Doucecroft School Services

Missing Child Policy

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Within this policy, Doucecroft School Services relates to the school day and residential services.
Autism Anglia, Doucecroft School Services
Missing Child Policy

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1. **Our Ethos**  
We welcome individuality and provide a safe and positive learning environment, to enable our students to thrive and meet their full potential preparing them for their future.

2. **Our Mission**  
At Doucecroft School Services our mission is that our students are/have:  
- Developing – Independence and life skills  
- Opportunity – to experience and learn new things  
- Understanding – to be understood and valued as an individual  
- Creativity – to express myself as an individual  
- Encouraged – to try new things and realise my potential  
- Confidence – to achieve and develop my self-esteem  
- Respect – to feel accepted and accept others  
- Openness – to share experience and feelings with others  
- Fairness – to be recognised for achievement  
- Tolerance – accept that everybody is different

3. **Purpose of the Policy**  
Doucecroft School Services aims to provide a safe and secure environment and seeks to promote the welfare of all the students, irrespective of gender, ethnic background or ability. The production of this document in no way presupposes that students should or will go missing, but rather serves to provide staff with a clearly defined strategy for managing the situation in the unlikely event of its occurrence. This policy is written to guide staff in the event of a student going missing on the premises, going missing when on out of school trips, or a child/young person that has absconded from the school/residential site.

4. **The key issues regarding students with autism are summarised as follows:**  
The nature of autism, with deficits in the areas of communication, social interaction and creativity/flexibility and unique sensory needs, places students in a position of vulnerability. These impairments may not be outwardly apparent to others and, in safeguarding each student, significant demands are placed upon staff and carers.

Each student with autism is unique and therefore has different strengths, sensory needs and related issues which influence the individualised programme planning, approach and level of support leading to the provision of appropriate and meaningful experiences for each student. Students may present unpredictable, unprecedented, uninhibited and impulsive behaviour, without regard to, or understanding of, the consequences of their actions.

Doucecroft School Services aim to develop each student’s independence and self-confidence and offers opportunities for the student to make decisions and to solve problems. An essential element of every student’s development is to be able to generalise skills and knowledge from the school to the wider community. Students should have the opportunity to use and practice skills in real-life situations, both within and outside the education environment. Use of public facilities, services and
community resources help students to learn to transfer skills and further their independence.

Doucecroft School Services offers a high staff/student ratio and is committed to providing a level of support appropriate to meet the needs of each individual, both within the school and during out-of-school trips. Individual risk assessments identify the potential risks and detail the controls and actions required to minimise such risks.

Students have the right to have times of being alone and in private, and it is neither appropriate nor desirable for staff to be with the student all the time, but they will be within discrete observation distance. Levels of support and supervision are based on regular assessments and review of individual needs.

Students are entitled to exercise their independence and a gradual progression towards self-advocacy, self-reliance and the acquisition of life skills is promoted.

5. Guidance on relevant procedures
   The ‘missing child’ procedure has been prepared in consideration of the following policy documents:
   - a. The SET procedures
   - b. Statutory Guidance on Children who run away or go missing from home or care.
   - c. Minimum Standards of Care for Residential Special Schools standard 15.7 (RMFHC) protocol.

6. Prevention of such a situation arising
   A register of students will be completed each morning and afternoon in school. The transition of students to/from the residential houses will be recorded and signed over on the handover sheet. This would also happen when the residential evening staff team handover to the night staff, and again in the morning when the night staff handover to the teacher or teaching assistant.

   It is the responsibility of the Teacher, Teachers Assistants, Positive Behaviour Team, Residential Team Leaders, and the supporting staff member to know the whereabouts of their allocated students at all times. It is the responsibility of the allocated staff member to keep the students safe, and report to relevant staff if a child goes missing.

7. Management of the situation should a student be missing:
   Upon discovering a student is missing on site, an immediate search is to be made of the school/residential site with all available staff. This search should not exceed ten minutes. Any known area that the student is known to go to should be searched too.
   If the student is a known absconder this should have been recorded in their Individual risk assessment.

   Staff should then regroup and extend the search to the wider school grounds. This should not exceed a further ten minutes.
If the child is not located during the search of the wider school grounds, then the most senior member of staff on site must contact the local Police to inform them that the child is missing and cannot be allocated from the initial search.

The most senior staff member of site is to then contact:

a. Parents and any other person with parental responsibility, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child’s welfare.

b. The authority responsible for the child’s placement.

The most senior member of staff on site must then organise all available staff to search the immediate local community. This includes ensuring effective communication systems are in place to allow for clear communication between those involved in the search. It is essential that staff must take potential dangers into account and not put themselves or other students at risk in the quest to locate the missing child.

The most senior member of staff must not leave the premises but remain on site to co-ordinate the search, answer phone calls and provide photos and information as required. Each student has a key information sheet stored on the shared drive. The Missing person log is kept in the Head Teacher’s office. If the child goes missing beyond the times of the school day the police are to be given the telephone numbers of the boarding houses. The police will want to visit the school, and agree a plan of action.

The most senior member of staff on site must ensure that the appropriate documents are completed as soon as possible. This includes the absconding record, missing persons log located in Head Teachers office and an incident record.

Once the child has been located a serious incident review must take place to discuss the circumstances of the incident and the effectiveness of the current procedures. This incident review must include a review of the student’s individual risk assessment and, where appropriate, individual management programme.

**Off School Premises**

Students involved in an out of school activity are recorded on the out of school trips form.

All staff on out of school trips should ensure they have read, signed and understood the students individual risk assessments, venue risk assessments and individual management programmes. It is the responsibility of the person in charge of the trip to ensure all staff are aware of what communication systems are in place before leaving the school site.

A ‘head count’ of the students should be made at regular intervals and always before a minibus leaves a venue. If a student is discovered as missing, then a search (not exceeding ten minutes) of the immediate area is undertaken by all
available members of staff, ensuring that all other students continue to be appropriately supervised.

If the missing student is not located, the person responsible should notify the most senior manager at the school or the on call person during residential hours. Then act on instructions given.

The most senior staff member will notify the police and provide them with as precise a description of the student as possible, the last known whereabouts of the student and any other details they may require. A key information sheet is available on the shared drive.

The person responsible for the trip must notify the venue of the incident and instruct them to implement their own missing person’s procedure if they have one.

The senior manager on the school site or via the telephone if on call will notify the student’s parents and keep them updated as necessary. The residential staff and the on call person need to agree who is most suitable to contact the parents.

The member of staff initiating the search should remain in situ until the police or where possible assistance from school arrives in case the missing student should return or be found.

In such stressful circumstances it is important that staff remain as calm and collected as possible.

In the cases where a student accesses off site work experience, where they are not supported by our staff, arrangements are made between school and the work experience provider to ensure that in the event of the student not arriving, that the placement will contact the school immediately. The school will make contact with the parents/ carers initially to establish the reasons for absence. This will then be recorded in the register using the appropriate code.

In the event of a student absconding from the placement, the provider will contact the police and then contact school, who will then liaise with the police/parents.

**Absconding**
A student is considered to have ‘absconded’ if they intentionally / knowingly leave the school site, residential house or the immediate area of an off-site activity without permission.

If a student absconds then where possible, a member of staff should follow the student at a safe distance and/or respond in line with guidance from the student’s individual risk assessment and behaviour management programme

A senior manager/on call person from the school must immediately be informed of the situation.

Where possible, the member of staff following the student should remain in contact with either the main group or the senior manager or on call person from school via a mobile phone.
The senior manager or on call person will then, if appropriate, allocate further staff members to go and collect the student and return them either to the venue or to school.

The senior manager, on call person, or team leader will also inform the child’s parents and keep them updated as necessary.

8. Effective reviewing of situation should a student go missing
If a student absconds and is then deemed to be ‘missing’, procedures will follow those outlined previously for a student missing off-site.
It is important that following an incident the issues that arise are addressed and staff should:
   c. Review the individual risk assessment for the child involved.
   d. Review the child’s individual management programme
   e. Where appropriate, talk through the incident with the student involved.
   f. Ensure that a record is kept of the discussion held with the student.
   g. Complete an incident form and/or a missing person’s information. A copy should also be placed in the student’s personal files.
   h. Complete Missing Child log record which is kept in the Head Teacher’s office
   i. Review procedures and ensure control measures are in place and that all staff are fully informed.
   j. Inform Governors of any incidents of absconding.
During residential hour the senior member of staff on duty must contact the on-call person as soon as possible.

If the child is not found, the most senior member of staff on duty is to contact the local police and report the child as missing. All relevant information must be passed to the police including; last known location of the child, full description of the child, medical information and known behaviours relevant to the search. The key information sheet should be shared at this stage.

The most senior member of staff on duty must contact the parents immediately to inform them of the situation and keep regular contact to update on the situation.

A serious incident review is held to explore why/how the child went missing, to review procedures and documentation and identify learning outcomes. Work with the child at an appropriate level to support understanding regarding staying safe.