



## **Bowden House School**

### **Absconding/RMFHC Policy & Procedures**

Under Section 3 of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, schools owe a duty of care towards their students. This duty of care requires that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that students are safe and remain in the care of the school, including the residential areas or when participating in external activities away from the school.

Bowden House School also complies with Standard 20.9 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools which requires that 'Staff working within the school know and implement the school's policy, and any local protocols, in relation to children going missing, and understand their role in implementing that policy. Staff actively search for children who are missing, including working with the police where appropriate. The school's procedures are compatible with the local runaway and missing from home and care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where the school is located. Where children placed out of authority go missing, the school follows the local RMFHC 26 protocol and complies with and makes staff aware of any other processes required by the placing authority. Staff must keep written records of absent and missing episodes. (NMS for Residential Special Schools, Sept 2022).

This Policy also complies with the DfE 'Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' (January 2014) and is in line with the ESCC RNFHC protocols..

The specific needs of our students make it inevitable that occasionally they will absent themselves from the school building or the school site. It is accepted that some students will absent themselves for a short period of time and then return to the school site with their whereabouts known. There will also be occasions when students might leave the school site and be seen to 'test the boundaries'. This would be considered as normal behaviour and not necessarily a situation of risk. However, the school's duty of care extends to the role of acting in 'loco parentis' and all staff should ensure that the students are aware of the risks they take when they leave the school site or on an activity, without staff supervision.

In the event of a student or students reported as missing from school, the first indication is likely to be their absence from class, an activity, mealtime or their bedroom.

The first action for any member of staff who suspects a student(s) as missing, is to enquire with other students and colleagues as to the possible whereabouts of the missing student(s). If they cannot be found,

the senior member(s) of staff on duty and the SLT should be informed, and the following actions will be taken:

- a thorough search of the school buildings and its grounds
- a check of strategic points in the local area or places where the student might be known
- contact with any known associates in the area, if appropriate
- a check on locations such as Seaford railway station, to ask if student(s) matching a description – uniform/height, etc., have been sighted and ask them to contact the school if anyone is seen
- contact with the student(s) on their mobile phone, if applicable – this might depend on the time of day they are missing

If the above action results in the missing student(s) not being located, a decision will then be taken regarding contacting the Police and reporting them as missing.

The SLT should refer to the agreed protocols set out in the DfE guidance 'children who run away or go missing from home or care' RMFHC (January 2014) relevant sections of which have been incorporated into this document. Care should be taken to ensure that in the case of a student in Local Authority Care (LAC), that contact with the appropriate persons is made. This could be parents/carers/those who have parental responsibility and the student's Social Worker.

As a general rule, the younger the student, the shorter the delay. All students at Bowden House School have Special Educational Needs and are therefore considered vulnerable or at potential risk.

When the Police are contacted, they will ask for:

- the personal details of the student(s).
- a brief description, including clothes worn.
- details of the last time; place and by whom the student(s) was seen
- a recent photograph (if available)
- family address(s)
- known associates and addresses
- any previous history of absconding and where found
- name and address of the student's GP and dentist
- the circumstances under which the student is missing
- any factors which increase the risk to the student
- school address
- contact details of parents/carers/Social Worker (where appropriate)
- names of staff members who have completed the search of the school site and surrounding areas.

The Police will then arrange for an officer to visit the school to collect further information following which the school's 'Missing Persons' form will be completed.

Following contact with the Police, the Head of Student Welfare or another member of the SLT, will endeavour to contact the parents/carers and or

Social Worker, to inform them of the situation. They will also ask if the student(s) have made contact with them.

The Police will, based upon the information given, determine the level of risk the student poses. The risk levels are medium or high.

The high-risk category requires immediate deployment of Police resources. Police guidance makes it clear that a senior member of the force must be involved in the examination of initial enquiry lines and approval of appropriate Police personnel such as an Investigating Officer being appointed. In extreme incidents, there should be a media strategy and close contact with other agencies. Family support should be put in place.

The medium risk category requires an active and measured response by Police and other agencies in order to trace the missing student.

Enquiries will continue until the missing student is found

If/when the missing student(s) returns, the Police/parents/carers and if necessary, Social Worker, should be informed immediately. The student(s) should be seen by a member(s) of staff and a discussion held as to the reason for their absence.

When the student(s) has returned, he should meet with a member of the SLT or his mentor to discuss the incident. It is also usual procedure for the Police to visit the school to undertake a Safe & Well check. A member of staff should be available at this interview. As with the reporting of a student missing from the school site or on an external activity, when the student returns or is returned, the RMFHC protocols should be followed. Risk Assessments must be updated if a student goes missing from the school.

Throughout this process, the school's 'Missing Persons' form should be updated. Any issues relating to Safeguarding and the Protection of Children will be referred to the Local Safeguarding Partnership following the agreed procedures within the school's Safeguarding & the Protection of Children Policy in the event there is a safeguarding concern in relation to a student(s) going missing from school.

All staff at Bowden House School will encourage students to remain at all times within the supportive environment of the whole school site.

A copy of this Policy and procedures will be issued to all placing authorities upon a student's admission to the school.

If the placing authority has its own protocols which differ from those in this policy, these should be provided to the school.

## **Bowden House Missing Persons Protocols and Procedures**

Bowden House School follows the local (East Sussex) RMFHC protocols in the event a student from the school goes missing. In addition, the school complies with any other requirements detailed within the RMFHC protocols of the student's placing authority, if provided.

In all cases of students absconding, staff should follow the Bowden House School absconding procedures.

Agreed by the schools governing body and minuted at their meeting.

Agreed: Autumn Term 2024

Review date: Autumn Term 2025

## Absconding Log

This log should be completed in conjunction with the student's 'posted' missing information form.

Student's name	Date/time of incident	Time issue resolved	Comments

## Students 'posted' missing – collation of information

Sheet to be handed to the person responsible for managing incident until resolution

<u>Name of student</u>	<u>Name of others</u>	<u>Staff member</u>	<u>Time</u>
<b>Antecedents</b>			
<b>Decision to post student missing</b>	<b>By whom:</b>		<b>Time:</b>
<b>Police informed</b>	<b>By whom:</b>	<b>To whom:</b>	<b>Time</b>
<b>RMFHC protocols followed</b>	<b>Which LA (s)?</b>		<b>Time</b>
<b>Missing persons form completed</b>			
<b>Parents/carers informed</b>			
<b>Social Services informed</b>			
<b>Others (Specify)</b>			
<b>On going information</b>		<b>Incident Number:</b>	

	<b>By whom</b>	<b>To whom</b>	<b>Time</b>
<b>Police informed</b>			
<b>Parents informed</b>			
<b>Social Services informed</b>			
<b>Others (Specify)</b>			
<b>Resolution (including any possible Safeguarding and Child Protection issues)</b>			

When a student is known to be safe, all parties to be informed of his whereabouts