The purpose of the debrief is to:

1. Discover factors leading to the missing episode
2. Inform efforts to prevent further episodes
3. Inform future Missing Persons Investigations
4. Learn of activities, risk, associate and victimisation involved in the episode and address those risks.

If it is not appropriate or possible to interview in detail the young person, as often is the case of young people accommodated within Valence School, then staff caring for the young person at the time will be interviewed and debriefed to illicit a clear picture

of activities prior to the missing incident. Care reports will also be analysed to check for any circumstances or reasons which may have had an effect on the young person causing them to go missing.

- On return the young person will be seen by their social worker or the Independent Disputes Advisor to consider why the young person absented themselves.
- If a young person states that they went missing because of abuse at the home, it is immediately considered to be a child protection issue and must be reported to a Designated Safeguarding Lead who will notify the Young person's Duty Social Work team and the young person's placing authority.
- The two categories identified are defined within the policy as follows:

### **Revised Police Guidance/Definition in respect of Missing Persons (2013)**

Missing children/young people will be classified by the police as either 'missing' or 'absent' after a risk assessment has been carried out by police call handlers.

The new NPCC definition of a missing person is:

**Missing** – 'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another'.

**Absent** – 'A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be'.

The 'absent' category should comprise cases in which children/young people are not presently where they are supposed to be but there is no apparent risk and they are not believed to be immediately at risk of harm.

Police will not be sent to cases where children/young people are defined as being 'absent'. Instead the onus will be on care providers to take steps to locate the child/young person, with monitoring by the police and escalation to 'missing' if there is a change to the circumstances that has increased the level of risk. It is expected that all reasonable steps should be taken by care providers to locate the child/young person prior to making a report to the police. Where they remain absent, and the care provider feels that they may be at risk of harm, then a report should be made to the police.

Police will attend reports of 'missing' children/young people'.

### **Missing Person Procedure**

1. The member of staff working with the young person will inform the senior on site of the young person's name, what they are wearing, their current mood and where they were last seen and their current medication status (i.e. what time are they next due

to take any medication). They should also provide information about the activity the person was engaging in prior to them going missing.

2. The senior on site will co-ordinate a search of the home living areas, the school buildings and the grounds. They will inform the site that a young person is missing and call on all available staff to assist in the search. They will also contact the police to inform them that we are currently looking for a young person, not for the police to come out but just so that they are aware we may need assistance. The Police contact number is **101**. If it is out of office hours or a weekend, the senior on site will contact the on call manager to inform them of the situation and that the protocol has been followed. At this stage they will make the decision as to the status of the young person (eg: absent or missing person).

3. The senior on site will, at this point, get the missing young person's information sheet, (Off site the young person's information sheet is carried by the senior member of staff), which will include any information regarding health diagnosis and safety awareness/risk management.

4. The senior on site will then instruct the staff involved in the search, to extend the search to the immediate area off site should the young person not be found on site, which will involve the use of some vehicles. The Senior will give staff members specified areas to search to ensure all areas are covered. Staff involved in the search should keep the senior on site informed using mobile phones of where they have searched and the results. It is essential that while a search of the site and immediate area is carried out that all other radio traffic ceases except for emergency / assistance calls to ensure that information is relayed clearly. Staff searching off site must take a Valence School mobile phone with them to ensure that information can be relayed effectively back to the site.

5. If, after a maximum of 15 minutes a young person has NOT been found, the senior on site will contact the Police on 101 reporting the incident, giving information about the young person as detailed on the missing persons information sheet and giving the status of the young person.

6. The manager on call or on duty will make the telephone calls necessary to parents/carers and Placing Authority social worker for the young person.

7. Staff searching for the young person need to continue the search until advised by the senior on duty or the Police to scale down the search or until the young person is found.

8. Once a young person is returned to the site and is checked to ensure that they are medically fit the Senior on site will inform anyone notified of the missing status that the young person has returned and the outcome of the incident.

9. The senior on site will arrange for the young person to be debriefed (if appropriate) and the staff member responsible for the young person prior to them being missing

regarding the incident within 24 hours of the incident happening regardless of the length of time a young person has been missing. The senior will write a report on the incident or appoint another member of staff to do this and will include information from the debrief session in this.

10. At this point further action will be decided and the risk assessment for the young person updated.

A copy of the debrief information and incident report should be forwarded to the Police when they have been involved in an incident.

## **Monitoring**

The Head of Social Care and Safeguarding will monitor absences from the school. For all missing person's reports the Police contact number is: **101**

## **STUDENT REPORTED MISSING**

**Manager** and support staff make enquires to locate the missing person with colleagues. This should include calls to their mobile, searches of the accommodation and local area, enquiries of their friends as to their whereabouts

**Manager** informs relevant Senior On Call Staff

### **Manager**

to put together details of the missing person:

- Young person's name
- Description of young person
- DOB
- Recent photo
- Where, when, who missing with?
- Medical history
- What child was last wearing
- Legal status

**Member of Senior staff** to contact **parents** and inform them of what is happening

**Senior staff to be kept informed throughout**

**Manager** to inform **police on 101** with details of the missing person

*All efforts to locate the child/young person must be recorded*

**Police** : Officers to perform a risk-assessment which will form the basis for the resulting proportionate actions. Sharing of information between the police, school, parents and other agencies as appropriate.

**Young person is located or returns to the House**

**Parents to be informed at earliest opportunity**

## External Procedure Flowchart

### Young People Missing from Home and Care Process Flowchart

