



Use of Reasonable Force Policy

Responsibility	Delegated to the Head Teacher (Students, Parents and Community)	
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1 Introduction

This policy has been developed in line with the Department for Education's (DfE) guidance on the use of reasonable force in schools. It is intended to support all teaching and support staff, as well as volunteers at the Richmond upon Thames School (RTS), in understanding the school's arrangements for care and control of students. The policy outlines when and how reasonable force may be used to maintain a safe and orderly environment.

The use of reasonable force is considered a last resort and must be conducted in a way that maintains the dignity and safety of all students.

This policy has been prepared following key guidance, including:

- [Use of Reasonable Force: Advice for Head Teachers, Staff and Governing Bodies \(DfE, 2013\)](#)
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- [Searching, Screening, and Confiscation: Advice for Schools \(DfE, 2023\)](#)
- The Education Act 1996 forbids corporal punishment, but allows all teachers to use reasonable force in order to prevent a student from:
 - Harming him/herself or others¹
 - Seriously damaging property
 - Committing a criminal offence and
 - Acting in a way that is counter to maintaining good order and discipline at the school.

This policy should be read in conjunction with all other school policies and procedures, such as the Behaviour for Learning Policy, to ensure a cohesive approach to student welfare and behaviour management.

RTS's approach to managing behaviour focuses on prevention and the use of positive handling as a last resort. Staff are trained to de-escalate situations using non-physical interventions whenever possible.

2 What is reasonable force?

All school staff, like anyone else, are permitted to use reasonable force (the minimum necessary) to defend themselves. The school recognises that staff are not expected to put themselves in danger, and removing students or themselves from a source of danger is considered appropriate action. We value the integrity of our staff and appreciate their efforts to address challenging situations while exercising their duty of care for students. However, we do not expect them to go beyond what is reasonable. It is also acceptable for any member of staff to decide that they will not use physical intervention for personal reasons.

The term "reasonable force" covers a broad range of actions involving some degree of physical contact with students. According to the DfE's guidance, "*Force is usually used either to control or restrain*" (DfE, 2013, pg 4). This can range from guiding a student to safety by the arm to more extreme circumstances, such as breaking up a fight or restraining a student to prevent violence or injury.

¹ Injury (or harm to self or others) "actual or grievous bodily harm, physical or sexual abuse, risking the lives of or injury to self or others by wilful or reckless behaviour and self-poisoning".

“Reasonable in the circumstances” means using no more force than is necessary (DfE, 2013, pg 4). Schools generally use force to **control** or **restrain** students.

- **Control** includes passive physical contact, such as standing between students or blocking a student’s path, or active physical contact, such as leading a student by the arm out of a classroom.
- **Restraint** means to physically hold back or bring a student under control. It is typically used in more extreme situations, for example, when two students are fighting and refuse to separate without physical intervention.

School staff should always aim to act in ways that avoid causing injury, though *“in extreme cases, it may not always be possible to avoid injuring the student”* (DfE, 2013, pg 5).

3 Who can use reasonable force?

- *“All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force”* (DfE, 2013, pg 4). This authority is granted under Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.
- This power applies not only to any member of staff employed by the school but also extends to individuals *“whom the headteacher has temporarily put in charge of pupils, such as unpaid volunteers or parents accompanying pupils on a school-organised visit”* (DfE, 2013, p. 4).

4 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 schools, *“force is used for two main purposes – to control pupils or to restrain them”*
- The decision on whether or not to physically intervene rests on the *“professional judgement of the staff member concerned and should always depend on the individual circumstances”* (DfE, 2013)

5 Use of reasonable force

Schools can use reasonable force to:

- *“Remove disruptive pupils 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”* (DfE 2013)
- Restrain a student at risk of harming themselves through physical outbursts.
- Make reasonable adjustments in the use of force for students with disabilities and special educational needs (Equality Act 2010).

Schools Cannot:

Use force as punishment; *“it is always unlawful to use force as a punishment”* (DfE, 2013).

Unacceptable and Illegal Physical Interventions:

It is unacceptable and potentially illegal or grounds for disciplinary action for staff to use any physical intervention designed to cause pain or injury, including:

- Any form of corporal punishment, slapping, punching, or kicking.
- Holding by the neck or collar, or otherwise restricting the ability to breathe.
- Holding by the hair or an ear
- Twisting or forcing limbs against a joint
- Tripping up a student or holding an arm out at neck or head height to stop them.
- Holding a student's face down on the ground or sitting on them
- Shutting or locking a student in a room, 'except in extreme situations while summoning support (DfE, 2013, pg 7)'

Staff should also avoid touching or holding a student in a way that might be considered indecent. The dignity of students is vital, and the school aims to foster their self-respect.

Using Physical Intervention:

Except in cases where there is an immediate danger, staff should try other ways of resolving or de-escalating a situation, such as:

1. Calmly re-stating the rules and expectations for the situation
2. Removing other students from the situation to protect them from danger or from being an audience
3. Using physical proximity, but not in a threatening way
4. Encouraging the student to withdraw to a safer and calmer situation
5. Calling another adult for support or to take over

6 Power to search students without consent

In addition to the general power to use reasonable force, the Head Teacher and authorised staff "can use such force as is reasonable given the circumstances" to conduct a search for the following 'prohibited items' (DfE - Searching, Screening and Confiscation, 2018):

- 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

It is important to note that "*force cannot be used to search for items banned under the school rules*" (DfE, 2018).

7 Physical contact with students

It is not illegal to touch a student.

There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, is both proper and necessary. According to the DfE guidance, examples where touching a student might be appropriate include:

- Holding the hand of the child at the front or back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school;
- Comforting a distressed student;
- Congratulating or praising a student;
- Demonstrating how to use a musical instrument;
- Demonstrating exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching; and
- Providing first aid.

8 Principles Relating to the Use of Physical Restraint

- *“Reasonable force must only be used as a last resort when other strategies have failed”* (DfE, 2013). It must serve to defuse or prevent a violent, or potentially violent, situation and must not be used purely to force compliance with staff instructions when there is no immediate risk to people or property
- Staff should have substantial grounds for believing that immediate action (reasonable force) is necessary to prevent a student from injuring themselves or others or causing serious damage to property
- Where possible, staff should take steps in advance to avoid the need for reasonable force, e.g., through dialogue and diversion. The student should be warned verbally that physical restraint will be used unless they desist
- Physical restraint must not be used in anger. When it becomes apparent that the student is not responding to verbal instructions and a violent incident is imminent, the member of staff, wherever possible, should call for assistance before engaging in reasonable force
- When it becomes necessary to restrain a student, the member of staff should, if possible, continue to talk to the student in a calm manner, offering choices and time for the student to become calm
- The age and competence of the student must be taken into account when deciding what degree of intervention is necessary
- Only the minimum force necessary to prevent physical injury or damage should be applied. Particular care must be taken to avoid inflicting any unnecessary pain or injury

Use of force must *“never involve deliberately painful or dangerous procedures”* (DfE, 2013). It must:

- Never interfere with breathing, blood supply, or genital areas,
- Never involve holding the head, throat, or fingers,
- Be discontinued as soon as the situation is deemed safe,
- As soon as it is safe, use of force must be gradually relaxed as the student regains self-control and
- A student must never be asked to apply reasonable force to another student.

8.1 Operational/Procedural Points Relating to the Use of Reasonable Force

- *“The circumstances and reason for using reasonable force must be recorded immediately, or as soon as possible, ideally no later than the next working day”* (DfE, 2013,). This documentation ensures a clear record is kept and can be reviewed as needed
- The member of staff involved must inform the Head Teacher or another member of the senior leadership team about the incident within 24 hours
- The student’s views should be recorded as soon as possible, preferably on the same day, to provide a balanced account of the incident
- The Head Teacher or a delegated member of the Senior Leadership Team should discuss the incident with the staff member within 24 hours to review the circumstances and any necessary follow-up actions
- Staff who are distressed following an incident may be offered support through the school’s Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) with Education Support, recognising the emotional impact such situations can have. This service provides confidential counselling and support to help staff manage their well-being. Staff can contact Education Support 24/7 at 08000 562 561 or via their website at www.educationsupport.org.uk
- After the incident, the student should be counselled to understand why restraint was deemed necessary, helping them reflect on their behaviour and the outcomes
- The student will be interviewed about the incident, including the events leading up to and following the restraint. This interview must be conducted by a senior member of staff who was not directly involved in the incident, ensuring an impartial review
- Staff involved in incidents of restraint should be given the opportunity to discuss their feelings and the incident’s aftermath. If further advice or training is needed, the Head Teacher or a delegated member of the Senior Leadership Team should take prompt action to provide it
- Parents or carers will be informed when reasonable force has been used and will be given the chance to discuss the incident with the school, supporting transparency and open communication
- Trustees will be made aware of any incidents involving the use of reasonable force at the next Safeguarding meeting, ensuring oversight and accountability.

9 Student complaints

- All complaints about the use of force should be thoroughly, speedily, and appropriately investigated, following the principles outlined in the DfE guidance on the use of reasonable force (DfE, 2013)
- Where a member of staff has acted within the law—specifically, they have used reasonable force to prevent injury, damage to property, or disorder—this provides a defence against any criminal prosecution or other civil or public law action (DfE, 2013)
- When a complaint is made, the onus is on the person making the complaint to prove their allegations. It is not for the member of staff to show that they acted reasonably (DfE, 2013)
- Suspension should not be an automatic response when a member of staff is accused of using excessive force. Schools should refer to the guidance [“Dealing with Allegations of Abuse against Teachers and Non-teaching staff”](#) (DfE, 2012) in such cases. This guidance clearly states that suspension must not be automatic or without careful consideration (DfE, 2012)
- Schools must carefully consider whether the circumstances of the case warrant a person’s suspension until the allegation is resolved or if 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 for support (DfE, 2012)
- Governing bodies must always consider whether a teacher has acted within the law when deciding on potential disciplinary action.
- Schools and local authorities, as employers, have a duty of care towards their employees. Schools must provide appropriate pastoral care to any member of staff subject to a formal allegation following a use-of-force incident

10 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years.

11 Further Sources of Information

Other departmental advice and guidance you may be interested in

- [Guidance on the Use of Restrictive Physical Interventions for Staff Working with Children and Adults who display Extreme Behaviour in Association with Learning Disability and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorders \(2002\)](#)
- [Guidance on the Use of Restrictive Physical Interventions for Pupils with Severe Behavioural Difficulties \(2003\)](#)
- [Screening, searching and confiscation – advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies.](#)
- [Dealing with allegations of abuse against teachers and other staff – guidance for local authorities, headteachers, school staff, governing bodies and proprietors of independent schools Associated resources](#)
- [Allegations of abuse against teachers and non-teaching staff](#)

(Other links)

- [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(PACE\) Code G: Revised Code of Practice for the Statutory Power of Arrest by Police Officers](#)

Appendix 1: INCIDENT RECORD FORM

This form should be completed following an incident involving the use of reasonable force and kept by the school for future reference.

Name(s) of Student(s)	Form Group	Gender
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Date	Time	Location of incident
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Nature of incident: *verbal abuse, threatening behaviour, refusal, kicking, punching, bullying, fighting, other (please specify below):*

Involving: *staff, students, property, equipment, other (please specify below):*

Why was Reasonable Force Necessary?

Clearly define the circumstances that led to the incident, describing the student's behaviour, the danger perceived, and the restraint used.

Why was Reasonable Force Necessary?

(Continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

Further action taken by the Head Teacher

Tick as appropriate

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recorded in the Accident Book (Arbor) | <input type="checkbox"/> Racial Incident Recorded |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accident Form completed | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent / Carer contacted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recorded as an assault | <input type="checkbox"/> Police / others contacted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child protection | <input type="checkbox"/> LEA informed |

Name of member of staff report:

Signature of member of staff reporting: **Date:**

Appendix 2: Non-Physical Intervention Techniques

1. Stay calm and composed

- Appear calm and relaxed
- Keep the pitch and volume of your voice down
- Feel comfortable with the fact that you are in control (if you are in control of yourself, you control the situation)
- Project a calm and assured feeling that you will see the situation through to a peaceful end, no matter what happens
- Be flexible and sensitive to the student's needs while maintaining consistency in your approach

2. Engage positively

- Talk with the student using calming phrases, such as:
 - "I'm here to help."
 - "Let's work through this together."
- Acknowledge the student directly by name to help ground them
- Be very matter-of-fact if the student becomes agitated
- Acknowledge their feelings if a student's agitation increases significantly
- Gently remind the student of boundaries while being supportive, such as, "I need you to stay safe."

3. Monitor the Situation

- Be aware of body language
- Observe changes in body language that may indicate increased agitation
- Maintain an appropriate distance while attending to the student's needs, providing space if needed
- Where possible, remain seated as long as the student does
- Stand to one side to appear non-threatening

4. Provide options and space

- Provide the student with choices to give them a sense of control
- Give the student space and always ensure they have an avenue to de-escalate safely
- Suggest a change in environment, such as stepping outside the classroom, to help the student calm down
- Acknowledge positive behaviour, even small steps towards de-escalation

5. When necessary ...

If the situation escalates, signal for additional staff support without raising alarm