

Lost or Missing Child Policy



Love, Learn and Shine Together with Jesus.

Written: September 2021

Reviewed: September 2026

Leader: Mrs C Sime

1 Purpose and scope

The safety and welfare of every child at St Matthew's Catholic Primary School are paramount. This policy explains how the school will prevent children from going missing, respond immediately when a child cannot be located, manage an incident during an educational visit and safeguard a child who is not collected at the agreed time.

This policy applies whenever a child is under the school's supervision, including before and after the formal school day where the school operates provision, during transitions around the site, at Breakfast Club or After-School Club, during off-site activities and on educational visits.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. All staff, governors, volunteers, contractors and visitors must remain vigilant and must report concerns immediately. Staff must not assume that another person has acted.

2 Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

A lost or missing child is a child whose whereabouts cannot be established when the child should be under the school's supervision. This includes a child who has left, or may have left, the premises or group without permission.

An absent child is a child who is not present at school when expected. Unexplained absence is managed through the school's Attendance, First-Day Response and Children Missing Education procedures.

An uncollected child is a child who has not been collected by an authorised adult at the agreed collection time and for whom no safe alternative arrangement has been confirmed.

The incident leader is the Headteacher, DSL or most senior leader available who coordinates the response and records key decisions.

3 Legal and statutory framework

This policy has regard to the following legislation and statutory guidance, as amended:

the Children Acts 1989 and 2004;
section 175 of the Education Act 2002;
Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026;
Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026;
the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2026;
Children Missing Education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools;
the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974;
the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013;
the UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018; and
Liverpool safeguarding, attendance, children missing education and educational-visit procedures.

4 Related school policies

This policy should be read alongside the school's:

Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
Attendance Policy and First-Day Response procedures
Children Missing Education procedures
Educational Visits Policy
Health and Safety Policy
Collection of Children arrangements
Critical Incident and Emergency Plan

SEND Policy and individual risk assessments

5 Responsibilities

5.1 Governing Body

The Governing Body will ensure that appropriate safeguarding, supervision, security, attendance and educational-visit arrangements are in place and that this policy is reviewed at least annually.

5.2 Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead

ensure that staff understand and can implement this policy;
coordinate or delegate the immediate response to an incident;
ensure that the police, parents, Children's Services and other agencies are contacted when required;
ensure that accurate contemporaneous records are maintained;
consider the child's individual vulnerabilities and safeguarding history;
lead the post-incident review and ensure that learning is acted upon; and
make any required notifications and inform the Chair of Governors and local authority where appropriate.

5.3 All staff

maintain appropriate supervision and complete accurate registers and headcounts;
follow collection, handover, transition and educational-visit procedures;
report a child who cannot be located immediately;
follow instructions from the incident leader without leaving other children inadequately supervised;
record facts, times, actions and observations accurately; and
preserve confidentiality and refer all media enquiries to the Headteacher.

6 Preventive arrangements

Morning and afternoon registers are completed accurately at the agreed times. Unexpected and unexplained absences are followed up promptly.

Children leaving during the school day are signed out and released only to an authorised adult, unless a formally agreed arrangement applies.

External doors, gates and access-control arrangements are checked and supervised appropriately. Staff carry out headcounts and register checks before and after transitions, visits and changes of location where required.

Visitors follow the school's signing-in, identification and supervision procedures.

Educational visits have an approved risk assessment, named Visit Leader, emergency contacts, registers and appropriate staffing arrangements.

Relevant staff know which children have SEND, communication, medical, emotional, behavioural or safeguarding needs that may increase the risk of leaving supervision.

Children known to be at increased risk have an individual risk assessment and safety plan, shared with relevant staff and reviewed after any incident.

Parents and carers keep contact and emergency-contact information up to date and inform the school promptly of changes to collection arrangements.

Part One Missing child on the school premises

7 Immediate action

Time is critical. The response must begin immediately and must be calm, coordinated and proportionate to the child's age, needs and assessed level of risk.

1. The member of staff who identifies that a child cannot be located must notify the Headteacher, DSL or most senior leader available immediately.
2. The exact time the concern was raised and the time and place the child was last seen must be recorded.
3. The class or group register must be checked and an immediate headcount completed. Other children must remain safely supervised.
4. The incident leader will take control, allocate named staff to specific search areas and appoint a member of staff to maintain a chronological incident log.
5. Staff will calmly establish when and where the child was last seen, what the child was wearing and whether the child said anything about where they intended to go.
6. Allocated staff will immediately check classrooms, toilets, corridors, offices, shared areas, cupboards, outdoor areas, play equipment, gates and other locations in which a child could be concealed. Staff must not leave other children inadequately supervised.
7. CCTV, access-control information, signing-out records, gates and exits will be checked immediately where available.
8. The incident leader will identify any relevant medical, SEND, communication, emotional, behavioural or safeguarding information and consider likely destinations or trusted adults.
9. Parents or carers will be contacted and asked whether they have collected the child or have information about the child's whereabouts. Where necessary, all available contact and emergency-contact numbers will be tried.
10. If the child cannot be located promptly, may have left the premises, or may be at immediate risk, the police will be contacted without delay. The school will not wait for every possible search to be completed before contacting the police.

8 Contacting the police

Call 999 where there is immediate danger, an urgent risk of harm or a medical emergency. In other circumstances, contact the police using the current non-emergency route and follow their instructions. Parents and the police may be contacted simultaneously.

The school will provide, as available:

the child's full name, date of birth and home address;
a current photograph and description of clothing;
the time and place the child was last seen;
relevant medical, SEND, communication or safeguarding information;
known risks, likely destinations and trusted adults;
parents' and carers' contact details; and
the chronological record of searches and other actions already taken.

The police will lead any external search or investigation. The school retains responsibility for the children remaining in its care and will assist the police fully. Staff will not leave the site to conduct an external search unless authorised by the Headteacher and coordinated with the police. Staff safety must be considered at all times.

9 Communication and safeguarding referrals

The DSL will consider without delay whether a referral to Liverpool Children's Services is required. If there is reason to believe that the child is at immediate risk of harm, a referral will be made immediately and the police contacted as appropriate.

The Chair of Governors and the local authority will be informed where appropriate. Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis. All media or external enquiries must be referred to the Headteacher or the person designated under the school's critical-incident arrangements.

10 Information for children and families during the incident

Other children will be supervised calmly and reassured without being given unnecessary or confidential information. The school will maintain appropriate contact with the child's parents or carers and provide factual updates where this will not interfere with police activity.

Part Two Missing child on an educational visit

11 Immediate action on an educational visit

1. Stop the activity and complete an immediate headcount and register check.
2. Inform the Visit Leader immediately and record the time and location at which the child was last seen.
3. Keep the remaining children together in a safe, supervised location with appropriate staffing.
4. Allocate adults to search the immediate area only where it is safe to do so, without compromising the supervision of other children.
5. Notify venue management or security and activate the venue's missing-child procedure.
6. Contact the Headteacher or DSL and provide clear factual information.
7. Contact the police without delay if the child is not located promptly, may have left the venue or is at risk. Call 999 where there is immediate danger.
8. The Headteacher or DSL will contact the child's parents or carers and coordinate communication with Children's Services and other agencies where required.
9. Follow the police, venue and school emergency-plan instructions. The remaining group will return to school only when it is safe and appropriate to do so.
10. Maintain a full chronological record of all actions and decisions.

The Visit Leader must have access to the register, emergency contacts, pupil information, relevant medical and SEND information, a current school contact number and the approved risk assessment.

12 Overseas or residential visits

For an overseas or residential visit, the Visit Leader will also follow the approved visit plan, provider procedures, insurer or assistance-provider instructions and relevant local emergency arrangements. The school's emergency contact must be informed immediately.

Part Three Action when the child is found

13 Immediate welfare response

1. Confirm the child's identity and location and notify the incident leader immediately.
2. Inform the police, parents or carers and all search teams promptly. Do not assume that someone else has cancelled the search.
3. Check the child for injury, distress, exposure, medical need or indications of harm. Provide first aid or urgent medical assistance where required.
4. Reassure the child calmly. Do not blame, punish or question the child aggressively.
5. Allow the DSL or police to lead any necessary safeguarding conversation. Staff should not ask the child to repeat an account to several adults.
6. Record any spontaneous explanation in the child's own words, together with the time, location and people present.
7. Consider whether an immediate safeguarding referral, medical assessment or additional support is required.

14 Recording, review and support

The Headteacher will ensure that a full incident record and appropriate CPOMS entry are completed. The record must include:

the date, times and locations involved;
the name of the child and the staff and children present;
when and where the child was last seen;

how and when the concern was identified;
the searches, calls, notifications and decisions made;
when, where and by whom the child was found;
the child's presentation and any explanation given;
any injury, first aid, medical treatment or safeguarding referral; and
the immediate and longer-term actions agreed.

Relevant CCTV, access records and other evidence will be preserved in accordance with safeguarding and data-protection requirements. Records will be stored securely and shared only where lawful and necessary.

The Headteacher and DSL will undertake a formal review as soon as practicable. This will consider supervision, staffing, registers, doors and gates, communication, risk assessments, the child's individual needs, the effectiveness of the response and any changes required. The child, other pupils, parents and staff will be offered appropriate support.

15 External notifications

Notifications will be made according to the facts of the incident and applicable legal requirements. They are not automatic in every case.

Police and Children's Services will be contacted where the circumstances or level of risk require it. The local authority and Chair of Governors will be informed where appropriate.

Ofsted or another regulator will be notified only where a statutory or regulatory notification requirement applies. Where applicable to registered childcare, a notifiable serious childcare incident must be reported as soon as possible and within the prescribed period.

The school's insurers or risk-protection provider will be informed where required by the applicable arrangements.

An accident or injury will be reported under RIDDOR only where it meets the statutory reporting criteria, following advice from the local authority or the school's health and safety adviser. Most incidents involving pupils are not reportable under RIDDOR.

Part Four Uncollected child

16 Procedure when a child is not collected

The child's welfare remains the school's priority. Staff will respond calmly and must not express frustration or blame in front of the child.

1. The child will remain safely supervised in the agreed location.
2. Staff will check whether a change to collection arrangements has been communicated and whether the child is booked into an after-school activity or provision.
3. If the child has not been collected within 15 minutes of the agreed time, the parent or carer will be contacted using all available numbers, unless an earlier call is needed because of known risk or concern.
4. If contact is not made, all authorised emergency contacts will be tried.
5. The Headteacher, DSL or senior leader will be informed and will review any known safeguarding, attendance, medical or family information.
6. The child will not be released to an unauthorised person, taken home by a member of staff or left alone.
7. Two members of staff should remain with the child wherever practicable until safe arrangements are confirmed.
8. If the child remains uncollected and no responsible adult can be contacted, the DSL or senior leader will contact Liverpool Children's Services for advice. The police will be contacted where there is an immediate welfare concern or risk of harm, or where advised by Children's Services.

9. The school will follow the instructions of Children's Services or the police and will not make informal care arrangements independently.
10. Every call, message, decision and action will be recorded, including the time of collection and the identity of the authorised adult collecting the child.

17 Repeated late collection

Where late collection is repeated, the school will meet or communicate formally with the parent or carer, clarify expectations, consider barriers and agree support where appropriate. Repeated or concerning late collection may lead to an early-help, attendance or safeguarding response. Any immediate safeguarding concern will be referred without delay.

18 Children travelling independently

A child may leave school independently only where this is permitted under the school's arrangements and written parental permission has been received where required. If a child who is expected to leave independently does not follow the agreed arrangement or cannot be located, the missing-child procedure will be followed.

Part Five Attendance and children missing education

19 Unexplained absence

A child who is unexpectedly absent from school is not automatically a child missing from the school premises. The school will follow its Attendance Policy and First-Day Response procedures immediately, including checking absence messages, contacting parents and carers, using emergency contacts where appropriate, recording all actions on Arbor and escalating unresolved or concerning absence to the attendance lead and DSL.

If there is reason to believe that a child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, a referral will be made to Children's Services and the police contacted where appropriate. The school will not wait for an early-help assessment before making a safeguarding referral.

20 Children missing education

Where enquiries indicate that a child may no longer be attending St Matthew's and no confirmed suitable education arrangement is known, the school will refer to the child's home local authority Children Missing Education team as soon as possible. The school will continue reasonable enquiries and communication with the local authority until it is agreed that enquiries have concluded or there are no further actions the school can reasonably take. A child will not be removed from the admission register unless a lawful ground applies and the required enquiries and notifications have been completed.

21 Training and testing arrangements

This policy will be included in staff induction and safeguarding updates. Relevant staff will know how to raise the alarm, who will coordinate the response, how search areas are allocated and where emergency pupil information is held. The school will periodically review or test its arrangements without causing unnecessary anxiety to children.

22 Monitoring and review

The Headteacher and DSL will monitor the implementation of this policy. It will be reviewed annually by the Governing Body and earlier when there is a relevant change in law or guidance, a change to school arrangements, learning from an incident or advice from the local authority, police or safeguarding partners.

23 Approval

Approved by	Governing Body
Chair of Governors	Mrs Cathie Sergeant
Signature and date	
Next review	September 2027

Reference documents

Department for Education, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.

Department for Education, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.

Department for Education, Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2026.

Department for Education, Children Missing Education: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and Schools.

Health and Safety Executive, Incident Reporting in Schools under RIDDOR.

Part Two Missing child on an educational visit

11 Immediate action on an educational visit

- 1.** Stop the activity and complete an immediate headcount and register check.
- 2.** Inform the Visit Leader immediately and record the time and location at which the child was last seen.
- 3.** Keep the remaining children together in a safe, supervised location with appropriate staffing.
- 4.** Allocate adults to search the immediate area only where it is safe to do so, without compromising the supervision of other children.
- 5.** Notify venue management or security and activate the venue's missing-child procedure.
- 6.** Contact the Headteacher or DSL and provide clear factual information.
- 7.** Contact the police without delay if the child is not located promptly, may have left the venue or is at risk. Call 999 where there is immediate danger.
- 8.** The Headteacher or DSL will contact the child's parents or carers and coordinate communication with Children's Services and other agencies where required.
- 9.** Follow the police, venue and school emergency-plan instructions. The remaining group will return to school only when it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- 10.** Maintain a full chronological record of all actions and decisions.

The Visit Leader must have access to the register, emergency contacts, pupil information, relevant medical and SEND information, a current school contact number and the approved risk assessment.

12 Overseas or residential visits

For an overseas or residential visit, the Visit Leader will also follow the approved visit plan, provider procedures, insurer or assistance-provider instructions and relevant local emergency arrangements. The school's emergency contact must be informed immediately.