



# Children walking to/from school independently

<b>Author:</b>	Sean English – Headteacher
<b>Date:</b>	October 2022
<b>Review Date:</b>	October 2024
<b>Ratified by:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>On behalf of:</b>	

## Context

Technically, the law doesn't state a minimum age limit for children walking to and from school alone. A families' guide to the law states:

*"There is no law prohibiting children from being out on their own at any age. It is a matter of judgement for parents to decide when children can play out on their own, walk to the shops or school."*

Ultimately, only a parent knows if their child is ready to walk to school alone. At Garden City Academy, we want to encourage children's independence, particularly in readiness for secondary school, and owing to the fact that the vast majority of pupils attending the school live within a very short distance to Garden City Academy, and will be a short walk away from the main local secondary feeder school.

Parents are legally obliged to ensure their children get to school and attend regularly, but this in itself does not disallow independent travel. However, as a school we are responsible for the welfare of our pupils and therefore have to consider what we believe is good practice in ensuring the safety of our pupils. We also have an obligation to alert relevant authorities should we believe a child's welfare is at risk.

## Drop-off and collection by older siblings

There is no minimum age set in law when a young person is allowed to remain in charge of another child, however it is an offence to leave a child alone if it places them at risk. This can include in the care of an older sibling if the level of supervision is 'likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health' (Children and Young Persons Act, 1933). Therefore parents/carers must understand and be prepared to take responsibility for anything that should go wrong in their absence. They are also responsible for the care and safety of their eldest child, even while that child is acting in a caring role for younger siblings.

If parents have given permission for older siblings to collect /drop off younger children, this should be recorded on Arbor as one of the key contacts for collection. If the school has any concern that older siblings are not competent to take younger siblings to and from school or there are concerns about any child's safety or welfare due to these arrangements; this must be raised with the parent (ideally in advance of collection) and if alternative arrangements are not made, a safeguarding referral made to Children's Services where necessary.

The school has therefore set out in its policy that the minimum age at which an older sibling can collect or drop off a younger sibling is 14 years of age. The school have the right to refuse any person under this age permission to collect a pupil from the school's premises. The suitability of a sibling caring for a younger child needs to be considered on a case by case basis, by a judgment of the potential risks of this arrangement; the maturity of the child collecting/being collected; the length and nature of the journey home, the behaviour and relationship of the children collecting/being collected.

## Pupils in Foundation Stage or KS1

Our agreed school policy is that no pupil in Early Years Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1 should walk to or from school on his or her own or be left on their own on the school premises either before or after school. In addition, we will only hand over pupils to named adults or older siblings provided they are 14 years old or above (however, if the professional judgement of the adult at school deems the older sibling not to be suitable, they will not hand the child over).

Pupils will not be handed over to other adults unless the school has been informed by the parent that they have made this arrangement. We also ask that you keep us informed of any changes in arrangements, preferably by letter. If someone turns up to collect your child and we have not been notified, the adult will have to wait until we have verified their identity. If no one turns up to collect a child in these year groups, they will be kept in school and parents contacted. If the child is not collected and we have failed to make contact with the child's carer, we will refer to our uncollected child policy. We will not allow older brothers or sisters in school to collect younger siblings.

### **Pupils in KS2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6)**

While there is no set age when children are ready to walk to school or home on their own, we believe that pupils in Year 3 should be still brought to and collected from school and this is our school policy. Therefore, as regards pupils in Year 4, Year 5 and 6, we believe that you as parents/carers need to decide whether your child is ready for the responsibility of walking to and from school alone.

The leadership team have agreed that, where permission is given by parents/carers, children in Year Four, Five and Six can walk to or from the school on their own. Permission will be given in the form of written consent in advance, although the school can use its discretion to agree to verbal consent in individual and one-off occasions where written permission is unable to be given.

The school may refuse a proposal if a child is not deemed able to walk home alone. If the school has concerns about a particular child's ability to travel safely or if a child lives too far away [more than 10 minutes], permission for the child to walk home alone may be refused.

Parents/carers must assure themselves that their child is prepared to walk to or from school independently, and as part of their written consent will confirm that they have talked about things such as road safety and safe routes to school with their child, and are confident in their ability to get themselves to/from school safely.

### **Considerations parents/carers should make in deciding whether to let their child walk to/from school**

In deciding whether your child is ready to walk to school, parents/carers should assess any risks associated with the route and their child's confidence. Work with your children to build up their independence while walking to school through route finding, road safety skills and general awareness. There are many ways you can prepare your child to make an independent journey. Children who are driven to school do not have the opportunity to develop road awareness and are therefore more vulnerable when they start to walk to school independently.

Walking to school is a great opportunity to learn road safety skills. The best way to do this is to walk with your children from a young age, teaching them about crossing the road, learning how to navigate and a host of other skills. This helps them gain the experience and confidence to deal with traffic and way finding on their own, in preparation for walking with friends or alone when they are older.

Teach your child to:

- Pay attention to traffic at all times when crossing the street; never become distracted.
- Always cross at the intersection where there are traffic lights; do not cross in the middle of the road. Alternatively, cross in a place where you can see clearly in all directions. Avoid parked cars or bends in the road.
- Look both ways before crossing; listen for traffic coming; cross while keeping an eye on traffic.
- Look out for cyclists.
- Remember that drivers may not see them, even if they can see the driver.
- Remember that it is hard to judge the speed of a car so be cautious.
- Never, ever, follow someone who is either a stranger or someone they know but is not a designated "safe" adult. Speak to your child about what they should do if this should ever happen.

When deciding whether your child is ready for this responsibility you might want to consider the following:

- Do you trust them to walk straight home?
- Do you trust them to behave sensibly when with a friend?
- Are they road safety aware?
- Would they know what to do if a stranger approaches them?
- Would they have the confidence to refuse to do what a stranger asked?
- Would they know the best action to take if a stranger tried to make them do something they did not want to do?

- Would they know what to do if they needed help?
- Would they know whom best to approach to get help?

For further information and resources, please see the NSPCC website and their related materials [here](#).

If you are not confident about how your child would react, then you should seriously consider whether you should allow them to walk on their own. If you decide that your child is ready for this responsibility, then you must inform the school by letter or by completing the slip within this policy. Your child will be prevented from walking home unless this permission has been given in writing.

Your child will also be responsible for their behaviour whilst on the school premises either before or after school. Should their behaviour not be acceptable you will be asked to accompany them or collect them until they have proved they can be trusted again.

We will not allow children to walk home alone in the dark. Please bear in mind that if they are attending an after-school club it may be dark when the club finishes.

**IF AT ANY TIME YOU NEED TO CHANGE ARRANGEMENTS YOU HAVE MADE PLEASE ENSURE YOU LET US KNOW IN WRITING IMMEDIATELY.**

#### **Pupils walking home (Year 4/5/6 pupils only)**

There must always be an appropriate adult/parent/carer at home to meet the child on their arrival. Parents/carers need to be aware when walking home the school will not know if a child arrives home as planned. Hence the parent/carer needs to ensure adequate safety protocols are in place should an emergency/accident arise.

A register of children who have permission to walk home alone after the school day will be kept by the school on Arbor. If a child has left the school to walk home but does not arrive home when expected and direct contact with the child has not been established, the parent/carer should contact the school in the first instance to seek clarification from the responsible adult who dismissed their child as to the time they left school. However, the school may not be contactable after 4pm when the office closes, and so therefore it will be parents/carers responsibility to notify the police after this time.

#### **Arriving at school (Year 4/5/6 pupils only)**

As the responsible body receiving children from home at the start of the day, the school will ensure that morning registrations are taken in each class. If a child is found to be absent and no prior notice of such absence has been received from the child's parent/carer, the school recognises a clear responsibility to contact the parent/carer to ascertain the reason for absence or highlight that a child has not attended morning registration. It is the parent/carers responsibility to ensure that school is informed should their child be unable to attend school for any reason in accordance with the school attendance policy.

If the school knows a child walks to school independently or are expecting them to be, and they do not arrive within the registration window without any prior explanation, priority will be given to these pupils for the Education, Welfare and Pastoral Lead to make contact with families immediately.

If upon contact it is confirmed that a child has left home with the intention of walking to school but has not arrived and therefore an issue of a missing child is noted, the school will contact the police immediately. The school's designated senior person for safeguarding/child protection will then be immediately informed and safeguarding procedures for child protection/children missing procedures will be followed.

If no contact is able to be made with any of the emergency contacts, and the registration window is closed, a member of the senior leadership team will be notified and a decision made about next steps (such as making a welfare call to visit the home and check the child is safe), or to call the police. This decision will

be based on a dynamic risk assessment, depending on the family circumstances, distance from school and other information about the child.

### **Extra-curricular activities**

The same procedures for drop off and collection can be applied to extended school activities, where the activity is provided by the school. Safeguarding concerns are reported to Children's Services, who will decide on the appropriate response. Where the activity is provided by an external organisation, it is the responsibility of that organisation to identify and respond to safeguarding concerns, including those arising from drop off and collection issues. The school governing body will ensure that as part of the service level agreement, the organisation has confirmed that: safeguarding training has been completed by staff a child protection policy is in place.

## Children walking to/from school Permission slip

I give permission for my child **to walk home** unaccompanied at the end of the school day.

My child has permission **to walk to school** themselves each day as required.

I understand that as a parent/carer, it is my responsibility to ensure that my child has the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding of how to travel safely and I can confirm that they will be able to safely walk to or from school independently.

I understand it is my responsibility to inform the school should these arrangements change.

Parent/carer name:	
Parent/carer signature:	
Date of signature:	