



# SHAPWICK SCHOOL

*'The same road by different steps'*

## **RUNAWAY AND MISSING FROM HOME, CARE & EDUCATION (RMFHCE) POLICY**

**Review: 31 August 2019**

# **SHAPWICK SCHOOL**

## **RUNAWAY AND MISSING FROM HOME, CARE & EDUCATION POLICY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Roles and responsibilities**
- 3. Shapwick School's RMFHCE procedures**
- 4. Unauthorised absence**
- 5. Role of the police**
- 6. Return procedure**
  - 6.1 Police safe and well check
  - 6.2 Independent return interview
- 7. Reporting, recording and evaluating RMFHCE incidents**
- 8. Multi-agency partnership**
- 9. Staff training**
- 10. Seeking the views of young people, parents, carers, local authorities and staff**
- 11. Safeguarding and child protection**
- 12. Implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review**

### Appendices

1. Roles and responsibilities
2. Further information about running away
3. Shapwick School's RMHFCE procedures
4. Action to be taken by senior staff in a case of missing from site
5. Action to be taken by senior staff in a case of missing from an off-site visit/Shapwick School's transport
6. Reporting and recording RMFHCE incidents

# **SHAPWICK SCHOOL**

## **RUNAWAY AND MISSING FROM HOME, CARE & EDUCATION POLICY**

**Shapwick School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and requires all staff to act in the best interests of our young people at all times.**

### **1. Introduction**

For the purpose of this policy, Shapwick School has adopted the term 'missing' to describe a child who is absent from their family home or placement without permission for any length of time where their age, experience, background or ability make this a concern. This includes circumstances where:

- There is identified or imminent risk of the child being exposed to significant harm.
- The child poses a risk of significant harm to others.
- The absence is out of character or unusual behaviour.
- There are indications that the child has already come to harm.
- The child is not expected to return within reasonable time limits, is not staying at the home(s) of others known to them or cannot be easily located.

Missing is not considered the same as 'unauthorised absence', which is addressed in section 4 of this policy document.

We recognise our duty under the Education Act 2002 to make arrangements to ensure that functions are carried out with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and comply with The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

As a residential special school, Shapwick School, follows the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools (2015).

We also follow HM Government advice 'What to do if you're worried a child is being abused' (2015), 'Working together to safeguard children' (2015), 'Keeping children safe in education' (2018) and the Local Safeguarding Children Board's policies, procedures, guidance and protocols.

This policy and all associated procedures apply to all staff (including agency staff, volunteers and students on placement) and young people and should be read in conjunction with other safeguarding and employment policies including (not an exhaustive list):

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Compliments and Complaints Policy
- Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- E-Safety and Multi-Media Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Management of Behaviour: Rewards and Sanctions Policy
- Off-Site Visits Policy

- Privacy Policy
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Safe Working (Caring) Practice Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Whistle Blowing Policy

Failure to comply with these policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action.

## 2. Roles and responsibilities

The designated senior member of staff with overall responsibility for dealing with RMHFCE issues at Shapwick School is the Principal.

For further information on the **roles and responsibilities** of the Designated Person see Appendix 1.

It is the responsibility of all professional staff to follow the procedures outlined in this policy; and report and record any suspicions or concerns to a senior member of staff.

For further information on the **risks, causes and consequences** associated with running away and **preventative strategies** see Appendix 2.

## 3. Shapwick School's RMHFCE procedures

In dealing with RMHFCE incidents, different circumstances necessitate different responses. This document outlines our response to three particular situations:

- A young person goes missing from Shapwick School or Boarding House.
- A young person goes missing from their family home i.e. parents/carers or another individual with parental responsibility
- A young person's absence is considered 'unauthorised' in accordance with the terms of this policy

For further information on the **Shapwick School's RMHFCE Procedures** see Appendix 3

## 4. Unauthorised absence

Missing is not considered the same as 'unauthorised absence', which occurs when:

- *a young person is absent for a short period of time **and/or***
- *their whereabouts is known, or thought to be known but unconfirmed; **and***
- *after a thorough risk assessment and consideration of their care plan, the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of anyone else.*

Children who have an 'unauthorised absence' should not be reported to the police and must be the subject of a continuous risk assessment review process while they remain absent. If there is evidence of any of the 'missing' circumstances outlined in section 1 being present **or** the child has not returned or been located within **SIX** hours they should be re-categorised as missing.

For further information on **unauthorised absence** see Appendix 3

## 5. Role of the police

Since April 2013 police forces have been rolling out new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' in relation to children reported as missing to the police.

For information, on the **role of the police** and **risk assessment**, please refer to:

'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/307867/Statutory\\_Guidance\\_-\\_Missing\\_from\\_care\\_3\\_.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care_3_.pdf)

'Guidance on The Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons, Second Edition at [www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2011/201103CRIIMP02.pdf](http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2011/201103CRIIMP02.pdf)

## 6. Return procedure

When the young person is located, their return should be managed by senior staff, in order to minimise disruption to other young people, and RMFHCE protocols followed.

Never label a young person as 'the problem' - running away must not be viewed as behaviour that needs to be punished, but seen as an indicator of underlying problems which require further intervention. Where issues external to the placement are trigger factors in a child going missing, staff must continue to offer them warm and consistent care when they return. In this instance, it would be counter-productive and detrimental to the young person's wellbeing to use their absence as a reason for disengaging from positive and constructive relationships.

Given the significant risks faced by young people who go missing it is critically important that they are given the opportunity to explain why they ran away so that a plan can be developed with input from them to reduce the risk. A young person's concerns will always be taken seriously and addressed, where appropriate.

The need for safe and reliable care may well be particularly significant for a young person who faces pressure to leave their placement as a result of circumstances beyond the control of their carers. In these circumstances, it will be even more important that the child's care plan is kept up-to-date and includes a very clear strategy to reduce the pressure on the child to leave – with explicit actions for professionals to take in situations where they are absent from their placements.

Interviewing a young person on their return from a missing episode is necessary to understand why they went missing or ran away and will enable appropriate support to be put in place, reducing the occurrence of repeat incidents. There are two stages to the process, the 'Safe and Well Check' and the 'Independent Return Interview'.

### 6.1 Police safe and well check

Usually when a missing young person has returned or been found, a police officer should physically see and interview the individual as soon as possible. The purpose of this meeting is to try and establish why the individual went missing, check for any

indications that the young person has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them.

There may be occasions when police safe and well checks are not practicable, for example where a young person frequently goes missing. However, this must be considered and agreed in partnership with the young person's parents/carers, placing authority, the police and any other relevant agency. Decisions not to carry out a safe and well check must be recorded on the child/young person's case file.

For information, on the **role of the police** and **safe and well checks**, please refer to:

'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/307867/Statutory\\_Guidance\\_-\\_Missing\\_from\\_care\\_3\\_.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care_3_.pdf)

'Guidance on The Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons, Second Edition at [www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2011/201103CRIIMP02.pdf](http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2011/201103CRIIMP02.pdf)

## 6.2 Independent return interview

Regardless of whether a police safe and well check has been carried out, a young person must be offered a 'Return Interview' within 72 hours of their return. This is a more in-depth consultation and is usually best carried out by an independent person, usually the child's social worker.

Shapwick School will take account of any information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect the child.

In the event that the child or social worker is unwilling or unable to participate in such a meeting, **responsibility rests with the placing authority to make alternative arrangements**. We will take all reasonable steps to ensure the placing authority meet their obligations, as defined in the latest statutory guidance.

For more information, on **independent return interviews**, please refer to the 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/307867/Statutory\\_Guidance\\_-\\_Missing\\_from\\_care\\_3\\_.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care_3_.pdf)

## 7. Reporting, recording and evaluating RMFHCE incidents

All RMFHCE incidents (confirmed or otherwise) must be reported to senior staff and recorded as soon as is reasonably possible (and in any event within 24 hours of the incident).

Whenever a child goes missing from Shapwick School the Designated Person must ensure that key individuals and agencies are informed within the timescales specified.

All missing-from-care incidents will be brought to the attention of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) as soon as is reasonably possible (and in any event within 24 hours of the incident).

For further information on **reporting and recording RMFHCE incidents** see Appendix 6.

All RMFHCE incidents are evaluated in order to identify any gaps in training, skills or knowledge of staff or to record and retain evidence of what worked well.

## **8. Multi-agency partnership**

As a boarding school we work in partnership with Children's Social Care in both our locality and young people's home areas. Any duplication or inconsistencies between locally agreed RMFHC procedures and those of other placing authorities will be discussed and addressed, as appropriate.

We are committed to working with parents/carers, local authority representatives, the police and other interested parties in a positive and constructive relationship to support young people who may be at risk of running away or going missing.

We take appropriate steps to escalate concerns, including with the placing and host local authority and the young person's allocated social worker (where appropriate) and the police.

In the event that a young person repeatedly runs away from Shapwick School, has been missing for a long period of time or engages in other risky behaviours, such as frequently meeting with inappropriate adults, the Designated Person will co-ordinate and/or host a multi-agency risk management meeting involving the parents/carers, placing authority, the local authority in which the setting is located and representatives from the police.

## **9. Staff training**

Shapwick School is committed to providing the support, supervision and training necessary to safeguard our young people. All professional staff receive training in child protection, behaviour management and risk assessment including RMFHCE (where appropriate).

All staff receive and read a copy of 'Part one: Safeguarding information for all staff' from the DfE guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' (2018).

## **10. Seeking the views of young people, parents, carers, local authorities and staff**

Regular enquires are made of all young people as to how safe they feel at Shapwick School and ways in which services and outcomes can be improved. The views of parents, carers, local authorities and staff are also sought through existing mechanisms for consultation and feedback. Records are kept of these enquiries and any actions taken.

## **11. Safeguarding and child protection**

Shapwick School will always consider whether a young person's behaviour gives cause to suspect that they are suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. All child protection concerns will be addressed in accordance with our 'Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy'.

## **12. Implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review**

The designated senior member of staff with overall responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 'Runaway and Missing from Home, Care and Education Policy' is the Principal.

The designated member of staff is also responsible for ensuring that all young people, staff, parents/carers and placing local authorities are aware of our policy. Additional support would also be provided to any parent or significant person, wishing to know more about the policy and procedures outlined above. A copy of this policy document is available for inspection on the premises during office hours and an electronic copy is posted on our website [www.shapwickschool.com](http://www.shapwickschool.com)

This policy document will be reviewed and publicised in writing, at least annually and, if necessary, more frequently in response to any significant incidents or new developments in national, local and organisational policy, guidance and practice.

The Advisory Board will also undertake an annual review of the school's policies and procedures relating to safeguarding, and ensure that all duties have been discharged in accordance with current legislation, regulations and statutory guidance; as well as local authority procedures and practice including the relevant Local Safeguarding Children Board(s).

The Advisory Board stringently holds senior leaders to account for all aspects of the school's performance through robust systems of governance and monitoring.

**Roles and responsibilities**

The designated senior member of staff with overall responsibility for dealing with RMFHCE issues at Shapwick School is the Principal.

The role of the Designated Person is to:

- Take a lead role in managing missing-from-care/education incidents in accordance with local RMFHC protocols and Shapwick School's policies and procedures;
- Ensure effective recording, reporting and information-sharing procedures are implemented;
- Co-ordinate and/or host multi-disciplinary meetings in response to RMFHCE incidents e.g. a multi-agency risk management, strategy or planning meeting;
- Monitor, analyse and report on the levels and frequency of RMFHCE incidents to Shapwick School's Leadership Team, Safeguarding Committee and other interested parties, as appropriate;
- Provide advice, guidance and support to staff involved in/affected by RMFHCE incidents;
- Provide advice, guidance and support to young people involved in/affected by RMFHCE incidents;
- Liaise with the Advisory Board's Committee about all safeguarding concerns, as soon as reasonably possible (and in any event within 24 hours of the concern being reported).
- Ensure that all staff receive appropriate training in accordance with their roles and responsibilities.

It is the responsibility of all professional staff to follow the procedures outlined in this policy; and report and record any suspicions or concerns to a senior member of staff.

## Further information about running away

### 1. Risks, causes and consequences

Running away is a clear risk factor making young people vulnerable to negative outcomes, both immediately and later in their adult lives. Abuse, (sexual) exploitation, and risk to life are the most concerning of all dangers that children face.

Other immediate risks include becoming a victim or perpetrator of crime and violence, grooming, alcohol/substance misuse, sleeping rough, hunger, thirst, fear, loneliness, accidental death, avoidable self-harm and involvement in gang activity.

The risks faced by young people are the same regardless of the duration, frequency or number of runaway incidents. However, younger children and those who runaway more often are more likely to face serious, long-term difficulties including:

- Loss of potential due to lack of school attendance;
- No means of support or legitimate income – leading to high risk/illegal activities;
- Possible involvement in criminal activities including prostitution;
- Drug and alcohol problems;
- Homelessness;
- Illness and disease; and
- Mental health problems.

Running away can be symptomatic of wider problems in a young person's life, but whatever the reason, children who decide to run away are unhappy, vulnerable and in danger. Research shows that the main causes may be broadly classified into two inter-related categories: push and pull factors.

#### **Push factors**

Push factors are those circumstances which make remaining at the family home or in placement dangerous, distressing or unworkable. Examples include:

- Family conflict and domestic violence;
- Long term abuse or maltreatment including being thrown out;
- Grooming, exploitation and teenage pregnancy;
- Relationship problems including arguments, conflicts or bullying;
- Drug and alcohol abuse (parents/carers or child);
- Mental health problems (parents/carers or child).

Where family life is dysfunctional, young people may see running away from a difficult situation to be a positive step towards taking control of an otherwise intolerable situation.

Children in care homes are three times more likely to runaway than other children. Young people are often unhappy or are influenced by others and do so to fit in with the group. Sometimes young people just feel so fed up that they run away without having particular reasons and without thinking things through at all.

Other reasons may include:

- Inconsistent or ineffective boundaries and expectations;

- Feeling that they are in the wrong placement;
- Being treated as part of a group, rather than an individual;
- Feeling they have no one to talk to or not feeling 'listened to';
- Alleviating boredom - some young people do 'run for fun'; or
- Simply wanting to get away from the expectations, pressure or people they live with 24/7.

For some young people, they may not know how, who, where or when to get help. For others it may be that the help they require is not available or accessible.

### **Pull factors**

Some young people fall in to patterns of going missing when they meet people who show them the attention or affection that they crave. This is a phenomenon widely exploited by individuals seeking to groom young people for sexual exploitation or child trafficking. Such behaviour illustrates the influence of 'pull factors' which induce young people to leave their family home or placement. Other pull factors include:

- Running to be near friends or family – especially when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements;
- Young people who seek to exercise control over their lives when they have no power or influence over important decisions such as contact, placement and future plans;
- Children may also runaway in order to enjoy some freedom and independence.

The early identification of issues in a child's life, including a first missing incident, provides an opportunity to prevent further risk-taking behaviour and harm. Where root causes are not resolved, the underlying issues continue to grow with the danger that they can spiral out of control.

## **2. Preventative strategies**

### **2.1 Ethos and relationships**

A placement where the child or young person feels safe and secure, and where their concerns are taken seriously, is likely to be the most effective way of reducing the likelihood that they will be motivated to run away.

Through a clear, consistent and positive approach to the management of behaviour we have established an ethos and environment in which all members of the community are expected to treat one another with mutual respect, dignity and tolerance. Staff, in particular, must lead by example in modelling positive relationships and communication with colleagues, young people and visitors.

By establishing secure, positive and trusting relationships with young people, staff empower them to seek help when they are worried about their own or others' safety. Children who have supportive relationships with the adults in their lives are also more likely to turn to those adults for help in dealing with any fears or frustrations. Young people are also informed of their right to be supported by an independent advocate.

Staff must also be proactive in gathering, communicating and acting upon intelligence about issues between young people which may provoke risk-taking behaviour. This will, in turn, reduce the probability of them running away in the first place.

## **2.2 Admissions policy**

On receiving a referral, the Principal will seek to establish whether the young person being referred would be likely to benefit from a placement at Shapwick School.

The assessment of the child needs takes into account any history of running away. If there is a history then the placement plan must include a strategy to keep them stay safe and minimise the likelihood of the child going missing in the future. This strategy will be discussed and, as far as possible, agreed with the parents/carers, referring authority, social worker and child concerned; and include detailed information about the responsibilities of all services, the child's parents and other adults involved in the family network. If the child is looked-after, their care plan (arranged by their placing authority) should include such a strategy.

When a child is placed out of their local authority area, the responsible authority<sup>1</sup> must make sure that the child has access to the services they need. Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority<sup>2</sup> and other specified services.

Consideration is always given to the impact of a new young person on the existing population.

## **2.3 Risk assessment and behaviour management plans**

Where a young person has been involved in running away or going missing from home, care or education, relevant information will be recorded in their individual risk assessment and behaviour management plan. However, it is important to consider not only the likelihood that the young person may go missing/run away, but also their individual characteristics such age, level of understanding, strengths, vulnerabilities, health needs (e.g. epilepsy), reasons, experience and history of running away which may increase the risks they might face when they do go missing.

Any new information will be communicated to other staff as soon as reasonably possible and the individual risk assessment and/or behaviour management plan will normally be reviewed and redistributed (where appropriate) within 72 hours. All professional staff are obliged to familiarise themselves with the current risk assessment and behaviour management plan for every young person with whom they work.

All risk assessments and behaviour management plans are shared with young people to enable them to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to manage their own behaviour effectively.

## **2.4 Contact**

We recognise the importance and benefits of contact for children and young people, not least because it reduces the likelihood of runaway/missing incidents.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Responsible local authority:** the local authority that is responsible for a looked after child's care and care planning.

<sup>2</sup> **Host local authority:** the local authority in which a looked after child is placed when placed out of the responsible local authority's area.

We are committed to working with parents/carers, local authority representatives and other interested parties in promoting, organising and facilitating contact in accordance with the terms and conditions of our placement contract.

### **2.5 Education and support**

Running away is usually a sign that a crisis point has been reached. It is vital therefore, that we do everything we can to engage children and young people and help them understand the risks and dangers involved in running away, inform them of the support mechanisms available to resolve issues and make them aware of how to seek help if they do run away *before* they decide to run.

Issues surrounding social awareness, health education and sex education are taught to all pupils during Assemblies/Tutor time/RE/PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and other areas of the academic and social curriculum.

### **2.6 Safeguarding and child protection**

We have comprehensive policies and procedures on all other aspects of safeguarding and child protection made clear to staff, young people, parents/carers and referring authorities. All staff are aware of, and follow in practice, our policy to ensure that the appropriate action is taken immediately where it is believed a young person may be at risk or it is alleged that a young person is suspected of being abused.

### **2.7 Management of behaviour**

Children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour.

We have a written policy on the management of behaviour, and staff, young people, parents/carers and referring authorities are made aware of it. All staff are made aware of, and follow in practice, our policy on the use and techniques of physical intervention, to protect young people from harm either to themselves or others.

### **2.8 Anti-bullying policy**

All members of our community have a right to learn and work in a safe, secure and positive environment. Bullying of any kind is wholly unacceptable and will not be tolerated. We have, and follow, an anti-bullying policy, with which children and staff are familiar.

### **2.9 E-safety and multi-media policy**

Given the potential for misuse, we provide comprehensive guidance for staff and young people on the use of the internet, email facilities, mobile phones and other multi-media devices. Both staff and young people are obliged to sign a multi-media contract which provides a clear and concise summary of our expectations as well as the potential consequences of any breach.

### Shapwick School's RMHFCE Procedures

In dealing with RMHFCE incidents, different circumstances necessitate different responses. This document outlines our response to three particular situations:

- A young person goes missing from Shapwick School or Boarding House
- A young person goes missing from their family home i.e. parents/carers or another individual with parental responsibility
- A young person's absence is considered 'unauthorised' in accordance with the terms of this policy

#### 1. Missing from Shapwick School Educati

While young people may run away for a variety of reasons, the majority often do so, on impulse. All staff must adopt a pro-active approach to supervising and monitoring the location and behaviour of young people at all times, particularly 'on grounds', trips off-site and when young people are unsettled. Knowledge of individual young people is all-important in terms of the likelihood of running away and their influence on other more vulnerable children. Information on these issues may be found through a young person's risk assessment, behaviour management plan, pupil file and placement plan.

If a young person does attempt to run away the staff response should be influenced by a number of factors, including:

- the age, ability and understanding of young person(s) involved;
- the frame of mind, vulnerability and perceived risk to the individual and others;
- location and circumstances of the incident; and
- the number/experience of staff and young people present.

However, the following considerations must always be borne in mind:

- All young people have the potential to run away, irrespective of history, relationships or behaviour and must be monitored and/or supervised appropriately at all times.
- If a young person does attempt to run away, staff should warn a child loudly and clearly that they should not walk/run off and ask them to return to the staff/group.
- All staff trained in Team-Teach strategies may **only** use a physical intervention to prevent a young person from running away if they have cause to believe that they are placing themselves or others at immediate and unacceptable risk.
- In monitoring a young person off site staff must follow **at a walking pace** and undertake frequent risk assessments of the situation, taking into account the young person's potential response to being observed and the likelihood of them putting

themselves at greater risk e.g. near busy roads, rivers or railways. Staff must contact the police on **101** (or **999** in an emergency) if the welfare of the child continues to be a cause for concern.

**In all run away situations, senior staff must be informed as soon as possible.**

**(a) Runaway from Shapwick School's site**

A runaway from site may come to staff attention in a variety of ways:

- a young person is observed leaving site boundaries without permission;
- a young person does not appear for a group meeting/assembly;
- another child or member of staff informs you that a young person has runaway.

**In all run away situations, senior staff must be informed as soon as possible.**

**During the school day**, the Principal/ Headteacher must be notified.

**Outside school hours**, the Head of Care must be notified.

On being notified of an alleged incident, senior staff must investigate and then follow the procedure outlined in Appendix 4.

**(b) Runaway from an Off-Site Visit/Shapwick School's Transport**

Off-site visits are typically one of the most unpredictable activities we undertake with young people. The importance of good planning, preparation and risk assessment should never be underestimated. Staff must maintain the highest level of vigilance and supervision at all times.

If a young person is believed to have run away from a trip or our transport, staff must act to prioritise the welfare and good management of the group. Failure to do so may provoke a large-scale incident involving greater risk-taking and more young people.

**In all run away situations, senior staff must be informed as soon as possible.**

On being notified of an alleged incident, senior staff must establish the facts and follow the procedure outlined in Appendix 5.

**2. Missing from a family home**

Where a child is absent from their family home without permission, parents/carers or persons with parental responsibility should take all practical steps to establish the child's location and encourage them to return without delay. This may include:

- searching the young person's accommodation, surrounding area and vehicles;
- speaking with other children who live in the family home to obtain relevant information about the missing child;
- searching the family home for important leads (e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity) which may inform the investigation and/or assist in protecting or recovering the child;
- contacting the child themselves, known friends and relatives; and
- visiting locations the child is known to frequent, if possible.

If the whereabouts are known or suspected, it is the responsibility of the parents/carers or persons with parental responsibility to arrange for the child's return. If they have not

returned **within 6 hours** after becoming absent a decision must be made about reporting the child as missing to the police.

It is the responsibility of the parents/carers or persons with parental responsibility to inform the police that a child is missing and/or returned.

The Designated Person will support the parents/carers in safeguarding the young person by:

- Providing information on 'missing from home protocols' as defined in this document;
- Encourage parents/carers to report children as missing to the police (as appropriate);
- Informing the responsible local authority of the missing-from-home incident;
- Sharing information about potential triggers, behaviours and risks together with any intelligence about the individual's whereabouts, motivation or intentions;
- Establishing contact and facilitating resolution, where appropriate. We would not encourage a young person to return, where circumstances gave rise to child protection concerns.

A brief summary of the missing-from-home incident must be recorded in the 'RMFHCE Log Book'.

### **3. Unauthorised Absence**

Missing is not considered the same as 'unauthorised absence', which occurs when:

- a young person is absent for a short period of time **and/or**
- their whereabouts is known, or thought to be known but unconfirmed; **and**
- after a thorough risk assessment and consideration of their care plan, the absence does not raise concern for their immediate safety or that of anyone else.

Children who have an 'unauthorised absence' should not be reported to the police and must be the subject of a continuous risk assessment review process while they remain absent. If there is evidence of any of the 'missing' circumstances outlined in section 1 being present **or** the child has not returned or been located **within 6 hours** they should be re-categorised as missing.

The term 'unauthorised absence' may describe a number of circumstances, including:

- a young person has run away from Shapwick School for a short period of time **and/or** their whereabouts is known, or thought to be known but unconfirmed; and
- a young person fails to return to Shapwick School in accordance with arrangements agreed between parents/carers, children's services, local authority and Shapwick School **and** we know, or have a good idea about where they are.

Where a young person has run away from Shapwick School and their whereabouts is known, a decision will be made as to our response based on the best interests of the child and consultation with all interested parties e.g. parents/carers, social worker etc.

A young person's absence would also be recorded as 'unauthorised' if they:

- fail to appear at a pre-agreed time and location for collection by private or Shapwick School transport; or

- refuse to return to Shapwick School on a pre-arranged date in either public, private or Shapwick School's transport.

Irrespective of the circumstances Shapwick School does not involve itself in forcibly returning young people to site under these particular conditions. Thus, senior staff would report the matter to parents/carers, children's services, local authority, as appropriate.

**We would not (normally) report an unauthorised absence to the police as this directly contradicts the latest government guidance.**

Where a young person has run away from Shapwick School or failed/refused to return to Shapwick School, details should be recorded appropriately and entered in the 'RMFHCE Log Book'.

## Action to be taken by senior staff in a case of missing from site

Unless a child is directly observed leaving site, thorough checks must be made of the:

- Young person's house e.g. bathrooms, bedrooms (under beds, in wardrobes) etc.
- School buildings including dining room, kitchen, meeting rooms, classrooms etc.
- Other site buildings/areas including vehicles, sports hall, playing field etc.

If the child is located on site, this should be recorded and reported as '**out of bounds**'.

If the young person is not located during a site search, immediate action must be taken to locate and safeguard the child. Senior staff must inform the Head Teacher and organise a local search. Staff involved in a search must:

- Carry a mobile phone that is switched on and set to ring rather than silent/vibrate;
- Be advised NOT to 'chase' young people near roads or junctions.

If the young person is located during a local search, staff must observe, monitor and encourage the individual to return to site (if possible).

Following the young person's return to site the Principal, parents/carers, local authority and children's services (where appropriate) must be informed as soon as reasonably possible. This would be considered an '**unauthorised absence**' and must be recorded in the 'RMFHCE Log Book'.

If the child is not located during a local search, a judgment needs to be made as to whether to contact the police - consideration must be given to the age, maturity, vulnerability and risk to those involved. However, if young person is missing for **more than 1 hour**, then Shapwick School's Incident logging must be followed and all necessary details recorded including antecedents and details of appearance.

Steps should also be taken to search their accommodation for any leads (e.g. mobile phones, diaries, letters, notes explaining absence, email and website activity) which may inform the investigation and/or assist in protecting or recovering the child.

To contact the police, staff must telephone **101** (or **999** in an emergency). Staff must have the child's personal details and photograph to hand. **An officer of the local Constabulary may visit site to gather relevant information, following notification of the incident.** If the child is reported missing from Shapwick School and their whereabouts is unknown; the police may undertake a site search. Parents/carers and children's services (including E.D.T. outside office hours) must be informed, as appropriate.

When the young person is located, their return must be managed by senior staff in order to minimise disruption to other young people.

On returning to Shapwick School, the young person must be offered a positive and warm response. It is important to establish what, if any, motive there was for the behaviour in order to identify and address any potential difficulties the young person may be experiencing. The young person must also be offered both a 'safe and well check' by the police and an 'independent return interview' by an independent person.

## Action to be taken by senior staff in a case of missing from an off-site visit/Shapwick School's transport

Unless a young person is directly observed leaving the area ensure thorough checks are made of the immediate vicinity including shops, toilets, playgrounds etc. If the child is located during this search, this should be recorded and reported as '**out of bounds**'.

If the young person is not located during such a search, immediate action must be taken to locate and safeguard the child. Senior staff must inform the Principal and staff must conduct a search of the immediate locality as soon as possible **including nearby train and bus stations**. If the young person is located during a local search, staff must observe, monitor and encourage the individual to return with them to the vehicle (if possible).

If the young person does return under the supervision of staff, this would be considered an '**unauthorised absence**' and must be recorded in the 'RMFHCE Log Book'. Following the child's return to site the Principal, parents/carers, local authority and children's services (where appropriate) must be informed as soon as reasonably possible.

If the child is not located within one hour during a local search, the Principal should be informed and the police should be contacted - consideration should be given to the age, maturity, vulnerability and likely intentions of those involved.

In reporting the matter to the police, senior staff should contact the police station nearest to the incident, contact details of which may be found via a telephone information service e.g. 118 24 7 or a local search engine e.g. [www.yell.com](http://www.yell.com). Staff must have the child's personal details and photograph to hand, in order to pass on relevant details.

In contacting the local police it may be appropriate to pass on the Group Leader's mobile telephone number. **An officer of the local Constabulary may visit site to gather relevant information, following notification of the incident including personal details and a photograph of the missing person.** Parents/carers and children's services (including E.D.T. outside office hours) should also be informed, as appropriate.

When the young person is located, their return must be managed by senior staff in order to minimise disruption to other young people.

On returning to Shapwick School, the young person must be offered a positive and warm response. It is important to establish what, if any, motive there was for the behaviour in order to identify and address any potential difficulties the young person may be experiencing. The young person must also be offered both a 'safe and well check' by the police and an 'independent return interview' by an independent person.

**Reporting and recording RMFHCE incidents**

Whenever a child goes missing, the Designated Person must ensure that the following individuals and agencies are informed within the timescales specified.

- the local police. When referring to the police any relevant information that might help to find or support the child should be shared, including:
  - description of the child including their clothing;
  - details of where the child was last seen and with whom;
  - recent photograph;
  - relevant addresses, known associates and addresses frequented;
  - previous history of absenteeism and circumstances of where found;
  - circumstances under which the child is absent; and
  - any factors that increase the risk to the child.
- the authority responsible for the child's placement. Notification is likely to be by phone to the social worker (or E.D.T. outside office hours) in the first instance followed up by email confirmation; and
- Parents/carers and any other persons with parental responsibility must be informed as soon as possible, unless it is not reasonably practicable or to do so would be inconsistent with the child's welfare.

An accurate and up to date record must be made as to when the local police, authority and parents/carers (where appropriate) have been informed, what information has been given to them, any actions taken, agreed actions, messages etc.

All RMFHCE incidents must be recorded in a bound and page-numbered 'RMFHCE Log Book' where a distinction will be made between missing-from-care incidents, missing-from-education incidents, missing-from-home incidents and unauthorised absences.

All missing-from-care/education incidents originating from Shapwick School must also be reported to parents/carers and relevant authorities as soon as possible. All such communications must be recorded in accordance with Shapwick School's procedures.

All missing-from-care incidents must be brought to the attention of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) as soon as is reasonably possible (and in any event within 24 hours of the incident).