Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

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Contributors	Rob Arrowsmith		
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Note	This policy must not be amended without prior approval of the Education Director		

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1. Supporting Documents

- Behaviour Policy (EDU.POL.027)
- Mobile Phone Policy (EDU.POL.040)
- Positive Handling and Physical Intervention Policy (EDU.POL.020)
- Safeguarding Children in Education Policy (EDE.POL.002)
- Anti-bullying Policy

Related policies are held within RADAR in the School's policy folder.

2. Introduction

At Acorns School, we keep our school safe and calm so that pupils can learn. Screening, searching and confiscation are tools we use to keep harmful and banned items out of school, including weapons, drugs, alcohol, vapes and mobile phones. We use these powers lawfully, proportionately and with the pupil's dignity and welfare in mind, and we always put safeguarding first.

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Some of our schools screen pupils on arrival to stop phones and vapes coming on site. This policy explains how we screen and search, what we may confiscate, and the limits the law places on us. It keeps two different things clearly apart: screening every pupil as a condition of entry, and searching an individual pupil because we suspect they are carrying something they should not have.

Searches should, wherever possible, be undertaken away from other pupils to preserve dignity and reduce distress.

3. Aim & Scope

This policy applies to all staff, governors, pupils, parents and carers, and visitors at Acorns School. It aims to:

- Keep harmful and banned items out of school.
- Set out clearly when and how we screen, search and confiscate, and the legal limits on each.
- Protect the dignity, welfare and rights of every pupil, and treat searching as a safeguarding matter.
- Make sure staff act consistently, record what they do, and involve parents and the police appropriately.

4. Abbreviations and Definitions

Screening. Requiring pupils to pass through or be scanned by a walk-through or hand-held metal detector, an arch or a wand, on arrival or at other times. Screening applies to all pupils and does not involve physical contact.

Search with consent. A member of staff searching a pupil, or their possessions, where the pupil has freely agreed and understands what will happen.

Search without consent. A search of a pupil, their outer clothing, possessions, desk or locker, carried out under the statutory power without the pupil's agreement, where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a prohibited or banned item.

Prohibited items. The items set in law that a search can be made for, namely knives and weapons, alcohol, illegal drugs, stolen items, tobacco and cigarette papers, fireworks, pornographic images, and any article likely to be used to commit an offence or cause injury or damage.

Banned items. Items the school bans in its rules and may search for, for example mobile phones and vapes. These are not prohibited by law, so the school may only search for them if it has named them in its rules, and reasonable force must never be used to search for them.

5. Policy Content

5.1 Principles and Approach

Our approach rests on the following principles, drawn from the DfE guidance and the lessons of the Child Q safeguarding review.

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- Safeguarding comes first. A search is a serious step. We consider the welfare of the pupil at every stage and treat any search as a safeguarding matter.
- Dignity and proportionality. We use the least intrusive approach that meets the need, and we treat pupils with respect.
- Two distinct powers. Screening every pupil as a condition of entry is different in law from searching a pupil on suspicion, and we keep them apart.
- Clear legal limits. Reasonable force may be used only to search for items prohibited by law, never for banned items such as phones or vapes.
- We never strip search. Schools have no power to strip search. That is a police power, and we do not use it.
- We adapt for need. We take account of a pupil's age, special educational needs, disability and any trauma, and we record and review what we do.

5.2 Searching, Screening and Confiscation in Practice

Prohibited items and banned items

Our behaviour rules set out the items pupils must not bring to school. This list includes every prohibited item set in law, and the items Acorns School bans in its own rules, such as mobile phones and vapes. Because vapes and phones are not prohibited by law, we can only search for them because we have named them in our school rules, and we never use reasonable force to search for them. The full list for our school is in the annex.

Screening on entry

Some of our schools screen all pupils on arrival, using a walk-through or hand-held metal detector, to keep weapons, phones and vapes off site. Screening applies to every pupil, does not single anyone out, and does not involve physical contact. We tell pupils and parents in advance what the screening involves and why we do it. A pupil who refuses to be screened may be refused entry until they agree, and we manage that under our Behaviour Policy (EDU.POL.027) and contact parents. The screening arrangement for our school is set out in the annex.

Searching with consent

Staff may ask a pupil to agree to a search of their possessions or person. We make sure the pupil understands the reason for the search and how it will be done, so that any agreement is informed. A pupil can decline, in which case we consider whether a search without consent is justified.

Searching without consent

A search without consent may be carried out only by a member of staff the headteacher has authorised, and only where there are reasonable grounds to suspect the pupil has a prohibited or banned item. We may search a pupil's outer clothing, pockets, bags, desk and locker. The pupil is not required to remove any clothing other than outer clothing.

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The search is carried out by a member of staff of the same sex as the pupil, with a second member of staff present as a witness. There is a narrow exception only where there is a risk of serious harm and it is not reasonably practicable to wait, in which case the reasons are recorded. Reasonable force may be used only to search for items that are prohibited by law, and never to search for banned items such as phones or vapes. We take particular care with pupils who have special educational needs, a disability or a history of trauma.

Searching electronic devices and phones

Where a phone or other electronic device is confiscated through a search, staff may examine data or files on it only where there is a good reason to do so. If a member of staff suspects the device may contain an indecent image of a child, they must never view, copy, share or delete the image. They confiscate the device, do not look at it, and refer the matter to the designated safeguarding lead at once, who advises on the response and on involving the police. Any data or file that may be evidence of an offence is preserved and the device handed to the police as soon as possible. We follow the DfE guidance on examining and erasing data.

Confiscation, retention and disposal

Staff may confiscate any item found in a search that poses a risk, is prohibited or banned, or may be evidence of an offence. We deal with confiscated items as follows:

- Weapons and knives, and anything that may be evidence of an offence, are passed to the police, and we always involve the designated safeguarding lead.
- Illegal drugs and stolen items are passed to the police, unless there is a good reason to dispose of a controlled drug safely, in line with the guidance.
- Alcohol, tobacco, cigarette papers and fireworks are retained or disposed of and are not returned to the pupil.
- Vapes are confiscated and disposed of safely and are not returned to the pupil.
- Mobile phones and other banned items are confiscated, kept securely and returned in line with our Mobile Phone Policy (EDU.POL.040) and Behaviour Policy (EDU.POL.027) at Acorns School.

Weapons and serious violence

Where a search finds a weapon, or raises a concern about serious violence, we treat it as a safeguarding matter, involve the designated safeguarding lead, contact the police, and consider a referral to local authority children's social care. This reflects the strengthened duties in Keeping Children Safe in Education on weapons and serious violence.

We do not strip search

Schools have no power to strip search a pupil. A strip search is a police power under the law, and it is never carried out by school staff. If the police consider a

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strip search on school premises, an appropriate adult must be present unless the law allows otherwise, the pupil's welfare and dignity are paramount, and the designated safeguarding lead is involved throughout. We follow the safeguarding principles set out after the Child Q review.

After a search

After any search we check the pupil is alright and offer support, inform the pupil's parents or carers about the search and anything confiscated, and record the search and its outcome. Where a search raises a safeguarding concern, we act on it through our Safeguarding Policy (EDE.POL.002).

5.3 Recording, Monitoring and Reporting

Every screening incident that leads to action, every search and every confiscation is recorded on CPOMS, with what was found, who was involved and the outcome. Leadership and governors monitor this data, including for any disproportionate impact on pupils with particular protected characteristics, so that Acorns School applies these powers fairly.

5.4 Equality and Inclusion

At Acorns School, these powers are used fairly and in line with the Equality Act 2010. We monitor searches for any disproportionate impact, and we adapt our approach for pupils with special educational needs, disabilities or a history of trauma. Any concern that this policy is applied unfairly should be raised with the headteacher.

6. Responsibilities

6.1 Pupils

Co-operate with screening as a condition of entry, and understand that the school may search for prohibited or banned items.

6.2 Staff

Only carry out a search without consent if they are authorised by the headteacher, and always within the legal limits in this policy put safeguarding first, involve the designated safeguarding lead where needed, and record every search and confiscation.

6.3 Leadership

The headteacher at Acorns School authorises which staff may search without consent, sets the screening arrangements, and makes sure every search is lawful, proportionate and recorded. The headteacher may authorise staff generally or for a specific search.

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6.4 Governance

The proprietor and governors at Acorns School make sure this policy is lawful and applied fairly, and they review search and confiscation records, including for any disproportionate impact on particular groups of pupils.

6.5 Parents and carers

Are informed of the screening arrangements in advance, and are told when their child has been searched or had an item confiscated.

6.6 Named leads

The designated safeguarding lead at Acorns School is Paula Tankard. The deputy designated safeguarding lead for Acorns Marple School is Carrie-Anne Harrison. The deputy designated safeguarding lead for Acorns Ashley School is Ellie Coot. The staff authorised by the headteacher to carry out searches at Acorns School are listed in the annex.

7. Training Requirements

Staff authorised to search are trained on the legal powers and limits, on safeguarding and dignity, on same-sex and witness requirements, and on handling electronic devices and indecent images. All staff are briefed on the screening arrangements and on this policy, and training is refreshed regularly at Acorns School.

8. Equality Impact Statement

All policies will be developed and implemented in a manner that promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all individuals. Policies must align with relevant equality legislation and reflect the expectations and standards set by our regulatory bodies. They will demonstrate a commitment to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering an inclusive environment that respects and values the diverse needs, backgrounds, and experiences of those we support, as well as our workforce.

9. Sources of Information / References

This policy reflects current statutory guidance and legislation, including:

- Searching, Screening and Confiscation: advice for schools (DfE, July 2022, in force 1 September 2022).
- Education Act 1996, sections 550ZA to 550ZD, which define prohibited items and the power to search.
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1 paragraph 9, which is the legal basis for searching in independent schools.
- The Schools (Specification and Disposal of Articles) Regulations 2012.

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- Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2025, and 2026 from 1 September 2026, including the strengthened duties on weapons and serious violence).
- Behaviour in Schools (DfE, February 2024).
- Equality Act 2010.

10. Version Control

This document can also be found in Radar. This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if legislation or statutory guidance changes. The named owner for review at Acorns School is the headteacher.

11. Appendices

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11.1 Appendix A: School-Specific Annex

- Banned items named in our school rules for which a search may be made:

Cigarettes and vapes
Weapons of any kind
Alcohol, drugs or illegal substances of any kind
Electronic recording devices, including cameras attached to drones unless the property of the school
Fireworks
Any stolen items
Pornographic paraphernalia or images
Clothing that depicts association with, or symbolism of, extremist groups or hate messages of any type that are likely to cause offensive to the protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010) or promote any form of extremist ideology. Also, anything that links to illegal activities (such as weapon or drug paraphernalia)

- Screening arrangement, including when and how we screen: All pupils are 'Wanded' on entry to the school. This is a handheld metal detector, there are always 2 staff members present. If the detector beeps / vibrates we ask the pupils to show us what might have caused the wand to alarm. If this needs to be completed in a private room the pupil is taken to the medical room.

Authorised staff permitted to search pupils at Acorns School Marple are:

- Staff authorised by the headteacher to search without consent are:

Liam Morrison, Deputy Headteacher
Simone Stopford, Assistant Headteacher
Carrie-Anne Harrison, Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead

- Designated safeguarding lead: Paula Tankard
- Deputy designated safeguarding lead: Carrie-Anne Harrison
- Our local police contact is Anne Squires - Anna.Squires@gmp.police.uk

Authorised staff permitted to search pupils at Acorns School Ashley are:

- Staff authorised by the headteacher to search without consent:

Naomi Mitchell – Deputy Headteacher,
Ellie Coot Assistant Headteacher, Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead
Sarah Booth – SENDCO
Roxanne O'Gorman Pastoral Lead.

If a male member of staff is required it would be either Matthew Noble Y9 teacher or Dan Timmis Y10 teacher.

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- Designated safeguarding lead: Paula Tankard
- Deputy designated safeguarding lead: Ellie Coot
- Local police contact: Cheshire Police 999 or 101

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11.2 Appendix B: Search Without Consent Quick-Reference

Use these steps for a search without consent. Record the search and outcome on CPOMS. Reasonable force may be used only to search for items prohibited by law, never for phones or vapes.

1. Check you are authorised by the headteacher and that you have reasonable grounds to suspect a prohibited or banned item.

2. Consider the pupil's welfare and any special educational needs, disability or trauma, and whether a safeguarding response is needed first.

3. Carry out the search with a member of staff of the same sex as the pupil and a second member of staff as witness. The pupil removes only outer clothing.

4. Search outer clothing, pockets, bags, desk and locker. Do not use force to search for banned items such as phones or vapes.

5. If an item is found, confiscate it and deal with it under section 7.6. For a weapon, drugs, stolen items or anything that may be evidence, involve the designated safeguarding lead and the police.

6. If you confiscate a phone or device and suspect an indecent image of a child, do not view it. Refer to the designated safeguarding lead at once.

7. Check the pupil is alright, offer support, and inform parents or carers about the search and anything confiscated.

8. Record the full timeline, what was found and the outcome on CPOMS.

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