



Highworth Combined School & Nursery

Searching, Screening & Confiscation Policy

Item	Detail
Approved by	Curriculum Committee
Date approved	October 2026
Written/updated by	Brian Stother
Next review due	October 2029, or sooner if statutory guidance changes

1. Purpose and scope

Highworth Combined School & Nursery is committed to providing a safe, calm, supportive and inclusive environment in which all pupils and staff can learn and work.

Searching, screening and confiscation are important safeguarding and behaviour-management measures which may be used to maintain the safety and wellbeing of pupils and staff.

This policy sets out:

- the circumstances in which pupils and their possessions may be searched;
- who may conduct searches;
- the items for which pupils may be searched;
- the arrangements for obtaining informed cooperation and consent;
- the procedures to be followed before, during and after a search;
- the circumstances in which items may be confiscated;
- arrangements for searching and confiscating electronic devices;
- arrangements for screening pupils, where applicable;
- safeguarding procedures arising from searches;
- arrangements for recording and monitoring searches;
- arrangements for equality, reasonable adjustments and preventing disproportionate or biased use of searching powers.

This policy applies to all pupils at Highworth Combined School & Nursery and to all members of staff who may be involved in searching, screening or confiscation.

2. Legislative and guidance framework

This policy has regard to:

- the Education Act 1996;
- the Education and Inspections Act 2006;
- the Department for Education guidance *Searching, Screening and Confiscation*;
- *Keeping Children Safe in Education*;
- Department for Education guidance on behaviour in schools;
- relevant guidance concerning mobile phones and electronic devices;
- relevant safeguarding guidance concerning nudes and semi-nudes;
- the Equality Act 2010;
- other relevant statutory guidance and local safeguarding procedures.

The policy also incorporates the safeguarding principles and updates contained in the guidance supplied for the school's 2026 policy review, including the emphasis on safeguarding, proportionality, privacy, dignity, bias, recording and monitoring of searches.

The policy should be read alongside:

- the Behaviour Policy;
- the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy;
- the Equality Policy;
- the Online Safety Policy;
- the Acceptable Use Policy;
- the Complaints Policy;
- relevant staff codes of conduct and safeguarding procedures.

The school will review this policy whenever relevant legislation or statutory guidance changes.

3. Policy objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- explain the legal and school-based powers to search pupils and their possessions;
 - explain when searches may be undertaken with or without the pupil's consent;
 - identify the items for which pupils may be searched;
 - ensure searches are conducted safely, respectfully and proportionately;
 - protect the dignity, privacy and wellbeing of pupils;
 - ensure that searching is considered as part of the school's safeguarding arrangements;
 - identify the school's arrangements for confiscating, retaining, returning and disposing of items;
 - explain arrangements for electronic devices;
 - explain arrangements for screening, where screening is used;
 - ensure that searches are properly recorded;
 - enable the school to identify safeguarding trends and possible disproportionate use of searches;
 - ensure that staff understand their responsibilities when exercising search and confiscation powers.
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4. Safeguarding, privacy, dignity and proportionality

All staff have a duty to consider the best interests and safeguarding needs of pupils.

When deciding whether to search a pupil, staff must balance:

- the need to safeguard pupils and staff from harmful, illegal or disruptive items;
- the privacy, dignity, wellbeing and safeguarding needs of the pupil being searched.

Any search must be necessary and proportionate to the concern.

Staff should consider:

- the pupil's age and developmental stage;
- the pupil's individual circumstances;
- SEND or disability;
- communication needs;
- known vulnerabilities;
- any previous distressing experiences;
- the potential impact of the search on the pupil's dignity and wellbeing;
- whether there is a less intrusive way of addressing the concern.

Searches should be conducted discreetly and respectfully and should avoid unnecessary embarrassment or loss of dignity.

A search is not simply a disciplinary intervention. It may identify that a pupil is vulnerable or at risk and may therefore require a safeguarding response.

5. Items for which a pupil may be searched

5.1 Statutory prohibited items

The statutory prohibited items are:

- knives or weapons;
- alcohol;
- illegal drugs;
- stolen items;
- tobacco and cigarette papers;
- fireworks;
- pornographic images;
- any article that a member of staff reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be, used to:
 - commit an offence; or

- cause personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person, including the pupil.

5.2 Items prohibited by Highworth Combined School

In addition to statutory prohibited items, Highworth Combined School may identify additional items which are prohibited or banned under the school's Behaviour Policy or school rules.

These currently include:

- e-cigarettes and vapes;
- mobile phones where prohibited by the school's Behaviour Policy or school rules;
- any other item specifically identified in the school's Behaviour Policy or school rules.

The school will ensure that pupils, parents/carers and staff are informed about items which may be searched for.

The distinction between statutory prohibited items and items banned by the school will be maintained in the school's policy and records.

6. Who can carry out a search

Only the Headteacher or a member of staff specifically authorised by the Headteacher may exercise the school's statutory search powers.

The Headteacher may authorise individual members of staff to search for:

- particular statutory prohibited items; and/or
- particular items identified in the school's Behaviour Policy or school rules.

At Highworth Combined School, authorised staff will normally include members of the senior leadership and safeguarding teams, together with any other staff specifically authorised by the Headteacher.

A list of staff authorised to conduct searches will be maintained by the Headteacher.

The DSL or deputy DSL will provide safeguarding advice and oversight where a search raises a safeguarding concern.

Any arrangements for authorising searches when the Headteacher is absent must remain consistent with the statutory requirements. The DSL's safeguarding responsibilities do not, by themselves, confer the Headteacher's statutory search powers.

7. When a search may take place

An authorised member of staff may conduct a search where:

- the pupil agrees to the search; or
- the member of staff has reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil may have a prohibited item or another item for which the school has search powers.

Where a search is undertaken with the pupil's agreement, the member of staff should ensure that the pupil understands:

- why the search is being proposed;
- what is being searched for;
- how the search will be conducted;
- what may happen as a result.

The pupil's agreement should be informed and genuine wherever possible.

Where an authorised member of staff has reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil has a prohibited item, the statutory search power may be exercised without the pupil's consent.

8. Reasonable grounds

A search must be based on reasonable grounds where the school is exercising its statutory search powers without the pupil's consent.

In considering whether reasonable grounds exist, staff should consider all relevant information available to them, including:

- information received from pupils or staff;
- observations;
- behaviour or circumstances giving rise to a reasonable suspicion;
- information about a prohibited item;
- information arising from a previous incident;
- any immediate safeguarding or safety risk.

Staff must not rely on stereotypes, assumptions or discriminatory characteristics when deciding whether a pupil should be searched.

9. Equality, bias and disproportionate searching

Staff must remain alert to the possibility that conscious or unconscious bias may influence decisions about whether to search a pupil.

Search decisions must be based on reasonable grounds and must not be influenced by:

- race;
- sex;
- disability;
- religion or belief;
- sexual orientation;

- age;
- SEND;
- social background; or
- assumptions or stereotypes concerning a particular group.

The school will monitor its search data to identify any patterns or disproportionate use of searches involving particular groups of pupils.

Where a pattern or concern is identified, the Headteacher, DSL and relevant staff will review the circumstances and consider whether:

- further safeguarding action is required;
- staff training is required;
- changes to practice are required; or
- the school's behaviour or safeguarding arrangements need to be reviewed.

The school will comply with its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

10. Before a search

Before conducting a search, staff should, wherever practicable:

1. establish the reason for the search;
2. consider whether there are reasonable grounds;
3. consider the pupil's age, needs and individual circumstances;
4. explain the reason for the search to the pupil;
5. explain what will happen during the search;
6. seek the pupil's cooperation and informed agreement;
7. consider whether the pupil may require additional explanation, reassurance or support;
8. identify an appropriate location;
9. identify an appropriate witness; and
10. consider whether there is an immediate safeguarding risk.

Staff should consider why a pupil may be reluctant to cooperate. Reasons may include:

- possession of a prohibited item;
- not understanding the instruction;
- not understanding what the search will involve;
- fear of embarrassment;

- a previous distressing experience of being searched;
 - SEND or communication difficulties; or
 - another safeguarding or welfare concern.
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11. If a pupil refuses to cooperate

If a pupil does not cooperate with a proposed search, staff should first seek to understand the reason for the refusal.

Where appropriate, staff should provide further explanation, reassurance or support.

Where an authorised member of staff has reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil has a prohibited or school-banned item, the relevant statutory search powers may be exercised without the pupil's consent.

Where the pupil's refusal itself constitutes behaviour that breaches the school's Behaviour Policy, an appropriate sanction may be applied in accordance with that policy.

Any sanction must be proportionate and must take account of the pupil's individual circumstances.

A pupil's refusal should not be treated automatically as evidence that they possess a prohibited item.

12. Parent/carers involvement following refusal

Where appropriate, parents/carers may be contacted to discuss concerns arising from a proposed search.

Parental attendance does not replace the statutory search powers available to an authorised member of staff.

If a search is delayed while awaiting a parent/carers, staff must consider the nature and urgency of the safeguarding concern and ensure that the pupil is supervised appropriately.

The school should not unnecessarily delay action where there is an immediate risk of serious harm.

13. Occasional group checks

On occasions, it may be necessary to check a group of pupils where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that multiple pupils may be in possession of prohibited or school-banned items.

For example, pupils may be asked to:

- empty their own pockets;
- display the contents of bags;

- empty desks;
- display the contents of lockers; or
- hand over items for inspection.

Staff must distinguish between a pupil voluntarily displaying or emptying their own possessions and a physical search conducted by a member of staff.

Where staff conduct a physical search of a pupil or their possessions, all requirements of this policy relating to authorised staff, reasonable grounds, same-sex searching, witnesses, location and recording must be followed.

Group checks must not be used as a means of avoiding the safeguards applicable to individual searches.

14. During a search

14.1 Location

An appropriate location must be found for the search.

Where possible, the search should take place away from other pupils and in a manner that protects the pupil's privacy and dignity.

The search may only take place on school premises or where the member of staff has lawful control or charge of the pupil, for example on a school trip.

14.2 Who conducts the search

The member of staff conducting the search must be of the same sex as the pupil.

There must normally be another member of staff present as a witness.

The witness should be of the same sex as the pupil wherever reasonably practicable.

14.3 Emergency exception

The normal requirements for the same-sex searcher and witness do not apply where:

- the member of staff reasonably believes that there is a risk of serious harm to a person if the search is not carried out urgently; and
- it is not reasonably practicable to summon another member of staff within the time available.

Where a member of staff conducts a search without a witness under this exception, they must immediately report the search to another member of staff and ensure that a full record is made.

15. Extent of a search

An authorised member of staff may search a pupil's:

- outer clothing;
- pockets;
- possessions;
- bag;
- desk;
- locker,

where the relevant legal requirements are met.

The person conducting the search must not require the pupil to remove any clothing other than outer clothing.

"Outer clothing" means clothing that is not worn wholly next to the skin or immediately over a garment being worn as underwear. It includes:

- coats;
- hats;
- shoes;
- boots;
- scarves.

A pupil's possessions include goods over which the pupil has or appears to have control, including desks, lockers and bags.

A pupil's possessions should normally be searched in the pupil's presence and in the presence of another member of staff.

16. Strip searches

It is not lawful for school staff to conduct any form of strip search on a pupil.

School staff must never require a pupil to remove clothing beyond outer clothing.

Only the police may conduct a strip search where the relevant legal requirements are met.

If police involvement is being considered, the school must:

- consider the best interests and safeguarding needs of the pupil;
- consider the potential physical and emotional impact on the pupil;
- consider whether other approaches have been exhausted;
- consider whether the proposed police involvement is necessary and proportionate;

- ensure that the DSL or appropriate senior leader is involved.

Any police search undertaken at school must be recorded.

17. Police involvement

The police should be called into school where their involvement is necessary and proportionate.

Where practicable, before involving the police, the school should:

- consider whether other appropriate approaches have been exhausted;
- assess the immediate risk to pupils and staff;
- consider the pupil's welfare and safeguarding needs;
- consider the potential impact of police involvement on the pupil;
- consult the DSL or Headteacher.

This does not prevent the school from contacting the police immediately where there is an urgent risk of serious harm, a suspected serious offence or another circumstance requiring immediate police intervention.

Where police conduct a search, the school will continue to fulfil its safeguarding responsibilities towards the pupil.

18. After a search

Whether or not an item is found, the Headteacher or DSL/deputy DSL should consider whether:

- the circumstances leading to the search indicate a safeguarding concern;
- the pupil may be suffering or be likely to suffer harm;
- the pupil may be vulnerable to exploitation, including criminal exploitation;
- the pupil requires pastoral or additional support;
- the search itself may have caused distress;
- further safeguarding action is required;
- an early help or children's social care referral should be considered.

Where a safeguarding concern is identified, staff must follow the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

19. Safeguarding and vulnerability

Possession of drugs, alcohol, weapons, stolen property or other harmful or illegal items may indicate that a pupil is vulnerable or at risk of exploitation.

Staff should consider whether the pupil may:

- have been coerced;
- be subject to peer pressure;
- be involved in criminal exploitation;
- be at risk of harm;
- be experiencing difficulties at home;
- be involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour;
- require additional support.

A pupil in possession of a prohibited item should not automatically be regarded solely as a perpetrator of poor behaviour.

Where a search reveals evidence that a child may be at risk of harm, the DSL or deputy DSL must be informed without delay.

Where appropriate, the school will consider:

- pastoral support;
- early help;
- referral to children's social care;
- referral to another safeguarding agency;
- police involvement.

20. Recording searches

Any search for a statutory prohibited item or an item identified in the school's Behaviour Policy or school rules should be recorded in the school's safeguarding reporting system, **BehaviourWatch**, whether or not an item is found.

Any search conducted by police officers at school should also be recorded.

The record should include:

- the date, time and location of the search;
- the pupil searched;
- who conducted the search;
- any witness or other adults/pupils present;
- what was being searched for;
- the reason for the search;
- the reasonable grounds for the search, where applicable;
- whether the pupil's cooperation/informed consent was sought;

- the pupil's response;
 - what items, if any, were found;
 - what was confiscated;
 - whether a safeguarding concern was identified;
 - whether parents/carers were informed;
 - any police involvement;
 - any sanction applied;
 - what follow-up action was taken.
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21. Monitoring search records

The Headteacher and DSL will periodically review search records.

The review will consider:

- the number and nature of searches;
- the items being searched for;
- items found;
- recurring locations or circumstances;
- safeguarding referrals;
- police involvement;
- searches involving particular groups of pupils;
- possible disproportionate use of searching;
- complaints or concerns;
- staff training needs;
- implications for the Behaviour Policy or safeguarding arrangements.

Search data will be used to identify possible risks and trends and to inform safeguarding and behaviour practice.

Where disproportionate patterns are identified, the school will investigate the circumstances and take appropriate action.

22. Informing parents/carers

Parents/carers will normally be informed as soon as practicable following a search for a prohibited or school-banned item.

Parents/carers will normally be informed:

- that a search took place;
- the reason for the search;
- whether an item was found;
- what was confiscated;
- what action the school has taken;
- whether any sanction has been applied.

Where there is a safeguarding reason why immediate parental notification may not be appropriate, the school will follow the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and seek advice from the DSL and, where necessary, relevant external safeguarding agencies.

23. Confiscation

An authorised member of staff carrying out a search may confiscate an item where they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that it:

- poses a risk to staff or pupils;
- is a statutory prohibited item;
- is an item prohibited by the school's Behaviour Policy or school rules; or
- is evidence in relation to an offence.

The school's general disciplinary powers may also allow a member of staff to confiscate, retain or dispose of a pupil's property as a disciplinary penalty where it is reasonable and proportionate to do so.

Staff should consider:

- the nature of the item;
 - the risk posed by the item;
 - whether the item is illegal;
 - whether it is evidence of an offence;
 - whether returning the item could create a risk;
 - whether the item can safely be retained or disposed of; and
 - the pupil's individual circumstances.
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24. Prohibited and illegal items

24.1 Drugs

Controlled drugs must be dealt with in accordance with relevant legal and safeguarding requirements and, unless there is a good reason not to do so, delivered to the police as soon as possible.

Where staff are unsure of the legal status of a substance and have reason to believe it may be a controlled drug, they should treat it as such and seek appropriate advice.

Possession of drugs must also be considered as a potential safeguarding concern.

24.2 Alcohol, tobacco, vapes and fireworks

Where staff find alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarettes, vapes, cigarette papers or fireworks, they may retain or dispose of them as appropriate.

Such items should not be returned to the pupil where doing so would contravene the school's rules or create a safeguarding or safety concern.

24.3 Stolen items

Where stolen items are found, they should be dealt with in accordance with the relevant legal and safeguarding requirements.

Where appropriate, stolen items should be delivered to the police as soon as reasonably practicable.

Staff should consider whether possession of stolen property indicates wider safeguarding concerns.

24.4 Weapons

Any weapon or item which may constitute evidence of a suspected offence must be handled safely and, where appropriate, passed to the police as soon as reasonably practicable.

Staff should avoid unnecessary handling of potential evidence.

25. Pornographic and indecent images

If a member of staff finds a pornographic image, they may dispose of the image where appropriate unless there are reasonable grounds to suspect that its possession constitutes a specified offence.

Where an image may be an indecent image of a child, staff must:

- not intentionally view the image;
- not copy it;
- not print it;
- not share it;
- not store or save it;

- refer the matter immediately to the DSL, deputy DSL or Headteacher.

Where appropriate, the device should be secured and the police or another safeguarding agency contacted.

The school will follow its Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and relevant national guidance concerning nudes and semi-nudes.

26. Electronic devices

Electronic devices, including mobile phones, may contain files or data relating to:

- an offence;
- a safeguarding concern;
- bullying or abuse;
- harmful material;
- a breach of the school's Behaviour Policy;
- other conduct which may undermine the safe environment of the school.

Confiscation of an electronic device and examination of its contents are separate decisions.

An authorised member of staff may examine data or files on a confiscated device where there is a good reason to do so.

A good reason may include a reasonable suspicion that the device or its contents have been or could be used to:

- cause harm;
- undermine the safe environment of the school or disrupt teaching;
- commit an offence.

Staff should act proportionately and should only examine material relevant to the reason for the search.

27. Electronic devices and nudes/semi-nudes

Where an incident may involve an indecent image of a child or a nude/semi-nude image of a child, staff should avoid intentionally viewing the image.

The device should be secured where necessary and referred immediately to the DSL, deputy DSL or Headteacher.

Staff must not:

- copy;
- print;

- forward;
- share;
- save;
- intentionally distribute

such imagery.

Where the device may need to be passed to the police, it should be secured and handled in accordance with safeguarding advice.

The school will follow current national safeguarding guidance and local safeguarding procedures.

28. Screening

28.1 Current arrangements

Highworth Combined School & Nursery does not currently routinely screen pupils using walk-through or hand-held metal detectors.

28.2 Future introduction of screening

If the school considers introducing screening arrangements, it will:

- consider whether screening is necessary and proportionate;
- consult appropriately, including with the local police where relevant;
- inform pupils and parents/carers about the arrangements and the reasons for screening;
- make reasonable adjustments for pupils with disabilities;
- ensure staff understand the distinction between screening and searching; and
- ensure any refusal to undergo screening is managed in accordance with the relevant legal requirements and school procedures.

Screening arrangements will be reviewed through the school's safeguarding and risk-assessment processes.

29. SEND, disability and reasonable adjustments

When exercising search, screening or confiscation powers, staff will consider the pupil's:

- age;
- developmental stage;
- SEND;
- disability;
- communication needs;

- individual circumstances;
- known vulnerabilities;
- previous experiences which may affect their response.

Reasonable adjustments will be made where required.

Staff should consider whether a pupil requires:

- additional explanation;
- visual or other communication support;
- reassurance;
- additional time;
- support from a familiar adult;
- another reasonable adjustment.

Reasonable adjustments must not prevent the school from taking necessary and proportionate action to safeguard pupils and staff.

30. Staff training and responsibilities

Staff authorised to conduct searches must be familiar with this policy and relevant legal and safeguarding requirements.

Appropriate staff guidance or training will cover:

- when searches may be conducted;
- reasonable grounds;
- informed cooperation and consent;
- refusal to cooperate;
- same-sex searching;
- witness requirements;
- the extent of a search;
- safeguarding;
- privacy and dignity;
- equality and unconscious bias;
- prohibited and school-banned items;
- confiscation;
- electronic devices;
- indecent images;

- recording;
- police involvement;
- screening, where applicable.

Staff should seek advice from the Headteacher, DSL or another appropriately authorised senior leader if they are uncertain about whether a search should be conducted.

31. Complaints

Any complaint about searching, screening or confiscation should be dealt with under the school's Complaints Policy.

Where a complaint raises a safeguarding concern, it must also be referred to the DSL or Headteacher in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures.

32. Monitoring and review

The Headteacher and DSL will monitor the operation of this policy.

The school will review:

- the number and nature of searches;
- the items found;
- safeguarding referrals;
- police involvement;
- use of screening;
- complaints;
- search patterns;
- possible disproportionate use of searches;
- staff training needs;
- any changes to legislation or statutory guidance.

This policy will be formally reviewed at least annually and sooner where relevant legislation, statutory guidance or Department for Education guidance changes.

33. Related policies and documents

This policy should be read alongside:

- Behaviour Policy;
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy;

- Equality Policy;
 - Online Safety Policy;
 - Acceptable Use Policy;
 - Complaints Policy;
 - Staff Code of Conduct;
 - Educational Visits Policy;
 - relevant local safeguarding procedures.
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34. Equality statement

This policy has regard to the Equality Act 2010 and the school's Equality Policy.

Search, screening and confiscation decisions must be based on reasonable grounds and must not be influenced by discriminatory assumptions or stereotypes.

The school will monitor search data for possible disproportionate impact on particular groups of pupils.

Reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled pupils where required.

Appendix 1 – Quick reference for authorised staff

Before searching

Ask:

1. Am I authorised to conduct this search?
2. What am I looking for?
3. Do I have reasonable grounds?
4. Have I explained the reason to the pupil?
5. Have I sought their cooperation?
6. Have I considered their age, SEND, disability and individual circumstances?
7. Is the search necessary and proportionate?
8. Is an appropriate same-sex member of staff available?
9. Is a witness available?
10. Is the location private and appropriate?

During searching

Remember:

- protect the pupil's dignity;
- use the least intrusive approach appropriate;
- search only within the lawful extent of the power;
- do not require removal of clothing beyond outer clothing;
- normally have a witness present;
- consider safeguarding concerns;
- do not conduct a strip search.

After searching

Record:

- who;
- when;
- where;
- why;
- what was being searched for;
- the grounds;
- who was present;

- whether the pupil cooperated;
- what was found;
- what was confiscated;
- safeguarding concerns;
- parental notification;
- sanctions;
- police involvement; and
- follow-up action.

Then ask:

Does this search reveal that the pupil may themselves need safeguarding or additional support?

Appendix 2 – Search recording checklist

Every recorded search should include:

Information	Recorded
Date	☐
Time	☐
Location	☐
Pupil	☐
Member of staff conducting search	☐
Witness	☐
Other adults/pupils present	☐
Item being searched for	☐
Reason/reasonable grounds	☐
Cooperation/consent sought	☐
Pupil response	☐
Item found	☐
Item confiscated	☐
Safeguarding concern	☐
DSL informed	☐
Parent/carers informed	☐
Sanction	☐
Police involvement	☐
Follow-up action	☐

Appendix 3 – Key principles

All staff should remember:

SAFEGUARD FIRST

SEARCH ONLY WHEN NECESSARY AND PROPORTIONATE

EXPLAIN AND SEEK COOPERATION

RESPECT PRIVACY AND DIGNITY

USE AUTHORISED STAFF

FOLLOW SAME-SEX AND WITNESS REQUIREMENTS

NEVER STRIP SEARCH A PUPIL

CONSIDER VULNERABILITY AND EXPLOITATION

BE ALERT TO BIAS

RECORD EVERY RELEVANT SEARCH

REVIEW SEARCH DATA FOR PATTERNS AND DISPROPORTIONALITY

REFER SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS TO THE DSL

TREAT ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND INDECENT IMAGES WITH PARTICULAR CARE