

CARRICKFERGUS MODEL PRIMARY SCHOOL



REASONABLE FORCE & SAFE HANDLING POLICY

September 2025

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.

At Carrickfergus Model Primary school staff never go searching for physical affection from a child but if a child asks for a hug or physical comforting / assurance, staff may do this in a way that is age appropriate. Sometimes staff, in conjunction with a parent / carer will physically help a child into school in the mornings especially if Emotionally School Based Avoidance is involved. This may involve lifting a small child, taking a child by the hand or lifting a child with permission from the parent / carer. These strategies are not included within this policy as they are strategies we use as part of our ethos and values to love and care for each pupil in our care. Other areas of potential physical contact with pupils is included in our intimate care policy and educational visits policy.

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 Carrickfergus Model Primary School 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
- (b) 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 Carrickfergus Model Primary School 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.

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 nonurgent 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.

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. 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.

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. However, all strategies should be 95% proactive and 5% reactive in accordance with the best interests of a child. The core principle should be that '*care too much to let you be out of control.*'

Staff should understand that all behaviour is communication and they should always reflect on what the child is trying to communicate:

- Being rude
- Defiance
- Kicking
- Spitting
- Absence
- Disrupting the class
- Ripping up work
- Being late
- Running out of class
- Shouting
- Swearing at a teacher
- Getting angry

Understanding behaviour

- Has this happened before?
- What worked well last time?
- Is there a pattern emerging?
- What might have triggered this?
- Is there an unmet need?
- What about previous trauma?
- What additional needs may they have?
- What are their preferred supports?
- How am I feeling?
- Am I the right person to respond?
- Do I need support?

Strategies for Children with Special Education Needs:

- PLP
- Visuals / Objects / Photos
- Transition Cards
- Headphones / Quiet Areas
- Reinforcers (ipad / light up toys / spinners / balloons / bubbles / books / sand / water etc)
- Sensory Room / Sensory Circuit / Sensory Gym / Trim Trail / Forest School
- Clear Instructions
- Activities kept short and meaningful
- Use only minimal language

Strategies for Meaningful De-Escalation:

1. Think what is best for this individual at this time
2. Understand when to respond rather than react to behaviour
3. Think about how you can reduce the risk for everyone
4. Think about the risk of doing something vs not doing it
5. Practise effective de-escalation strategies until they become automatic
6. Practise active listening and respond with empathy
7. Employ a restorative approach to rebuild relationships
8. Be evaluative and consider what worked and what didn't work

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 and tell the pupil to stop the inappropriate behaviour (unless the pupil is demand avoidant as this could escalate things further)
3. Ask the pupil to behave appropriately, clearly stating the desired behaviour
4. Use PATHS strategies
5. Intervene early with dignity
6. Try to maintain eye contact
7. If necessary, summon help before the problem escalates
8. If possible, remove audience from the immediate location

Space & Stance / Body Language

Body language makes up a huge proportion of what we actually communicate. And having an awareness of this can greatly improve classroom practice.

Facial expressions

The expression on your face can often tell a very different story to the words you are using. In fact, facial expression is one of the most powerful methods of non-verbal communication that we have: this makes it a really valuable teaching tool.

With the right facial expression, you can deliver three-quarters of the message before you say a thing. Think carefully about the stock of facial expressions at your disposal and how you can use them to pre-empt having to utter a single word.

The power of a simple smile or scowl shouldn't be underestimated. A disapproving look can be used to avoid conflict before it arises and, similarly, a smile can congratulate a pupil without having to draw attention to the praise.

For some pupils, facial cues are the crucial signals that will help them to stay on task.

Space

Proxemics – the space between people – is of paramount importance in the classroom. Having somebody in your personal space can be uncomfortable, and the nature of teaching means that, quite often, we have to move into a pupil's personal space to help them with their work. In some cases, this can lead to a negative reaction.

Be mindful of the space between you and the pupil you are speaking with. Realistically, most classrooms are relatively small and don't allow for you to always keep your distance, but you can still judge the situation. If you're dealing with a behavioural issue, think about where you are standing. Are you being overbearing? Are you being too intimidating? Are you, in fact, too far away? Quite often, distance will determine how effective your words are.

Eye contact

Never underestimate the power of eye contact. We can communicate a significant amount of emotion through our eyes, but eye contact can be used for a whole lot more in the classroom – and is one of the best behaviour management tools a teacher has.

Making eye contact with a pupil who is misbehaving sends a silent signal of acknowledgement. This creates no disturbance, no fuss, but still gets your message across: "I know what you're doing and I don't like it, so stop."

On the flip side, eye contact can be used to positively reinforce behaviour. Maintaining eye contact creates a sense of personalisation and value. It shows that you are interested in what a pupil has to say and this can be a huge motivator.

Eye contact also has the benefit of allowing you to recognise when a speaker is becoming uncomfortable, giving you the opportunity to move on and to make that pupil feel safe.

Not only this, but eye contact allows you to model confident non-verbal communication. Speaking and communicating effectively and openly is something all pupils will need once they leave school, and maintaining eye contact is high up on the list of things that exhibit confidence. By making eye contact with your pupils, you are helping to teach them effective communication.

Hands

To successfully engage your pupils, you must command their attention. Barricading yourself behind a desk and a computer is never going to engage anyone, no matter how flashy your PowerPoint display is.

Hand gestures are a great tool for getting pupils to pay more attention. Have a think about your own practice: what do you do with your hands? What does this say to your pupils?

Holding out open palms suggests openness and sincerity, while putting your hands in your pockets shows that you are relaxed and comfortable. These gestures might sound small, but they are the type of action that actors will consider all the time. Ultimately, there is a component of acting to commanding the attention of a class, so it pays to think a bit more explicitly about what messages your hands convey.

In reality, we all react to situations instinctively. There will always be elements of our body language that we can't control, no matter how hard we try. But simply being aware of our idiosyncrasies is a powerful way of improving our practice in the classroom, and body language is just as much a part of that as the words we use.

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.

CALM Communication:

C = Communication (stance, posture, gesture, facial expression, intonation, scripts)

A = Awareness & Assessment (reading behaviour, anticipating what might happen next, knowledge of handling plans)

L = Listening and Learning (give time and space, allow pauses for take up time, give them a way out)

M = Making safe (objects, space, hotspots, safety responses)

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

Risk Assessments / Risk Management Plans / Staff Training

It is important to note in this policy that the Education Authority does not allow staff in mainstream primary schools to be trained in 'Team-Teach.' This is only reserved for Special Schools and those with SPiM units

Staff will receive awareness training / meetings in this area of school life, particularly those staff involved with pupils who regularly exhibit these type of behaviours. Staff are taught that prevention and seeking to meet children's needs is better than being reaction but the Board of Governors recognise that this is not always possible.

A small number of pupils may exhibit disturbed or distressing behaviour which may require some form of physical intervention by staff. To minimise the risk of incidents escalating unnecessarily due to lack of foresight, planning and training, schools should carry out a risk assessment from two perspectives:

- Environmental risk assessment (flash points / hot spots); and
- Individual risk assessment

Risk Assessments should:

- Identify situations or locations where there is increased risks of incidents happening
- Analysis of past incidents to identify medium to high risk locations

- Staff and pupils consulted as appropriate
- Individual pupil consulted if able
- Decide the appropriate type and level of supervision
- Principal to make recommendations to Board of Governors on type and level of supervision to minimise risk
- Implement plan
- Review plan
- Risk Assessments should be written by the class teacher, classroom assistant and SENCO

Record Keeping

All incidents involving the use of reasonable force must be recorded in the school's "**Record/Report of the Use of Reasonable Force Book**" unless the pupil has a record book of their own due to having a statement of special educational needs or where this policy is often used with a particular child. The school Principal and SENCO will keep an accurate up-to-date record of all such incidents. The Chairperson / Board of Governors will review annually the entries in the book. If able, the pupil's view should also be recorded.

Post Incident Management

The use of physical intervention can be upsetting to all concerned, therefore the Board of Governors will ensure that staff and pupils are given emotional support and/where required basic first aid treatment. Immediate action will be taken to ensure that staff and pupils are given emotional support and/where required basic first aid treatment. Immediate action will be taken to ensure that medical help is accessed for any injuries that require more than basic first aid. All injuries should be reported and recorded in accordance with the school's procedures – parents / carers must be informed and allowed an opportunity to discuss incidents.

- If a staff member is significantly hurt by a pupil, the parent / carer will be asked to collect the pupil in order for the staff member to be properly looked after by colleagues
- If deemed appropriate and necessary the pupil may have a delay to their return to school following such an incident to allow key staff to meet, debrief, formulate an updated plan for action / support for the pupil and to also allow time to communicate with parents / carers. The time involved in this will be kept to a minimum eg a delayed start to the next day, a reduced day or a full day
- Use of suspension may be considered

Post-incident Learning for the pupil / Restorative Practice

- All significant incidents should be followed by a positive restoration process depending on the age, stage and capabilities of the child involved
- Reflect and repair
- Putting things right again
- It is not always appropriate to do this on the same day when tensions are heightened

- If a child does not know how to feel empathy a verbal apology may not be the best technique; this type of child may find a way of their own to be restorative with an adult or other child
- Recovery can take time

SENCO & Designated Teacher for Child Protection

The SENCO and Designated Teacher for Child Protection has responsibility for providing guidance to other staff on the use of reasonable force / safe handling and for implementing the school's procedures.

Links to other School Policies

- Pastoral Care & Pupil Wellbeing
- Positive Behaviour
- SEND
- Anti-Bullying
- Staff Code of Conduct & Handbook
- Ethos, Aims and Values
- Safeguarding & Child Protection
- Intimate Care
- Education Visits