

Missing Children Policy

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TEAGUES BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Missing children policy and procedures

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Staff Responsibility	Mrs S. Abdulla
Governor responsibility	Stephen Reynolds

Teagues Bridge Primary School takes the safety of children very seriously and will take every precaution necessary to ensure that the children in their care do not leave a session unaccompanied. The chances of finding a missing child safe are greatest if the child's absence is soon discovered. In the unlikely event that a child is noted to be missing from school premises, the school puts into practice agreed procedures. These ensure the most effective resolution of this potentially distressing situation. Many of our school routines and procedures are always in place to contribute to the prevention of a child going missing and to ensuring the safety and security of all children.

Purpose and Aims of this policy:

The purpose of the policy is to give all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, a clear understanding of how to respond and who to inform should they discover a child is missing during the school day.

The aims of this policy are:

- To provide a clear procedure which is understood and effectively implemented by all staff
- To enable the missing child to be located as quickly as possible and given the appropriate level of safety and security commensurate with the pupils' age and emotional/behavioural maturity.

Occasions when a child may go missing

Staff need to be mindful that a child can go missing at any time of the day. The times and examples of the occasions which may provide opportunities for a child to go missing are:-

a) From an indoor lesson

This could occur when a child is allowed to leave the classroom unaccompanied by an adult and fails to return;

- e.g. - to go to the toilet,
- to collect something from his/her bag in the cloakroom,
- being sent to another class or teacher as a punishment,
- undertaking errands for the teacher such as taking the register to the office.

b) From an outdoor lesson

This could occur when the class are outside the building with the children spread out and/or engaged in a variety of activities that make it is easy for a child to wonder away unnoticed. e.g.

- during games lessons on the playground or field
- during other outdoor lessons, (e.g. measuring parts of the building)
- at the beginning or end of outdoor lessons when children are getting changed or using the toilet, drinking fountains etc.

c) Travelling about the school

This could occur when the children are spread out and beyond the teacher's direct total supervision.

- e.g. - going to and from the hall or outdoors before and after a PE lesson,
- going to and from the hall before and after assembly,
- going to and from the classroom at the beginning/end of lunch/break times.

d) Other Times

These include:

- at the start of the school day when children are freely moving about the grounds and building to get to their cloakroom and classroom.
- At break and lunch times.
- At the end of the school day when children and parents are freely moving about.

Upon Discovering a child is Missing

It is important that the person discovering a child is missing knows what to do. What action is taken depends on who discovers the child is missing. Therefore, the following action should be taken by the following personnel.

Teaching Assistants will:

Immediately notify the class teacher. If the teacher is not available for whatever reason they must inform the nearest available teacher. They should state the name of the child and what he/she was last seen doing and where, and how long since they last saw the child. Thereafter they should assist with any organised search for the child or supervision of the rest of the class as directed by the class teacher or the Head teacher.

Lunchtime supervisors will:

Immediately notify a teacher, or the Headteacher (whoever is found first). They should state the name of the child (if known) or a description of the child (if the child's name is not known to them), what the child was last seen doing and where, and how long since they last saw the child. Thereafter they should assist with any organised search for the child or supervision of the rest of the children as directed by the Senior Lunch Supervisor or the Headteacher or Assistant Headteacher.

The Class Teacher will:

Conduct a search of the immediate surroundings, i.e.:

Indoors - in the classroom (looking under tables, work surfaces and other possible hiding places such as cupboards), adjacent work areas and classrooms, nearby cloakrooms, and toilets.

Outdoors - in the immediate area where the child was last seen including looking under bushes and up trees etc.

[NB The teacher should quickly arrange for another adult (e.g. support staff or neighbouring teacher) to supervise their class while they conduct any search away from the class for which they are responsible].

If this initial search does not find the child the teacher shall begin a wider search of the school buildings and grounds including searching public areas in other parts of the school e.g. library areas, toilet and cloakroom areas, corridors, hall etc. (it is not necessary at this stage to search classrooms unless they are empty). The task of undertaking this search can be done either by the teacher personally or they can delegate this to a member of the support staff depending on the teacher's knowledge of the child including their emotional and behavioural characteristics. At all times, the rest of the class must be supervised by either the class teacher or a member of the support staff. If appropriate a neighbouring teacher can be asked to supervise the class (as well as their own) to enable both the teacher and the support staff to conduct the search.

If this search does not discover the missing child within a reasonable time the teacher must inform the Headteacher (directly or via the school office) of the missing child and the facts surrounding the child's disappearance.

Headteacher will:

Take charge of the situation. If satisfied that the class is adequately supervised the Headteacher will join the teacher (and support staff if applicable) in searching the school premises for the missing child directing the teacher (and others) where to search (e.g. while she searches externally, the teacher searches internally). Alternatively, the Headteacher may direct the teacher (or support staff) to return to their class in order to continue supervising the class and to be a familiar adult should the missing child return to their classroom. In this situation the Headteacher will continue the search alone or with other available adults.

When the Headteacher is satisfied that the child is not on the premises she will instruct the office staff to contact the child's parents and inform them of the situation and to enquire if the child has returned home. If the child is at home the parents will be informed by telephone of the known facts surrounding the child going missing. If the child is not at home the Headteacher will, in consultation with the parents, begin a search outside of the school premises. If the parents cannot be contacted at home the Headteacher (or other adults as directed by the Headteacher) will begin a search outside of the school's immediate premises. This may include a visit to the child's home if this is near the school. If the child is not found within 45 minutes the Head teacher (or other staff if so directed by the Headteacher) will inform the police and, as appropriate, the social services and the Chairman of Governors of the child's disappearance. Thereafter the Headteacher will follow the instructions of the police regarding the continuation of the search for the child.

The Office staff will:

Inform the Headteacher of the missing child and then await further instructions. They will not take part in the search but will instead contact the child's parents when instructed by the Headteacher to do so and inform them of the situation and enquire if the child has returned home. They will then hand communication with the parents over to the Headteacher unless directed otherwise by the Headteacher. If the parents cannot be contacted the office staff will, if directed to do so by the

Headteacher, telephone the police, social services and Chair governors to inform them of the missing child and giving them such information as they may request. The school staff, including the Headteacher, will then continue the search as directed by the police and the office staff will continue to try to contact the child's parents.

Missing Children Seen Running Off the Premises

If, during the search, the missing child is seen leaving the premises, the member of staff witnessing this must inform the most senior member of staff immediately available or, if none are available, send a message to the office via a reliable messenger without losing sight of the child if possible. As a rule, staff should not pursue a child beyond the school boundary. Instead they should report to the Head Teacher where they last saw the child and the direction the child was heading so that this information can be communicated to the parents or police as appropriate. The member of staff should then return to their normal duties unless directed otherwise by the Head Teacher.

In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the member of staff to go beyond the school boundary, e.g. to retrieve a child who has accidentally wandered out of an open gate, or to follow/retrieve a child with special needs who has deliberately left the premises but in doing so does not understand the gravity of their action. Staff are expected to use their professional discretion in deciding whether it is appropriate to go beyond the school boundary in pursuance of such children. If a child is followed beyond the school boundary the member of staff must behave in a manner that is not threatening to the child. They must not run after the child as this may cause the child to run into a dangerous situation, e.g. the child might run into a road without looking out for traffic in an attempt to evade the pursuing, running adult. When off premises, the member of staff must ensure they have an accompanied adult or access to a mobile phone.

In exceptional circumstances where a child is known to be liable to run off the premises, the school may prepare and enact contingency search plans involving named staff. When enacting these plans staff should be mindful not to put themselves or the child at risk.

Follow-up Procedures:

- A written record of the incident and any action taken should be made as soon after the incident as practicable and placed in the pupil's confidential record. The system the school uses is CPOMS (Child protection online monitoring service) and all staff should input any relevant information. including conversations with parents, carers, child minders, police, the Local Authority, and any other person they feel has contributed to the collection of evidence.
- The Senior Management Team should conduct an internal investigation to establish how the situation occurred, how effective was the response and whether action could be taken to ensure it does not happen again. This information should also be collected in writing and onto the CPOMS system.

We will ensure that:

- We make regular checks to ensure that if an incident of this sort does happen, we have all the necessary phone numbers at hand – correct, up to date and kept together.
- If the Headteacher or Chair of Governors is not on the premises, she will be informed as soon as possible via the school office team, Assistant headteacher or senior staff member in charge.
- We will provide the following information to safeguarding:
 - o What happened?
 - o What systems are in place for preventing such occurrences?
 - o What we did, at what time and in what order.
 - o Who we informed and when.
 - o We will cooperate fully in any investigation.

Recording:

- o We will start to build a record as soon as is possible in the incident log, this will include:
 - o The last definite sighting of the child.
 - o Any unusual behaviour of the missing child or other children.
 - o How many children were on the premises?
 - o How many adults were on the premises and who?
 - o What steps have been taken and when, by whom.

Dealing with people's reactions

We accept that the child's parents/carers will be frightened, distressed and angry. If the setting shares all policies with parents/carers, the situation will be easier for all because there will be an understanding of working within a framework of mutual trust and understanding.

We accept that in such circumstances powerful emotions are involved and people's behaviour can be unpredictable. Those who may seem quite calm about the incident at the time can later become angry, threaten legal action or approach the local press.

We will be clear about the circumstances surrounding the incident and will respond sympathetically to questions without implications or admission of responsibility.

Responses could include:

- How sorry you are that the incident has happened.
- That a full investigation is in hand.
- That the Local Safeguarding Children's Board/Ofsted has been informed and will be investigating.

Dealing with the media

Distressed parents/carers may contact the local press, or reporters may hear about the incident if the police are involved. It is sensible for one person, usually the Headteacher or Chair of Governors to be the one who speaks for the setting. All adults will be asked to refer all enquiries to the agreed spokesperson.

The spokesperson for the setting is: Mrs Sarah Abdulla Headteacher or Mrs Natalie Woods Assistant Headteacher in the absence of the Headteacher.

Actions to be followed by staff once the child is found:

- Talk to, take care of and, if necessary, comfort the child
- Speak to the other children to ensure they understand why they should not leave the premises
- The head will speak to the parents to discuss events and give an account of the incident
- A full investigation will be carried out
- Media queries should be referred to the headteacher
- The investigation should involve all concerned providing written statements.
- The report should be detailed covering: time, place, numbers of staff and children, when the child was last seen, what appeared to have happened, the purpose of the outing, the length of the time that the child was missing and how s/he appeared to have gone missing, as well as lessons for the future.