



FOXFORD

School & Community Arts College

Wearing of the Kirpan Policy

Approved by Governors May 18

Foxford School respects the rights of those that are baptized observers of Khalsa Sikhi and those who observe the Sikh religion to wear a Kirpan¹ as a part of their religious beliefs. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for accommodating the Kirpan at Foxford School.

Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Ensure religious tolerance and harmony within Foxford School, which serves a diverse religious and ethnic community.
- Encourage and value the religious and cultural practices of students and staff.
- Ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of everyone.

Background

Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee, the founder of the Khalsa ('Akal Purakh de fauj' - the Army of God), instructed its members to wear five special signs to show that they were Sikhs. Known as the five K's these signs are: Kesh, Kangha, Kara, Kachera and Kirpan.

Each sign has a particular significance. Sikhs who have been initiated by receiving Amrit (and have become baptised Sikhs) are expected to wear the Five K's at all times.

- **Kesh** (uncut hair) signifying spiritual strength, power, humility and an acceptance of God's will.
- **Kangha** (wooden comb) signifying cleanliness of the mind and body and of a well-ordered life.
- **Kara** (steel wristband) signifying one God who is beyond birth and death; unity and equality. Usually worn by all Sikhs (Baptised or not).
- **Kachera** (specially made cotton underwear) signifying high moral character and modesty.
- **Kirpan** (small dagger/sword), 'Kirpa' meaning blessings and benevolence, and 'Aan' meaning honour and dignity respect, justice and authority. The Kirpan is never used for offensive purposes.

Section 1 Prevention of Crime Act 1953 makes it an offence to have an offensive weapon in a public place. Section 139 (1) Criminal Justice Act 1988 makes it an offence to have a bladed or sharply pointed article in a public place. Section 139A (1) Criminal Justice Act 1988 makes it an offence to have a bladed or sharply pointed article on school premises. However, under Section 4, subsection (4), a person has a defence if the article in question is worn for religious reasons or as part of any national costume².

The Kirpan is a sacred instrument of Sikhi life and is treated and used with great spiritual care.

A high level of loyalty and sacrifice for Sikhi is demanded from those wearing the five K's. Self-discipline is considered to be of the utmost importance and a member of the Khalsa is expected to observe a strict code of conduct.

The Kirpan is not a weapon in the normal sense of the word and has no equivalent in the English language. Its concept, wearing and use within the Sikh religion as an article of faith is unique and original.

It is not generally considered appropriate to wear one of the five K's without wearing the other four.

Policy

The school has to balance the responsibilities to ensure the health and safety of persons using school premises with the religious requirements of practising Sikhs.

The school will allow the Kirpan to be worn, subject to the following conditions:

- That it is restricted to students/staff who have gone through the Amrit ceremony. Parents/carers should be asked to authorise the wearing of the Kirpan by providing a letter confirming that a young person has been through the Amrit ceremony of initiation and is therefore expected to wear the five Ks at all times. Parents/ carers of Kirpan wearing children will need to sign a disclaimer which waives their right to make any claims against the school, its staff or students should anything happen as a result of them carrying a Kirpan.
- Under health and safety legislation, Foxford needs to be sure that the wearing of the Kirpan does not present any health and safety risks. The Kirpan should not be more than 6 inches in length (including both blade and handle) and the blade should not exceed 3 inches in length; the Kirpan should always be sheathed and worn out of sight. Some Sikhs may find it acceptable to wear a smaller and more symbolic Kirpan in school, as small as one and a half inches which is sealed so that it cannot be drawn.
- The Kirpan should never be unsheathed and should never be used as a weapon to threaten others. In either case the Kirpan would constitute an offensive weapon within the law. In the event of any such occurrences, the offender would be subject to the school's normal disciplinary procedures which would include supported transfer/ permanent exclusion and police involvement.
- The Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher, upon consultation, reserve the right in asking parents to remove the Kirpan, if the Kirpan is used in such a way which contraindicates the principles of Sikhi.
- School staff will contact the student's parents at the earliest opportunity if it becomes apparent that the student is not wearing all five K's to further discuss the situation with them.
- It is recommended that the smaller, symbolic Kirpan is worn during physical education lessons. If the full Kirpan is worn then it should be sheathed, secured and worn out of sight.

Reference:

1. In 1699, [Guru Gobind Singh](#) told his Sikhs at the [Baisakhi Amrit Sanchar](#) to constantly and regularly wear a **Kirpan** at all times. This was an article of defence which together with the other 4 [Kakars](#) formed the external visible symbols to outwardly display ones commitment to the [Hukam](#) (orders given) of the tenth master. This injunction was primarily in order to protect the weak from tyranny and slavery, to maintain a state of harmony and security, to allow for the free development of trade, craftsmanship, arts & literature and to safeguard and protect the universal right of all beings to live their lives in a peaceful, stable and sheltered environment. The word "Kirpan" has two roots - the first root is: Kirpa

which means "Mercy, grace, compassion, kindness" and the second root is Aan which in turn means "Honor, grace, dignity". So together the word stands for "the dignity and honor of compassion, kindness and mercy".

2. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/26/section/4>

Policy written by:

Sarah Beestone

Sulakhan Singh Heer

This policy will be reviewed in March 2021.

Appendix 1

Dear Parent/ Carer

You have made us aware that (name of student) wishes to wear the Kirpan in school. Foxford School respects the rights of those that are baptized observers of Sikhi and those who observe the Sikh religion to wear the Kirpan as a part of their religious beliefs. We refer you to our policy on the wearing of the Kirpan which is attached to this letter.

We ask you to sign the slip attached to this letter to indicate that you understand and support the school policy on the wearing of the Kirpan. We are sure you understand that the school has to balance its responsibilities to ensure the health and safety of persons using school premises with the religious requirements of practising Sikhs.

We would draw your attention to the following:

- The wearing of the Kirpan is restricted to students/staff who have gone through the Amrit ceremony.
- Parents/carers should authorise the wearing of the Kirpan by providing a letter confirming that a young person has been through the Amrit ceremony of initiation and is therefore expected to wear the five Ks at all times.
- Parents/carers of Kirpan wearing children will need to sign a disclaimer which waives their right to make any claims against the school, its staff or students should anything happen as a result of them carrying a Kirpan.
- The Kirpan should not be more than 6 inches in length (including both blade and handle) and the blade should not exceed 3 inches in length; the Kirpan should always be sheathed and worn out of sight. Some Sikhs may find it acceptable to wear a smaller and more symbolic Kirpan in school, as small as one and a half inches which is sealed so that it cannot be drawn.
- The Kirpan should never be unsheathed and should never be used as a weapon to threaten others. In either case the Kirpan would constitute an offensive weapon within the law. In the event of any such occurrences, the offender would be subject to the school's normal disciplinary procedures which would include supported transfer/ permanent exclusion and police involvement.
- The Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher, upon consultation, reserve the right in asking parents to remove the Kirpan, if the Kirpan is used in such a way which contraindicates the principles of Sikhi.
- School staff will contact the student's parents at the earliest opportunity if it becomes apparent that the student is not wearing all five K's to further discuss the situation with them.
- It is recommended that the smaller, symbolic Kirpan is worn during physical education lessons. If the full Kirpan is worn then it should be sheathed, secured and worn out of sight.

If you have any further questions then please do not hesitate to contact school to speak to myself or Sulakhan Singh Heer, Director of Learning.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Beestone
Deputy Head Teacher

I (PRINT NAME) parent/carer of (Insert name) sign to state

I understand and support the policy of Foxford School on the wearing of the Kirpan.

I attach a letter to confirm that (insert name) has been through the Amrit ceremony of initiation and is therefore expected to wear the five Ks at all times.

I understand that, by signing this letter, I waive my right to make any claims against the school, its staff or students should anything happen as a result of (name of student) carrying the Kirpan.

Signed.....