

Gracehill Primary School



Caring, Learning, Achieving Together

Reasonable Force and Safe Handling Policy

May 2025

Gracehill Primary School
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Reasonable Force and Safe Handling Policy

The purpose of our school is to create a safe and secure environment where all children are enabled to achieve their full potential and to be educated with respect and dignity. The school's policy on the use of reasonable force has been developed to enable staff to achieve this purpose.

No matter how skilfully or sensitively pupils are managed, a small minority will occasionally engage in aggressive behaviour, which threatens the safety of other pupils and staff. All schools have a pastoral responsibility towards the pupils in their charges and should therefore take all reasonable steps to ensure that the welfare of pupils is safeguarded and that their safety is preserved.

Policy Aims

The use of reasonable force is only one of the strategies available to schools and teachers to secure pupils' safety and well-being and to maintain good order and discipline. All those who may have to use reasonable force with pupils must clearly understand the options and strategies open to them and they must know what is regarded as acceptable action on their part and what is not.

The objectives of this policy are:

- To create a learning environment in which young people and adults feel safe
- To protect every person in the school community from harm
- To protect all pupils against any form of physical intervention that is unnecessary, inappropriate, excessive or harmful
- To put in place guidance for staff so that they are clear about the circumstances in which they might use reasonable force to restrain pupils and how such reasonable force might be applied.

Preventative Strategies

The school actively promotes positive behaviour management strategies thus reducing the need for the use of any form of physical intervention, except in emergency situations.

Preventative strategies for inappropriate behaviour(s) are detailed in our school's 'Positive Behaviour Policy.' The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils in a school will never require any form of physical intervention. However, a small number of pupils may exhibit behaviour which may require some form of physical intervention.

Definition of Reasonable Force

Article 4 of the Education (NI) Order 1998 clarifies the powers of members of staff of a grant-aided school regarding the use of reasonable force. Article 4, nor this policy, in any way, authorises teachers or other members of staff to use any degree of physical contact which is deliberately intended to cause pain or injury or humiliation. The application of reasonable force to restrain or control a pupil is to be used as a last resort, only when other behaviour management strategies have failed, and when the pupil, or other pupils, members of staff, or property are at risk.

Based on this legal framework, **the working definition of 'reasonable force' is the minimum force necessary to prevent a pupil from physically harming him/herself or others or seriously damaging property, but used in a manner which attempts to preserve the dignity of all concerned.**

Use of reasonable force will always depend on the circumstances of each case. However, there are three relevant considerations to be borne in mind:

1. The use of force can be regarded as reasonable only if the circumstances of the particular incident warrant it. The use of any degree of force is unlawful if the particular circumstances do not warrant the use of physical force. Therefore, physical force could not be justified to prevent a pupil from committing a trivial misdemeanour, or in a situation that clearly could be resolved without force.
2. The degree of force employed must be in proportion to the circumstances of the incident and seriousness of the behaviour or the consequences it is intended to prevent. Any force used should always be the minimum needed to achieve the desired result.
3. Whether it is reasonable to use force, and the degree of force that could reasonably be employed, might also depend on the age, level of understanding and gender of the pupil, and the physical disability he/she may have.

When should reasonable force be used?

Staff at Gracehill Primary School and Nursery Unit are enabled to use, in relation to any pupil at the school, such force as is reasonable in the following circumstances to prevent a pupil from:

- (a) committing an offence;
- (b) causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil him/herself); or

- (c) engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any of its pupils, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

Who may use reasonable force?

The use of reasonable force is only one of the strategies available to schools and teachers to secure pupils' safety and well-being and also to maintain good order and discipline. All those who may have to use reasonable force with pupils must clearly understand the options and strategies open to them and they must know what is regarded as acceptable action on their part and what is not.

To facilitate this, members of staff and governors of Gracehill Primary School and Nursery Unit have been issued with a copy of this policy.

The right of a member of staff to use such force as is reasonable to restrain or control a pupil applies:

- where the member of staff is on the premises of the school; or
- elsewhere at a time when he/she has lawful control or charge of the pupil concerned;
- to teachers at the school, and to any other member of staff who, with the authority of the principal has lawful control or charge of pupils.

When might it be appropriate to use reasonable force?

Reasonable force may be used in a situation where other behaviour management strategies and techniques have failed to resolve the problem, or are inappropriate (eg in an emergency) there are a wide variety of circumstances in which reasonable force might be appropriate or necessary, to restrain or control a pupil. They will fall into three broad categories:

- a. Where action is necessary in self-defence or because there is an imminent risk of injury.
- b. Where there is a developing risk of injury, or significant damage to property;
- c. Where a pupil is behaving in a way that is compromising good order and discipline.

Examples of situations that fall into one of the first two categories are:-

- A pupil(s) attacks a member of staff, or another pupil;

- Pupils are fighting;
- A pupil is causing, or at risk of causing, injury or damage by accident, by rough play, or by misuse of dangerous materials, substances or objects;
- A pupil is running in a corridor or on a stairway in a way in which he/she might have or cause an accident likely to injure him or herself or others;
- A pupil absconds from a class or tries to leave school (NB this will only apply if a pupil could be at risk if not kept in the classroom or at school).

Examples of situations that fall into the third category are:-

- A pupil persistently refuses to obey an order to leave a classroom;
- A pupil is behaving in a way that is seriously disrupting a lesson.

The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils in a school will never require any form of physical intervention. However, a small number of pupils may require some form of physical intervention by staff. In order to minimise the risk of incidents escalating unnecessarily, the school should carry out a risk assessment. If the school becomes aware that a pupil is likely to behave in a disruptive way that may require reasonable force, it should plan how to respond if the situation arises. Such planning will address:

- Consulting the parents to ensure that they are clear about the specific action the school might need to take.
- Briefing staff to ensure they know exactly what action they should be taking.
- Managing the pupil, for example, reactive strategies to de-escalate a conflict.
- Ensuring additional support can be summoned wherever possible.

These strategies should help to ensure that any force used is the minimum necessary to achieve the desired outcome.

Sometimes a member of staff will not intervene in an incident without help (unless it is an emergency), for example when dealing with an older pupil, or a physically large pupil, or more than one pupil, or if the teacher believes he/she may be at risk of injury. In those circumstances the member of staff will remove other pupils who might be at risk, and summon assistance from a colleague or colleagues, or where necessary, telephone the police. The member of staff will inform the pupil(s) that he/she has sent for help. Until assistance arrives the member of staff will continue to attempt to defuse the situation orally and try to prevent the incident from escalating. (Appendix 2)

What might be regarded as constituting reasonable force?

Physical intervention can take a number of forms. It might involve staff:

- Physically interposing between pupils;
- Blocking a pupil's path;
- Holding;
- Pushing;

- Pulling;
- Leading a pupil by the arm;
- Shepherding a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of the back; or
- (In extreme circumstances) using more restrictive holds.

In exceptional circumstances, where there is an immediate risk of injury, a member of staff may need to take any necessary action that is consistent with the concept of “reasonable force”, for example, to prevent a young pupil running off a pavement onto a busy road, or to prevent a pupil hitting someone, or throwing something.

However, staff should never act in a way that might reasonably be expected to cause injury, for example by:

- holding around the neck;
- any hold that might restrict breathing;
- kicking, slapping or punching or using any implement on a pupil;
- throwing any object at a pupil;
- twisting or forcing limbs against joints;
- tripping up a pupil;
- holding or pulling by the hair or ear;
- holding a pupil face down on the ground;

Staff should also avoid touching or holding a pupil in any way that might be considered indecent.

Is it appropriate to use reasonable force in every situation?

Reasonable force should not be used automatically in every situation. In a non-urgent situation, reasonable force should only be used when other behaviour management strategies and techniques have failed. Any action which could exacerbate the situation needs to be avoided. The possible consequences of intervening physically needs to be carefully evaluated and the age and level of understanding of the pupils is also very relevant in those circumstances.

Staff may not always have the time to weigh up the possible courses of action and it would be prudent therefore for them to have considered in advance the circumstances when they should and should not use reasonable force. Staff should, whilst taking due account of their duty of care to pupils, always try to deal with a situation through other strategies and techniques before using reasonable force. A calm and measured approach to a situation is needed and staff should never give the impression that they have lost their temper, or are acting out of anger or frustration, or to punish the pupil.

All staff need to be aware of preventative strategies and techniques for dealing with difficult pupils and situations so that they can defuse and calm a situation. (Appendix 1)

Reporting incidences of use of reasonable force

This policy designates the Principal or a member of the School Safeguarding Team for notifying parents about incidents where reasonable force has had to be used and for dealing with any complaints which may emerge. This will help to ensure a consistent approach within the school to the use of reasonable force and the reporting arrangements.

The school will keep an up-to-date record of all such incidents in an incident book. Immediately following any such incident, the member of staff concerned should tell the Principal or a member of the School Safeguarding Team and provide a short written factual report as soon as possible afterwards (Appendix 3). That report should include –

- The name(s) of the pupil(s) involved, and when and where the incident took place;
- The names of any other staff or pupils who witnessed the incident;
- The reason that force was necessary (eg to prevent injury to the pupil, another pupil or a member of staff);
- Briefly, how the incident began and progressed, including details of the pupil's behaviour, what was said by each of the parties, the steps taken to defuse or calm the situation, the degree of force used, how that was applied, and for how long;
- The pupil's response, and the outcome of the incident;
- Details of any obvious or apparent injury suffered by the pupil, or any other person, and of any damage to property.

The Chairman of the Board of Governors and the Principal will review the entries in the incident book annually and confidentially and the young person's right to privacy will need to be ensured.

The pupil's view on the incident will also be recorded as soon as possible, preferably on the same day.

The use of physical intervention can be upsetting to all concerned, therefore, it is important to ensure that staff and pupils are given emotional support and where required basic first-aid treatment if there are any injuries. All injuries will be reported and recorded in accordance with the school's procedures.

Incidents involving the use of force can cause parents of the pupil involved great concern. Parents will be informed immediately and provided with an opportunity to discuss the incident.

Appendix 1

Preventative Strategies

All teachers need to be aware of strategies and techniques for dealing with difficult pupils and steps which they can take to defuse and calm a situation.

The strategies listed below as examples will be influenced by the age of the pupil(s) and the context in which they are applied.

1. Move calmly and confidently
2. Make simple, clear statements
3. Intervene early
4. Try to maintain eye contact
5. If necessary, summon help before the problem escalates
6. If possible, remove audience from the immediate location

Action

1. Tell the pupil who is misbehaving (for example, committing an offence and/or causing injury or damage to a person or property) to stop and tell him/her the possible consequences of failure to do so
2. If possible, summon another adult
3. Continue to communicate with the pupil throughout the incident
4. Make it clear that physical intervention will cease as soon as it is no longer necessary
5. Appropriate follow-up action should be taken, which may include:
 - Providing medical support
 - Providing respite for those involved

- Accessing external advice/support

A calm and measured approach to a situation is needed and staff should never give the impression that they have lost their temper or are acting out of anger or frustration when handling a problem.

Appendix 2

Intervention Guidelines

There are situations where staff should not intervene without help. Assistance should be sought when dealing, for example, with:

- An older pupil
- A physically large pupil
- More than one pupil
- When the teacher believes that he/she may be at risk of injury

In those circumstances where the member of staff has decided that it is not appropriate to restrain the pupil without help, he/she should:

- Remove other pupils who might be at risk
- Summon assistance from colleagues
- Where necessary, contact the police
- Inform the pupil(s) that help will be arriving
- Continue to attempt to defuse the situation orally and try to prevent the incident from escalating

Appendix 3

Safe Handling Record

Date of Incident:	Time of Incident:
Pupil Name:	Date of Birth:
Member(s) of staff involved:	Adult witness(es) to incident: Pupil witnesses to incident:
Outline of event leading to incident, including place where incident occurred, description of pupil's behaviour and steps taken to defuse the situation other than physical intervention:	

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Outline of incident including reason for use of reasonable force, how it was applied and for how long:
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Measures taken following the incident (e.g. respite for pupil(s), support for teacher(s))

Description of any injury(ies) sustained by anyone, any subsequent treatment and any damage to property:
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Date parent/carer informed of incident:

Time parent/carer informed of incident:

By whom informed:

Outline of parent/carer response:

Signature of Staff completing report:

Date:

Signature of Teacher-in-charge:

Date:

Signature of Principal:

Date: