Use of Reasonable Force Policy

Responsibility	Delegated to the Head Teacher (Student Welfare, Engagement and Community Committee)	
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1 Introduction

This policy is prepared with reference to the DfE's draft Use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions in schools (2025). Pages 14–15 of that document set out statutory requirements, expected to commence September 2025, relating to the recording and reporting of each significant incident involving the use of force. RTS will keep this policy under review and implement statutory changes once confirmed.

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)
- 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 others[1]
    - 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?

For the purposes of this policy, reasonable force means physical contact by a member of staff on a pupil to control or restrain their actions or movements. "Reasonable" means using no more force than is necessary for the least amount of time, in line with the circumstances.

Restrictive interventions are any planned or reactive actions which limit a pupil's movement, liberty or freedom to act independently and may include the use of equipment, medication or seclusion (supervised confinement in an area the pupil cannot leave of their own free will). Restraint is a form of restrictive intervention involving direct

[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".

physical contact and force to prevent, restrict or subdue movement of the body or part of the body. These categories can overlap. Restraint may also include mechanical or chemical restraint.

RTS staff will always seek to minimise the need for reasonable force and other restrictive interventions through early support, prevention and de-escalation strategies, and will act proportionately with due regard to pupils' dignity, welfare, and Equality Act duties.

3 Who can use reasonable force?

- "*All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force*" (DfE, 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, p. 4).

3.1 Training and competence

Staff who are likely to need to use reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions will receive training in their safe, lawful and proportionate use, and in preventative strategies (including de-escalation). Leaders will determine the level and frequency of training based on RTS's context, pupil profile and risk assessment.

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)

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)
- The employer will, so far as reasonably practicable, secure employees' health, safety and welfare. RTS will complete and review risk assessments for settings and roles where the use of reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions may be required, ensuring staff can act as safely as possible.

Schools Cannot:

Use force as punishment; "*it is always unlawful to use force as a punishment*" (DfE).

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, 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

When assessing whether use of force is necessary and proportionate, staff will consider:

- whether there are reasonable alternative ways to manage the situation;
- whether the intervention is likely to reduce risk or escalate it;
- the least restrictive option and shortest duration;
- relevant personal circumstances (age, size, medical needs, SEND, communication needs) and equality implications; and
- the pupil's welfare and dignity (including avoiding unnecessary use in front of peers, communicating clearly what is happening and why, and pausing or ceasing if risk reduces).

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 in schools):

- 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). 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). 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 Considerations for pupils with SEND

For pupils with SEND and/or communication differences, RTS will:

- anticipate triggers and embed preventative plans;
- ensure staff know the pupil's communication profile;
- adapt de-escalation and intervention strategies; and
- review behaviour support plans following any significant incident to reduce future need.

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

The governing body must take all reasonable steps to ensure the school's procedure for recording and reporting the use of force is complied with.

8.2.1 Recording (statutory)

- RTS will maintain a procedure for recording each significant incident in which a member of staff uses force on a pupil.
- The member(s) of staff involved must make the written record as soon as practicable after the event.
- A "significant incident" is any incident where the use of reasonable force goes beyond appropriate everyday physical contact
- The requirement to record applies even if the use of reasonable force in certain circumstances has been agreed with parents as part of a pupil's behaviour support plan.

8.2.2 Reporting to parents (statutory)

RTS will have a procedure for reporting each significant incident to each parent as soon as practicable after the incident, except where:

- The pupil is aged 20 or over; or contacting a parent would likely result in significant harm to the pupil, in which case the incident will be reported to the local authority where the pupil is ordinarily resident.
- Parent reports will include as a minimum:
  - time/date/location/approximate length of force used;
  - a brief account of the type and degree of force;
  - details of any injuries; and why force was assessed as necessary.

    - RTS may choose the medium (phone/email/online system) and will invite parents to a follow-up discussion where appropriate.

  The requirement to report applies even if the use of reasonable force in certain circumstances is agreed with parents as part of a behaviour support plan
- 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.

8.3 Post-incident evaluation and debrief

- Following each significant incident, RTS will evaluate what happened and why, the impact on pupils and staff, and any patterns/trends
- A restorative, reflective follow-up conversation will be held with the pupil and separately with involved staff, facilitated where possible by a colleague not involved in the incident, to support wellbeing and learning and to consider preventive adjustments (e.g. amending Behaviour Support Plans). Witness pupils who were distressed will also be supported
- Where injuries occur, RTS will ensure medical assessment/treatment and record/report injuries under school procedures and, where applicable, report to the HSE.

9 Allegations or complaints arising from the use of force

- RTS will investigate any complaint about the use of force thoroughly, without delay and proportionately, with due regard to pupil welfare, staff welfare and the evidence available. Investigations will follow the school's complaints and safeguarding procedures and the DfE's draft guidance on the use of reasonable force.
- Where a member of staff has acted within the law, that is, used reasonable force to prevent injury, damage to property or serious disorder, this will be taken into account in any criminal, civil or public law context. The school will make contemporaneous records as set out in this policy.
- On receipt of an allegation or complaint, the school will apply KCSIE (Part 4). This includes triage with the LADO where required, clear decision-making on next steps, and maintaining confidentiality as appropriate. Suspension is not automatic; leaders will consider whether the circumstances warrant

suspension or whether alternative arrangements (e.g. redeployment away from contact, additional supervision) are more appropriate while enquiries are completed.

- If suspension is used, the member of staff will be provided with a named contact for support and given information about the process and expected timescales, consistent with KCSIE. Pastoral and wellbeing support will be offered regardless of suspension.
- Following any investigation outcome, the governing body/trust board will consider whether the member of staff acted within the law and whether any disciplinary action is appropriate, having regard to the evidence and to KCSIE.
- Nothing in this section limits the school's duty to safeguard children or to report matters to external agencies where thresholds are met.

10 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if the DfE confirms statutory changes.

Appendix 1: Significant Incident Record (Use of Force)	
Complete as soon as practicable after the event by the staff member(s) involved.	
Pupil name	
Staff directly involved (names)	
Relevant needs/circumstances of pupil (incl. whether the pupil has an identified SEND/disability and **SEN status code**)	
Date	
Start time – End time	
Location	
Approximate length of time the intervention/force was used	
Brief account of incident (what led up to it; identified/potential triggers if known; **any preventative/de-escalation strategies used**; **what type of reasonable force** was applied; **degree of force**; **details of any physical injuries** sustained, if applicable)	
Brief account of why the use of force was assessed as necessary in this instance	
Post-incident support (e.g. **medical treatment** for injuries, or other adverse impacts)	
Record completed by (name)	
Date/time record completed	

Appendix 2: Parent/Carer Reporting Template

Parent/Carer Reporting Template	
Schools must have a procedure to report each significant incident where force is used to each parent as soon as practicable after the incident, except where a statutory exception applies. *Include only the minimum details below.*	
Pupil	
Date of incident	
Approx. time window and **location**	
Approximate length of time force was used	
Type of reasonable force applied and **degree of force**	
Any physical injuries sustained (if applicable)	
Brief account of why force was assessed as necessary in this instance	
Method of report to parent (phone/email/online message)	
Date/time report made	
Reported to (each parent/carer)	
Reported by (name/role)	

Appendix 3: Exceptions & Local Authority Notification Log

Exceptions & Local Authority Notification Log	
Complete only if a statutory exception to parental reporting applies. If an exception applies, the incident must be reported to the local authority for the area where the pupil is ordinarily resident.	
Pupil	
Incident date/time	
Exception applied?	☐ Reporting to parent likely to result in significant harm to the pupil
Rationale / evidence for "likely significant harm" (concise)	
Local authority notified (name of LA)	
Date/time LA notified	
How notified (e.g. phone/email/portal)	
Name/role of staff who notified LA	

Appendix 4: 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