



Weapons Policy

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Final

Weapons Policy and practice guidance

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 academy 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 young people and adults alike.

If a young person deliberately and intentionally brings a weapon onto the academy site, they will be placed on a fixed term exclusion and the appropriate actions will be taken following the Exclusions Policy.

Purpose and aim

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 any of the Ascent Trust sites. This policy/practice guidance will also show the direct actions an Academy will take around the use of weapons on site considering the full context around each and every incident.

The Ascent Trust are committed to the safety and well-being of all of our young people, Trust colleagues and parents and will always take immediate action to reduce the risk of harm to any individual on our Academy sites.

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 ie: pocket knives, 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 ie: 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 academies 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 for academies and settings is 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 trust colleagues must be prompt and consistent and therefore ALL our colleagues must know and understand this policy and the expectations of keeping children safe.

In any circumstance where this occurs it is important that Trustees, Senior Leaders and Safeguarding Leads take forward any learning from such incidents to improve policy, revise training and improve practice.

Creating a safeguarding culture

In order for young people and colleagues to feel safe it is necessary that everyone agrees to and works within the Trust and academy's ethos where a culture of vigilance positively contributes to the sharing of information where there may be risk. By creating a strong culture of safeguarding within all academies individuals accessing the site should feel safe to raise concerns, seek support and for a seamless and consistent response to incidents to be followed. To create this environment, the whole workforce and pupils should 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. Trust colleagues and young people 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 or PSHE should support young people in understanding the risks around the use of weapons, the legal implications of carrying weapons and the academies' response to such incidents. A curriculum that allows strong discussion around the use of weapons may act preventatively to allow young people to think twice about the consequences of carrying a weapon and equally may create opportunities for young people to share useful intelligence around peer on peer abuse, gang related behaviours and contextual issues in the local area that may impact on the increased use of weapons. Any such intelligence shared would need to be passed on to the Head of Academy, Safeguarding Leads and the appropriate front door services, police and social care.

Working with parents

Parents need to be aware of the academy stringent policy around weapons by supporting the decision made by Head of Academy 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 **academy 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 could 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 the academies. 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. If the Ascent Trust and its Academies continue to promote positive working relationships with front door services such as the police and social care, effective responses and partnership working can achieve positive outcomes for children.

It is important that signposting is also available to young people in the event that they don't feel confident raising an issue to academy colleagues or a peer. It is useful to have a resource board with support services on a wide range of issues so young people can seek their own solutions should they wish to. In the same way external services or support programmes could be brought in to talk to young people about specific issues in support of the prevention of peer on peer abuse.

Understanding the Law and Current Guidance

Guidance Taken from Searching, Confiscation and Screening, July 2022

Searching

Heads of Academy and colleagues they authorise have a statutory power to search a young person or their possessions where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the young person may have a prohibited item.

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

Screening

The Trust Academy's statutory power to make rules on young people's behaviour and their duties as employers in relation to the safety of Trust colleagues, young people and visitors enables them to impose a requirement that young people undergo screening.

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

If the head of academy decides to introduce a screening arrangement, they will inform young people and parents in advance to explain what the screening will involve and why it will be introduced.

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

If a young person refuses to be screened, the Trust colleague should consider why the young person is not co-operating and make an assessment of whether it is necessary to carry out a search.

Confiscating

An authorised Trust colleague carrying out a search can confiscate any item that they have reasonable grounds for suspecting:

- poses a risk to Trust colleagues or young people;
- 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 Trust colleague conducting the search should explain to the young person 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 young person continues to refuse to co-operate, the Trust colleague will sanction the young person in line with the Trust behaviour policy, ensuring that they are responding to misbehaviour consistently and fairly. If the young person still refuses to co-operate, the Trust colleague will assess whether it is appropriate to use reasonable force to conduct the search.

A Trust colleague will search a young person'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, academy colleagues retain a duty of care to the young person/s involved and will always advocate for young people wellbeing.

Who can search?

The law states the identified academy colleague conducting the search must be of the same sex as the young person being searched. There must be another academy colleague present as a witness to the search.

There is a limited exception to this rule. This is that an academy colleague can search a young person of the opposite sex and/or without a witness present only:

- if the academy colleague 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 an academy colleague who is same sex as the young person or it is not reasonably practicable for the search to be carried out in the presence of another academy colleague.

Recording Searches

Any search by an academy colleague for a prohibited item and all searches conducted by police officers will be recorded in the Academy'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. Heads of Academy may also decide that all searches for items banned by the academy rules should be recorded.

At Ascent Trust the following records of every search will be made:

- the date, time and location of the search;
- which young person was searched;
- who conducted the search and any other adults or young person 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 Academy Colleague

Only the head of academy, or an academy colleague authorised by the head of academy, can carry out a search. The head of academy will authorise individual academy colleague to search for specific items, or all items set out in the trust's behaviour and regulation policy.

At this academy, the following colleagues are authorised to undertake a search
.....

Informing Parents

Academies 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. An academy colleague will inform the parents of what, if anything, has been confiscated and the resulting action taken, including any sanctions applied.

Training for Academy colleagues

Appropriate training is in place to enable all academy colleagues 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.

Guidance for policy Taken from Searching, screening and confiscation: advice for schools, July 2022

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 academy 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 the academy in the event of the threat of, or use of a weapon (as per stated list) on the academy site. The young person 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 academy's next course of action.

Gathering the Facts

In all circumstances, academy colleagues will speak to all the young people involved separately, gain a statement of facts from them and use **consistent language** and **open questions** for each account. This will occur by asking the young person directly to tell you what has happened. Academy colleagues should only interrupt the young person to gain clarity with open questions, 'where, when, why, who.' (What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?). A full and clear record of exactly what the young person 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 academy's recording procedures.

Consider Intent

From the information gathered the next step will be to consider intent. Did the young person intend to bring a weapon onto the academy 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 academy will decide on the level of risk the young person poses in the academy. 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 young person's return to school.

Returning to the Academy/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 into the academy. 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 academy colleagues and are a planned intervention to support young people in feeling secure

in the academy/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/Risk Assessments are available in the academy 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 academy to consider if anything could have been done differently. Any internal lessons learnt, can support in identifying what necessary changes within the academy need to occur. This demonstrates our academy/Trusts 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 Board of Trustees 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: Advice for Schools, July 2022

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 Safeguarding Toolkit 2022.

https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/brochures/safe_safeguarding-toolkit-2019-as-at-june-2022.pdf

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

DFE: Keeping Children Safe in Education. September 2023

[Safeguarding adults and Young people policy \(academy specific Sept 2023\)](#)

Behaviour and Discipline Policy

Final