Aspire Absconding Policy (Students who abscond or go missing)

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Policy reviewed by:	Executive Headteacher, Director of Safeguarding, Aspire Trustees Ratified by Trustees March 2025
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1. Purpose and context

Aspire is committed to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of students and staff and we expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. Aspire strives to provide a safe and secure environment where students will want to come and enjoy learning with others.

It is always our expectation that students will choose to comply with policies and procedures whilst on school premises or under the direct supervision of staff during educational visits.

This procedure is written to maintain the safety of students and staff when dealing with the unlikely event of a student absconding from school premises or during an educational visit. In doing so, Aspire acknowledges its duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, particularly Section 2, which places a duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare of employees; and Section 7, which places a duty on employees to take reasonable care of themselves and others who may be affected by their actions at work.

The safety strategies will be dependent on school phases/ ages and the vulnerability of specific individuals. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play in safeguarding children. Aspire also recognises its duty under Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2024, which requires that all decisions made in relation to safeguarding must consider staff welfare and the potential risks they may face.

Children who go missing are potentially at risk of harm, and a significant number, because of their circumstances, may face the risk of sexual, criminal, or economic exploitation. Where a student or young person is known to present a high risk of absconding and placing themselves or others in danger, this will be reflected in their individual assessment of risk, outlining how those needs should be addressed in a safe and positive way.

In the event of a student absconding from Aspire, the Head of School (HoS) or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will become the lead person to take charge of the incident, ensuring compliance with both safeguarding and health and safety legislation.

2. Definitions

A student attending an Aspire site is considered to have 'absconded' if they intentionally/knowingly leave the school site or any activity outside the school as part of their learning, without permission.

Where staff have reasonable ground to believe that in leaving the school site, students may place themselves or others in danger, this protocol will be followed.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is **everyone's** responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners should make sure their approach is *child centred*. This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child.
(KCSIE 2024, S2)

Under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974 and in Common Law, schools and other education settings owe a duty of care towards their students. This duty of care requires that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that students are safe and remain within the care of the school at all times throughout the school day and during school-led activities.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, staff are required to assess risks, as far as reasonably practicable, before undertaking any action.

All staff are responsible for:

- Knowing the students and actively working with them to support good regulation and safe behaviours.
- Informing the HoS or Site Admin if they become aware that parental contact details have changed, especially phone numbers.
- Act immediately in the case of a child absconding.
- Considering the risks to themselves, the absconding student, their colleagues, and other students in their care before taking action.
- Bear in mind that students who abscond may be upset or agitated and therefore it is important to remain calm.
- Knowing if a student has particular needs or risk associated with absconding listed on their risk assessment

The Head of School is responsible for:

- Ensuring that students' contact details are up to date on Arbor.
- Knowing the safeguarding status of every student (CP/LAC).
- Managing an absconding event in line with this procedure with the support of the DSL team.
- Considering the risks to themselves, the absconding student, their colleagues, and other students in their care before taking action.
- Sharing information with school staff regarding student-specific absconding risks.

The DSL/ Deputy DSL is responsible for:

- Supporting the Head of School to manage the absconding event in line with this procedure.
- Reviewing a student's individual risk assessment following any absconding event.
- Reporting the event and the school's response to the event to any safeguarding partners e.g. the mainstream school/ social workers.

4. During an incident

If a student absconds:

- Staff need to inform the HoS/ DSL immediately – this may be done over the radio or passing a message via another member of staff.
- A staff member may choose to follow the student off site, if they feel that it would be safe for them to do so, and they judge that they may be able to deescalate the situation and persuade the student to come back to school.
- A staff member may choose to follow the student off site, if the student is particularly vulnerable or there is concern that the student may come to harm (history of self-harm, suicidal intent or child exploitation).
- If a staff member does not feel that they can positively impact the situation or feels that by following the student they may escalate the situation or place themselves at risk, staff are asked to try and see in which direction the student leaves, so that they can give the HoS that

information.

- If staff do decide to leave site to follow or find the student, they should make sure that the HoS/DSL is aware of this.
- If a staff member decides to leave the site to follow or find a student, they should remain aware of their surroundings and ensure they do not compromise their own welfare or that of others in their care.
- Staff should consider how they are able to stay in touch with the school (remain within radio range/ pick up a school mobile) and look after their own comfort.
- It would not be expected that staff would stay off site for more than approx 15 mins, or stray beyond the immediate vicinity of the school.

HoS/DSL:

- Should establish the facts around a student absconding - How, state of student, anything they said as leaving, where they might have gone.
- Should establish if a staff member has left the site as well, or if the student is on their own.
- If a staff member has gone off site, the HoS/DSL may direct them to come back to site if it is felt to be safer by the HoS who is managing the incident. The HoS/DSL may also decide to send another member of staff to support.
- Should consider any specific risks or plans outlined in the students' risk assessment.
- The HoS/DSL should contact the parents and inform them of the absconding event as soon as possible and make a record of the call on Arbor.
- If the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan or is in the care of the Local Authority (LAC), the HoS/DSL will inform the social worker.
- The HoS/DSL will inform the police after notifying the parent/guardian. If the parents/ guardians cannot be contacted, the HoS/DSL will take an appropriate decision depending on the response/reaction of the student, as well as the location/direction of the student's movement.
- The HoS/DSL will provide the police with as precise a description of the student as possible, the last known whereabouts of the student and any other details they may require.
- The HoS/DSL will also keep the student's parents/guardians/social worker updated as necessary.

5. Student absconding whilst off-site on educational visits, trips or with a home tutor

If a student absconds during an educational visit, the incident will be handled by the trip lead. Parents/guardians and police will be called within 5 minutes of a child going missing.

The staff member in charge must provide the following Information to the police:

- The precise location
- Who the absconding student was with
- When the student was last recorded as being seen
- How the student absconded
- The time that the student absconded
- A description of the student
- Any immediate danger

The lead teacher will then ring the school office and report the absconding incident to the HoS/DSL.

6. Following an incident

It is important that following an incident, the issues that have arisen are addressed and staff should:

- Review the individual risk assessment for the student involved.
- Where appropriate, talk through the incident with the student involved, explaining the consequences of such action in terms of Health and Safety of the student and staff involved. Ensure that a record of such discussion with the student is kept.
- Complete an incident log on CPOMS.
- Keep all members of staff informed and discuss the incident in staff meetings.
- Review procedures for the individual every half term to ensure appropriate control measures are in place and that all staff are fully informed.
- Review school procedures to ensure staff safety is considered in future incidents.

7. Aspire policies

Staff are reminded to read the following school policies and practice guidelines in conjunction with this policy:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Risk Assessment for Student Welfare Policy
- Sole Working Policy