

Jigsaw Learning Trust

Weapons Policy & Practice Guidance 25-26

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Introduction

There are many reasons why children take a weapon into a school, and this could have a devastating and long-term impact on their future, whether the weapon is used or not. Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) highlights that some children, particularly those who are being criminally or sexually exploited, may be coerced or intimidated into carrying a weapon or begin to carry a weapon or knife for a sense of self-protection. The reasons why a child or young person carries a weapon can include fear, protection and peer pressure. It is imperative that school staff are curious and explore the reasons for each incident in their own individual circumstances.

The purpose of this policy is to clearly indicate the actions school will take in the event of a child bringing a weapon on to site. Immediate action will be taken where there is evidence of the deliberate and intentional bringing in and use of weapons on the school site. The use of such weapons on site would create unacceptable risks of bullying, injury and death and is extremely intimidating and frightening for children and adults alike.

If a child deliberately and intentionally brings a weapon onto the school site, the school will consider suspension and/or permanent exclusion in accordance with statutory guidance, taking account of all relevant circumstances.

Where there is an unidentified and immediate risk, the school may be placed in full or partial lockdown until the situation is resolved appropriately.

PURPOSE AND AIM

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

At Fulwell Infant and Ouston Primary School we are committed to the safety and well-being of all of our children, staff and parents and will always take immediate action to reduce the risk of harm to any individual on the school site.

This policy only relates to incidents where a weapon or knife has been brought into school. Where there is information about a student carrying a weapon or knife in the community then this should be discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The DSL should then share the information with the Police and Youth Justice Service.

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 or pointed objects i.e., zombie knives. pocketknives, craft knives, scissors etc;
- explosives, including fireworks, aerosol sprays, lighters, matches;
- a corrosive substance;
- 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;
- num chukkas, death stars and other martial arts objects;
- screwdrivers, hammers, chisels, bradles and any tool that could be offensively used;
- razor, razor blades or chains.



Preventative Strategies

Recognition

For all schools and settings, it is important to develop appropriate strategies in order 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 is the 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.

Where this occurs, senior leaders will take forward any learning from such critical incidents to improve policy, revise training and improve practice.

Staff should recognise that carrying a knife or weapon may be an indicator that a child is vulnerable to criminal exploitation, serious violence, coercion, gang association or other safeguarding concerns. Any such concerns must be considered within the school's safeguarding procedures and assessed on an individual basis

Creating a Safeguarding Culture

In order for children and staff to feel safe it is necessary that everyone agrees to and works within the school's ethos and culture of vigilance and positively contributes to the sharing of information where there may be risk. A strong culture of safeguarding within school ensures that all individuals accessing the site feel safe to raise concerns, seek support and allows for seamless and consistent responses to incidents to be followed. To create this environment, the whole workforce and children will receive appropriate learning and training around the expectations upon them in the event that 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 children should feel able to contribute to this learning/training to understand what to do in a number of potentially different circumstances.

Effective Use of the Curriculum

Having an effective curriculum in place via SMSC/PSHE/RSE will support children 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 children to think twice about the consequences of carrying a weapon and equally will create opportunities for children to share useful intelligence around child-on-child abuse, gang related behaviours and contextual issues in the local area that may impact on the increased use of weapons. Any such intelligence shared will be passed on to the appropriate Local Authority children's social care, and the police.

Teachable Moments

It is important to consider that when a child picks up and carries a knife, especially if they bring it into school because of fear or for self-protection, they may be a victim of criminal or sexual exploitation, and this may require a safeguarding or contextual safeguarding response. If there are concerns around a child being exploited this should be discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and a safeguarding referral submitted to the local authority. All staff should explore the reasons for each incident. It is necessary for all professionals to understand if the young person has brought in the weapon due to mental health concerns or for self-harm. Where a child is found to have brought a weapon or knife into school, or where there are reports that a child is carrying a weapon or knife, and the school have intervened, it is important we see this as a 'reachable or teachable moment.' A 'reachable or teachable moment' is a moment where a child will be more accepting to the offer of support and in such instances provide an opportunity for those involved to engage with the child and for the child to share information about any worries or concerns, they may have which could be placing them at risk. It is important that those involved try to engage with the child in a way that helps to gain a greater understanding of what is going on for the child, their vulnerabilities, any indicators of the child being at risk or/being exploited and think about what additional support they may

Working with Parents

Parents will be made aware of the school's s policy around weapons and should 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 will 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 school. 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. At Fulwell Infant and Ouston Primary School we will continue to promote positive working relationships with Local Authority children's social care and the police to ensure that effective responses and partnership working can disrupt the current behaviour patterns and achieve positive outcomes for children.

External services or support programmes will be brought in to talk to young people about specific issues in support of the prevention of child-on-child abuse mapped out clearly in the curriculum.

Understanding the law

Taken from Searching, Screening & Confiscation Advice for Schools, July 2022



Searching

Headteachers and staff they authorise have a statutory power to search a child or their possessions where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the child may have a prohibited item.

Under common law, school staff have the power to search a child for any item if the child agrees. The member of staff should ensure the child understands the reason for the search and how it will be conducted so that their agreement is informed.

Screening

Our school's statutory power to make rules on children's behaviour and our duty as employers in relation to the safety of staff, children and visitors, enables our school to impose a requirement that children undergo screening.

Screening is the use of a walk-through or hand-held metal detector (arch or wand) to scan all children for weapons before they enter the school premises.

If the Headteacher decides to introduce a screening arrangement, the school will inform children and parents in advance to explain what the screening will involve and why it will be introduced.

Where a child has a disability, reasonable adjustments to the screening process will be made.

Where a child refuses to be screened, the member of staff will consider why the child is not co-operating and will make an assessment of whether it is necessary to carry out a search.

Confiscating

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 children;

• is prohibited, or identified in the school rules for which a search can be made; or

• is evidence in relation to an offence

Searching

Before any search takes place, the member of staff conducting the search will explain to the child why they are being searched, how and where the search is going to take place and give them the opportunity to ask any questions. It is important to have a calm approach and not surprise the young person.

The following may be a useful reference and provide structure to the search prior, during and after the event.

- Ensure that the place you are going to conduct the search is away from other students, in a safe environment.
- Communicate who you are, what position you hold and if the pupil knows you or you them.
- Explain to the pupil what the object of the search is and how it is going to be conducted.
- State your grounds for the search; be confident in your powers under the Department of Education guidance, reassure them that their dignity and safety is paramount.
- Search them. Technique: There should be two people present during a search. One designated person to search (they should be the same sex as the person being searched) and one witness. The designated person's job is to conduct the search, and the witness will engage the student in conversation, watch for any escalation of behaviour and act as a safety officer.
- Record the event, what was found/not found and subsequent actions. You should also update CPOMS. Inform parents/carers

If a child refuses to co-operate, the member of staff will sanction the child in line with the school's behaviour policy, ensuring that they are responding to misbehaviour consistently and fairly. If the child still refuses to co-operate, the member of staff will assess whether it is appropriate to use reasonable force to conduct the search.

A member of staff will search a child's outer clothing, pockets, possessions, desks or lockers.

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 PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act, 1984 Code A). While the decision to undertake the strip search itself and its conduct are police matters, school staff retain a duty of care to the child(ren) involved and will advocate for the child's wellbeing at all times.

Who can Search?

As shown above, the law states the member of staff conducting the search must be of the same sex as the child 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 child 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 child, or it is not reasonably practicable for the search to be carried out in the presence of another member of staff

Recording Searches

Any search by a member of staff for a prohibited item and all searches conducted by police officers will be recorded in the school's safeguarding reporting system, 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. The Headteacher will make a record of all searches for items banned by the school rules.

At Fulwell Infant and Ouston Primary School the following records of every search will be made:

• the date, time and location of the search;

• which child was searched;

• who conducted the search and any other adults or children 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

Authorising Members of Staff

Only the Headteacher, or a member of staff authorised by the Headteacher, can carry out a search. The Headteacher will authorise individual members of staff to search for specific items, or all items set out in the school's behaviour policy.

Informing Parents

School will reinforce the whole-school approach by building and maintaining positive relationships with parents. Parents will 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 will inform the parents of what, if anything, has been confiscated and the resulting action taken, including any sanctions applied.

Training for School Staff

Appropriate training is in place to enable all staff to carry out their responsibilities.

Any weapons or items which are evidence of a suspected offence WILL be passed to the police as soon as possible.

Searching, Screening & Confiscation Advice for Schools, current version

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 will 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 will occur including contacting the police and parents immediately. Under the updated Offensive Weapon Act 2019 police have the power to enter, intervene and search school in the event of the threat of, or use of a weapon (as per stated list) on school site. The child will be isolated immediately.

If the weapon has been identified because it has been used to harm e.g., another child or member of staff, the school will instigate its critical incident management protocols immediately inclusive of lock down and partial lockdown 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 will speak to all the children involved separately, gain a statement of facts from them and use **consistent language** and **open questions** for each account. This will occur by using the same script and staff will ask the children directly to tell them what has happened. Staff should only interrupt the child to gain clarity with open questions, 'where, when, why, who.' (For example: What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?) A full and clear record of exactly what the child has said in their own language will be made (and no individual interpretation of the facts made which could impact on the disclosure) and stored following the school's recording procedures.

Consider Intent

From the information gathered the next step will be to consider intent. Did the child 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 concerning, however one shows a deliberate attempt of harm and therefore both circumstances will have different outcomes.

Deciding on the Next Course of Action

It is essential that schools have a range of tools to establish high standards of behaviour and maintain the safety of school communities, including, as a last resort, suspensions and permanent exclusions. Following the outcome of the investigation the school will decide on the level of risk the child 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 child's return to school. Evidence indicates that suspension and exclusion may remove a child from their existing supportive networks and protective factors, increasing their vulnerability and potentially their involvement in anti-social behaviours and exploitation. Exclusion can increase isolation and risk-taking and, in turn, raise further safeguarding concerns. A decision to exclude a child cannot be taken lightly and must be balanced against the potential risk they pose to the rest of the school community.

Multi Agency Planning Meeting

Where appropriate a multi-agency planning meeting should be convened to support a child with any additional services that may be required. This meeting should include school, early help/front door services, police-single point of contact and any other services engaged with the child or family to agree a safety plan for the child.

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. Safety Plans are available in school and will be put in place by the Designated Safeguarding Lead with the child and their parents.

Review of Circumstances

Following any incident of harm, it is necessary for the school to consider if anything could have been done differently. Any internal lessons learnt can support in identifying what necessary changes within the school need to occur. This demonstrates our school's commitment to continually reviewing its policies and systems in effectively keeping children safe. Any review of circumstances will then be discussed between senior leadership and the Governing Body to put immediate and necessary changes into effect.

Police Intervention

Once the police have recorded and investigated the incident they will:

- Put a knife/weapon warning marker on the young person's record. This is for the purposes of intelligence but also the safety of officers, if the young person is stopped and searched in the future, for example.
- Submit a child concern notification to children's social care. This is again for intelligence purposes but will also help social care form a picture of the young person, put appropriate interventions in place or/and update the young person's worker, if they have one.
- Make a referral to the young person's local Youth Justice Services.

On deciding the outcome for the young person, CPS guidance states:

- 16/17-year-olds – simple possession Charge unless exceptional circumstances make it more appropriate to issue a Youth Conditional

Caution. History of violence, previously dealt with for a weapon/knife offence, or an offence under investigation is an offence other than a simple possession and therefore the young person should be charged.

- Under 16s Simple possession, no previous – Youth Conditional Caution. Or alternate disposal in truly exceptional circumstances. History of violence, previously dealt with for a weapon/knife offence, or an offence under investigation is an offence other than a simple possession and therefore the young person should be charged.
- Where a decision is taken not to charge, the young person will be referred to the Youth Justice Service for an Out of Court Disposal (OOCD) assessment. The Out of Court Panel, with reference to the guidance, makes the decision as to the most appropriate disposal

This policy/practice guidance has been heavily supported by the following key documents:

Searching, Screening and Confiscation current version

https://www.google.com/goto?url=CAEShwEB6zswFajlHoI32OIRjPNUYGKtd1h_8cwAfjBkQrvar72hdZoBwrQ1B6t7wNrRMr3fUrdHA_zYkrnWvomlCCvaVEaihqbHdBUfz5c0ee4COUzrdqPaBuv_oi0DK46taEMcLk2xdLgPiIwDZEwkAtF0O3pwlGpIdOuZEYpwZobDrgpV275bIu4

Farrer and Co: Addressing Child-on-Child Abuse: A resource for schools and colleges 2024.

https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/clients-and-sectors/safeguarding/addressing-child-on-child-abuse.pdf

This policy/practice guidance should be read in conjunction with:

DFE: Keeping Children Safe in Education. September 2026

Child Protection Policy

Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

Behaviour and Discipline Policy