

MY OASIS

Therapeutic Alternative Provision

Missing in Education Policy 2026/2027

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Introduction

At My Oasis Therapeutic Alternative Provision, an independent special school, the safety and supervision of students is our main responsibility. This policy sets out the clear procedures that will be followed should a child abscond from school or from a member of My Oasis staff, subsequently being classed as being Missing in Education. For the purposes of this policy, to abscond is defined as leaving the school premises or a supervised activity without permission.

Absconding poses significant risks to the safety and well-being of students and places the school under an increased duty of care. Under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and in Common Law, schools are legally required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that students remain safe and within their care at all times during the school day and throughout school-led activities.

This policy ensures that all staff understand their responsibilities and the processes to follow if a child absconds. It is designed to promote a swift, consistent, and effective response, minimising risk and securing the safe return of the student as quickly as possible.

Policy Aims

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that My Oasis provides a clear, consistent, and effective approach to managing any situations in which a student absconds from school. The key aims are:

1. To safeguard every student at My Oasis

- Ensure that students who leave without permission are protected from harm and are returned to a place of safety as quickly as possible.
- Minimise risks posed to students, such as traffic, strangers, unsafe environments, or potential exploitation.
- To ensure parents and carers are informed immediately should their child abscond.

2. To uphold the school's duty of care

- Comply with legal responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Common Law.
- Demonstrate that all reasonable steps are taken to keep students safe at all times, including during school-led activities when off-site.

3. To ensure a consistent and effective response

- Provide clear guidance for all staff so that actions taken are proportionate, calm, and effective.
- Ensure the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) has oversight and takes responsibility for decision-making during and after any incidents of absconding.

4. To prevent repeat incidents

- Identify students who may be at risk of absconding through early assessment and planning and reduce this risk by implementing additional environmental safeguarding measures.
- Put in place personalised risk assessments for students and support strategies to reduce the risks of it occurring.
- Work with parents/carers and external agencies to reduce triggers and provide consistent support.

5. To strengthen safeguarding practice across the school

- Promote a culture of vigilance where staff are alert to warning signs that a student may attempt to abscond.
- Ensure that absconding procedures are aligned with safeguarding and child protection policies.
- Record, monitor, and review all absconding incidents to identify patterns, inform practice, and improve preventative measures.

6. To support students following an incident

- Provide opportunities for students to express their views and reflect safely on the incident and explore why it occurred.
- Use restorative approaches to rebuild trust and reinforce positive behaviour.
- Update individual support plans and risk assessments so that strategies are strengthened and more effective in the future.

7. To support and protect staff

- Ensure that staff understand their responsibilities and are confident in following the correct procedures.
 - Provide clear boundaries so that staff do not place themselves or others at unnecessary risk.
 - Offer debriefing opportunities for staff after challenging incidents, or more intensive therapeutic support if needed.
- 8. To maintain strong communication with parents and carers**
- Inform parents/carers promptly when an absconding incident occurs.
 - Engage them in preventative strategies and support planning.
 - Build trust and shared responsibility for safeguarding the student, parents/carers are invited to a meeting in school to discuss a plan to prevent any further incidents of absconding behaviour.
- 9. To meet the expectations of external agencies and inspectors**
- Ensure that practice meets the requirements of Ofsted and safeguarding partners.
 - Demonstrate that absconding is taken seriously, with robust procedures in place to protect students and uphold the school's reputation for safeguarding excellence.

Assessment and Planning

At My Oasis, safeguarding is at the heart of our practice, and this includes the proactive identification and management of any risks associated with absconding. Preventing incidents and being proactive is always preferable to responding after they occur by being reactive. Assessment and planning are therefore central to this policy.

All students at My Oasis have a risk assessment in place. For some learners, this may be very general, while for others it will be more detailed depending on their needs. Where a risk of absconding is identified, this will be clearly highlighted within the student's individual risk assessment, alongside the strategies staff must use to minimise this risk and reduce the likelihood of an incident occurring.

Students who are considered vulnerable, or who have a history of absconding, will have a more detailed risk assessment carried out under the direction of the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). These assessments take into account a student's age, previous incidents, known triggers, patterns of behaviour, and the level of risk posed if they were to leave the site. Risk assessments are living documents; they are reviewed regularly at least once per term and always following an incident to ensure they remain accurate and effective.

Where a student is identified as being at a particularly high level of risk, the DSL will oversee the creation of an Individual Support Plan (ISP). These plans provide clear and practical guidance for staff, including early intervention strategies, actions to take if a student begins to show signs of leaving, and agreed responses in the event of an absconding incident. The development of such plans is a collaborative process, involving staff, parents and carers, and,

where appropriate, external professionals. Plans are shared with all relevant members of staff to ensure consistent implementation.

The school site is regularly assessed to minimise risks of absconding. Security measures include controlled entry systems, safety door mechanisms, alarms on windows, fire doors, and the use of staff keys and passes. Supervision levels are carefully managed, particularly during unstructured times, to ensure students are safe at all times and that they are never left unsupervised.

The DSL works closely with external agencies when required, such as social care, the police, CAMHS, or Early Help services. Working collaboratively ensures that risks are addressed holistically and that safeguarding strategies are consistent across all areas of a child's life. Parents and carers are kept fully informed of risk assessments and support plans and are encouraged to contribute to the ongoing process of prevention and planning.

Through these measures, My Oasis ensures that risk is anticipated, managed, and reviewed in a way that keeps students safe, provides staff with clarity, and demonstrates the school's strong safeguarding culture.

For further information, please refer to the My Oasis Risk Assessment policy.

Absconding

A student is considered to have 'absconded' if they intentionally/knowingly leave the school premises or a school-related activity at another location.

If a student absconds then:

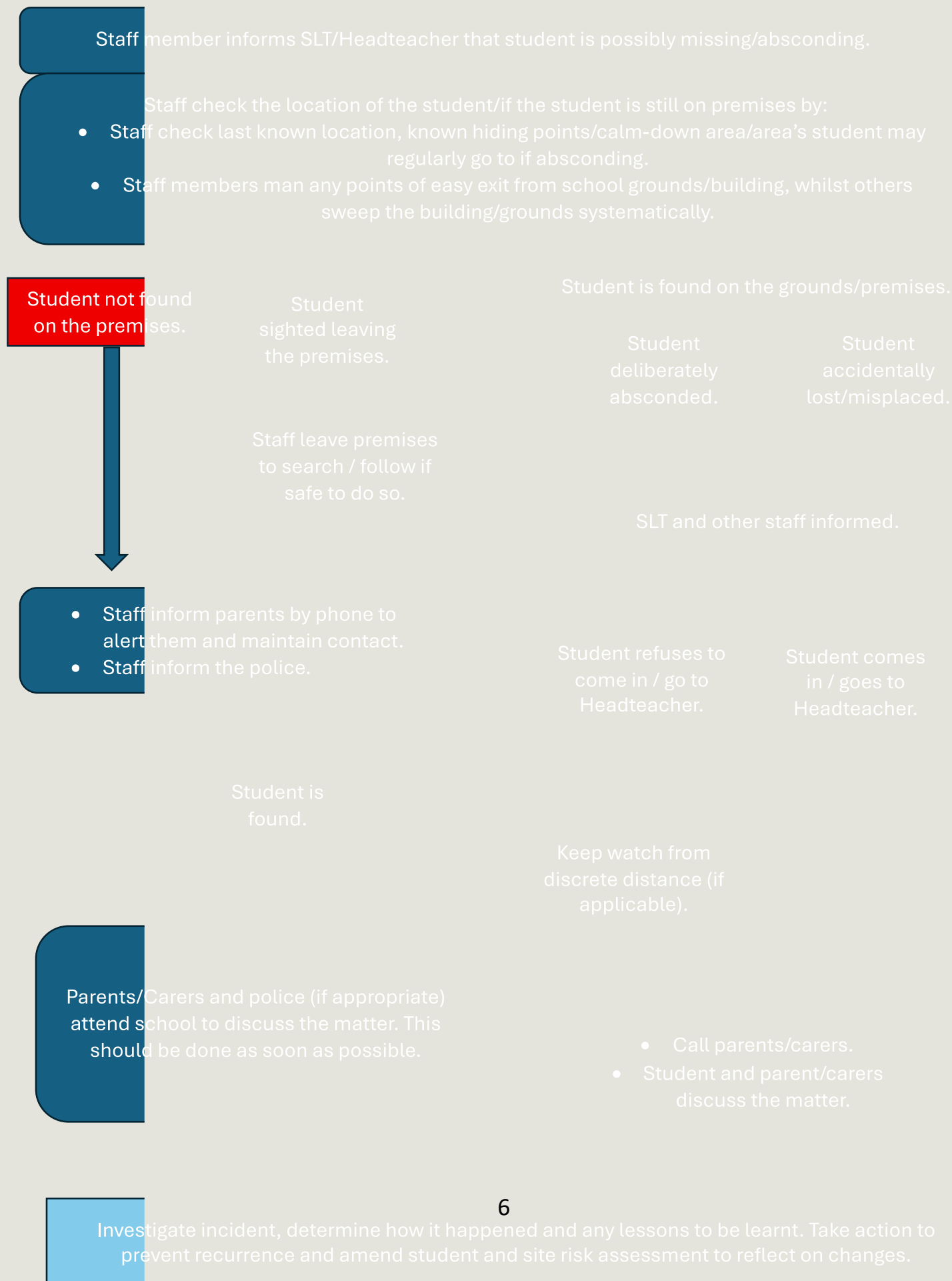
- Where possible, a member of staff should follow the student at a safe distance and respond in line with the student's individual risk assessment.
- A member of staff within the senior leadership team must immediately be informed of the situation, as they can then inform relevant parties.
- Where possible, the member of staff following the student should remain in contact with a member of SLT via a work mobile phone/walkie-talkie.
- SLT might allocate further staff members to go and collect the student and return them to school or off-site location where the educational activity is taking place.
- Where applicable, SLT will inform the students' mainstream school, keeping them informed of the situation.

If a student absconds and is then deemed to be 'missing', procedures will follow those outlined by the student's mainstream school.

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. Ensure that a record of the discussion with the student is held by the DSL and logged onto CPOMS.
- Keep all colleagues informed and discuss the incident in staff meetings and/or supervision meetings.
- Review procedures for the student every half term to ensure appropriate control measures are in place and that staff are fully informed.
- Work with a student's mainstream school and external agencies to gather as much information as possible about the student to add value to the individual risk assessment.
- Present a review of incidents of absconding from mainstream schools and external agencies in a student's progress review, distributed on a termly basis.

Appendix 1 – School procedure if a child is missing / absconds.



Roles and Responsibilities

All Staff

All staff have a responsibility to safeguard students and must act immediately if a child is suspected of, or known to have, absconded. Staff should:

- Remain vigilant to signs that a student may attempt to leave school or a school-related activity.
- Follow the agreed risks and safeguarding procedures calmly and consistently.
- Inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a member of SLT staff without delay.
- Never put themselves or students at risk while managing an incident.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

The DSL has overall responsibility for managing and overseeing any incidents of absconding as well as students' mainstream school. The DSL will:

- Assess the level of risk to the student and decide on the next steps.
- Coordinate the immediate response, including staff actions and communication with parents/carers.
- Contact external agencies, such as the police or social care, if necessary.
- Ensure that incidents are fully recorded and logged on CPOMS.
- Lead on follow-up work completed with the student, parents/carers and staff, including updating all risk assessments and support plans.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

The Senior Leadership Team supports the DSL by:

- Ensuring staff fully understand and follow the policy.
- Monitoring absconding incidents to identify any patterns and address concerns.
- Ensuring the site and staffing levels are appropriate to minimise the risks of a student absconding.
- Reviewing the policy on an annual basis or following an incident of absconding to maintain the best safeguarding practice.

Parents and Carers

Parents and carers play an important role in safeguarding. They are expected to:

- Work with the school to reduce the risk of their child absconding.
- Share relevant information with staff that may impact a child's behaviour.
- Support the implementation of risk assessments and individual support plans for all students, especially those at risk of absconding.

Student Information

Q - What happens if you go missing? What is meant by 'missing'?

A – You will be considered missing if a member of staff does not know where you are and you leave school or a school-related activity without the permission of a staff member.

Q – What is meant by 'absconding'?

A – You have absconded if you deliberately go away from where you should be without telling a member of staff or without a member of staff giving you permission.

Q – What will happen if I go missing?

A – The people looking after you have a responsibility to know where you are and to make sure you are safe. If you are 'missing', they will speak to your school, parents/carers etc to see if they can help. If there is concern for your safety, staff will work with your mainstream school and external agencies (where applicable) to help search for any clues as to where you are. Your school or parent/carer may inform the police that you are missing, and they may look for you if we do not find you very quickly.

Q – What will happen if you can't be found?

A – A meeting will be held between your school and the Police to plan how to search for you. Your name, description and a photograph will be given to the Police to help them with their search. Your school should update the Deputy Head of Centre here at My Oasis, where appropriate.

Q – What will happen when you are found?

A – You will be returned to a safe place and will be asked about the reasons for you going missing. This is to try to find out if anything is troubling you and to see if anyone can help. You do not have to run away to talk to someone. If you want to talk to someone outside of school, this can be arranged.

You may also be visited by a Police Officer who will check that you are back. This is called a 'Safe and Well Check'. You will be able to speak to the Police Officer without any member of staff present if you wish to do so.

Q – Will anything else happen?

A – If you are injured or unwell, then you will be checked by a doctor or Nurse. Your teacher or keyworker will want to talk to you about going missing. This may be done in school. If you have deliberately absconded, then the people responsible for your safety will meet to discuss ways in which such incidents can be prevented by looking at the reasons for your actions.

Linked Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Behaviour Policy.
- Health and Safety Policy.
- Risk Assessment Policy.
- Educational Visits and Trips Policy.
- Missing from Education Policy.