

Trust-Education Group Ltd

Absconding Policy and Procedure

Purpose and Intent

This policy explains how Trust-Education Group Ltd prevents, manages, and responds to situations where a pupil leaves the school site without permission. Absconding is treated as a safeguarding concern and not simply a behaviour issue. The policy reflects a therapeutic, trauma-informed approach that recognises the emotional, social, and mental health needs of pupils.

The primary aim is to keep pupils safe while maintaining positive relationships, dignity, and trust. Responses are calm, proportionate, and focused on regulation, learning, and prevention rather than punishment. This policy aligns with Keeping Children Safe in Education, DfE safeguarding guidance, and the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework.

This policy should be read in conjunction with other Trust Education Group Ltd policies including Safeguarding, Behaviour, Positive Handling, Educational Visits, Health & Safety, and Missing Pupils policies.

Understanding Absconding

Absconding occurs when a pupil leaves the school premises without permission, fails to return from an authorised activity, or attempts to leave the site in a way that raises safeguarding concerns. For pupils with SEMH needs, absconding is often a response to emotional dysregulation, anxiety, or perceived threat rather than deliberate risk-taking.

Because of this, absconding is always viewed through a safeguarding lens. Each incident is considered individually, taking account of the pupil's age, vulnerability, emotional state, and known risk factors.

Ethos and Therapeutic Approach

Trust-Education Group Ltd is committed to a therapeutic and relational approach. Staff prioritise de-escalation, emotional regulation, and connection with trusted adults. Pupils are supported to understand boundaries while being helped to develop coping strategies and self-regulation skills.

Punitive responses following absconding are avoided. Instead, the focus is on understanding the cause, repairing relationships, and reducing the likelihood of recurrence.

Roles and Responsibilities

All staff have a responsibility to remain vigilant, particularly during transitions, unstructured times, and periods of heightened emotional need. Staff must follow individual risk assessments and behaviour support plans and respond calmly and professionally to absconding risks. Any concerns or incidents must be reported and recorded accurately.

Duty staff are responsible for monitoring exit points and responding immediately to absconding attempts. They communicate promptly with senior leaders and safeguarding leads and help maintain visual awareness of the situation when safe to do so.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for Trust-Education Group Ltd is Katie Everson. Katie has extensive training in trauma-informed approaches and ACEs. The Deputy DSL (DDSL) is Melissa Wainman. They oversee the safeguarding response, make decisions about contacting parents, carers, police, or external agencies, and ensure appropriate support and review following any incident.

Prevention and Risk Reduction

Preventative practice is central to reducing absconding. The environment is managed through controlled access points, clear boundaries, and visible staff presence at high-risk times. Pupils are supported to understand expectations in a clear and consistent way.

Individual planning is essential. Pupils who are identified as being at risk of absconding have individual risk assessments and behaviour support plans that outline triggers, early warning signs, and agreed strategies. These plans are shared with relevant staff and reviewed regularly.

Therapeutic strategies include predictable routines, access to quiet or safe spaces, regulation breaks, and consistent relationships with trusted adults. Emotion coaching and co-regulation are used to help pupils manage distress before it escalates.

Responding to an Attempt to Abscond

When a pupil shows signs of wanting to leave the site, staff intervene early using calm verbal communication and de-escalation strategies. The aim is to support regulation and reduce the need for the pupil to leave.

If the risk increases, duty staff and senior leaders are informed immediately. Staff maintain visual contact where it is safe to do so, but do not pursue a pupil if this would increase risk to the pupil or staff. Decisions are made dynamically, based on safeguarding judgement rather than rigid rules.

Responding When a Pupil Has Absconded

If a pupil leaves the site without permission, the situation is treated as a safeguarding incident and escalated immediately. The DSL or DDSL are informed without delay. Accurate information is gathered, including the pupil's last known location, direction of travel, clothing, emotional state, known risks, and any factors relating to mental health or vulnerability.

Where Trust-Education Group Ltd is operating as an alternative provision or on behalf of a commissioning school, the pupil's base school is informed as soon as practicable. Parents or carers are contacted promptly and kept informed throughout the incident. The police are contacted when there is immediate danger, significant vulnerability, concerns relating to mental health, suspected exploitation, prolonged absence, or when advised by safeguarding judgement.

Staff do not pursue a pupil if it could escalate the situation or place anyone at risk. All communication with external agencies is coordinated by the DSL or DDSL. Updates are shared appropriately until the pupil is located and confirmed safe.

Return to School

When a pupil returns to school, they are met calmly and without judgement. A welfare check is completed to ensure the pupil is safe and well, and medical attention is sought if needed.

Once the pupil is emotionally regulated, a restorative and therapeutic conversation takes place. This focuses on understanding what happened, repairing relationships, and identifying support strategies rather than attributing blame.

All incidents are recorded on the safeguarding system in line with Trust procedures.

Post-Incident Review and Support

Following any absconding incident, the pupil's individual risk assessment and behaviour support plan are reviewed and updated. Parents and carers are involved in this process, and external agencies are consulted where appropriate.

The purpose of the review is to reduce future risk, strengthen support, and ensure staff are confident in preventative strategies. Learning from each incident is used to improve training, procedures, and environmental controls.

Recording, Monitoring, and Review

All absconding incidents and near-misses are recorded and monitored by senior leaders. Patterns and trends are analysed to inform practice, training, and environmental changes. This policy is reviewed annually or following a significant incident to ensure it remains effective, current, and compliant.

Training and Staff Support

Staff receive regular training in safeguarding, SEMH, trauma-informed practice, de-escalation, and positive behaviour support. Ongoing supervision and support are provided to ensure staff feel confident and supported when managing absconding risks.

Compliance Statement

This policy demonstrates that Trust-Education Group Ltd meets Ofsted and DfE expectations by identifying safeguarding risks, responding proportionately, and supporting pupils' emotional wellbeing while maintaining safety.

Policy Lead	Melissa Wainman Director of Education
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