



Springfield Primary School



School Policy

Use of Reasonable Force and Restraint

Ratified: January 2024

Date for review: February 2026



Use of physical contact

There are occasions when staff will have cause to have physical contact with pupils for a variety of reasons, this may include:

- to comfort a pupil in distress (*appropriate to their age and individual specific needs identified through a risk assessment*);
- to direct a pupil;
- for curricular reasons (*for example in PE, Music, Drama etc*);
- in an emergency, to avert danger to the pupil or others;

The guidance produced by the Department for Education (July 2013) [Use of reasonable force - Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies \(DfE, 2016\)](#) states that:

*“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.”*

In all situations where physical contact between staff and pupils takes place, staff must consider the following:

- the pupil's age and level of understanding;
- the pupil's individual needs and history;
- the location where the contact takes place (ideally it should not take place in private without others present).

When might you use physical contact?

Schools may choose to use touch with children for a variety of reasons but, in general terms, they would normally do so for comfort, reward or guidance. It should be acknowledged that some children will not want to be touched. This should be respected.

Use of reasonable force and restrictive physical intervention (restraint)

Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2021) states: *“When using reasonable force in response to risks presented by incidents involving children with SEN or disabilities or with medical conditions, schools and colleges should in considering the risks carefully recognise the additional vulnerability of these groups. They should also consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to making reasonable adjustments, non-discrimination and their [Public Sector Equality Duty](#). By planning positive and proactive behaviour support, for instance through drawing up individual behaviour plans for more vulnerable children, and agreeing them with parents and carers, schools and colleges can reduce the occurrence of challenging behaviour and the need to use reasonable force”.*

The guidance produced by the Department for Education (July 2013) “Use of Reasonable Force” is helpful and the following section is directly from this guidance.



What is reasonable force?

- The term 'reasonable force' covers the broad range of actions used by most teachers 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.
- Control means either passive physical contact, such as standing between pupils, redirecting a pupil's path, or active physical contact such as escorting a child by the arm or arms out of a classroom. This should never involve pulling or dragging.
- 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 headteacher 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 harming 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.

Schools can use reasonable force to:

This list is not exhaustive and provides examples of where reasonable can and cannot be used – this is also taken from DfE guidance.



- 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.

Reasonable force is only be used to avoid harm to the child or other and where all other strategies have been considered or attempted

Key messages

Schools cannot use force as a punishment; - “it is **always** unlawful to use force as a punishment” (Use of Reasonable Force - DfE, 2013)

It must be emphasised that the vast majority of pupil misbehaviour can be managed without any use of force or restraint. All behaviour can be seen as communication.

Schools should consider whether the behaviour under review gives cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. Where this may be the case, school staff should follow the schools’ safeguarding policy. They should also consider whether continuing disruptive behaviour might be the result of unmet educational or other needs (Behaviour and Discipline in Schools – DfE, 2016)

All members of staff have a ‘Duty of Care’ towards the children in their care. Therefore, if a child is likely to be at risk from harm in an emergency situation, action must be taken and this may include a physical intervention

The action taken will be dependent on the level of risk and the assessment that is made at that moment in time.

Where children show dangerous or harmful behaviour, identified through a risk assessment, then restrictive physical intervention may be considered as a strategy to manage harm. The necessity to use this should reduce over time. If incidents do not decrease, it is not a successful strategy and risk management plan reviews need to take place regularly (at least termly).

The following principles must be borne in mind when considering any use of physical restraint:

- Physical intervention carries the possibility of being interpreted as an assault;
- Physical intervention may carry the risk of injury to the child or to the adult involved;
- Any consideration of the use of restraint or containment should only occur, as a last resort,



where no other intervention is feasible or effective; and

- The intention of any physical intervention must be clear

In short, staff should only intervene physically to restrain or contain a child:

- Where there is a clear danger to the child or others (including adults);
- Where all other interventions have failed or are not feasible;
- With the clear intention of removing the child from danger; and
- With the minimum force required to ensure the child's safety

Managing allegations against members of staff / volunteers

In Essex, every school must work in accordance with statutory guidance and the Essex in respect of allegations against an adult working with children in a paid or voluntary capacity. Essex [SET Procedures \(ESCB, 2019\)](#) require that, where an allegation against a member of staff is received, the Headteacher, senior named person or the Chair of Governors must inform the duty Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in the Children's Workforce Allegations Management Team on **03330 139 797** within one working day. However, wherever possible, contact with the LADO should be made immediately as they will then advise on how to proceed and whether the matter requires Police involvement. This will include advice on speaking to pupils, parents and HR. **The school should not carry out any investigation before speaking to the LADO.**

Essex data shows that in 2016-17, 45% of allegations against the workforce in schools involved allegations of physical abuse, which was very much in line with previous years. This was the most frequently recorded abuse type for schools, so it is essential all staff members are made aware of the boundaries of appropriate behaviour and conduct. This forms part of staff induction and is outlined in the Staff Handbook / Code of Conduct. of their behaviour towards pupils at all times.

Communication to parents / carers

Where it has been deemed necessary to use a restrictive physical intervention, the detail of will be accurately recorded and the incident communicated to parents. Parents will be informed of the incident initially by phone and this may be followed up in writing.



Further Guidance

- i) [Keeping Children Safe in Education \(DfE, 2019\)](#)
- ii) [Use of Reasonable Force \(DfE, 2013\)](#)
- iii) [Behaviour and Discipline in Schools \(DfE, 2016\)](#)
- iv) [Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and PRUs in England \(DfE, 2017\)](#)
- v) [ESCB SET Procedures 2019](#)
- vi) [Searching, screening and confiscation \(DfE, 2018\)](#)
- vii) [Positive environments where children can flourish \(Ofsted, 2018\)](#)
- viii) [Creating a Culture: how school leaders can optimise behaviour \(DfE, 2017\)](#)
- ix) [Essex Special Schools Education Trust - Essex Steps Training](#)
- x) [Guidance for schools on the use of reduced educational provision \(Essex LA, 2016\)](#)

Acknowledgements:

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