



SCHOOL RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS INVOLVING OFFENSIVE WEAPONS

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1. The Context

Every child or young person has the right to be safe and protected, and to feel safe and protected from any avoidable situation or acts which might result in that child:

- Being physically, sexually, or emotionally harmed in any way.
- Put at risk of physical, sexual, or emotional harm, abuse, or exploitation.
- Having their basic needs neglected or experiencing that their needs are met in ways that are not appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- Being denied the sustained support and care necessary for them to thrive and develop normally.
- Being denied access to appropriate medical treatment.
- Being exposed to demands and expectations which are inappropriate to their age and stage of development.

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

The Law

The carrying, or the suspicion that an individual is carrying a weapon, impacts greatly on the creation of safe places where our young people can feel safe and protected and where effective teaching and learning can take place.

The Criminal Law (Consolidation)(Scotland) Act 1995 states:

“Any person who has an article to which section 49 of this Act applies with them on school Premises shall be guilty of an offence”

“Any person who without lawful authority, or reasonable excuse, has with him/her in a public place, any offensive weapon commits an offence”

An offensive weapon is deemed as being any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to a person or intended by the person having the article, for use for causing injury to a person.

2. About the Guidance

This guidance sets out the procedure to be followed in schools when the carrying of a weapon is known or suspected.

The purpose of these guidelines is to help protect the children and young people of Aberdeenshire and to build the confidence of staff to work safely with young people and to take responsibility for protecting them.

This document provides guidance and direction in four key areas:

- Procedure
- Response
- Prevention
- Communication

Embedding Trauma Informed Practice:

The Scottish Government's ambition, shared with COSLA, is for a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive workforce across Scotland. Policies and procedures therefore align with [Aberdeenshire position statement on ACES and Trauma Informed Practice](#)

Adopting a trauma informed approach is especially supportive when:
(1) attempting to de-escalate a potential situation
(2) where decisions may be required to be made by professionals for the best interests/safety of a young person and/or other people.

Procedure and responses should be underpinned by the 5 key principles of Trauma Informed Practice: Safety, Choice, Collaboration, Trust, and Empowerment). This supports professionals to respond in ways that do no harm and resist practices or approaches that may result in re-traumatisation.

3. Operations

3.1 Procedure

All schools must follow the procedures laid out below if they are informed or suspect that a weapon has been brought onto school premises including a school trip / excursion.

3.2 Response, for all bladed or offensive weapon incidents and allegations

When there is a suspected knife or weapon incident in school, this may be as a result of the following:

- An allegation has been made of a pupil with a bladed or other weapon in school
- A pupil has been seen with a bladed or other weapon in school
- A knife or other weapon has been confiscated from a pupil
- A member of the public is suspected of having a knife or a weapon on site.

The following flow diagram guides staff through the process of handling the incident and contacting the Police.

There is a known or suspected knife or weapon incident in the school

Examples are:

- An allegation has been made of a pupil with a bladed or other weapon in school.
- A pupil has been seen with a bladed or other weapon in school.
- A knife or other weapon has been confiscated from a pupil.
- A member of the public is suspected of having a weapon.

- Has anyone been injured?

- Are Pupils, staff, or members of the public at risk?

ACTIONS

- Seek urgent medical assistance as necessary.
- **All incidents must be reported to the Police Scotland** on 101 **Or 999** where the incident is felt to require an urgent response.
- Advise the Police you will be contacting the Parents / Carers of the pupil to advise them of the incident and follow any advice the Police give.
- Inform Parents/Carers of Pupil(s) involved (if pupil is 16 or over refer to Notes on Flow Diagram Pg 6)
- For actual or suspected risk, consider what actions can safely be taken to isolate the pupil with the weapon and take necessary actions to keep others safe. If the weapon is in the possession of school staff, keep this secure (locked away) until the Police arrive.
- Report the incident to the Head of Service and the QIO
- QIO to inform Corporate Comms

- Where there are no injuries to deal with and no immediate threat to pupils, staff, or the public, isolate the pupil and seek permission from the pupil to search their bag and request pockets be emptied out. The pupil must be supported by 2 staff at all times.

- Pupil has agreed to be searched, search must be undertaken in presence of another adult for purposes of safety and corroboration. **Note, only the Police can carry out a physical search of the pupil**

- Where pupil does not agree to a search, isolate pupil, and await Police Scotland arrival. Update Police

School Search Carried out

- **Weapon found**, secure the weapon, and await Police arrival, update Police on 101
- **No weapon found**, update Police on 101 and follow Police advice.
- Continue to investigate the allegation internally
- Update QIO. They will update the Head of Service and Corporate Communications as necessary

Police Search

- Police arrive, search, and find a weapon and/or take possession of a weapon previously given to staff
- Follow advice of Police
- Update QIO. They will update the Head of Service and Corporate Communications
- Where Police search fails to find a weapon, follow Police advice, and continue to investigate allegation internally

Notes on the flow diagram:

- i) Where a member of the public is suspected of having a weapon on site, the Police must be called. The school can make the call to the Police on 101 or 999, where it is felt an urgent response is needed.

When a pupil aged 16 or over refuses consent for the school to contact the Parent / Carer this must be respected- however School staff should inform pupil that the Police will be contacting the Parent / Carer as part of their enquiry.

- ii) Where a pupil is suspected of having a weapon, consider what actions can safely be taken to isolate the pupil. Where it is felt safe to do so, the pupil can be asked to come with staff to the HT's office or another suitable room closer to where the pupil is. The pupil should be accompanied by two adults.

Where it is not felt safe to move the pupil or the pupil refuses to move, other pupils and staff should remove themselves quietly and without fuss to another location. Once the pupil has been isolated, they **must not be left alone. Two adults** should remain with the pupil.

- iii) Only where it is felt safe to do so, the Head Teacher (or a senior staff member, when the Head Teacher is not available) can ask the pupil to empty their pockets and can also ask the pupil for permission to look in the pupil's school bag or other bags or coats. There should be **two members of staff present** when this request is made and the search takes place. If it is felt this course of action is likely to exacerbate the situation then staff should not make these requests.

Please note that only the Police can make a body search and staff must not perform any kind of body search.

3.2.1 Alerting the QIO and others within the Authority

The Head of Service, QIO must be informed of all knife or weapon related incidents and allegations.

The QIO will advise Corporate Communications of the incident if appropriate.

The Head of Service will decide who else needs to be advised of the incident e.g., a relevant elected member.

3.2.2 Notes on Contacting the Police

- All knife and weapon incidents must be reported to the Police.
- Report incidents to the Police Scotland on 101 or for incidents requiring an urgent response dial 999.
- Brief Police Scotland on the incident. Inform them if you have been able to carry out a search and what you have found.
- The Police have undertaken to respond to all knife and weapon incidents in schools.
- The speed of response will be dictated by the level of severity of the incident in the school and other priorities which need to be dealt with at that time.
- Follow advice given by the Police.

3.2.3 Guidance on Pupil Searches

If it is known or suspected that a pupil may be carrying a weapon or have one in their bag or coat, when it is felt safe to do so, a pupil should be asked to agree to a search and to give up the weapon. Only the Police can carry out a physical search, so here, pupils are being asked to empty out bags and pockets.

Police advise that by taking this approach, where a weapon is actually being carried, the weapon may readily be given up by the pupil, in situations where the pupil is felt to be calm.

If the pupil agrees to permission for pockets/bag to be searched, the staff member should explain to the pupil what they are going to do and when they are going to do it. The staff member should ask the pupil if they have any questions before they proceed. There should be two members of staff present when this request is made and the search takes place.

If possible, a search to be undertaken in a suitable room that feels safe and (with the exception of the two staff members present), is away from onlookers. The intention is by taking this approach to the physical environment, is to help the pupil feel calm and reduce likelihood of a trauma (fight/flight or freeze) response.

Each situation needs a dynamic risk assessment to monitor the wellbeing of the pupil and how they are responding. It may be better to wait for the Police to arrive before requesting items to be surrendered.

If a weapon is surrendered school staff must ensure it is stored securely by being locked away until the Police arrive. When handing over the weapon school staff will be asked to sign a 'Production Label' as part of the Police enquiry.

Where staff feel that to do this would be unsafe, the pupil should be kept isolated until a Police search can be carried out.

- Staff should not attempt to disarm a pupil armed with a weapon. The pupil should be isolated, other pupils, staff and members of the public moved away from the area and Police Scotland called.
- Where a search is going to be carried out, staff can only do this with the pupil's consent.
- The physical searching of a pupil can only be carried out by Police Scotland.
- Where consent to search is given by the pupil, the Head Teacher or nominee can undertake searches of the pupil's belongings. Another adult must be present for safety and corroboration.
- Where the pupil does not consent to a search, await Police Scotland's arrival.
- Ensure a familiar adult is with the Pupil if the Police are conducting a search
- Parents / Carers will be informed of searches, in line with advice received from Police Scotland.

Any weapon found in a pupil's possession will be confiscated and held securely for action by Police Scotland.

3.3 Actions and Investigation following the incident

Aberdeenshire Council exercises a zero-tolerance policy regarding incidents involving weapons and knives. Each incident will require an appropriate and proportionate response.

3.3.1 Exclusion

The power to exclude a pupil from a school and the circumstances under which a pupil may be excluded; and the requirements on local authorities where a decision to exclude has been taken are set out in Regulations 4 and 4A of the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975 ("the 1975 Regulations"), as amended³⁶ and the Schools General (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1982³⁷ (S.I. 1982/1735).

Regulation 4 provides that an education authority shall not exclude a pupil from school unless the authority:

"... are of the opinion that the parent of the pupil refuses or fails to comply, or to allow the pupil to comply with the rules, regulations, or disciplinary requirements of the school".

or

"... consider that in all the circumstances to allow the pupil to continue his attendance at the school would be likely to be seriously detrimental to order and discipline in the school or the educational well-being of the pupils there."

Where there has been a knife or weapon incident in a school, a period of exclusion will be put in place while the incident is being investigated and risk assessments are being prepared. During this period, the safety and circumstances of the pupil being considered for exclusion must also be considered. Once a decision to exclude has been made, the child or young person should not leave the school until their safety, health and wellbeing are assured and appropriate arrangements are in place.

All exclusions from school **must be** formally recorded. Children and young people **must not** be sent home on an "informal exclusion" or sent home to "cool off".

When managing an incident involving an offensive weapon Aberdeenshire Council's "Promoting Inclusion and Reducing Exclusions in Educational Establishments, 2022 [Policy](#) and [Guidance](#)", should be referred to.

3.3.2 Child's Plan Meeting

In most cases, a Child's Plan Meeting will be convened within an appropriate timescale to consider the circumstances of the incident and to prepare a multi-agency action plan. This will be convened by the Named Person Service unless there is already a Lead Professional in place, in which case the Lead Professional will convene the meeting.

Risk assessments such as a CARM Plan (Care and Risk Management Plan), should be considered as part of the Child's Plan process.

3.3.3 Recording an Incident

It is important that details of weapon and knife related incidents are recorded, and that the information can be accessed to build a picture both of individual incidents and the broader position within Aberdeenshire.

Pupil information will be recorded for all pupils involved in the incident on their SEEMIS record and in their Pupil progress record and Chronology, as appropriate.

The Aberdeenshire Corporate Accident and Incident Recording System (CAIRS), accessed via [Ask HR](#), enables the recording and collection of knife and weapon related incidents.

When a knife or weapon incident has taken place, schools must ensure that the incident is recorded on the CAIR System without delay.

4. Prevention

The safety and wellbeing of pupils, staff and people who visit our schools is of paramount importance.

Aberdeenshire Council exercises a zero-tolerance approach to the possession of a weapon or knife in school to help ensure, as far as possible, that pupils, staff, and visitors are kept safe from harm.

Within the curriculum, we will continue to adopt a clear preventative strategy across all schools to raise awareness of and educate all pupils on the risks of the carrying a weapon, of knife crime and the life changing consequences this could have for them and others.

In addition, all schools will keep under review the communication channels that young people use in their schools to express their views and concerns about their school and personal life.

5. Communication

While each school has its own character and culture which reflects its history, background, and the area it serves, it is important that a consistent message is shared across the schools on the carrying of knives and weapons.

All pupils and parents should be aware that there is a consistent zero tolerance approach in all of our schools to the carrying of knives and weapons.

Media Contact

Where the school or staff are contacted by the members of the media regarding alleged weapon incidents, the school and staff should consult with the QIO who will direct the enquiry to Corporate Communications, who will handle the contact and provide information to the media as appropriate. The communications team can be contacted on 01467 538222, by email at news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
In the event of an out-of-hours emergency call 07770 314617.

Social Media

Where comment or questions have been raised on social media following an alleged incident, the school and staff should not react or respond to these posts. Contact should be made with Corporate Communications and the QIO who will support the school on any response that needs to be made.

