



Hillingdon's Offensive Weapons Protocol

London Borough of Hillingdon

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London Borough of Hillingdon OFFENSIVE WEAPONS PROTOCOL

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1. Introduction

- 1.1** Knife crime continues to pose a serious risk to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, particularly in London and other metropolitan areas. While national trends show some fluctuations, the concentration of knife-related incidents remains high in urban settings, including Hillingdon. These incidents are often linked to a complex web of vulnerability factors, including trauma, criminal exploitation, poor mental health, peer pressure, and disengagement from education.
- 1.2** In 2019 Ofsted published [Safeguarding children and young people in education from knife crime: Lessons from London](#), which found that no single agency can tackle this issue alone. Instead, it calls for coordinated multi-agency responses, robust safeguarding systems, and early help to prevent escalation. Similarly, the Children's Commissioner's report [Still Not Safe](#) (2021) highlighted the increased risks that are faced by pupils following exclusion, off-rolling or removal from trusted institutions.
- 1.3** Many pupils found carrying weapons are themselves victims of serious youth violence, coercion, or fear, rather than perpetrators. Education settings therefore have a vital role not only in identifying risk and responding swiftly, but also in fostering environments where pupils feel safe, supported, and understood. This includes a balanced and proportionate response to incidents, with exclusion considered only when absolutely necessary, and always following a thorough investigation.
- 1.4** This protocol sits within the broader context of the government's [Serious Violence Strategy](#) (2018) and the Mayor of London's [Knife Crime Strategy](#) (2017), both of which emphasise the importance of education settings, youth engagement, and early intervention. It aligns with current statutory guidance from the Department for Education, including [Searching, Screening and Confiscation \(2022\)](#), [Keeping Children Safe in Education \(2025\)](#) and [Behaviour in Schools - Advice for headteachers and school staff \(2024\)](#).
- 1.5** Locally the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership recognises that incidents involving offensive weapons often reveal wider safeguarding needs. Our multi-agency response focuses on protecting all children from harm, whether they are directly involved, are witnesses or are indirectly affected. The aim is to support all education settings to act proportionately and in the best interests of their pupils and the wider community.
- 1.6** Further to this, the Partnership recognises that knife-crime does not exist in a vacuum; children who are both the victims and perpetrators of knife-crime are likely to experience multiple layers of vulnerability. For example, they may have witnessed other children carrying knives or have suffered trauma which has had an impact on their ability to make safe choices and self-regulate, as well as feel the need to carry knives for 'protection'.
- 1.7** All partners are working together to reduce the number of children exposed to knife- crime and other weapon-related incidents. This protocol supports that approach.

2. Safeguarding Partnership Commitment

2.1 The Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership commits to the following objectives when implementing different aspects of its strategic response to the use or threat of use of offensive weapons in our education settings:

- To work together to reduce exclusions for pupil cohorts which are consistently higher than the average across the local authority, including those with SEND, Children with a Social Worker and pupils receiving free school meals (FSM).
- To implement an early intervention approach which does not stigmatise education settings seeking to be open and proactive in preventing offensive weapons or prohibited items.
- To prevent pupils from entering the criminal justice system on a first offence.
- To ensure appropriate interventions are put in place to divert pupils from re-offending.
- To support pupils who are the victims of knife-crime and their families.
- To work with parents/carers to raise awareness of internet safety and the risks posed by social media.
- To ensure education settings are actively educating pupils on the dangers of offensive weapons and prohibited items.

3. Aims and Definitions

3.1 The term 'offensive weapon' is defined as: *"any article made or adapted for use to causing injury to the person or intended by the person having it with him for such use"* (The Prevention of Crime Act, 1953)

3.2 Offensive weapons fall into three categories:

- a. Those made for causing injury to the person. These include machetes, swords, flick knives, and truncheons. These weapons are classed as having no innocent quality. Other weapons which do not fall into this category do have an innocent purpose such as ordinary razors, penknives and lock knives.
- b. Those adapted for such purposes.
- c. Those not so made or adapted but carried with the intention of causing injury to a person. This category offers much broader scope to include items which do have an innocent purpose but are carried with the intent to use them as an offensive weapon.

3.3 This protocol aims to:

- Establish guidance and processes to be followed in the event of a risk of an offensive weapon or prohibited item being brought into an education setting.
- Provide a wraparound service for pupils in the event of an offensive weapon(s) incident.
- Ensure all Hillingdon pupils, regardless of age and which setting they attend, receive equitable responses and support if they are involved in incidents involving offensive weapons.
- Ensure education settings are a safe place for staff, pupils, parents and visitors where interventions can take place to prevent escalating behaviour, including the carrying of weapons, both within settings and across the community.
- Understand the rise in knife crime incidents and the link with serious youth violence, gangs and exploitation.
- Offer guidance tools to support education settings when assessing situations which involve pupils bringing in an offensive weapon or prohibited item.

4. What should an education setting do when there is an incident relating to offensive weapons?

4.1 Where an immediate response to an incident at an education setting is required due to the assessed level of danger, education staff should dial 999. An example would be where a pupil has been detained in possession of a knife on the premises and poses, or is likely to pose, a risk of:

- a. Danger to life
- b. Use or immediate threat of use, of violence
- c. Serious injury to a person
- d. Serious damage to property

4.2 When there is no immediate risk, education settings should report incidents to the police non-emergency number: 101. Settings can also report a non-emergency crime online [here](#).

4.3 Where a pupil is found in possession, on the premises, of any article which has a blade or is sharply pointed, staff must immediately report this to the police via the non-emergency 101 service or via their DWO-CYP police officer.

4.4 Under most other circumstances, the police should be informed of any incident believed to involve a weapon. However, where in the judgement of staff, the circumstances are innocent and there is no suggestion of the use of the article as a weapon; the matter may be dealt with internally. If there is any doubt, the setting must inform the police.

4.5 When reporting incidents to the police, education settings should provide their evaluation of the seriousness of the incident (i.e. in progress, immediate threat or request for weapon collection only) to assist the police in judging the nature and immediacy of the response required. An incident/fact finding form should be completed as soon as possible and made available to the police.

4.6 Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a pupil might have in their possession an offensive weapon, it may be appropriate for the headteacher or an authorised and trained member of the senior leadership team, to conduct a search of the pupil or their possessions with or without the pupil's consent. Any search conducted by a trained member of staff should follow the DofE [Searching Screening and Confiscation \(2022\)](#) guidance, aspects of which are detailed below.

4.7 Staff must be aware of the legal powers they have/do not have for searching pupils:

- Staff may search outer clothing, pockets, possessions (including bags), desks, and lockers. However, they must not require the pupil to remove any clothing other than outer garments like coats, hats, shoes, boots, or scarves.
- Staff are not permitted to conduct any form of strip search, defined as searches involving the removal of more than outer clothing. Such searches can only be carried out by police officers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Code A. Even then, they must be conducted in appropriate settings with strict safeguards.
- A pupil can be searched without consent if there are reasonable grounds to suspect the pupil has a prohibited item, such as an offensive weapon in their possession.

4.8 If during a search the member of staff finds anything they suspect may fall under the definition of an offensive weapon they must seize and retain the item. Parents/carers should be contacted, regardless of whether the result of any search was positive or negative.

4.9 A detailed record of the search should be made by the undertaking member of staff, with a copy kept only by the headteacher and DSL. These records should clearly specify the date; time and any witnesses present during the confiscation of any items.

4.10 Where the pupil is suspected of carrying a weapon and is not a registered pupil at the education setting, or where the incident takes place outside the setting's premises, any search should only be undertaken by a police officer.

4.11 Where an offensive weapon is found on the education setting's premises, staff may take possession of the object. Education settings should make their own arrangements as to which members of staff may be authorised to do so.

4.12 Where satisfied it is reasonable to do so, it is possible to arrange for it to be taken away by the parent/carer of the pupil from whom it was taken. However, some weapons are by their very nature offensive and should under no circumstances be returned.

4.13 Where it is not considered reasonable to return the item, it may be retained by staff. Possession of a weapon in such circumstances by a member of staff is likely to be with good reason or lawful authority, and thus not an offence under the Offensive Weapons Act 1996. However, any member of staff in possession of a weapon in such circumstances should secure it, and arrange, without delay, to surrender it to the police

4.14 Where weapons are surrendered to the police, an incident/fact finding form from the setting should be updated to reflect this, with a full copy provided to the police.

5. Post Incident Recommendations and Deciding Sanctions

5.1 There should be consideration of how to manage the situation immediately post-incident to ensure the safety of pupils, staff, and members of the public. The following should be considered:

- In the case of a serious incident, the local authority should be informed in line with the council's [Hillingdon Critical Incident Policy for Schools, Settings and Colleges \(2024\)](#). Support for dealing with any media enquiries can also be found within this policy.
- Support for the staff and pupils involved should be arranged by the education setting and local authority.
- An immediate vulnerabilities risk assessment should be undertaken with regards to the pupil and the incident. An example can be found in [Appendix A](#).
- The risk assessment should seek to establish why the pupil was in possession of an offensive weapon and provide clarity around the next options which can be considered for support.
- Where a risk assessment establishes the pupil was at risk to exploitation or county lines, then the ongoing support provided is crucial.
- An immediate referral to the local authority's [Stronger Families Hub](#) should be made in line with a pupil bringing an offensive weapon into an education setting.

5.2 Following an incident, an appropriate sanction should be considered at the discretion of the headteacher after a full investigation into the incident has taken place, in accordance with [Behaviour in Schools - Advice for headteachers and school staff \(2024\)](#) and statutory DfE guidance on [School Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions \(2024\)](#).

5.3 The decision of any sanction should always be based on the individual circumstances around the offensive weapon or any prohibited item. An advisory checklist has been formulated to support settings following an incident related to offensive weapons or prohibited items. This can be found in [Appendix C](#).

5.4 Consideration should be given to what support is offered to anyone who has been adversely affected by a pupil bringing an offensive weapon. It may be necessary to consider what is offered to any victims of such behaviours, such as counselling.

5.5 AXIS is Hillingdon's local offer and can provide support and advice around a pupil who is at risk of exploitation, gang affiliation and serious youth violence. A referral should be made to the following email address: axis@hillingsdon.gov.uk. AXIS will work together with the pupil, the family and the education setting to formulate a personalised support package. Referrals should set out the type of intervention required and any areas of concern. AXIS is a consent-based service so the views of the pupil and family should be sought prior to submission.

5.6 Education settings may also take the opportunity to reach out to [Makepeace](#). Makepeace focuses on the work that frontline officers can conduct with pupils in relation to youth violence. They may seek guidance from charity [The New Way Trust](#) which provides interactive, area specific programmes for pupils in the prevention of crime or serious youth violence.

5.7 The following government strategies and organisations also offer advice and guidance to settings on how to support those pupils involved with offensive weapons and/or knife crime:

- MOPAC – [Police and Crime Plan for London 2022 to 2025](#)
- London Assembly – [London's Violence Reduction Unit](#)

- Knife Crime Strategy: [London Needs You Alive toolkit](#)
- Ministry of Justice: [The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales and supporting public information materials, 2025](#)
- Violence Reduction Unit: [Three phases of critical incident management](#)
- *iMatter* - [A guide to managing critical incidents in schools](#)

5.8 If following the incident investigation the pupil is considered to be at risk of permanent exclusion, the setting should contact the Exclusions & Reintegration team in Hillingdon (exclusionsupport@hillington.gov.uk). They will be able to arrange an emergency meeting with key partners to discuss the options and support available. It is essential the individual circumstances of each case are considered to ensure the headteacher's discretion is not fettered through the application of a blanket policy.

5.9 There should be due consideration to whether it is possible for the pupil to remain in the education setting without compromising the integrity of the setting's behaviour policy or putting at risk the safety of others.

5.10 For care experienced pupils, the headteacher should discuss the incident with the Virtual School Headteacher responsible for the pupil before coming to a final decision on the sanction. The setting should also ensure contact is made with the pupil's allocated social worker.

5.11 For children or young people with an EHCP, the headteacher will discuss the incident with the relevant EHC Officer before coming to a final decision on the sanction to verify whether any additional support or alternative course of action is available.

5.12 Where it is clear a pupil has had some involvement in a weapon-related incident, but the extent of their involvement is not yet known, headteachers may choose to isolate the pupil on-site or direct them to an off-site provision until a full investigation has been carried out.

5.13 Headteachers should allow time for a thorough investigation to take place (e.g., collation of witness statements, CCTV evidence, feedback from agencies such as health, children's social care and the police).

6. The Dedicated Ward Officer–Child Young Persons Officer (DWO-CYP)

6.1 The DWO-CYP officers in Hillingdon can support with education sessions in secondary education settings, where appropriate. This includes mainstream settings, UTCs, SEND specialist provisions and independent schools. Education settings should contact their DWO-CYP through their established local Safer Neighbourhood Team or the designated contact within their local Safer Schools Partnership.

6.2 There is an opportunity to support in the delivery of primary education sessions, if there is a need to do it, which includes if there has been a rise in offensive weapons and prohibited items. This is usually performed by the youth engagement team.

6.3 Hillingdon DWO-CYP officers can offer all settings the opportunity to conduct weapon screening operations to support offensive weapons and prohibited items. Should this be something they wish to consider, contact should be made with their assigned DWO-CYP officer.

6.4 School staff may become aware soft intelligence relating to weapons in the home of a pupil. An example of this might be where a parent is a collector of knives and these are in a display case in the home. Any such soft intelligence should be shared with the DWO-CYP.

Appendix A: Offensive Weapons Risk Assessment

A probability impact assessment is a risk matrix approach; this simple assessment tool can allow education provisions to assess the 'likelihood of something happening' and the 'impact this could have' if it did happen.

Situation	Examples
Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Inside/outside setting2. Staff/pupils present3. Busy/quiet place4. Community involved – inside or outside setting5. Parental engagement
Pupil	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• History of pupil – e.g. social care, early help, suspensions• Previous incidents of offensive weapons and prohibited items• Risk of exploitation/serious youth violence• SEN (Special Educational Needs) needs/care experienced• Weapon with intent to use it.• Open case to AXIS/ Youth Justice service

Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the pupil brought the knife in with an intent on using it? What type of weapon has been brought into the setting From gathering the information, are the setting satisfied that the pupil has brought the knife in with an intention to cause harm? Through the pupil's statement, have they expressed a reason for bringing in the offensive weapon for protection?
Weapon of intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the pupil stated that he was intended to use the weapon to hurt someone else – statements, parents declaration, knife size?

The impact assessment should consider the weapon of intent and why the pupil brought an offensive weapon in. The table below is an example of a commonly used risk matrix system to calculate likelihood versus impact.

Assessing *likelihood* versus *impact* always includes an element of interpretation of information and often individuals will differ on where a line is drawn between the three grade levels. Those completing the assessment should not be concerned about exact interpretations. This process is used in a huge variety of risk analysis processes, and it relies on professional judgement of the individual who is tasked with completing it

		Impact				
		Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Likelihood	Very High					
	High					
	Medium					
	Low					
	Very Low					

Appendix B: Positive Practice Case Studies

The following 6 case studies have been provided from real life situations although certain details have been changed to protect identities. The probability assessment mentioned in [Appendix A](#) has been applied to demonstrate guidance and support, and to understand the assessment of risk when education settings are making decisions regarding a pupil.

1. Ryan

Ryan is a year 8 pupil with no prior concerns regarding his behaviour whilst being in mainstream education. Ryan has a diagnosis of high functioning autism spectrum disorder, and he took cooking as one of his core subjects. Whilst in a cooking lesson, Ryan pulled a cheese knife out of his bag and put it on the table. The teacher assessed the situation and was able to speak to Ryan outside the classroom about the cheese knife, who in turn stated that he took the cheese knife from home, and he wanted to bring it into cooking today. The teacher was able to use a restorative approach with Ryan as he was finding it difficult to understand why he was in trouble for the cheese knife.

Immediate Actions

- Assess the situation and immediate dangers - I.e., environment, pupil, situation, weapon of intent – Probability/Impact Assessment undertaken. Score **Low/Medium**
- Pupil spoken to regarding the weapon brought into the school.
- Ryan was also searched.
- Cheese knife was immediately confiscated and taken out of the class.

Follow up Actions

- Parents were informed of the situation and advised to speak to Ryan about the decision making leading to taking the cheese knife.
- DWO-CYP Officer contacted who has provided guidance for the school, which included advice about steps to take with Ryan.
- Ryan is spoken to about the importance of taking things from home and he has been informed he can use the equipment which is already provided within the school.
- Safety session was delivered by the school around bringing objects from home into school.
- Referral made to the Stronger Families Team (consented from mother) for extra support for the family.

2. Hassan

Hassan is a year 9 pupil who displayed a deterioration in his behaviour over a two-week period. Hassan had recently received a suspension for 'assault against a pupil' for four days. Mother phoned the school and stated she is extremely worried about his activities outside of school and is very scared he may be carrying a knife. Staff in school also overheard another student say they think that Hassan has brought a knife into school.

Immediate Actions

- Assessment the situation of immediate dangers. I.e. environment, pupil, situation, weapon of intent – Probability/Impact Assessment undertaken. Score **High**
- Consider the need to take Hassan out of circulation to be spoken to by staff, searched if required and seize any weapons that are found.
- Call Police – 999 – Immediate risk of harm.

Follow Up Actions

- MASH referral
- AXIS informed – due to risks of CSE/CCE axis@hillingdon.gov.uk
(Hillingdon local offer, due to serious youth violence and concerns around County lines)
- Referral to *Catch 22*
- Managed move placement discussed and authorised to another setting.
- School made a referral into *Makepeace*, to come and talk to school about the causes and consequences of youth violence

3. Rhys

Rhys is a year 11 pupil and has previously received three suspensions from school for assault against a pupil, as well as for persistent disruptive behaviour. Rhys is a vulnerable young person who is on a Child in Need plan. He is known to try extremely hard to impress his peers and there is a risk he is being exploited. He is extremely open with staff and has told school he is 'mixed up with people' outside school and within this area. Rhys has said he is extremely scared and that he wants to get a gun so he can use it on the people who are threatening him. He has said that he can get a gun for '£300, but he hasn't got one yet'. There is a concern that this young person is being criminally exploited.

Immediate Actions

- Assessment of the situation of immediate dangers. I.e., environment, pupil, situation, weapon of intent – Probability/Impact Assessment undertaken – Score **High**
- Reported to the DWO-CYP Officer due to vulnerabilities

Follow up Actions

- Social worker was informed of the situation
- Thorough risk assessment which tied in with support outside school
- AXIS informed - Due to risks of CCE, CSE axis@hillingdon.gov.uk -
- Referral made to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- Referral made to *Catch 22*
- Commissioned placement made to alternative provision (Rhys was able to finish his exams at a different setting, without the need for a permanent exclusion)

4. Leanne

Leanne is a year 10 pupil whose attendance was extremely poor. Leanne was in school, and a teacher overheard her conversation with another pupil in the class where she stated she has 'now got a boyfriend' who is older than her and that they got engaged over the weekend. Leanne was heard saying that her new boyfriend is someone who has been involved within gangs, usually carries a knife to protect himself and that he looks after her well. When the teacher asked Leanne, on her own, how she was, Leanne stated she was 'good' and 'it was great to be back in school' again.

Immediate Actions

- Assessment of the situation of immediate dangers. I.e., environment, pupil, situation, weapon of intent – Probability/Impact Assessment undertaken. Score **Medium/High**
- Immediate discussion with headteacher
- Telephone contact with the DWO-CYP Officer.
- MASH referral made (pupil was already allocated a social worker- so they were informed from MASH)

Follow up Actions

- Monitoring the pupil's attendance
- Child in Need meeting was held
- Safety plan was written into school guidance

5. Brandon

Brandon is a year 6 student and has occasionally displayed 'some forms of aggressive behaviour' towards other pupils within school. This has often led to time within the reflection room. On one occasion, when Brandon was in the reflection room, he stated that he wanted to hurt a pupil with 'something sharp', that he 'wants to hurt him hard' and he does not care if he gets in trouble for it. Brandon has also said that he often bites himself when he feels frustrated (and marks can be seen on his hands). Brandon stated that his parents often 'shout at each other at home' and will often tell him to go to his room when he asks for the iPad.

Immediate Actions

- Assessment the situation of immediate dangers. I.e., environment, pupil, situation, weapon of intent – Probability/Impact Assessment undertaken. Score **Medium**
- Meeting called with parents – to discuss behaviour and ongoing support

Follow Up Actions

- Referral Made to the *Stronger Families Service* (consent gained from mother).
- Risk Assessment carried out and safety plan written into the pupil's pastoral support plan.
- Referral made to CAMHS due to aggressiveness and self-harming

6. Jarod

Jarod is a year 6 pupil and has recently started school following a move from a neighbouring borough. He has struggled to settle with class peers and was involved in an altercation in which he was cyber bullied and then set on by two boys in the same class. Jarod sustained a fractured nose and an injury to his left eye. Following this incident, it has been alleged that Jarod sent numerous *Snapchat* messages stating he was 'gonna get his boys to merc' the two of them next week in retaliation. All messages have been deleted, however there appears to be local awareness of the issue and it is believed to be credible.

Immediate Actions

- Assessment the situation of immediate dangers. I.e., environment, associations in and around residence and communication with Police Safer Neighbourhood Officers. Score **Medium**
- Meeting called with parents – to discuss threat of violence and necessary school sanctions going forward.

Follow Up Actions

- Risk Assessment carried out and safety plan written into the pupil's pastoral support plan
- Referral made to AXIS to map associates and consider soft intelligence:
axis@hillingdon.gov.uk
- Monitoring of the pupil's attendance at school.

Appendix C: Offensive Weapons Response Checklist

This checklist acts as a guideline for staff and senior leaders in the event of such incidents occurring and will enable actions to be taken, to ensure education settings feel confident in reporting an incident of offensive weapons or prohibited items.

Questions	Yes/No (please circle)
Has the weapon been secured in line with police advice?	Yes/No
Has there been a reasonable assessment of a threat to use a weapon to harm a person, or cause them alarm, distress or fear that violence will be used?	Yes/No
Source identified?	Yes/No
Have the pupil's parents/carers been informed?	Yes/No
Has the pupil been given the opportunity to give their accounts of events?	Yes/No
Has the incident been reported to the DWO-CYP Officer?	Yes/No
Has a referral been made to children's social care (MASH)?	Yes/No
Has a response been received from children's social care (MASH)?	Yes/No
Has a response been received from the DWO-CYP Officer?	Yes/No
Has the pupil received an offer of additional support?	Yes/No
Is it possible for the pupil to remain in the education setting without compromising on the safety of others?	Yes/No
If there is an identified victim, have their needs been assessed and have any additional support or safety planning been put in place as appropriate?	Yes/No
Is it necessary to permanently exclude the pupil? Have alternatives been considered (e.g. multi agency intervention/wraparound/commissioned placement)?	Yes/No Yes/No
If a decision has been made to permanently exclude the pupil, have the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter • feedback from children's services and police • incident report • risk assessment • pupil summary 	Yes/No Yes/No Yes/No Yes/No Yes/No Yes/No

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attendance certificate <p>been sent to the Hillingdon Exclusion and Reintegration team (or relevant out of borough service) on Day 1 of the permanent exclusion?</p>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
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