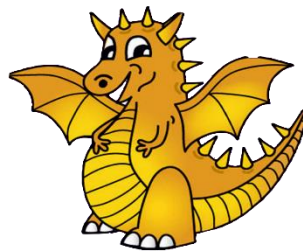




Wessex
Learning Trust
We Learn Together!

Early Years: Uncollected and Missing Children Policy



Date approved by Trust Board: September 2024
Review Date: September 2027

Wessex Learning Trust

Uncollected and Missing Children Policy

This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees annually.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gavin Ball". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'G'.

Signature:

Name: Mr Gavin Ball

Position: Chief Executive

Date: 01/09/2024

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Jacobs". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'P'.

Signature:

Name: Mr Paul Jacobs

Position: Chair of the Board

Date: 01/09/2024

1. Introduction

1.1 The welfare of the children in our care is always our number one priority, and as such the Trust has robust procedures in place to deal with any time a child may be at risk of being uncollected or going missing.

1.2 All early years staff must be aware of the procedures for dealing with an incident where a child is missing or not collected, and able to respond professionally and effectively so as to give the best chance of a positive outcome.

2. Uncollected Children

2.1 If a child is not collected by closing time, or the end of the session and there has been no contact from the parent/carer, or there are concerns about the child's welfare then the following procedure must be followed:

- The Pre-school/Nursery lead should be informed of the uncollected child and an attempt to contact their parents/carers as soon as possible.
- If the child's parents/carers cannot be contacted the Pre-school/Nursery lead will contact the child's emergency contacts to inform them of the situation and arrange collection of the child. If staff are unable to get hold of the emergency contacts then the Headteacher will be informed.
- If after one hour no contact can be made with either the child's parents/carers or emergency contacts, and/or there are concerns about the child's welfare or the welfare of their parents/carers, the designated safeguarding lead should contact the local social care out-of-hours duty officer to arrange the collection of the child by social care.
 - Where necessary the designated safeguarding lead should also notify the Police
- Throughout this time, staff must be sure to look after the uncollected child and maintain as normal a situation for the child as possible so as not to stress or worry them. This could include playing with the child, offering them a snack or drink, talking to them, keeping them company, or allowing them to stay with other children who may still be attending the setting.

2.2 Where a child is uncollected, at no point should staff:

- Leave the premises to look for the child's parents/carers
- Leave the premises to take the child home or to a carer (they must be collected by a parent or carer)
- Offer to take the child home with them to care for them in their own home until contact with the parent or carer is made

2.3 Where a child has failed to be collected, staff must make a record of the incident and log this in the child's personal file. This should include the time the child was expected to be collected, what time the child was finally collected and by whom, what action the centre took to make contact with a parent or carer and what other actions the centre took while trying to arrange the safe collection of the child. A record of the conversation with the parent/carer should also be made and parents/carers asked to sign and date the record. A confidential safeguarding incident report form on safeguard my school should also be completed and passed onto the Designated Safeguarding Lead if there are safeguarding and welfare concerns about the child, or if Social Care have been involved due to the late collection.

2.4 If there are recurring incidents of late collection a meeting should be arranged with the child's parents/carers to highlight the issues and agree a plan to improve time-keeping and identify any further support that may be required. The Trust reserves the right to charge parents/carers for the additional time the centre is required to look after the child where they are not collected on time.

3. Missing Children

3.1 Children's safety and welfare is the Trust's number one priority, and as such where a child goes missing while in a centre's care immediate action must be taken to ensure the safety of the child.

3.2 While working, staff should be constantly vigilant of the location of the children in their care, as well as any potential threats to children's welfare (such as people acting suspiciously), and take action to mitigate risks before they become problems. In addition, children should be educated as to the importance of 'stranger danger' and reminded to keep close to their peers. In this way, the risk of a child becoming missing can be kept low, however if such an incident does occur the following procedures must be followed:

If a child is missing on-site:

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the member of staff informs the Pre-school/Nursery lead who initiates a search within the setting, as well as any outside space and if necessary, the school. The setting should also inform the Headteacher, designated safeguarding lead and school and ask staff to remain vigilant for the child
- If the child is found on-site, the Pre-school/Nursery lead will check on the welfare of the child and investigate the circumstances of the incident. If there is a reason which allowed the child to go missing, this should be rectified as soon as possible to stop any further children going missing
- If after a thorough search of the site the missing child cannot be found, one member of staff should leave the site immediately to search the immediate vicinity (such as surrounding streets or fields). If after this there is no sign of the child or this is not possible as it would leave other children unsupervised, the Police must be called immediately calling 999
- Following this, the missing child's parents/carers should be contacted and briefed on the incident. The Police will advise on the best next steps and lead the subsequent investigation into the child's whereabouts
- At all points throughout this process, staff should act calmly so as to not alert the other children as to the problem and risk mass hysteria. The normal operation of the setting should continue as much as possible, with children continuing to be looked after as normal and given no reason for alarm

If a child is missing while off-site:

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the senior staff member present should carry out a headcount/register to confirm the child is missing
- Once it is clear that the child is not with the group, one (or more if the remaining children can still be adequately looked after) member of staff should conduct a search of the immediate vicinity. If on a visit to a managed site such as a zoo, the staff working at the establishment must be alerted so as to assist with the search (for instance through tannoy announcements or locking the site down)
- If the child is found, the senior member of staff should check on the welfare of the child and investigate the circumstances of the incident, rectifying any immediate issues which could lead to a similar incident occurring
- If the child is not found, the senior member of staff should phone the Police immediately, phoning 999, as well as contacting the Pre-school/Nursery lead (if not already aware), and the Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead, who should then contact the missing child's parents/carers
- Following this, members of staff should seek to return the remaining children to the setting as soon as safe and possible, with one senior member of staff remaining at the site where the child went missing to wait for the Police to arrive. The Police will then take the lead and the centre staff must cooperate with their instructions as to the best course of action

- At all points throughout this process, staff should act calmly so as to not alert the other children as to the problem and risk mass hysteria

4. Recording and Reporting

- 4.1 When a child goes missing while attending a Trust Pre-school/Nursery setting, a record must be made of what happened, how it was dealt with, what the outcome was, and any changes that need to be put in place to reduce the risk of the incident re-occurring.
- 4.2 Where Police involvement is required, staff may need to provide statements to aid an investigation.
- 4.3 Following any incident where a child goes missing while attending the setting, the Headteacher must reflect on what happened and seek to learn from and make appropriate changes to their procedures so as to minimise the risk that such an incident could happen again.

5. Investigation

- 5.1 Following a child going missing, the following steps must be taken:
- Inform Ofsted as soon as possible (and at least within 14 days) using this link: [Report a serious childcare incident - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/report-a-serious-childcare-incident)
 - Have the Headteacher carry out a full investigation, with the Designated Safeguarding Lead. This will include speaking with the parents/carers of the child and explaining the process of the investigation
 - Each member of staff present during the incident will be interviewed by the investigating officer and a report completed
 - At no point should staff discuss any missing child incident with the press. If the press make contact with the Pre-school/Nursery establishment, the Trust central team must be informed, so that they can provide support to the establishment
 - The investigating officer will put together a report and present their findings and recommendations to the Trust
 - The incident must be recorded on the EEC reporting system