



SAFE START SCHOOL

WILLPOWER-NITIATIVE-SUCCESS-EMPATHY

Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

2025/26

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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. The use of screening, searching and confiscation powers is a key safeguarding tool and must always be exercised lawfully, proportionately and with respect for pupils' dignity and rights.

This policy sets out how staff will use these powers in line with statutory guidance and safeguarding expectations.

Statutory Framework

This policy is based on:

- DfE *Searching, Screening and Confiscation (2022 – current)*
- KCSIE 2025
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Schools (Specification and Disposal of Articles) Regulations 2012
- Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998 (Article 8)
- UK GDPR / Data Protection Act 2018

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy

Key Principles

All searches must be:

- Lawful
- Reasonable
- Proportionate
- Safeguarding-led
- Respectful of dignity and privacy

Staff must adopt a trauma-informed approach, particularly given the SEMH needs of pupils.

Introduction

Ensuring that school staff and pupils feel safe and secure is vital to establishing calm and supportive environments conducive to learning. Using searching, screening and confiscation powers appropriately is an important way to ensure pupil and staff welfare is protected and helps schools establish an environment where everyone is safe.

Before screening or conducting a search of a pupil, it is vital that schools consider their obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights. Under Article 8, pupils have a right to respect for their private life. In the context of these rights and obligations, this means that pupils have the right to expect a reasonable level of personal privacy.

The right under Article 8 is not absolute; it can be interfered with, but any interference with this right by a school (or any public body) must be justified and proportionate. A school exercising those powers lawfully should have no difficulty in demonstrating that it has also acted in accordance with Article 8.

Roles and Responsibilities

Headteacher

- Authorises staff to carry out searches
- Ensures compliance with statutory guidance
- Decides when police involvement is required

Authorised Staff

- SLT
- Pastoral Leads
- Deputy DSLs
- Trained designated staff
- Or staff with written authorisation from the Headteacher

Authorisation must be explicit and recorded.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

- Receives all safeguarding concerns arising from searches
- Monitors patterns and trends
- Ensures appropriate referrals

Screening

Screening is a preventative measure used to detect prohibited items.

- May be conducted using walk-through or handheld detectors
- Does **not require suspicion**
- Does **not require same-sex staff**
- Pupils may refuse screening

If a pupil refuses screening:

- Follow Behaviour Policy
- Consider safeguarding risks
- Inform parents where appropriate

Searching

Searching can play a critical role in ensuring that schools are safe environments for all pupils and staff. It is a vital measure to safeguard and promote staff and pupil welfare, and to maintain high standards of behaviour through which pupils can learn and thrive.

Headteachers and authorised staff have a statutory power to search a pupil or their possessions where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil may have a prohibited item (see list below) or any other item that the school rules identify as an item which may be searched for.

Staff may search a pupil if they have **reasonable grounds to suspect** possession of:

Prohibited items:

- Knives or weapons
- Alcohol
- Illegal drugs
- Stolen items
- Tobacco/vapes
- Fireworks
- Pornographic images
- Any item likely to:
 - Commit an offence
 - Cause harm or damage

Schools may also search for items banned under school rules.

Being in possession of a prohibited item – especially knives, weapons, illegal drugs or stolen items – may mean that the pupil is involved, or at risk of being involved, in anti-social or criminal behaviour including gang involvement, and in some cases may be involved in child criminal exploitation. A search may play a vital role in identifying pupils who may benefit from early help or a referral to the local authority children’s social care services.

Before the Search

Authorised staff must consider the age, SEN and communication needs and trauma history of pupils being searched or screened. This includes the individual needs or learning difficulties of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and making reasonable adjustments that may be required where a pupil has a disability.

School staff may wish to consider using CCTV footage to decide whether to conduct a search for an item.

The member of staff should assess how urgent the need for a search is and should consider the risk to other pupils and staff.

The member of staff should always explain to the pupil why they are being searched, how and where the search is going to take place and give them the opportunity to ask any questions.

The member of staff should always seek the co-operation of the pupil. If the pupil is not willing to co-operate with the search, the member of staff should consider why the pupil has refused. Reasons might include that they are in possession of a prohibited item, do not understand the instruction, are unaware of what a search may involve, have had a previous distressing experience of being searched.

If the pupil continues to refuse, the member of staff should aim to de-escalate the situation and place the pupil in supervised isolation and contact parents/carers if appropriate. Reasonable force may be used only when necessary, must be proportionate to the risk and only as a last resort.

During a search

An appropriate location should be found away from other pupils, for example, an SLT office, that is not in public view. The search must take place on school premises or offsite (eg. trips) where staff have lawful control.

The law states that the member of staff conducting the search must be of the same sex as the pupil being searched.

There must be another member of staff present as a witness to the search (same sex where possible). The only exception to this is if the member of staff believes that there is a risk of harm if the search is not carried out as a matter of urgency.

Extent of a search

Authorised members of staff may search a pupil's outer clothing, pockets, possessions, bags or desk.

The member of staff must not require the pupil to remove any clothing other than outer clothing. Outer clothing means any item of clothing that is not worn wholly next to the skin or immediately over a garment that is being worn as underwear, as well as hats, shoes, boots, or scarves. Pupils should remove these items themselves.

The power to search does not enable the member of staff to conduct a strip search. Strip searches on school premises can only be carried out by police officers.

The decision to call the police to assist with a search can only be made by the Headteacher.

Strip Search Guidance (Police Only)

Strip searches must only be carried out by police.

Where this occurs:

- The DSL must be informed immediately
- Two appropriate adults must be present
- Same sex requirement applies (except emergencies)
- Parents must be informed unless it places the child at risk

- A safeguarding risk assessment must be completed

Use of Reasonable Force

Reasonable force may be used where necessary to conduct a search for prohibited items, in line with the Use of Reasonable Force Policy.

Use of force must be:

- Proportionate
- Necessary
- Recorded

After a search

If a pupil is found in possession of a weapon, illegal drugs or alcohol, this should be reported to the DSL.

If a pupil is found in possession of vapes and tobacco, follow the Behaviour Policy. These items should not be returned to the pupil.

Confiscation & Disposal

Staff may seize, retain or dispose of items in line with statutory powers:

Item	Action
Weapons	Police
Drugs	Police (unless exceptional circumstances)
Alcohol	Dispose
Vapes/tobacco	Not returned
Stolen items	Return to owner/police

Electronic Devices & Data

Staff can search phones if authorised

Data can be examined if safeguarding concerns exist. Inappropriate content may be deleted. Refer serious content to DSL/police.

Testing of Confiscated Vapes

Where a vape has been confiscated from a pupil and there is reasonable suspicion that it may contain a controlled substance, the school may undertake testing in order to inform safeguarding decisions.

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 Considerations

Searches may indicate wider safeguarding risks, including:

- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)
- County lines involvement
- Substance misuse
- Harmful sexual behaviour

Where concerns arise:

- Immediate DSL referral
- Record on CPOMS
- Consider external referrals

Recording Searches

All searches must be recorded on CPOMS under the Search category and the record must include the following information:

- Date, time and location of the search
- Who conducted the search and who was the witness.
- Item being searched for and the reason for the search.
- What items if any were found
- Follow up action taken as a consequence of the search.

At each half term the DSL will run a report to analyse if searching is falling disproportionately on any groups of pupils, to identify any patterns or safeguarding concerns.

Informing Parents

Parents will be informed, unless doing so would place the child at risk, of any search and the outcome as soon as is practicable. The Member of staff should inform what, if anything, has been confiscated and the resulting action the school has taken, including any sanctions applied.

Equality & SEND Considerations

The school will ensure:

- Searches are not discriminatory
- Reasonable adjustments are made for SEND pupils
- Cultural and religious sensitivities are respected

Any disproportionality will be addressed through:

- DSL monitoring
- Leadership oversight
- Action planning

Staff Training

All staff will receive:

- Annual safeguarding training (KCSIE 2025)
- Training on search powers
- De-escalation and trauma-informed practice

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if:

- Legislation changes
 - Safeguarding concerns arise
 - Ofsted recommendations are made
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Appendix 1: Search Decision-Making Checklist

Before searching, ask:

- Is there reasonable suspicion?
- Is the search necessary and proportionate?
- Have I considered SEND needs?
- Have I explained the process?
- Is a witness available?

Appendix 2: Safeguarding Trigger Indicators

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

→ **Immediate DSL referral required**

Appendix 3: Staff Quick Guide

DO:

- Stay calm
- Be respectful
- Record everything

DON'T:

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