

# Hornsea School & Language College



## Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

<b>Last Reviewed:</b>	<b>Date:</b> October 2025	<b>By:</b> Kay Sullivan
<b>Approved by:</b>	<b>Headteacher:</b> 26.11.25	<b>Governing Body:</b> 26.11.25
<b>Date of Next Review:</b>	November 2026	

## **1. Introduction**

Hornsea School and Language College (HSLC) is proud of having an inclusive ethos and places the utmost emphasis upon maintaining a safe, settled and positive learning environment, where every member of the school community feels valued and able to participate.

Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE September 2023<sup>4</sup>) - (KCSiE 2025) - is statutory guidance that clearly outlines the responsibilities and expectations of school in terms of safeguarding the school community. This Policy is based heavily upon advice *DfE July 2022 Searching, screening and confiscation, Advice for Schools*. It is designed to outline and clarify the approach of HSLC and ensure transparency and best practice is maintained in what is a potentially difficult and challenging area for all concerned.

On occasions it will be necessary to investigate concerns related to alleged possession of 'prohibited items' and items banned under school rules and it is unavoidable that again on occasions this may involve the need to search pupils and their belongings in school. Such a course of action will be undertaken to safeguard and protect the wider school community – students and staff - and ensure that HSLC is fulfilling relevant legal obligations and expectations in terms of any potential criminal activity, as well as school behaviour expectations.

As is the case with the use of any physical intervention in school, the need to resort to searching / screening / confiscation will always be viewed as a last resort as we look to work in positive partnership with students and parents / carers

Schools and their staff are an important part of the wider safeguarding system for children. This system is described in the statutory guidance *Working together to safeguard children*. Keeping children safe in education makes clear that all school staff have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which pupils can learn.

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. The powers to search in the Education Act 1996 are compatible with Article 8. A school exercising those powers lawfully should have no difficulty in demonstrating that it has also acted in accordance with Article 8. This advice will assist schools in deciding how to exercise their searching powers in a lawful way.

### **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 staff they authorise 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 below, or any other item that the school rules identify 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;

- Vapes or vaping materials
- 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 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.

When exercising their powers, schools 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.

School 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 the school's behaviour policy. For example, a member of staff may be authorised to search for stolen property and alcohol but not for weapons or drugs. The DSL will be consulted by the member of staff conducting the search, and wherever possible, the DSL will attend the search.

Whenever possible, 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 a sufficient number of 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. 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 seek advice from the Safeguarding and Partnership Hub immediately. 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.

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 make an assessment of 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 refuse to co-operate, the member of staff may sanction the pupil in line with the school's Positive Discipline Policy, ensuring that they are responding to misbehaviour consistently and fairly.

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 a Senior 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 still refuses to co-operate, 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, but not to search for items which are identified only in the school rules. The decision to use reasonable force should be made on a case-by-case basis. The member of 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**

Where: 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, as well as hats, shoes, boots or scarves.

The powers to search outlined in this guidance only apply in England. When on a trip outside England, the law of that country should be followed. '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 and any items identified in the school rules for which a search can be made.

A pupil's possessions can only be searched in the presence of the pupil and another member of staff, except where there is a risk that serious harm will be caused to a person if the search is not conducted immediately and where it is not reasonably practicable to summon another member of staff. The member of staff may use a metal detector 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.12 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 be sensitive to whether such outer clothing is worn for religious reasons when conducting a search. Searches may entail different levels of invasiveness and exposure. A search under PACE Code A that involves removing more than outer clothing but does not expose intimate parts of the body would not require the presence of an appropriate adult. However, from a pupil wellbeing perspective, schools may wish to involve an appropriate adult as a matter of course during all searches conducted by police and 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 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.

The role of the appropriate adult is to safeguard the rights, entitlements and welfare of children and vulnerable adults in police custody. This adult must not be a police officer or otherwise associated with the police. Examples of an appropriate adult include, but are not limited to, a parent, relative, social worker, teacher or, if the person is in the care of a local authority or voluntary organisation, a

person representing that authority or organisation. Note that an appropriate adult is not required when a pupil is eighteen or above.

### **After-care following a strip 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 also be at the centre of support following a strip search in which the item is not found, both in the sense of supporting the pupil to deal with the experience of being searched, and regarding wider issues that may have informed the decision to conduct a strip search in the first place. In both cases, pupils should feel that they have an opportunity to express their views regarding the strip search and the events surrounding it. School 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.

### **After a search**

Whether or not any items have been found as a result of any search, schools should consider whether the reasons for the search, the search itself, or the outcome of the search give cause to suspect that the pupil is suffering, or is likely to suffer harm, and/or whether any specific support is needed. Where this may be the case, school staff should follow the school's Child Protection Policy and speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or deputy) as set out in Part 1 of Keeping children safe in education. They will consider if Pastoral support, an early help intervention or a referral to the Safeguarding and Partnership Hub is appropriate. If any prohibited items are found during the search, the member of staff should follow the guidance on confiscation. If a pupil is found to be in possession of a prohibited item, 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~~ Positive Discipline policy to ensure consistency of approach.

### **Recording searches**

Any search by a member of staff for a prohibited item, and all searches conducted by police officers, should be recorded in the school's safeguarding reporting system (CPOMS), including whether or not an item is found. This will allow the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or deputy) to identify possible risks and initiate a safeguarding response if required. Headteachers may also decide that all searches for items banned by the school rules should be recorded. Staff members should follow the school policy in these cases.

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**

Schools should reinforce the whole-school approach by building and maintaining positive relationships with 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 that the school is taking measures to create a calm, safe and supportive environment. Schools' statutory power to make rules on pupil behaviour 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 make an assessment of whether it is necessary to carry out a search.

## **Confiscation**

Items found as a result of a search: 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
- 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, the member of staff must safely dispose of the drugs. In determining whether there is a good reason to dispose of controlled drugs, the member of staff must have regard to the statutory guidance. The member of 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 the member of staff is 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.

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, 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, the member of staff must have regard to the following guidance issued by the Secretary of State in paragraph below.

The member of 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, the member of 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.

The member of staff 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.

Section 62 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 defines prohibited images of children. Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigrations Act 2008 defines extreme pornographic images.

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. The member of 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.

Staff 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. 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 schools should follow the principles as set out in Keeping children safe in education. The UK Council for Internet Safety also provides the following guidance to support school staff and Designated Safeguarding Leads: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people.

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 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 disciplinary penalty**

Schools' general power to discipline enables a member of staff to confiscate, retain or dispose of a pupil's property as a disciplinary penalty, where reasonable to do so. The law protects members of staff from liability in any proceedings brought against them for any loss of, or damage to, any item they have confiscated, provided they acted lawfully.