



Policy:	Use of Reasonable Force
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Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Luke 18:16)

This policy is based upon our Christian values of thankfulness, respect, honesty, love and resilience.

Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Definitions	Page 2
Who can use reasonable force	Page 3
When can reasonable force be used	Page 3
Schools can use reasonable force to..	Page 3
Schools cannot..	Page 3
Power to search pupils without consent	Page 3
The school's approach to the use of force	Page 4
Using force	Page 5
Staff training	Page 5
Telling parents when force has been used	Page 5
Recording and Evaluation	Page 5
What happens when a child complains that force has been used?	Page 6
What about other physical contact with children?	Page 7
Being proactive	Page 7
Frequently asked questions	Page 8

Introduction

The vast majority of children will never have reason to experience 'reasonable force' whilst they are at school. However, occasionally it is necessary to support individual pupils to remain safe, to prevent injury, damage to property or disorder.

Definition

The term 'reasonable force' covers actions, used by most teachers at some point in their career, that involves a degree of physical contact.

Force is used to control a situation, for example if children are fighting, destroying property, or harming another child (for example, if a child was to throw a chair). This can range from guiding pupils safely by the arm, through to more extreme situations such as breaking up a fight or where a child needs to be removed from the room to prevent violence or injury.

The term 'reasonable in the circumstances' means using no more force than is needed.

Control means either passive physical contact, such as standing in front of a pupil or blocking their path, or acting physical contact, such as removing a child by the arm, out of a classroom.

Restraint means to put your arms around a child to prevent them being hurt or hurting others. It is typically used in extreme circumstances, for example during a fight where pupils refuse to separate without physical touch.

School staff should always avoid acting in a way child could cause injury, but it may not always be possible to avoid injuring a child.

Who can use reasonable force?

All members of staff have the legal power to use reasonable force. This power applies to all members of staff at a school, and there are DfE guidelines in respect of this [here](#). It can also apply where the Headteacher has delegated responsibility to adults accompanying pupils on a school visit.

When can reasonable force be used?

Reasonable force can be used to prevent a pupil hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or causing disorder. The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned, and should always depend upon the individual circumstances.

Schools can use reasonable force to:

The following list is not exhaustive, but provides some examples of situations where an adult may have to intervene:

- Removing a child from the classroom where they have refused to follow instructions to leave.
- Prevent a pupil from behaving in a way which disrupts a school lesson, event or trip.
- Prevent a pupil from leaving the classroom, where allowing them to do so would risk their safety, or lead to behavior which disrupts others.
- Prevent a pupil from attacking a member of staff or pupil, or to stop a fight, or to prevent a pupil from harming themselves.

School cannot:

Use force as a punishment – it is always unlawful to use force as a punishment.

Power to search pupils without consent

In addition to this general power, Headteachers and authorized staff can use powers to conduct a search for the following 'prohibited items':

- Knives and weapons
- Alcohol
- Illegal drugs
- Stolen items

- Tobacco, cigarettes and vapes
- Fireworks
- Pornographic images
- An item which is likely to be used to commit an offence, cause personal injury or damage property.

Force cannot be used to search for banned school items, such as toys.

The school's approach to use of force

Every school is required to have a behavior policy, and make this known to staff, parents and pupils. At St Mary's we use a Trauma Informed approach to behavior management, and trying to instill a sense of psychological safety in all staff and pupils.

When needing to use force with pupils who have additional educational needs, reasonable adjustments will be made. This may include giving additional time for a child to consider their behavior.

Schools do not require parental consent to use force, for example where a child is fighting. Government advice to schools is that they should not have a 'no contact' policy, because this could prevent a member of staff demonstrating their duty of care towards a child, or prevent them taking action where a child could be harmed. By taking steps to ensure everyone is clear about what force could be used, the school aims to reduce the likelihood of complaints being made when force has been used properly.

Steps to be taking when using physical interaction:

- Show care and concern by acknowledging unacceptable behavior and requesting alternatives using negotiation and reasoning (emotion coaching/trauma informed approach).
- Give clear direction for the pupil to stop.
- Remind the pupil about the rules and outcomes.
- Remove the audience.
- Provide vulnerable pupils with privacy to regulate and calm.
- Make the environment safe (removing scissors, equipment)
- Use positive guidance to escort the pupil to somewhere less pressured
- Call for help, and ensure a colleague knows
- Use thumbs up/ Thumbs down to ask for help.

Using force

Examples of reasonable force are:

Physically inserting yourself between 2 pupils

Block a pupil's path

Holding back by putting your arm around a child

Pulling

Leading a pupil by the hand or arm

Shepherding a pupil by putting your hand behind a pupil.

In extreme circumstances holding a child back may be necessary. Where practicably possible, we aim that a member of the senior leadership team will lead on this. As always, this will depend upon the context at the time, and circumstances.

Examples of unreasonable force:

- Holding a child around the collar or neck
- Physical assault
- Tripping
- Holding a pupil down.

Government guidelines also prohibits the use of:

- The seated double embrace
- The double basket hold (holding a pupil's arm across their chest)
- The nose distraction technique

Staff Training

Government advice is that schools can make their own decision about staff training. At St Mary's, staff have had a considerable training in emotion coaching and trauma led approaches to de-escalate a situation. We acknowledge that, often where staff feel they have to intervene, the pupils involved have experienced inappropriate/uncontrolled physical intervention, and it is not our intention to re-traumatize children in school. For this reason, and where practicably possible, we aim to provide pupils with psychological safety, and safe place to calm, and an emotionally available adult who will hear them.

In 2025, all staff will complete the Certificate in Use of Reasonable Force, from the National College. Staff will be provided with additional training where there is a need.

Telling parents when force has been used

The school will inform a parent as soon as possible about a serious incident which involved the use of reasonable force, and the incident will be recorded on the Use of Force register for that year.

It may be the case that the Headteacher will ask a parent to come to school if a child reports they have been harmed. This is not to collect the child (unless a suspension or exclusion is appropriate) but to discuss what has happened and speak to the child.

Recording

All incidents of concerning behavior will be recorded on safeguard my School, which is our safeguarding reporting system. A record of what happened must be made as soon as possible after the incident, following our safeguarding procedures (see safeguarding policy). Witnesses must be identified, in case the matter reaches the threshold for further investigation by outside agencies. The headteacher must be informed as soon as possible. If there is violence against a member of staff, this must also be reported on our safeguarding system. The Headteacher will also record the incident on the school's reasonable Force Register of Incidents.

When making the record please remember to include:

- When and when the incident happened.
- What led up to the behavior.
- What happened.
- Any witnesses.
- Reasonable force was used.
- The de-escalation strategies tried (if appropriate)
- What reasonable force was used.
- Any injuries to yourself or the child.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Headteacher will ensure that each incident is reviewed and investigated, and look at what further action is required. This could include LADO referral and Front Door referral procedures.

What happens if a pupil complains when reasonable force is used?

All complaints about the use of force will be thoroughly, speedily and appropriately investigated. Where a member of staff has acted within the law – that is, they have used reasonable force in order to prevent injury, damage to property or disorder – this will provide a defence to any criminal prosecution or other civil or public law action.

When an allegation of excessive force is made, or an injury is sustained, the Local Authority LADO will be informed and a referral made. It could be that a referral through the Front Door is also made to ensure that a robust investigation is completed. This will safeguard the member of staff and the child.

When a complaint is made, the onus is on the person making the complaint to prove that his/her allegations are true – it is not for the member of staff to show that he/she has acted reasonably (DfE guidance on Use of Reasonable Force). Suspension must not be an automatic response when a member of staff is accused of using excessive force. Schools must consider carefully the circumstances if the circumstances on the day warrant a member of staff being suspended until the allegation has been resolved, or whether alternative arrangements are more appropriate. If a decision is taken to suspend a member of staff, the school should ensure that the member of staff has access to a named contact who can provide support.

Governing Bodies should always consider if a member of staff has acted within the law when reaching a decision on whether or not to take disciplinary action against a member of staff. As employers, the school and local authority have a duty of care towards their employees. It is important that St Mary's provide appropriate pastoral care to a member of staff who is subject to a formal allegation following a use of force incident.

What about other physical contact?

It is not illegal to make physical contact. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, is proper and necessary.

Examples of this could be:

- Holding the hand of a child in the line
- Comforting a distressed child.
- When a pupil is celebrating
- Demonstrating in a lesson (a head stand in PE or a musical instrument lesson)
- To give first aid.

Being proactive

Risk assessments are required for pupils who exhibit extreme behavior. Responsible staff should think ahead to anticipate what could go wrong.

When considering a pupil's behavior, staff will think about:

- Can we anticipate a health and safety risk?
- Do we have all of the information to complete a risk assessment?
- Do we need a written plan?
- What steps can be taken to prevent dangerous behavior developing?

Post incident debrief

Following a serious incident, it is the policy of our school to offer support to all involved. This is an opportunity for learning, and time needs to be given for following up incidents so that pupils can express their views, staff can consider alternative courses of action, and parents perspective can be acknowledged.

It is difficult to devise a framework of support which meets the needs of all staff. As individuals we vary in how much support we need after an unpleasant incident. Generally a member of the leadership team will support staff and children involved (if appropriate). If a member of staff requires rest or time to compose themselves, the Headteacher will make arrangements for the class to be supported.

Frequently asked questions:

Q: I am worried that if I use force a pupil or parent could make a complaint against me. Am I protected?

A: Yes, if you have acted lawfully. If the force is reasonable, all staff will have a robust defence against accusations.

Q: How will I know if the use of a physical intervention is reasonable?

A: The decision to physically intervene is down to professional judgement, and a last resort in a serious situation. The use of force is reasonable if it is proportionate to the consequences it is intended to prevent. This means that the force is no more than is needed to achieve the required result. School staff should expect the full backing of the leadership team if they have had to use reasonable force to prevent harm.

Q: What about school trips?

Staff should risk assess whether it is safe to take a child on a trip, if their behavior is a concern and a risk to themselves or others. It is always a priority to keep a trip safe and comfortable for all involved.

The power to use reasonable force in an appropriate situation stands whenever staff are lawfully in charge of pupils.