Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

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Legal framework

- Education Act 1996
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Human Rights Act 1998
- DfE Searching, Screening and Confiscation Guidance
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026
- NPCC When to Call the Police Guidance

Availability of this policy

A copy of this policy may be downloaded from our website or is available on request from the school office, St Paul's Girls' School, Brook Green, London, W6 7BS (tel: 0207 603 2288). This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.

Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to all members of the school community, including students, parents, employees, temporary staff, contractors, agency workers, peripatetic staff, volunteers and governors, and when staff or volunteers are working with students off-site (e.g. on trips).

What this policy is for

The school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all students. Searches, screening and confiscation may be necessary where there are concerns about safety, welfare, behaviour, criminal activity or serious breaches of school rules.

The school will ensure that any search:

- is lawful, necessary and proportionate
- respects students' dignity and privacy
- takes account of age, vulnerability, SEND and safeguarding needs
- is carried out in accordance with current Department for Education guidance.

Other relevant school policies

- Behaviour policy
- Safeguarding (Child Protection) policy
- Child-on-Child Abuse policy
- Mobile Phone policy
- Substance Misuse Management and Education policy
- Supervision of Students policy

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Principles

The school recognises that:

- students have a right to a reasonable expectation of privacy
- the school's safeguarding duties may require searches in certain circumstances
- cooperation should normally be sought before any search
- searches should be conducted sensitively and discreetly
- searches should be conducted by a member of staff of the same sex as the student
- safeguarding considerations take precedence where there is a risk of harm.

Authorised Staff

The High Mistress authorises the following staff to undertake searches:

- Teaching staff.

Wherever practicable, searches for prohibited items should be discussed with the Deputy Head (Pastoral) or DSL before proceeding. The authorisation applies when on school premises and when participating in school trips or activities away from the premises.

All authorised staff will receive an appropriate briefing in advance of carrying out a search.

Searches With Consent

Authorised staff may ask a student to consent (which does not need to be in writing) to a search for an item **banned** under school rules. Refusal may result in behaviour sanctions and may lead to further investigation.

Examples of banned items include:

- mobile phones or smart devices being used contrary to school rules or policy
- chewing gum
- unauthorised electronic devices
- other items banned by the Behaviour Policy:
    - Smoking or vaping paraphernalia including cigarette lighters
    - Solvents or legal highs
    - Blades which includes razors, scalpels
    - Smoke bombs
    - Inflammatory material of a religious, political, racist, homophobic, anti-trans, or sexist nature
    - Any other item that could reasonably be assumed to be used, or misused, to disrupt effective learning and good order in the school or its environs, or to commit an offence, cause personal injury, or damage property.

Searches Without Consent

Authorised staff may search a student or their possessions without consent where there are reasonable grounds to suspect possession of a **prohibited** item.

Prohibited items include:

- knives or weapons
- alcohol

- illegal drugs
- stolen items
- fireworks
- tobacco and smoking-related items
- pornographic images
- any article reasonably suspected to have been used, or likely to be used, to commit an offence or cause injury or damage.

Reasonable grounds may arise from:

- a disclosure
- information from another student
- information from a member of staff
- observations or behaviour
- information received from parents or external agencies.

Conduct of Searches

Searches must:

- be conducted by an authorised member of staff
- normally be undertaken by a member of staff of the same sex as the student
- normally be witnessed by another member of staff
- take place in a private location.

Staff may:

- ask a student to empty pockets
- search bags, lockers and desks ordinarily with the student and another member of staff present; searches without the student present are permitted
- search outer clothing.

Staff must never:

- conduct intimate searches
- search beneath clothing
- require removal of clothing other than outer clothing
- conduct strip searches.

Searching Electronic Devices

Where a device is lawfully confiscated, staff may examine its contents where there is good reason to do so.

Examples include:

- safeguarding concerns
- cyberbullying
- harmful sexual behaviour
- child-on-child abuse

- breaches of school rules.

Particular caution must be exercised regarding:

- indecent images
- AI-generated sexual imagery
- deepfake sexual abuse
- sextortion
- extremist material.

Where illegal material is suspected:

- the device must be secured
- the DSL informed immediately
- police advice sought where appropriate.

Staff must not unnecessarily view, copy, store or forward images.

Strip Searches

School staff must never conduct strip searches.

Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a prohibited item is concealed beneath clothing:

- the DSL and senior leadership team member must be consulted immediately
- a risk assessment must be undertaken
- police involvement must be considered.

Only police officers may conduct strip searches. The school will continue to exercise safeguarding responsibilities before, during and after any police-led search.

Screening

The school may use screening measures, including handheld or walk-through metal detectors. Students may be required to undergo screening as a condition of entry to school premises where the school considers this necessary to maintain safety. Reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled students and those with SEND.

Confiscation

Any member of staff may confiscate an item where it:

- breaches school rules
- presents a safety concern
- disrupts learning
- causes a safeguarding concern.

Confiscated items may:

- be returned to the student
- be returned to parents
- be retained
- be disposed of
- be handed to the police.

The decision will be proportionate and based on safeguarding, welfare and disciplinary considerations.

Parent Communication

Parents will not normally be contacted before a search. The school will normally inform parents following any significant search or confiscation. Parents will always be informed where:

- prohibited items have been found
- police involvement becomes necessary
- there is a safeguarding concern requiring parental notification.

Notification may be delayed where immediate communication could increase risk to a child.

Safeguarding

Where a search gives rise to a safeguarding concern, the matter must be referred promptly to the DSL (or a DDSL in their absence) and managed in accordance with the Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy. Safeguarding considerations will always take precedence over disciplinary matters.

Police Involvement

The school will refer to NPCC guidance when deciding whether police involvement is appropriate.

Police involvement will normally be considered where:

- weapons are involved
- controlled drugs are found
- serious assaults are alleged
- indecent images of children are suspected
- there is significant criminal activity.

Record Keeping

Staff are required to record all searches and confiscations on CPOMS. Records will be stored on CPOMS and will include:

- date and time
- location
- staff involved
- reason for the search
- outcome
- items found
- parental communication
- safeguarding actions taken.

Monitoring and Review

The Deputy Head (Pastoral) and DSL will review search and confiscation records annually to identify trends, ensure consistency and evaluate safeguarding concerns.