



Guidance on the Use of Force and Physical Intervention

Aims

The Federation of Sydenham and Lighthorne Heath Primary Schools believes that it is important to establish a safe, secure and stable environment to enable children to grow, develop and learn. To achieve this, the school recognises that, in certain circumstances, physical intervention, including safe touch and the use of reasonable force, is necessary.

The school understands that behaviour is often a means of communication which may signal that a child is in need of support but does not know how to express this; therefore, the school takes a proactive approach to anticipating, managing and minimising potential triggers of distressed behaviour that may cause harm.

This policy acknowledges that situations may arise in which staff members will be required to use physical intervention, and in some cases reasonable force, in order to handle a child's emotions or aggressive behaviour when other measures have failed to do so.

The aim of this policy is to ensure that physical intervention is used in a correct and safe manner, which is in accordance with the relevant legislation and national guidance.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education Act 2011
- Children Act 1989
- Equality Act 2010

This policy has due regard to the following guidance:

- DfE (2013) 'Use of reasonable force in schools'
- DfE (2018) 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'
- DfE (2022) 'Keeping children safe in education 2022'
- HM Government (2019) 'Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Behaviour Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedures
- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

2. Roles and responsibilities

The governing body is responsible for:

- Monitoring the overall implementation of this policy.
- Evaluating on an annual basis instances of physical intervention to analyse how and when reasonable force is used and identify any trends.
- Reviewing this policy on an annual basis.
- Responding to any complaints, in liaison with the Executive Head Teacher, from children or parents regarding the use of reasonable force.

The Executive Head Teacher is responsible for:

- Deciding whether members of staff require additional training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities, considering the needs of the child.
- Ensuring all members of staff understand the correct conduct in terms of positive handling.
- Handling any allegations of abuse.
- Maintaining the records of the use of reasonable force and evaluating on a termly basis how reasonable force and physical intervention is used.
- Responding to any complaints, in liaison with the governing body, from children or parents regarding the use of reasonable force.
- Provide staff with reasonable force training where deemed necessary.

The Associate Head Teacher is responsible for:

- Ensuring that any member of staff who uses reasonable force records this on CPOMS.
- Reporting any incidents of the use of reasonable force to the Executive Head teacher.
- Ensuring all members of staff use reasonable force in accordance with this policy.

The SENDCO is responsible for:

- Providing training to members of staff on how to handle the needs of children with SEND.
- Ensuring staff understand how children with SEND may react differently to reasonable force.
- Ensuring that staff understand the additional vulnerability of children with SEND or medical conditions.
- Developing individual risk assessments for children with SEND or medical conditions that are agreed with the child's parents, and ensuring teaching staff are aware of these.
- Ensuring that staff understand how reasonable force principles may need to be adapted for children with medical conditions.
- Evaluating on a termly basis how reasonable force and physical intervention is used with regard

to children with SEND, in collaboration with the Associate and Executive Head Teacher.

- Taking the lead on producing Personal Intervention Plans for any children with high level needs who may require physical intervention.

3. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, '**physical intervention**' is used to refer to any situation in which physical contact with a child is necessary – this includes reasonable force, e.g. to defuse a situation in which a child is at risk of harming themselves or others, and safe touch, e.g. comforting a child in emotional distress.

For the purposes of this policy, '**positive handling**' is defined as the overall, graduated approach of responding to children's behaviour and emotions with the intention of protecting children and staff, and limiting damage to others and property. Positive handling adapts the least intrusive intervention techniques in response to situations, before using gentle physical intervention and reasonable force as a last resort.

For the purposes of this policy, '**reasonable force**' is considered to refer to a broad range of actions that may be used to control or restrain a child to prevent that child from hurting themselves/others or from damaging property which could also cause harm. Reasonable force covers force that is necessary and proportionate to the circumstances.

There are two key types of reasonable force:

- '**Control**' – actions used in an attempt to direct a child's movements; this includes passive physical contact, e.g. standing between children or blocking a child's path, or active physical contact, e.g. leading a child out of a classroom by their arm.
- '**Restraint**' – actions used in an attempt to physically bring a child under control. This type of force is typically used in more extreme circumstances, e.g. where two children are fighting and refuse to separate, causing staff to intervene to hold them back from one another physically.

For the purposes of this policy, '**safe touch**' is defined as physical contact which, if avoided, would be inhumane, unkind or cause distress to a child, e.g. where a child is significantly distressed and in need of physical comfort.

4. Positive handling

The principle of positive handling means that senior leaders expects staff to assess whether the incident requiring a response can be resolved without physical intervention.

The school implements an approach of prevention, where staff will be trained in recognising warning signs of severe pain or distress and/or aggressive behaviour, communicating empathetically with children displaying such signs to aid them in regulating their emotions, and altering their environment to minimise distressing stimuli.

Teaching staff will be aware of the behavioural patterns, medical conditions and levels of need of children in their class, and will ensure that incidents of disruptive or aggressive behaviour in the classroom are handled in line with the individual child's needs.

Staff will not generally resort to physical contact or reasonable force immediately without first questioning whether there is a need to use physical intervention. Staff will question whether:

- Verbal de-escalation is the best way.
- There are actions that can be taken to remove triggers from the child, e.g. dimming the lights and encouraging quiet where a child is dysregulated in response to sensory overstimulation.
- The child can be removed from the situation without physical intervention, e.g. if they will follow a member of staff out of the classroom to a safe space.
- The child has a condition or support needs that mean physical intervention would be inherently more dangerous, e.g. asthma which may be made worse by restrictive holds or sensory issues where physical touch would contribute to sensory overload and may provoke further dis-regulation.
- They have the ability, training and adequate support to physically intervene safely without causing unnecessary harm to the child or themselves. These children will normally have a Personal Intervention Plan already in place where there are clear indicators for when to use physical intervention and when not to.

Where there is no immediate risk of harm to themselves or others, destruction of property or serious disruption, reasonable force will not be used. Any reasonable force used in situations that are non-urgent will only be used once all alternative options have been exhausted and where the staff member in charge deems that the situation is escalating.

The school understands that, in some cases, action may be required very quickly, e.g. in the event that a child attempts to run out into a busy road, or where a child may be physically out of control and hurting another, and staff are forced to intervene. Staff will not be penalised for resorting to the use of physical intervention or reasonable force in such situations where it is justified and perceived necessary to prevent harm to others or property in the circumstances.

Positive handling will be applied with the intention of re-establishing verbal control as soon as possible and, at the same time, allowing the child to become regulated. Reasonable force is not used as a method of behaviour management or discipline – only as a last resort in situations that require de-escalation to prevent harm.

5. Reasonable force

Staff members will use actions that are appropriate and in proportion to the circumstances. Physical restraint will never be used routinely. Where reasonable force is required, the degree and type of force that is used will depend on the child's circumstances, e.g. their age or SEND. The following list is not exhaustive, but provides examples of situations where the school may decide to use reasonable force where other methods of defusing a situation have been exhausted or are not appropriate:

- Members of staff need to control a child who is risking the safety of themselves or others outside of school premises where the same range of support options are not available, e.g. on school trips.
- Members of staff must prevent a child from leaving an area, e.g. the classroom or school grounds, where doing so would risk their safety or the safety of others.
- A child is attacking another child member or member of staff.
- A child is at serious risk of harming themselves and a member of staff must intervene to prevent this.

- A child is causing high levels of distress to the rest of the children in the class, so must be removed from the classroom and are refusing instructions to leave.
- The Associate / Executive Head Teacher or authorised staff are conducting a search for items prohibited under the Education Act 1996.

All members of staff will be permitted to use reasonable force where they believe it to be appropriate in line with their training, as long as all necessary precautions are taken. The decision to physically intervene during a situation is down to the professional judgement of the member of staff and always depends on the circumstances and the child's individual needs.

The power to use reasonable force also applies to any individual whom the Associate or Executive Head Teacher has identified as temporarily in charge. This responsibility would not be placed on an unfamiliar adult.

In many cases where physical intervention or reasonable force is required, minimal and non-restrictive force will be appropriate, e.g. guiding a child by the arm to escort them from one area to another.

Reasonable force techniques that involve restraint will only be used where the staff member in charge feels it is necessary to prevent serious harm. In general, restraint will only be used briefly and prolonged restraint will not be used, i.e. restraint beyond that which is necessary to remove the immediate threat a child is posing to themselves or others.

Where staff determine physical intervention is necessary, they will calmly communicate the reasons for their actions to the child and explain why it is necessary in a non-threatening manner. In most cases, staff will communicate this to a child before making physical contact to minimise distress and/or further dis-regulation from the child; however, the school recognises that this is not possible in some emergency situations.

Staff will never give the impression that they are acting out of anger or are punishing the child. Staff members will always avoid acting in a way that could cause injury; however, the school understands that accidental injury may occur in emergency situations where there is not sufficient time for a considered response, e.g. bruising on a child's wrist where a staff member has grabbed them to prevent them running onto a busy road.

Where a member of staff believes that they are at risk, e.g. where an injury is likely to occur, they will not intervene in an incident without the help and assistance of another staff member.

Staff will also be aware that, in some instances, it will cause more distress to a child, and may increase the risk of harm to their peers, if they are prevented from leaving an area, e.g. their classroom, using physical intervention. Where it is not dangerous to allow them to leave, the staff member in charge of the situation should use their judgement in allowing a child to remove themselves from the area, as environmental factors in the area specifically may be provoking their behaviour.

6. Children with SEND

The school will have due consideration to the risks posed by the additional vulnerability of children with SEND in terms of physical intervention and reasonable force.

The SENDCO will ensure that the stipulations of the Equality Act 2010 are adhered to in relation to reasonable

adjustments, non-discrimination and the Public Sector Equality Duty, and will ensure that staff that come into regular contact with children with SEND are aware of the ways in which their needs can be met without reasonable force.

The school is aware that children with SEND may sometimes experience dysregulation, which can sometimes manifest in behaviour which may be aggressive or seem uncontrollable. Where it is known that a child is prone to high levels of dysregulation, the SENDCO will draft a risk assessment as part of a Personal Intervention Plan to determine planned strategies for managing the child's dis-regulation that are tailored to the child's specific needs, to avoid the use of reasonable force. These risk assessments will be conducted in collaboration with the all adults who work closely with the child and with the child and their parents, where appropriate.

Some children with SEND may require physical intervention when they feel overwhelmed or stressed, e.g. a tight hug or pressure, however, this will be discussed as part of a relevant risk assessment.

Staff members will not assume that a technique employed for one child with SEND will be applicable to other children with SEND.

Staff will also be aware that children with SEND may engage in frequent, repetitive self-stimulatory behaviour, known as 'stimming', and that some children may engage in self-injurious stimming, e.g. repeatedly hitting or scratching themselves. While this can be alarming, staff will be aware that stimming is often carried out as a means of emotional regulation or self-soothing in response to stressful or overwhelming stimuli. Staff members will aim to remove distressing stimuli from the environment, where possible, or will support children to engage in less harmful stimming methods, e.g. by providing them with something to play with or demonstrating a less harmful stim, such as hand flapping.

Staff will be aware that restraining a child in a way that prevents them from stimming entirely can cause extreme distress and lead to further dysregulated behaviour. Self-injurious stimming and tactics to support a child to engage in safer stims will be included as part of the child's risk assessment.

The school will adhere to its Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy at all times.

7. Post-incident support

Following an incident of reasonable force, all children and staff members involved will be given any necessary first aid to treat injuries as soon as possible, and emotional support.

Wherever reasonable force is used, staff members and children involved in incidents will be given separate opportunities to reflect on what happened.

It will be explained to the child involved the reason that such intervention was used, and reassured that the use of the intervention was not a punishment for their behaviour, but rather a method of defusing the situation and preventing them from harming themselves or others. The child will be asked about the reasons for their behaviour, including:

- Why their environment was causing such distress for them, e.g. in an instance of sensory overstimulation leading to a meltdown.
- Whether they feel there was anything that could have been done to meet their needs before the

situation escalated.

- Whether, and how, staff actions were helpful or unhelpful.

Staff will be encouraged to reflect on their actions and how they handled the situation, and will be reassured, where appropriate, that they have done nothing wrong and acted in what they perceived to be the best interests of child.

Following such conversations, further adaptations may need to be made to the Personal Intervention Plan.

8. Reporting incidents

A detailed written report will be kept of incidents, where reasonable force is used, distinguishing between planned interventions, i.e. those in line with approved strategies for the behaviour of specific children (those with a Personal Intervention Plan), and unplanned or emergency interventions.

Immediately following an incident, the member(s) of staff involved will verbally report the incident to the Associate / Executive Head Teacher and provide a comprehensive written record of the situation as soon as possible, using CPOMS. The written report of the incident must be thorough, including as much detail as possible as to what had happened before, during and after the incident, the reasons why specific interventions were employed, and any injuries incurred due to the incident.

Records should be retained and analysed regularly by the Associate Head Teacher, Executive Head Teacher and SENDCO where physical intervention was used. This is to ensure that such interventions are being used appropriately, and to identify patterns of behaviour and responses to that behaviour that may require changes to school practice, e.g. increased staff training or further behavioural or emotional support. Numbers of incidents and evaluations will be reported to governors through the Head Teacher Report to Governors.

Staff members who do not record an instance of reasonable force where it has occurred may be disciplined in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

Where reasonable force or physical restraint has been used, the child's parents will be informed as long as this would not place the child at greater risk. If the decision is made that the parents cannot be informed as this would place the child at greater risk, a safeguarding referral will be made in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. The Head of School, in consultation with the SENDCo or Executive Head Teacher, will make the final decision as to whether it is appropriate to inform the child's parents of the details of an incident.

If a member of staff witnesses or suspects the use of reasonable force, where another member of staff is actively involved in physical intervention, they will report this to the Head of School or Executive Head Teacher immediately.

Any allegations against staff will be dealt with as a matter of urgency, and in accordance with the procedures outlined in the school's Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy.

The Executive Head Teacher will be responsible for conducting a thorough investigation to find out the correct details of what occurred; this may include talking to other children about the incident, for instance those who witnessed the event.

If the allegations is against the Executive Head Teacher, the governors are responsible for conducting a thorough investigation.

9. Complaints

All members of staff will be made fully aware of the consequences and legal retributions that can occur following the incorrect use of physical intervention and force.

All complaints regarding the use of physical intervention or force will be investigated in a thorough and speedy manner, in line with the school Complaints Policy and Procedures. The person making the complaint is responsible for providing evidence for their allegations, e.g. testimony of events or evidence of injury – it is not for the member of staff to prove that their actions were made reasonably.

Where a safeguarding allegation is made against a member of staff that involves physical contact, e.g. restraint, the strategy discussion or initial evaluation with the LADO will take into account that teachers and other school staff are entitled to use reasonable force to control or restrain children in certain circumstances, where a children or others are in immediate danger.

10. Safe touch

The school understands that the following examples are instances of safe touch which may occur between staff and children:

- Comforting an upset or distressed child
- Congratulating or praising a child
- Holding the hand of a child to guide them, such as when crossing a road or walking to assembly
- Giving first aid to a child
- Demonstrating exercises or techniques during PE lessons
- Administering medicine
- Using musical instruments

The school understands that certain types of physical contact between staff and children are inappropriate, e.g. cuddling, lap-sitting and some instances of holding hands, and that safe touch should never be invasive, humiliating or flirtatious.

Staff employing touch for reward or comfort will use the 'school hug', rather than an embrace. The school hug is a sideways hug whereby the member of staff places their hands on the child's shoulders. This type of hug prevents the child from turning themselves towards the member of staff and thus engaging in a 'front' embrace, which the school deems inappropriate.

The school understands that children are not always aware of the boundaries between staff and children and thus may try to engage in physical contact, such as lap-sitting or inappropriate hugging. Should a child try to engage in any inappropriate physical contact, the member of staff will explain to the child why it is unacceptable and encourage them to engage in the school-hug instead.

If a member of staff attempts to use one of the safe methods of touch and a child is unhappy or uncomfortable with this, the member of staff will retract immediately in order to respect the child's wishes.

Appropriate touch involving children with SEND will be in line with their EHC plan, personalised risk assessment or Manual Handling Plan.

Where it is reported that a staff member has engaged, or is suspected to have engaged, in touch that is not appropriate in line with this policy, this will be handled in line with Safeguarding policies and Staff Disciplinary policies.

11. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Executive Head Teacher, Associate Head Teacher, SENDCO and governing board, who will consider any necessary changes and communicate the findings of the review to all members of staff.

This guidance was ratified:

September 2025

And will be reviewed:

September 2026

Signed by the Head teacher:



Chair of Governors:

Richard Butler