Wolsey House Primary School

Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

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Policy review date: August 2027

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Policy information

School	Wolsey House Primary School
Headteacher	Mr S Powell
Policy owner	Headteacher
Reviewed with	Governing body
Review cycle	At least annually and following material legal or guidance changes
Related policies	Behaviour; Child Protection and Safeguarding; Online Safety; SEND; Restrictive Intervention and Positive Handling; Staff Code of Conduct; Complaints

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1. Purpose and principles

This policy explains how Wolsey House Primary School will use its powers to search and screen pupils and to confiscate items. Its purpose is to protect pupils and staff, support a calm and safe learning environment and ensure that any interference with a pupil's privacy is lawful, justified, necessary and proportionate.

The best interests, dignity, safety and welfare of the child will remain central. Searching is not routine and will never be used to humiliate, intimidate or punish a pupil. Staff will consider whether the circumstances reveal a safeguarding, SEND, disability, medical, mental-health or exploitation concern and will provide appropriate support after any search.

In this policy, "parent" includes a carer and any person with parental responsibility. "Pupil" includes a child in the Early Years Foundation Stage through to Year 6.

2. Legal and guidance framework

This policy has regard to current legislation and Department for Education guidance, including:

- Education Act 1996, particularly sections 550ZA to 550ZC;
- Education and Inspections Act 2006, particularly sections 89, 90 and 94;
- Schools (Specification and Disposal of Articles) Regulations 2012;
- Equality Act 2010;
- Human Rights Act 1998 and Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights;
- Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and PACE Codes A and C;
- Searching, Screening and Confiscation: Advice for Schools (DfE, July 2022, updated landing page July 2023);
- Behaviour in Schools: Advice for Headteachers and School Staff;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026;
- Mobile Phones in Schools statutory guidance (2026);
- Restrictive Interventions, including the Use of Reasonable Force, in Schools (effective from 1 April 2026); and
- UKCIS guidance on sharing nudes and semi-nudes.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Headteacher

- authorises suitable members of staff in writing to search for specified items or all searchable items;
- ensures sufficient authorised staff are appropriately trained and understand the rights of pupils;
- maintains strategic oversight so searches are safe, proportionate and appropriate;
- ensures the policy is communicated and aligned with the Behaviour Policy; and
- reviews records, patterns and any disproportionate impact with support from the DSL and Deputy Headteacher responsible for behaviour.

The current written authorisation register will be maintained separately from this policy. A member of staff may not be required to conduct a search if they refuse.

3.2 Designated Safeguarding Lead

- is informed of every search for a prohibited item and every search or confiscation revealing a safeguarding concern;
- considers the circumstances against wider risks, including exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, self-harm, substance misuse and unmet need;

- takes action under the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, including referral to children's social care where required; and
- coordinates appropriate support and contributes to monitoring.

3.3 Authorised staff

Only the headteacher or a member of staff authorised by the headteacher may conduct a search using the statutory search power. Authorisation may cover all searchable items or specified items only. Authorised staff must act within the scope of their authorisation and this policy.

4. Searchable items

4.1 Prohibited items

The prohibited items defined in legislation are:

- knives or weapons;
- alcohol;
- illegal drugs;
- stolen items;
- tobacco and cigarette papers;
- fireworks;
- pornographic images; and
- any article that a member of staff reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be, used to commit an offence or cause personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person, including the pupil.

4.2 School-banned items for which a search may be made

In addition to prohibited items, the school rules identify the following as items for which an authorised search may be made because they are detrimental to safety, good order or a mobile phone-free environment:

- e-cigarettes, vapes and vaping liquids or accessories;
- lighters and matches;
- a mobile phone, smartwatch or other personal smart/communications device retained by a pupil contrary to section 4.1 of the Behaviour Policy; and
- any other item expressly identified in the published Behaviour Policy as an item for which a search may be made.

5. Deciding whether to search

5.1 Searches with the pupil's agreement

Under common law, a member of school staff may search a pupil for any item where the pupil agrees. The pupil must understand why the search is proposed and how it will be conducted so that the agreement is informed. Staff should seek cooperation calmly and should not misrepresent their powers.

5.2 Searches using the statutory power

The headteacher or an authorised member of staff may search a pupil or their possessions without agreement where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil has a prohibited item or an item identified in the school rules as searchable.

Reasonable grounds may arise from information received, something seen or heard, a pupil's behaviour, relevant CCTV footage or other reliable circumstances. Staff must record the factual basis

for the decision rather than relying on stereotypes, protected characteristics or generalised assumptions.

5.3 Assessment before searching

Before a search, the authorised member of staff will assess:

- what item is suspected and the reasonable grounds for that suspicion;
- the urgency and the risk of not recovering the item;
- whether a less intrusive response would be effective;
- the pupil's age, understanding, communication and individual circumstances;
- any SEND, disability, medical, religious, cultural, trauma or safeguarding considerations and required reasonable adjustments;
- where and by whom the search can be conducted safely and respectfully; and
- whether advice is required from the headteacher, DSL, SENDCO or police.

5.4 Explaining the search and seeking cooperation

Before the search, the member of staff should explain, in an accessible and age-appropriate way, why the search is being conducted, what it will involve, where it will take place and what may happen to any item found. The pupil must be allowed to ask questions. A trusted adult or communication support should be offered where appropriate, provided this does not create an unacceptable delay or risk.

5.5 Where a pupil does not cooperate

Staff will consider why the pupil is not cooperating, use de-escalation and make reasonable adjustments. If the search is necessary but not urgent, the pupil will be supervised away from other pupils while advice is sought from the headteacher, DSL or another suitable senior member of staff.

A proportionate behaviour consequence may be considered for a refusal to follow a reasonable instruction, taking account of SEND, disability, communication and safeguarding factors. A consequence must never be used to coerce apparent agreement to a search.

6. Conducting a search

6.1 Location, privacy and dignity

A search will take place on school premises or at another place where the member of staff has lawful control or charge of the pupil, such as a school visit. Wherever possible it will take place away from other pupils in a suitable private location. The approach must protect dignity and avoid unnecessary exposure, humiliation or distress.

6.2 Sex of the searcher and witness

Normally, the member of staff conducting the search must be the same sex as the pupil and another member of staff must be present as a witness. The witness does not need to be authorised to search.

The limited statutory exception permits a search by a member of staff of the opposite sex and/or without a witness only where the member of staff reasonably believes that serious harm will be caused to a person if the search is not conducted urgently and it is not reasonably practicable, in the time available, to obtain a same-sex searcher or witness. A search conducted without a witness must be reported immediately to another member of staff and fully recorded.

6.3 Extent of a staff search

A member of staff may search outer clothing, pockets, possessions, desks and drawers. Outer clothing includes clothing not worn wholly next to the skin or immediately over underwear, as well as

hats, shoes, boots and scarves. Staff must be sensitive to clothing worn for religious, cultural, disability or medical reasons and make reasonable adjustments.

Staff must not require a pupil to remove any clothing other than outer clothing and must never conduct an intimate or strip search.

6.4 Searching possessions

Possessions include any goods over which the pupil has, or appears to have, control, including bags, desks and drawers. A possession will normally be searched in the presence of the pupil and another member of staff. The limited urgent exception applies only where serious harm may otherwise be caused and it is not reasonably practicable to summon another member of staff.

6.5 Use of reasonable force

Reasonable force may be used only where lawful, necessary and proportionate to search for a prohibited item. It must not be used to search for an item banned solely under the school rules, including a mobile phone, smartwatch, vape, lighter or matches. Any consideration or use of force must follow the school's Restrictive Intervention and Positive Handling Policy and the DfE guidance effective from 1 April 2026.

Any significant incident involving force must be recorded and reported to parents as soon as practicable in accordance with the school's restrictive-intervention procedures. Staff must consider medical attention, safeguarding action, post-incident support and review.

7. Police involvement and strip searches

7.1 Calling the police

The headteacher or senior leader will consider the National Police Chiefs' Council guidance, When to Call the Police. Police involvement will not be automatic. Before calling police, the school will consider the seriousness and urgency of the risk, safeguarding implications and whether the suspected item can be recovered safely by less intrusive means. The DSL must be informed.

7.2 School staff must not strip search

A strip search involves the removal of more than outer clothing. School staff have no power to conduct one. A strip search on school premises may only be conducted by police under PACE Codes A and C. Although the decision and conduct are police matters, the school retains its duty of care and must advocate for the pupil's safety, dignity and wellbeing.

7.3 Before a potential police strip search

Before police are called where a strip search may result, the headteacher and DSL will balance the risk to the pupil's mental and physical wellbeing against the risk of not recovering the item and ensure that less invasive approaches have been exhausted. The SENDCO will be consulted where relevant. Unless there is an immediate risk of harm and where reasonably possible, a parent will be informed before the search.

7.4 Safeguards during a police strip search

The police are responsible for complying with PACE. Where exposure of intimate body parts is involved, except in an urgent case involving risk of serious harm:

- at least two people other than the pupil must be present, one of whom must be an appropriate adult;
- the school should facilitate a parent acting as appropriate adult where possible;
- police officers conducting the search must be the same sex as the pupil;

- no person of a different sex may be present unless specifically requested by the pupil as their appropriate adult; and
- the location must preserve confidentiality and prevent the pupil being seen by others.

An appropriate adult is independent of the police and safeguards the child's rights, entitlements and welfare. It may be a parent, relative, social worker, teacher or other suitable adult. The appropriate adult will be determined according to the individual circumstances and PACE; the school will not rely on a fixed list of named staff.

7.5 Notification, records and aftercare

A parent must always be informed by the school once a strip search has taken place. Every police search and any strip search on school premises will be recorded on CPOMS. The DSL will coordinate support whether or not an item was found, enable the pupil to express their views and consider the impact on other pupils and staff. Repeated strip searches and any disproportionate pattern will trigger senior review and preventative action.

8. After any search

After any search, whether or not an item is found, staff will:

- check the pupil's immediate welfare and offer appropriate reassurance and support;
- consider whether the reason, conduct or outcome suggests that the pupil or another child is suffering or likely to suffer harm;
- speak to the DSL or deputy without delay where a safeguarding concern exists;
- consider SEND, disability, medical, pastoral or early-help support;
- listen to and record the pupil's views where appropriate;
- manage any item found under section 11; and
- apply any behaviour consequence lawfully, fairly and proportionately under the Behaviour Policy.

9. Recording and informing parents

9.1 Recording

Wolsey House will record every search on CPOMS, including searches where no item is found. The record will include:

- date, time and location;
- the pupil searched;
- the searcher, witness and any other person present;
- the item sought and whether the search relied on agreement or the statutory power;
- the reasonable grounds, risk assessment and adjustments made;
- whether the pupil cooperated;
- the extent and outcome of the search;
- any force used;
- items found and how they were managed;
- parental notification;
- the pupil's views where appropriate; and
- safeguarding, behaviour and support follow-up.

The DSL must be informed of every search for a prohibited item, every police search and any search revealing a safeguarding concern. Electronic recording does not replace an immediate verbal safeguarding report.

9.2 Informing parents

Parents will be informed as soon as practicable of every search conducted under this policy, its outcome, anything confiscated and any resulting action. Parents must always be informed of a search for a prohibited item and after any police strip search. Notification may be delayed only where immediate contact would create a safeguarding risk; the DSL will record the reason and decide the appropriate action.

10. Screening

Screening means using a walk-through or hand-held metal detector to scan pupils for weapons before entry. Wolsey House does not routinely screen pupils.

If screening is considered necessary, the headteacher will consult the local police, assess proportionality and equality implications, establish safeguarding and staffing arrangements, make reasonable adjustments and inform pupils and parents in advance about what will happen and why. Refusal to be screened will prompt consideration of the reasons and whether a lawful search is necessary; refusal alone does not permit an unlawful search.

11. Confiscation, retention and disposal

11.1 General principles

A member of staff may confiscate, retain or dispose of an item as a disciplinary penalty where reasonable. Staff will consider safety, the item's nature and value, the pupil's circumstances, the purpose of confiscation, how long it should be retained and whether it should be returned to the pupil, a parent, the owner, the police or another agency. Items will be stored securely and an auditable handover made where appropriate.

11.2 Statutory handling of items found

Item	Action
Controlled drugs or suspected controlled/harmful substances	Deliver to the police as soon as possible unless there is a good reason to dispose of them safely. Use a witness, secure packaging and record the police reference and handover.
Alcohol	Retain or dispose of it; do not return it to the pupil.
Tobacco or cigarette papers	Retain or dispose of them; do not return them to the pupil.
Fireworks	Retain or dispose of them; do not return them to the pupil.
Stolen items	Deliver to the police as soon as reasonably practicable, unless there is a good reason to return the item to its owner or dispose of it. Take account of value and circumstances.
Weapons or items that are evidence of an offence	Deliver to the police as soon as reasonably practicable.
Items used or likely to be used to cause injury or property damage	Deliver to the police as soon as reasonably practicable.

Item	Action
Pornographic image	Dispose of it unless there are reasonable grounds to suspect it is evidence of an offence, in which case deliver it to the police as soon as reasonably practicable.
School-banned item	Retain, return to a parent or dispose of it as is reasonable under this policy and the Behaviour Policy. Vapes, vaping materials, lighters and matches will not be returned to a pupil.

11.3 Suspected controlled drugs

Staff will not taste, test or handle an unknown substance unnecessarily. Where temporary possession is necessary, a second adult should witness the process; the item should be sealed, labelled with the date, time and witnesses, stored securely and passed to police. The DSL will consider safeguarding, medical attention, exploitation and support. Parents will normally be informed unless doing so would place a child at risk; that decision will be made and recorded by the DSL.

11.4 Mobile phones and smart technology

Under the Behaviour Policy, pupils who bring a permitted phone for travel must switch it off and hand it to the designated member of staff for secure storage in the school office. A retained phone or smart device may be confiscated and will normally be collected by a parent or carer. The duration and arrangements must be proportionate and any agreed medical, safeguarding or SEND exception must be respected.

12. Electronic devices and data

12.1 Examining data or files

Where an electronic device has been lawfully confiscated, a member of staff authorised by the headteacher may examine data or files if there is good reason to do so. A good reason exists where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the data or file has been or could be used to cause harm, disrupt teaching or the safe environment of the school, or commit an offence. The examination must be necessary, proportionate and limited to what is relevant.

12.2 Nude or semi-nude images and suspected child sexual abuse material

If staff suspect that a device contains a nude or semi-nude image of a child, they must not intentionally view, copy, print, share, store or save the image. They will confiscate the device without exploring its contents and report verbally to the DSL immediately. The DSL will follow current UKCIS and safeguarding guidance and seek police or children's social care advice where appropriate.

12.3 Evidence of an offence and deletion

If data or a file may be evidence of an offence, it must not be deleted and the device or evidence will be passed to police as soon as reasonably practicable. Where it is not suspected evidence of an offence, an authorised member of staff may delete data where there is a good reason—normally because continued existence is likely to cause harm or disruption—and the pupil or parent refuses to delete it. The decision and rationale will be recorded.

13. Safeguarding, equality and SEND

Searches and confiscations can be distressing and can affect pupils differently. Staff will avoid discriminatory assumptions and make reasonable adjustments. Consideration will be given to age,

sex, race, religion or belief, disability, SEND, communication, medical needs, gender identity, trauma, care experience and any known safeguarding history, while maintaining safety.

Possession of a prohibited or harmful item may indicate exploitation, coercion, self-harm, substance misuse, abuse, harmful sexual behaviour or another unmet need. The school's safeguarding and disciplinary processes may operate alongside one another. Support does not prevent proportionate action where necessary to protect others.

14. Monitoring, oversight and training

The Deputy Headteacher responsible for behaviour will review search and confiscation records every half term as part of the school's behaviour analysis. This will include the number, type, reason, outcome and location of searches; use of force; police involvement; items found; repeated searches; pupil and parent feedback; and patterns by pupil group where data permits safe and meaningful analysis.

Findings and recommended actions will be reported to the headteacher. Governors will receive regular anonymised information sufficient to monitor legality, safeguarding, equality, disproportionality and policy effectiveness. Small-number information will be handled in a way that protects confidentiality.

Authorised staff will receive appropriate training in lawful powers, safe searching, de-escalation, dignity and privacy, SEND and reasonable adjustments, safeguarding, recording and confiscated-item handling. All staff will understand that they must seek authorised support and must not conduct a strip search.

15. Complaints

Concerns about the application of this policy should normally be raised promptly with the headteacher. Formal complaints will be considered under the school's Complaints Policy. A safeguarding concern about an adult's conduct must instead be reported under the school's allegations and low-level concerns procedures.

16. Review and publication

This policy will be published or made available alongside the Behaviour Policy and communicated to staff, pupils and parents in an accessible form. It will be reviewed at least annually and sooner following a serious incident, identified disproportionate impact or a material change in legislation or guidance.

Appendix A: Search decision and recording checklist

☐ Identify the suspected item and the legal basis for searching.

☐ Record the objective reasonable grounds and assess urgency and risk.

☐ Check authorisation and whether the search is within its scope.

☐ Consider less intrusive options, safeguarding information and reasonable adjustments.

☐ Explain why, how and where; invite questions and seek cooperation.

☐ Use a same-sex searcher and staff witness unless the urgent serious-harm exception lawfully applies.

☐ Search only outer clothing, pockets, possessions, desks or lockers; protect dignity.

☐ Do not use force for an item banned solely by school rules.

☐ Secure and manage any item in accordance with section 11.

☐ Check welfare, listen to the pupil and consider support or safeguarding action.

☐ Record the full incident on CPOMS and report verbally to the DSL where required.

☐ Inform the parent as soon as practicable and record the contact.

Appendix B: Minimum CPOMS record

Field	Details to record
Search	Date, time, location, pupil, item sought, legal basis and reasonable grounds
People	Searcher, authorisation, witness and anyone else present
Planning	Urgency/risk assessment, pupil explanation, cooperation and adjustments
Conduct	Extent of search, any exception to same-sex/witness rules and any force
Outcome	Item found or not found; confiscation, storage, disposal or police handover
Follow-up	Pupil's views, welfare, safeguarding/DSL action, support and behaviour response
Notification	Parent contact, time, person contacted and information given