St. Joseph's R.C. Primary School

Nursery Missing Child Policy

September 2026

Review: September 2027

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed in full by the Governing Body on a yearly basis.

The policy was last reviewed and agreed by the Governing Body September 2026

It is due for review in September 2027

Hayley Francis Date: September 2026

Head Teacher



Lindsay Wise Date: September 2026

Chair of Governors



1. Policy statement

The safety and welfare of children is our highest priority at all times, both on and off the premises.

The Nursery has procedures in place to reduce the risk of a child becoming missing, including appropriate supervision, secure entrances and exits, accurate registers and headcounts, risk assessments and safe arrangements for outings.

If a child cannot be located, staff will act immediately. The priority is to locate and safeguard the child while ensuring that all other children remain appropriately supervised and safe.

This policy should be read alongside the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

The policy is informed by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework for group and school-based providers, effective from 1 September 2026, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and relevant local safeguarding procedures.

2. Prevention

The Nursery will take reasonable steps to prevent children from becoming missing by:

- maintaining accurate registers and attendance records;
- carrying out regular headcounts, particularly during transitions and when moving between areas;

- maintaining appropriate staff-to-child ratios and supervision;

- ensuring children are appropriately supervised and, where required, within sight and hearing of staff;

- keeping external doors, gates and other access points appropriately secured;

- following the Nursery's arrivals, departures and collection procedures;

- ensuring visitors and contractors follow the setting's security arrangements;

- completing appropriate risk assessments for outings;

- ensuring staff understand their responsibilities for individual children;

- considering individual needs and vulnerabilities, including SEND, communication difficulties, medical needs and any known tendency to leave supervised areas;

- ensuring staff, students and volunteers are aware of the missing child procedure as part of induction.

3. Definition

For the purpose of this policy, a missing child is any child who:

- cannot be located when expected to be present;
- has left an area without staff knowledge or authorisation;
- cannot be accounted for during a headcount or transition; or
- is separated from the staff member or group responsible for them during an outing.

The procedure applies regardless of how long the child has been unaccounted for.

4. Child missing from the Nursery premises

Immediate action

As soon as a child is identified as missing:

- The member of staff who discovers the child is missing informs the Nursery Manager, Deputy Manager or most senior member of staff immediately.
- The register/headcount is checked immediately to confirm:
- the identity of the missing child;
- which children are present;
- when the child was last seen;
- where the child was last seen;
- who last saw the child.

The Nursery Manager or designated senior member of staff takes responsibility for coordinating the response.

The remaining children must remain safely supervised. Staff must not leave children unsupervised or compromise required staffing arrangements in order to search.

Staff check the immediate premises systematically, including, where applicable:

- classrooms and play areas;
- toilets;
- cupboards and storage areas where a child could enter;
- sleeping/rest areas;
- outdoor areas;
- playgrounds and garden areas;
- entrances and exits;
- areas immediately outside the premises.

Doors, gates and other potential exit points are checked to establish whether the child may have left the premises.

Staff should not conduct an unnecessarily wide or uncontrolled search that leaves other children inadequately supervised.

Contacting the police

The police must be contacted immediately where:

- there is reason to believe the child has left the premises;
- the child may be at immediate risk of harm;
- abduction is suspected;
- the child has not been located following an immediate search;

- the child's individual circumstances mean that delay could place them at risk; or
- staff are otherwise unable to establish the child's whereabouts promptly.

999 should be used where there is an immediate risk to the child's safety or an emergency requiring urgent police assistance.

Staff will follow the instructions given by the police.

A recent photograph, where available, together with a description of the child's clothing, physical description, known vulnerabilities, communication needs and any other relevant information will be provided to the police.

5. Informing senior leaders, the DSL and parents/carers

The Nursery Manager or designated senior member of staff will inform the Head Teacher as soon as possible.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will be informed immediately where the circumstances may constitute a safeguarding concern.

Parents/carers will normally be informed as soon as practicable. This must not delay contacting emergency services where immediate action is required.

The setting will provide parents/carers with factual information and will avoid speculation or assigning blame before the circumstances have been established.

The setting will consider whether a referral to Children's Social Care is required and will follow the procedures of the relevant Local Safeguarding Partners.

6. Safeguarding considerations

A missing child incident will be treated as a safeguarding matter.

The DSL will consider:

- whether the child was exposed to or may have been exposed to harm;
- whether there were concerns about supervision or staff practice;
- whether there was a security failure;
- whether there are concerns about an adult's actions or conduct;
- whether the child has additional vulnerabilities;
- whether there are concerns about possible abduction or other criminal activity;
- whether Children's Social Care or another safeguarding agency should be contacted.

Where an allegation or concern arises about a member of staff, the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and procedures for allegations against staff will be followed.

Where required, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and other relevant agencies will be contacted in accordance with local safeguarding procedures.

7. Child missing during an outing

The safety of the remaining children must be maintained at all times.

When a child is identified as missing:

- The staff member responsible for the group informs the most senior member of staff immediately.
- The remaining children are brought together and counted.
- The children remain with designated staff and are kept calm and reassured.
- One appropriately designated member of staff may make an immediate search of the surrounding area, without leaving the remaining children inadequately supervised.

Staff do not undertake a wider search unless directed to do so by the police or in accordance with the venue's emergency procedures.

Venue staff/security are alerted where appropriate.

The police are contacted promptly where the child cannot be immediately located or where there is concern for the child's safety.

The Nursery Manager/Head Teacher is contacted immediately.

Parents/carers are informed as soon as practicable.

A member of senior staff will remain at the location where the child was last seen if directed to do so by the police.

Staff follow police instructions regarding whether and when the remaining children should return to the Nursery.

A recent photograph and detailed description of the child are provided to the police where available.

The incident is recorded in full.

Staff should remain calm and avoid discussing the incident in a way that could unnecessarily distress the other children.

8. Whole-group outings and parents/carers attending

Where parents/carers are attending a whole-group outing, staff will establish which children are under the direct supervision of their parent/carer and which children remain the responsibility of the Nursery.

Any concern that a child is missing or at risk will be acted upon immediately.

The presence of parents/carers does not remove the Nursery's responsibility to respond appropriately to a safeguarding concern involving a child in its care.

9. When the child is found

When the child is located:

- the child's immediate safety and wellbeing are assessed;
- first aid or medical attention is provided where necessary;
- the child's parents/carers are informed;
- the police and other agencies are updated where appropriate;
- the child is reassured and supported;
- staff avoid questioning the child unnecessarily where police or safeguarding agencies are involved;
- any relevant evidence is preserved;
- the circumstances are recorded fully.

The DSL will consider whether the child requires any further safeguarding or wellbeing support.

10. Recording the incident

A written record must be completed as soon as practicable.

The record should include:

- date and time of the incident;
- child's name;
- date of birth, where relevant;
- exact location from which the child went missing;
- time the child was last seen;
- person who last saw the child;
- time the child was identified as missing;
- staff and children present;
- staff responsible for the child's supervision;
- child's clothing and distinguishing features;
- relevant medical, SEND or vulnerability information;
- searches undertaken and by whom;

- areas checked;
- time and method of contact with the police;
- police incident/reference number, where provided;
- time and method of contact with parents/carers;
- time the Head Teacher, Nursery Manager and DSL were informed;
- any contact with Children's Social Care or other agencies;
- instructions received from external agencies;
- time and location at which the child was found;
- the child's condition when found;
- any first aid or medical treatment;
- any witnesses;
- any relevant CCTV or other evidence;
- actions taken following the incident;
- lessons identified and changes required.

Records must be factual, objective and stored securely in accordance with the school's record-keeping and data protection procedures.

11. Ofsted notification

The Nursery Manager and Head Teacher will consider whether the incident meets the current Ofsted notification requirements.

Where notification is required, Ofsted will be informed as soon as possible and within the required statutory timescale. The current Ofsted guidance states that significant events should be reported as soon as possible and always within 14 days.

Where the incident involves police attendance or other circumstances requiring notification, the setting will follow the current Ofsted reporting requirements.

The setting will retain a record of any notification made.

12. Investigation and review

Following a missing child incident, the Head Teacher, Nursery Manager and/or Governors will ensure that the circumstances are reviewed.

The review will consider:

- what happened;
- when and where it happened;
- how the child became missing;
- whether procedures were followed;
- whether staffing and supervision were appropriate;
- whether registers and headcounts were accurate;
- whether the premises were secure;

- whether communication was effective;
- whether the risk assessment was adequate;
- whether staff training or practice contributed to the incident;
- whether there were any safeguarding concerns;
- whether further action or referral is required;
- whether policies or procedures need to be amended.

Where police or Children's Social Care are investigating, the Nursery will cooperate fully and will not undertake actions that could interfere with the external investigation.

Staff may be asked to provide factual written statements.

13. Staff support

Missing child incidents can be extremely distressing for staff.

The Nursery Manager and Head Teacher will ensure that staff involved are treated fairly and respectfully and are given appropriate support.

Where a staff member is subject to an investigation, the setting will follow the school's disciplinary, safeguarding and allegations procedures as appropriate.

Support may include:

- a management debrief;
- access to appropriate wellbeing support;
- further supervision;
- additional training;
- referral to occupational health or other support where appropriate.

14. Support for parents/carers

Parents/carers will be treated with sensitivity, honesty and respect.

The setting will provide factual information about what happened and the actions taken.

Where a parent/carer is extremely distressed, meetings should normally involve two members of senior staff, one of whom should be the Head Teacher, Nursery Manager or another appropriate senior representative.

Aggressive, threatening or abusive behaviour towards staff will not be tolerated. Where there is an immediate threat to safety, the police will be contacted.

Parents/carers will be informed of the setting's complaints procedure and, where appropriate, their right to raise concerns with Ofsted.

15. Other children

The remaining children will be supervised by staff who are not directly involved in the search wherever possible.

Staff will:

- maintain children's safety and routines;
- avoid discussing confidential details in front of children;
- respond honestly and appropriately to children's questions;
- provide reassurance;
- monitor children who appear particularly worried or distressed.
- Age-appropriate explanations will be used where necessary.

16. Confidentiality and media

Information about a missing child is confidential.

Staff must not discuss the incident with the media or post information about it on social media.

Any media enquiries must be referred to the Head Teacher or the person authorised by the school.

Information will only be shared with parents/carers, staff, agencies and other individuals where there is a legitimate safeguarding, legal or operational reason to do so.

17. Learning and prevention following an incident

Following every significant missing child incident, the Nursery will consider whether preventative measures need to be strengthened.

This may include:

- changes to supervision arrangements;
- additional headcounts;
- changes to entrance and exit security;
- changes to risk assessments;
- changes to outing arrangements;
- staff training;
- changes to communication arrangements;

- individual risk assessments for children with identified vulnerabilities;
- changes to relevant policies and procedures.

Where changes are identified, the Nursery Manager/Head Teacher will ensure that actions are allocated, implemented and reviewed.

18. Staff awareness

All staff working in the Nursery will be made aware of this procedure as part of induction and through ongoing safeguarding updates.

The Nursery Manager will ensure that staff understand:

- who takes charge during a missing child incident;
- who supervises the remaining children;
- who contacts the police;
- who contacts parents/carers;
- who contacts the DSL and Head Teacher;
- how the incident is recorded;
- how safeguarding concerns are escalated.

The procedure will be reviewed after any significant incident and at least annually.

19. Legal and statutory guidance

This policy should be read alongside the current versions of:

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework for Group and School-Based Providers;

Keeping Children Safe in Education;

Working Together to Safeguard Children;

The setting will follow the most current statutory guidance and local safeguarding procedures where these are updated during the life of this policy.

Policy written by Emily Lerego (Nursery manager and DSL) 2026

Due for renewal: September 2027