



Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust Guidance

S-CAT Kirpan Guidance

Committee and Date Approved	Trust Board- Summer 2026
Category	Recommended
Next Review Date	Annually – Summer 2027
Policy Availability	Trust Website
Officer Responsible	CEO

This document is guidance, not policy, and therefore The Trust, all Academies within the Trust, and Shireland Learning Limited do not need to comply with it.

Contents

Introduction	3
The Five Ks and the turban	3
Legislation and the Wearing of 5 K's	4
The Equality Act 2010.....	4
Criminal Justice Act 1988	4
Section 4 of the Offensive Weapons Act 1996	4
Offensive Weapons Act 2019.....	5
S-CAT Staff awareness	5
5 K's and Swimming.....	6

Introduction

This guidance is intended to provide advice to S-CAT students and staff regarding the wearing of the Kirpan. A number of S-CAT Sikh students have gone through the Amrit ceremony and are required to wear the “5 Ks”, including the Kirpan, therefore this guidance has been created, based on guidelines issued by DfE.

Sikhism is one of the world’s newest major monotheistic faiths, dating from the late 15th and early 16th century CE (AD). Its founder, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, was born in the Punjab in 1469, in an area now part of Pakistan. Guru Nanak was succeeded by nine living Gurus. The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), instructed that he would be replaced, not by a person, but by teachings of the Sikh Gurus and saints compiled in the Guru Granth Sahib. For Sikhs this is considered the living Guru, and the scripture remains the highest authority of the Sikhs, offering guidance on all situations in life and motivating personal transformation.

Sikhs are a significant religious and ethnic minority in Britain.

The Five Ks and the turban

All initiated Sikhs (also referred to as Amritdhari Sikhs) are required to wear their articles of faith, the turban and the Five Ks (panj kakaar), at all times. These are physical articles of faith and most Amritdhari Sikhs believe that they cannot be replaced by symbolic replicas. The Five Ks are the:

- **Kanga:** a small wooden comb worn in the hair at all times, inside the turban. It represents the aspiration for spiritual discipline and purity.
- **Kirpan:** a curved blade worn over or underneath the individual’s clothing. It symbolically represents the power of truth to cut through untruth and is a reminder of the obligation to prevent violence rather than stand by. The kirpan is associated with the concepts of ‘kirpa’ (blessings and benevolence) and ‘aan’ (meaning honour and dignity).
- **Kara:** an iron or steel bracelet, worn on the wrist. It reminds Sikhs that they have made a commitment to God and acts as a constant reminder to individuals to restrain themselves from immoral or unrighteous acts.
- **Kachera** (or kachh or kaccha): special cotton undershorts representing fidelity and morality.
- **Kesh:** hair, which is regarded as a gift from God, kept uncut, and always covered.

The turban (also known as dastar, pag and pagri) is a long loose piece of cloth wrapped and tied around the head to cover the hair. While it is not one of the Five Ks, wearing a turban is mandatory for an Amritdhari Sikh. It is decreed to be an integral part of the body and makes up part of the Sikh identity.

It is important to note that as well as having religious significance, both the kara and the turban are of exceptional importance to the cultural and racial identity of Sikhs and may also be worn by non-initiated Sikhs.

Legislation and the Wearing of 5 K's

Sometimes the wearing of Sikh articles of faith may appear to conflict with the needs of an organisation and the lack of understanding of Sikh articles of faith can inadvertently lead to tensions between the rights of individuals and the rights of the organisation. Developments in legislation to make provision for the wearing of Sikh articles of faith have shown that there are resolutions to longstanding concerns for employers, service providers and individuals. To a certain extent, these developments have clarified the rights of those wearing Sikh articles of faith, but there remain varying levels of understanding and practice around this.

Sikhs are both an ethnic and a religious group so are protected from racial as well as religious discrimination. This principle was decided by the House of Lords (the *Mandla v Dowell-Lee* case [1983] 2 AC 548).

The Equality Act 2010

Under this Act it is unlawful for a person to discriminate because of race against another person. The law states that race includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin. As well as against another person because of their religion or belief, whereby belief means any religious or philosophical belief.

As Sikhs are recognised as both a religious and ethnic group they have dual protection under this act.

So, any policies or rule that restrict a Sikh wearing their Kirpan (they must be wearing the other 4 k's highlighted above as well) to all but particularly disadvantage Sikhs could constitute indirect discrimination. Thus, a breach of the Equality Act 2010.

Criminal Justice Act 1988

The Kirpan because of its nature is sometimes seen as an offensive weapon and therefore section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 applies. However, it is a defence under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to possess such a sword in public for religious reasons to ensure that a person of Sikh faith can possess a kirpan.

Section 4 of the Offensive Weapons Act 1996

Creates the offence of having an article with a blade or point (or offensive weapon) on school premises, etc. 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 costume.

Offensive Weapons Act 2019

The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 made possession and selling a sword or blade over 50cm illegal. However, within the Act it states, a person has good reason for having a bladed article with them, if the person has the article for religious reasons.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-offensive-weapons-act-2019/statutory-guidance-offensive-weapons-act-2019-accessible-version>

S-CAT Staff awareness

S-CAT staff should be aware that the wearing of the “5 K’s” at all times is of utmost importance and sensitivity for initiated Sikhs and is the subject of vows made during the Amrit ceremony. It is essential for an initiated Sikh to keep their vows, and this commitment, which is not entered into lightly or easily, should be respected by the school community.

S-CAT must balance the responsibilities of ensuring the health and safety of persons using the school premises, with the religious requirements of practising Sikhs.

S-CAT will allow initiated Sikh students to wear a Kirpan in its academies subject to the following conditions:

- i. that it is restricted to students/staff who have gone through the Amrit ceremony;
- ii. that the Kirpan is no more than 6 inches long, excluding the handle, and will be sheathed and restrained with a cord, to the satisfaction of the school, in such a way as to ensure that it will be incapable of withdrawal;
- iii. that the sheathed Kirpan will be further enclosed in secured padding and securely sewn up;
- iv. that the Kirpan will be worn under clothing and will not be visible, to provide the highest possible safety at all times;
- v. that, on no account, will the Kirpan be drawn while the young person/staff member is on school premises whilst on a school trip or on school transport or involved in other school activity;
- vi. that the student or parent/carer, if the student is under 18 years of age or school carer of a young person, will be required to sign a declaration indicating that they are aware of the implications of the young person wearing the Kirpan in school and, in particular, during physical education activities, and that they waive any claims against SCAT
- vii. if any of the above conditions have not been observed during the school day or whilst on a school activity, the Principal of the relevant SCAT academy has the discretion to exclude the student from a particular activity if he believes that the student or others may be at risk of injury. In the event of serious or persistent breaches of the above conditions by a student, the Principal may refuse permission for the student concerned to wear the Kirpan whilst at school or on any school activity.

Should a student wear a Kirpan during the aforementioned high-risk activities (eg PE), then the following additional condition shall apply:

- i. that the sheathed and securely padded Kirpan must be worn under the clothing and will not be visible or carried in a small pocket in clothing being worn, so that it is safe for the wearer, never visible and so that other students have no access to it. If the Principal considers that these requirements have not been met, they will take appropriate action to ensure the safety of all students which may include restricting the right of the student to participate in particular activities.

5 K's and Swimming

The wearing of the Kara and Kirpan during swimming can be seen as a health and safety issue. To overcome and keep the balance between health and safety issues on one side and the individual's right to practice their faith, the following practical solutions are offered:

Kara – A sweatband or any waterproof covering can be used to cover the Kara

Kirpan options available:

- The Kirpan can be worn round the smaller version of the Turban (as Sikhs do when having a shower) or concealed in it.
- If a swimming T-shirt is allowed, the Kirpan can be worn underneath.
- The Kirpan can be wrapped around the waist (as Sikhs do when washing their hair) OR in special clothing (Kammar – Kassa) around their waist. In both options the Kirpan would be concealed and held securely