

POLICY FOR SCREENING & SEARCHING

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Omnia Foundation website

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Mission

We believe in investing in people. As professionals in the teaching and training professions, we strive to provide a better future for the children, young people and home settings we work with. Success for us means unleashing the potential of each individual so they can grow, develop and reach the potential of which they are capable. Our values are grounded in our determination to be the change we want to see in the world, through passion, commitment and integrity. We strive to plant a seed of kindness and compassion in a generation that will produce resilience and hope and enable them to aspire and achieve productive and fulfilled lives. Our success is measured in the lives we changed.

At the Omnia Foundation, we create a secure and safe environment that encourages communication, self-belief, mutual respect and success. We provide a rich and balanced curriculum that develops every child, allowing them to achieve their true potential.

Aims of the policy

- to outline the rationale behind the foundation's approach to screening and searching students
- to give an overview of the processes in place for effective screening and searching
- to ensure that these processes and procedures comply with current legislation
- to ensure that the dignity and well-being of each student is protected
- to ensure that students, staff and home settings are fully aware of the foundation's approach to Screening & Searching

This policy is written in light of and should be read in conjunction with the foundation Me, Myself and I Policy, Rights & Responsibilities Policy, Drugs Policy and Child Protection Policy.

This policy was written in line with the government guidance Searching, Screening and Confiscation.

This policy recognises that

1. certain prohibited items present a clear risk to the health, wellbeing and safety of our students and staff. This policy is in place to protect students, staff and visitors to the site
2. our students may be vulnerable to criminal and sexual exploitation and that this will adversely impact on their understanding of what is appropriate and inappropriate
3. given the nature of our students' special educational needs, it is likely that they will try to "smuggle in" prohibited items on occasion
4. some prohibited items represent a distraction for the students, eg mobile phones. The foundation has drawn up a mobile phone charter with students, which states that students are permitted to have their phones during the lunch hour on the understanding that they are returned before learning recommences in the afternoon.
5. it is illegal, given the age of our students, for the majority of items prohibited on-site to be in the students' possession, eg addictive substances
6. it is vital that educational establishments consider their obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights. Under Article 8, students have a right to respect for their private life. In the context of these rights and obligations, this means that students have the right to expect a reasonable level of personal privacy. The right under Article 8 is not absolute; it can be interfered with, but any interference with this right by an educational establishment (or any public body) must be justified and proportionate

Searching & Screening

At the Omnia Foundation, searching and screening play a critical role in ensuring that our site is a safe environment for all students and staff. It is a vital measure to safeguard and promote student and staff welfare, and to uphold the rights and responsibilities that all stakeholders have for the safety of others in ensuring that students can learn and thrive.

Searching is the act of being "patted down" and having the contents of bags and/or pockets explored.

Screening is the act of using an electric hand held wand to detect metal, for example, weapons or vapes. At the Omnia Foundation, this is known as "wandering."

Students at the Omnia Foundation are searched and screened every morning on arrival at the foundation as a matter of routine. This is reviewed and agreed with students periodically in order to protect the safety of every individual. Students understand why the process is in place and that it is fair for everyone to undergo the same procedure, as otherwise it may appear that certain students are being targeted.

Only permanent members of staff employed by the foundation may conduct a search. All members of staff are authorised by the Head of Foundation under the remit of this policy to search for any and all prohibited items that may be deemed to constitute a threat to the safety of the students, staff and visitors to the foundation.

The list of prohibited items, as defined in subsection (3) of Section 550ZA of the Education Act 1996, is

- knives and weapons;
- alcohol;
- illegal drugs;
- stolen items;
- any article that the member of staff reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be used:
 - to commit an offence, or
 - to cause personal injury to, or damage to property of; any person (including the student) an article specified in The Schools (Specification and Disposal of Articles) Regulations 2012:
- tobacco and cigarette papers;
- e-cigarettes and vapes
- fireworks; and
- pornographic images.

Being in possession of a prohibited item – especially knives, weapons, illegal drugs or stolen items – may mean that the student is involved, or at risk of being involved, in anti-social or criminal activity including gang involvement, and in some cases may be involved in child criminal exploitation. A search may play a vital role in identifying students who may benefit from early help or a referral to the local authority children’s social care services.

Members of staff searching a student may not be the same sex as the student. This is because the majority of items expected to be brought on-site would constitute a threat to the safety of the students, staff and visitors to the foundation.

Screening and searching will always take place at the entrance to the foundation with multiple members of staff present.

Where a student resists a search, members of staff can use such force as is reasonable given the circumstances when conducting a search for knives or weapons, alcohol, illegal drugs, stolen items, tobacco and cigarette papers, e-cigarettes and vapes, fireworks, pornographic images or articles that have been or could be used to commit an offence or cause harm.

On arrival, students are “wanded,” using a handheld battery-operated metal detector. Different members of staff, as outlined above, will be assigned this duty each day.

Once the students have been wanded, they are lightly patted down by a nominated member of staff to search for items that will be missed by the metal detector, eg cigarettes.

If the member of staff “patting down” suspects that the student is concealing a prohibited item, they may ask them to turn out their pockets or take off their shoes.

Strip Searches

Strip searches will never be carried out by staff, will only be carried out in extreme circumstances by a police officer who has been called to the foundation as a last resort and home settings will always be informed. While the decision to undertake the strip search itself and its conduct are police matters, foundation staff retain a duty of care to the student(s) involved and should advocate for student wellbeing at all times.

Before calling police onto site, staff should assess and balance the risk of a potential strip search on the student’s mental and physical wellbeing and the risk of not recovering the suspected item. Staff should consider whether introducing the potential for a strip search through police involvement is absolutely necessary, and should always ensure that other appropriate, less invasive approaches have been exhausted. Once the police are on foundation premises, the decision on whether to conduct a strip search lies solely with them, and the role of the foundation is to advocate for the safety and wellbeing of the student(s) involved. Two members of the foundation staff will always be present.

Details of how strip searches may be conducted by the police are outlined in the above linked guidance.

Should a strip search be necessary, students should be given appropriate support, irrespective of whether the suspected item is found. If an item is found, this may be a police matter, but will always be accompanied by a safeguarding process handled by the foundation which gives attention to the student’s wellbeing and involves relevant staff, such as the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy).

Safeguarding will be at the centre of foundation support following a strip search in which the item is not found, both in the sense of supporting the student to deal with the experience of being searched, and regarding wider issues that may have informed the decision to conduct a strip search in the first place. In both cases, students will be given the opportunity to express their views regarding the strip search and the events surrounding it.

Foundation staff will give particular consideration to any students who have been strip searched more than once and/or groups of students who are more likely to be subjected to strip searching with unusual frequency, and consider preventative approaches.

After screen and search

Once staff are satisfied that a student has not concealed a prohibited item, the student will be permitted on-site and will go straight to their hub.

What happens to items that are confiscated?

As stated above, there are some items which must be delivered to the police. This includes weapons, controlled drugs and some stolen items. The foundation also operates a Drugs Policy which outlines more specifically what happens when students are found in possession of different types of drugs.

Where extreme or child-related pornographic images are found, or suspected to be held on electronic devices, the images and/or devices must be delivered to the police as soon as is practicable. Other pornographic material may be destroyed by staff.

Items such as cigarettes and alcohol will be disposed of by staff and not returned to the student.

All mobile phones are locked in a box and retained by staff until lunchtime when they are returned to the students for them to use during their break. Mobile phones are expected to be returned to staff at the end of the lunch break. If students fail to comply, then they will not be permitted to have their phone during the lunch break on the following day.

Recording searches

Since students are searched and screened routinely every morning, only searches which result in a prohibited item being found will be recorded on CPOMS and dealt with in line with the Child Protection Policy and Rights and Responsibilities Policy.

Monitoring & Review

This policy is monitored regularly by members of the senior leadership team and is reviewed annually by the Executive Director.
