



Policy on the use of Reasonable Force/ Safe Handling

April 2025

Date ratified by BoG: 16th April 2025
Signed (chairperson of BoG): T Wallace

Rationale

Context

- our dual responsibility
 - providing safe and secure environment for the entire school community (pupils and staff)
 - promoting and sustaining appropriate behaviour;
- taking account of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12); International 1989 (UK 1991)
- taking account of the Education (NI) Order 1998 (Article 3) which requires Boards of Governors to ensure that policies are designed to promote good behaviour and discipline on the part of the pupils;
- taking account of the Education (NI) Order 1998 (Article 4) which clarifies the powers of members of staff of a grant-aided school regarding the use of reasonable force;
- taking account of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 (Articles 17 + 19) which imposes a duty on Boards of Governors to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils; and
- taking account of the Human Rights Act 1998 which provides for the right to education.
- This policy and our procedures have been developed in line with guidance from:
- The Department of Education NI circular 1999/9;
- DE document “Towards a Model Policy in Schools on the Use of Reasonable Force” August 2002;
- Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour (2001);
- Pastoral Care in Schools – Child Protection: Code of Conduct for Staff (1999/10) paragraphs 69 to 72; and
- DE Circular 2003/13 Welfare and Protection of Pupils.
- DE Circular 2021/13

Principles

Donemana Primary School believes that:

- Each child has the right to be educated in a safe and secure environment where each child’s moral, intellectual, personal, social and emotional development is promoted.
- Parents and carers are informed and reassured that their children are being educated in a safe, caring and respectful atmosphere.
- All staff have the right to work in a safe and secure environment.

These principles underpin our school ethos.

Purposes

The following purposes underpin Donemana Primary School’s policy and practices to:

- create a learning environment in which young people and adults feel safe;
- protect every person in the school community from harm;
- protect all pupils against any form of physical intervention, which is unnecessary, inappropriate, excessive or harmful; and
- develop and implement guidance for staff (teaching and non-teaching) so that they are clear about the circumstances in which they might use reasonable force to restrain pupils and how such force might be applied.

Legislative Framework

This policy has been formulated with due consideration to the following legislation:

- Children (NI) Order 1995 – duty to protect and child protection responsibilities/ fulfilling responsibility;

Donemana Primary School

- UN Convention On The Rights Of The Child 1989 – (Articles 12, 16 and 19); UK 1991;
- Education (NI) Order 1998 (Part II Article 4(1));
- Human Rights Act 1998 – Articles 3 and 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights
- Health and Safety at Work Act (NI) Order 1978;
- Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 – Articles 17, 18, 19.

Links With Other Policies

- This policy is one of the overall pastoral policies and dovetails into the school's existing Positive Behaviour Policy, Anti-bullying Policy, Child Protection Policy, Special Needs Policy and Complaints Policy.
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and curricular policies.

Definition of Reasonable Force

The Education (NI) Order 1998 (part II Article 4 (1)) 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 himself); 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 him/herself or others or seriously damaging property, but used in a manner which attempts to preserve the dignity of all concerned.

Practices

Preventative Strategies

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.

Preventative strategies for inappropriate behaviour(s) are detailed in our schools Positive Behaviour Policy.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is one of our preventative strategies to minimise the risk of an incident escalating unnecessarily and will be a normal practice for our school where a pupil or a small number of pupils are known to exhibit disturbing or distressing behaviour (EBD). Risk assessment will be considered only for those pupils where there is a foreseeable risk and enables the school to plan and train accordingly. Risk assessment will be considered from two perspectives (a) environmental risk assessment or (b) individual risk assessment. This should form part of the pupil's education plan. (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2)

Procedures - Support Structures

The following procedures have been agreed by the staff and adopted by the Board of Governors. Parents and pupils will be informed of the school's procedures and support structures within the overall Pastoral Care Policies.

Roles and Responsibilities

Reasonable force/safe handling can be used by any member of staff who is authorised by the Principal to have lawful control or charge of pupils, e.g. teachers, classroom assistants, supervisory assistants. The Principal will confirm with all staff those who are authorised to be in charge of pupils at any given time.

Procedures

There may be circumstances when a member of staff may have to decide between making an intervention/using reasonable force by placing him/herself in a dangerous situation or standing back and thereby allowing colleagues or pupils to face a potential danger. There will always be an element of personal judgment in these decisions and there is the possibility of someone being injured. However, it is reasonable to expect a member of staff to engage in some risk where there is evidence of danger to others and intervention has a good chance of being effective.

Staff should not, however, put themselves in personal danger merely to safeguard property.

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, on authorised out of school activities such as a sporting event or educational trip. Reasonable force should be limited to emergency situations and used only as a last resort when all other behaviour management strategies have been exhausted and where:

- action is necessary in self defence or because there is imminent risk of injury to another pupil or person;
- there is a developing risk of injury to another pupil or person, or significant damage to property;
- there is a developing risk of injury to themselves;
- a pupil is behaving in a way that is compromising good order and discipline.

Examples that fall into the above categories 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 s/he might cause an accident likely to injure her/himself 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);
- a pupil persistently refuses to obey an order to leave a classroom;
- a pupil is behaving in a way that is seriously disrupting a lesson.

Forms of Reasonable Force

When other behaviour management strategies have failed - it should be the minimum intervention or force that should 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. The use of reasonable force/ safe handling should involve a calm and measured approach at all times appropriate to the particular pupil and be in accordance with the schools agreed strategies and the following procedures:

- tell the pupil to stop the inappropriate behaviour;

Donemana Primary School

- ask the pupil to behave appropriately, clearly stating the desired behaviour;
- tell the pupil that physical intervention will take place if inappropriate behaviour continues;
- during the incident repeatedly reassure the pupil and tell him/her that physical contact will stop as soon as he/she is ready to behave appropriately;
- if the teacher, classroom assistant or supervisory assistant feels at risk, e.g. from a large or older group of pupils, send for the nearest staff support.

The forms of reasonable force the school will use will depend on the individual circumstances and are:

- separating pupils who are fighting, or who are about to fight;
- blocking a pupil's path;
- holding;
- breakaway techniques (e.g. when a member of staff is grabbed by a pupil);
- leading a pupil by the arm;
- shepherding a pupil away by placing hands on the backs of elbows; or
- using more restrictive holds (in extreme circumstances).

SEN

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO) places duties on educational settings not to directly discriminate against a pupil because of their disability, or to treat disabled pupils less favourably (for a reason relating to their disability) than it treats, or would treat, a pupil to whom that reason does not or would not apply (unless justified) and to make 'reasonable adjustments' to all policies, procedures and practices to ensure that a disabled pupil is not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to those who are not disabled. A person is regarded as being disabled for the purposes of SENDO if he/she has 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day to day activities'. This is the same definition as that used in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The school's Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) should keep staff informed about pupils with special educational needs who may require individual support with regard to their physical management. Staff should discuss any concerns they have about physical management with the SENCO and/or Principal. This should also include engagement with the pupil and their parents/carers.

Health and Safety

When using reasonable force/physical intervention/restraint/safe handling, the pupil's health and safety must always be considered and monitored.

Physical interventions should involve the minimum amount of force necessary to resolve the situation and calm the pupil.

Limits on the Use of Force

The law strictly prohibits the use of force, which constitutes the giving of corporal punishment. The use of force as a punishment or to intentionally cause pain, injury or humiliation would contravene our Child Protection Policy. 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 or punching or using any implement;

Donemana Primary School

- forcing limbs against joints;
- tripping;
- holding or pulling by the hair;
- holding the pupil face down on the ground;
- staff should also avoid touching or holding a pupil in any way that might be considered indecent.

The use of reasonable force is only to be employed in exceptional circumstances or an emergency where a pupil appears to be unable to exercise self-control of emotions and whose behaviour is presenting a threat to himself/herself or others. A member of staff should not intervene in an incident without help if there is a risk that he/she may be injured or may endanger his/her life.

Record Keeping

All incidents involving the use of reasonable force must be recorded. The Principal will keep an accurate up-to-date record of all such incidents. Immediately following any incident the member of staff concerned must inform the Principal and provide the contemporaneous written record/report. (Appendix 3 Incident Record Form)

The Chairperson of the Board of Governors and the Principal will review annually the incidents. Records of incidents will be kept in line with the Disposal of Records Schedule. Confidentiality and the young person's right to privacy will need to be ensured.

The pupil's views should also be recorded as soon as possible, preferably on the same day. Ref Appendix 3 Specimen Incident Record Form.

Post-Incident Management

The use of physical intervention can be upsetting to all concerned, therefore, it is important to ensure that staff and pupils are given emotional support and where required basic first-aid treatment. Immediate action should be taken to ensure that medical help is accessed for any injuries that require more than basic first-aid. All injuries should be reported and recorded in accordance with the school's procedures – parents/carers must be informed and allowed an opportunity to discuss.

Where it is clear that the teacher/member of staff concerned needs further support, advice or training, the Principal should take prompt action to ensure it is provided.

Contacting Parents

Parents/carers should be contacted as soon as possible and the incident explained to them. This must also be recorded. Any complaint from a parent will be dealt with within the school's complaints procedures.

Complaints

If an incident occurs involving the use of reasonable force/restraint by a teacher, the procedures governing such incidents should be followed. This will include informing the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child as outlined above.

In the event of a subsequent complaint made against a member of staff either by or on behalf of the child, this will be dealt with in accordance with the School's Complaints Procedure.

Donemana Primary School

Staff who themselves are subject to physical violence or assault should be supported, as appropriate, in taking any necessary action against an assailant.

Designated Teacher

The Principal will have special responsibility for providing guidance to other staff on the use of reasonable force/safe handling and for implementing and supporting the schools procedures.

Training and Development

All staff will have regular awareness raising of issues relating to the use of reasonable force/safe handling, procedures and practices relating to behaviour management and child protection policy and procedures.

Education Authority's Behaviour Support Teams will offer professional guidance and support to schools on a range of behavioural support, including the use of reasonable force/safe handling – prevention and intervention strategies.

Policy Development and Guidance

Key stakeholders must be consulted on the policy – (Education & Libraries Order (NI) 2003). These must include:

- children and young people;
- parents and carers;
- all staff; and
- Board of Governors.

Date policy agreed by Board of Governors and staff

Signed Chair of Governors

Date for review of policy

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

A small number of pupils may exhibit disturbed or distressing behaviour which may require some form of physical intervention by staff. To minimise the risk of incidents escalating unnecessarily due to lack of foresight, planning and training, schools should carry out a risk assessment from two perspectives:

- environmental risk assessment; and
- individual risk assessment.

Environmental Risk Assessment

- Identify situations or locations where there is increased risk of incidents happening.
- Analysis of past incidents to identify medium to high risk locations.
- Staff and pupils consulted.
- Individual pupil consulted.
- Decide the appropriate type and level of supervision.
- Principal to make recommendations to Board of Governors on type and level of supervision to minimise risk.
- Implement plan.
- Review plan.

Individual Risk Assessment

Where a school is aware that a pupil is likely to behave in a disruptive way that may require the use of reasonable force/safe handling, the school should plan its response by:

- consulting the pupil, as appropriate;
- consulting the parents – specific action the school may need to take;
- briefing staff – what action they should be taking (may require training or guidance);
- managing the pupil – e.g. reactive strategies to de-escalate a conflict;
- ensuring that additional support can be summoned wherever possible;
- implementing plan and review;
- reviewing Plan.

Risk Reduction

Risk reduction should include:

- proactive measures to support the child effectively and prevent difficulties emerging;
- early interventions to help the child in difficult situations and avert problems; and
- planned measures to manage the child and others safely, when unavoidable difficulties arise.

Appendix 2: Risk Assessment Proforma

NAME OF PUPIL: _____ **DOB:** _____ **AGE:** _____

SEN REGISTER CODE OF PRACTICE STAGE: _____

SUPPORT TO DATE:

RISK ASSESSMENT COMPLETED BY

DATE: _____

SIGNED: _____

(Principal)

(Date)

Consultation has been carried out

Please ✓ as
Appropriate.

with the pupil	
with other pupils	
with the parent/carer	
with staff	

Types of Behaviour Causing Concern: Level of Risk, Frequency, People to Whom Behaviour Exhibited.

BEHAVIOUR	VERY LIKELY	LIKELY	QUITE POSSIBLE	POSSIBLE	UNLIKELY	<i>Frequency H – hourly D – daily W – weekly M – monthly T – termly</i>
Vandalism						
Bullying						
Fighting						
Violent and Aggressive						
Angry Outbursts						
Impulsive Dangerous Behaviour						
Self-Harms						
Medically Related Behaviour						
Threatening and Abusive						
Non Compliance						
Other (please specify)						
PEOPLE TO WHOM BEHAVIOUR IS MOST LIKELY EXHIBITED						
Classroom Teacher						
Other Teacher (please specify)						
Classroom Assistant						
Ancillary Staff (lunchtime supervisors, caretakers)						
Member of SMT						
Male / Female Staff						
Other Pupils in Class						
Other Pupils in School						
Male / Female Pupils						
Younger/Older Pupils						
Ethnic Minority Pupils						

**ENVIRONMENTS AND TIMES OF GREATEST RISK
– FLASH POINTS / HOT SPOTS.**

LOCATION AND TIME OF BEHAVIOURS	VANDALISM	BULLYING	FIGHTING	VIOLENT / AGGRESSIVE	ANGRY OUTBURSTS	IMPULSIVE DANGEROUS BEHAVIOUR	SELF HARMS	MEDICAL RELATED BEHAVIOUR	THREATENING AND ABUSIVE	NON-COMPLIANCE	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
Behaviour During Lessons											
Behaviour in practical Lessons (please specify)											
Behaviour In Library											
Behaviour In Dinner Hall											
Behaviour at Break Times											
Behaviour in Playground											
Behaviour on Trips											
Behaviour Off-Site											
Behaviour in PE Hall											
Behaviour on School/Public Transport Bus											
Behaviour in Taxi											
Behaviour if Medication Not Taken											
Other Behaviours – (please specify)											

Risk Evaluation

Level of Likelihood	X	Frequency	=	Risk
Very Likely 5	X	Hourly (5)	=	25 greatest
Likely 4	X	Daily (4)	=	16
Quite Possible 3	X	Weekly (3)	=	9

Possible 2 X Monthly (2) = 4
 Unlikely 1 X Termly (1) = 1 lowest

Likelihoods		Frequency	
Very likely	5	Hourly	5
Likely	4	Daily	4
Quite Possible	3	Weekly	3
Possible	2	Monthly	2
Unlikely	1	Termly	1

This numerical evaluation of risk is not an absolute but simply affords a pupil's predisposition and risk frequency to be compared.

Risk Factors

Score	Risk
25	Very High
15-20	High
8-12	Medium
6-10	Low
1-5	V Low

Drawn up by _____ Date _____

Name of Pupil _____

Agreed by _____ (Principal) Date _____

Presented to BOG _____

To be reviewed _____

Signed _____ (Parent)

Date _____

Behaviour	Risk Factor	Existing Precautions/ Support/Supervision Linked to Education Plan	Additional Precautions/ Support/ Supervision/ Strategies	Action By Whom	Action By When

INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Name of School: Donemana Primary School

Year Group: _____ Date of Incident: _____

Employing Authority: _____

Staff Involved in restraint: _____

Designation: _____

Events Leading up to the Incident

Where did the incident start? _____

What was happening at time? _____

Describe the Event that Occurred

When did the incident occur? _____

What action did you take to try to de-escalate the situation before using restraint?

What behaviour was the child presenting that warranted restraint / physical intervention?

Risk of injury to self or others

Risk of significant damage to property

Compromising good order and discipline

Risk of committing a criminal offence

What do you believe would have happened if there had been no physical intervention?

How long was the pupil held? _____

How long did the pupil need to be held? _____

Was anybody injured? YES NO

If YES, please give details. _____

Member of staff who verbally checked pupil for injury after the hold _____

Has the pupil been restrained before? YES NO

Implications for future planning:

Does the pupil have an individual behaviour programme / education plan? YES NO
Do changes need to be made to any of the following?

The environment e.g. organisation, curriculum

Targets for teaching new skills

Reinforcement strategies

Defusing and calming strategies

Other Please specify _____

Do other agencies need to be involved in the future YES NO

If yes, please specify who and with what aim _____

Follow Up Action

Medical intervention was needed YES / NO

Has school nurse / doctor been informed YES / NO

Please specify other recording procedures:

Accident form

Child Protection Record

Parent/carer informed by Telephone Letter Direct Contact

Form Completed by _____

Principal's Signature: _____ Date: _____