Controlled Searches Guidelines

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Committee approved by	Foxford Local Governing Body
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Date	Notes

1. Purpose

This document outlines the procedures and expectations for searching students and responding to suspected possession of prohibited items, including controlled drugs, at Foxford School.
It ensures that all practices are:

- Lawful
- Proportionate
- Safeguarding-focused
- Consistent with DfE statutory guidance

2. Legal Framework

This policy is written in accordance with:

- Education Act 1996 (sections 550ZA–550ZD)
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- DfE: Searching, Screening and Confiscation (latest applicable guidance)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (latest version)

School staff have a statutory power to search a pupil or their possessions without consent where there are reasonable grounds to suspect they may have a prohibited item, including illegal drugs.

3. Principles

- Searches will only take place where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion
- All searches must be proportionate, necessary and justified
- The dignity, privacy and wellbeing of the student must be prioritised
- Searches are a safeguarding action, not purely disciplinary
- The school will act in the best interests of the child at all times

4. Definition of Prohibited Items

The school may search for:

- Illegal drugs
- Alcohol
- Stolen items
- Tobacco, vapes or cigarette papers
- Fireworks
- Pornographic images
- Weapons
- Any item likely to be used to cause harm or commit an offence
- Any item banned under school rules

5. Authorisation to Search

- The Headteacher authorises staff to carry out searches
- This includes members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and other designated staff
- Searches should normally be led by SLT, but authorised staff, such as Year Leaders, may act where necessary

6. Searching Procedures

6.1 Searching with consent

- A student may be asked to voluntarily empty pockets or bags
- Consent should be informed and recorded where appropriate

6.2 Searching without consent

A search without consent may be carried out if:

- There are reasonable grounds for suspicion, and
- The item is a prohibited item or banned item

This power is supported in law.

7. Conduct of Searches (Staff-Led)

- Searches must be conducted by staff of the same sex as the student
- A second member of staff must be present as a witness
- Searches must take place in an appropriate, private location
- Outer clothing only may be searched (e.g. coat, blazer) In addition to bags and other areas of storage
- Staff will never conduct personal searches; these would always be referred to the police

If a student refuses:

- This will be dealt with under behaviour procedures
- The school may escalate and involve parents or police if risk remains

8. Police Involvement and Drug Detection Dogs

Where the school has evidence to suggest:

- Drug dealing is occurring, or
- Drug use is impacting safety or learning

the school may work in partnership with the police.

Procedures:

- Senior staff will be informed
- The Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher will accompany police
- Police may conduct searches in line with their legal powers
- Selected classes and/or locker areas may be visited
- Use of drug detection dogs may be deployed by police as part of wider safeguarding work

Compliance clarification:

- Police searches (including any intrusive search) are governed by separate police powers and safeguards
- The school must not direct or participate in any strip search
- An appropriate adult must be present for police searches involving children

9. If a Student is Suspected of Possessing Drugs

- The student will be referred to SLT
- The student may be asked to accompany staff to a private space
- They will be asked to hand over any prohibited items voluntarily
- Parents/carers will be informed

If drugs are found:

- The item will be confiscated and handed to the police
- Police will determine next steps (e.g. caution, arrest)
- The school will apply appropriate behaviour and safeguarding responses

10. Safeguarding and Support

- Drug possession/use will be treated as a safeguarding concern
- Referrals may be made to:
  - Early Help
  - Substance misuse services
  - External agencies
- The school will ensure:
  - Support is offered alongside sanctions
  - Students are not criminalised unnecessarily

11. Communication with Parents/Carers

- Parents/carers will be **informed as soon as possible** after a search
- The reason for the search and outcomes will be explained
- In serious cases, parents may be asked to attend school

12. Equality and Respect

- All searches will be carried out with respect for:
  - Cultural background
  - Religious beliefs
  - Individual needs
- The school will ensure compliance with:
  - **Equality Act 2010**
  - **Human Rights considerations (proportionality and dignity)**

13. Record Keeping

The school will keep a record of:

- Reason for the search
- Who conducted the search
- Outcome
- Any follow-up actions

This supports safeguarding and accountability.

14. Key Safeguarding Safeguards

- No strip searches by school staff
- Police actions must follow national guidance
- Appropriate adult required for police searches involving children
- Proportionality and necessity must always be evidenced
- Staff must not search without reasonable suspicion