BANNOCKBURN
Primary School

# WALKING TO AND FROM SCHOOL ALONE & HOME ALONE POLICY

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| **Date of Last Review:** | September 2026 |
| **Date of Next Review:** | September 2027 |

**Introduction**

There are no laws around age or distance of walking to school. 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."*

Parent/carers 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 and behaviour of our pupils and therefore we reserve the right to identify the procedures that we believe are good practice in ensuring the safety of our pupils. This next stage of independence for children is a privilege and the school reserve the right to remove this privilege.

We also have an obligation to alert relevant authorities should we believe a child's welfare is at risk.

**Pupils in Foundation Stage (Nursery & Reception), Key Stage 1 (Years 1 & 2) and Years 3 & 4**

Our agreed school policy is that **no pupil in Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Year 3 or Year 4** should walk to or from school on their own or be left on their own outside or 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 16 years old or above. Pupils will not be handed over to other adults unless the school has been informed by the parent/ carer that they have made this arrangement.

We also ask that you keep us informed of any changes in arrangements, preferably by letter or email. If no one turns up to collect a child in these year groups they will be kept in school and parent/ carers contacted. We will not allow older brothers or sisters, who are currently pupils at Bannockburn, to collect younger siblings.

**Pupils in Years 5 & 6**

There is no set age when children are ready to walk to school or home on their own. It very much depends upon their maturity and confidence. Therefore, as regards to pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 we believe that you as parents need to decide whether your child is ready for this responsibility.

As a school we only allow pupils in Year 5 and 6 the option of travelling to and from school alone. Travelling 'home alone' is only allowed when the school has received written permission from the child's parent/ carer. This option can be removed with immediate effect should school feel that it is unsafe for the child to do so.

In deciding whether your child is ready to walk to school you should assess any risks associated with the route and your 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 a number of 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 finding their way 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 cards 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. (A safe adult is someone who has been previously agreed upon by you and your child to be safe, such as a grandparent or trusted neighbour). And if that person tries to convince him to go with them or tries to physically get close to him, then scream, "Help! This is not my dad!" or "Help! This is not my mum!" and run away. If they grab them, tell your child to kick, punch, and hit as hard as they can. Children should head straight to the nearest 'safe zone' e.g. school, home, shop, police station.

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

1. Do you trust them to walk straight home?
2. Do you trust them to behave sensibly when with a friend?
3. Are they road safety aware?
4. Would they know what to do if a stranger approach them?
5. Would they have the confidence to refuse to do what a stranger asked?
6. Would they know the best action to take if a stranger tried to make them do something they did not want to do (scream, shout, kick, fight)?
7. Would they know what to do if they needed help?
8. Would they know who best to approach to get help?

**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 at the end of this document.

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 them to accompany or collect them until they have proved they can be trusted again.

**Mobile Phones**

To support the safe and responsible independence of pupils in Years 5 and 6 who walk to or from school alone, the school recognises that some parents may choose to allow their child to carry a mobile phone for communication and safety purposes.

Mobile phones must remain switched off and out of sight at all times on and around school premises, including during arrival, dismissal and waiting in or around and outside the school gate.

On arrival to school, pupils are expected to turn mobile phones off, in line with the values set out in the school's Behaviour and Relationships Policy.

Pupils who are seen by school staff using their mobile in or outside the school premises will receive the following consequences:

First incident– Children will receive a verbal warning from a school staff member not to use their mobile phone

Second incident – Children will miss their break time that school day

Third incident – Children will have their Home Alone permission revoked by the school and will need to be brought and collected by an adult for one school week. Any further incidents will increase the time that Home Alone permission is revoked.

Any misuse of mobile phones outside school that causes distress, harm, or disruption to others (including on the journey to or from school) may result in school sanctions, in line with the Behaviour and Relationships Policy.

The school encourages all parents to regularly discuss safe and respectful mobile phone use with their children, particularly if they are allowed to walk home alone.

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

**HOME ALONE**

**Is it legal to leave a child home alone?**

There's no legal age a child can be left home alone. Every child matures differently, so it would be almost impossible to have a "One size fits all" law.

However, parents/carers are responsible for keeping their children safe. If leaving your child home alone puts them at risk of harm – because they are too young to care for themselves for example – the law might consider this neglect.

A child who is not old enough or who does not feel comfortable should never be left home alone. If this is the case, it is best to look into childcare options that might work for your family.

NSPCC recommendations are:

- **Babies and toddlers** should never be left alone.
- **Children under 12 years old** should not be left home alone for long.
- **Children under 16 years old** should not be left alone overnight.
- **Over 16 year olds** should not be left alone frequently for long periods of time or for multiple nights.
- Children should never be left in **a home that could put them at risk** – e.g. with no electricity or heat, all doors locked, expectation of cooking unsupervised, or with dangerous objects.

**At what age can a child be left home alone?**

Learning to be independent is an important part of growing up. Between work, appointments and other family commitments – every parent/carer will have to leave their child home alone at some point so it is good to have a plan in place. Every child is different so build up their independence at their pace – and check in with them to make sure they feel safe.

Infants and young children aged 0-3 years old should never be left alone – even for 15 minutes while you pop down the road. This applies not just to leaving them home alone but also in your car while you run into the shops, drop

another child to the school playground or in another room on their own.

While every child is different, we would not recommend leaving a child under 12 years old home alone, particularly for longer periods of time.

Children in primary school aged 6-12 are usually too young to be home alone, babysit or cook for themselves without adult supervision. If you need to leave them at home, it is worth considering leaving them at a friend's house, with family or finding some suitable childcare.

**Checking your child feels safe home alone**

As your child gets older, talk to them about how they feel about being left home alone. If they are worried, work out what parts of being home alone worry them. Do they feel safe in the home? Are they afraid of the dark?

Talk about anything that is bothering them and discuss a solution. Understanding why they do not feel comfortable will give you an idea of how to help – or why they might not be ready to be left alone.

We would always recommend leaving a child younger than 12 years old with family, a friend or in childcare.

**Our tips to keep your child safe home alone**

Being home alone for the first time is probably going to be just as worrying for them as it is for you. It can help to think about:

- Would they know what to do if the phone rang or someone came to the door?
- Do they know how and when to contact you if they need to? Write down all your numbers and the numbers of friends and family in case you cannot be reached.
- Are there any activities that could be dangerous without an adult in the house? Some activities – like cooking, climbing furniture, lighting candles – might not be safe without an adult at home.
- Where does your child spend time online? Are there games or sites that you're worried they'll access while you're out, that might upset them or put them in danger? You can attend our online training for parents/carers held termly for tips and advice.
- Are your children allowed to have friends over while you are gone? Agree some rules together to make sure you are both comfortable.

**Agree what they will do whilst you are out**

- It is a good idea to talk about what they are going to do while you are out. For example, agree whether they can have a friend round or even go over to a friend's house. You both might feel more comfortable with a plan in place.

**Make sure they are safe online**

- Talk about what your child is doing online whilst you are away.
- Remind them before you leave that they should never give any personal information away online or meet someone in person without discussing this with you or a trusted adult first.

**Practice what to do in an emergency**

- However unlikely, it is safest to prepare for anything to go wrong whilst you are out. From accidental fires to burglaries, you need to feel comfortable your child knows what to do in an emergency.
- Come up with a safety plan for different scenarios. Talk to your child about their concerns about being left alone and come up with plans for what to do if something like that happens.

**Be clear what time you will be back**

- Make sure they are clear about what time you will be getting back and how you will let them know if your plans change.
- You should leave all the numbers that you can be contacted on, as well as the numbers of family members, neighbours or friends in case they cannot reach you or need some help straight away.
- Make sure to list the emergency services as well in case they need help urgently.

**Check in with them every now and then**

- Give your child a call every so often. If it is the first time they have been left alone, try to check in regularly. Even if your child is older and has been left home alone before, you should still check in once every few hours, particularly if you are out late.
- You could also ask a friend or neighbour to pop in and check, to put your mind at rest.

**Put dangerous objects and substances out of sight**

- Make sure that any potentially dangerous things like tools, knives and prescription medicines are safely out of harm's way before you go out. If they have allergies, be careful that there is nothing in the house that could trigger a reaction. If you have pets, think about whether it is safe to leave your child home with them unsupervised.
- Being left alone is an opportunity for your child to experiment with things like alcohol or drugs/medication (however unlikely it might seem) – so it is a good idea to have a conversation about safety and what to do in an emergency.

**Build up slowly**

- Depending on the child, being left home alone can be a big change to get used to. It is better to leave them for a short time at first, no more than 20 minutes, then build this up over time.
- As you build up to leaving your child alone for longer stretches, keep checking in and making sure they are comfortable. Being left home alone for an hour is very different to being alone for a whole afternoon or overnight.
- We would not recommend leaving your child home alone overnight if they are under 16 years old.

**Leaving a child alone with siblings**

- If your child has an older sibling or step-sibling, you might feel more comfortable leaving them home together, especially if one child is older.
- There is no legal age a child can babysit – but if you leave your children with someone who is under 16 you are still responsible for their wellbeing.

**Our advice about leaving a child home alone with siblings**

- **Consider how well your children get on.** Do they fight when you are not there? Are they able to resolve a conflict between them peacefully?
- **Talk to your older child before leaving them in charge.** Ask if they feel comfortable looking after their younger brother or sister alone. You should not leave them in charge if they do not feel comfortable.
- **Does one of your children have complex needs?** Think carefully about whether your child needs adult supervision, in case something goes wrong and they need support.
- **Agree some house rules**. We have some suggestions to help with these above.
- **Check your older child knows what to do in an emergency.** And come up with a safety plan for them to follow when you are not there.
- **Leave them a list of contact numbers.** Include all your contact numbers, friends or family members, any trusted neighbours and the emergency services.
- **Do a trial run.** Try leaving them together for a short period of time, while you are still close by, and build this up over time.
- **Plan some activities for them to do while you are out.** Both you and your children might feel more comfortable if they're focused on an activity – like watching a film or playing a board game.

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**Bannockburn Primary School – Walking Home Alone**

**This section is only to be completed by parents/ carers of children in Year 5 and Year 6 who are giving permission for their child to walk to and from school unaccompanied**

**Person with parental responsibility to complete and return this reply slip to school**

Name of child: …… Class: ……

- I wish to inform you that my child will be walking to/from school on regular basis.
- I will notify you immediately should this arrangement change.
- I have read and understood the guidelines stated in the Walking Home Alone policy.
- I take full responsibility for my child walking to / from school

- Name (print)…….. Date: ……

- Signature: ……