

Guidance for Staff on the Use of Force to Control or Restrain Pupils

September 2026



This Guidance is based on Section 93 of the 2006 Education and Inspections Act, Use of Reasonable Force – advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies (DfE 2013) and LA guidance.

A note on the law

Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 enables school staff to use reasonable force to prevent a pupil from:

- Committing any offence (or what would be an offence in an older child)
- Causing personal injury to or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself)
- 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.

This power applies to teachers and any other person the head teacher has authorised to have control or charge of pupils (e.g. teaching assistants and lunchtime supervisors)

The power may be used where the pupil is on school premises or elsewhere, where the child is in the lawful control of a member of staff (e.g. school trips).

There is no statutory definition of when it is reasonable to use force, but the DfE document Use of Reasonable Force Advice for Headteachers, Staff and Governing Bodies (July 2013) states:

Q: How do I know whether using a physical intervention is 'reasonable'?

A: The decision on whether to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the teacher concerned. Whether the force used is reasonable will always depend on the particular circumstances of the case. The use of force is reasonable if it is proportionate to the consequences it is intended to prevent. This means the degree of force used should be no more than is needed to achieve the desired result. School staff should expect the full backing of their senior leadership team when they have used force.

The precise circumstances of each individual case are always relevant. The degree of force used should always be the minimum needed to achieve the desired result. Use of force could not be justified to prevent trivial misbehaviour.

It is always unlawful to use force as a punishment.

Reducing the likelihood of situations arising where force is required

Staff should always regard the use of force as a last resort and should work to reduce the likelihood of situations arising where force is required by:

- Creating a calm orderly and supportive school environment that minimises the risk and threat of violence of any kind

- Developing effective relationships between pupils and staff
- Adopting a whole school approach to developing social and emotional skills – helping pupils to develop skills to manage strong feelings etc. (ie. through the PSHCE Curriculum)
- A structured approach to developing staff skills for positive behaviour management and support for staff during and after an incident
- Recognising that challenging behaviours are often foreseeable
- Effectively managing individual incidents (e.g. non-threatening verbal and body language, removing the incident to a quiet setting, using a member of staff well known to the pupil)
- Where practicable, warning a pupil that force may have to be used before using it.

Deciding if force is appropriate

The judgement on whether to use force and what force to use should always depend on circumstances of each specific case and information about the individual - taking into account the particular characteristics of the pupil including age, understanding and any SEN or disability he or she may have.

Though decisions typically have to be made quickly staff should make the clearest possible judgements about:

- The seriousness of the incident. The greater the potential for injury, damage or serious disorder, the more likely it is that using force may be justified
- The chances of achieving the desired result by other means. The lower the probability of resolving the situation by other means the more likely it is that using force may be justified
- The relative risks associated with physical intervention compared with other strategies. The smaller the risks associated with physical intervention compared with other methods the more likely it is that using force may be justified.

Examples of situations where the use of force may be reasonable:

- A pupil attacks a member of staff, or another pupil
- Pupils fighting, causing risk of injury to themselves or others
- A pupil is committing or on the verge of committing deliberate damage to property
- A pupil is causing or at risk of causing injury or damage by accident, by rough play, or by misuse of dangerous materials or object
- A pupil absconds from a class or tries to leave school other than at an authorised time. Refusal of a pupil to remain in a particular place is not enough on its own to justify use of force
- A pupil persistently refuses to follow an instruction to leave a classroom
- A pupil is behaving in a way that seriously disrupts a lesson
- A pupil is behaving in a way that seriously disrupts a school sporting event or school visit.

Examples of occasions when physical contact is proper and necessary:

Current guidance states that:

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

Examples of where touching a pupil might be proper or necessary:

- *Holding the hand of the child at the front/back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school;*

- *When comforting a distressed pupil;*
- *When a pupil is being congratulated or praised;*
- *To demonstrate how to use a musical instrument;*
- *To demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching*
- *To give first aid.*

Guidance on Using Force

All school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force to prevent pupils committing a criminal offence, injuring themselves or others or damaging property and to maintain good order and discipline.

In schools, force is generally used for two different purposes – to control pupils and to restrain them.

- **Control** can mean either passive or physical contact such as standing between pupils or blocking a pupil's path, or active physical contact such as leading a pupil 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.

Staff should not intervene in an incident without help, unless it is an emergency. If a member of staff believes they may be at risk of injury they should take steps to remove any pupils who might be at risk and then summon help from other staff or, where necessary, phone the police.

Staff should communicate in a calm and measured manner throughout any incident. Staff should avoid giving the impression of acting out of anger or frustration or to punish a pupil and should make it clear that physical contact or restraint will stop as soon as it ceases to be necessary.

Types of force could include:

- Passive physical contact e.g standing between pupils or blocking a pupil's path
- Leading a pupil by the hand or arm
- Ushering a pupil by placing a hand in the centre of the back
- In extreme circumstances, using appropriate restrictive holds, which may require specific training.

In high or immediate risks of death or serious injury (a pupil running into a road, or a pupil armed with a dangerous object) staff would be justified in taking any necessary action consistent with the principle of seeking to use the minimum force required to achieve the desired result.

Staff should make every effort to avoid acting in a way that might reasonably be expected to cause injury.

Staff should always avoid touching or restraining a pupil in a way that could be interpreted as sexually inappropriate conduct.

SEN and Behavioural Difficulties

Some children such as those who display extreme behaviour in association with learning disability and/or autistic spectrum disorders or behavioural emotional and social difficulties present different challenges with regard to the use of force.

In such cases a positive handling or behaviour management plan should be developed for the individual pupil in consultation with the pupil, his or her parents the SENCO and the class teacher. The *Proforma for assessing and managing foreseeable risks for children who present challenging behaviours* can be used for this purpose.

Any specific strategies or techniques that are agreed should be shared with all staff and acted upon and will be recorded in an Individual Behaviour Support Strategy.

Recording incidents

All incidents which require the use of force or restraint should be recorded on CPOMS. The Governing Body is responsible for ensuring that a procedure is in place for recording and reporting *significant* incidents to parents.

Significant incidents could include:

- An incident where unreasonable force is used on a pupil
- Any incident where substantial force has been used e.g. physically pushing a pupil out of a room
- The use of a restraint technique
- An incident where a child was genuinely very distressed.

A report to the parent should include:

- When and where the incident took place
- Why it was decided force had to be used
- Strategies used to try to avoid having to use force.
- What force was used.
- Whether there were any injuries
- What follow-up action was being taken in relation to their child.

Handling Complaints and Allegation about Use of Force

Schools should refer to the LA Guidance on *Allegations of Abuse Made Against Staff and Volunteers Working with Children* where an allegation of excessive force is made against a teacher.

Where a member of staff has acted in 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 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.

Suspension must not be an automatic response when a member of staff has been accused of using excessive force. School will consider carefully whether the circumstances of the case warrant a person being suspended until the allegation is resolved or whether alternative arrangements are more appropriate.

Governing bodies should always consider whether a teacher has acted within the law when reaching a decision on whether or not to take disciplinary action against a teacher.

As employers, schools and local authorities have a duty of care towards their employees. It is important that schools provide pastoral care to any member of staff who is subject to a formal allegation following a use of force incident.

Final Note

Oxfordshire County Council comment on guidance:

'It is clear that the government wants the pendulum to swing back to adult rights and for education services to be places where adults are firmly and fairly in charge of children. The guidance is strong on message but weak on detail. It leaves all the responsibility and accountability for decision making in this area with head teachers and Governing Bodies.'

In the light of this staff are advised to approach the use of force with the following principles in mind:

- **Force should always be the last resort.**
- **Summon other adult help where possible.**
- **Always warn pupils that you are about to use force and always use the minimum force required to achieve the desired result.**
- **Restrictive holds should not be employed unless you are trained to use them and have prior agreement to employ them.**
- **Incidents should be recorded as soon as possible after the event.**

Ben McPherson
Headteacher

Date: