

## Missing Student Procedure

### Statement

This policy is designed to be implemented in cases where students are believed to be absent or missing from the care of OPDS. The purpose of the policy is to locate the student by the safest and fastest means possible.

OPDS is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. This policy is required to ensure that missing or absent students (who are not under the duty of care of the school), are subject to an appropriate response by OPDS. This is to ensure that children are found and returned to an approved location as soon as practicable.

The benefits of this policy are that all reports of missing/absent people will be recorded. The policy provides a model and framework for response and dealing with incidents dependent on the risk posed. This policy is applicable to all staff members who may become involved in the initial stages of a report of a missing child or young person.

OPDS will respond appropriately to reports of missing and absent persons. Every report will be risk assessed so that those who are vulnerable or represent a high risk will be immediately identified. This process shall be on-going, dynamic and supervised in each and every case with a focus on locating the person safely and mitigating any risk posed to others. Where criminality is associated with either the initial disappearance or subsequent harbouring of those who wish to remain absent, this will be reported to the police.

OPDS will liaise closely with schools following a report that a student has gone missing. OPDS is aware that some schools may wish to take the lead in the response as they retain the overall duty of care as the student's sponsor. In these cases, OPDS will cooperate fully with the school's requests. The procedure outlined in this policy assumes that the guardianship organisation is taking the lead in the response.

### Definitions:

OPDS adopts distinct definitions to determine whether someone is missing or absent in accordance with the National Police Chiefs Council definitions (issued by ACPO in 2013). The following definitions are included within the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership protocols:

**Absent** - a child or young person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be and there is no apparent risk.

**Missing** - a child or young person whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

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## Supporting Reference Documents:

NSPCC publications

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

Safeguarding Children and Young People from CSE 2009

Scoping Report on Missing and Abducted Children - CEOP

Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Protocols - Reporting children who go missing from care

Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care - DfE 2014

Children Missing Education: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education/children-missing-education-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities-and-schools>

## Procedure:

This workflow applies when a young person is absent (they are not where they are supposed to be but there is no apparent risk) or when they are missing (unexpected and uncharacteristic absence which causes concern for their safety). It applies when they are under the care of OPDS during journeys around the UK organised by us or at a homestay. The DSL Sunny Field or Deputy DSL Lynda Tao, shall manage any cases of absent or missing children or young people, and as such all reports must be brought to the attention of the DSL or Deputy DSL.

## Contact details for the DSL and DDSL

Job title	Name	Telephone/ Email
DSL	Sunny Field	Telephone: 07936 899333 Email: sunny@opds.co.uk
DDSL	Lynda Tao	Telephone: 07308 408545 Email: lynda.tao@opds.co.uk
OPDS 24-hour emergency number (out of hours)	Staffed on a rota basis	Telephone: 07842 303240

If a child or young person goes missing out of hours and OPDS receives a report then the staff on duty is responsible for ensuring the completion of the initial reasonable enquiries where a student is absent/missing during an event (for example half term, exeat or during a suspension/expulsion) which will include:

- if appropriate, reviewing the flight and transfer details (with communication to the airline and transfer company to confirm transport arrangements for the student)

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- texting, emailing and phoning the student (leaving a message if no answer) asking them to make contact with the on duty member of staff and repeating this contact every 30 minutes
- texting, emailing and phoning the house parent to collate any relevant information about the whereabouts of the student - this is only possible if the houseparent is at school.
- texting, emailing and phoning the parent/agent to collate any relevant information about the whereabouts of the student
- texting, emailing and phoning the homestay to collate any relevant information about the whereabouts of the student
- review of information held on file which may indicate friends or associates who the student may be with.

**Any member of staff or homestay may report a child or young person as absent or missing to the police where they have genuine concerns for their safety.**

Following a risk assessment, the receiving police force will record a report of absent or missing where there are grounds to do so. In cases of missing children or young people, the police will work cooperatively with Children's Social Care staff during any enquiry.

The incident lead is responsible for ensuring the school is informed of any report made to the police of an absent or missing child or young person, as the school retains the overall duty of care. The school should be updated with any developments as they should know the whereabouts of the student at all times, especially those on visas. The school may decide to take the lead in the incident and will have their own missing child procedure. Where this is the case, OPDS should take direction from the member of school staff leading the response.

The incident lead is responsible for ensuring that the parents/agent are informed of any report made to the police of an absent or missing child or young person. The parents/agent should be regularly updated (recommended a minimum of every 4 hours) with any developments. This is to ensure that they are fully informed as to the situation involving their son or daughter.

All missing person reports are to be reviewed by the DSL as soon as practicable with subsequent on-going daily review until the incident is resolved.

## Process and Response - report of a missing child

1. A child or young person who falls into the 'Missing' Category must be reported to the police as soon as possible by telephoning 101 for a non-emergency report or 999 for an emergency response i.e. information received that a child or young person is in immediate danger of harm.

**YOU WILL NEED TO ENSURE THAT YOU ARE TRANSFERRED TO THE FORCE RELEVANT TO THE AREA THE CHILD IS MISSING/ABSENT FROM. IF CALLING 999**

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**YOU WILL NEED TO TELL THE CALL HANDLER TO STAY ON THE LINE WHILE YOU ARE TRANSFERRED TO THE RELEVANT FORCE.**

If the report to the police is not made by the DSL/ DDSL, then the reporter must inform the DSL/ DDSL of the situation as soon as possible.

2. The DSL or Deputy DSL will ensure that the following information is gathered for the initial report to the police:

- Name, date of birth and nationality of the child or young person;
- The specific concern for the child or young person;
- Whether they are likely to be subjected to crime, a victim of abuse or at risk of sexual exploitation;
- Whether the child or young person is likely to attempt suicide;
- Whether the child or young person is likely to pose a danger to other people;
- What actions have been completed so far to locate the child or young person;
- A description of the child or young person, including their build, hair, clothing and glasses;
- Details of when the child or young person was last seen and with whom;
- Personal details of the child or young person (including any medical conditions or ailments);
- Any previous history of absconding/absenteeism and circumstances of where found;
- The circumstances under which the child or young person is absent;
- Any factors which increase the risk to the child or young person;
- Homestay address.

Information that may be needed later to extend investigations if the young person is not located:

- A recent photograph (if available);
- Family addresses and contact telephone numbers;
- Known associates, telephone numbers and addresses frequented;
- The names and addresses of the child or young person's GP and dentist;
- The circumstances under which the child or young person is absent;
- Any factors which increase the risk to the child or young person;
- School and House Parent addresses and contact details;
- Details of any travel and accommodation plans authorised by the overseas parents;
- Details of any social media accounts that may be open to the public.

3. The incident must be recorded as an incident report file with regular updates being added until the matter has been resolved. If a police report has been made, the police

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incident reference number must be recorded. A record of all emails should be included in the incident report file.

4. Following the report to the police, the parents, the agent (if applicable), school and homestay must be informed and requested to contact DSL without delay if the child or young person makes contact.

## Process and Response - report of an absent child

1. If a child or young person is considered to fall within the definition of absent, the decision to record the child as such, together with the evidence supporting that decision must be recorded. The absence of a child or young person must be recorded in the Student File as an 'incident'.
2. Details of children or young people who are absent should still be notified to the police (using the non-emergency telephone number 101 or the emergency telephone number 999) in order that a record of the child or young person's absence can be made, an agreement can be reached on what needs to be done, review times and on-going actions. Although there is an expectation that OPDS should continue to make reasonable enquiries to locate the child or young person, the police may also initiate some enquiries as appropriate.
3. The Incident Lead will notify the school and parents/agent of the incident and regularly provide updates to both parties (minimum every 4 hours) with news of any developments, or confirmation that there have been no developments since the last update. This also affords an opportunity for the school or parents/agent to update the staff on duty with any contact they may have had from the student or other information received. All updates provided to the school and parents/agent must be recorded in the incident record.
4. OPDS staff will constantly review the circumstances in the light of any enquiries made or information received and inform the police of any developments by telephoning 101, quoting the reference number and providing the new information received. If the period of absence continues for six hours, consideration should be given as to whether the child should still be regarded as absent, or whether they should now be considered as missing. Six hours should be regarded as the maximum period before reconsideration, and in many cases a shorter period would be more appropriate.
5. Any case of an absent child or young person which causes significant concern, or gives rise to the suspicion of harm, should be brought to the attention of the Designated or Deputy Safeguarding Leads without delay and should be reviewed with a view to the possibility that this is a missing child or young person.

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## Informing the media

The Police are responsible for advising the media regarding children or young people who are reported as missing. The decision to publicise these matters will always be made in consultation with the parents who have to give their signed consent before the media are able to circulate the details. As such, no member of OPDS should release any details to the media and must refer any contact from them directly to the relevant force's Media Relations Office.

## The Return

1. The police are responsible for ensuring that the child or young person reported missing has returned safe and well and has an opportunity to disclose any relevant issues in the return interview.
2. Where a child or young person has been reported as absent to the police, they will not be given a return interview. In such cases, a OPDS member of staff will conduct the return interview to allow the child or young person an opportunity to talk to someone about their absence.
3. Where an allegation of any form of child abuse is made or becomes evident, child protection procedures must be implemented, and immediate contact must be made with the police child protection team and the Local Authority Child Protection Service where the child is living.
4. If there is any suggestion that the child has been a victim or perpetrator of crime, consideration must be given to securing evidence by police including by forensic examination. This should also include securing clothing and delaying washing/bathing in relevant cases. Staff must remember that all necessary permissions must be obtained from the child or young person's parents and/or those with parental responsibility. The priority is to recognise that the welfare of the child or young person is paramount, and careful consideration must be given to the potential effects of such procedures on the child or young person.
5. Any persons informed of the child or young person's absence should be advised of the child or young person's return without delay including the school and parent/agent.
6. For a child or young person who has been reported as absent or missing on two or more occasions, OPDS will decide in consultation with others, whether a formal review of the guardianship is required.

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## Children who are absent from education

As explained in Keeping Children Safe in Education, all staff and homestays should be aware that children going missing from education, particularly repeatedly, can act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding possibilities. This may include abuse and neglect, which may include sexual abuse or exploitation and can also be a sign of child criminal exploitation including involvement in county lines. It may indicate mental health problems, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation, so-called 'honour'-based abuse or risk of forced marriage. Early intervention is necessary to identify the existence of any underlying safeguarding risk and to help prevent the risks of a child going missing in future. Should OPDS become aware that a student in their care is missing from education, they will notify the school or college that the student attends immediately.

Children Missing Education (2025) is statutory guidance that sets out key principles to enable local authorities in England to implement their legal duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to identify, as far as it is possible to do so, children missing education (CME).

Children Missing Education explains that:

'Children missing education (CME) are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school.'

'Regardless of their circumstances, the law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education which is suitable to their:

- age
- ability
- aptitude
- any special educational needs they may have

This may include suitable education through regular attendance at school, alternative provision or otherwise (for example, EHE).

CME are at significant risk of underachieving, having poorer health outcomes, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) later in life.

No single individual at a school, local authority or related service can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances. If children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action to help in the identification and support of CME.

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Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone’s responsibility. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all individuals involved in identifying and supporting CME should make sure their approach is child centred.’

### Review

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually.

This policy was last reviewed on: .....21<sup>st</sup> April 2026.....

Signed: .....

Date: .....21<sup>st</sup> April 2026.....

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