LONDON SOUTH EAST ACADEMIES TRUST

Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

Responsible post holder	Deputy CEO and Group Executive Director Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Inclusion
Approved by / on	Trust SLT July 2025
Next Review	September 2027

This policy has been reviewed using the DfE's Searching, Screening and Confiscation advice (Searching, Screening and Confiscation (publishing.service.gov.uk) for schools document of July 2023. It states very clearly the powers our Trust academies are able to exhibit in terms of screening and searching pupils, to ensure all pupils and staff are safe at all times whilst on site.

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 delegated 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 (listed in paragraph 31 DfE Searching, Screening and Confiscation 2023) or any other item that the school identifies as an item which may be searched for.

The list of prohibited items is:
- knives and weapons;
- alcohol;
- illegal drugs;
- stolen items;
- any article that the member of staff reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be used:
    - to commit an offence, or
    - to cause personal injury to, or damage to property of; any person (including the pupil).
- an article specified in regulations:
    - tobacco and cigarette papers;
    - fireworks; and
    - pornographic images.

Under common law, school staff have the power to search a pupil for any item if the pupil agrees. The member of staff should ensure the pupil understands the reason for the search and how it will be conducted so that their agreement is informed.

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 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. (See Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children).

When exercising powers, staff must consider the age and needs 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.

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

The role of the headteacher, the designated safeguarding lead and authorised members of staff

Only the headteacher, or a member of staff authorised by the headteacher, can carry out a search. The headteacher can authorise individual members of staff to search for specific items, or all items set out in this policy.

The headteacher should oversee the school's practice of searching to ensure that a culture of safe, proportionate and appropriate searching is maintained, which safeguards the welfare of all pupils and staff with support from the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy).

The headteacher should ensure that enough staff are appropriately trained in how to lawfully and safely search a pupil who is not co-operating, so that these trained staff can support and advise other members of staff if this situation arises. However, it is vital that all staff understand their rights and the rights of the pupil who is being searched.

The designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) should be informed of any searching incidents where the member of staff had reasonable grounds to suspect a pupil was in possession of a prohibited item as listed in this policy. The staff member should also involve the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) without delay if they believe that a search has revealed a safeguarding risk.

If the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) finds evidence that any child is at risk of harm, they should make a referral to children's social care services immediately (as set out in part 1 of Keeping children safe in education). The designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) should then consider the circumstances of the pupil who has been searched to assess the incident against potential wider safeguarding concerns.

Before searching

A search can be considered if the member of staff has reasonable grounds for suspecting that the pupil is in possession of a prohibited item or any item identified in the school rules for which a search can be made, or if the pupil has agreed.

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

Before any search takes place, the member of staff conducting the search should 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 authorised member of staff should always seek the co-operation of the pupil before conducting a search. If the pupil is not willing to co-operate with the search, the member of staff should consider why this is. 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; or
- have had a previous distressing experience of being searched.

If a pupil continues to not consent, the member of staff may sanction the pupil in line with the school's behaviour policy, ensuring that they are responding to behaviour consistently and fairly. Where possible, staff should avoid presenting the idea that a pupil can be sanctioned for refusing to consent to a search, as this may imply that the pupil didn't freely consent.

If the member of staff still considers a search to be necessary, but is not required urgently, they should seek the advice of the headteacher, designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) or pastoral member of staff who may have more information about the pupil. During this time the pupil should be supervised and kept away from other pupils

If the pupil continues to not consent, the member of staff should assess whether it is appropriate to use reasonable force to conduct the search. A member of staff can use such force as is reasonable to search for any prohibited items identified in this policy (see guidance on the Use of Reasonable Force in Schools and LSEAT Positive Handling Policy).

The decision to use reasonable force should be made on an individual basis. Staff should consider whether conducting the search will prevent the pupil harming themselves or others, damaging property or from causing disorder.

It should be noted that the use of reasonable force will differ depending on whether the member of staff is searching possessions or the pupil themselves.

During a search

Location: An appropriate location for the search should be found. Where possible, this should be away from other pupils. The search must only take place on the school premises or where the member of staff has lawful control or charge of the pupil, for example on a school trip.

Who: The law states 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.

There is a limited exception to this rule. This is that a member of staff can search a pupil of the opposite sex and/or without a witness present only:

- if the member of staff carrying out the search reasonably believes there is risk that serious harm will be caused to a person if the search is not carried out as a matter of urgency; **and**
- in the time available, it is not reasonably practicable for the search to be carried out by a member of staff who is same sex as the pupil or it is not reasonably practicable for the search to be carried out in the presence of another member of staff.

When a member of staff conducts a search without a witness they should immediately report this to another member of staff, and ensure a record of the search is kept.

The extent of the search

A member of staff may search a pupil's outer clothing, pockets, possessions, desks or lockers.

The person conducting the search 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. Hats, shoes, boots and scarves, for example, may also be searched.

'Possessions' means any goods over which the pupil has or appears to have control; this includes desks, lockers and bags.

A member of staff is able to search lockers and desks or other personal spaces at the school for any item provided the pupil agrees. Schools can make it a condition of having the locker or space that the pupil agrees to have these searched. If the pupil withdraws their agreement to search, a search may be conducted both for the prohibited items listed in this policy and any items identified in the school rules for which a search can be made.

The member of staff may use a metal detector/ wand to assist with the search.

The member of staff's power to search outlined above does not enable them to conduct a strip search.

Strip searching

A strip search is a search involving the removal of more than outer clothing. **Strip searches on school premises can only be carried out by police officers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Code A and in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Code C.** While the decision to undertake the strip search itself and its conduct are police matters, school staff retain a duty of care to the pupil(s) involved and should advocate for pupil wellbeing at all times.

Before calling police into school, staff should assess and balance the risk of a potential strip search on the pupil's mental and physical wellbeing and the risk of not recovering the suspected item. Staff should consider whether introducing the potential for a strip search through police involvement is absolutely necessary, and should always ensure that other appropriate, less invasive approaches have been exhausted. Once the police are on school premises, the decision on whether to conduct a strip search lies solely with them, and the role of the school is to advocate for the safety and wellbeing of the pupil(s) involved.

Unless there is an immediate risk of harm and where reasonably possible, staff should inform a parent/carer of the pupil suspected of concealing an item in advance of the search, even if the parent is not acting as the appropriate adult. Parents should always be informed by a staff member once a strip search has taken place. Schools should keep records of strip searches that have been conducted on school premises and monitor them for any trends that emerge.

The process the police must follow during a strip search

Except in cases of urgency, where there is risk of serious harm to the pupil or others, whenever a strip search involves exposure of intimate body parts there must be at least two people present other than the pupil, one of which must be the **appropriate adult**. If the pupil's parent would like to be the appropriate adult, the school should facilitate this where possible.

Police officers carrying out the search must be of the same sex as the pupil being searched. An appropriate adult not of the same sex as the pupil being searched may be present if specifically requested by the pupil. Otherwise, no-one of a different sex to the pupil being searched is permitted to be present, and the search must not be carried out in a location where the pupil could be seen by anyone else.

Except in urgent cases as above, a search of a pupil may take place without an appropriate adult only if the pupil explicitly states in the presence of an appropriate adult that they do not want an appropriate adult to be present during the search and the appropriate adult agrees. A record should be made of the pupil's decision and signed by the appropriate adult.

The presence of more than two people, other than an appropriate adult, shall be permitted only in the most exceptional circumstances.

Strip searching can be highly distressing for the pupil involved, as well as for staff and other pupils affected, especially if undertaken on school premises. PACE Code C states that a strip search may take place only if it is considered necessary to remove an item related to a criminal offence, and the officer reasonably considers the pupil might have concealed such an item. Strip searches should not be routinely carried out if there is no reason to consider that such items are concealed.

Following a Search

Pupils should be given appropriate support, irrespective of whether the suspected item is found.

If an item is found, this may be a police matter, but should always be accompanied by a safeguarding process handled by the school which gives attention to the pupil's wellbeing and involves relevant staff, such as the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy).

Safeguarding should be informed and present following a strip search in which the item is not found, to support the pupil process and to review the wider issues which informed the initial decision to conduct a strip search.

Pupils should feel that they have an opportunity to express their views regarding the strip search and the events surrounding it. Staff should give particular consideration to any pupils who have been strip searched more than once and/or groups of pupils who are more likely to be subjected to strip searching with unusual frequency, and consider preventative approaches.

Whether or not any items have been found because of any search, schools should consider whether the reasons for the search, the search itself, or the outcome of the search has caused or is likely to cause harm and suffering. The school's safeguarding and wellbeing team must be

informed immediately and appropriate support identified. If any prohibited items are found during the search, the member of staff should follow the guidance set out below in the paragraphs on confiscation.

If a pupil is found to be in possession of a prohibited item listed in this policy, then the staff member should alert the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) and the pupil should be sanctioned in line with the school's behaviour policy to ensure consistency of approach.

Recording searches

Any search by a member of staff for a prohibited item listed and all searches conducted by police officers should be recorded on CPOMs. This will allow the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) to identify possible risks and initiate a safeguarding response if required.

Schools are encouraged to include in the record of each search:

- the date, time and location of the search;
- which pupil was searched;
- who conducted the search and any other adults or pupils present;
- what was being searched for;
- the reason for searching;
- what items, if any, were found; and
- what follow-up action was taken as a consequence of the search.

Schools who conduct a high number of searches should consider whether the searches fall disproportionately on any particular groups of pupils by analysing the recorded data. In such cases where searching is falling disproportionately on any group or groups, they should consider whether any actions should be taken to prevent this.

Informing parents

Parents should always be informed of any search for a prohibited item that has taken place, and the outcome of the search as soon as is practicable. A member of staff should inform the parents of what, if anything, has been confiscated and the resulting action the school has taken, including any sanctions applied.

Schools should consider that in some circumstances it might also be necessary to inform parents of a search for an item banned by the school policy.

Any complaints about searching, screening or confiscation should be dealt with through the normal school complaints procedure

Screening

Screening can help provide reassurance to pupils, staff and parents/carers that the school is taking measures to create a calm, safe and supportive environment.

Schools' statutory power to implement rules and expectations on pupil behavior and their duties as employers in relation to the safety of staff, pupils and visitors enables them to impose a requirement that pupils undergo screening.

Screening is the use of a walk-through or hand-held metal detector (arch or wand) to scan all pupils for weapons before they enter the school premises.

Before considering the installation and use of any technology for screening, the headteacher is encouraged to consult with the local police who may be able to provide advice about whether installation of these devices is appropriate.

If a headteacher decides to introduce a screening arrangement, they should inform pupils and parents in advance to explain what the screening will involve and why it will be introduced.

Where a pupil has a disability, schools should make any reasonable adjustments to the screening process that may be required.

If a pupil refuses to be screened, the member of staff should consider why the pupil is not co-operating and assess whether it is necessary to carry out a search.

Confiscation

An authorised staff member carrying out a search can confiscate any item that they have reasonable grounds for suspecting:

- poses a risk to staff or pupils;
- is prohibited, or identified in the school rules for which a search can be made; or
- is evidence in relation to an offence.

Prohibited or illegal items

Controlled drugs must be delivered to the police as soon as possible unless there is a good reason not to do so. In these cases, following consultation with the Headteacher, the staff member must safely dispose of the drugs.

In determining whether there is a good reason to dispose of controlled drugs, staff must have regard to the following guidance issued by the Secretary of State:

Staff should take into account all relevant circumstances and use their professional judgement to determine whether they can safely dispose of the controlled drug. When staff are unsure as to the legal status of a substance and have reason to believe it may be a controlled drug, they should treat it as such. If staff are in doubt about the safe disposal of controlled drugs, they should deliver them to the police.

Other substances which are not believed to be controlled should also be delivered to the police, or disposed of as above, if the member of staff believes they could be harmful.

Where a person conducting a search finds alcohol, tobacco, cigarette papers or fireworks, they may retain or dispose of them as they think appropriate but should not return them to the pupil.

If a member of staff finds a pornographic image, they may dispose of the image unless they have reasonable grounds to suspect that its possession constitutes a specified offence (i.e. it is extreme or an indecent image of a child) in which case it must be delivered to the police as soon as reasonably practicable. Members of staff should never intentionally view any indecent image of a child (also sometimes known as nude or semi-nude images). Staff must never copy, print, share, store or save such images. See below for further advice on searching electronic devices.

Where a member of staff finds stolen items, these must be delivered to the police as soon as reasonably practicable. However, if there is good reason to do so, in consultation with the headteacher, the member of staff may also return the item to the owner or retain or dispose of it if returning them to their owner is not practicable. In determining whether there is a good reason to return the stolen item to its owner or retain or dispose of the item.

Staff should take into account all relevant circumstances and use their professional judgement to determine whether they can safely dispose of the seized article. In taking into account the relevant circumstances, staff should consider the following:

- the value of the item - it would not be reasonable or desirable to involve the police in dealing with low value items such as pencil cases, though school staff may judge it appropriate to contact the police if the items are valuable;
- whether the item is banned by the school;
- whether retaining or returning the item to the owner may place any person at risk of harm; and
- whether the item can be disposed of safely.

Any weapons or items which are evidence of a suspected offence must be passed to the police as soon as possible.

Items that have been (or are likely to be) used to commit an offence or to cause personal injury or damage to property should be delivered to the police as soon as reasonably practicable, returned to the owner, retained or disposed of. In deciding what to do with such an item, staff must have regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Staff, in consultation with the Headteacher should take into account all relevant circumstances and use their professional judgement to determine whether the item should be delivered to the police, retained, returned to the owner or disposed of. In taking into account all relevant circumstances the member of staff should consider:

- whether it is safe to dispose of the item; and
- whether and when it is safe to return the item.

If a member staff suspects a confiscated item has been used to commit an offence or is evidence in relation to an offence, the item should be delivered to the police.

Members of staff should use their judgement to decide to return, retain or dispose of any other items banned under the school rules. In deciding what to do with such an item, the member of staff must have regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State:

Staff should take into account all relevant circumstances and use their professional judgement to determine whether they can safely dispose of the seized item. In taking into account all relevant circumstances, the member of staff should consider:

- the value of the item;
- whether it is appropriate to return the item to the pupil or parent; and
- whether the item is likely to continue to disrupt learning or the calm, safe and supportive environment of the school.

Members of staff should follow any additional guidance and procedures on the retention and disposal of items put in place by the school.

Electronic devices

Electronic devices, including mobile phones, can contain files or data which relate to an offence, or which may cause harm to another person. This includes, but is not limited to, indecent images of children, pornography, abusive messages, images or videos, or evidence relating to suspected criminal behaviour.

As with all prohibited items, staff should first consider the appropriate safeguarding response if they find images, data or files on an electronic device that they reasonably suspect are likely to put a person at risk.

The Headteacher, DSL or Deputy DSL, may examine any data or files on an electronic device they have confiscated as a result of a search, if there is good reason to do so. 'Good reason' is defined as suspecting the device has (or could be used to):

- Cause harm
- Undermine the safe environment of the school and disrupt teaching
- Commit an offence

If the member of staff conducting the search suspects they may find an indecent image of a child (sometimes known as nude or semi-nude images), the member of staff should never intentionally view the image, and must never copy, print, share, store or save such images.

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 designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) as the most appropriate person to advise on the school's response. Handling such reports or concerns can be especially complicated and the school should follow the principles as set out in KCSIE 2025.

If a member of staff finds any image, data or file that they suspect might constitute a specified offence, then they must be delivered to the police as soon as is reasonably practicable.

In exceptional circumstances members of staff may dispose of the image or data if there is a good reason to do so. In determining a 'good reason' to examine or erase the data or files, the member of staff must have regard to the following guidance issued by the Secretary of State in paragraphs below:

In determining whether there is a 'good reason' to examine the data or files, the member of staff should reasonably suspect 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.

In determining whether there is a 'good reason' to erase any data or files from the device, the member of staff, in consultation with the Headteacher, should consider whether the material found may constitute evidence relating to a suspected offence. In those instances, the data or files should not be deleted, and the device must be handed to the police as soon as it is reasonably practicable. If the data or files are not suspected to be evidence in relation to an offence, a member of staff may delete the data or files if the continued existence of the data or file is likely to continue to cause harm to any person and the pupil and/or the parent refuses to delete the data or files themselves.

Confiscation as a sanction

Headteachers may authorise staff to confiscate, retain or dispose of items as a sanction in line with the school's behaviour policy, where reasonable to do so. For example, if a pupil brings in a banned item the school may confiscate, retain or dispose of the item.