



# **Hadrian Learning Trust**

## **Screening, Searching and Confiscation**

**September 2024**

Next annual update: September 2025

**HEXHAM MIDDLE SCHOOL AND QUEEN ELIZABETH HIGH SCHOOL  
PART OF HADRIAN LEARNING TRUST**

**POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR  
SCREENING, SEARCHING AND CONFISCATION**

**(HMS & QEHS follow the [guidance](#) set out by the Department for Education)**

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**Key points about this Guidance**

**Searching**

- School staff can search a pupil for any item if the pupil agrees<sup>1</sup>.
- Headteachers and staff authorised by them have a statutory power to search pupils or their possessions, without consent, where they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that the pupil may have a prohibited item. Prohibited items are:
  - knives or weapons
  - alcohol
  - illegal drugs
  - stolen items
  - tobacco and cigarette papers
  - e-cigarettes or vapes
  - fireworks
  - pornographic images
  - 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 the property of, any person (including the pupil).
- Headteachers and authorised staff can also search for any item banned by the school rules which has been identified in the rules as an item which may be searched for. It may be that a hand-held scanner is used in the search of a student if they are suspected of being in possession of an illicit item on school premises.

**Confiscation**

School staff can seize any prohibited item found as a result of a search. They can also seize any item, they consider harmful or detrimental to school discipline.

**Schools' obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**

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<sup>1</sup> The ability to give consent may be influenced by the child's age or other factors

- Under article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights pupils have a right to respect for their private life. In the context of these particular powers, 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 the searching powers in a lawful way.

## SCREENING

### What the law allows:

- Schools can require pupils to undergo screening by a walk-through or hand-held metal detector (arch or wand) even if they do not suspect them of having a weapon and **without** the consent of the pupils.
- Schools' statutory power to make rules on pupil behaviour<sup>2</sup> and their duty as an employer to manage the safety of staff, pupils and visitors<sup>3</sup> enables them to impose a requirement that pupils undergo screening.
- Any member of school staff can screen pupils.

### Also note:

1. If a pupil refuses to be screened, the school may refuse to have the pupil on the premises. Health & safety legislation requires a school to be managed in a way that does not expose pupils or staff to risks to their health and safety and this would include making reasonable rules as a condition of admittance.
2. If a pupil fails to comply, and the school does not let the pupil in, the school has not excluded the pupil and the pupil's absence will be treated as unauthorised. The pupil must comply with the rules and attend.
3. This type of screening, without physical contact, is not subject to the same conditions as apply to the powers to search without consent.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 89 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 for all maintained schools, PRUs and NMSS and the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 for academy schools and alternative provision academies

<sup>3</sup> Section 3 of the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974

## SEARCHING WITH CONSENT

### Schools' common law powers to search:

□ School staff can search pupils **with their consent** for any item.

#### Also note:

- 1) We are not required to have formal written consent from the pupil for this sort of search – it is enough for the teacher to ask the pupil to turn out his or her pockets or if the teacher can look in the pupil's bag or locker and for the pupil to agree.
- 2) Banned items include those listed below under 'Searching without consent'. It should be noted mobile phones, ipods, mp3players should be switched off in pupil bags at all times during the school day.
- 3) If a member of staff suspects a pupil has a banned item in his/her possession, they can instruct the pupil to turn out his or her pockets or bag and if the pupil refuses, the teacher can apply an appropriate punishment as set out in the school's behaviour policy.
- 4) A pupil refusing to co-operate with such a search raises the same kind of issues as where a pupil refuses to stay in a detention or refuses to stop any other unacceptable behaviour when instructed by a member of staff – in such circumstances, the school can apply an appropriate disciplinary penalty. Depending upon the issue, this could range from a detention to a seclusion or exclusion in serious cases.

## SEARCHING WITHOUT CONSENT

### What the law says:

What can be searched for?

- Knives or weapons, alcohol, illegal drugs and stolen items; and
- Tobacco and cigarette papers, fireworks and pornographic images; and
- 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; and
- Any item banned by the school rules which has been identified in the rules as an item which may be searched for.

### 1) Who can search?

- The Executive Headteacher or a member of school staff authorised by the Executive Headteacher.

### 2) Under what circumstances?

- You must be the same sex as the pupil being searched; and there must be a witness (also a staff member) and, if at all possible, they should be the same sex as the pupil being searched.
- There is a limited exception to this rule. You can carry out a search of a pupil of the opposite sex to you and without a witness present, but **only** where you reasonably believe that there is a risk that **serious harm** will be caused to a person if you do not conduct the search immediately and where it is **not reasonably practicable** to summon another member of staff.

### 3) When can you search?

- If you have reasonable grounds for suspecting that a pupil is in possession of a prohibited item.

#### Also note:

The law also says what must be done with prohibited items which are seized following a search.

The requirement that the searcher is the same sex as the pupil and that a witness is present will continue to apply in nearly all searches. Where it is practicable to summon a staff member of the same sex as the pupil and a witness then the teachers wishing to conduct a search must do so.

### 4) Authorising members of staff

- ☐ The Executive Headteacher has authorised members of the Senior Leadership Teams, Student support staff, Mentors and behaviour support workers use these powers.

### 5) Training for school staff

- ☐ When designating a member of staff to undertake searches under these powers, the Executive Headteacher will consider whether the member of staff requires any additional training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities.

### 6) Establishing grounds for a search

- Teachers can only undertake a search without consent if they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that a pupil may have in his or her possession a prohibited item. The teacher must decide in each particular case what constitutes reasonable grounds for suspicion. For example, they may have heard other pupils talking about the item or they might notice a pupil behaving in a way that causes them to suspect that a pupil is concealing a prohibited item.

- In the exceptional circumstances when it is necessary to conduct a search of a pupil of the opposite sex or in the absence of a witness, the member of staff conducting the search should bear in mind that a pupil's expectation of privacy increases as they get older.
- The powers allow school staff to search regardless of whether the pupil is found after the search to have that item. This includes circumstances where staff suspect a pupil of having items such as illegal drugs or stolen property which are later found not to be illegal or stolen.
- School staff can view CCTV footage in order to make a decision as to whether to conduct a search for an item.

## 7) Searches for items banned by the school rules

- An item banned by the school rules may only be searched for under these powers if it has been identified in the school rules as an item that can be searched for.

## 8) Location of a search

- Searches without consent can only be carried out on the school premises or, if elsewhere, where the member of staff has lawful control or charge of the pupil, for example on school trips in England or in training settings.
- The powers only apply in England.

### During the search

## 9) Extent of the search – clothes, possessions, desks and lockers

### What the law says:

- The person conducting the search may not require the pupil to remove any clothing other than outer clothing.
- 'Outer clothing' means clothing that is not worn next to the skin or immediately over a garment that is being worn as underwear but 'outer clothing' includes hats; shoes; boots; gloves and scarves.
- 'Possessions' means any goods over which the pupil has or appears to have control – this includes desks, lockers and bags.
- 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.

**Also note:**

The power to search without consent enables a personal search, involving removal of outer clothing and searching of pockets; but not an intimate search going further than that, which only a person with more extensive powers (e.g. a police officer) can do.

**10) Lockers and desks**

- Under common law powers, schools are able to search lockers and desks for any item provided the pupil agrees. Schools can also make it a condition of having a locker or desk that the pupil consents to have these searched for any item whether or not the pupil is present.
- If a pupil does not consent to a search (or withdraws consent having signed a consent form) then it is possible to conduct a search without consent but only for the “prohibited items” listed above.

**11) Use of force**

- Members of staff can use such force as is reasonable given the circumstances when conducting a search for knives or weapons, alcohol, illegal drugs, stolen items, tobacco and cigarette papers, fireworks, pornographic images or articles that have been or could be used to commit an offence or cause harm. Such force **cannot** be used to search for items banned under the school rules.
- Separate advice is available on teachers’ power to use force – see Associated Resources section below for a link to this document.

**After the search****12) The power to seize and confiscate items – general****What the law allows:**

□ Schools’ general power to discipline, as set out in Section 91 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, enables a member of staff to confiscate, retain or dispose of a pupil’s property as a disciplinary penalty, where reasonable to do so.

**Also note:**

- 1) A senior leader can use their discretion to confiscate, retain and/or destroy any item found as a result of a ‘with consent’ search so long as it is reasonable in the circumstances. Where any article is thought to be a weapon it must be passed to the police.
- 2) Staff have a defence to any complaint or other action brought against them. 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.

### 13) Items found as a result of a 'without consent' search

#### What the law says:

- A person carrying out a search can seize anything they have reasonable grounds for suspecting is a prohibited item (that is the items identified in paragraph C on page 3) or is evidence in relation to an offence.
- Where a person conducting a search finds **alcohol** they must report it to a senior leader who may retain or dispose of it. This means that schools can dispose of alcohol as they think appropriate but this should not include returning it to the pupil.
- Where they find **controlled drugs**, this must be reported to a senior leader. Controlled drugs must be delivered to the police as soon as possible but may be disposed of if the person thinks there is a good reason to do so.
- Where they find **other substances** which are not believed to be controlled drugs these can be confiscated where a teacher believes them to be harmful or detrimental to good order and discipline and must be reported to a senior leader. This would include, for example, so called 'legal highs' - New psychoactive substances (NPS). Where staff suspect a substance may be controlled they should treat them as controlled drugs as outlined above.
- Where they find **stolen items** this must be reported to a senior leader. Stolen items must be delivered to the police as soon as reasonably practicable – but may be returned to the owner (or may be retained or disposed of if returning them to their owner is not practicable) if the person thinks that there is a good reason to do so.
- Where a member of staff finds **tobacco or cigarette papers** they may retain or dispose of them. As with alcohol, this means that schools can dispose of tobacco or cigarette papers as they think appropriate but this should not include returning them to the pupil.
- **Fireworks** found as a result of a search must be reported to a senior leader. Fireworks may be retained or disposed of but should not be returned to the pupil.
- If a member of staff finds a **pornographic image**, they must report it to a senior leader. The senior leader may dispose of the image unless its possession constitutes a specified offence (i.e. it is extreme or child pornography) in which case it must be delivered to the police as soon as reasonably practicable. Images found on a mobile phone or other electronic device can be deleted unless it is necessary to pass them to the police.
- Where an **article that has been (or could be) used to commit an offence or to cause personal injury or damage to property** is found it must be reported to a senior leader. The article may be delivered to the police or returned to the owner. It may also be retained or disposed of.
- Where a member of staff finds **an item which is banned under the school rules** it must be reported to a senior leader who will take into account all relevant circumstances and use their professional judgement to decide whether to return it to its owner, retain it or dispose of it.
- Any **weapons or items which are evidence of an offence** must be passed to the police as soon as

possible.

#### 14) Statutory guidance on the disposal of controlled drugs and stolen items

- It is up to a senior leader to decide whether there is a good reason not to deliver stolen items or controlled drugs to the police. In determining what is a “good reason” for not delivering **controlled drugs or stolen items** to the police the senior leader must have regard to the following guidance issued by the Secretary of State:
- **In determining what is a ‘good reason’ for not delivering controlled drugs or stolen items to the police, the senior leader should take into account all relevant circumstances and use their professional judgement to determine whether they can safely dispose of a seized article.**
- Where the senior leader is 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.
- With regard to stolen items, it would not be reasonable or desirable to involve the police in dealing with low value items such as pencil cases. However, the senior leader may judge it appropriate to contact the police if the items are valuable (iPods/laptops) or illegal (alcohol/fireworks).

#### 15) Statutory guidance for dealing with electronic devices

- Where the person conducting the search finds an electronic device that is prohibited by the school rules or that they reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be, used to commit an offence or cause personal injury or damage to property, they must report it to a senior leader who may examine any data or files on the device where there is a good reason to do so. The senior leader may also delete data or files if they think there is a good reason to do so, unless they are going to give the device to the police. This power applies to all schools and there is no need to have parental consent to search through a young person’s mobile phone if it has been seized in a lawful ‘without consent’ search and is prohibited by the school rules or is reasonably suspected of being, or being likely to be, used to commit an offence or cause personal injury or damage to property.
- The member of staff must have regard to the following guidance issued by the Secretary of State when determining what is a “good reason” for examining or erasing the contents of an electronic device:
- In determining a ‘good reason’ to examine or erase the data or files the staff member should reasonably suspect that the data or file on the device in question has been, or could be, used to cause harm, to disrupt teaching or break the school rules.
- If an electronic device that is prohibited by the school rules has been seized and the member of staff has reasonable grounds to suspect that it contains evidence in relation to an offence, they must give the device to the police as soon as it is reasonably practicable. Material on the device that is suspected to be evidence relevant to an offence, or that is a pornographic image of a

child or an extreme pornographic image, should not be deleted prior to giving the device to the police.<sup>23</sup>

- If a staff member does not find any material that they suspect is evidence in relation to an offence, and decides not to give the device to the police, they can decide whether it is appropriate to delete any files or data from the device or to retain the device as evidence of a breach of school discipline.
- All school staff should be aware that behaviours linked to sexting put a child in danger. Trustees should ensure sexting and the school's approach to it is reflected in the child protection policy<sup>4</sup>. The UK Council for Child Internet Safety. (UKCCIS) Education Group has recently published the advice - [sexting in schools and colleges - responding to incidents and safeguarding young people](#)

**Also note:**

- Senior Leaders should also take account of any additional guidance and procedures on the retention and disposal of items that have been put in place by the school.

**16) Telling parents and dealing with complaints**

- The school is not required to inform parents before a search takes place or to seek their consent to search their child.
- There is no legal requirement to make or keep a record of a search (although we will put this onto the pupil's behaviour log).
- The school will inform the individual pupil's parents or guardians where alcohol, illegal drugs or potentially harmful substances are found, though there is no legal requirement to do so.
- Complaints about screening or searching should be dealt with through the normal school complaints procedure.

**ASSOCIATED POLICIES**

**This policy should be read in conjunction with:**

- Behaviour management policy
- Use of reasonable force policy

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<sup>2</sup> Section 62 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 defines prohibited images of children. Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigrations Act

<sup>3</sup> defines extreme pornographic images.

<sup>4</sup> See Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

- Drugs and substance abuse policy
- Anti-bullying policy

### Sources of information

- [Use of Reasonable Force - advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies Behaviour and Discipline in Schools](#)
- [Behaviour in Schools - advice for head teachers and school staff](#)
- [Information Commissioner for advice on the Data Protection Act](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education statutory guidance for schools and colleges](#)
- [UK Council for Child Internet Safety- UKCCIS Sexting in schools and colleges -responding to incidents and safeguarding young people](#)

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Review date: Following any updating of DfE guidance