



SAFE START SCHOOL

WILLPOWER-NITIATIVE-SUCCESS-EMPATHY

Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

Review Date	September 2026
Reviewed by	Grace Speakman
Ratified By	Rachel Pilling
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Policy Statement

Safe Start School is committed to maintaining a safe, calm and supportive environment in which all pupils can learn and thrive.

Searching, screening and confiscation can be important safeguarding and behaviour-management measures. These powers will always be exercised lawfully, reasonably and proportionately, with appropriate regard to pupils' dignity, privacy, SEND, communication needs and individual circumstances.

The school recognises that searching a pupil can be distressing. Staff will therefore adopt a calm, respectful and trauma-responsive approach and will seek the pupil's cooperation wherever possible.

Statutory Framework

This policy has regard to:

- DfE *Searching, Screening and Confiscation: Advice for Schools*;
- *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026*;
- Education and Inspections Act 2006;
- Education Act 1996;
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014;
- Schools (Specification and Disposal of Articles) Regulations 2012;
- Equality Act 2010;
- Human Rights Act 1998; and
- relevant data-protection legislation.

The DfE searching guidance expressly applies to independent schools in England.

This policy should be read alongside the school's:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- Behaviour Policy;
- Online Safety Policy; and
- Use of Reasonable Force/Positive Handling arrangements.

Key Principles

Any decision to search a pupil should be:

- lawful;
- reasonable;
- proportionate;
- safeguarding-led;
- respectful of dignity and privacy; and
- informed by the individual pupil's needs.

Staff must consider relevant SEND, communication, disability, cultural, religious and trauma-related factors and make reasonable adjustments where required.

A search should not automatically be treated solely as a behaviour matter. The circumstances leading to a search, and anything discovered during it, may indicate an underlying safeguarding concern.

This is particularly important where there are concerns about exploitation, drugs, weapons, harmful sexual behaviour or criminal activity.

Roles and Responsibilities

Headteacher

The Headteacher will:

- identify and authorise appropriate members of staff to undertake searches;
- ensure appropriate procedures are followed;
- ensure staff understand their responsibilities;
- ensure searching practice is monitored; and
- support decisions regarding police involvement where necessary.

Authorised Staff

Only the Headteacher or a member of staff authorised by the Headteacher may conduct a search under the statutory searching powers.

Authorisation should be clear and understood by staff.

Designated Safeguarding Lead

The DSL will:

- receive safeguarding concerns arising from searches;
- consider whether further safeguarding action or referral is necessary;
- monitor patterns and trends in searches;
- consider potential disproportionality; and
- provide advice where a search raises safeguarding concerns.

Screening

The school may require pupils to undergo screening using appropriate screening equipment, such as a handheld or walk-through metal detector, even where there are no reasonable grounds to suspect possession of a weapon or other prohibited item.

Screening does not require the consent of the pupil.

Where a pupil refuses to cooperate with screening, staff will consider the circumstances and respond in accordance with the Behaviour Policy and safeguarding procedures.

Any response should consider the pupil's SEND, communication needs and reasons for refusing.

Searching a Pupil

The Headteacher and authorised staff have statutory powers to search a pupil or their possessions where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that the pupil may have a prohibited item or an item identified in the school's rules as an item that may be searched for.

Prohibited items include:

- knives or weapons;
- alcohol;
- illegal drugs;
- stolen items;
- tobacco and cigarette papers;
- vapes;
- fireworks;
- pornographic images; and
- any article that the member of staff reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be, used to commit an offence, cause personal injury or damage property.

The school may additionally identify items prohibited under its Behaviour Policy/school rules for which a search may be undertaken where lawful.

Before Conducting a Search

Before searching, the authorised member of staff should consider:

- the reasons for the search;
- the urgency and level of risk;
- the pupil's age and understanding;
- SEND and communication needs;
- disability and any required reasonable adjustments;
- relevant trauma or safeguarding information;
- the location in which the search will take place;
- whether the appropriate witness is available; and
- whether there are less intrusive means of managing the concern.

Staff should explain:

- why the search is being conducted;
- what is being searched for;
- how and where the search will take place; and
- what the pupil is expected to do.

The pupil should be given an opportunity to ask questions.

Staff should seek the pupil's cooperation before proceeding.

Conducting the Search

A search should take place in an appropriate location away from other pupils and, where practicable, out of public view.

The member of staff conducting the search must normally be the same sex as the pupil.

Another member of staff should normally be present as a witness and, where possible, should also be the same sex as the pupil.

There are limited statutory exceptions where an urgent search may be necessary because there is a risk that serious harm will be caused if the search is not conducted immediately.

These exceptions must not become routine practice.

Extent of a Search

Authorised staff may search:

- outer clothing;
- pockets;
- possessions;
- bags; and
- lockers, desks or other school storage where applicable.

Staff may require a pupil to remove outer clothing, such as coats, hats, shoes, boots or scarves, but must not require a pupil to remove clothing beyond what the law permits.

School staff must not conduct a strip search.

Strip Searches

A strip search involves the removal of more than outer clothing and may only be carried out by police officers exercising their lawful powers.

If police consider a strip search necessary, school staff must treat the situation as a significant safeguarding matter.

The DSL should be involved and the school should have regard to the statutory safeguards and current DfE guidance relating to police searches involving children.

Refusal to Cooperate

Where a pupil refuses to cooperate, staff should consider why.

The pupil may:

- not understand what is being requested;
- have communication difficulties;
- be frightened or distressed;
- have experienced previous trauma;
- require a reasonable adjustment; or

- be attempting to conceal an item.

Staff should seek to de-escalate the situation and obtain cooperation wherever possible.

Where refusal presents an immediate safeguarding or safety concern, staff should seek support from SLT/DSL and consider whether police involvement or other action is necessary.

Use of Reasonable Force

Any use of reasonable force must comply with the law and the school's relevant policy/procedures.

Reasonable force must not be used simply to search for any item prohibited under school rules.

Where staff believe force may be necessary, they must consider whether there is a lawful basis for its use and whether it is reasonable, necessary and proportionate in the circumstances.

Any use of force must be appropriately recorded.

Confiscation and Disposal

Where an item is found, staff will follow the applicable statutory guidance and safeguarding procedures.

As a general approach:

Item	Action
Weapons	Normally passed to police
Controlled drugs	Normally passed to police, subject to limited lawful exceptions
Alcohol	May be retained/disposed of and not returned to the pupil
Tobacco/vaping products	Not returned to the pupil

Fireworks	Not returned to the pupil
Stolen items	Normally returned to owner or passed to police, depending on circumstances
Pornographic material	Managed according to safeguarding guidance and the nature of the material
Electronic devices	Managed according to the circumstances and applicable guidance

The DSL should be consulted where the item or circumstances indicate a safeguarding concern.

Electronic Devices and Data

Where an electronic device is lawfully seized, authorised staff may examine data or files where the statutory conditions for doing so are met.

Any decision to examine, retain, delete or pass data to the police must be made carefully and in accordance with applicable guidance.

Where there is concern about nude or semi-nude images, sexual imagery or other potentially illegal material involving a child, staff must not routinely view, copy, print, share, forward or delete the material. The DSL must be informed and relevant safeguarding guidance followed.

Testing Confiscated Vapes

Where a vape has been lawfully confiscated and there are reasonable grounds for concern that it may contain a controlled or otherwise harmful substance, the school may undertake appropriate testing solely to inform its safeguarding and risk-management response.

Testing will be carried out by the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or an appropriately trained deputy, and must be conducted in the presence of a second member of staff acting as a witness.

The school will use an approved vape testing kit supplied by Change Grow Live (CGL) for this purpose.

The following principles apply:

- Testing is undertaken solely to support safeguarding and risk assessment, not for evidential or disciplinary proof
- Appropriate health and safety precautions will be followed when handling substances
- The process will be conducted discreetly and securely
- A clear record will be made on CPOMS, including:
 - Reason for testing
 - Staff involved
 - Outcome of the test
 - Actions taken

Where a test indicates the presence of a controlled substance, or where there remains concern regardless of the result:

- The DSL will take appropriate safeguarding action, which may include referral to external agencies
- The item will be retained and/or passed to the police, where appropriate
- Parents/carers will be informed unless doing so would place the pupil at risk

This process forms part of the school's wider safeguarding responsibilities and should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Safeguarding

A search or confiscated item may reveal or increase concerns relating to:

- child criminal exploitation;
- county lines;
- substance misuse;
- harmful sexual behaviour;
- exploitation or coercion;
- weapons;
- criminal activity;
- self-harm or risk-taking behaviour; or
- other risks to the pupil or others.

Where safeguarding concerns arise, staff must inform the DSL/deputy and record the concern in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Recording Searches

All searches should be recorded on CPOMS in accordance with the school's agreed recording arrangements.

The record should include:

- date, time and location;
- reason for the search;
- item being searched for;
- staff member conducting the search;
- witness;
- relevant pupil response;
- whether anything was found;
- anything confiscated;

- safeguarding considerations;
- parent/carers communication; and
- subsequent action.

The DSL should periodically analyse searching data to identify patterns, safeguarding concerns or potential disproportionality.

Informing Parents/Carers

Parents/carers will normally be informed as soon as practicable where a search has been conducted, and will be informed of the outcome. Where there is a safeguarding concern, the DSL will determine when and how parents/carers should be informed, taking account of whether doing so could place the pupil at increased risk of harm.

This should include, where appropriate:

- what was searched for;
- what was found;
- anything confiscated; and
- subsequent school action.

Any decision about communication with parents where there is a safeguarding concern must be made with the DSL and in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Equality, SEND and Trauma-Responsive Practice

The school will ensure that searching practices are not discriminatory.

Staff will consider:

- SEND;
- disability;
- communication needs;
- sensory needs;
- previous trauma;
- cultural and religious considerations; and
- any other relevant individual circumstances.

Reasonable adjustments will be made where required.

The DSL/SLT will monitor searching data for potential disproportionality and take action where concerns are identified.

Staff Training

Relevant staff will receive appropriate training and guidance relating to:

- statutory searching powers;
- safeguarding;
- SEND and reasonable adjustments;

- de-escalation;
- trauma-responsive practice;
- recording and reporting; and
- circumstances requiring DSL or police involvement

Monitoring and Review

The Headteacher and DSL will monitor implementation of this policy.

The policy will be reviewed annually and sooner where:

- legislation or statutory guidance changes;
 - safeguarding concerns identify a need for amendment;
 - practice monitoring identifies an issue; or
 - school arrangements materially change.
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Appendix 1: Search Decision-Making Checklist

Before searching, ask:

- What am I searching for?
- What is my lawful basis for the search?
- Are there reasonable grounds for suspicion where these are required?
- Is the action necessary and proportionate?
- Have SEND, disability, communication and trauma needs been considered?
- Have reasonable adjustments been considered?
- Has the process been explained to the pupil?
- Have I sought cooperation?
- Is the appropriate witness present?
- Is this an appropriate and private location?
- Is there a safeguarding concern requiring DSL involvement?
- How will the search and outcome be recorded?

Staff Quick Guide

DO:

- Stay calm
- Be respectful
- Record everything

DON'T:

- Conduct strip searches
- Search alone (unless urgent risk)
- Ignore safeguarding concerns

Appendix 2: Safeguarding Trigger Indicators

- Weapons possession
- Drug-related concerns
- Refusal with high anxiety
- Gang indicators
- Sexualised content

→ **Immediate DSL referral required**
