



# Lonsdale School

## Children who are absent from School Policy

Policy previously known as –  
Pupil Whereabouts and Missing from School

This overarching policy is designed to meet the needs of all pupils with the exception of

- CLA
- Those who have had a missing episode
- Those at risk

All of whom will have an individual protocol

**SLT approval:**

**September 2024**

**Next review date:**

**September 2028**

## **Background**

This policy and guidance sets out the framework across Lonsdale School for ascertaining the whereabouts of pupils and the process to follow, if, pupils cannot be located and are 'missing'.

Pupils at Lonsdale School have a range of physical and neurological impairments that impact on their independence and their mobility. Pupils have a broad range of difficulties and as such Lonsdale School has a high ratio of staff to pupils. Some pupils have restricted mobility and require support with moving through the school, others have independently powered wheelchairs and can move around the school freely.

A key approach to ensuring that pupils do not 'go missing' is to provide a supportive and nurturing environment that ensures that pupils always approach staff if they have concerns or difficulties (in school or at home) and share these with staff rather than disengage or leave the school buildings and grounds if they are experiencing distress. However, it is also acknowledged that pupils will not always share difficulties and problems with school staff and may 'go missing' as a result of bullying and incidents that school staff may not always be aware of (either at home or school).

Where school staff are aware that a pupil is experiencing distress or difficulties, increased nurture support, supervision and monitoring may take place to preempt a 'missing' episode.

Pupils are encouraged to participate in a range of activities, which may include preparation for independence and life skills tasks that require pupils to leave the schools premise and grounds. In all situations where a pupil will leave the school site (accompanied or unaccompanied) a risk assessment will take place which will include consideration of the likelihood of a pupil 'go missing'.

As part of a pupil's induction and prior to a pupil commencing attendance at Lonsdale, key personal information will be gathered from parents/carers. This will include information about what may cause distress or unsettle a pupil, how any distress may be manifested and how it could be managed or mitigated. Contact details will be gathered from all parents/carers and those with parental responsibility; this will include emergency contact information for each parent, step parent/partner and those with parental responsibility. This information will be reviewed and up-dated each term by the Admin Team, when a pupil's is approved for residential provision and if there is a change of circumstances in the pupil's family. An accurate and up-to-date photograph of each pupil will be obtained each academic year and will also be up-dated should the pupils appearance change.

## **Daytime**

Lonsdale School has a start time window between 8:45am and 9:15am. Our expectation is that all pupils are in class by 9:00am. Pupils arrive on specifically commissioned school transport, or are taken to school by parents/carers. Transport providers will call at, and collect the pupil from the home. All pupils are 'welcomed' into school and a formal register is taken as pupils arrive. When our register closes, this is recorded on the School Information Management System (SIMS). A printed copy is kept in case of evacuation.

A designated member of the school administration team contacts the family of any pupil who is absent without prior authorisation once the registers close. In the first instance, the primary contact listed on SIMS will be contacted by the school office in order to ascertain the reason for the pupil's absence. This will be the pupil's parent or carer. If school are unsuccessful in contacting the primary contact for the pupil, additional contacts will be contacted. Should a pupil have an allocated social worker, they may be contacted if no response is received from the pupil's contacts listed on SIMS. At the end of this process and if the reason for the pupil's absence cannot be ascertained and their whereabouts is not confirmed (12.00pm), a member of SLT will take further action. If there are concerns about the pupil's wellbeing, this could include contact with Children's Service, the police or a home visit by school. The decision for this will lie with the Headteacher and will be on a case by case basis.

An afternoon register is taken at 1.50pm.

Pupils are taught in small class groups that provide a nurturing environment with a high ratio of staff to pupils. Where pupils leave the classroom for any reason, including but not limited to using the bathroom, classroom staff will monitor the pupil's absence from the class. If the pupil has not returned by the

designated time, or within 15 minutes of leaving the class room, a member of staff will look for the pupil and clarify if the pupil requires assistance.

If the pupil cannot be located, a search of the school premises and school grounds will be instigated. At the same time the admin support staff at Marriott's School will be contacted to clarify if the pupil has been seen within Marriott's School. If the pupil has not been located within 30 minutes of the last point of contact, a member of SLT will be contacted (if not already aware of the situation) who will contact the pupils parents and a decision will be made regarding checking locations that the pupil is familiar with and/or contacting the police. The decision will be informed by the pupil's level of distress, ability and vulnerability. If a pupil has not been located within 1 hour of the last point of contact they should be reported 'missing'<sup>1</sup>.

### **Lunchtime**

Primary and some secondary age pupils eat together in the downstairs dining room, with a high ratio of staff support. This comprises of teaching, support staff and specialist Midday Supervisory Assistants. The number of staff required is determined by a termly rota and an assessment of individual pupil needs. This is assessed on a daily basis. Staff absence will be taken into consideration and adequate oversight measures put in place. Four classes eat their lunch upstairs in the dining room upstairs. The same measures outlined above apply to the upstairs group.

### **Lunchtime Play and Social Time**

The majority of pupils participate in activities on either the primary or main playgrounds, whilst others attend organised activities inside the school building. The number of staff required is determined by a termly rota and an assessment of individual pupil needs. This is assessed on a daily basis. Staff absence will be taken into consideration and adequate oversight measures put in place. The level of staff supervision required for an activity is applied on a case-by-case basis and is dependent on the needs of the pupils participating in the activity.

### **Ascertaining a Pupils Whereabouts**

A log of all actions (including phone calls/discussions) undertaken in connection with and to ascertain the whereabouts of the pupil should be recorded, see appendix 1.

Where a 'missing' incident has occurred school staff will ascertain the reason for the absence and address the course. Where a 'missing' episode has resulted in a pupil leaving the school site the pupil will be offered an opportunity to discuss/explore the issue with an independent person and in line with the Hertfordshire Missing from Home and Care Policy. The return interview should be recorded on the Hertfordshire Children's Services – Return Interview Form.

Where pupils are returned home on commissioned transport the pupil is transferred into the care of a parent/carer. If there is no one (suitable) present at home, the pupil is returned to school and attempts will be made to contact the parent/s or carers. Depending on the circumstances and situation, the pupil's social worker may be contacted.

### **Information to be Made Available**

When reporting the matter to the Police, the following information should be made available.

- Description of child
- A recent photograph (Care Plan)
- When pupil was last seen and with whom
- Who has parental responsibility
- Family addresses
- Any known acquaintances
- Any previous history of going missing/absconding and information about where they were found

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<sup>1</sup> The Police categorise reports of young people that have gone missing in two ways – Missing or Absent. The Absent category should only be used when a young person is not in a place where they are supposed to be and there is no apparent risk.

**NOTE:** If someone is Absent there is no police response.

- Circumstances which increase the risk to pupil should be drawn to the attention of the Police, including any relevant medical needs

### **When pupils are not attending**

As a school, we are required to make 'reasonable enquires' where a pupil:

- Has not returned to school for 10 days after an authorised absence, **or**
- Has been absent without authorisation for 20 consecutive days

'Reasonable enquiries' when the whereabouts of a child are unclear or unknown, might include completing and recording **1 or more** of the following:

- Contacting parents/carers, relatives and neighbours using known contact details
- Checking local databases within the LA, or the DfE's Key to Success or school2school systems
- Following local information sharing arrangements, making enquiries to:
  - Other local databases and agencies
  - Agencies known to be involved with the family
- Checking with UK Visas and Immigration and/or the Border Force
- Checking with the LA and school from which your pupil moved from originally, or any past LAs or schools that have educated your pupil
- Checking with the LA where your pupil lives, if it's different from the one where your school is
- In the case of children of service personnel, checking with the Ministry of Defence [Children's Education Advisory Service](#)
- Conducting a home visit, following your own policies and risk assessment procedures. If appropriate, making enquiries with neighbours and relatives

Absence from school without explanation may be considered a safeguarding concern and external agencies may be notified by the school. Lonsdale School will always place the safety and wellbeing of pupils at the forefront of all decisions we make about involving external agencies. If we are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a pupil, we will liaise with the necessary professionals.

<b>RECORD OF ACTIONS TAKEN WHERE A PUPIL IS DEEMED MISSING</b>			
<b>Date/ Time</b>	<b>Action taken</b>	<b>Who by</b>	<b>Comments</b>