

The Richard Pate School



Missing Child Policy, Whole School, including EYFS

September 2026

1. Policy Statement

This policy has regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (KCSIE 2026), the Children Missing Education statutory guidance, Working Together to Improve School Attendance, the Independent School Standards and, where applicable, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework.

All staff must read KCSIE 2026 Part One in full and follow the School's safeguarding policies and procedures. Staff must maintain an attitude of "it could happen here" and act immediately where a missing or absent child may be at risk of harm.

The School recognises that absence from education, particularly where prolonged, repeated, unexplained or otherwise concerning, can be a safeguarding warning sign. It may be associated with abuse or neglect, child sexual or criminal exploitation, county lines, mental health concerns, substance misuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, female genital mutilation, forced marriage or other forms of harm.

At The Richard Pate School (RPS), the safety and wellbeing of every pupil is our highest priority. We recognise that a child going missing from school or while in our care is a potentially serious safeguarding incident requiring an immediate, coordinated and proportionate response.

Our aim is to provide a safe, secure and caring environment where pupils are encouraged to Aim High, Be Kind and Be Brave, whilst ensuring that robust procedures are in place to minimise risk and respond swiftly should a child become unaccounted for.

All staff share responsibility for maintaining pupils' safety and are expected to know and follow the procedures outlined in this policy. Prompt action, effective communication and accurate record keeping are essential to ensuring the safe return of any missing child and to identifying any safeguarding concerns.

This policy should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Attendance Policy, Educational Visits Policy, Behaviour Policy, Health and Safety Policy and Emergency Procedures.

2. Purpose

- distinguish between a child who becomes missing while in the School's care and a child who is absent from or missing education, while ensuring that safeguarding concerns in either situation are acted upon without delay;
- ensure information is shared lawfully and promptly with the DSL, parents/carers, police, local authority, children's social care and other agencies where necessary to safeguard a child; and
- ensure the child's wishes and feelings, age, understanding, SEND, communication needs and known vulnerabilities are considered in the response and subsequent review.

This policy aims to:

- safeguard pupils by ensuring an immediate and coordinated response if a child goes missing;
- minimise risk through effective supervision and attendance procedures;
- provide clear guidance for staff during school hours, educational visits and school activities;
- ensure concerns are managed in accordance with safeguarding procedures;
- support effective communication with parents, carers, the police and other agencies where necessary; and
- ensure every incident is recorded, reviewed and used to strengthen future practice.

3. Preventative Measures

The School will take a proactive, child-centred approach to attendance and absence. Staff will identify and respond to concerning patterns of absence, including repeated or prolonged absence, and will not wait for a child to meet a fixed absence threshold before considering safeguarding action.

Where a pupil is unexpectedly absent, the School will follow its first-day response/attendance procedures promptly, establish the reason for absence and make appropriate enquiries where the reason is unknown or gives cause for concern. Where contact cannot be established or there is concern for the child's welfare, the matter will be escalated to the DSL/Deputy DSL and appropriate external agencies without delay.

The School will maintain accurate admission and attendance registers and will comply with statutory Children Missing Education requirements, including required notifications to the local authority when a pupil's name is added to or removed from the admission register in circumstances prescribed by law.

Risk assessments and supervision arrangements will take particular account of pupils known to be at increased risk of going missing, including because of age, SEND, communication needs, impulsivity, previous incidents, family circumstances, exploitation risk or other safeguarding vulnerabilities.

RPS places great importance on preventing incidents before they occur.

This includes:

- accurate attendance registration at the start of every morning and afternoon session;
- effective supervision throughout the school day;
- appropriate staff deployment during lessons, transitions and breaktimes;
- secure entry and exit procedures;
- regular head counts during movement around the school;
- robust risk assessments for educational visits and off-site activities;
- age-appropriate supervision ratios; and
- promoting pupils' understanding of personal safety.

Attendance registers must be completed promptly by the class teacher at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session in accordance with the school's Attendance Policy. If the class teacher is absent, responsibility for completing the register must be delegated to an appropriate member of staff.

4. Procedures if a Child Goes Missing on the School Site

The DSL or Deputy DSL should be notified at the earliest practicable stage, and immediately where there is any safeguarding concern or known vulnerability. The response must not be delayed while attempts are made to determine why the child is missing.

The search should be proportionate to the circumstances and should include checking known hazards, exits, boundaries and places the child may reasonably have gone. Staff must not place themselves or other pupils at risk during a search.

Where CCTV or other School systems may assist in establishing the child's whereabouts, authorised staff may review them promptly in accordance with the School's CCTV, Data Protection and Safeguarding policies.

If a pupil cannot be accounted for, staff must treat the situation as a potential safeguarding incident and respond immediately.

Step 1 – Immediate Checks

The member of staff discovering the child is missing will:

- remain calm;
- check attendance registers and confirm the child has not been collected or authorised to leave;
- carry out a rapid search of the immediate area, including classrooms, toilets and nearby locations; and
- notify the School Office and the Headteacher (or the senior member of staff on site) immediately.

The remaining pupils must continue to be supervised appropriately throughout.

Step 2 – Coordinated Search

The Headteacher or delegated senior leader will coordinate a systematic search of the school site, allocating staff to designated areas while ensuring suitable supervision of all other pupils.

Staff should not leave the school site unless specifically directed to do so.

Step 3 – Escalation

There is no requirement to wait for a specified period before contacting the police. If there is reason to believe that the child has left the site, is in immediate danger, is particularly vulnerable or the circumstances are otherwise concerning, the police must be contacted without delay.

The DSL will consider whether the circumstances also require an immediate referral to local authority children's social care or information-sharing with another safeguarding agency. Necessary safeguarding information may be shared without consent where there is a lawful basis to do so; data protection law is not a barrier to protecting a child.

Information provided to police or other agencies should, where relevant, include the child's description, clothing, photograph, age, SEND/medical needs, communication needs, vulnerabilities, known risks, likely destinations, relevant family/contact information and the circumstances and time at which the child was last seen.

If the child has not been located within a very short period of time, or there is any reason to believe the child may have left the school site or be at immediate risk, the Headteacher (or delegated senior leader) will:

- contact the police without delay;
- inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL);
- contact the child's parents or carers;
- provide the police with all relevant information, including a recent photograph where available; and
- continue to support the police investigation.

The welfare of the missing child remains the school's overriding priority.

5. Procedures During Educational Visits

The visit risk assessment must identify foreseeable risks of a pupil becoming separated from the group and specify supervision, head-count, rendezvous and emergency arrangements. Additional measures must be considered for pupils with SEND, medical needs, communication needs or a known history/risk of going missing.

Staff must not compromise the supervision or safety of the remaining group while searching. Local emergency arrangements, venue security and police should be engaged promptly according to the level of risk; there is no requirement to wait for a set period before contacting police.

The DSL or Deputy DSL must be informed as soon as practicable so that any wider safeguarding concerns, referrals or information-sharing can be considered.

Educational visits require enhanced vigilance and regular counts.

If a pupil cannot be accounted for:

1. The visit leader will immediately gather the remaining pupils into a safe location and complete a head count.
2. One or more staff members will conduct a rapid search of the immediate area while maintaining appropriate supervision of the remainder of the group.
3. The Visit Leader will notify the Headteacher and follow the Educational Visits Emergency Procedures.
4. Staff will establish when and where the child was last seen and obtain relevant information from pupils and accompanying adults.
5. If the pupil is not located immediately, the venue management and the police will be contacted without delay.
6. Parents or carers will be informed by the Headteacher or delegated senior leader.
7. Once the child has been found, appropriate welfare support will be provided before returning to normal activities.

The visit leader will ensure that a full written record of the incident is completed following the visit.

6. Following the Safe Return of the Child

The pupil should be spoken with sensitively and, where possible, by an appropriate trusted adult. Staff should use open, non-leading questions and take account of the child's wishes and feelings, age, understanding, SEND and communication needs. The purpose is to establish welfare and safeguarding needs, not to conduct an investigative interview.

The DSL will consider whether the incident indicates abuse, neglect, exploitation, child-on-child abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, family difficulties, mental health needs, bullying, online contact, criminal activity or another safeguarding risk and whether Family Help/early support, children's social care, police or another agency should be involved.

The written record will include a clear chronology, the circumstances of the disappearance, searches and enquiries made, people/agencies contacted and times, decisions and the rationale for them, the child's account where appropriate, the outcome, support provided and actions to reduce recurrence.

Where an incident concerns an EYFS child, the School will consider immediately whether any notification is required under the EYFS statutory framework or the School's regulatory arrangements. Where the School is subject to an Ofsted notification duty for the provision concerned, any notifiable safeguarding/welfare incident must be reported as soon as reasonably practicable and within the applicable statutory timescale.

Once the pupil has been located, the immediate priority is to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

The Headteacher or a designated senior leader will:

- speak with the pupil to establish the circumstances surrounding the incident;
- ensure the child receives appropriate pastoral support;
- inform parents or carers of the outcome;
- consider whether further safeguarding action is required;
- complete all safeguarding and incident records; and
- review the incident to identify lessons learned and any improvements required to school procedures or risk assessments.

Where appropriate, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will consider whether the circumstances require referral to Children's Social Care or consultation with other safeguarding agencies.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

All roles under this policy operate within the School's wider safeguarding responsibilities. A missing-child incident must not be treated only as an operational or attendance matter where the circumstances indicate possible harm.

Ensuring the safety of every pupil is a shared responsibility. All members of the RPS community have an important role in preventing children from going missing and responding effectively should an incident occur.

Governing Body - Trustees

The Trustees are responsible for ensuring that appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place to protect pupils and promote their welfare. Trustees monitor the implementation of this policy through safeguarding oversight and regular policy review.

Head

The Head has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy and for ensuring that appropriate procedures, staffing and training are in place. In the event of a missing child, the Headteacher (or delegated senior leader) will coordinate the school's response, liaise with parents, carers and external agencies, and ensure that all actions are appropriately recorded and reviewed.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

The DSL will ensure that relevant information about children at heightened risk of going missing or being absent is known to staff who need it, subject to appropriate confidentiality and information-sharing principles.

The DSL will ensure that safeguarding records show the concern, actions taken, decisions made, rationale and outcomes, and will liaise with the local authority, children's social care, police and other agencies where appropriate.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will ensure that any incident involving a missing child is considered within the wider safeguarding context. The DSL will:

- provide safeguarding advice during and following the incident;
- determine whether further safeguarding action or referral is required;
- ensure accurate safeguarding records are maintained; and
- contribute to any review following the incident.

Staff

All staff must read KCSIE 2026 Part One in full and know the School's procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns, unexplained absence and a child who becomes missing while in the School's care.

Staff must act immediately and must not assume that another person has reported a missing child or safeguarding concern.

Every member of staff is responsible for maintaining the safety and wellbeing of pupils while they are in the school's care.

All staff are expected to:

- maintain appropriate supervision of pupils at all times;
- complete attendance registers accurately and promptly;
- remain vigilant and report concerns immediately;
- follow the procedures outlined in this policy without delay;
- cooperate fully with senior leaders and emergency services during any incident; and
- participate in safeguarding and emergency response training.

Educational Visit Leaders

Visit Leaders are responsible for ensuring that appropriate risk assessments, supervision arrangements and emergency procedures are in place for all off-site activities. They must ensure regular head counts are undertaken and respond immediately should a pupil become unaccounted for.

8. Monitoring and Review

Senior leaders and the DSL will monitor missing-child incidents and relevant attendance/absence information for repeat incidents, patterns, locations, times, supervision issues and safeguarding vulnerabilities. Monitoring will consider whether particular pupils or groups, including pupils with SEND or other vulnerabilities, are disproportionately affected.

The School will be able to demonstrate on inspection how incidents have been recorded, reviewed and used to improve safeguarding practice, supervision, risk assessment, attendance processes and staff training.

This policy will be reviewed against KCSIE 2026, current Children Missing Education and attendance guidance, the Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework where applicable, and current ISBA safeguarding/model-policy

recommendations. The School will consider amendments whenever those requirements or recommendations change.

The Richard Pate School is committed to continually reviewing its safeguarding practice to ensure the highest standards of pupil safety.

Following any incident involving a missing child, the school will undertake a review to:

- establish the circumstances surrounding the incident;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the response;
- identify any safeguarding concerns;
- review supervision, risk assessments or procedures where necessary; and
- implement any actions required to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

Where appropriate, outcomes from reviews will be shared with staff to strengthen safeguarding practice and improve future procedures.

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required, to reflect changes in statutory guidance, safeguarding legislation, the Independent School Standards or the operational needs of the school.

The policy should be read alongside the school's:

- Children Missing Education / Attendance procedures and local authority notification arrangements;
- SEND Policy;
- Online Safety / E-Safety Policy; and
- Taking, Storing and Using Images of Children Policy.
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- Attendance Policy;
- Educational Visits Policy;
- Behaviour Policy;
- Health and Safety Policy;
- Emergency Procedures;
- Lockdown Policy; and
- Staff Code of Conduct.

Through clear procedures, effective supervision and a strong culture of safeguarding, The Richard Pate School is committed to ensuring that every pupil remains safe, supported and able to Aim High, Be Kind and Be Brave in a school community where everyone is Respectful, Prepared and Safe.

Missing Child Quick Reference Flow Chart

