

**Woodbridge School**  
**SEARCHING A PUPIL'S ROOM, BELONGINGS OR PERSON**

## **1 Policy Statement**

Woodbridge School complies with The National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, standard 37, which protects pupils' personal privacy. Personal searches are to be avoided wherever possible.

**On no account is a member of staff ever to search, or touch in the process of a disciplinary enquiry, a pupil's person.**

**For premeditated searches the members of staff searching and witnessing should be of the same sex as the pupil under investigation, and at least one must be a Housemaster/mistress or member of the Senior Management Team (SMT, or Master of the Abbey or Head of Queen's House). In unpremeditated cases this would be the ideal, and all reasonable efforts should be made to comply.**

**A search can demonstrate innocence as much as guilt. This should always be made clear to the pupil.**

## **2 Procedure**

Prior to the search of a pupil's possessions, the highlighted sections of the policy must be fulfilled.

### **2.1 Search of the person by a member of staff**

For items such as alcohol, cigarettes, stolen property:

- The pupil should be asked by a member of staff, ideally in the presence of a second member of staff, to turn out his pockets or bag.
- In the case of initial refusal to co-operate, a member of SMT (who will now lead the investigation) should contact parents/guardians, declare and justify suspicions, and ask them to persuade the pupil to submit to the request.
- In the case of continuing refusal to co-operate, **and if appropriate**, suspend and isolate the pupil in School and call the parents/guardians to attend. In the case of items of considerable value advise parents and pupil that the pupil and any personal belongings under suspicion of containing incriminating items might be removed to the police station.
- In the case of continuing refusal to co-operate, a member of SMT might either take the pupil to the police, accompanied by parents, or send the pupil home, suspended pending further investigations.

For items such as illegal drugs or weapons:

- The pupil should be asked, in the presence of the senior member of staff in School as witness, to turn out his pockets or bag.
- In the case of initial refusal to co-operate: a member of the SMT will contact parents/guardians if possible and advise the pupil (and parents if they are available) that the police will be contacted.
- In the case of continuing refusal to co-operate: the police should be called to the School so that they might make the search, which might extend to School property used by the pupil (such as lockers or, in the case of a boarder, room). If for some reason the police cannot immediately attend and the search is deemed urgent, then the pupil should be taken to the police station.

## 2.2 Search of personal property or School property, for example in a room or locker

Belongings are no longer ‘of the person’ when they are being stored at School or in School property such as lockers. This allows for a greater flexibility of approach. However if a search by a member of staff is undertaken the level of intrusion is potentially as great and so the offence suspected needs to be sufficiently serious, the need for a search legitimate, and prospect of success reasonable:

- For ‘lost’ items of relatively low value, a pupil should be asked to search his own belongings to see if the item has been ‘misplaced’. If more than one pupil is included, the scope of the search and the number of pupils involved should reflect the nature of the loss and be legitimately targeted. Kit inspections fall into this category. It would be allowable for members of staff (one as witness) to watch the pupil(s) search, but may not be deemed necessary or appropriate.
- For more serious matters, any pupils to be searched should be asked, in the presence of a second member of staff as witness (ideally SMT), to oversee the search of the room or locker (performed by members of staff – one member of SMT or Housemaster/Mistress as witness), and to turn out any bags as requested. If a pupil is away from School and cannot be contacted, no search by the School should be undertaken but permission should be sought on return. Any more urgent situation should be referred to the police.
  - In the case of initial refusal to co-operate, a member of SMT to contact parents/guardians and ask them to persuade the pupil to submit to the request.
  - In the case of continuing refusal to co-operate, a member of SMT will suspend and isolate the pupil in school and call the parents to attend. **If appropriate** (items of considerable value, illegal drugs, weapons etc.), advise parents and pupil that the

police might be contacted and asked into the School to make the search.

- In the case of continuing refusal to co-operate, a member of SMT will call the police so that they might make the search at School. If for some reason the police cannot immediately attend and the search is deemed urgent, then the pupil should attend while a member of staff, with a member of the SMT as witness, make the search. Forcible entry is only to be used if reasonable grounds exist to search for illegal drugs (Misuse of Drugs Act 1971) or weapons, and then only on **School** property, not personal property.

### 2.3 Procedure to follow after the search

A written record must be made of any search setting out the main details of the search, including the date, time, people present and the outcome.

The affected pupil's parents must also be contacted after any search, regardless of the outcome.

If an illegal item is found as a result of the search it should be handed to the police.

In other cases, confiscated items should be returned to the pupil's parents, and are not to be destroyed or kept by staff for their own use.

### 2.4 Advice

Here are some scenarios to demonstrate the circumstances leading to a search.

A member of staff:

- Smells fresh cigarette smoke on a pupil;
- Sees smoke behind a bush, only for a pupil to emerge;
- Is approached by a pupil, indicating another 'who has just been smoking'.
  - Challenge suspect.
  - In case of confession, take names, and ask for all cigarettes and lighters which should be listed, signed for, and handed to SMT as soon as possible.
  - If no confession is offered or if no cigarettes handed over, accompany pupil to reception and call for SMT. Join SMT for interview at which the pupil will be warned or a search will be made as appropriate. A warning would be appropriate if the trail were deemed to be sufficiently cold so that it is unlikely a search would be successful.

A member of staff believes a pupil is:

- Under the influence of alcohol (perhaps via information from another pupil);
- Carrying alcohol (for example, to a school function).
  - Stating your concerns, accompany pupil to Reception/Matron/member of SMT or senior member of staff present.
  - Call SMT.
  - SMT, if on site, or senior member of staff present will instigate a personal search or issue a warning (informing parents) as appropriate.

Member of staff has good reason to believe a pupil to have stolen property on his person or in his bag:

- Accompany to Housemaster/mistress/SMT and proceed with personal search.

Member of staff has good reason to believe a pupil to have illegal drugs/weapons on his/her person or in his/her locker or room:

- Accompany to SMT and proceed with search (of person or property).

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