



STUDENTS ABSCONDING OR GOING MISSING FROM SCHOOL POLICY

Policy & Guidance

- This policy sets out the requirements for schools in the event of a student running away, or going missing from school or a school approved activity.
- If a school staff member reasonably suspects that a student has left the school grounds or a school-approved activity, or has otherwise gone missing, the school must:
 - take immediate steps to establish whether the student has left the school grounds or the school approved activity
 - take all reasonable steps (which will vary depending on the circumstances of the case and the individual student) to discharge the duty of care that is owed to the student
 - notify Victoria Police if there is a reasonable concern for the safety of the student or others
 - notify the parent or carer of the student as soon as reasonably possible
 - report the incident to the Department's Incident Support and Operations Centre on [1800 126 126](tel:1800126126), as soon as practicable, including to access place-based supports

Purpose

- To ensure Footscray North Primary School takes appropriate action in relation to managing a student who runs away from school or a school approved activity.
- To ensure the school complies with DET enrolment policy and guidelines.
- To ensure the school discharges its duty of care to students.
- To ensure the school has strategies in place to support Child Safe Standards 2 & 6.

Implementation

- The school will take immediate appropriate action in the event of a student absconding or going missing from school or a school approved activity.
- In determining what reasonable steps to take, the school will consider the following:
 - the location of the school or the school approved activity and its proximity to external dangers such as busy roads
 - the student's age, vulnerability (e.g. a disability or medical condition), and mental state immediately prior to leaving the school grounds or the school approved activity, i.e. whether they were highly distressed, drug or alcohol affected
 - the appropriate supervision of other students, whilst action is taken to ascertain and/or establish the safety of the missing or absconding student
- Depending on the individual circumstances of the case, the reasonable steps to be taken may include one or more of the following:
 - contacting the Victoria Police to advise them of the missing student and the particular age, disability, vulnerabilities, or mental state of the individual student
 - contacting the parent or carer of the student to advise them that the student has left the school grounds or school-approved activity and to obtain any additional information and assistance that may assist in locating the student

- searching for the student, particularly if there is information available as to the student's potential whereabouts
- following the student and maintaining visual contact until the student returns to school or school-approved activity, or is in the company of the police or their parent or carer
- making contact with the student and encouraging them to return to the school grounds or the school approved activity, go to a safe place, stop the behaviour that is putting them at risk, or remain in the company of a suitable and responsible adult
- restraining the student in appropriate circumstances and in accordance with the Department's policy [Restraint and Seclusion](#) — for example, where the student is about to step in front of a car or otherwise harm themselves
- After the incident, once the student returns to school, staff will take the following steps:
 - report the incident to the parent or carer (if this has not already been done)
 - report the incident to the Department's Incident Support and Operations Centre (ISOC) on 1800 126 126, including to access place-based supports
 - document the incident and the staff response to the incident
 - if there is a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect, take appropriate action in accordance with the [PROTECT](#) protocol
 - consider whether it is appropriate to
 - conduct a Student Support Group meeting
 - develop a Behaviour Support Plan
 - contact the student and encourage them to make positive choices regarding their behaviour, if appropriate

School Specific Procedures

SECTION A: If a student absconds from the classroom the following procedures apply:

1. One staff member is to follow the student and keep a close watch (and if possible, to take a mobile phone with them). The other staff member(s) present will supervise the other students present, and ensure the Principal and/or Nominee are alerted either via phone or by sending two students to the Office – and asking them to alert the Principal and/or Nominee.
2. If the child absconds when there is only one staff member present, she/he must stay with the class and alert the Principal and/or Nominee (as above).
3. The staff member staying with the class is to conduct a roll check of remaining students.
4. The Principal and/or Nominee will then request other staff to help search the school grounds and/or contact parents/carers (when appropriate).

Staff are to use our Evacuation Process Area Wardens for each studio to ensure all internal spaces are checked.

In these circumstances, school staff will not pursue a student or force him/her back into the school building.

School staff will use their judgement, knowledge of the student and assessment of the student's safety in deciding what to do. This will include taking into account the student's age and vulnerability. The demeanour of the student will also need to be taken into account. If the student is upset or angry, care should be taken in approaching the child. The size of the student will also be taken into account.

In all cases, staff should not place themselves in situations of potential danger of injury.

5. Once a student has been found, the Principal and/or Nominee, in consultation with the student's studio team, will use their professional judgement as to outline the response towards the student and the support the student will need in the future.
6. The Principal and/or Nominee will brief parents/carers, the police, and ensure the appropriate documenting of the incident occurs.

SECTION B: Where a student attempts or is seen to be leaving school premises without authorisation the following procedure should be followed:

1. A member of staff will alert Principal and/or Nominee who will direct the course of action.

2. A member of staff who knows the student well and has a good relationship with the student will follow the student to the perimeter fence, exit or gate and will try to persuade the student to stay in the school.
3. As active pursuit may encourage a child to leave the site and may also cause the student to panic; possibly putting him or herself at risk by running onto a road, staff will not chase but will try to keep a child in sight at a distance.
4. The Principal and/or Nominee may request additional staff to join the search in a vehicle, taking a mobile phone to enable contact with the school.
5. The Principal and/or Nominee will contact the student's parents/carers. The call or attempted calls will be documented. When appropriate, a member of the administration team will also call the police to log the incident and make a log of this call, and also, when appropriate, contact the Incident Support and Operations Centre (ISOC)
6. If the searching staff member loses sight of the student, she/he must contact the school office giving details of their current location and the clothes that the student is wearing.
7. If the student has left the immediate vicinity of the school grounds and is no longer visible then the Principal and/or Nominee will make a decision as to how to take matters further, which will take into account the age of the student, the nature of the incident which led to the student absconding, the student's previous history of being involved in episodes of absconding and their outcomes. As noted in point 5, the police will be notified, and their involvement requested if required.
8. If the student returns of their own volition, the parents/carers, police and the Department's Security Services will be informed.
9. Once a student has been found, the Principal and/or Nominee, in consultation with the student's studio team, will use their professional judgement as to outline the response towards the student and the support the student will need in the future.
10. The Principal and/or Nominee will brief parents/carers, the police, and ensure the appropriate documenting of the incident occurs.

SECTION C: If a student is found to be absent from the classroom the following procedures apply:

1. If, after a quick but careful look of areas near the classroom (or known places for this student) the student is not located, the classroom teacher will alert the Principal and/or Nominee either via phone or by sending two students to the Office – and asking them to alert the Principal and/or Nominee.
2. The Principal and/or Nominee (in conjunction with the classroom teacher where appropriate) is to organise a search of the building and known places that the student may have gone to.
3. The staff member remaining with the class is to conduct a roll check of remaining students.
4. If the student is not found, then all available staff to complete a more thorough sweep of the school and grounds.
Staff are to use our Evacuation Process Area Wardens for each studio to ensure all internal spaces are checked.
5. The Principal and/or Nominee or the office staff will phone the police, and when appropriate, ISOC will also be informed, when the school and grounds have been fully checked and the student is not found.
6. The Principal and/or Nominee or the office staff will contact parents/carers at this point, and inform them of the situation. Every attempt to make contact with parents/carers will be documented.
7. Consideration will be given as to whether the search should be extended beyond the school buildings and grounds or police involvement is now requested. This decision will be based on staff knowledge of the student and the levels of risk and on what action is in the child's best interests. (Please see information in Sections A and B).
8. Follow steps as outlined in Section B.

Please Note: Staff will be aware of the location of the classroom phone, and to keep their mobile phone on hand at all times during the school day - especially when teaching outside.

Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Each incident will be monitored and evaluated.
2. In all circumstances, once the student has been located, a behaviour report needs to be recorded on Compass, and consideration given to the holding of a Student Support Meeting and the creation of an individual Behaviour Support Plan (including the development of individual risk assessments).

Summary of Important Actions

- After an incident in which a student has run away from the school grounds or school-approved activity, school staff will take the following steps:
 - Report the incident to the parent/or carer (if this has not already been done)
 - Report the incident to ISOC
 - Document the incident and the staff response to the incident
 - Consider whether it is appropriate to conduct a Student Support Group meeting
 - Consider whether it is appropriate to develop a Behaviour Support Plan.
- Please refer also to the school's *Duty of Care Policy, Restraint & Seclusion Policy* and the *Reporting & Managing School Incidents (Including Emergencies) Policy*.

Evaluation

- This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's review cycle or if guidelines change (latest DET update mid-June 2020).

Possibly required for VRQA purposes

School Council Approval No Longer Required

Reference:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/students-absconding>