Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

This policy is effective for all schools within The Mead Educational Trust.

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Revision History:

Version	Date	Author	Summary of Changes:
7.0	Dec 2025	CJO / ACU	Addition of '3.1 Proactive Searches'; Updated to reflect the needs of pupils with SEND; Updated links to DfE guidance on restrictive interventions; Reordered policy sections
6.1	Oct 2024	A Curran	Reviewed policy in light of changes made to DfE guidance in July 2023 and no changes necessary.
6.0	Nov 2022	A Curran	Renaming of policy – previously called 'Search and Offensive Weapons policy' Policy reworded considering the Dfe Guidance: 'Searching, Screening and Confiscation' July 2022
Earlier version history is available on request.			

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Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

1. Introduction

This policy has been developed to be read alongside the school's behaviour policy. It has been developed to ensure that our schools are safe environments for all pupils and staff, enabling them to safeguard and promote staff and pupil welfare. For further information, see Searching, Screening and Confiscation (publishing.service.gov.uk)

The policy is based on advice and guidance on powers available to principals and their staff conferred by several pieces of legislation, including the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006, the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and the DfE guidance on Searching, Screening and Confiscation (published July 2022). The policy will also take note of obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) Article 8, which gives pupils the right to respect for their private life and a reasonable level of personal privacy.

2. Scope

There are occasions when it might be necessary to determine whether a pupil is in possession of a 'prohibited', or other specified item that the school does not allow on site (see list below). In such circumstances, this policy may be applied after all other reasonable and appropriate approaches to resolve the concern have been exhausted

3. Proactive checks, searching and screening

3.1 Proactive checks (for pupils with significant SEND needs)

- In some TMET schools, staff supporting pupils with significant special educational needs and disabilities may occasionally need to look informally in a pupil's possessions, locker or outer clothing (e.g. hats, gloves, coats and jackets etc.) to locate expected items such as letters, money, medication or equipment. This is part of everyday support and is carried out transparently with the pupil where possible and does not constitute a search under this policy.
- Informal checks must never be used to look for prohibited items or where there is any suspicion that the pupil may be in possession of such an item. If there is any concern that a pupil may be carrying a prohibited item, staff must follow the formal search procedures in this policy, including seeking consent or, if necessary, conducting a search without consent under the lawful powers available to schools.
- TMET acknowledges that some pupils with significant learning needs, may come into possession of prohibited items innocently, for example by picking up or 'finding' objects without understanding the implications. Staff will respond proportionately, sensitively and in partnership with families, ensuring parents/carers are informed of any search and its outcome.

3.2 Searching

- Only the principal, or a member of staff authorised by the principal, can carry out a search. The principal can authorise individual members of staff to search for specific items, or all items set out in the school's behaviour policy
- A search may be carried out for any item with a pupil's consent.
- A search without consent may only be carried out if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil is in possession of a prohibited item.

- Staff will use age-appropriate and accessible language to seek consent and ensure the pupil understands what is being asked and the reason for the search.
- If a pupil refuses to cooperate, we will prioritise safeguarding and our duty of care to all pupils. This means balancing:
    - The safeguarding needs and wellbeing of the pupil suspected of possessing these items
    - The need to safeguard all pupils by removing harmful, illegal, or disruptive items.
- In exceptional circumstances, where there is an immediate risk of harm and all other reasonable strategies have been exhausted, the principal (and staff they authorise) may use reasonable force, where appropriate, to search for legally prohibited items only (not for items banned under the school rules only).
- Staff can search either on the school premises or elsewhere where they have lawful control or charge of the pupil, for example on school trips.
- For further information, see Restrictive interventions, include the use of reasonable force, in schools (GOV UK).

3.2.1 Strip searches (police-led searches only)

- A strip search is a search involving the removal of more than outer clothing.
- Strip searching can only be carried out by police officers and would only be considered as a last resort.
- Strip searches will be dealt with in accordance with the DfE Guidance: 'Searching, Screening and Confiscation' July 2022.
- Where a strip search takes place on school premises, there must be at least two people present in addition to the pupil, one of whom must be an appropriate adult (e.g. parent, relative, social worker or teacher).
- Strip searches are intrusive, can be traumatic, and should only occur in the most exceptional circumstances. TMET will always prioritise the child's dignity, safety and welfare when responding to such incidents.

3.3 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 premises. Schools have the legal power to screen pupils for weapons using a walk-through or hand-held metal detector without requiring consent.
- In TMET schools, screening would only be introduced in consultation with the police.
- Parents would be told that screening would happen during the year, but schools may be advised by the police not to provide exact dates to ensure that the screening is effective.
- Parents would be informed about what will be involved and why it will be introduced.
- If a pupil refuses to be screened, the school may refuse them entry to the premises. This will be treated as an unauthorised absence and not as a disciplinary suspension. Additionally, the member of staff will assess whether it is necessary to conduct a search (see above).

4. Prohibited items are:

- Knives or weapons
- Alcohol
- Illegal drugs
- Stolen items
- Tobacco and cigarette papers

- 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.)

In addition, the following items are not allowed at name of school:

- Vapes

5. Authorising members of staff to conduct a search

Within TMET, screening and searches are carried out by the Principal, or staff authorised by them. Staff members are entitled to refuse to do a search, unless they are named as a member of security staff. The Principal should ensure a culture of safe, proportionate and appropriate searching is maintained to safeguard the welfare of all pupils and staff. The Principal 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.

6. Before searching

Before conducting a search, staff should consider the pupil's cognitive and emotional needs and whether adapting their approach is necessary/required e.g. use visual aids or involving parents/carers. If an adaptation is required as per the pupil's EHCP, this should be followed with a positive handling plan or individual risk assessment.

Authorised staff at TMET schools will:

- Explain to the pupil: **why** they are being searched, **how** and **where** the search is going to take place.
- Seek cooperation of the pupil in the first instance. If the pupil refuses, the member of staff may consider a sanction under the school's behaviour policy.
- Consider whether a search must be conducted urgently, and whether it is appropriate to use reasonable force to search for 'prohibited' items only
- Find an appropriate place for the search, away from other pupils wherever possible.
- Ensure that the person undertaking the search is of the same sex as the pupil being searched **and** there is a witness present.
    - *N/B An exception to these requirements applies where a member of staff reasonably believes that there is a risk of serious harm to a person if the search is not carried out as a matter of urgency. In such circumstances, and where it is not reasonably practicable for the search to be carried out either by a member of staff of the same sex as the pupil and/or in the presence of another member of staff, an authorised member of staff may conduct the search regardless of sex and/or without a witness.*
    - *Where a search is conducted without a witness, the staff member must immediately report this to another member of staff and ensure that a record of the search is made in accordance with this policy.*

7. During searching

Authorised staff at TMET schools will:

- Conduct searches in a calm, private environment familiar to the pupil where possible.
- Ensure that only outer clothing, possessions, desks, drawers or lockers are searched, and only items of 'outer clothing' are removed, (e.g., coat, hats, shoes, boots, scarves);
- Be sensitive to asking pupils to remove items of clothing which hold religious significance;
- Only search a pupil's possessions in the presence of the pupil and another member of staff, unless there is a risk of serious harm if the search is delayed (see section 6).

8. After searching

Authorised staff at TMET schools will:

- Ensure that appropriate support is given to the pupil who has been searched;
- Notify the DSL, who will consider whether there are wider safeguarding risks and consider what support, interventions or referrals are needed;
- If appropriate, ensure that a sanction is given, in line with the school's behaviour policy, should the pupil be found in possession of a prohibited item;
- Inform parents of the search, the outcome and any confiscation as soon as possible;
- Record the search in CPOMS, regardless of whether an item is found or not. Records will include:
    - the time, date and location of the search
    - who conducted the search
    - what was being searched for
    - the reason for searching
    - what items, if any, were found
    - what follow up actions were taken as a consequence of the search
- TMET monitors the use of searches and screening to ensure they are used fairly, proportionately and without discrimination.

9. Confiscation

The authorised staff member conducting the search can confiscate anything that they have reasonable grounds for suspecting:

- poses a risk to staff or pupils
- is a prohibited item, or other item not allowed in school (listed in section 4 above)
- is evidence in relation to an offence

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 have acted lawfully.

A member of staff should inform parents of what, if anything, has been confiscated and the resulting action the school has taken, including any sanctions applied.

Any confiscated items will be dealt with in accordance with the DfE Guidance: 'Searching, Screening and Confiscation' July 2022, e.g.,

- Drugs, other controlled substances, stolen items and weapons should be delivered to the police;
- Alcohol, tobacco, cigarettes or fireworks may be retained or disposed of as appropriate, but should not be returned to the pupil;

- Pornographic images, if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that possession of the images constitutes a specified offence (i.e., it is extreme or child pornography) they must be delivered to the police as soon as reasonably practicable.

10. Electronic devices

- Where the person conducting the search finds an electronic device, they may examine any data or files on the device if they think there is a good reason to do so. However, if they suspect they may find a nude or semi-nude image they must never intentionally view the image or copy, print, share, store or save. If an indecent image of a child may be involved, the device must be confiscated, and the DSL will take appropriate action.
- Devices must be delivered to the police if any image, data or file indicates an offence. No data should be deleted.
- In exceptional circumstances, members of staff may dispose of the image or data if there is a 'good reason' to do so, in accordance with guidance from the Secretary of State:
  '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 cause harm to any person and the pupil and/or the parent refuses to delete the data or files themselves.