



Mary Hare Policy: SCH024

Children missing from Education (CME)

Policy Owner: Head of Residential
Care Operations

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Securing the future of deaf children and young people

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Statement

1. This policy's protocols are compatible with:
 - [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership \(In West Berkshire\) Procedures](#),
 - [West Berkshire Council – Children Missing Education Policy \(2023\)](#)
 - [Children missing education \(September 2024\)](#)
 - [Keeping children safe in education \(Sept 2024\)](#).
 - [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2023 \[updated Feb 2024\]\)](#)
2. It seeks to address four forms of absence without permission. The first is withdrawal of a child by their families for holidays and for other reasons. The second is when a child fails to return to school after a weekend or holiday. The third is when a young person removes themselves from the care or school setting without permission and is missing for a short period. The fourth is when a young person removes themselves from school for a longer period, including being absent overnight.
3. This policy should be read in conjunction with '[Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care \(January 2014\)](#)'.

Aim

4. To provide all staff with a clear understanding of how to respond and who to inform should a child not return to school or discovers a child missing. The following procedures are to:
 - Provide a clear procedure which is understood and effectively implemented by all staff.
 - Enable the missing child to be located as quickly as possible.

Definitions

5. The following definitions are sourced from the '[Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care \(January 2014\)](#)'

Missing

6. 'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be the subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another'.

Absent

7. 'A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be'. The 'absent' category should comprise cases in which children / young people are not presently where they are supposed to be but there is no apparent risk, and they are not believed to be immediately at risk of harm.
8. Police will not be sent to cases where children / young people are defined as being 'absent'. Instead, the onus will be on care providers to take steps to locate the child / young person, with monitoring by the police and escalation to 'missing' if there is a change to the circumstances that has increased the level of risk. It is expected that all reasonable steps should be taken by care providers to locate the child/young person prior to making a report to the police. Where they remain absent, and the care provider feels that they may be at risk of harm, then a report should be made to the police. Police will attend reports of 'missing' children / young people'.
9. Thames Valley Police will not categorise the following as absent – they will always be subject of a missing person investigation:
 - All children 14 and under
 - All children 15 and over who have a child sexual exploitation (CSE) warning marker, CSE intelligence or are named in a child abduction warning notice.

10. A child will be classified by the police as either 'missing' or 'absent' after considering 10 risk assessment questions carried out by police call handler:
- What is the specific concern that has caused you to call the police?
 - What has been done so far to trace the individual?
 - Is this significantly out of character?
 - Do they need urgent medical attention or essential medication that is not likely to be available to them?
 - If under 18, are they currently at risk of child abuse including CSE?
 - Are they likely to be subjected to any other crime?
 - Are they likely to be the victim of any other form of abuse?
 - Are they likely to attempt suicide?
 - Do they pose a danger to other people?
 - Is there any other information relevant to their absence?

Absconded

11. Refers to a person who has deliberately and secretly left or avoided attending school or lessons without permission or notice. This can be seen as a serious issue, as it may indicate underlying problems that need to be addressed. Absconding from school or lessons can be a sign of safeguarding concerns and can be a barrier to attendance that needs to be addressed through supportive measures.

School context

12. Mary Hare School has a very low level of absence without permission or absconding and when it does occur, it is likely to be an upset child seeking time to cool off. The location of the school site means that children are unlikely to make their way to town alone.

Children failing to return to school after a period away from school

13. If a child fails to return following a period away from school without parental notification, the guidance below should be followed:
- When a child fails to arrive when expected and without parental notification, first day contact should be made by the Residential Care Staff, or, if a day pupil, following the procedures outlined in the [Attendance and Punctuality Policy](#).
 - Parents are expected, or requested to communicate with school each day their child is unable to attend due to illness or any other unavoidable circumstance to the absence@maryhare.org.uk email address, providing any medical evidence when requested.
 - The School Attendance Officer monitors attendance each morning, calling the houses, or parents for information about any absence.
 - Unauthorised absence is recorded on Class Charts by the form tutors daily.
 - Mary Hare will inform the relevant local authority of any child who fails to attend school regularly, or has been absent without school's permission for a continuous period of 6 school days or more.
 - Any safeguarding concerns relating to absence should be made to the **Designated Safeguarding Lead**.

Unauthorised holidays

14. Request for any term time absence should be made through absence@maryhare.org.uk.
15. Unauthorised holidays are primarily the responsibility of the Principal and teaching staff but information from Residential Care Staff, who may be the first to know of such plans, should be passed to absence@maryhare.org.uk. It will be made clear to families that the school cannot authorise extended leave

during term time, but if families take such leave without permission, the school will notify the placing Local Authority.

Actions to be followed by staff when a child is missing or has absconded during the EDUCATIONAL DAY

16. When a child is missing from school, the member of staff who discovers they are missing should do the following:
- Email pupillocator@maryhare.org.uk, with the child's name, expected location and any other information known. If the child is not located through this method, a member of this team will be allocated to search the school buildings, including toilets, and likely outside areas.
 - Check with the child's friends, or class peers to see if they know their whereabouts.
 - In nearly all cases at Mary Hare, children are located following the above process. **If the child is not located by the above action, within 30 minutes**, the following additional action will be necessary:
 - Senior Management Team (SMT) to be informed and to lead on procedures to expand the search areas, liaise with parents/carers and notify the police.
 - Arrange as many staff as possible to carry out a thorough search inside and out. Check all legitimate possibilities, including; residential houses, Speech and Language Therapy, the medical department, sports fixtures, etc.
 - Try contacting the child by phone or text message. It may be appropriate to ask a friend or peer to attempt contact. This should be done sympathetically, considering the impact on the friend or peer.
 - Check areas the child may go when upset (typically the bottom of the field, the woods, etc.).
 - Contact, and maintain contact with parents AFTER legitimate reasons for absence have been explored.
 - Expanded search areas should include the Oxford Road heading south into Newbury town and north toward the Chieveley Services, Snelsmore Common and the general location of the Mary Hare site.

Actions to be followed by staff when a child is missing or has absconded during RESIDENTIAL TIME

17. When a child is missing during residential time, the member of staff who discovers they are missing should do the following:
- Inform the house leadership team and other house colleagues with the child's name, expected location, last time they had been seen and any other information known.
 - If the child is not located through this method;
 - Try contacting the child by phone or text message. It may be appropriate to ask a friend or peer to attempt contact. This should be done sympathetically, considering the impact on the friend or peer.
 - The On-Call manager should be informed. All other Residential Staff should be informed, house leaders should organise searches for their houses and environments.
 - The On-Call manager will lead on procedures to expand the search areas; to include the school buildings, including toilets, and likely outside areas.
 - In nearly all cases at Mary Hare, children are located following the above process. **If the child is not located by the above action, within 30 minutes**, the following additional action will be necessary:
 - Senior On-Call person to be informed by the On-Call Manager and to advise on procedures to expand search areas, liaise with parents/carers and notify the police.
 - Arrange as many staff as possible to carry out a thorough search inside and out. Check all legitimate possibilities, including all residential houses, Speech and Language Therapy, the medical department, sports fixtures, etc.
 - Check areas the child may go when upset (typically the bottom of the field, the woods, etc.).

- Contact and maintain contact with parents AFTER legitimate reasons for absence have been explored.
- Expanded search areas should include the Oxford Road heading south into Newbury town and north toward the Chieveley Services, Snelsmore Common and the general location of the Mary Hare site.
- On-Call system to arrange for the police to be notified and follow any advice or guidance they have. Note: it may be difficult to get the police to act when a child has been missing for a relatively short period of time and it may be necessary to stress their deafness and additional vulnerability.

18. When the Police are notified, they may require information regarding the circumstances of the child's disappearance, what they were wearing and where possible a photograph of the child. They will also require contact details for the child's parents or carers and may contact the duty team at Children's Services themselves. A risk assessment will be produced which will be regularly reviewed; if the answer to any of the initial 10 questions is yes, the child is recorded as missing. An officer will visit the school and commence a missing person investigation. It is standard procedure for the police to search the child's bedroom and surrounding area. They are searching for the child and evidence of 'push/pull' factors behind the child going missing. This may lead to the child being added to the Missing Person's Database and the Police National Computer.

The returning child

19. After a child has returned to the school, it is important they are offered a return meeting. This provides an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect the child from the risk of going missing again, or from the risks they may have been exposed to while missing.
20. A full record of all actions taken by staff to be completed, ensuring an accurate timeline of events and actions is captured. To include all communications with parents/carers, police and other agencies. This record should be completed within 24 hours and before key staff have gone home for the day.
21. The child's Individual Support Plan (ISP) in Residential Care should be updated following the event.
22. The Designated Safeguarding Lead should be informed of any missing children. Any decision to contact the child's local authority will be taken in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Children missing education

23. All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to a full-time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have. A child going missing from education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect. It is essential that staff are alert to the signs to look out for and to help identify the risk of abuse and neglect, including CSE and the risk of potential travel to conflict zones, FGM and forced marriages.
24. Mary Hare recognises the increased vulnerability of deaf and disabled children to abuse and neglect and the barriers they may face, especially around communication.

Abuse can happen to anyone, but deaf and disabled children are 3 times more likely to be abused or neglected than non-disabled children (Jones et al, 2012)¹.

¹ Taylor, J. et al (2015) *Deaf and disabled children talking about child protection*. London: NSPCC.

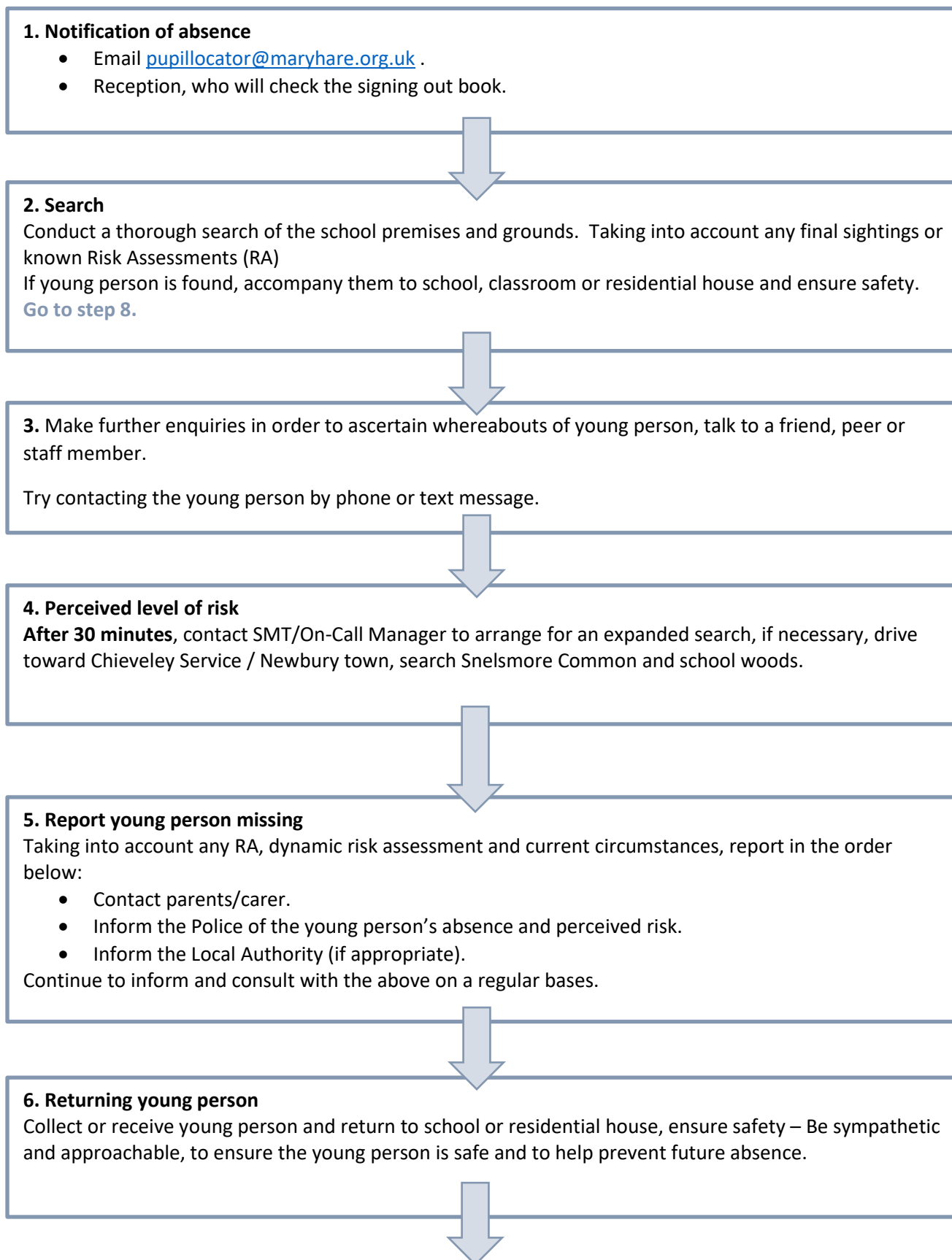
25. The vulnerabilities increase the potential for deaf and disabled children to miss education. The nature of the residential provision at Mary Hare reduces the risk of children missing education but does not negate it.
26. If there are any child protection concerns, then the school's safeguarding procedures should be followed. This policy should be read alongside the schools *Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy*.
27. Mary Hare is committed to maintaining an accurate and updated admission register (Class Charts). Ensuring that children are entered onto the list at the beginning of the first day on which the school has agreed, or been notified, that the child will attend the school. If the child fails to attend on this day, the school will undertake reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts. Mary Hare will notify the local authority at the earliest opportunity.
28. Mary Hare will monitor attendance closely and address poor or irregular attendance. This is done through the daily registers. Patterns are determined by the Attendance Officer and discussed with the safeguarding team.
29. The school uses a range of strategies when a child is absent from school which starts with the first day of absence contact, such as, phone call home, text messages or emails. Other actions include furthermore formal contact with home including emails, letters, meetings and referrals to the authority's Education Welfare Officer.
30. The school will only remove a child's name from the admission register at a non-standard transition point under any of the fifteen grounds set out in the regulations (See Annex A of CME 2024) and only after the school and the local authority have jointly made reasonable enquires and efforts to maintain the placement. The school will notify the local and placing authority when the child's name is removed.
31. Mary Hare will notify the local and placing authority within five days when a child's name is added to the admission register at a non-standard transition point. The information held on the admission register will be provided to the authorities.
32. For further information on the school's use of Common Transfer Files and the sharing of information see the Admissions and Reception of Pupils policy.

Children at particular risk of missing education

33. There are many circumstances where a child may become missing from education. It is vital that staff are aware of reasons children fall out of education. The list (which is not exhaustive) below are identified through the statutory guidance *Children missing education – September 2024*.
 - Children at risk of harm/neglect (including those at risk from FGM and CSE).
 - Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Families.
 - Children of Service Personnel.
 - Missing children/runaways.
 - Children and young people supervised by the Youth Justice System.
 - Children who cease to attend a school.
 - Children of new migrant families.

Annex

Annex 1: Missing or absconding procedure flow chat



7. Notify all relevant people in step 4 and 5 of the return of the young person.



8. Discuss the reason for absence/behaviour with the young person

Include strategies for avoiding a recurrence of absence.

- Update any RA or ISPs.
- Take into account the young person's view and feelings.
- Implement any sanction (if appropriate).



9. Complete record of absence

Document the incident using the Incident report form. Details will need to include the name of the pupil, the date, the time, any details known about reasons for absence, the time the young person was missing, details of search and contacts made.

Policy Version Detail

Reviewed Date:	Version:	Details of change:
Summer 2025	0.1	• New Policy
Summer 2026	0.2	• No Changes apart from the Policy Owner and an update to the flow chart in the Annex 1 (section 2)