

Ambleford School Missing Child Policy

Reviewed: September 2025

Next Review: August 2026 (or sooner if required by regulatory updates)

1. Purpose

This policy sets out the procedures to be followed in the event that a child is discovered to be missing from the school site or during off-site activities. The safety and welfare of children is paramount, and this policy ensures that a swift, coordinated, and effective response is in place to minimise risk and secure the child's safe return.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, students, and visitors involved in Ambleford School activities, including Forest School and off-site visits.

3. Prevention Measures

Ambleford School recognises that prevention is the most effective safeguard against missing child incidents. Staff conduct regular headcounts, particularly during transitions, before and after activities, and whenever the group moves location. A buddy system is used during outings and larger group activities to ensure that pupils remain accounted for. Attendance registers are maintained carefully, with pupils signed in and out each day.

Although not all of the school's boundaries are fenced, staff set clear expectations for pupils about how far they may go during activities. Games and activities are used to reinforce recall and the importance of returning promptly when asked. A visitor log is maintained, and all visitors are supervised at all times by a member of staff.

4. Immediate Actions

If a child is discovered missing, staff take immediate action. A swift search of the immediate area is carried out while an urgent headcount confirms whether any other children are unaccounted for. The session leader must be informed without delay, and the Headteacher or the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) must be contacted immediately. Staff gather key information, including the child's last known location and any relevant details such as who they were last seen with, before expanding the search into surrounding areas. The rest of the group are taken to the roundhouse with a member of staff to keep them calm and secure.

5. If the Child is Not Found

If the child is not located within ten minutes of being reported missing, the police must be contacted immediately by the session leader or Headteacher. The child's parents or guardians are informed as soon as possible, using the emergency contact details held on record. While waiting for emergency services and parents to arrive, staff continue the search and deploy additional resources where possible. The remaining children are taken to a safe location, such as the roundhouse, where they can be supervised and reassured by staff while the search continues.

6. After the Incident

Once the child has been found, a full incident report is completed. This includes a factual record of what happened, the actions taken, the staff involved, timings, and the outcome. A review is then carried out to identify the circumstances that allowed the child to go missing and to assess any vulnerabilities or weaknesses in existing procedures. Lessons learned are used to update procedures and strengthen prevention measures.

A debriefing session is held for staff to reflect on the incident, share feedback, and reinforce the importance of vigilance. Where the incident raises safeguarding concerns, the DSL will make a referral to the local safeguarding partnership. Depending on the seriousness of the event, other regulatory bodies such as ISI or the local authority may also be informed.

7. Training

All staff and volunteers receive training on this policy and the procedures for preventing and responding to a missing child. Training is refreshed regularly and updated whenever the policy is revised or after an incident. Staff are expected to demonstrate familiarity with the procedures in practice.

8. Review

This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if an incident occurs, to ensure that it remains effective and up to date. Reviews take into account statutory guidance, local safeguarding procedures, and feedback from staff and parents.

9. Policy Availability

The Missing Child Policy is readily available to all staff and volunteers and is included as part of induction training. Parents are informed of the policy and how the school will respond should such an incident occur. It is also available on the school website and in hard copy upon request.

Conclusion

Ambleford School is committed to preventing incidents of missing children through robust supervision, clear boundaries, and strong preventative strategies. In the rare event that a child does go missing, this policy ensures that staff respond immediately, follow clear steps, and work closely with emergency services and parents to safeguard the child's welfare.