

Innsworth Preschool Missing Child Policy

Last Updated: 1st January 2026

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 Overview: This policy outlines the immediate and preventive procedures to be followed if a child goes missing while in our care.

1.2 Objective: Our primary commitment is to prevent children from going missing through robust supervision, and to respond swiftly and effectively if such an incident ever occurs.

2. Legal and Statutory Framework

2.1 Compliance: This policy is underpinned by our duties under the following key legislation and statutory guidance:

- The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS): Specifically the requirement to ensure children's safety and prevent them from leaving the premises unsupervised.
- **Supervision Duty:** We comply with the requirement to ensure that children are adequately supervised, that premises are secure, and that we maintain a daily record of the names of the children being cared for on the premises and their hours of attendance.
- The Children Act 1989.
- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children.

3. Definition of a Missing Child

3.1 Operational Definition: A child is treated as missing if they cannot be located immediately after a prompt check of the known location(s) and they are not with a named staff member or in a signed/recorded transition.

3.2 Rapid Check: A "30–60 second rapid check" is conducted immediately to confirm the child is not simply obscured from view (e.g. behind equipment) before escalating to the full procedure.

4. Preventive Measures

4.1 Security: To reduce the risk of a child going missing, we will always:

- **Secure the Premises:** Ensure all entry and exit points, including perimeter gates and fences, are secure and monitored.
- **Daily Checks:** A daily check is conducted to ensure gates, latches, and fences are secure. Faults are logged and repaired promptly; temporary controls are implemented until fixed.
- **Access Control:** Parents must not allow any other person to enter through secure gates or doors. Each adult must use their own authorised access. If in doubt, let the gate close and alert staff. Repeated breaches may lead to restricted access arrangements.

4.2 Supervision:

- **Vigilance:** Ensure vigilant staff supervision across all areas.
- **Farm School Protocols:** Specific headcounts are conducted before entering and immediately after leaving the Farm School/Animal Zones.
- **Ratios:** Always maintain correct staff-to-child ratios.
- **Transition Logs:** A named staff member is responsible for headcounts during each transition (e.g. indoors to outdoors) and records completion on the transition log.

5. Procedure: Immediate Action (The "Golden Minutes")

5.1 Initial Response: If a child is not located after the initial rapid check, the following steps will be taken immediately and calmly.

5.2 Secure and Alert:

- **Alert:** The staff member noticing the absence will inform the Manager or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) immediately.
- **Lockdown:** Close and secure all external exits; position staff at each exit point; stop all transfers between areas until resolved. We will stop admitting or releasing children to parents until the missing child is found or police take control, unless directed otherwise.
- **Register Check:** Attendance registers and room transition records are immediately checked. We will check sign-out records and confirm with the staff member at the door/collection point whether any early handover occurred.
- **Headcount:** All other children will be gathered in a safe area and a headcount conducted to confirm exactly who is missing.

5.3 Systematic Zone Search (Role Allocation): An immediate, coordinated search of the premises will begin using defined roles:

- **Coordinator:** The Manager/DSL coordinates the search and keeps time.
- **Group Supervision:** Staff Member A remains with and supervises the main group of children.
- **Searchers:** Staff Members B and C search pre-defined zones systematically (e.g. Farm zone, behind sheds, perimeter fences, toilets, quiet corners, cupboards).
- **Documentation:** Key information is noted: time last seen, location last seen, and clothing description.

6. Procedure: Escalation (The 5-Minute Trigger)

6.1 Trigger: If the child is not located within **5 minutes (maximum)** of initiating the search, the police are called.

6.2 Vulnerability Override: For very young, non-verbal, or medically vulnerable children, or if there is evidence of a breach of the perimeter, escalation to emergency services may occur **immediately** without waiting for the full systematic search.

6.3 Emergency Services & Parents:

- **Police:** The Manager will contact the Police on 999 without further delay.
- **Parents:** The child's parents/carers will be informed immediately after the police are called (or sooner if there is evidence the child has left the site).
- **Preparation:** Staff will prepare the child's details (photo with consent, physical description, medical needs) for the police.

6.4 Staff Deployment (External Search):

- **Ratios:** Only staff authorised by the Manager may search beyond the boundary, and only where this does not compromise the safety and ratios of the remaining children.
- **Limitation:** If staffing does not permit an external search, staff will remain on site and provide the police with the last known direction and perimeter check information.

6.5 Communication:

- **Operational Use:** Staff are strictly prohibited from using personal mobile phones to text, call, or post on social media regarding the incident while it is unfolding. Phones may only be used for operational coordination as directed by the Manager.
- **Media:** No member of staff is authorised to speak to the press or post on community groups. All external communication is handled solely by the Manager.

7. Procedure: If the Child Cannot be Found

7.1 Police Handover: If the child remains missing upon police arrival:

- **Cooperation:** We will continue the search under police direction.
- **Evidence:** We will preserve relevant evidence, such as CCTV footage and door access logs.
- **Operations:** Normal operations will be halted or restricted as necessary.
- **Liaison:** A specific staff member will be designated to meet the police and parents to manage information flow.

8. Reporting to External Agencies

8.1 Notification: Following the incident, the following authorities will be notified as required:

- **Ofsted:** Notified as soon as reasonably practicable and always within the statutory 14-day timeframe.
- **LADO:** The Local Authority Designated Officer will be notified if there is an allegation or concern that a staff member may have behaved in a way that harmed a child, may have committed a criminal offence against a child, or indicates they may pose a risk of harm.
- **HSE:** We will consider whether any other statutory reporting applies depending on circumstances (e.g. RIDDOR in the event of serious injury).

9. Procedure: When the Child is Found

9.1 Immediate Aftercare:

- **Welfare:** The child's welfare is the priority. They will be comforted, reassured, and checked for any injury.
- **Notification:** Parents and Police are updated immediately.

9.2 Documentation & Data:

- **Data Protection:** We will share with parents the full facts relating to their child, actions taken, and the outcome. We will not disclose third-party personal data about other children or families except where there is a lawful basis and it is necessary and proportionate.
- **Record:** A full Missing Child Incident Record will be completed, signed by the Manager, and retained.

9.3 Review:

- **Internal Review:** A full internal review will be conducted to identify any failings (e.g. broken latch, supervision lapse) and update risk assessments.
- **Debrief:** A debrief will be held to support staff and learn from the incident.

10. Monitoring and Review

10.1 Review: This policy is reviewed annually or immediately following any relevant incident.

