PHYSICAL INTERVENTION POLICY

Updated: Sept 2026

Signed: SJ

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Reference Points

- Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Section 93)
- D*f*ES Circular 10/98
- Use of Force Guidance '*The use of force to control or restrain pupils'* – non-statutory guidance, DCSF 2007 (supersedes Circular 10/98) see www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/piguide

Contact Point:
Schools seeking advice on the use of physical intervention should contact Dr. Tony Mackin, Interim Head of Access to Education on:

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The Purpose of this policy

- To ensure that CSF, schools and settings have fully discharged their duty of care to students, children and employees.
- To provide a framework for the management of physical interventions that is legal, effective, safe, appropriate and proportionate.

Positive Physical Contact
There are occasions where there may be physical contact between staff and pupils other than when adults are physically intervening to prevent serious misbehaviour.
Staff and adults need to be aware of sensitivities of any form of physical contact with children/pupils. However, contact between children and adults might be appropriate for a variety of reasons, including:

- Holding hands with a small child in the playground
- Calming/reassuring/comforting contact with a child that upset or injured
- A gentle touch on the arm to re-focus attention
- Guiding (without force) a pupil/child away from a situation or location.

Any physical contact has to be managed in order to make sure that it is appropriate and leaves neither party vulnerable to allegations of abuse. Factors to consider might include:

- Knowledge of the child, e.g. history/background
- Age (and age difference) – of child and adult
- Context – where, when, why
- Relationship between staff member and child
- Gender

Planned physical intervention can be viewed as positive, because it is committed to keeping children and adults safe and included in all settings.

What the law says about restrictive physical intervention:

School staff can use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances to prevent a pupil from doing, or continuing to do, any of the following:

- Committing any offence (or, for a pupil under the age of criminal responsibility, what would be an offence for an older pupil);
- Causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil him/herself); or
- Prejudicing the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any pupils receiving education at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

Definitions of 'school staff':

- Any teacher who works at the school; and
- Any other person whom the head has authorised to have control or charge of pupils. This:
    1. includes support staff whose job normally includes supervising pupils, such as teaching assistants, learning support assistants, learning mentors and lunchtime supervisors.
    2. can also include people to whom the head has given temporary authorisation to have control or charge of pupils, such as paid members of staff whose job doesn't normally involve supervising pupils (e.g. catering or premises staff) and unpaid volunteers (e.g. parents accompanying pupils on school-organised visits).
    3. does NOT include prefects or any other pupils .

This power may be used where a pupil (incl. one from another school) is on school premises or in the lawful control or charge of the member of staff – e.g. on a school visit.

Reasonable force:

- There is no legal definition of when it is reasonable to use force. That will always depend on the precise circumstances of individual cases. To be judged lawful, the force would need to be in proportion to the consequences it is intended to prevent.

- The degree of force should be the minimum needed to achieve the desired result.

- Use of force could not be justified to prevent trivial misbehaviour. However, deciding whether misbehaviour is trivial also depends on circumstances e.g. running in a corridor crowded with small children may be considered dangerous.

- Proper account must always be taken of any particular special educational need and/or disability that a pupil might have – there are 2 key duties under the Disability Discrimination Act:

1. not to treat a disabled pupil less favourably, for a reason relating to his/her disability, than someone to whom that reason does not apply, without justification; and
2. to take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage to pupils who are not disabled (reasonable adjustments).

The statutory power described above is in addition to the common law power of any citizen - in an emergency - to use reasonable force in self-defence, to prevent another person from being injured or committing a criminal offence. *NB There is NO legal requirement for practical training in techniques of physical intervention.* When dealing with an emergency, any adult who is lawfully placed in charge of pupils by a Head Teacher can use reasonable and proportionate physical intervention even if he/she has had no prior training.

Reasonable force may also be used to search pupils, without their consent, for weapons, however, schools are strongly advised not to search pupils where resistance is expected, but to call the police.

It is always unlawful to use force as a punishment.

Policy Management and Guidance:

Schools must have a policy on the use of reasonable force to control or restrain pupils. This policy should have regard to the documents listed in the Reference Points above. It is good practice for governors, staff, pupils and those with parental responsibility to be consulted about the policy and for the policy to be approved formally by the Governing Body and made known to all stakeholders either as part of the school's behaviour policy or separately. Appropriate account should be taken of the needs of individual pupils with SEN and/or disabilities including 'fragile' pupils.

The DCSF Guidance (2007) contains some explicit key messages:

- Strong emphasis on staff training in de-escalation strategies alongside physical intervention skills – this should include support staff, lunchtime supervisors etc.
- Acknowledges the potential for injury to children/pupils and staff involved in physical intervention responses
- Schools should have a policy on the use of reasonable force to control pupils, along side the behaviour policy
- No school should have a policy of 'No Physical Contact' (schools cannot deprive staff of their statutory power or hinder their exercise of it.)
- All staff need to understand their powers and options open to them – what is acceptable and what is not

Reference to the policy on the use of force to control or restrain pupils should be made in the information, which the school gives to parents about its policy on discipline and standards of behaviour.

Pupils with SEN and/or disabilities:

Where a school is aware that an individual pupil may be at greatest risk of needing restrictive physical interventions, it should be planned for in consultation with the pupil and his/her parents, following an individual risk assessment. A model risk assessment form can be found as an annex to the "Restrictive Physical Intervention model policy" for schools, see: http://www.thegrid.org.uk/learning/behaviour/policies/

- The positive handling plan should set out the techniques that should be used, and those that shouldn't normally be used

- The plan should be compatible with the pupil's statement and properly documented with the pupil's records.

- As far as practically possible, make staff who come into contact with the pupil aware of the relevant information in the plan, i.e.

    - Triggers known to provoke difficult behaviour, preventive strategies & what de-escalation tactics most likely to work
    - Triggers known to provoke a violent reaction, including relevant information relating to similar incidents in the past
    - Where physical intervention likely to be needed, detail specific strategies & techniques that have been agreed by staff, parents and pupil.
    - Decide which staff members should be called for the individual pupil concerned – not necessarily to take the action, but to be involved in the follow-up process.

- Pupils known to be at risk should be taught how to communicate in times of crisis and what strategies they can use. All staff working with the pupil should be made aware of these strategies.

Risk assessments:

Schools are advised to assess the frequency and severity of incidents requiring use of force that are likely to occur in their schools and use these assessments to inform staff training.

Schools should seek to provide initial and refresher training for staff on the behaviour management policies and codes of conduct determined by the school. In particular, staff should be given the clearest possible judgement about what situations the school considers justify physical intervention. *DCSF 'Use of Force Guidance' 2007 gives some useful examples.*

Schools should actively review such training and its relevance on a regular basis as part of the Behaviour Management Policy, of which the use of physical intervention should form only a part. Individual risk assessments should highlight specific areas for training. If there is a significant risk that staff may need to use physical intervention then the school should consider providing them with training in practical techniques of safe physical intervention

from a trainer associated with an accredited training organisation. Further information about practical training can be obtained from the Head of Access to Education (contact details above).

NB there is no legal requirement for staff to be trained in the use of practical techniques so staff may exercise their legal right to physically intervene even if they have not had such training. However, they would still need to demonstrate that their intervention was reasonable and proportionate.

Situations where staff should not normally intervene without help:

Help may sometimes be needed in dealing with a situation involving an older pupil, a large pupil, more than one pupil, or if the authorised member of staff believes s/he may be at risk of injury. For such situations, staff need to have an agreed system of communication for summoning help quickly. The member of staff should also take steps to remove other pupils who might be at risk.

Recording and Reporting Incidents:

Schools are strongly advised to keep systematic records of every significant incident in which force has been used. Such records can be used to provide evidence of defensible decision-making in case of a subsequent complaint or investigation. The DCSF guidance above provides a model recording form.

When recording such incidents, staff should bear in mind that, if this information is passed to the police, it may be included in a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure. Schools should retain records of such incidents until the member of staff involved has reached retirement age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if that is longer.

After any recordable incident, it is good practice to ensure that parents are informed as soon after the event as possible. (However, there is no longer a statutory requirement to do this). Governors should also be informed in due course.

Any injuries to staff or pupils should be reported under the school's Health & Safety procedures

Dealing with Complaints and Allegations:

If a specific allegation of abuse is made against a member of staff then the school needs to follow the guidance set out in its child protection procedures