



LACEWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Pupil Absconding / Leaving School Premises Safeguarding Policy

2026–2027

School	Lacewood Primary School
Policy owner	Headteacher / Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
Approved by	Governing Body
Date approved	September 2026
Review date	September 2027, or sooner following significant incident or guidance change
Status	Statutory safeguarding-related school procedure

Safeguarding principle: safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The child's safety and welfare are the priority.

1. Purpose and scope

This policy sets out Lacewood Primary School's arrangements for preventing, responding to, recording and reviewing incidents where a pupil leaves, attempts to leave, or is believed to have left the school premises without appropriate authorisation or supervision.

For the purposes of this policy, 'absconding' includes a pupil leaving a classroom, supervised area, playground, off-site activity or the school site without permission where this creates, or could create, a safeguarding risk. It also includes situations where a pupil moves beyond an agreed safe boundary or leaves during a transition, break, lunchtime, educational visit or other school activity.

This policy applies to all pupils, including pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils with SEND, pupils with additional vulnerabilities, and pupils receiving support through an individual risk assessment or safety plan.

2. Policy principles

- The safety, dignity and welfare of the pupil are the first priority.

- The response will be child-centred, proportionate, calm, non-punitive and informed by the pupil's individual needs.
- An incident of absconding is treated as a safeguarding concern, not simply as poor behaviour.
- Staff must act immediately when a pupil is believed to be at risk; concerns must not be delayed until the end of a lesson or the end of the day.
- The school will consider whether the incident indicates a wider safeguarding concern, including abuse, neglect, exploitation, bullying, mental health or wellbeing concerns, unmet SEND needs, family circumstances, peer conflict or other factors.
- The school will work in partnership with parents/carers and, where appropriate, children's social care, the police, the local authority, health professionals and other agencies.
- Information will be shared where necessary and proportionate to safeguard the child, in line with safeguarding and information-sharing requirements.
- Staff safety is also important. Staff must not place themselves or others at unreasonable risk while attempting to locate or safeguard a pupil.

3. Legislative and guidance framework

This policy should be read alongside Lacewood Primary School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Behaviour Policy, Attendance Policy, SEND Policy, Health and Safety arrangements, Educational Visits procedures, First Aid procedures and any relevant local authority safeguarding procedures.

The policy has been developed with regard to the current statutory safeguarding framework in England, including:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026 – statutory guidance for schools on safeguarding and promoting children's welfare.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 – statutory guidance on multi-agency safeguarding.
- Children Missing Education – statutory guidance for local authorities and schools.
- Working Together to Improve School Attendance – statutory attendance guidance.
- Relevant duties under the Children Act 1989 and 2004, Education Act 1996 and other applicable legislation.
- Local safeguarding partnership procedures and local authority guidance.

KCSIE 2026 is in force from 1 September 2026. It reinforces that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, that staff should act immediately on concerns, and that absence from education can be an important warning sign of safeguarding risk.

4. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Absconding	A pupil leaving, attempting to leave or moving beyond an agreed safe boundary without permission or supervision, creating a safeguarding concern.
Missing from school premises	A pupil whose whereabouts are unknown after they have left or are believed to have left the school site.
Unauthorised absence	An attendance matter recorded in accordance with the school's attendance procedures. An individual absconding incident may also have attendance implications.
Child missing education (CME)	A child of compulsory school age who is not registered at a school or otherwise receiving suitable

	education. CME is distinct from an individual incident of absconding but repeated or prolonged absence may contribute to wider safeguarding concerns.
Individual risk assessment / safety plan	A documented plan identifying known risks, triggers, preventative measures, supervision arrangements, agreed responses and review arrangements for a particular pupil.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 All staff

- Know and follow this policy and the school's safeguarding procedures.
- Report concerns to the DSL or deputy without delay.
- If a pupil leaves unexpectedly, raise the alarm immediately and follow the incident procedure below.
- Keep information confidential and share it only with those who need it to safeguard the pupil.
- Record factual information promptly, including what was seen, heard, actions taken and outcomes.
- Never assume that an incident is 'just behaviour'; consider the safeguarding context.

5.2 Headteacher / senior leader on duty

- Coordinate the immediate response and allocate staff to appropriate tasks.
- Assess the level of risk and decide when the police or other emergency services should be contacted, unless an immediate emergency requires staff to call 999 first.
- Ensure parents/carers and the DSL are informed as appropriate.
- Ensure the incident is recorded and reviewed.
- Ensure staffing, site and supervision arrangements are reviewed where necessary.

5.3 Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

- Provide safeguarding oversight and determine whether the incident indicates a wider safeguarding concern.
- Review existing safeguarding records, known vulnerabilities, risk assessments and relevant information.
- Make or support referrals to children's social care, the police or other agencies where thresholds are met.
- Ensure repeated incidents are analysed and that an individual safety plan or multi-agency plan is considered.
- Ensure learning from incidents informs safeguarding practice and staff training.

5.4 Governing Body / Trust

- Ensure the school has effective safeguarding arrangements and that this policy is reviewed.
- Receive appropriate assurance about serious or repeated incidents, while protecting pupil confidentiality.
- Ensure the school has appropriate site, staffing and risk-management arrangements.

6. Prevention and risk reduction

Lacewood Primary School will seek to prevent absconding through good safeguarding, relationships, supervision, behaviour support and early identification of need.

- Maintain secure and appropriately supervised premises, with clear procedures for gates, doors and site access.
- Ensure pupils understand boundaries and safe movement around the school.

- Use consistent routines for registration, transitions, break, lunch, assemblies and dismissal.
- Identify pupils whose individual needs may increase the likelihood or impact of absconding.
- Consider triggers such as anxiety, sensory overload, transitions, conflict, bullying, demands, communication difficulties, unmet SEND needs, emotional dysregulation or safeguarding concerns.
- Where appropriate, develop an individual risk assessment and safety plan with the pupil, parents/carers and relevant professionals.
- Use reasonable adjustments and positive behaviour support to reduce known triggers.
- Ensure staff supervising higher-risk pupils know the agreed response and safe boundaries.
- Review supervision and site arrangements following any serious or repeated incident.
- Teach pupils about personal safety, trusted adults, road safety and what to do if they become lost or separated from staff.

7. Immediate response when a pupil attempts to leave

The following procedure should be adapted to the age, developmental level, known risks and circumstances of the pupil.

1. Raise the alarm immediately. Tell the nearest appropriate adult / senior leader and the office. Do not wait to see whether the pupil returns.
2. Maintain supervision of other pupils. Staff must not abandon a class or group unsafely.
3. If it is safe and practicable, a familiar adult should use calm, non-threatening language and encourage the pupil to stop or return.
4. Do not shout, threaten, shame, corner or physically pursue the pupil in a way that is likely to escalate the situation.
5. Where a pupil has left the site, identify the direction of travel, last known location, clothing, belongings, known destinations, hazards and any immediate risk information.
6. The senior leader/DSL should coordinate a proportionate search of the school site and immediately surrounding safe areas, using available staff without compromising supervision of other pupils.
7. If there is an immediate danger to life, serious injury or a high and imminent safeguarding risk, call 999.
8. Where the pupil cannot be located promptly, or the risk assessment indicates a significant risk, the school should contact the police and provide accurate information about the pupil, circumstances, vulnerabilities and likely locations.
9. Contact the parent/carer as soon as appropriate, taking account of the safeguarding circumstances and any relevant information about who is safe to contact.
10. Keep a clear record of times, actions, decisions, people contacted and information received.
11. When the pupil is located, ensure they are safely reunited with an appropriate adult and assess whether first aid, medical attention or immediate emotional support is required.
12. Inform the DSL and complete the safeguarding/incident record before the end of the school day wherever practicable.

8. When a pupil is missing from the premises

The school will use a dynamic risk assessment. There is no single fixed time that must elapse before contacting the police. The decision will be based on the individual circumstances and level of risk.

Factors increasing urgency may include:

- The pupil is very young or has limited awareness of danger.

- The pupil has a disability, medical condition, communication difficulty or additional need that increases risk.
- The pupil is distressed, dysregulated, injured, suicidal, self-harming or otherwise at immediate risk.
- There is known or suspected exploitation, abuse, neglect, trafficking, criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation or other safeguarding risk.
- The pupil may be heading towards roads, railways, water, heights or another known hazard.
- The pupil has access to medication, dangerous items or other means of harm.
- There are concerns about another person attempting to collect, influence or harm the pupil.
- The pupil has previously gone missing or there is a pattern of escalating incidents.
- Weather, time of day or location significantly increases risk.
- The pupil's whereabouts are unknown and reasonable initial searches have not located them.

If police assistance is required, the school will provide the child's name, age, description, photograph where appropriate and lawful, clothing, last known location/time, known risks, communication needs, medical information relevant to safety, likely destinations, family information and any other information requested by police.

9. Police involvement

The school will contact the police when the circumstances indicate that police assistance is necessary to protect the child. The school will not delay an emergency call while attempting to complete internal searches.

Staff should follow police instructions and cooperate with requests for information. Where appropriate, the school will record the incident/reference number and any advice provided.

A 999 call is appropriate where there is an immediate danger to life, serious injury or an imminent serious safeguarding threat. For other circumstances, the school will use the appropriate local police route and follow local safeguarding procedures.

10. Contacting parents/carers

Parents/carers will normally be informed promptly when a pupil has left or is believed to have left the premises. The timing and method of contact will be informed by safeguarding considerations.

The school will consider whether contacting a particular person could increase risk to the child. Where there are safeguarding concerns about a parent/carer or another person, the DSL will consider advice from children's social care and/or the police before sharing information, where appropriate.

11. Return of the pupil

- The pupil should be welcomed back calmly and safely. Staff should avoid confrontation or immediate punitive questioning.
- Check for injury, illness, distress or other immediate welfare needs and arrange first aid/medical attention where required.
- A trusted adult should speak with the pupil at an appropriate time to understand what happened, what they needed and what might help prevent recurrence.
- The pupil should be given an opportunity to share their experience without being led or pressured.
- Any disclosure or safeguarding concern must be passed to the DSL in accordance with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

- Parents/carers should be updated appropriately.
- The incident should be reviewed and any risk assessment/safety plan updated.

12. Safeguarding assessment following an incident

Every incident should prompt consideration of why the pupil left and whether the behaviour is an indicator of another need or risk. The DSL or delegated safeguarding lead should consider:

- Was there a safeguarding disclosure or concern?
- Is there evidence of abuse, neglect, exploitation, bullying, peer-on-peer abuse or coercion?
- Are there attendance concerns or a pattern of absence/missing episodes?
- Are there unmet SEND, communication, sensory or emotional needs?
- Are there mental health or wellbeing concerns?
- Are there concerns about the home environment or family circumstances?
- Does the pupil have a known vulnerability or previous missing episode?
- Are there concerns about criminal or sexual exploitation, county lines, radicalisation or other contextual safeguarding risks?
- Does the incident require early help, a social care referral, police involvement or another agency response?

Where a child's absence or repeated missing episodes suggest a wider safeguarding risk, the school will follow its safeguarding referral procedures and the relevant local authority arrangements. Children missing education procedures must also be considered where applicable.

13. Individual Risk Assessments and Safety Plans

Where a pupil has absconded, attempted to abscond repeatedly, or is assessed as being at significant risk, the school should consider an individual risk assessment and safety plan.

- Known triggers and early warning signs.
- The pupil's communication preferences and calming strategies.
- Named trusted adults.
- Safe spaces and agreed boundaries.
- Supervision arrangements and high-risk times/locations.
- Agreed de-escalation approaches.
- What staff should do if the pupil moves towards an exit.
- When and how parents/carers should be contacted.
- When the DSL, senior leader, police or other agencies should be contacted.
- How the plan will be reviewed after incidents and at agreed intervals.

Plans should be proportionate and reviewed with the pupil and family wherever appropriate. They should not unnecessarily restrict a pupil's lawful participation in school life.

14. Use of reasonable force

Staff must follow the school's policy and legal requirements relating to the use of reasonable force. Any physical intervention must be lawful, necessary and proportionate to the circumstances and used to prevent injury, serious damage or another significant risk. Staff must not use physical intervention as punishment.

Where a pupil is moving towards a significant danger, staff should seek to reduce risk using calm communication and the least restrictive safe response. Staff must not put themselves in unreasonable danger, for example by entering traffic or hazardous areas. Any use of force must be recorded and reported in line with school procedures.

15. Educational visits and off-site activities

For trips and off-site activities, the educational visit risk assessment must consider the possibility of a pupil becoming separated from the group or leaving the agreed area.

- Staff must know the agreed boundaries, meeting points and emergency arrangements.
- The visit leader must hold current emergency contact information and relevant pupil risk information.
- If a pupil goes missing, the group must be kept safe while staff implement the visit's emergency plan.
- The visit leader should contact the school and emergency services as appropriate.
- A serious incident must be reported and reviewed on return.

16. Recording and information sharing

All incidents must be recorded factually and promptly. Records should distinguish observed facts from professional opinion.

The record should include:

- Date, time and location.
- Pupil's name and class.
- What happened immediately before the incident.
- What the pupil did and where they went, including last known location.
- Known risks and vulnerabilities relevant to the incident.
- Staff involved and actions taken.
- Search areas and times checked.
- Whether and when parents/carers were contacted.
- Whether and when the police or other agencies were contacted, including reference numbers where available.
- How and when the pupil was located and returned.
- Any injury, medical attention or safeguarding disclosure.
- Decisions made, rationale and follow-up actions.
- Any changes to the risk assessment or safety plan.

Records will be stored securely in accordance with the school's safeguarding record-keeping arrangements. Relevant information will be shared on a need-to-know basis where necessary to safeguard the child. Data protection requirements are not a barrier to appropriate safeguarding information sharing.

17. Post-incident review and learning

Following a serious, repeated or high-risk incident, the Headteacher/DSL will lead a review. The review should consider the immediate response, supervision, site security, communication, staff actions, pupil experience, family information and whether additional support is required.

- What happened?

- What worked well?
- What could have been done differently?
- Were there delays in raising the alarm or contacting appropriate services?
- Were staff clear about their roles?
- Were there environmental or site risks?
- Did the pupil have an existing plan and was it followed?
- What did the pupil tell us about their experience?
- Does the pupil require additional support?
- Do policies, risk assessments, staffing arrangements or training need to change?

18. Serious incidents and escalation

The Headteacher/DSL will consider whether a serious incident meets any threshold for notification or referral under local safeguarding arrangements. Where appropriate, the school will cooperate with safeguarding partners and contribute to reviews, information requests or learning processes.

A serious incident may include, for example, a pupil being missing for a significant period, exposure to serious danger, serious injury, suspected criminal or sexual exploitation, police involvement, or an incident indicating a significant failure in safeguarding arrangements.

19. Equality, inclusion and SEND

The school recognises that some pupils may be more likely to leave an area because of disability, neurodivergence, communication differences, sensory needs, anxiety, trauma or other additional needs. The school will make reasonable adjustments and seek to understand the underlying need rather than relying solely on sanctions.

The school will avoid discriminatory assumptions and will consider the individual pupil's age, development, communication, disability, culture and circumstances when planning support.

20. Staff training and awareness

- All staff will receive safeguarding training and know how to raise concerns.
- Relevant staff will be briefed on this procedure and on individual pupil risk assessments/safety plans.
- Staff responsible for supervision should understand site boundaries and emergency procedures.
- Lessons from incidents will be shared appropriately through staff briefings, safeguarding updates and training.

21. Monitoring and review

The DSL and Headteacher will monitor incidents of absconding at least termly, identifying patterns by time, location, pupil, trigger and response. Trends will inform safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, SEND and site-management improvements.

This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner if there is a significant incident, change in statutory guidance, change in local safeguarding procedures or identified weakness in practice.

22. Related school policies and procedures

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Attendance Policy
- SEND Policy / SEND Information Report
- Health and Safety Policy
- First Aid / Medical Needs procedures
- Educational Visits Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Online Safety Policy
- Equality Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Department for Education (2026), Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.
- Department for Education (2026), Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.
- Department for Education (updated 2025), Children Missing Education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools.
- Department for Education (updated 2026), Working Together to Improve School Attendance.

This policy should always be read alongside the latest published statutory guidance and Lacewood Primary School's local safeguarding arrangements. Where local authority or safeguarding partnership procedures set a more specific requirement, staff should follow the applicable local procedure.