



ABSCONDERS POLICY

REFERENCE:	V01 – 09/2025
OWNERSHIP:	AP Lead
AUTHORISED BY:	Emma Draper (Director)
REVIEW:	Annually – September 2026

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to protect students in the Churchwood Forest School AP as an AP. It outlines steps and procedures to keep students safe if they leave Churchwood Forest School AP premises/supervision without permission or cannot be located.

SCOPE

This policy applies to Churchwood Forest School AP, this includes all employees who work within Churchwood Forest School AP as well as contractors, volunteers and visitors. Churchwood Forest School AP will notify the commissioning school/LA (referrer) and parents/carers the same day for all absconding incidents.

SAFEGUARDING COMMITMENT

As an organisation that prioritises the safeguarding of children and all vulnerable people, The Churchwood Forest School AP is committed to providing a safe environment across all we do by actively adopting strategies that embed a culture of zero tolerance for abuse of any kind.

RESPONSIBILITIES

This section outlines the specific responsibilities of all staff members in preventing, managing, and responding to incidents of student absconding. Clear adherence to these responsibilities is crucial for ensuring the safety and well-being of all students.

1. Education Leadership Team/Directors

- **Policy Development and Review:** Ensure the absconders policy is up-to-date, comprehensive, and effectively communicated to all staff. Regularly review and update the policy in light of any incidents, changes in legislation, or best practice.
- Ensure a written DSL↔commissioner same-day contact protocol and alignment with local missing child procedures.

2. Provision Lead

- **Training Provision:** Arrange and ensure all staff receive appropriate and regular training on the policy and associated procedures, including recognising warning signs, communication protocols, and search procedures.
- **Resource Allocation:** Provide adequate resources (e.g., communication systems, staff availability) to effectively implement the policy.
- **Incident Oversight:** Oversee serious absconding incidents, ensuring all procedures are followed, external agencies are contacted appropriately, and a thorough debriefing and review take place. Confirm police contact where risk warrants; record time/CAD and rationale; ensure parents/carers and commissioner are notified same day.
- **Communication with External Agencies:** Maintain strong working relationships with relevant external agencies, including the police, social services, and the local authority, ensuring effective information sharing and collaboration when necessary.

3. Teaching Staff and Support Staff

- **Vigilance and Awareness:** Maintain constant vigilance regarding student whereabouts and behaviour. Be aware of students who may be at risk of absconding and report any concerns promptly.
- **Attendance Monitoring:** Accurately record and monitor student attendance in all lessons and activities. Report any unexplained absences immediately according to provision procedures.
- **Immediate Reporting:** Immediately report any suspected or confirmed absconding incident to the designated lead as per the provision's communication protocol. Do not pursue off-site; maintain observation only if safe, and call the police where there is immediate risk. Follow staff personal safety guidance.
- **Supervision:** Ensure effective supervision of students during lessons, breaks, and transition times, minimising opportunities for students to leave school premises unnoticed.
- **Knowledge of Students:** Develop a good understanding of students in their care, including any specific vulnerabilities or risk factors that might increase the likelihood of absconding.
- **Following Procedures:** Strictly adhere to all procedures outlined in the absconders policy during an incident, including search protocols and communication lines.

4. Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) / Deputy DSL

- **Primary Point of Contact:** Act as the primary point of contact for all absconding incidents.
- **Coordination of Response:** Coordinate the school's response to an absconding incident, including initiating search procedures, contacting parents/carers, and liaising with external



agencies.

- **Risk Assessment:** Conduct or oversee immediate risk assessments related to the absconding student, considering their vulnerabilities and potential dangers.
- **Record Keeping:** Ensure accurate and detailed records are kept of all absconding incidents, including actions taken, timings, and communication logs.
- **Support for Staff:** Provide support and guidance to staff involved in absconding incidents.
- Consider CME/persistent absence indicators and contextual risks (exploitation/serious violence). Liaise with children's social care where threshold is met and inform the commissioner.

5. Parents/Carers

- **Communication of Concerns:** Inform the school promptly of any concerns regarding their child's well-being, attendance, or any factors that might increase the risk of absconding.
- **Provision of Contact Details:** Ensure the school has up-to-date and accurate emergency contact information.
- **Cooperation during Incidents:** Cooperate fully with the Churchwood Forest School AP School and commissioning school/LA and any external agencies during an absconding incident, providing any relevant information that may assist in locating their child.

DEFINITIONS

1. Absconding

Absconding refers to a student leaving the provision premises or designated supervision area without permission or without notifying a member of staff, and where their whereabouts are unknown to the provision. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Leaving the building or grounds during the scheduled day.
- Failing to return to the provision after an authorised absence (e.g., lunch break, external trip).
- Leaving a supervised activity (e.g., sports lesson, external trip) without permission.

2. Student at Risk of Absconding

A **student at risk of absconding** is an individual identified by the provision as having specific vulnerabilities, behaviours, or a history that indicates an increased likelihood of absconding. This may include students with:

- A history of previous absconding incidents.
- Significant pastoral or welfare concerns.



- Known mental health issues or emotional difficulties.
- Family circumstances that may contribute to a desire to leave school.
- Developmental or learning needs that impact their understanding of safety boundaries.

3. Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

The **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** is the member of the provision leadership team responsible for overseeing safeguarding and child protection, including the implementation of this absconders policy. They act as the primary point of contact for all safeguarding concerns and liaise with external agencies.

4. External Agencies

External agencies refers to any professional bodies or organisations outside of the provision that may be involved in supporting students, ensuring their safety, or assisting in locating an absconding student. This typically includes:

- **Police:** Local law enforcement responsible for investigating missing persons and ensuring public safety.
- **Local Authority Children's Services/Social Services:** Agencies responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
- **NHS / Mental Health Services:** Healthcare providers who may offer support to students with identified needs.
- **Commissioning school/LA (referrer):** the child's home school/local authority who retains statutory duties for attendance/CME and must receive same-day information.

POLICY

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Introduction

When a child is referred to the Churchwood Forest School AP provision staff should ensure that more than one emergency contact number for each young person is obtained. This goes beyond the legal minimum and is good practice to give the centre additional options to make contact with a responsible adult when a child that is missing education is also identified as a welfare and/or safeguarding concern.

Absconders

Staff should consider that whenever a young person absconds, their welfare and safety is placed at an increased risk. Where a young person absconds on repeat occasions, this could be a



potential indicator of an underlying safeguarding issue.

All instances of absconding from the site must be recorded on behaviour and safeguarding record systems. Staff should raise a concern on the system which will be monitored. If staff suspect that there may be associated underlying safeguarding issues action may need to be taken to help identify the risk of abuse and neglect, including exploitation and serious violence. All safeguarding concerns must be logged on the safeguarding record system under the appropriate categories. Repeated or prolonged absence informs safeguarding decisions and may indicate risk of exploitation/serious violence; escalate per local threshold guidance.

Where such concerns exist, staff should follow guidance and reporting procedures outlined in the Safeguarding Policy. On return: complete welfare/first-aid check; capture the child's voice; hold a same-day debrief where practicable; update risk assessment/plan (triggers, routes, times, escorts, transport); agree a reintegration plan with parents/carers and the commissioner.

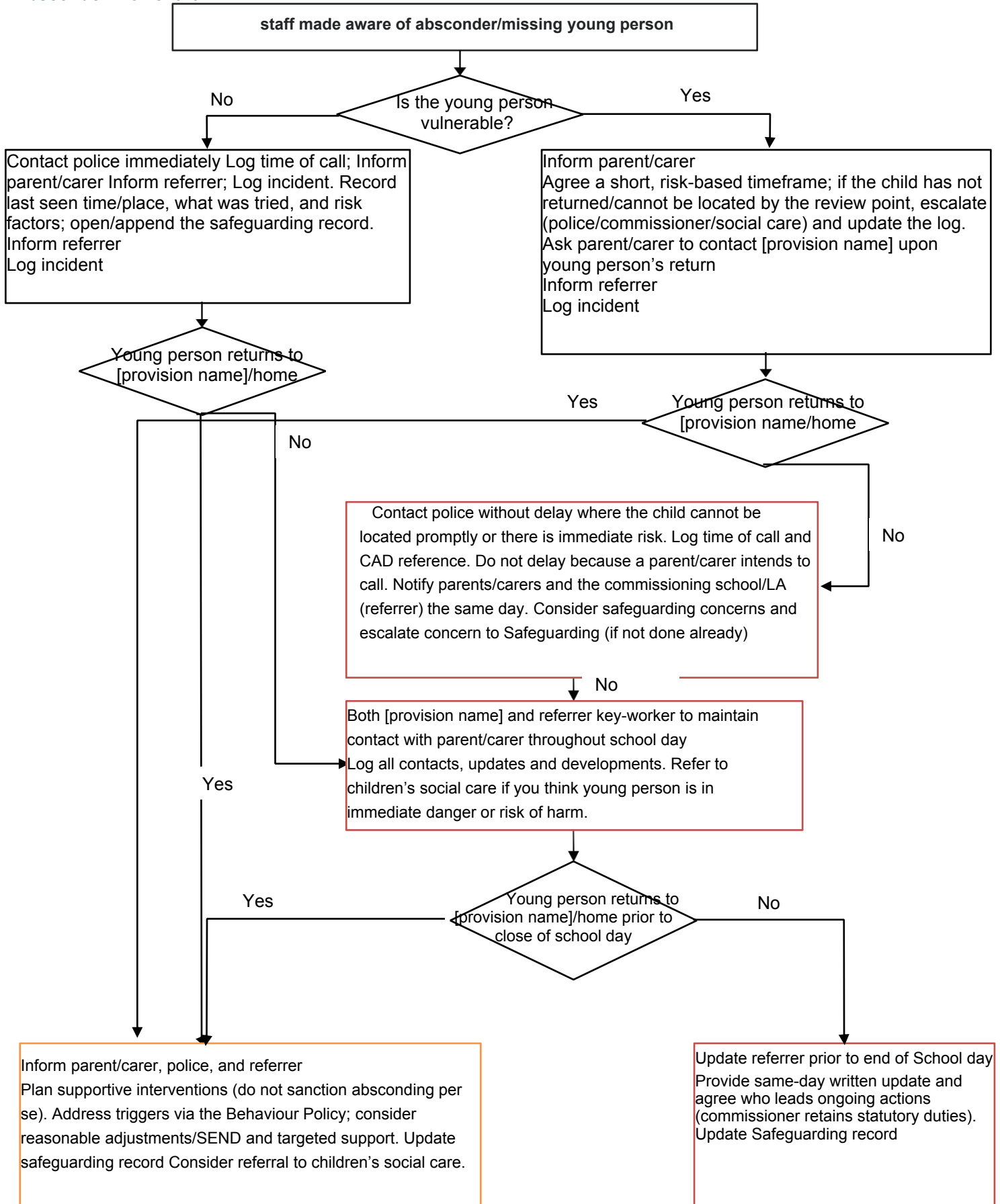
If a student leaves Churchwood Forest School AP without permission, or you discover that they are missing from the premises, you must follow the procedure set out in the flow chart below.

Staff should always liaise with the centre-based DSL or the Churchwood Forest School AP Safeguarding Lead on whether there are additional concerns - is a referral to social care needed? Is further support needed (e.g. an early help plan)? In addition, staff should consider what further actions are needed (i.e. sanctions for behaviour that triggered absconding (but not the absconding itself), further support for dealing with anger/anxiety/conflict etc.).

The following indicators increase risk and normally require immediate police contact and same-day DSL/commissioner notification:

- Child looked-after / on a child protection or child in need plan / has a social worker.
- Known safeguarding risks (e.g., exploitation, domestic abuse, serious violence).
- SEND/medical vulnerabilities (including autism/learning difficulties) affecting safety awareness.
- Circumstances out of character, signs of acute distress, or high-risk locations/time of day.
- Weather/environmental hazards or lack of means to get home safely.

Absconder Flowchart





POLICY CONTEXT

AP context (AP): Churchwood Forest School AP operates as an Alternative Provision (AP). The commissioning school/LA (referrer) retains statutory responsibilities for attendance registers, Children Missing Education (CME) and exclusions. Churchwood Forest School AP provides same-day safeguarding/attendance information and follows local missing child procedures. Police contact follows risk-based thresholds (do not delay where there is immediate risk).

This policy relates to the following legislative requirements, standards and internal documents:

Legislation/Standards	• Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025
Related Forms & Documents	• Churchwood Forest School AP Safeguarding statement of intent • Churchwood Forest School AP Safeguarding Policy • Churchwood Forest School AP Attendance Policy • •

VERSION CONTROL

We will review our documentation regularly and we reserve the right to amend our policies and procedures at any time.

Version	Date	Change Summary	Author/ Reviewer	Approved by:
1	09/2025	Initial version	Mark Wrangles	
2				
3				