



CONDUCTING A SEARCH – POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Last reviewed:	September 2026
Next review due:	September 2027
Reviewed by:	Head of Boarding Vice Principal Pastoral

1. Aims and scope

Trust and mutual respect are essential features of the ethos at d'Overbroeck's and of the interactions among members of our school community. It is nevertheless possible in any school that circumstances may arise where it is necessary to conduct a search for things which are banned under school rules or included in the DfE list of 'prohibited' items. Searches are a safeguarding and behaviour-management measure and must always be lawful, necessary, proportionate and carried out with due regard to the student's dignity, privacy, individual needs and best interests.

In practice, such searches happen very rarely. However, if and when they do, it is important that the search is done safely, sensitively and in accordance with the rights of students and the statutory powers of schools and school staff. The purpose of this document is to set out the circumstances in which a search may be conducted and the procedure which must be followed by staff when doing so. Searches should be used only where there is a genuine reason to do so. When a search is necessary, it must be conducted safely, sensitively and proportionately, in accordance with applicable law, the student's rights and the school's safeguarding arrangements. This document sets out both the searching procedure and the operational protocol to be followed by authorised staff. It applies to searches of students and their possessions, including boarders' possessions and accommodation.

This policy and procedure is written with reference to the guidance given by the DfE in the document entitled '*Searching, screening and confiscation - Advice for schools*', July 2022 and is intended to operate consistently with the statutory safeguarding framework in Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2026).

In the event that a search may be needed, a student is reminded of the school rules and expectations and offered opportunity to declare anything at that point. If nothing is declared, the search policy and procedure below will be followed. Before a search, wherever practicable and safe, the student should be told why a search is being considered and given an opportunity to hand over or identify the item voluntarily. The member of staff must consider whether the matter is instead primarily a safeguarding concern and should consult the Vice Principal or DSL. A refusal to consent does not itself create a power to search: any search without consent must be justified under the applicable legal or school-rule authority and must satisfy the relevant threshold.

2. What may be searched for?

- Any of the items that a student may have in their possession which appear in the DfE list of [‘prohibited’ items](#). These include knives or weapons, alcohol, illegal drugs, stolen items, tobacco or vaping products, pornographic images, fireworks, and any article that is reasonably suspected of having been, or of being likely to be, used to commit an offence or to cause personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person, including the student themselves.
- Any items that a student may have in their possession which are banned under the school rules at d’Overbroeck’s. This includes vaping products as well as tobacco products for all students. Over the counter medication or prescription medication that has not been signed off by the School Nurse is not allowed in boarders’ rooms.
- Our Behaviour, Rules, Rewards and Sanctions policy (available from the [school website](#)) makes clear that any items which are banned under school rules including in the boarding houses, may be searched for.

‘Possessions’ means any goods over which the student has or appears to have control, including in pockets, bags, desks, lockers, electronic devices and, in the case of boarders, bedrooms including any drawers, cabinets, cupboards, etc, therein. Access to or inspection of boarding accommodation for routine operational reasons is not automatically a ‘search’ and must be governed by the boarding/room-access arrangements, with due regard to boarders’ privacy.

3. Searching with consent

Wherever practicable, a search should be conducted with the student’s consent. Where a student has given their consent, then any item may be searched for. Consent does not need to be given formally in writing: it is enough for staff to ask and for the student to give their consent verbally. Staff should explain in age-appropriate terms what they are asking the student to do. Consent should not be obtained through coercion, intimidation or an implied threat of sanction.

If the student does not consent, staff must consider whether a lawful power to search without consent applies; a refusal alone does not justify a search.

A student’s individual needs, in particular for SEND, will be taken into account when seeking consent and making arrangements for a search and reasonable adjustments will be put in place, where necessary.

4. Searching without consent

Searching a student without their consent should be avoided wherever possible. Schools do, however, have the power to search without consent for items listed in Section 2 above.

To conduct a search without consent, staff must have reasonable grounds for suspecting that a student may be in possession of a ‘prohibited’ or a banned item, or that the student is at risk of harm to themselves or others. Please see Section 2 for the definition of possession. The reason for the search must be based on specific and proportionate grounds. A generalised suspicion, discriminatory assumption or reliance solely on a student’s protected characteristic, SEND, appearance, reputation or previous behaviour is not sufficient. Where there is an immediate safeguarding risk, the DSL or deputy should be involved as soon as practicable and the school’s safeguarding procedure followed.

Under these circumstances, staff have the power to conduct the search regardless of whether the student is found after the search to have that item. This includes circumstances where staff suspect a student of having items such as illegal drugs or stolen property which are later found not to be illegal or stolen.

5. Who may conduct a search?

A search may be conducted by the Principal or any other authorised members of staff. In the absence of the Principal, the following senior staff may conduct a search or authorise one to be conducted by other colleagues: Head of Senior School, Head of Sixth Form, Vice Principal, DSL and Head of Boarding. Contractors and other adults who do not have the required legal authority must not conduct a statutory student search.

6. Procedure for conducting a search

- Wherever possible, a search must be conducted in the presence of the student. The staff member should explain what will happen before the search starts, as far as it is safe to do so.
- In all cases, two members of staff must be present.
 - At least one member of staff conducting a room search should be of the same sex as the student. In the event this is not practicable, approval for the room search must be given by the Principal or Vice Principal. The search must be proportionate to the concern, confined to places/items where the relevant item could reasonably be found, and carried out with respect for privacy and dignity. Routine access to rooms for cleaning, maintenance or other authorised purposes must not be used as a substitute for a properly authorised search.
 - For a personal search, the searching staff member must be the same sex as the student. The witness should also be the same sex as the student where reasonably practicable. There is a limited exception to this rule: a member of staff can carry out a search of a student of the opposite sex and without a witness present, but only where they reasonably believes that there is a risk that immediate serious harm will be caused to a person if the search is not conducted straight away and where it is not reasonably practicable to call another colleague. In the exceptional occasion where such a search occurs, the member of staff must immediately report to the Principal, Vice Principal, DSL, Head of Site or Head of Boarding. Whether conducted with or without consent, a search must always be conducted sensitively and with due regard to the student's dignity, right to privacy SEND and other individual needs.
- As part of a personal search, a student must not be required to remove any clothing other than outer clothing. 'Outer clothing' means clothing that is not worn next to the skin or immediately over a garment that is being worn as underwear. Outer clothing does, however, include hats, shoes, boots, gloves and scarves.
- Staff may confiscate any prohibited or banned item(s) found as a result of a search. They may also confiscate any item, however found, which they consider harmful or detrimental to school discipline. Confiscation must be proportionate and, where used as a disciplinary measure, consistent with the school's Behaviour, rules, rewards and sanctions policy and the student's individual circumstances. Staff should consider whether an item may be evidence of

an offence or a safeguarding concern before deciding how it should be stored, returned, destroyed or referred to the police.

- Any controlled drugs, and any items suspected of being controlled drugs, will normally be handed over to the police. The same will usually apply to any items believed to be stolen. Items suspected to be controlled drugs, weapons or other evidence of criminal offending must be handled securely and referred to the Principal or Vice Principal, with the police contacted where required or appropriate. Staff must not place themselves or students at unnecessary risk, attempt to investigate suspected criminal activity beyond their role, or dispose of potential evidence in a way that could compromise safeguarding or a police investigation.

7. Where can a search be conducted?

A search may be conducted on school premises or outside school premises where staff are in charge of students (for example, on a school trip). An appropriate location for a search should be found; where possible, this should be away from other students.

Statutory powers to search apply only in England but as every trip is an extension of school, the teacher of a trip outside England may conduct a search if they have first contacted the Principal, Vice Principal or DSL (or the named SLT emergency contact, in the case of an educational visit out of hours) to discuss the nature of the request. The Principal/Vice Principal or named emergency contact should be consulted where a search or confiscation is contemplated, unless immediate action is required to protect a student or another person.

Boarders are aware the bedrooms are accessed by staff for cleaning and daily visual and health and safety checks. See Boarding Handbook.

8. Electronic devices

- Electronic devices, including mobile phones, can contain files or data which relate to an offence, or which may cause harm to another person. This includes, but is not limited to, indecent images of children, pornography, abusive messages, images or videos, or evidence relating to suspected criminal behaviour. Staff should follow the school's safeguarding, online-safety and data-protection procedures and must not conduct exploratory or unnecessary searches of personal content.
- As with all prohibited items, staff should first consider the appropriate safeguarding response if they find images, data or files on an electronic device that they reasonably suspect are likely to put a person at risk. If a search of an electronic device identifies information suggesting that a child may be at risk of harm, staff must consider the safeguarding response immediately and refer the concern to the DSL/Vice Principal in accordance with KCSIE 2026 and the school's Safeguarding policy. The device and relevant evidence should be preserved safely without unnecessary viewing, copying or dissemination.
- A staff member may examine data or files on an electronic device they have confiscated as a result of a search if they believe that there is good reason to do so. However, the member of staff should have another colleague present where possible and, if the member of staff conducting the search suspects they may find an indecent image of a child (sometimes known as nude or semi-nude image), the member of staff should never intentionally view the image, and must never copy, print, share, store or save such images. When an incident might involve

an indecent image of a child and/or video, the member of staff should confiscate the device, avoid looking at the device and refer the incident to the DSL (or deputy) as the most appropriate person to advise on the school's response.

- In determining if there is a 'good reason' to examine or erase the data or files the staff member conducting the search should reasonably suspect that the data or file(s) in question have been, or could be, used to cause harm, undermine the safe environment of the school and disrupt teaching, or be used to commit an offence. Staff should limit any examination to what is reasonably necessary and should not access unrelated personal content.
- If a member of staff finds any image, data or file that they suspect might constitute a specified offence, then they must be delivered to the police as soon as is reasonably practicable. Staff must not undertake their own criminal investigation or disseminate the material.
- If the electronic device is to be returned to the student, in exceptional circumstances the school may dispose of the image or data if there is a good reason to do so. For example, if the data or files are not suspected to be evidence in relation to an offence, the school may delete the data or files if the continued existence of the data or file is likely to continue to cause harm to any person and the student and/or the parent refuses to delete the data or files themselves

9. Written records

A written record must be made of any search, giving an explanation of the reasons for conducting the search, the circumstances in which it was conducted, the date and time of the search, who was present, what was searched, the outcome of the search and, where relevant, details of decisions made regarding any items of concern that may have been found and any sanctions applied. Records of all searches must be stored via the school's safeguarding reporting system and kept for future reference.

10. Informing parents

The policy at d'Overbroeck's is to share any concerns or relevant information with parents wherever possible, unless there is reason to believe that doing so could potentially be harmful to the student concerned.

There is no statutory requirement on schools to inform parents before a search takes place or to seek their consent to conduct the search. However, parents will normally be contacted after any search regardless of the outcome. Parents and guardians will always be informed of any search for a DfE prohibited item, the outcome of the search and action taken (including any sanctions applied) as soon as is practicable.

11. Access to students' rooms in boarding houses

Staff and contractors working for the school need to be able to access student rooms during the teaching day for cleaning and maintenance work, to conduct visits for prospective students and parents, etc. The school also reserves the right for the Head of House, boarding and other staff to have access to student rooms at other times where there is a need to do so. Routine room access must be clearly distinguished from a search for prohibited or school-rule items. Where a search of a

boarder's personal belongings is required, the searching provisions of this procedure must be followed.

If 'prohibited items' as defined above, items banned under school rules or items that clearly should not be in students' rooms are found on such occasions, the items will be confiscated and the matter will be dealt with in the same manner as if the item(s) were to be found in the course of a search. The incident should be recorded and dealt with under the Behaviour, Safeguarding and Boarding procedures, including consideration of whether the item is evidence of a criminal or safeguarding concern.

12. Dealing with complaints

A complaint received from a parent about a search conducted on their child will be dealt with through the school's normal Complaints Procedure, which is available from the [school website](#).

13. How these search powers accord with the obligations of schools under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

- Under Article 8 of the ECHR, students have a right to respect for their private life. In the context of these particular powers, this means that students have the right to expect a reasonable level of personal privacy.
- However, the right under Article 8 is not absolute. It can be interfered with; but any interference with this right by a school must be both justified and proportionate.
- The powers to search in the Education Act 2011 are compatible with Article 8. A school exercising those powers lawfully should have no difficulty in demonstrating that it has acted in accordance with Article 8.

14 Compliance, oversight and review

The Principal and Vice Principal will ensure that this procedure is implemented effectively, reviewed regularly and kept aligned with the current DfE guidance. The procedure will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where there is a significant change in guidance.

Staff must not conduct searches beyond their authority or competence.

The school will monitor the use of searches, including the number and type of searches, outcomes, use of the exceptional search power, complaints and any patterns affecting particular groups. The Vice Principal will use this information to identify safeguarding, equality or training issues and to inform review.

Boarders will be informed in age-appropriate terms about the school's searching arrangements, their right to be treated with dignity, how to raise a concern or complaint, and how to access an independent or trusted adult if they are unhappy about a search. Boarders will not be penalised for raising a concern in good faith.

Where a search identifies a safeguarding concern, child-on-child abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, exploitation, possession of harmful material or another concern covered by KCSIE, staff must follow the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and refer to the DSL or DDSL. Searching must not be used as a substitute for safeguarding assessment or referral.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following d’Overbroeck’s policies available from the [school website](#) or from the school office on request:

- Behaviour, rules, rewards and sanctions policy
- Boarding house rules
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children
- Smoking policy
- Substance abuse policy

Government guidance:

- [Searching, screening and confiscation - Advice for schools](#) (DfE, July 2022; last updated July 2023)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2026, including child-on-child abuse, safeguarding and staff responsibilities.
- Education Act 1996, sections 550ZA–550ZC (searching students and possessions).
- National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (current edition, updated May 2026), including requirements concerning behaviour policy, safeguarding, searches/screening and boarders’ privacy and complaints.
- Department for Education, Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force in schools (effective from April 2026), where any physical intervention is contemplated.

*