POSITIVE HANDLING & USE OF REASONABLE FORCE POLICY

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This policy should be read in conjunction with associated school policies:

- Behaviour Policy
- Searching, screening and confiscation guidance
- Safeguarding and Child Protection policy

1.1 Legal Framework .

The DfE Use of Reasonable Force Guidance (April 2026) allows all staff at a school to use reasonable force to keep children safe. It also allows other adults in the school to use physical interventions where reasonable, proportionate and necessary to ensure the safety of children. Those might include

- classroom assistants
- individual care worker
- lunchtime supervisors
- caretakers
- voluntary helpers, including people accompanying pupils on visits, organised by the school.

The right for school staff to use reasonable force is further set out in the DFE document Behaviour and Discipline in Schools; Advice for Head teachers and School Staff (September 2022) which states that members of staff have the power to use reasonable force to

- prevent students committing an offence
- injuring themselves or others,
- damaging property
- maintain good order and discipline in the classroom.

Positive Handling should only be used when all other strategies which do not employ force have been tried and found unsuccessful or in an emergency situation.

There is no legal definition of reasonable force. The Criminal Law Act (1967) allows any person to use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances to prevent an offence (e.g. physical assault) being committed.

Reasonable minimal force must be a matter of personal judgement. All teachers have a professional 'duty of care' within their job description which is underwritten Part 7 & Annex 1 of School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document September 2021. Together with the legislative framework this enables teachers and other members of staff in the school, authorised by the Headteacher to use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances, to prevent a pupil from: committing an offence, injuring themselves or others, damaging property and to maintain good order and discipline in the classroom.

What is reasonable force?

The term 'reasonable force' covers the broad range of actions used by most staff at some point in their career that involve a degree of physical contact with pupils.

Clear definitions: The guidance distinguishes between:
Reasonable force: physical contact to control or restrain
Restrictive interventions: actions limiting a pupil's movement or liberty
Restraint: direct physical force to subdue movement
Seclusion: a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others, and preventing them from leaving either by physical obstruction, blocking, or making them believe they will be punished if they try to leave

Force is usually used either to control or restrain. This can range from guiding a pupil to safety by the arm through to more extreme circumstances such as breaking up a fight or where a student needs to be restrained to prevent violence or injury.

'Reasonable in the circumstances' means using **no more force than is needed**. As mentioned above, schools generally use force to control students and to restrain them. Control means either passive physical contact, such as standing between pupils or blocking a pupil's path, or active physical contact such as leading a student by the arm out of a classroom.

Restraint means to hold back physically or to bring a pupil under control. It is typically used in more extreme circumstances, for example when two pupils are fighting and refuse to separate without physical intervention.

School staff should always try to avoid acting in a way that might cause injury, but in extreme cases it may not always be possible to avoid injuring the student.

Seclusion:
We may use seclusion as a safety measure to protect others from harm when a student is experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation and is not acting with intent. Seclusion is a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others and preventing them from leaving. Seclusion will not be implemented by staff through the threat of punishment.

Who can use reasonable force?

- All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force
- This power applies to any member of staff at the school. It can also apply to people whom the head teacher has temporarily put in charge of pupils such as unpaid volunteers or parents/carers accompanying students on a school organised visit.

When can reasonable force be used?

- Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or from causing disorder.
- In a school, force is used for two main purposes – to control pupils or to restrain them.
- The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned and should always depend on the individual circumstances

The following list is not exhaustive but provides some examples of situations where reasonable force can and cannot be used.

Schools can use reasonable force to:

- remove disruptive children from the classroom where they have refused to follow an instruction to do so;
- prevent a pupil behaving in a way that disrupts a school event or a school trip or visit;
- prevent a pupil leaving the classroom where allowing the pupil to leave would risk their safety or lead to behaviour that disrupts the behaviour of others;
- prevent a pupil from attacking a member of staff or another pupil, or to stop a fight in the playground; and
- restrain a pupil at risk of harming themselves through physical outbursts.

Schools 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 the general power to use reasonable force described above, Head teachers and authorised staff can use such force as is reasonable given the circumstances to conduct a search for the following "prohibited items"

- knives and weapons
- alcohol
- illegal drugs
- stolen items
- tobacco and cigarette papers •
- fireworks
- pornographic images
- phones
- any article that has been or is likely to be used to commit an offence, cause personal injury or damage to property.
- any article that is listed as a prohibited item in the school behavior policy

The power to search without consent may also apply to prevent a pupil from;

- Committing an offence
- Causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself); or
- Engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among its pupils, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

What does it mean to restrain a child?

Positive Handling is;

'The positive application of force with the intention of protecting the child from harming himself or others or seriously damaging property'. The proper use of Positive Handling requires skill and judgement, as well as knowledge of non-harmful methods of restraining.

The decision to use Positive Handling as restrictive physical intervention must take account of the circumstances and be based on an assessment of the risks associated with the intervention compared with the risks of not employing a restrictive intervention. The physical intervention must also only employ a reasonable amount of force – that is the minimum force needed to avert injury or damage to property, or to prevent a breakdown in discipline – applied for the shortest period of time.

Why use restraint?

Positive Handling should avert danger by preventing or deflecting a child's action or perhaps by removing a physical object, which could be used to harm themself or others.
Positive Handling skillfully applied may be eased by degrees as the child calms down in response to the physical contact. It is only likely to be needed if a child appears to be unable to exercise self-control of emotions and behaviour.

GENERAL AIMS:

All staff in RGS recognise that the use of reasonable force is only one of the strategies available to secure pupil safety/well-being and also to maintain good order and discipline.
Our policy on the use of reasonable force is part of our overall pastoral care procedures and closely related to our policies on managing pupil behaviour in the Behaviour Policy and also the Safeguarding Policy.
We will always look to minimise the need to use restrictive interventions, such as through prevention, de-escalation, and approaches for individual pupils.
Whole-school measures include:

• consideration of how the school and classroom environment can support all pupils to achieve and thrive
• sharing best practice for whole-class behaviour management, and for managing communal spaces such as corridors and playgrounds
• training staff in effective communication strategies, such as using an appropriate tone of voice and empathy to aid de-escalation
• development of working staff-student relationships and trust
• recording and analysing data on the use of restrictive interventions to inform improvement planning and individual risk ssessment/support plans

The Aims:

- To protect every person in the school community from harm.
- To protect all pupils against any form of physical intervention which is unnecessary, inappropriate, excessive or harmful.
- To provide adequate information and training for staff so that they are clear as to what constitutes appropriate behaviour and to deal effectively with violent or potentially violent situations.
- To use the minimum degree of force necessary to accomplish positive handling.
- To give full support to staff who have been assaulted or have suffered verbal abuse from pupils or others.
- To maintain accurate records of incidents where Positive Handling has been employed.

RISK ASSESSMENT:

Although most young people will never require any form of Positive Handling, staff may have to deal with some young people who exhibit disturbed, distressed and distressing behaviour. It is therefore necessary to carry out risk assessment. We will attempt to reduce risk by managing:

- The environment
- Body language
- The way we talk
- The way we act

Environmental Risk Assessment

We will complete a risk analysis within the school and put in place strategies to minimise these risks in identified locations.

Individual Risk Assessments

RGS respects for the rights of the individual takes into consideration the context of The Human Rights Act (1998) and The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). The school's ethos and the guidance in this policy are based on the presumption that every adult and child is entitled to:

- Respect for his/her/their private life
- The right not to be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment
- The right to liberty and security: and
- The right not to be discriminated against in his/her enjoyment of those rights.

If we become aware that a pupil is likely to behave in a disruptive way that may require the use of reasonable force, it is our intention to plan how to respond if the situation arises. Such planning needs to address:

- Managing the pupil (e.g. reactive strategies to de-escalate a conflict, holds to be used if necessary);
- Involving the parents/carers 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 (this may identify a need for training or guidance);
- Ensuring that additional support can be summoned if appropriate.
- If Positive Handling is likely to be necessary, this should be included in the pupil's Individual Plan together with information on: de-escalation strategies; the manner in which the pupil will be held; how support can be summoned if needed; any medical factors to be considered.

More detailed examples of risk assessment and preventative steps can be found in Appendix 2.

PROCEDURES

In the event of Positive Handling having been used it is important to consider the strategies, which are deemed acceptable, and the recording procedures that should be in place.

Action Steps:

1. Tell the pupil who is misbehaving to stop and state 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 restraint will be removed as soon as it ceases to be necessary;
5. Appropriate follow-up action should be taken, which may include:

- Providing medical support
- Providing respite for those involved (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)

Recording:

Staff should record on CPOMS all incidents of restraint in accordance with School Policy and report these to the Head teacher. A sample proforma for reporting can be found in this policy, in Appendix 3.

Details should include:

- Name of student(s)
- Staff member(s) involved
- Factors necessitating physical intervention
- The strategies which were employed prior to using physical intervention
- How physical intervention was effected
- Outcome of restraint
- Any other action taken in the management of the incident parents/carers should be contacted as soon as possible and the incident explained to them. This action should also be recorded.

Contacting parents/carers:

We will contact parents/carers to share incidents as appropriate. Parents/carers should be contacted as soon as possible following a significant incident and the incident explained to them. School will communicate this in writing, most likely via email.
This includes any child who required seclusion or restraint as part of a behaviour support plan or risk assessment.
This action should also be recorded.
When reporting the use of force to parents the report should include:

- Time, date, location and approximate duration of the intervention
- brief account of why the intervention was assessed as necessary in that instance
- brief account of what type of force was applied, and the degree of force
- details of any physical injuries sustained, if applicable.

In deciding what is a serious incident, school leaders will use their professional judgment and consider the:

- pupil's behaviour and level of risk presented at the time of the incident
- degree of force used
- effect on the pupil or member of staff
- the child's age

Recording:

Staff should record (Appendix 2 or CPOMS) all incidents of reasonable force in accordance with school policy and alert the DSL and the Head teacher.

Details should include:

- Name of pupil(s)
- Staff member(s) involved
- Factors necessitating physical intervention
- The strategies which were employed prior to using physical intervention
- Where possible use body maps to record body areas that may have come into contact
- Outcome of restraint
- Any other action taken in the management of the incident

COMPLAINTS:

We all have a duty of care to the young people in our school and cannot escape our legal responsibilities by avoiding taking appropriate and necessary action. Involving parents/carers when an incident occurs with their child, together with a clear policy adhered to by the staff, and should help to avoid complaints from parents/carers. It will not prevent all complaints, however, and a dispute about the use of force by a member of staff might lead to an investigation, either under disciplinary procedures or by the Police and social services department under child protection procedures.

Staff, subjected to physical violence or assault, have the right to be supported in making a formal complaint to the Police and, if necessary, taking private action against an assailant.

It is our intention to inform all staff, students, parents/carers and Governors about these procedures and the context in which they apply.

We will review this policy on a yearly basis.

Remember that adhering to the principles and procedures referred to in this policy statement is part of effective practice and should minimise risk to young people in our care and enhance our own self-protection.

Communicating the school's approach to the use of force

- There is no requirement to have a policy on the use of force but it is good practice to set out, in the Behaviour Policy, the circumstances in which force might be used. For example, it could say that teachers will physically separate students found fighting or that if a student refuses to leave a room when instructed to do so, they will be physically removed.
- Any policy on the use of reasonable force should acknowledge their legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and children with special educational needs & disabilities (SEND).
- Schools do not require parental consent to use force on a student.
- Schools should not have a 'no contact' policy. There is a real risk that such a policy might place a member of staff in breach of their duty of care towards a student, or prevent them taking action needed to prevent a student causing harm.
- By taking steps to ensure that staff, student and parents/carers are clear about when force might be used, the school will reduce the likelihood of complaints being made when force has been used properly.

Appendix 1

When might it be appropriate to use reasonable force? Examples include where a student is;

- Committing an offence
- Causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the student himself); or
- Engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or amongst its students, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

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

- A student attacks a member of staff, or another student;
- student s fighting;
- A student 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 student 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 her/himself or others;
- A student absconds from a class or tries to leave school (NB this will only apply if a student could be at risk if not kept in the classroom or at school).

Examples of situations that fall into the third category are:

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

Appendix 2 Strategies

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

- Move calmly and confidently.
- Make simple, clear statements.
- Intervene early.
- Try to maintain eye contact.
- If necessary, summon help before the problem escalates.
- Remove audience from the immediate location.

There are situations where staff should not intervene without help:

Assistance should be sought when dealing with:

- A physically large student,
- More than one student, or
- When the member of staff believes that they may be at risk of injury.

In those circumstances where the member of staff has decided that it is not appropriate to restrain the student without help they should:

- Remove other students who might be at risk,
- Summon assistance from colleagues,
- Where necessary, telephone the police,
- Inform the student(s) that help will be arriving,
- Until assistance arrives, the member of staff should continue to attempt to defuse the situation orally, and try to prevent the incident from escalating.

The method of restraint employed must use the minimum force for the minimum time and must observe the following requirements:

Restraint must NOT:

- Involve hitting the student;
- Involve deliberately inflicting pain on the student;
- Restrict the student's breathing; or involve contact with sexually sensitive areas.

During any incident the restrainer should:

- Offer verbal reassurance to the pupil;
- Cause the minimum level of restriction of movement;
- Reduce the danger of any accidental injury.

Physical intervention can take several forms. It might involve staff:

- Physically interposing between students;
- Blocking a student's path;
- Holding;
- Pushing;
- Pulling;
- Leading a student by the hand or arm;
- Shepherding a student away by placing a hand in the centre of the back; or
- (In extreme circumstances) using more restrictive holds.

Some Dos and Don'ts

DO:

- Be aware of any feelings of anger
- Summon help
- Continue to talk to the student in a calm way
- Provide a soft surface if possible
- Be aware of any accessories worn by you or the student
- Hold the student's arms by their sides

DON'T:

- Try to manage on your own
- Stop talking even if the pupil does not reply
- Straddle the student
- Push arms up the back
- Touch the student near the throat or head
- Put pressure on joints

Appendix 3: Reporting and Recording Pro-forma

Royal Grammar School Newcastle – Record of physical intervention (to be uploaded onto CPOMS)

Date of incident: Time of incident:

Student Name: **D.O.B:**

Member(s) of staff involved:

Student SEND Status (tick applicable): **No SEND Support** **SEND Support** **EHCP**

Adult witnesses to restraint:

Student witnesses to restraint:

Outline of event leading to restraint – including other strategies tried and reasons for using Positive Handling rather than another strategy:

Outline of incident of physical intervention (including physical intervention method used):

Outcome of restraint:

Description of any injury(ies) sustained by injured student and any subsequent treatment:

Date parent/carer informed of incident: **Time:**

By whom informed:

Informed via (method)?:

Outline of parent/carer response:

Signature of staff completing report: **Date:**

Signature of Teacher-in-charge: **Date:**

Signature of Head SLT member **Date:**

Brief description of any subsequent inquiry/complaint or action:

Further Information:

Use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions guidance

Staff training resource