

Weapons and Prohibited Items Policy

The Bridge



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Introduction

The purpose of this policy/practice guidance is to state clearly that the deliberate and intentional bringing in and use of weapons on our school site will not be tolerated. The use of such weapons on site would create unacceptable risks of bullying, injury and death and is extremely intimidating and frightening for pupils and adults alike. If a pupil deliberately and intentionally brings a weapon onto the school site, the pupil will be placed on a fixed term exclusion and a disciplinary hearing will be carried out. The policy also relates to all other prohibited items that are specified within the behaviour policy.

Purpose and aim

At The Bridge the purpose of this policy/practice guidance is to clearly set out the preventative actions in place to prevent the use of any weapons on our site. This policy/practice guidance will also show the direct actions a school will take around the use of weapons on site considering the full context around each and every incident.

At The Bridge we are committed to the safety and well-being of all our pupils, staff and parents and will always take immediate action to reduce the risk of harm to any individual on our school site.

What is a weapon?

For the purpose of this Policy a “weapon” is:

- a firearm of any description, including starting pistols, air guns and any type of replica or toy gun, pellet guns or BB guns;
- knives, including all variations of bladed objects i.e., pocket knives, craft knives, scissors etc;
- explosives, including fireworks, aerosol sprays, lighters, matches;
- laser pens or other objects, even if manufactured for a non-violent purpose but has a potentially violent use i.e., the purpose of keeping or carrying the object is for use, or threat of use, as a weapon.
- Nunchucks, death stars and other martial arts objects.
- Screwdrivers, hammers, chisels, bradles and any tool that could be offensively used.
- Razor, razor blades or chains.

What are prohibited items?

- Drugs
- Legal highs
- Alcohol

Preventative Strategies

Recognition For all schools and settings, it is important to develop appropriate strategies to prevent the issue of weapon misuse or any contextual issues around the misuse of weapons such as children having them to ‘feel safe’ from peers or gangs.

Firstly, and most importantly for schools and settings is recognition that incidents where children bring weapons onto site may happen intentionally as well as unintentionally even with the most stringent of policies. In these cases, the immediate actions taken by staff must be prompt and consistent and therefore ALL staff must know and understand this policy and the expectations of keeping children safe. In any circumstance where this occurs it is important that senior leaders take forward any learning from such incidents to improve policy, revise training and improve practice.

Creating a safeguarding culture

For pupils and staff to feel safe it is necessary that everyone agrees to and works within the school’s 3 ethos and culture of vigilance and positively contributes to the sharing of information where there may be risk. By creating a strong culture of safeguarding within school all individuals accessing the site should feel safe to raise concerns, seek support and for a seamless and consistent response to incidents to be followed. To create this environment, the whole workforce and pupils should receive appropriate learning and training around the expectations upon them if a weapon may be brought onto site. This includes, how to raise the alarm, procedures for lockdown, use of social media and

critical incident response. Staff and pupils should feel able to contribute to this learning/training to understand what to do in several potentially different circumstances.

Effective use of the Curriculum

Having an effective curriculum in place via SMSC or PSHE should support pupils in understanding the risks around the use of weapons, the legal implications of carrying weapons and the school's response to such incidents. A curriculum that allows strong discussion around the use of weapons may act preventatively to allow pupils to think twice about the consequences of carrying a weapon and equally may create opportunities for pupils to share useful intelligence around peer-on-peer abuse, gang related behaviours and contextual issues in the local area that may impact on the increased use of weapons. Any such intelligence shared would need to be passed on to the appropriate front door services, police and social care.

Working with parents

Parents need to be aware of the school's stringent policy around weapons and support the decision made by senior leaders in the event of an incident. Parents should always be vigilant of the behaviours of their own children and seek support and intervention when necessary. If parents believe that their child may be carrying a weapon they should inform the school immediately and the police in order to protect not only their child but other children and adults.

By sharing the information immediate intervention can be offered and a plan of support and services could be put in place without an incident occurring.

By continuing good communication between home and school a positive safety plan could be created to manage the safety and the well-being of any child who may need it. Working with partnership agencies/signposting services Multi agency working can consolidate in house procedures in schools/settings.

By accessing advice, support and guidance when required, effective decisions can be made in collaboration to improve outcomes for children who may be at risk of harm. Seeking advice and guidance can act as a preventative measure so that the right course of action is taken at the earliest opportunity. If schools continue to promote positive working relationships with front door services such as the police and social care, effective responses and partnership working can achieve positive outcomes for children. It is important that signposting is also available to pupils if they don't feel confident raising an issue to staff or a peer. It is useful to have a resource board with support services on a wide range of issues so young people can seek their own solutions should they wish to. In the same way external services or support programmes could be brought in to talk to young people about specific issues in support of the prevention of peer-on-peer abuse.

Searching, Confiscation and Screening

Searching, screening and confiscation is conducted in line with the DfE's [latest guidance on searching, screening and confiscation](#).

Confiscation

Any prohibited items (listed in section 3) found in a pupil's possession as a result of a search will be confiscated. These items will not be returned to the pupil.

We will also confiscate any item that is harmful or detrimental to school discipline. These items will be returned to pupils after discussion with senior leaders and parents, if appropriate.

Searching a pupil

Searches will only be carried out by a member of staff who has been authorised to do so by the headteacher, or by the headteacher themselves.

Subject to the exception below, the authorised member of staff carrying out the search will be of the same sex as the pupil, and there will be another member of staff present as a witness to the search.

An authorised member of staff of a different sex to the pupil can carry out a search without another member of staff as a witness if:

- The authorised 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 the 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 an authorised member of staff conducts a search without a witness, they should immediately report this to another member of staff, and ensure a written record of the search is kept.

If the authorised member of staff considers a search to be necessary, but is not required urgently, they will 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 will be supervised and kept away from other pupils.

A search can be carried out if the authorised 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.

An appropriate location for the search will be found. Where possible, this will be away from other pupils. The search will 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.

Before carrying out a search the authorised member of staff will:

- Assess whether there is an urgent need for a search
- Assess whether not doing the search would put other pupils or staff at risk
- Consider whether the search would pose a safeguarding risk to the pupil
- Explain to the pupil why they are being searched
- Explain to the pupil what a search entails – e.g. I will ask you to turn out your pockets and remove your scarf
- Explain how and where the search will be carried out
- Give the pupil the opportunity to ask questions
- Seek the pupil's co-operation

If the pupil refuses to agree to a search, the member of staff can give an appropriate behaviour sanction.

If they still refuse to co-operate, the member of staff will contact the Headteacher or DSL to try and determine why the pupil is refusing to comply.

The authorised member of staff will then decide whether to use reasonable force to search the pupil. This decision will be made on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration whether conducting the search will prevent the pupil harming themselves or others, damaging property or from causing disorder.

The authorised member of staff can use reasonable force to search for any prohibited items identified in section 3, but not to search for items that are only identified in the school rules.

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

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

Outer clothing includes:

- Any item of clothing that is not worn immediately over a garment that is being worn wholly next to the skin or being worn as underwear (e.g. a jumper or jacket being worn over a t-shirt)
- Hats, scarves, gloves, shoes, boots

Searching pupils' possessions

Possessions means any items that the pupil has or appears to have control of, including:

- Desks
- Lockers
- Bags

A pupil's possessions can be searched for any item if the pupil agrees to the search. If the pupil does not agree to the search, staff can still carry out a search for prohibited items (listed in section 3) and items identified in the school rules.

An authorised member of staff can search a pupil's possessions when the pupil and another member of staff are present.

If there is a serious risk of harm if the search is not conducted immediately, or it is not reasonably practicable to summon another member of staff, the search can be carried out by a single authorised member of staff.

Informing the designated safeguarding lead (DSL)

The staff member who carried out the search should inform the DSL without delay:

- Of any incidents where the member of staff had reasonable grounds to suspect a pupil was in possession of a prohibited item as listed in section 3
- If they believe that a search has revealed a safeguarding risk

All searches for prohibited items (listed in section 3), including incidents where no items were found, will be recorded in the school's safeguarding system.

Informing parents

Parents will always be informed of any search for a prohibited item (listed in section 3). A member of staff will tell the parents as soon as is reasonably practicable:

- What happened
- What was found, if anything
- What has been confiscated, if anything
- What action the school has taken, including any sanctions that have been applied to their child

Support after a search

Irrespective of whether any items are found as the result of any search, the school will consider whether the pupil may be suffering or likely to suffer harm and whether any specific support is needed (due to the reasons for the search, the search itself, or the outcome of the search).

If this is the case, staff will follow the school's safeguarding policy and speak to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL will consider if pastoral support, an early help intervention or a referral to children's social care is appropriate.

Strip searches

The authorised member of staff's power to search outlined above **does not** enable them to conduct a strip search (removing more than the outer clothing) and strip searches on school premises shall only be carried out by police officers in accordance with the [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(PACE\) Code C](#).

Before calling the police into school, staff will 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 will consider whether introducing the potential for a strip search through police involvement is absolutely necessary, and will always ensure that other appropriate, less invasive approaches have been exhausted first.

Once the police are on school premises, the decision on whether to conduct a strip search lies solely with them. The school will advocate for the safety and wellbeing of the pupil(s) involved. Staff retain a duty of care to the pupil involved and should advocate for pupil wellbeing at all times.

Communication and record-keeping

Where reasonably possible and unless there is an immediate risk of harm, staff will contact at least 1 of the pupil's parents to inform them that the police are going to strip search the pupil before strip search takes place, and ask them if they would like to come into school to act as the pupil's appropriate adult. If the school can't get in touch with the parents, or they aren't able to come into school to act as the appropriate adult, a member of staff can act as the appropriate adult (see below for the role of the appropriate adult).

The pupil's parents will always be informed by a staff member once a strip search has taken place. The school will keep records of strip searches that have been conducted on school premises, and monitor them for any trends that emerge.

Who will be present

For any strip search that involves exposure of intimate body parts, there will be at least 2 people present other than the pupil, except in urgent cases where there is risk of serious harm to the pupil or others.

One of these must be the appropriate adult, except 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

If this is the case, a record will be made of the pupil's decision, and it will be signed by the appropriate adult.

No more than 2 people other than the pupil and appropriate adult will be present, except in the most exceptional circumstances.

The appropriate adult will:

- Act to safeguard the rights, entitlement and welfare of the pupil
- Not be a police officer or otherwise associated with the police
- Not be the headteacher
- Be of the same sex as the pupil, unless the pupil specifically requests an adult who is not of the same sex

Except for an appropriate adult of a different sex if the pupil specifically requests it, no one of a different sex will be permitted to be present and the search will not be carried out anywhere where the pupil could be seen by anyone else.

Care after a strip search

After any strip search, the pupil will be given appropriate support, irrespective of whether any suspected item is found. The pupil will also be given the opportunity to express their views about the strip search and the events surrounding it.

As with other searches, the school will consider whether the pupil may be suffering or likely to suffer harm and whether any further specific support is needed (due to the reasons for the search, the search itself, or the outcome of the search).

Staff will follow the school's safeguarding policy and speak to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL will consider if, in addition to pastoral support, an early help intervention or a referral to children's social care is appropriate.

Any pupil(s) who have been strip searched more than once and/or groups of pupils who may be more likely to be subject to strip searching will be given particular consideration, and staff will consider any preventative approaches that can be taken.

Screening

All students who attend The Bridge are screened on arrival.

- Staff use the wand that is provided.

- Students are wanded outside of their clothes and staff are not invasive of intimate areas
- All students are treated equally
- This is performed at the front of the building in reception not in an enclosed area

Recording

- 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

What follow-up action was taken as a consequence of the search

Taking action in the event of a weapon on site

If it has been identified that a weapon is on site and the appropriate searching and confiscating has occurred, then the school must begin a full and thorough investigation into what has occurred. If it can be proven that a weapon was brought on site with intent to harm then immediate action should occur including contacting the police and parents immediately. The pupil should be isolated immediately. If the weapon has been identified because it has been used to harm e.g. another pupil or member of staff, the school should instigate its critical incident management protocols immediately inclusive of lock down procedures, secure and isolate the student and weapon if possible and again contact the police immediately. If the context of the situation is not so easily identified then a full and thorough investigation is required to establish the school's next course of action.

Gathering the facts In all circumstances, staff need to speak to all the pupils involved separately, gain a statement of facts from them and use consistent language and open questions for each account. The easiest way to do this is not to have a line of questioning but to ask the pupils to tell you what happened. Only interrupt the pupil from this to gain clarity with open questions, 'where, when, why, who'. (What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?) A full and clear record of exactly what the pupil has said in their own language should be made (and no individual interpretation of the facts made which could impact on the disclosure) and stored following each school/setting's own recording protocols (paper or electronic systems).

Consider intent

From the information gathered the next step would be to consider intent. Did the pupil intend to bring a weapon onto the school site in order to harm someone in a deliberate act or did the young person bring the weapon on site as a form of defence or for their own safety? Both situations are of equal concern, however one shows a deliberate attempt of harm and both circumstances may have different outcomes.

Deciding on the next course of action

From the outcome of the investigation the school must decide on the level of risk the pupil poses in school. If the risk is clear and the intent is obvious then a fixed term exclusion and a disciplinary hearing may follow or the decision to permanently exclude may be made following the necessary protocols. However, depending on the intent, the age of the child and also the circumstances surrounding the incident or the contextual issues it may be a fixed term exclusion is given followed by a risk assessment/safety plan put in place following the pupil's return to school.

Returning to school/safety planning Safety planning is a positive way of supporting a child who may benefit from a planned approach to support or intervention following an incident where a weapon has been brought to school. Safety plans support the child by considering the behaviour behind the use of a weapon and plan ways to manage any identified risks/triggers and seek support from adults and peers. They are inclusive of parents and staff and are a planned intervention to support young people

in feeling secure in the school/setting, helping young people identify behaviours that may leave them feeling anxious or at risk and have strategies that they can apply to keep themselves feeling safe. The language of safety planning is more positive than risk assessment and can give security to the child that a joined-up approach is being followed by all in school.

Linked Policies

Child Protection

Behaviour Policy

Positive Handling