

Searching, Screening, Confiscation and Offensive Weapons Policy

Acorn AP

Date written/reviewed	14th May 2026
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Board approval	Pending
Signed	
Position	Chair of Trustees
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1. Purpose

This policy sets out Acorn AP's approach to searching, screening, confiscation and offensive weapons.

The safety and wellbeing of children, young people, staff, volunteers and visitors is of paramount importance. Acorn AP is committed to maintaining a safe, calm and respectful environment in which risks of harm are minimised and safeguarding responsibilities are fully upheld.

This policy reflects Acorn AP's trauma-informed and relational approach and supports safeguarding, behaviour management and staff safety responsibilities.

2. Legal Framework

This policy is based on current legislation and guidance including:

- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Education Act 1996
- Criminal Justice Act 1988
- Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (current edition)
- Searching, Screening and Confiscation: Advice for Schools (DfE updated 2023)
- Use of Reasonable Force in Schools guidance
- Working Together to Safeguard Children

3. Safeguarding Principles

All searches and responses to prohibited items will be carried out lawfully, proportionately, respectfully and with safeguarding at the centre of decision making.

Acorn AP recognises that many students attending alternative provision have experienced trauma, adverse childhood experiences, exclusion, exploitation, social, emotional and mental health difficulties or SEND-related vulnerabilities.

Staff will therefore:

- use de-escalation wherever possible
- minimise distress and humiliation
- preserve dignity and privacy
- consider communication needs and vulnerabilities
- avoid unnecessary physical contact
- ensure responses remain trauma-informed and relational

Search incidents may themselves indicate safeguarding concerns and may require referral to the DSL, Children's Social Care, Police or contextual safeguarding processes.

4. Related Policies and Cross References

This policy should be read alongside:

- Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Physical Intervention / Positive Handling Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- SEND Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Admissions, Attendance and Suspensions Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Whistleblowing Policy

All incidents involving weapons, prohibited items, restraint, exploitation concerns or significant safeguarding concerns must also be considered within the context of Acorn AP's safeguarding procedures and CPOMS recording expectations.

5. Prohibited Items

Staff may search for and confiscate prohibited items including:

- knives or weapons
- sharp implements or blades
- alcohol
- illegal drugs
- stolen items
- tobacco products and cigarette papers
- vapes or e-cigarettes
- fireworks
- pornographic images
- any item reasonably suspected to be used to commit an offence, cause injury or damage property

Acorn AP prohibits students from bringing any knife, blade or offensive weapon onto site or to any provision-related activity, including folding pocket knives, Swiss Army knives and razor blades.

6. Screening

Acorn AP may use proportionate and non-invasive screening measures where necessary to maintain safety.

Any screening arrangements will:

- be proportionate
- be communicated clearly
- comply with safeguarding and equality duties
- be conducted respectfully and calmly

7. Authority to Search

The Head of Centre and authorised staff have legal powers to search students or their possessions where there are reasonable grounds to suspect possession of a prohibited item.

Only trained and authorised staff may conduct searches without consent.

Volunteers must not conduct searches.

8. Conducting a Search

Whenever possible staff should:

- seek cooperation first
- explain reasons for the search
- use calm and respectful communication
- use CPI-informed de-escalation approaches

Searches should normally:

- involve two staff members
- be witnessed

- be carried out by same-sex staff wherever possible

Students should be asked to empty pockets or open bags themselves where possible.

Staff must not conduct strip searches. Any strip search can only be carried out by Police in line with statutory safeguarding guidance.

9. Discovery of a Weapon or Dangerous Item

If a student is believed to possess a weapon or dangerous item:

1. Safety must be prioritised.
2. Senior leadership must be informed immediately.
3. The student should, where possible, be separated from others calmly.
4. Staff should use de-escalation strategies.
5. Police assistance should be requested where appropriate.

Staff should not attempt to seize a weapon unless necessary to prevent immediate harm.

10. Use of Reasonable Force

Reasonable force may only be used:

- to prevent injury
- to prevent serious damage
- to prevent serious disorder
- to prevent the commission of a criminal offence

Any force used must:

- be proportionate
- use the least restrictive option
- minimise harm
- end as soon as risk reduces

All incidents involving force must be recorded on CPOMS and reviewed by senior leadership.

11. Recording and Reporting

All searches and serious confiscation incidents must be recorded on CPOMS.

Records should include:

- date and time
- staff involved
- witnesses
- reason for search
- outcome
- confiscated items
- police involvement
- safeguarding concerns
- actions taken
- parent/carers communication

The DSL must be informed where safeguarding concerns arise.

12. Parent and Carer Communication

Parents/carers will normally be informed as soon as reasonably practicable following:

- searches for prohibited items
- confiscation of dangerous items
- police involvement
- incidents involving weapons
- use of force

Information may be temporarily withheld where sharing information would increase safeguarding risk.

13. Sanctions and Follow-Up

Serious incidents involving offensive weapons are likely to result in suspension pending investigation and risk assessment.

Acorn AP will consider:

- seriousness of the incident
- safeguarding context
- SEND needs
- coercion or exploitation concerns
- risk to others
- previous incidents

Outcomes may include:

- reintegration planning
- behaviour support plans
- safeguarding referrals
- restorative work
- managed transition discussions
- termination of placement

14. Training

Relevant staff will receive training appropriate to their role including:

- safeguarding
- CPI Safety Interventions
- de-escalation
- trauma-informed practice
- positive handling
- recording procedures

15. Equality and Inclusion

Acorn AP will ensure this policy is implemented fairly and without discrimination.

Staff will remain alert to:

- unconscious bias
- disproportionality
- communication barriers
- SEND-related vulnerabilities
- cultural considerations

Reasonable adjustments will be considered where appropriate.

16. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner following:

- significant incidents
- safeguarding reviews
- legislative changes
- updates to statutory guidance

The Board of Trustees and senior leadership team will monitor implementation and incident trends.

Appendix A – Search and Confiscation Record

Date and time of incident	
Student name	
Staff conducting search	
Witness present	
Reason for search	
Was consent sought?	
Items found/confiscated	
Police informed?	
Was force used?	
Safeguarding concerns identified	
Parents/carers informed	
Follow-up actions agreed	
Recorded on CPOMS by	

Appendix B – Offensive Weapon Incident Review Template

Summary of incident	
Immediate actions taken	
Safeguarding concerns identified	
Risk to other students/staff	
Police involvement	
Parent/carer involvement	
Multi-agency involvement	
Risk assessment reviewed?	
Reintegration/support plan	
Lessons learned	
Leadership review completed by	
Date of review	

Approval and Sign-Off

Chair of Trustees Signature	
Date	
Director of Services Signature	
Date	