PROCEDURE · 2026–27

Missing Student Procedure

Statement

This policy is designed to be implemented in cases where students are believed to be absent or missing from the care of WBS Guardians and/or the host family. The purpose of the policy is to locate the student by the safest and fastest means possible.

WBS Guardians is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.

This policy is required to ensure that missing or absent students (who are not under the duty of care of the school), are subject to an appropriate response by WBS Guardians This is to ensure that children are found and returned to an approved location as soon as practicable.

The benefits of this policy are that all reports or missing/absent people will be recorded. The policy provides a model and framework for response and dealing with incidents dependent on the risk posed. This policy is applicable to all staff members who may become involved in the initial stages of a report of a missing child or young person.

WBS Guardians will respond appropriately to reports of missing and absent persons. Every report will be risk assessed so that those who are vulnerable or represent a high risk will be immediately identified. This process shall be on-going, dynamic and supervised in each and every case with a focus on locating the person safely and mitigating any risk posed to others. Where criminality is associated with either the initial disappearance or subsequent harbouring of those who wish to remain absent, this will be reported to the police.

WBS Guardians will liaise closely with schools following a report that a student has gone missing. WBS Guardians is aware that some schools may wish to take the lead in the response as they retain the overall duty of care as the student's sponsor. In these cases, WBS Guardians will cooperate fully with the school's requests. The procedure outlined in this policy assumes that the guardianship organisation is taking the lead in the response.

Definitions:

WBS Guardians follows the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on missing persons. The police treat anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established as missing until they are located and their wellbeing is confirmed, and grade the risk as very low, low, medium or high. (The former police category of 'absent', previously described as 'no apparent risk', has been replaced by 'very low risk'.) To help staff and homestays decide how to respond, this procedure uses the following two working categories:

Absent (police 'very low risk') – a child or young person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be, and there is no apparent risk.
Missing (police 'low', 'medium' or 'high' risk) – a child or young person 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.
If there is any doubt, the student must be treated as missing.

Supporting Reference Documents:

NSPCC publications
College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice: Missing persons
Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026
Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners (DfE, 2017)
Scoping Report on Missing and Abducted Children – CEOP
Local Safeguarding Children Partnership protocols – children who go missing from home or care
Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care – DfE 2014

Children Missing Education:

Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools (updated September 2025) – https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education

Procedure:

This workflow applies when a young person is absent (they are not where they are supposed to be but there is no apparent risk) or when they are missing (unexpected and uncharacteristic absence which causes concern for their safety). It applies when they are under the care of WBS Guardians during journeys around the UK organised by us or at a homestay.

The DSL, Iain Howell, shall manage any cases of absent or missing children or young people, and as such all reports must be brought to the attention of the DSL (or, in their absence, the DDSL, Jennifer Britton)

Contact details for the DSL and DDSL

Job title	Name	Telephone/ Email
DSL	Iain Howell	Telephone: +44 7984 925526 Email: iain@whichbritishschool.com
DDSL	Jennifer Britton (Co-founder and Director)	Telephone: +44 7540 868974 Email: jennifer@whichbritishschool.com
WBS Guardians 24-hour emergency number (out of hours)	Iain Howell (CEO and DSL)	Telephone: +44 7984 925526 guardians@whichbritishschool.com

If a child or young person goes missing out of hours and WBS Guardians receives a report then the CEO is responsible for ensuring the completion of the initial reasonable enquiries where a student is absent/missing during an event (for example half term, exeat or during a suspension/expulsion) which will include:
- if appropriate, reviewing the flight and transfer details (with communication to the airline and transfer company to confirm transport arrangements for the student)
- texting, emailing and phoning the student (leaving a message if no answer) asking them to make contact with the on duty member of staff and repeating this contact every 30 minutes
- texting, emailing and phoning the house parent to collate any relevant information about the whereabouts of the student – this is only possible if the houseparent is at school.
- texting, emailing and phoning the parent/agent to collate any relevant information about the whereabouts of the student
- texting, emailing and phoning the homestay to collate any relevant information about the whereabouts of the student
- texting, emailing and phoning the CEO, Iain Howell +44 7984 925526 (if WBS Guardians has these) to collate any relevant information about the whereabouts of the student, along with any contact details we may not be aware of
- review of information held on file which may indicate friends or associates who the student may be with.

Any member of staff or homestay may report a child or young person as absent or missing to the police where they have genuine concerns for their safety.

Following a risk assessment, the receiving police force will record a report of absent or missing where there are grounds to do so. In cases of missing children or young people, the police will work cooperatively with Children's Social Care staff during any enquiry.

The incident lead is responsible for ensuring the school is informed of any report made to the police of an absent or missing child or young person, as the school retains the overall duty of care. The school should be updated with any developments as they should know the whereabouts of the student at all times, especially those on visas.

The incident lead is responsible for ensuring that the parents/agent are informed of any report made to the police of an absent or missing child or young person. The parents/agent should be regularly updated (recommended a minimum of every 4 hours) with any developments. This is to ensure that they are fully informed as to the situation involving their son or daughter.

All missing person reports are to be reviewed by Iain Howell, CEO, as soon as practicable with subsequent on-going daily review until the incident is resolved.

Process and Response – report of a missing child

1. A child or young person who falls into the 'Missing' Category must be reported to the police as soon as possible by telephoning 101 for a non-emergency report or 999 for an emergency response i.e. information received that a child or young person is in immediate danger of harm.
YOU WILL NEED TO ENSURE THAT YOU ARE TRANSFERRED TO THE FORCE RELEVANT TO THE AREA THE CHILD IS MISSING/ABSENT FROM.
IF CALLING 999 YOU WILL NEED TO TELL THE CALL HANDLER TO STAY ON THE LINE, WHILE YOU ARE TRANSFERRED TO THE RELEVANT FORCE.

If the report to the police is not made by the DSL then the reporter must inform the DSL (or, in their absence, the DDSL) of the situation as soon as possible.

2. The DSL will ensure that the following information is gathered for the initial report to the police:
- Name, date of birth and nationality of the child or young person;
- The specific concern for the child or young person;
- Whether they are likely to be subjected to crime, a victim of abuse or at risk of sexual exploitation;
- Whether the child or young person is likely to attempt suicide;
- Whether the child or young person likely to pose a danger to other people;
- What actions have been completed so far to locate the child or young person;
- A description of the child or young person, including their build, hair, clothing and glasses;
- Details of when the child or young person was last seen and with whom;
- Personal details of the child or young person (including any medical conditions or ailments);
- Any previous history of absconding/absenteeism and circumstances of where found;
- The circumstances under which the child or young person is absent;
- Any factors which increase the risk to the child or young person;
- Homestay address.

Information that may be needed later to extend investigations if the young person is not located:
- A recent photograph (if available);
- Family addresses and contact telephone numbers;
- Known associates, telephone numbers and addresses frequented;
- The names and addresses of the child or young person's GP and dentist;
- The circumstances under which the child or young person is absent;
- Any factors which increase the risk to the child or young person;
- School and House Parent addresses and contact details
- Details of any travel and accommodation plans authorised by the overseas parents;
- Details of any social media accounts that may be open to the public;

3. The incident must be recorded as an incident report file with regular updates being added until the matter has been resolved. If a police report has been made, the police incident reference number must be recorded. A record of all emails should be included in the incident report file.

4. Following the report to the police, the parents, the agent, school and homestay must be informed and requested to contact Iain Howell, CEO without delay if the child or young person makes contact.

Process and Response – report of an absent child

1. If a child or young person is considered to fall within the definition of absent, the decision to record the child as such, together with the evidence supporting that decision must be recorded. The absence of a child or young person must be recorded in the Student File as an 'incident'.
2. Details of children or young people who are absent should still be notified to the police (using the non-emergency telephone number 101 or the emergency telephone number 999) in order that a record of the child or young person's absence can be made, an agreement can be reached on what needs to be done, review times and on-going actions. Although there is an expectation that WBS Guardians should continue to make reasonable enquiries to locate the child or young person, the police may also initiate some enquiries as appropriate.
3. The CEO, Iain Howell and/or host family will notify the school and parents/agent of the incident, and regularly provide updates to both parties (minimum every 4 hours) with news of any developments, or confirmation that there have been no developments since the last update. This also affords an opportunity for the school or parents/agent to update the CEO, Iain Howell and/or host family with any contact they may have had from the student or other information received. All updates provided to the school and parents/agent must be recorded in the incident record.
4. WBS Guardians staff (The CEO, Iain Howell and/or host family) will constantly review the circumstances in the light of any enquiries made or information received, and inform the police of any developments by telephoning 101, quoting the reference number and providing the new information received. If the period of absence continues for six hours, consideration should be given as to whether the child should still be regarded as absent, or whether they should now be considered as missing. Six hours should be regarded as the maximum period before reconsideration, and in many cases a shorter period would be more appropriate.
5. Any case of an absent child or young person which causes significant concern, or gives rise to the suspicion of harm, should be brought to the attention of the Designated Lead without delay and should be reviewed with a view to the possibility that this is a missing child or young person.

Informing the media

The Police are responsible for advising the media regarding children or young people who are reported as missing. The decision to publicise these matters will always be made in consultation with the parents who have to give their signed consent before the media are able to circulate the details. As such, no member of WBS Guardians should release any details to the media and must refer any contact from them directly to the relevant force's Media Relations Office.

The Return

1. The police are responsible for ensuring that the child or young person reported missing has returned safe and well, and has an opportunity to disclose any relevant issues in the return interview.
2. Where a child or young person has been reported as absent to the police they will not be given a return interview. In such cases, a WBS Guardians member of staff will conduct the return interview to allow the child or young person an opportunity to talk to someone about their absence.
3. Where an allegation of any form of child abuse is made or becomes evident, child protection procedures must be implemented and immediate contact must be made with the police child protection team and the Local Authority Child Protection Service where the child is living.
4. If there is any suggestion that the child has been a victim or perpetrator of crime, consideration must be given to securing evidence by police including by forensic examination. This should also include securing clothing and delaying washing/bathing in relevant cases. Staff must remember that all necessary permissions must be obtained from the child or young person's parents and/or those with parental responsibility. The priority is to recognise that the welfare of the child or young person is paramount and careful consideration must be given to the potential effects of such procedures of the child or young person.
5. Any persons informed of the child or young person's absence should be advised of the child or young person's return without delay including the school and parent/agent.
6. For a child or young person who has been reported as absent or missing on two or more occasions, WBS Guardians will decide in consultation with others, whether a formal review of the guardianship is required.

Children Missing Education

As explained in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, all staff and homestays should be aware that children going missing from education, 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 can also be a sign of child criminal exploitation including involvement in county lines. It may indicate mental health problems, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation, 'honour'-based abuse 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 child going missing in future.' Should WBS Guardians become aware that a student in their care is missing from education, they will notify the school or college that the student attends immediately.

Children Missing Education (statutory guidance, updated September 2025) sets out key principles to enable local authorities in England to implement their legal duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to identify, as far as it is possible to do so, children missing education (CME).

Children Missing Education explains that:

'All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to an efficient, full time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have.

Children missing education are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. Children missing education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later in life.

Effective information sharing between parents, schools and local authorities is critical to ensuring that all children of compulsory school age are safe and receiving suitable education. Local authorities should focus their resources effectively in intervening early in the lives of vulnerable children to help prevent poor outcomes.'

Review

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually.

This policy was last reviewed on: 28/09/2026. Next review: September 2027.

Amended: 29/10/2026 (definitions aligned to current College of Policing missing persons guidance; references updated).

Signed: Iain Howell, CEO and DSL

Date: 28/09/2026

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