

Use of Reasonable Force Policy

Portsmouth Primary School & Early Years



Approved by: Governing Board

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1. Introduction

The vast majority of children will never experience any form of 'Reasonable Force' whilst they are at Portsdown Primary School and Early Years. However, on occasion, it will be necessary in supporting individual children to remain safe, to prevent injury, prevent damage to property or disorder. This policy is based on the guidance provided by the Department for Education and is available at:

https://consult.education.gov.uk/behaviour-unit/revised-use-of-reasonable-force-guidance/supporting_documents/Use%20of%20reasonable%20force%20and%20other%20restrictive%20interventions%20guidance.pdf

2. Definitions

Reasonable force: Using no more force than is necessary to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, damaging property, or causing disorder.

Restrictive intervention: Any planned or reactive action which limits a pupil's movement, liberty, or freedom to act independently. This may include physical restraint, seclusion, or the use of equipment. Restrictive interventions should only be used where absolutely necessary and proportionate.

Restraint: The physical part of restrictive interventions, which may or may not involve force.

3. 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.

4. When can reasonable force be used?

Reasonable force may be used to:

- Prevent a pupil from harming themselves or others.

- Prevent serious damage to property.
- Prevent serious disruption to the school environment.

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.

5. Schools can use reasonable force to:

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

- 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.

6. Schools cannot:

It must **never** be used as a punishment or to enforce compliance where there is no immediate risk.

7. Power to search pupils without consent.

Searching can play a critical role in ensuring that schools are safe environments for all pupils and staff. It is a vital measure to safeguard and promote staff and pupil welfare, and to maintain high standards of behaviour through which pupils can learn and thrive. Portsdown Primary School and Early Year's Relationships And Behaviour Regulation Policy provides further information and guidance on searching pupils and whether to do so without consent (where force may be necessary). This force will be reasonable and bound within the approaches of the Reasonable Force Policy.

It is important to state that staff may use reasonable force only to search for legally prohibited items, not items merely banned by school rules.

8. The school's approach to the use of force

Every school is required to have a behaviour policy (ours is called the Relationships And Behaviour Regulation Policy) and to make this policy known to staff, parents and pupils. The school's behaviour policy includes the power to use reasonable force when necessary. However, we have also taken the decision to write this Reasonable Force Policy to provide further information on this area of the school's practice and procedures.

When considering the use of reasonable force with disabled pupils and those with special educational needs (SEN), staff must make reasonable adjustments. Examples include allowing additional time for a child to process instructions or to change their behaviour, adapting communication approaches, or using sensory regulation strategies.

Staff should be alert to triggers such as sensory overload or anxiety, and record equality and dignity considerations after every incident. Behaviour support plans must be co-produced with parents, carers, pupils (where appropriate), and relevant professionals. These plans should be reviewed periodically, especially after incidents involving restrictive interventions.

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the school to ensure pupils with SEND are not placed at a substantial disadvantage. Staff must always consider this duty when deciding how to act.

Schools do not require parental consent to use force on a pupil and Government guidelines state that they 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.

At Portsdown Primary School and Early Years, we pro-actively foster positive relationships and only use reasonable force when there is no realistic alternative. This means that we expect staff to conduct a risk assessment and choose the safest alternative. We expect staff to think creatively about any alternatives to physical intervention which may be effective.

N.B: The risk assessment is not written down. Rather it is the staff member considering the risks to the child and others and whether there are alternatives to the physical controls.

Prevention and De-escalation

Our priority is to prevent situations from escalating to the point where reasonable force or restrictive interventions are necessary. This includes:

- Creating a positive school culture through values-led behaviour expectations.
- Providing staff with training in de-escalation, communication and emotional regulation strategies.
- Supporting pupils through clear routines, visual aids, and co-produced behaviour support plans.
- Identifying triggers and making reasonable adjustments for pupils with SEND.
- Using early intervention strategies, such as restorative practice, quiet spaces, and sensory breaks.
- Whole-school measures: well-designed environments, regular staff training, sharing good practice, and analysing patterns in behaviour data.
- Individual approaches: behaviour support plans that include identified triggers and agreed de-escalation strategies, co-produced with parents and pupils.

Steps to be taken before using physical controls

- Show care and concern by acknowledging unacceptable behaviour and requesting alternatives using negotiating and reasoning.
- Give clear directions for the pupil to stop
- Remind the pupil about rules and likely outcomes
- Remove an audience or take the vulnerable pupil to a safe place
- Make the environment safer by moving furniture and removing objects which could be used as weapons
- Use positive guidance to escort pupils to somewhere less pressured
- Ensure that colleagues know what is happening and call for help.

9. Using force

The Physical Control in Care Medical Panel – 2008 (as used by Team Teach)) identified that certain restraint techniques presented an unacceptable risk when used on children and young people.

The techniques in question are:

- The 'seated double embrace' which involves two members of staff forcing a person into a sitting position and leaning them forward, while a third monitors breathing;
- The 'double basket-hold' which involves holding a person's arms across their chest;

- The 'nose distraction technique' which involves a sharp upward jab under the nose

In addition, the 2025 guidance states that:

'Pupils should not be deliberately restrained in a way that affects their airway, breathing or circulation, for example by covering the mouth and/or nose or applying pressure to the neck region or abdomen. The use of force can be dangerous, particularly where it occurs on the ground. If a pupil is unintentionally held on the ground, staff should release their holds or re-position into a safer alternative or standing position as quickly as possible.'

Where needed, the pupil should receive a medical assessment and treatment for any injuries as soon as possible. For any form of restraint, including seated and standing, there is a risk of physical and psychological harm, and it should be avoided where possible.'

10. Staff training

Government advice is that schools take their own decisions about staff training. The headteacher should consider whether members of staff require any additional training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities and should consider the needs of the pupils when doing so. Identified training will be completed by a recognised provider..

11. Telling parents when force has been used on their child

The School will inform parents as soon as possible about **serious incidents** involving the use of force and to consider how best to record such serious incidents.

In deciding what is a serious incident, teachers should use their professional judgement and consider the:

- pupil's behaviour and level of risk presented at the time of the incident;
- degree of force used;
- effect on the pupil or member of staff; and
- the child's age.

The school will not report an incident where to do so risks harm (then refer to local authority via the safeguarding procedures).

12. Recording, Monitoring and Evaluation

Recording

From September 2025, the school is required by law to record all significant incidents involving the use of reasonable force.

Records will include:

- Names of staff and pupils involved
- SEN status of the pupil
- Date, time, and location
- Description of the incident, including triggers and de-escalation strategies used
- Type and degree of force applied
- Duration of intervention
- Injuries or damage caused
- Rationale for necessity

- Equality and dignity considerations
- Post-incident support provided

Where restrictive interventions are used without force (e.g., time spent with the senior leadership team or extended time with the welfare team), these will also be recorded in line with best practice.

- All incidents of unacceptable behaviour should be recorded electronically on CPOMS or in the behaviour log in the classroom (as per the Relationships And Behaviour Regulation Policy)
- All uses of force (not just restraint) must be logged in line with statutory guidance.
- All serious incidents (as defined by the Relationships And Behaviour Regulation Policy) and all incidents involving restraint will be recorded in the child's records on CPOMS.
- Within these recording strategies, all details must be recorded by witnesses within twenty-four hours.

The Headteacher must be informed and a Physical Intervention / Reasonable Force Record Form completed (available from the front office).

- If violence was used against a staff member, a violent incident form must also be completed as soon as possible (available from the front office)

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Headteacher will ensure that each incident is reviewed and investigate further action as required as part of the monitoring and evaluation process..

The Full Governing Body will receive anonymised termly reports on restraint incidents, to ensure accountability and compliance to this policy and the guidance it is based upon.

13. What happens if a pupil complains when force is used on them?

All complaints about the use of force should be thoroughly, speedily and appropriately investigated. Where a member of staff has acted within the law – that is, they have used reasonable force in order to prevent injury, damage to property or disorder – this will provide a defence to any criminal prosecution or other civil or public law action.

Where an allegation of using excessive force is made against a staff member, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will be informed and a referral made

When a complaint is made, the onus is on the person making the complaint to prove that his/her allegations are true – it is not for the member of staff to show that he/she has acted reasonably. Suspension must not be an automatic response when a member of staff has been accused of using excessive force. Schools must consider carefully whether the circumstances of the case warrant a person being suspended until the allegation is resolved or whether alternative arrangements are more appropriate. If a decision is taken to suspend a teacher, the school should ensure that the teacher has access to a named contact who can provide support.

Governing bodies should always consider whether a teacher has acted within the law when reaching a decision on whether or not to take disciplinary action against the teacher or member of staff. As employers, schools and local authorities have a duty of care towards their employees. It is important that schools provide appropriate pastoral care to any member of staff who is subject to a formal allegation following a use of force incident.

14. What about other physical contact with pupils?

It is not illegal to touch a pupil. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, with a pupil is proper and necessary.

Examples of where touching a pupil might be proper or necessary:

- Holding the hand of the child at the front/back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school;
- When comforting a distressed pupil;
- When a pupil is being congratulated or praised;
- To demonstrate how to use a musical instrument;
- To demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching; and
- To give first aid.

15. Being Proactive

Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are required for pupils who exhibit extreme behaviour. Responsible staff should think ahead to anticipate what might go wrong.

When considering a pupil's behaviour, staff will think about the following questions:

- Can we anticipate a Health and Safety risk related to this pupil's behaviour?
- Have we got all the information we need to conduct a risk assessment?
- Have we provided a written plan as a result?
- What further steps can we take to prevent dangerous behaviour from developing?

Positive Handling Plans

Risk management is regarded as an integral part of behaviour management planning. All pupils who have been identified as presenting a risk should have a Positive Handling Plan. The plan details any strategies which have been found to be effective for that individual, along with any particular responses which are not recommended. Any particular physical techniques which have been found to be effective should be named, along with any alerts to any which have proved to be ineffective or which caused problems in the past.

Positive Handling Plans should be considered along with the child's Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) and any other planning document relevant to the pupil. They should take account of age, sex, level of physical, emotional and intellectual development, special needs and social context.

Post Incident Debrief

Following a serious incident, it is the policy of our school to offer support to all involved.

This is an opportunity for learning and time needs to be given for following up incidents so that pupils have an opportunity to express their feelings, suggest alternative courses of action for the future and appreciate other peoples' perspective.

It is difficult to devise a framework of support that meets the need of all staff. As individuals we all vary in how much support we need after an unpleasant incident.

Generally, a member of the leadership team (ideally as an impartial facilitator not directly involved in the incident) would expect to talk to staff and children involved (if appropriate) in any incidents involving violence. This is to foster learning and relationship repair.

If members of staff need time to rest or compose themselves, then the Headteacher will make arrangements for the class group to be supported/ other arrangements put in place if the member of staff is not class based.

The school will also provide ongoing wellbeing support, including counselling or follow-up, and support for witnesses who may be distressed.

Pupils involved in an incident will be offered an age-appropriate opportunity to give their account and contribute to the reviews of support plans.

16. Frequently Asked Questions (These are from the department of education) Q: I'm worried that if I use force a pupil or parent could make a complaint against me. Am I protected?

A: Yes, if you have acted lawfully. If the force used is reasonable all staff will have a robust defence against any accusations.

Q: How do I know whether using a physical intervention is 'reasonable'?

A: The decision on whether to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the teacher concerned. Whether the force used is reasonable will always depend on the particular circumstances of the case. The use of force is reasonable if it is proportionate to the consequences it is intended to prevent. This means the degree of force used should be no more than is needed to achieve the desired result. School staff should expect the full backing of their senior leadership team when they have used force.

Q: What about school trips?

A: The power may be used where the member of staff is lawfully in charge of the pupils, and this includes while on school trips.

Q: Can force be used on pupils with SEN or disabilities?

A: Yes, but the judgement on whether to use force should not only depend on the circumstances of the case but also on information and understanding of the needs of the pupil concerned.

Q: I'm a female teacher with a Year 10 class - there's no way I'd want to restrain or try to control my pupils. Am I expected to do so?

A: There is a power, not a duty, to use force so members of staff have discretion whether or not to use it. However, teachers and other school staff have a duty of care towards their pupils and it might be argued that failing to take action (including a failure to use reasonable force) may in some circumstances breach that duty.

Q: Are there any circumstances in which a teacher can use physical force to punish a pupil?

A: No. It is always unlawful to use force as a punishment. This is because it would fall within the definition of corporal punishment, which is illegal.