Ormiston Academies Trus

Searching, screening and confiscation policy

Policy version control

Policy type	Mandatory
Author In consultation with	National Director of Primary & Safeguarding - Rebecca Bierton National Directors of:- Secondary, AP and Special Education Lead Practitioners for:- Behaviour and SEND Head of Safeguarding Head of Mental Health Head of IT Cyber Security and Digital Safeguarding Manager Trust Data Protection Officer Representative sample of education directors and academy principals, behaviour leads, Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs)
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Review	Policies will be reviewed in line with OAT's internal policy schedule and/or updated when new legislation comes into force
Description of changes	• Complete re-write of policy.

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1. Purpose of this policy

1.1. This policy sets out how OAT academies will use searching, screening, and confiscation to keep children and staff safe and to maintain an orderly environment.

1.2. It reflects the **DfE Searching, Screening and Confiscation Guidance (July 2022)** and the **DfE Use of Reasonable Force (2025)** and works alongside our:

- Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Attendance & Visitors Procedures

1.3. The policy applies to all pupils on academy premises, during off-site activities, and on academy transport.

2. Key principles

2.1. Safeguarding pupils is always the priority.

2.2. Searches and screening must always respect the dignity, rights and wellbeing of pupils.

2.3. Staff will act reasonably, proportionately, and in line with statutory guidance.

2.4. Parents will be informed when prohibited items are found or when incidents raise safeguarding concerns.

2.5. Records will be kept of all without consent searches, and any significant incidents.

3. Definitions

3.1. Prohibited items (*DfE list)*

- Knives or weapons
- Alcohol
- Illegal drugs
- Stolen items
- Tobacco, vapes, cigarette papers
- Fireworks
- Pornographic images
- Any item that has been or is likely to be used to commit an offence, cause personal injury, or damage property:

3.2. Academy banned items

- Any item that is contraband is banned these include but are not limited to weapons, alcohol, drugs and drug paraphernalia, laser pens, large metal objects, aerosols, explicit material, fireworks, stolen items, and non-permitted electronic devices.

3.3. Screening

3.3.1. Using an electronic or mechanical system (e.g., metal detector) to check pupils for prohibited items.

3.4. Search with consent

3.4.1. A search carried out with the pupil's agreement.

3.5. Search without consent

3.5.1. A search carried out when a member of staff has reasonable grounds to suspect a pupil has a prohibited item.

4. Screening

4.1. Academies may screen any pupil for weapons or banned items using a walk-through or hand-held metal detector/knife wand. Consent is not required for screening.

4.2. If a pupil refuses to be screened, they may be refused entry to the academy, and the refusal may be treated as a behaviour breach.

4.3. Screening must be carried out by trained staff only.

4.4. Screening does not involve physical contact.

4.5. Principles

4.5.1. When screening, searching or confiscating items, staff must:

- Act in a way that prioritises the pupil's safety, dignity and wellbeing;
- Use clear, calm communication and check the pupil has understood;
- Use de-escalation and regulation strategies wherever this is safe;
- Make decisions based on a dynamic assessment of risk, using the least intrusive action necessary to keep everyone safe;
- Enable the pupil's voice to be heard where appropriate (e.g., allowing them to explain, ask questions, or request a trusted adult);
- Provide support during and after any incident, ensuring the pupil is safe, calm and able to re-engage;
- Record key decisions, rationale and outcomes as part of safeguarding practice.

5. Searching

5.1. Searching with consent

- Staff may search a pupil's outer clothing, bags or possessions **with their consent** for any item.
- Staff should explain why the search is being requested and ask the pupil to cooperate.
- A second adult should be present where reasonably possible.
- Where a pupil refuses, staff may apply the procedures for a search without consent **only** if the item is prohibited.

5.2. Searching without consent

5.2.1 When a search without consent can take place

5.2.1.1 A search without consent may only be carried out where a member of staff has **reasonable grounds** to suspect the pupil is in possession of a **prohibited item**.

5.2.2 Who may search

5.2.2.1 Only the **Principal/DSL** or staff authorised in writing by the Headteacher/DSL may conduct a without consent search. The search must be conducted by:

- A staff member of the **same biological sex** as the child (except in limited urgent cases), and
- In the presence of another adult, if practicable.

5.2.3 How searches must be conducted

- Only outer clothing (coat, blazer, shoes) can be removed.
- Staff may search pockets, bags and possessions.
- Staff may **not** conduct an intimate search.
- Reasonable force may be used only where strictly necessary (see Dfe Use of Reasonable Force guidance).
- A pupil cannot be required to remove clothing other than outer garments.

5.3. Urgent '*exceptional circumstances*' searches

5.3.1. A same-sex search or second adult is not required if:

- There is a risk of serious harm if the search is delayed, and
- The staff member believes urgent action is necessary.
- A written justification must always be recorded after the incident on CPOMS.

5.4. Confiscation

5.4.1. Staff may confiscate prohibited or academy-banned items.

5.4.2. Items may be retained, returned to parents, handed to police, or disposed of.

5.4.3. Confiscation must be proportionate, necessary, and reasonable.

5.5. Mandatory actions

5.5.1. **Knives, weapons, illegal drugs, stolen items** → must be passed to police.

5.5.2. **Controlled substances** (e.g. illegal drugs or prescription drugs not belonging to the child) → Secure the item immediately and inform the police. Parents are to be contacted unless this would put the child at risk.

5.5.3. **Electronic devices** → may be examined, in exception circumstances, if there is good reason to believe they contain evidence of serious wrongdoing and only with the consent of the Principal to do so.

6. Electronic Devices (Search, Viewing, Deletion)

6.1. If any member of staff suspects they may find an indecent image of a child (sometimes known as nude or semi-nude images or youth-produced sexual imagery) on an electronic device, they must **never** intentionally view the image, and must never copy, print, share, store or save such images.

6.2. When an incident might involve an indecent image of a child and/or video, the member of staff should confiscate the device, avoid looking at the device and refer the incident to the DSL (or DDSL) immediately.

6.3. Any device which is confiscated will be returned to the parent at the end of the day. A phone may be returned to the student under exceptional circumstances.

6.4. Exceptions to return

6.4.1. Any device containing, (but not limited to)

- indecent images of children
- pornography
- abusive messages
- images or videos relating to suspected criminal behaviour

will be retained until such time as an investigation has taken place. The DSL or member of the core safeguarding team will contact the police if a member of staff finds any image, data, or file that they suspect might constitute a specific offence.

6.5. Examining data or files on electronic devices

6.5.1. Staff designated by the Principal, may examine any data or files on an electronic device that has been confiscated if there is good reason to do so. – not if there are suspected indecent or child abuse images

6.5.2. In determining whether there is a 'good reason' to examine the data or files, there should be reasonable suspicion that the data or file on the device has been, or could be used, to cause

harm, undermine the safe environment of the school and disrupt teaching, or be used to commit an offence.

6.5.3. If a member of staff finds any image, data, or file that they suspect might constitute a specified offence, it must be delivered to the DSL or Principal who will arrange for delivery to the police as soon as is reasonably practicable.

6.5.4. In exceptional circumstance the DSL or Principal may dispose of the image or data if there is a good reason to do so.

7. Strip searches (Police only)

7.1. Academy staff must **never** conduct a strip search.

7.2. In line with PACE (Police Code of Practice) the police may conduct a strip search on academy premises. KCSIE requires all DSL's to '*be aware of the requirement for children to have an appropriate adult with them during a strip search*.' Further information can be found here.

7.3. Where the police deem a strip search necessary:

- A staff member could act as the child's appropriate adult unless the child refuses.
- Safeguarding concerns must be recorded and referred to the DSL.
- The Headteacher must notify parents unless police advise otherwise.

7.4. After care following a strip search

7.4.1. Children and staff will be given appropriate support, irrespective of whether the suspected item is found.

7.4.2. If an item is found, this may be a police matter, but will always be accompanied by a safeguarding process handled by the DSL which gives attention to the child's wellbeing.

8. Communication and recording

8.1. Parent communication

8.1.1. The academy will inform parents of:

- Any search carried out **without consent**, and
- Any prohibited item found, unless informing parents creates a safeguarding risk to the pupil.

8.2. Recording

8.2.1. The following **must always** be logged on CPOMS for each child involved:

- All searches without consent
- Any search involving prohibited items

- Any search carried out in exceptional circumstances
- Any police involvement or strip search
- Any confiscation of prohibited items
- Any safeguarding concerns arising

8.2.2. Records should include date, time, staff, pupils involved, grounds for search, details of items found, and follow-up action.

9. Use of sniffer dogs

9.1. Principles

9.1.1. In line with DfE and ACPO guidance, academies may invite the police or accredited private providers to use sniffer dogs on academy premises.

9.1.2. Sniffer dogs may be used:

- Where there is reasonable suspicion of illegal drugs or prohibited items, or
- As a preventative/deterrent measure as part of broader safeguarding and behaviour strategies.

9.1.3. Before using sniffer dogs, the academy must:

- Inform the relevant Education Director, and OAT safeguarding and communications teams.
- Consider and clearly communicate the actions that will be taken if substances are found.
- Prepare for any potential media interest.

9.1.4. All use of sniffer dogs must respect safeguarding, dignity and cultural sensitivities (e.g., where dogs are considered unclean).

9.2. Sniffer Dogs to detect suspected illegal drugs

9.2.1. Where there is reasonable evidence of possession or supply of illegal drugs, the academy should consult the police in the first instance.

9.2.2. If the academy proposes using sniffer dogs without a police warrant, the Principal must ensure that the action is:

- Consistent with pastoral responsibilities and the duty of care,
- Culturally sensitive,
- Not likely to label or cause harm to pupils,
- Likely to lead to appropriate support where needed, and
- Proportionate and an effective use of academy resources.

9.2.3. Using a sniffer dog to identify a child or their belongings constitutes a *search* and must follow sections 4 and 5 of this policy.

9.2.4. Additionally, the academy must:

- Obtain parental consent before any sniffer-dog search involving children,
- Have procedures for children whose parents do not consent, and
- Respect the privacy of children who may be identified due to prescribed medication or passive exposure.

9.2.5. Any illegal drugs detected must be handled in line with Section 5.5.

9.3. Sniffer Dogs used solely as a deterrent

9.3.1. Where sniffer dogs are used as a deterrent or educational tool, the academy must:

- Inform parents and pupils of the purpose and planned use of sniffer dogs,
- Ensure the dog handler operates under academy direction, with the dog restricted to general areas and no direct contact with individuals,
- Have clear actions in place for responding if the dog indicates potential substances (e.g., increased supervision, targeted education).

9.3.2. Deterrent use must not single out any individual pupil.

10. Safeguarding

10.1. All searches must be conducted with consideration for:

- Trauma-informed practice
- Special educational needs
- Disability and medical needs
- Cultural beliefs
- Gender identity

10.2. Where a search raises safeguarding concerns (including exploitation, substance misuse, or criminal involvement), staff must follow the academy's safeguarding procedures.

10.3. Training

10.3.1. Academies must ensure that:

- Staff authorised to search are trained annually
- DSLs understand legal thresholds for police referral
- All staff receive basic awareness training as part of annual safeguarding and behaviour CPD

10.4. Monitoring and review

10.4.1. Academies must report monthly (Secondary and AP/Special) or termly (Primary) to their Education Director on:

- Volume and nature of searches
- Items confiscated
- Use of police
- Strip search incidents
- Safeguarding themes

10.4.2. OAT reviews this policy every **two years** or sooner if legislation changes.

Appendix 1- Summary guidance for staff

When you can search:

- With consent → for any item
- Without consent → only for prohibited items

Who can search:

- Principal/DSL or delegated staff
- Same sex member of staff required unless urgent risk

What can be searched:

- Outer clothing, bags, lockers (with conditions), desks, personal belongings

When to contact police:

- Knives, weapons, drugs, stolen items, harmful material, or where an offence is suspected

When to inform parents:

- Always for without consent searches unless it places child at risk

When to log:

- Always for without consent searches, prohibited items, exceptional circumstances, or safeguarding matters.