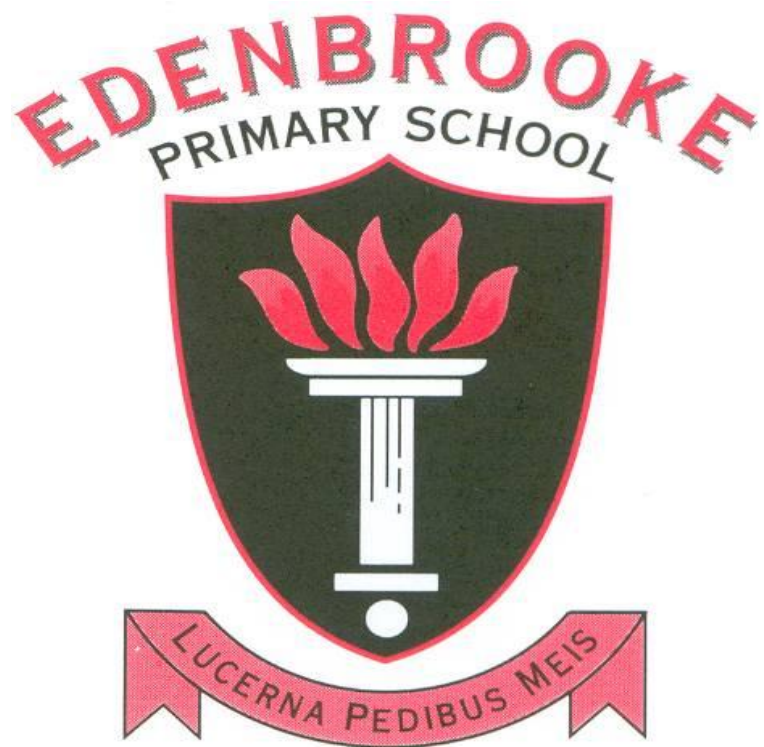




Reasonable Force and
Safe Handling Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy has been prepared for the support of all teaching and support staff who come into contact with pupils and for volunteers working within the school. The policy is intended to explain the school's arrangements for physical intervention. Its contents are available to parents and pupils.

The policy has been developed in line with guidance from:

- Pastoral Care: Guidance on the Use of Reasonable Force to Restrain or Control Pupils (Circular 1999/9)
- Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour (2001)
- Towards a Model Policy in Schools on the Use of Reasonable Force (August 2002)
- Pastoral Care in Schools – Child Protection: Code of Conduct for Staff (1999/10)
- Welfare and Protection of Pupils (Circular 2003/13)
- Regional Policy Framework on the Use of Reasonable Force / Safe Handling (2004)
- Interim Guidance on the use of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings (Circular 2021/13)

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's policies on Pastoral Care, Positive Behaviour, Anti-bullying, Child Protection & Safeguarding, Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers, Special Educational Needs and Inclusion and Health and Safety.

2. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The school believes that good personal and professional relationships between staff and pupils are vital to ensure good order in school. It is recognised that most pupils in our school respond positively to the discipline and control practised by staff. This ensures the safety and well-being of all pupils and staff in school. It is also acknowledged that in exceptional circumstances, staff may need to act in situations where the use of reasonable force may be required.

Every effort will be made to ensure that all staff in this school:

- (i) clearly understand this policy and their responsibilities in the context of their duty of care in acting appropriately where reasonable force is necessary and
- (ii) are provided with appropriate advice to deal with these difficult situations.

Staff have a responsibility to follow the policy and to seek alternative strategies wherever possible to prevent the need for physical intervention.

Physical intervention will only be used as a last resort when all other behaviour management strategies have failed or when pupils, staff, good order, or property are at risk, but should be reasonable and proportionate.

3.DEFINITIONS

a) Physical Contact

This may involve situations when physical contact with a pupil may be proper or necessary, e.g., during PE, Music or Drama lessons, or if a member of staff has to give first aid. Touching may also be appropriate where a pupil is in distress or needs comforting.

b) Physical Intervention

This may be used to divert a pupil from a destructive or disruptive action, for example guiding or leading a pupil by hand, arm, or shoulder with little or no force.

c) Restrictive Physical Intervention / Reasonable Force

This will involve the use of physical intervention/reasonable force when there is an immediate risk to pupils, staff, or risk of significant damage to property. A record of all such incidents will be kept.

4. UNDERPINNING PRINCIPALS

Everyone attending or working in this school has a right to:

- Recognition of his/her unique identity.
- Be treated with respect and dignity.
- Learn and work in a safe environment.
- Be protected from harm, violence, assault, and acts of verbal abuse.

Pupils attending this school and their parents have a right to:

- Individual consideration of pupil needs by staff who have a responsibility for their care and protection.
- Expect staff to undertake their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the school's policies.
- Be informed about school rules, relevant policies and the expected conduct of all pupils and staff working in the school.
- Be informed about the school's complaints procedures.

The school will do all it can to ensure that pupils understand the need for and respond to clearly defined limits which govern behaviour in the school.

5. STAFF AUTHORISED TO USE RESTRICTIVE PHYSICAL INTERVENTION

By reason of their conditions of service, the Principal can authorise all teachers to use restrictive physical intervention. Classroom assistants may also be authorised to use restrictive physical intervention. Authorisation is not given to volunteers or parents.

6. REASONABLE FORCE

The Education (NI) Order 1998 (part II Article 4) states:

“A member of the staff of a grant-aided school may use, in relation to any pupil at the school, such force as is reasonable in the circumstances for the purpose of preventing the pupil from doing (or continuing to do) any of the following, namely:

- *committing any offence;*
- *causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil herself); or*
- *engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any of its pupils, whether that behaviour occurs during a teaching session or otherwise.”*

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

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.

7. TYPES OF INCIDENTS WHERE PHYSICAL INTERVENTION MAY BE REQUIRED

Reasonable force will be limited to emergency situations and used only as a last resort when all other behaviour management strategies have been exhausted.

Reasonable force/safe handling can be used by a teacher or other authorised person(s) on the school premises or when authorised elsewhere e.g., supervision of pupils in bus queues, a sporting event or educational trip and fall into three broad categories (DE Circular 99/9 and Department of Education 2020):

- (a) Action due to imminent risk of injury.
- (b) Action due to developing risk of injury or significant damage to property.
- (c) Action where a pupil is behaving in a way that is compromising good order and discipline.

Examples that fall into categories (a) and (b) are:

- A pupil 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 which she might cause an accident likely to injure herself or others.
- A pupil absconds from a class or tries to leave school (Note: this will only apply if a pupil could be at risk if not kept in the classroom or at school).

Examples which fall into category (c) are:

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

Staff will not, however, put themselves in personal danger merely to safeguard property, or remove children from lessons if there is no risk of harm to themselves or others.

If a member of staff makes the decision to use reasonable force, they should always try to summon additional adult support, e.g., by sending a reliable pupil to seek out a member of staff.

8. FORMS OF REASONABLE FORCE

When other behaviour management strategies have failed, minimum intervention or force will reasonably be employed depending on the age, sex, physical strength, size, understanding, medical condition and any special needs of the pupil and used in a way that preserves the dignity and respect of all concerned for the shortest possible time. The use of reasonable force / safe handling will always involve a calm and measured approach.

Physical intervention may involve staff:

- Physically interposing between pupils.
- Blocking a pupil's path.
- Holding.
- Leading a pupil by the arm
- Pulling
- Shepherding a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of the back.
- In extreme circumstances, using more restrictive holds.

(Towards a Model Policy in Schools on the use of Reasonable Force, 2002)

Physical intervention uses the minimum degree of force necessary for the shortest period of time to prevent a pupil harming him/herself, others, or property. The use of reasonable force/safe handling should involve a calm and measured approach at all times.

Under Duty of Care, staff may use physical intervention and when they do, they should be clear that the action was:

- in the child's best interest
- necessary
- reasonable and proportionate
- last resort (where possible)

Physical intervention will stop if the child has:

- Difficulty in breathing.
- Vomits.
- Has a fit or seizure.
- Experiences swelling or a change of hue to the skin.

Wherever physical intervention is used, staff will keep talking to the pupil in a reassuring and positive manner unless risk assessment has indicated that this is likely to inflame the situation.

Unplanned physical intervention may trigger a Risk Assessment that may lead to a Risk Management Plan or Positive Handling Plan being developed.

9. PLANNED PHYSICAL INTERVENTION AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- Planned physical intervention will arise from Risk Assessments that the school will carry out on some pupils.
- Such assessments will be written and signed by the school, parents/guardians and where appropriate, pupil.
- Planned physical intervention will be agreed in advance (school, parents, other agencies and child, if appropriate).
- Implemented only by named staff.
- Recorded, as for unplanned intervention.
- Be part of a holistic plan.
- Shortest time/minimum force.

10. UNACCEPTABLE MEASURES OF PHYSICAL INTERVENTION

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, punching, or using any implement.
- Forcing limbs against joints.
- Tripping.
- Pulling hair.
- Holding the pupil face down on the ground.

- Staff should avoid touching or holding a pupil in any way that might be perceived as indecent.

11. REPORTING AND RECORD KEEPING

The Principal, Vice Principal or Senior Member of staff should be immediately informed if reasonable force has been used. The parent/guardian of the pupil should be contacted as soon as possible, and the incident recorded immediately.

The report on the use of Reasonable Force will contain:

- date of incident
- outline of events preceding incident
- outline of incident including reason for use of reasonable force
- action taken to subdue the incident and to support the staff/pupils involved
- record of any injury/treatment
- names of other involved adults and children
- signatures of reporting members of staff

12. COMPLAINTS

Any complaints received by the Principal from parents, staff, or any other persons regarding alleged ill treatment of a pupil or injuries received during the reasonable force incident, will be investigated fully by the Principal in line with the school's Safeguarding/Complaints procedures. The Chair of Governors will be informed of complaints.

13. SUPPORT

Children who have been subject to physical intervention, will be given the opportunity to discuss the incident with a member of staff at the first reasonable opportunity following the incident. Such discussions will offer pupils and school fresh opportunities to renew relationships that may have been strained by the incident.

Staff who have been involved in difficult incidents, will be offered the full support of the principal and SMT.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment/Risk Management Plan/Positive Handling Plan

Appendix 2: Incident report Form