

Absconding Policy

Purpose:

The purpose of this non-statutory Policy is to set out clearly for all stakeholders, the process that will take place should a student abscond from school.

Aim:

We actively work to provide a secure, safe environment, a school where students want to come to enjoy learning with others as part of a caring community. Every effort is made at class and school level to meet individual student's social, regulation and academic needs. These needs are addressed in the Individual Education Plan and in the student Behaviour Plans and are constantly monitored and reviewed. We recognise that it is rarely that a student will try to abscond from our school but this policy is written to ensure we are ready to deal with this eventuality should it occur.

Supporting structures and infrastructures in place at School of the Holy Spirit:

- Pupil teacher ratio 6:1
 - Two/three SNAs in each class
 - High levels of supervision by teachers and SNAs at recreation times.
 - Staff training in Studio 111: Low Arousal and Intervention strategies
 - Phones in classrooms / therapy rooms
 - Electric / remotely operated gates
 - Gates closed during the school day (each class has a fob and key to the side gate)
 - Key-pad door access to restricted rooms and main door.
 - Personal alarm system worn by Principal, Deputy Principal and designated staff who work with particularly vulnerable students
 - High level door snibs and locks
 - Internal fire doors kept closed
 - External security cameras
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- ❖ All fences are maintained in good condition. All staff have a responsibility under Health and Safety to monitor and report any failing in perimeter security.
 - ❖ There is always an appointed teacher on supervision duty outside during recreation breaks.

- ❖ Discrete teaching, visual schedules and social stories will be used as appropriate with students at risk of absconding. Specific behaviour plans will be in place to address identified needs. A Risk Assessment will be carried out prior to any outing or event outside the school grounds.
- ❖ When it is suspected that a student has absconded (or is missing from their class) the Principal will be informed at once. Other staff may be asked for assistance by means of the school's Emergency Alarm System.

Students who abscond from the school building but remain in the School Grounds:

The general advice in these circumstances is that staff should not pursue the student or try to force him/her back into school when the student is not deemed to be at risk. Staff will keep their distance and monitor the student's wellbeing. If appropriate, staff will engage with the student and encourage him/her to return to class. However, there may be circumstances where school staff will need to use their judgement, knowledge of the student and assessment of the student's safety in deciding what to do.

Students who return to school after absconding:

Most students who abscond will do so as a result of a specific incident which may have taken place either at school, at home or on the way to school.

For those students who return to school either by their own choice, with parental support or following intervention by a member of staff, thought should be given to their welfare and wellbeing. They are likely to be in need of support, understanding and perhaps some time apart from their peers.

The demeanour of the student will need to be taken into account. If the student is upset or angry, care must be given to how he/she is approached. Each situation will be treated on an individual basis.

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

Students who Abscond and leave the School Grounds:

If a student is suspected of leaving the school site without permission;

- The member of staff will alert the Principal or (in her absence) the deputising teacher.
- If the student has left the immediate vicinity of the school grounds, then the Principal and/or Deputy Principal and class teacher will make a decision as to how to take matters further. This decision will take into account any previous

agreement with parents/guardians, the age of the student, the nature of the incident which led to the student absconding and the student's previous history of being involved in episodes of absconding and their outcomes.

- If there is no doubt that the student has absconded from the school grounds, the school will contact the Garda.
- If the student is within an easy distance of the school, staff are not to engage in conversation as the student might be in a distressed state and unable to act in a controlled manner. This would mean there is still potential for tragic accidents. If verbal contact is considered to be appropriate - calmly ask the student to return to school where any problems can be sorted in a safe environment.
- In the event of a teacher being absent from class as a result of a student absconding, provision will be made for their class to be supervised by another teacher.
- Parents/guardians and if necessary the Garda will be informed. At a suitable time the teacher and Principal will speak with the student and a report will be filed on the incident.

Parents/Guardians:

Parents/guardians of students are responsible for supporting the work of the school. They are responsible for encouraging their children to keep to all school procedures and policies.

Once school has informed the parents/guardians that their child has absconded, parents/guardians are responsible for actively supporting the school with the subsequent procedures and actions. This could include coming to school to help secure the safety of the student after he/she has absconded as well as meeting with the principal in order to agree subsequent actions.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Each incident will be recorded, monitored and evaluated. Individual Behaviour Plans for students will be amended if necessary and a Risk Assessment for specific challenging activities may be deemed necessary.

This plan was ratified by the Board of Management on _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Chairman Board of Management

Date: _____