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Teachers will have power to search all pupils for knives

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TEACHERS will be authorised to search every pupil in their school if they suspect that there is a knife on the premises, *The Times* has learnt.

Britain's growing knife culture has prompted ministers to draw up plans for draconian new powers to try to prevent more schoolgate stabbings.

It comes as Home Office figures show that the number of children aged 12 to 14 convicted of carrying knives at school doubled between 2000 and 2004 to 170.

Alan Johnson, the Education Secretary, has decided that the new Violent Crime Reduction Bill does not go far enough in tackling the knife culture in schools and wants to give head teachers wider powers to track down and seize knives.

The Bill going through Parliament allows teachers to search individual pupils if they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that they have a knife. But teachers have complained that pupils could pass the weapon to a friend if they thought they were about to be searched. They believe that being able to search every pupil would be an effective deterrent.

The change would mean that many innocent pupils would be caught up in searches. It is certain to be challenged by civil liberties groups.

Some teachers may also object on the ground of safety and say that it is up to the police to search pupils. But a Whitehall source said it was teachers who had requested the extra powers. "If teachers have good reason to think there is a knife on the premises they need to have the powers to find it," he said. "It is only right to consider that option."

Teachers would be given statutory guidance on how to conduct a search. It would define what constituted "reasonable grounds" for suspecting the presence of a knife, what teachers should have before conducting a search, how many people should be present and the search methods, which would include metal detectors, airport-style frisking or scanners. The guidance would also set out rules on what sort of records should be kept.

Staff would still have the option, under existing law, to call the police and ask them to undertake the search instead.

Schools would be obliged to consult with their board of governors and local communities before being allowed to undertake school-wide searches. But once they have permission, they can carry out a search without notice.

Officials said that the recent spate of stabbings had illustrated the

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need for action. The move is part of a wider campaign against the culture of violence and drugs in schools, under which random drug testing will be introduced in secondary schools this autumn.

From September, pupils in Kent will be tested with mouth swabs for drugs including cannabis, cocaine and heroin. A pilot scheme at Abbey School in Faversham was said to have transformed pupil behaviour as well as their results.

Last month, Kiyan Prince, 15, was stabbed to death outside a school in Edgware, North London. Ahmed Hussain, 14, survived after being knifed in the stomach outside Heartlands school in Birmingham.

Although the Violent Crime Reduction Bill is nearing the end of its parliamentary passage, there would still be time to amend it. John Reid, the Home Secretary, is considering increasing the maximum jail term for carrying a knife from two to four years.

OFFENCES DOUBLE

- 170 pupils aged between 12 and 14 were convicted of possessing knives in 2004, almost double the 1999 total
- 37 children were convicted of carrying a knife or blade in a public place in 2004, compared with 18 in 2000
- About 30 per cent of pupils admit that they have carried a knife at some time
- A ten-week knife amnesty that began in May brought in more than 18,000 weapons, including meat cleavers, machetes and axes
- 5,784 people were convicted of carrying a knife or blade in England and Wales in 2004, compared with 3,511 in 2000

Source: Home Office

Should teachers have the power to search for knives? [Join the debate](#)

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