



MISSING STUDENT POLICY

Date of Policy	August 2024
Reviewer(s)	Director of Safeguarding, Mental Health and Wellbeing (DSL) Assistant Principal Boarding and Welfare, Assistant Principal Pastoral
Approved by	Principal
Next Review Date	August 2025

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AIM

Worthgate School is committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for all our students so the students can learn in a relaxed and secure atmosphere. As such, it is the school policy to actively investigate, and provide effective support and interventions, to students who are reported as 'missing' or who have taken leave without appropriate permissions.

Additionally, we will work to reduce the incidence of students going missing and the risks associated with young people who go missing.

This policy is consistent with the legal duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of students as described in section 175 of the Education Act 2002, Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2024, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and DfE guidance Children Missing Education 2016.

All staff should be aware that children going missing, 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 child criminal exploitation. It may indicate mental health problems, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation 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 student going missing in future.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear framework for all staff, including volunteers, who work at the school about the school's approach to managing incidents of missing students and students who take leave without permission.

It should be remembered that international students are a vulnerable group, who are often isolated from their friends and family who may be living thousands of miles away. International students may have an imperfect command of English and/or be unfamiliar with British customs. As such, information requests from the families of international students should be dealt with particularly sympathetically; as persons may not appreciate the provisions of the Data Protection Act, or the School's position on confidentiality.

RESPONSIBILITY

Ultimate responsibility for this policy and procedure lies with the Principal. The School has a legal responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of its students, staff and visitors and aims to provide a healthy and safe environment that promotes the welfare of all.

All staff and students have a legal responsibility to take reasonable care for their own safety and that of others.

All members of staff including volunteers, but specifically those in the boarding and pastoral teams, must be aware of the policy, procedures, and sanctions applicable to incidences of missing students or students who take leave without permission and apply them accordingly.

The procedures in this policy may be adapted as necessary. The Principal has a wide discretion in relation to the procedures in this policy.

THRESHOLDS

There are three thresholds which allow for different procedures to be adopted in the case of missing students and students who are absent without leave. The three thresholds are under 16s, under 18s (including Over 18s living in the same boarding house) and over 18s living in the School's 18+ accommodation or independently. In most cases staff will be dealing with students who are absent without proper authorisation. Cases in which students are determined to be 'missing' are rare.

In order to ascertain which procedure should be followed when a student is missing or absent without permission, the senior person coordinating the School's response should determine the age of the student and assess the risk. Staff should be aware that they do not need to wait until the threshold to report any students they have concerns about.

A number of contextual factors will be taken into account, including:

- Is the student despondent or mentally or physically disabled?
- Is the student experiencing academic, personal, or financial problems?
- Has the student disappeared before?
- Does the student have a known drug and/or alcohol problem?
- Has the student received any threats or warnings?
- What was the student's lifestyle? Does the student have a criminal record?
- Did the student or perpetrator leave a note?
- Possible threat factors: time of day; darkness; weather conditions; known local concerns.

OVER 18S LIVING IN 18+ ACCOMMODATION OR INDEPENDENTLY

For the purposes of this policy an over 18 student living in 18+ accommodation or independently, is defined as missing when they have been absent for more than 2 consecutive periods without proper authorisation or notification and where all other avenues of information gathering about their location and wellbeing have been exhausted. Students living in independent accommodation are defined as missing if they have been absent from school for 2 consecutive periods and there has been no response to calls and emails.

Staff will review contextual factors and should not wait longer than 2 hours to start mitigating actions if there are concerns.

These students are adults and have the right to be treated as such. Students who are over 18 have the right to privacy. Their parents, guardians, next of kin, members of staff or fellow students do not have an automatic right to know their whereabouts. Indeed, to reveal an over 18 student's whereabouts to any of these parties, without the permission of the student concerned, may well be a breach of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that came into effect in the UK on 25 May 2018.

It is important to remember that some students do not wish to have contact with their immediate family for personal reasons; as adults, this position must be respected. It is a serious matter to disclose personal details of a student to a third party, even if it is an over 18 students' next of kin.

Personal details should only be disclosed with the permission of the Principal or Vice Principal. It is important to remember that any person who decides to breach confidentiality must be able to justify their action in terms of the prevention of serious harm, or a genuine and reasonable belief that serious harm to the student might be prevented by such disclosure.

Attendance staff will monitor daily absence reports. Any student who has had unauthorised null attendance for two consecutive days, will have a Shackleton Student Welfare note raised and the Director of Safeguarding, Mental Health and Wellbeing (DSL), the Assistant Principal Boarding and Welfare, the Deputy DSLs, the Assistant Principal Pastoral, the Vice Principal and the Principal will be notified by e-mail. Where the student resides in independent accommodation and no communications have been possible, a safeguarding visit may be carried out, authorised by the Principal or Vice Principal, to support their personal safety

UNDER 18S (INCLUDING OVER 18S LIVING IN THE SAME BOARDING HOUSE)

For the purposes of this policy an under 18 student (including over 18s living in the same boarding house) is defined as missing where they fail to return to the Boarding House at curfew time, including on the day the student is expected back from an exeat, or if living in independent accommodation are absent from School for 2 consecutive days with no reply received from their parent/guardian stating that they are aware of their whereabouts.

For students in independent accommodation the parent/guardian should be contacted directly if there has been no explanation of the absence by the end of morning on the first day of absence.

UNDER 16S

For the purposes of this policy an under 16 student is missing when they do not appear at their required times of registration during the School teaching day or curfew times after the end of the School teaching day, including on the day the student is expected back from an exeat, or if living in Independent Accommodation, are absent from School for 2 consecutive days with no reply received from their parent/guardian stating that they are aware of their whereabouts.

For students in independent accommodation, the parent/guardian should be contacted directly as soon as possible (and at the latest by the end of the morning on the first day of absence) if there has been no explanation of the absence.

ALL STUDENTS: GENERAL PROCEDURE UPON DISCOVERY THAT A STUDENT IS MISSING

The safety of the student is paramount. The absence of a student from the School for a prolonged period, or an extremely anxious enquiry from a friend or relative, may give rise to concerns about the student's safety.

These concerns may be particularly acute if it is known that the student is suffering from a health or personal problem. It is essential that the member of staff dealing with the enquiry checks with all relevant sources of information to ensure that they have a full picture of the circumstances before escalating to senior management or any third parties, such as the police. Since the control of information is vital, a designated person should be identified, coordinating the collation of useful and relevant information and regulating the flow of information to appropriate individuals and/or agencies, bearing in mind the statutory obligations outlined above.

The first step must always be to confirm that the student is missing using the thresholds laid out above. Having confirmed that a student is missing, all other avenues for information gathering about their location and wellbeing should be exhausted, if not already. Obtain a photograph (from Shackleton) and familiarise yourself as to what the student looks like and then investigate possible avenues using the following examples of available sources of information:

- Acquire information through Shackleton and REACH to determine last time seen in residence, personal contact details, age, authorised absences, check exeat system etc.;
- Review the student file, (to determine whether confidential information has been stored on file) and other relevant information, e.g. Health issues, etc.;
- Speak to the Director of Safeguarding, Mental Health and Wellbeing (DSL), the Assistant Principal Boarding and Welfare, the Deputy DSLs, the Assistant Principal Pastoral, the Vice Principal, the Boarding Team Leads, the House Parents, the Student Communications team, the Maintenance and Catering Staff, etc.;
- Ask other staff on duty in the Boarding House, if they know any reason for absence.
- Obtain the student's or friend's number and make direct contact if possible.
- If appropriate ask friends to try to make contact using phone or social media as available.
- Ask other students if they are aware of any reason for the absence - though their information should only be taken as a guide to be followed up, and certainly not as the only evidence.
- Begin a search of the Boarding House, in other rooms, as it may be that the student is with a friend and has not told anyone;
- If appropriate visit private residence if student is in independent accommodation.
- Ask duty staff in other areas, to check their areas and ask their students for any information (i.e. for them to do what you have done within the House;

- Check other areas of the school, e.g. Learning Resource Centre, Private Study Areas, Common rooms (e.g. Chaucer café), Dining Room.
- Deploy a member of staff to the local Sainsbury's/ Cricket ground café to check if the student is there (since this is a popular venue for students to visit).

If none of this produces any information and all avenues of information have been reasonably exhausted, then the on-call Senior Lead should then decide to enquire/inform the parents or guardians of the missing student (if they are not already aware as they may be, particularly for students in independent accommodation) and/or inform the police. The on-call Senior Lead will also determine who is to make contact.

The member of staff designated as leading the response should maintain all notes, records, and recordings of telephone conversations.

REPORTING A STUDENT MISSING TO THE POLICE

When reporting a student missing the police will ask questions. The questions may be as follows so please ensure you have these details at hand when speaking to the police:

- All personal details known to you, including their full name, date of birth, address.
- Any details relating to the disappearance; when you or others last had contact with the individual, what they were wearing when they disappeared and any other details relating to possible reasons behind their disappearance.
- Any factors that might put the student at risk. This might be age, physical or mental health issues or perhaps the individual may have received bad news or been in emotional distress.

The police may ask for various personal items belonging to the missing individual. This may include mobile phones, diaries and laptop computers. The police may also want to visit the accommodation and carry out a routine search and ask for a picture of missing student. The DSL must be informed of the communications with the police and will liaise with them thereafter.

IN THE EVENT THAT A 'MISSING' STUDENT RETURNS TO SCHOOL

If/when the student returns to school, Boarding Staff must telephone the relevant member of the SLT at most appropriate time, e.g., if student returns at 3am, inform the relevant member of the SLT at 9am the following morning, but this is very much at the discretion of the SLT staff member. The police and DSL should be informed as soon as the student returns.

When the student returns a supportive interview should be completed, documenting where the student has been, who they have been staying with, reasons for being absent, etc.

Staff must maintain all notes, records, and recordings of conversations and telephone calls.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Staff cannot and should not promise total confidentiality. All staff must follow our Confidentiality Policy.

FOLLOW-ON PROCEDURES

Based on the return interview, students will usually be required to speak to a member of the pastoral/safeguarding team regarding their being missing. This team will consider what support the student requires upon returning to the school in accordance with the 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023' guidance.

Follow up will be in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and the Student Behaviour Policy, as well as any guidance from local agencies.

Completion of the 'missing' student procedures is onerous. Such cases usually arise out-of-hours and typically require a very labour-intensive approach. The school reserves the right to recover unnecessary costs from students or their parents. As such, House Parents must outline the procedures for exeat and the consequences of being absent without leave during the students' induction.

STUDENTS MISSING FROM EDUCATION

In addition to following this policy for unexplained absences reaching the defined threshold, Worthgate School is obliged to notify the local authority when a CSA student fails to attend school regularly or is absent without leave for more than 10 school days (continuous). Our Attendance Policy details our processes for monitoring and following up student attendance.

POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be evaluated and reviewed annually. It may also be reviewed in the light of new legislation or any incident that may relate to this policy. This policy has been developed and implemented in consultation with the whole school community including students, parents/carers, staff, and partner agencies.