

Reviewed: August 2024

POSITIVE HANDLING POLICY

Legal Framework .

The DfE Use of Reasonable Force Guidance; Advice for Headteachers, staff and Management Committee members (July 2013) allows all staff at a school to use reasonable force to keep children safe. It also allows other adults in the school to use physical interventions where reasonable, proportionate and necessary to ensure the safety of children. Those might include:

- classroom assistants
- care workers
- midday supervisors
- specialist support assistants
- escorts
- caretakers
- voluntary helpers, including people accompanying pupils on visits, exchanges or holidays organised by the school.

The right for school staff to use reasonable force is further set out in the DFE document Behaviour and Discipline in Schools; Advice for Head teachers and School Staff (February 2024) which states that members of staff have the power to use reasonable force to

- prevent pupils committing an offence
- injuring themselves or others,
- damaging property
- maintain good order and discipline in the classroom.

Positive Handling should only be used when all other strategies which do not employ force have been tried and found unsuccessful or in an emergency situation.

There is no legal definition of reasonable force. The Criminal Law Act (1967) allows any person to use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances to prevent an offence (e.g. physical assault) being committed.

Reasonable minimal force must be a matter of personal judgement. All teachers have a professional 'duty of care' within their job description which is underwritten by paragraph 58.7 of School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 2023. Together with the legislative framework this enables teachers and other members of staff in the school, authorised by the Headteacher (see Appendix 6), to use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances, to prevent a pupil from: committing an offence, injuring themselves or others, damaging property and to maintain good order and discipline in the classroom.

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What is reasonable force?

The term 'reasonable force' covers the broad range of actions used by most staff at some point in their career that involve a degree of physical contact with pupils.

Force is usually used either to control or restrain. This can range from guiding a pupil to safety by the arm through to more extreme circumstances such as breaking up a fight or where a student needs to be restrained to prevent violence or injury.

'Reasonable in the circumstances' means using no more force than is needed. As mentioned above, schools generally use force to control pupils and to restrain them. Control means either passive physical contact, such as standing between pupils or blocking a pupil's path, or active physical contact such as leading a pupil by the arm out of a classroom.

Restraint means to hold back physically or to bring a pupil under control. It is typically used in more extreme circumstances, for example when two pupils are fighting and refuse to separate without physical intervention.

School staff should always try to avoid acting in a way that might cause injury, but in extreme cases it may not always be possible to avoid injuring the pupil.

Who can use reasonable force?

- All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force
- This power applies to any member of staff at the school. It can also apply to people whom the head teacher has temporarily put in charge of pupils such as unpaid volunteers or parents accompanying students on a school organised visit.

When can reasonable force be used?

- Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or from causing disorder.
- In a school, force is used for two main purposes – to control pupils or to restrain them.
- The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned and should always depend on the individual circumstances

The following list is not exhaustive but provides some examples of situations where reasonable force can and cannot be used.

Schools can use reasonable force to:

- remove disruptive children from the classroom where they have refused to follow an instruction to do so;
- prevent a pupil behaving in a way that disrupts a school event or a school trip or visit;
- prevent a pupil leaving the classroom where allowing the pupil to leave would risk their safety or lead to behaviour that disrupts the behaviour of others;
- prevent a pupil from attacking a member of staff or another pupil, or to stop a fight in the playground; and
- restrain a pupil at risk of harming themselves through physical outbursts.

Schools cannot:

- use force as a punishment – it is always unlawful to use force as a punishment.

Power to search pupils without consent

In addition to the general power to use reasonable force described above, Head teachers and authorised staff can use such force as is reasonable given the circumstances to conduct a search for the following “prohibited items”

- knives and weapons
- alcohol
- illegal drugs
- stolen items
- tobacco and cigarette papers
- fireworks
- pornographic images
- any article that has been or is likely to be used to commit an offence, cause personal injury or damage to property.

The power to search without consent may also apply to prevent a pupil from;

- Committing an offence
- Causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself); or
- Engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among its pupils, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

What does it mean to restrain a child?

Positive Handling is;

‘The positive application of force with the intention of protecting the child from harming himself or others or seriously damaging property’.

The proper use of Positive Handling requires skill and judgement, as well as knowledge of non-harmful methods of restraining.

The decision to use Positive Handling as restrictive physical intervention must take account of the circumstances and be based on an assessment of the risks associated with the intervention compared with the risks of not employing a restrictive intervention. The physical intervention must also only employ a reasonable amount of force – that is the minimum force needed to avert injury or damage to property, or to prevent a breakdown in discipline – applied for the shortest period of time.

Why use restraint

Positive Handling should avert danger by preventing or deflecting a child’s action or perhaps by removing a physical object, which could be used to harm him/herself or others.

Positive Handling skillfully applied may be eased by degrees as the child calms down in response to the physical contact. It is only likely to be needed if a child appears to be unable to exercise self-control of emotions and behaviour.

GENERAL AIMS

All staff at Northumberland PRU recognise that the use of reasonable force is only one of the strategies available to secure pupil safety/well-being and also to maintain good order and discipline. Our policy on the use of reasonable force is part of our overall pastoral care procedures and closely related to our policies on managing pupil behaviour in the Relational Policy and also the Safeguarding Policy.

The Aims

- To protect every person in the school community from harm.
- To protect all pupils against any form of physical intervention which is unnecessary, inappropriate, excessive or harmful.
- To provide adequate information and training for staff so that they are clear as to what constitutes appropriate behaviour and to deal effectively with violent or potentially violent situations.
- To use the minimum degree of force necessary to accomplish positive handling.
- To give full support to staff who have been assaulted or have suffered verbal abuse from pupils or others.
- To maintain accurate records of incidents where Positive Handling has been employed.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Although most young people will never require any form of Positive Handling, staff may have to deal with some young people who exhibit disturbed, distressed and distressing behaviour. It is therefore necessary to carry out risk assessment. We will attempt to reduce risk by managing:

- The environment
- Body language
- The way we talk
- The way we act

Environmental Risk Assessment

We will complete a risk analysis within the school and put in place strategies to minimise these risks in identified locations.

Individual Risk Assessments

Northumberland PRU respect for the rights of the individual takes into consideration the context of The Human Rights Act (1998) and The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991). The school's ethos and the guidance in this policy are based on the presumption that every adult and child is entitled to:

- Respect for his/her/their private life
- The right not to be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment
- The right to liberty and security: and
- The right not to be discriminated against in his/her enjoyment of those rights.

If we become aware that a pupil is likely to behave in a disruptive way that may require the use of reasonable force, it is our intention to plan how to respond if the situation arises. Such planning needs to address:

- Managing the pupil (e.g. reactive strategies to de-escalate a conflict, holds to be used if necessary);
- Involving the parents to ensure that they are clear about the specific action the school might need to take;

- Briefing staff to ensure they know exactly what action they should be taking (this may identify a need for training or guidance);
- Ensuring that additional support can be summoned if appropriate.
- If Positive Handling is likely to be necessary, this should be included in the pupil's Individual Plan together with information on: de-escalation strategies; the manner in which the pupil will be held; how support can be summoned if needed; any medical factors to be considered.

More detailed examples of risk assessment and preventative steps can be found in Appendix 2.

PROCEDURES

In the event of Positive Handling having been used it is important to consider the strategies, which are deemed acceptable, and the recording procedures that should be in place.

Action Steps:

1. Tell the pupil who is misbehaving to stop and state possible consequences of failure to do so;
2. If possible summon another adult;
3. Continue to communicate with the pupil throughout the incident;
4. Make it clear that restraint will be removed as soon as it ceases to be necessary;
5. Appropriate follow-up action should be taken, which may include:
6. Providing medical support
7. Providing respite for those involved (A calm and measured approach to a situation is needed and staff should never give the impression that they have lost their temper or are acting out of anger or frustration when handling a problem)

Recording

Staff should record (Appendix 3) all incidents of restraint in accordance with School Policy and report these to the Headteacher.

Details should include:

- Name of pupil(s)
- Staff member(s) involved
- Factors necessitating physical intervention
- The strategies which were employed prior to using physical intervention
- How physical intervention was effected
- Outcome of restraint
- Any other action taken in the management of the incident Parents / carers should be contacted as soon as possible and the incident explained to them. This action should also be recorded.

COMPLAINTS

We all have a duty of care to the young people in our school and cannot escape our legal responsibilities by avoiding taking appropriate and necessary action. Involving parents when an incident occurs with their child, together with a clear policy adhered to by the staff, and should help to avoid complaints from parents. It will not prevent all complaints, however, and a dispute about the use of force by a member of staff might lead to an investigation, either under disciplinary procedures or by the Police and social services department under child protection procedures.

Staff, subjected to physical violence or assault, have the right to be supported in making a formal complaint to the Police and, if necessary, taking private action against an assailant.

It is our intention to inform all staff, pupils, parents and Governors about these procedures and the context in which they apply.

We will review this policy on a yearly basis.

Remember that adhering to the principles and procedures referred to in this policy statement is part of effective practice and should minimise risk to young people in our care and enhance our own self-protection.

Communicating the school's approach to the use of force

- Every school is required to have a Relational Policy and to make this policy known to staff, parents and pupils. The Management Committee should notify the Headteacher that it expects the school Relational Policy to include the power to use reasonable force.
- There is no requirement to have a policy on the use of force but it is good practice to set out, in the Relational Policy, the circumstances in which force might be used. For example, it could say that teachers will physically separate pupils found fighting or that if a pupil refuses to leave a room when instructed to do so, they will be physically removed.
- Any policy on the use of reasonable force should acknowledge their legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and children with special educational needs (SEND).
- Schools do not require parental consent to use force on a student.
- Schools should not have a 'no contact' policy. There is a real risk that such a policy might place a member of staff in breach of their duty of care towards a pupil, or prevent them taking action needed to prevent a pupil causing harm.
- By taking steps to ensure that staff, pupils and parents are clear about when force might be used, the school will reduce the likelihood of complaints being made when force has been used properly

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Appendix 1

When might it be appropriate to use reasonable force? Examples include where a pupil is;

- Committing an offence
- Causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself); or
- Engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or amongst its pupils, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

Examples of situations that fall into one of the first two categories are:

- A pupil attacks a member of staff, or another pupil;
- Pupils fighting;
- A pupil is causing, or at risk of causing, injury or damage by accident, by rough play, or by misuse of dangerous materials, substances or objects;
- A pupil is running in a corridor or on a stairway in a way in which he/she might have or cause an accident likely to injure her/himself or others;
- A pupil absconds from a class or tries to leave school (NB this will only apply if a pupil could be at risk if not kept in the classroom or at school).

Examples of situations that fall into the third category are:

- A pupil is behaving in such a way that is seriously disrupting a lesson.

Appendix 2 Strategies

All staff need to be aware of strategies and techniques for dealing with difficult pupils and steps, which they can take to defuse and calm a situation.

- Move calmly and confidently.
- Make simple, clear statements.
- Intervene early.
- Try to maintain eye contact.
- If necessary, summon help before the problem escalates.
- Remove the audience from the immediate location.

There are situations where staff should not intervene without help

Assistance should be sought when dealing with:

- A physically large pupil,
- More than one pupil, or
- When the member of staff believes that s/he may be at risk of injury.

In those circumstances where the member of staff has decided that it is not appropriate to restrain the pupil without help they should:

- Remove other pupils who might be at risk,
- Summon assistance from colleagues,
- Where necessary, telephone the police,
- Inform the pupil(s) that help will be arriving,
- Until assistance arrives, the member of staff should continue to attempt to defuse the situation orally, and try to prevent the incident from escalating.

The method of restraint employed must use the minimum force for the minimum time and must observe the following requirements:

Restraint must NOT:

- Involve hitting the pupil;
- Involve deliberately inflicting pain on the pupil;
- Restrict the pupil's breathing; or involve contact with sexually sensitive areas.

During any incident the restrainer should:

- Offer verbal reassurance to the pupil;
- Cause the minimum level of restriction of movement;
- Reduce the danger of any accidental injury.

Physical intervention can take several forms. It might involve staff:

- Physically interposing between pupils;
- Blocking a pupil's path;
- Holding;
- Pushing;
- Pulling;
- Leading a pupil by the hand or arm;
- Shepherding a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of the back; or
- (In extreme circumstances) using more restrictive holds.

Some Do's and Don'ts


DO

- Be aware of any feelings of anger
- Summon help
- Continue to talk to the pupil in a calm way
- Provide a soft surface if possible
- Be aware of any accessories worn by you or the pupil
- Hold the pupil's arms by his/her sides

DON'T

- Try to manage on your own
- Stop talking even if the pupil does not reply
- Straddle the pupil
- Push arms up the back
- Touch the pupil near the throat or head
- Put pressure on joints

Appendix 3: Reporting and Recording Pro-forma

 Northumberland's P.R.U.	<h2 style="margin: 0;">Record of Serious Incidents/ Physical Intervention</h2> <p style="margin: 0;">To be completed for all serious incidents and PI's</p>		
Name of pupil		Form completed by	
Date / time of incident / location of incident			
Witnesses	Name	Signature	
Trigger to incident: what was happening and what led to the dangerous situation?			
Overview of incident: bullet points			
Duration of incident			
Duration of hold (if applicable)			
Any injuries: Adult Describe		Any injuries: Pupil Describe	
Medical check offered		Medical check accepted	
Injury to person			
Damage to property (Actual damage)			
Criminal offence			
Serious Disruption			
Absconding /police informed			

Who was informed? – parent/carer / stakeholders? When? By?							
What was the risk? (circle)	Verbal abuse	Slap	Punch	Bite	Pinch	Kick	Hair grab
	Neck grab	Clothing grab	Body holds	Arm holds	Weapons	Missiles	Spit
	Disruption	Damage	Risk to self	Risk to others			
Reducing the risk?							
Diversions, distractions, de-escalations attempted.	Verbal advice & support	Firm clear directions	Negotiation	Limited choices	Distraction / diversion	Reassurance	
	Planned ignoring	Withdrawal offered	Withdrawal directed	Reminders about consequence	Humour	Success reminders	
Physical intervention strategies attempted For current Team Teach trained adults only. Otherwise complete "Other"	Help hug	Cradle hug	Wrap	Sitting wrap	Double elbow		
	Half shield	Sitting double elbow (single person)	Single elbow (2 person)	Sitting single elbow (2 person)	Figure of four (2 person)		
	other						
Signed				Date			
Why do you think the action was in the best interests of the pupil?							
Did this incident lead to an exclusion from school?							
Post incident learning/ reflection session with staff/ pupil?							
Referral to SLT? (injuries/ allegations against staff)							
Uploaded to CPOMS Risk Assessment updated : Exclusion Form?							