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Weapons Policy & Practice Guidance

Policy Author:	Safeguarding First
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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.

Purpose and Aim

At Washingwell Primary School the purpose of this policy/practice guidance is to set out clearly 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 the school will take around the use of weapons on site taking into account the full context around each and every incident.

At Washingwell Primary School we are committed to the safety and well-being of all of our pupils, staff and parents and will always take immediate action to reduce the risk of harm to any individual on the 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 or pointed objects i.e., 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 incidents to improve policy, revise training and improve practice.

Creating a Safeguarding Culture

In order for pupils 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. In order to create this environment, the whole workforce and pupils 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 pupils 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 through PSHE lessons will 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 will create opportunities for pupils 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.

Working with Parents

Parents will be made aware of the school's stringent 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 Washingwell 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 achieve positive outcomes for children.

It is important that signposting is also available to pupils in the event that they don't feel confident raising an issue to staff or a peer in school. Therefore, a resource board with support services on a wide range of issues so young people can seek their own solutions should they wish to can be found at……. In the same way 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 and Current Guidance

Taken from Searching, Confiscation and Screening, July 2023

Searching

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

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

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 pupils;

• 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 should explain to the pupil why they are being searched, how and where the search is going to take place and give them the opportunity to ask any questions.

If a pupil continues to refuse to co-operate, the member of staff will sanction the pupil in line with the school's behaviour policy, ensuring that they are responding to misbehaviour consistently and fairly. If the pupil 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 pupil'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 pupil(s) involved and will advocate for pupil wellbeing at all times.

Who can search?

The law states the member of staff conducting the search must be of the same sex as the pupil 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 pupil 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 pupil 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 Washingwell Primary School the following records of every search will be made:

• 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; 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.

At this school, the following members of staff are authorised to undertake a search;

Head Teacher

Senior Staff member

Inclusion Manager

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.

Taken from Searching, screening and confiscation: guidance for schools, July 2023

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 pupil will 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 will 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 will speak to all the pupils 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 pupils directly to tell them what has happened. Staff should only interrupt the pupil 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 pupil 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 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 concerning, however one shows a deliberate attempt of harm and therefore both circumstances will have different outcomes.

Deciding on the Next Course of Action

From the outcome of the investigation the school will 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. 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.

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

Searching, Screening and Confiscation: Guidance for Schools, July 2023

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1091132/Searching__Screening_and_Confiscation_guidance_July_2022.pdf

Farrer and Co: Addressing Child-on-Child Abuse: A resource for schools and colleges 2023.

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

SF Child-on-Child Abuse Policy 2024

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

DFE: Keeping Children Safe in Education. September 2024

Safeguarding Policy

Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

Behaviour Policy