



# STUDENTS RUNNING AWAY FROM SCHOOL POLICY

## **Rationale**

- Northcote Primary School works actively to provide a secure, safe environment, a school where students want to come to enjoy learning with others as part of a caring community. We recognise that it is unlikely that a student will try to abscond from our school, but these procedures are in place to ensure we are ready to deal with this eventuality should it occur.
- Schools must:
  - take immediate steps to establish whether the student has left Northcote Primary School grounds or a school approved activity
  - take all reasonable steps to discharge the duty of care that is owed to the student
  - notify the Victoria Police if there is a reasonable concern for the safety of the student or others
  - notify the parent, guardian or carer of the student as soon as reasonably possible
  - report the incident to the Department's Security Services Unit on (03) 9589-6266, as soon as practicable.
- If a staff member reasonably suspects that a student has left Northcote Primary School grounds or a school-approved activity, such as an excursion or camp, without authorisation, they should immediately notify a member of the leadership team so that all reasonable steps can be taken to discharge the duty of care owed to that student. The reasonable steps to be taken will vary and depend on the individual circumstances of the case and the individual student.
- In determining what reasonable steps to take, relevant considerations include the following:
  - the location of Northcote Primary School or Northcote Primary School approved activity and its proximity to external dangers such as busy roads or railway lines
  - whether the student has a disability that may affect their ability to appreciate the risk associated with their behaviour and actions
  - the age of the student
  - the student's prior behaviour or previously exhibited vulnerabilities, difficulties or troubles
  - the student's mental state immediately prior to leaving Northcote Primary School grounds or Northcote Primary School approved activity i.e. whether they were highly distressed, whether they were drug or alcohol affected, whether they had indicated an intention to hurt themselves or others
  - the time that has elapsed since the student has left Northcote Primary School grounds or school approved activity
  - whether other students who are under the care and supervision of Northcote Primary School staff can be appropriately supervised whilst appropriate action is taken to manage the student who has run away from school or Northcote Primary School approved activity.
- Depending on the individual circumstances of the case, the reasonable steps to be taken may include one or more of the following:
  - contacting the Victoria Police to advise them of the missing student and the particular age, disability, vulnerabilities, or mental state of the individual student
  - contacting the parent, guardian or carer of the student to advise them that the student has left Northcote Primary School grounds or school-approved activity and to obtain any additional information and assistance that may assist in locating the student
  - searching for the student, particularly if there is information available as to the student's potential whereabouts

- following the student and maintaining visual contact until the student returns to school or school-approved activity, or is in the company of the police or their parent, guardian or carer
- making contact with the student and encouraging them to return to Northcote Primary School grounds or Northcote Primary School approved activity, go to a safe place, stop the behaviour that is putting them at risk, or remain in the company of a suitable and responsible adult
- restraining the student in appropriate circumstances and in accordance with the Restraint of Student policy. For example, where the student is about to step in front of a car or otherwise harm themselves.

### **Purpose**

- To ensure Northcote Primary School takes appropriate action in relation to managing a student who runs away from school or a school approved activity.
- To ensure Northcote Primary School complies with DET enrolment policy and guidelines.
- To ensure Northcote Primary School discharges its duty of care to students.
- To ensure Northcote Primary School has strategies in place to support Child Safe Standards 2 & 6.

### **Implementation**

#### **SECTION A: If a student absconds from the classroom the following procedures apply:**

1. One staff member is to follow the student and keep a close watch (and if possible to take a mobile phone with them). The other staff member(s) present will supervise the other students present, and ensure the Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator are alerted either via phone or by sending two students to the Office – and asking them to alert the Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator.
2. If the child absconds when there is only one staff member present, she/he must stay with the class and alert the Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator (as above).
3. The staff member staying with the class is to conduct a roll check of remaining students.
4. The Principal, Student Welfare Coordinator (or nominee) will then request other staff to help search Northcote Primary School grounds and/or contact parents/carers (when appropriate).  
Staff are to use our Evacuation Process Area Wardens for a search of all buildings to ensure all internal spaces are checked.  
In these circumstances, school staff will not pursue a student or force him/her back into Northcote Primary School building.  
School staff will use their judgement, knowledge of the student and assessment of the student's safety in deciding what to do. This will include taking into account the student's age and vulnerability. The demeanour of the student will also need to be taken into account. If the student is upset or angry, care should be taken in approaching the child. The size of the student will also be taken into account.  
In all cases, staff should not place themselves in situations of potential danger of injury.
5. Once a student has been found, the Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator, in consultation with the student's teacher/team leader, will use their professional judgement as to outline the response towards the student and the support the student will need in the future.
6. The Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator will brief parents, the police, and ensure the appropriate documenting of the incident occurs.

#### **SECTION B: Where a student attempts or is seen to be leaving school premises without authorisation the following procedure should be followed:**

1. A member of staff will alert Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator; this lead person (or their nominee) will direct the course of action.
2. A member of staff who knows the student well and has a good relationship with the student will follow the student to the perimeter fence, exit or gate and will try to persuade the student to stay in Northcote Primary School.

3. As active pursuit may encourage a child to leave the site and may also cause the student to panic; possibly putting him or herself at risk by running onto a road, staff will not chase but will try to keep a child in sight at a distance.
4. The Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator may request additional staff to join the search in a vehicle, taking a mobile phone to enable contact with Northcote Primary School.
5. The Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator will contact the student's parents/carers. The call or attempted calls will be documented. When appropriate, a member of the administration (school office) team will also call the police to log the incident and make a log of this call, and also, when appropriate, contact the Department's Security Services Unit.
6. If the searching staff member loses sight of the student, she/he must contact Northcote Primary School office giving details of their current location and the clothes that the student is wearing.
7. If the student has left the immediate vicinity of Northcote Primary School grounds and is no longer visible then the Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator will make a decision as to how to take matters further, which will take into account the age of the student, the nature of the incident which led to the student absconding, the student's previous history of being involved in episodes of absconding and their outcomes. As noted in point 5, the police will be notified, and their involvement requested if required.
8. If the student returns of their own volition, the parents/carers, police and the Department's Security Services will be informed.
9. Once a student has been found, the Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator, in consultation with the student's teacher/ team leader, will use their professional judgement as to outline the response towards the student and the support the student will need in the future.
10. The Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator will brief parents/carers, the police, and ensure the appropriate documenting of the incident occurs.

**SECTION C: If a student is found to be absent from the classroom the following procedures apply:**

1. If, after a quick but careful look of areas near the classroom (or known places for this student) the student is not located, the classroom teacher is to ensure the Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator are alerted either via phone or by sending two students to the Office – and asking them to alert the Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator.
2. The Principal and/or Student Welfare Coordinator (in conjunction with the classroom teacher where appropriate) is to organise a search of the building and known places that the student may have gone to.
3. The staff member remaining with the studio/class is to conduct a roll check of remaining students.
4. If the student is not found, then all available staff to complete a more thorough sweep of Northcote Primary School and grounds.  
Staff are to use our Evacuation Process Area Wardens for each studio to ensure all internal spaces are checked.
5. The Principal, Student Welfare Coordinator or the office staff is to phone the police, and when appropriate, the Department's Security Services will also be informed, when Northcote Primary School and grounds have been fully checked and the student is not found.
6. The Principal, Student Welfare Coordinator or the office staff are to contact parents/carers at this point, and inform them of the situation. Every attempt to make contact with parents/carers will be documented.
7. Consideration will be given as to whether the search should be extended beyond Northcote Primary School buildings and grounds or Police involvement is now requested. This decision will be based on staff knowledge of the student and the levels of risk and on what action is in the child's best interests. (Please see information in Sections A and B).
8. Follow steps as outlined in Section B.

**Please Note:** Staff are to be aware of the location of the classroom phone, and to keep their mobile phone on hand at all times during Northcote Primary School day - especially when teaching outside.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

1. Each incident will be monitored and evaluated.

2. In all circumstances, once the student has been located, a behaviour report needs to be recorded, and consideration given to the holding of a Student Support Meeting (SSG) and the creation of an individual Behaviour Support Plan (including the development of individual risk assessments).

#### Summary of Important Actions

- After an incident in which a student has run away from Northcote Primary School grounds or school-approved activity, school staff will take the following steps:
  - Report the incident to the parent/or carer (if this has not already been done)
  - Report the incident to the Department's Security Services Unit
  - Document the incident and the staff response to the incident
  - Consider whether it is appropriate to conduct a Student Support Group meeting
  - Consider whether it is appropriate to develop a Behaviour Support Plan.
- Please refer also to Northcote Primary School's *Duty of Care Policy* and the *Emergency & Incident Reporting Policy*.

#### Evaluation

- This policy will be reviewed as part of Northcote Primary School's three-year review cycle or if guidelines change (no current DET A-Z Index reference).

**NPS School Council ratified this policy on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

Reference:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/pages/runningaway.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/pages/runningaway.aspx)