HCAT

Use of Reasonable Force and Restraint Policy

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1	Original	September 2019
2	Reviewed and Rebranded	September 2025
3	Amended to reflect updated guidance.	September 2025
4	Amended to reflect updated guidance for April 2026 including a section relating to seclusion.	January 2026

HCAT Use of Reasonable Force and Restraint Policy

1. Introduction

This policy has been developed between key advisors, the trade unions represented at the school and professional associations recognised by HCAT who have been consulted in the development of this policy.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the DFE Advice published in April 2026, "Use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions in schools".

2. Aims

The aims of this policy are to enable the staff at the Trust and its academies:

- To create a learning environment in which young people and adults feel safe.
- To protect every person in the Trust communities from harm.
- To protect all pupils against any form of physical intervention that is unnecessary, inappropriate, excessive or harmful.
- To put in place guidance for staff so that they are clear about the circumstances in which they might use reasonable force to restrain pupils and how such reasonable force might be applied.

3. Legal Framework

All Trust staff members 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.

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

- committing a criminal offence (or, for a pupil under the age of criminal responsibility, what would be an offence for an older pupil); or
- causing personal injury or damage to property; or
- prejudicing the maintenance of good order and discipline at the academies or among any pupils receiving education at the academies, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

The staff to which this power applies are:

- any member of staff at the Trust;
- any other person whom the Principal, Head of School or Executive Headteacher has authorised to have control or charge of pupils. This can also include people to whom they have given temporary authorisation to have control or charge of pupils such as unpaid volunteers (for example parents accompanying pupils on school- organised visits); and
- does not include any pupils (including those in positions of authority, such as advocates).

The power may be used where the pupil (including a pupil from another school or academy) is on Trust premises or elsewhere in the lawful control or charge of the staff member (for example on a school visit).

Staff members can sometimes be worried that using force will lead to false allegations of unreasonable or unlawful conduct in the form of a complaint or legal action. But if the force used is reasonable all staff will have a robust defence against any accusations. This policy and related use of force guidance is intended to help staff feel more confident about using force when they think it is right and necessary.

It is always unlawful to use force as a punishment. This is because it would fall within the definition of corporal punishment, which is illegal.

4. Reasonable Force

Whether the force used is reasonable will always depend on the particular circumstances of the case and the test is whether the force used is proportionate to the consequences it is intended to prevent.

This means the degree of force used should be the minimum needed to achieve the desired result.

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

Control can mean either passive physical contact (e.g. standing between pupils or blocking a pupil's path) or active physical contact (e.g. leading a pupil by the hand or arm, or ushering a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of the back).

When members of staff use "restraint" they physically prevent a pupil from continuing what they were doing after they have been told to stop. The use of restraint techniques is usually used in more extreme circumstances, such as when two pupils are involved in a fight and physical intervention is needed to separate them.

5. Judging whether to use force and what force to use

The judgement on whether to use force and what force to use will always depend on the circumstances of each case and – crucially in the case of pupils with SEN or disabilities – information about the individual concerned.

The academies will develop an individual risk assessment where it is known that force is more likely to be necessary to restrain a particular pupil, such as a pupil whose SEN and/or disability is associated with extreme behaviour.

Based on this legal framework, our '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. The use of reasonable force will always depend on the circumstances of the case and staff should take the following into consideration:

- whether it is reasonable to use force, and the degree of force that could reasonably be employed, given the age, sex, physical strength, size, understanding, medical conditions and any special educational needs of the pupil.
- the use of force can be regarded as reasonable only if the circumstances of the particular incident warrant it. The use of any degree of force is unlawful if the particular circumstances do not warrant the use of physical force. Therefore physical force could not be justified to prevent a pupil from committing a trivial misdemeanour, or in a situation that clearly could be resolved without force.
- the degree of force employed should be in proportion to the circumstances of the incident and the seriousness of the behaviour or the consequences it is intended to prevent. Any force used should always be the minimum needed to diffuse the situation.

Some examples of situations where reasonable force might be used are:

- to prevent a pupil from attacking a member of staff, or another pupil, or to stop a fight between two or more pupils;
- to prevent a pupil causing deliberate damage to property;
- to prevent a pupil causing injury or damage by accident, by rough play, or by misuse of dangerous materials or object;
- to ensure that a pupil leaves a classroom where the pupil persistently refuses to follow an instruction to do so;
- to prevent a pupil behaving in a way that seriously disrupts a lesson; or
- to prevent a pupil behaving in a way that seriously disrupts a school sporting event or school visit.

Prevention should be the primary consideration.

Steps to avoid these situations should be taken and the adult should be able to demonstrate that those steps were taken. Physical restraint should always be the last resort.

Staff have a responsibility to ensure the safety and welfare of their pupils. They are in a particular position of trust (in loco parentis).

The following should be applied in all cases:

- Staff should delay if at all possible. (However, in some circumstances e.g. a child running out onto the road, you might be deemed negligible if you do not intervene.)
- An 'on the spot' risk assessment for each occasion that you feel reasonable force or restraint may be necessary should be made.
- Consideration should be given to the environment, the medical circumstances and the clothing.
- Action being taken should always be for the good of the child, trying to keep them safe.
- Assure the child that the restraint is not a punishment.
- Never use other children in the restraint.

Restraint or reasonable force should be witnessed by another responsible adult. Staff should call for another adult if restraint or reasonable force is needed and another adult is not available in the area.

Reasonable force might be used:-

- in self defence, where risk of injury is imminent;
- when there is developing risk of injury to the person deemed in need of restraint or others.

Physical intervention in these circumstances may take several forms, e.g.:-

- physically interposing between pupils;
- blocking a pupil 's path;
- holding;
- leading a pupil by the hand or arm;
- shepherding a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of the back; or
- (in extreme circumstances) using more restrictive holds.

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, such as the examples below, (which are not exhaustive) should not be permitted under any circumstances:

- holding around the neck;
- any hold that might restrict breathing;
- kicking, slapping or punching;
- forcing limbs against joints;
- tripping;
- holding by the hair; and
- holding the pupil face down on the ground.

Physical intervention may involve staff in:-

- holding
- pushing
- pulling

Staff must always avoid touching or holding a pupil in a way that might be considered indecent.

Where a pupil has caused actual harm or injury, details will need to be recorded on the relevant form (HSE).

6. Power to Search Pupils

Searching without Consent

In addition to the general power to use reasonable force, Principal's, Heads of School or Executive Headteacher's and authorised staff can use force as is reasonable to conduct a search for the following items.

- Knives and weapons
- Alcohol
- Illegal drugs
- Stolen items
- Tobacco and cigarette papers
- Fireworks
- Pornographic images
- Any article that has been or is likely to be used to commit an offence, cause personal injury or damage to property

Force cannot be used to search for items banned under school rules.

Searching with consent

School staff can search pupils with their consent for any item.

School is not required to have formal written consent from the pupil, it is enough for the teacher to ask the pupil to turn out his or her pockets or if the teacher can look in the pupil's bag or locker and for the pupil to agree.

- Schools should make clear in their school behaviour policy and in communications to parents and pupils what items are banned.
- If a member of staff suspects a pupil has a banned item in his/her possession, they can instruct the pupil to turn out his or her pockets or bag and if the pupil refuses, the teacher can apply an appropriate consequence as set out in the school's behaviour policy.
- A pupil refusing to co-operate with such a search raises the same kind of issues as where a pupil refuses to stay in a detention or refuses to stop any other unacceptable behaviour when instructed by a member of staff – in such circumstances, schools will apply an appropriate consequence.

Any search without consent will conducted by a member of staff of the same sex and with a witness present. The exception to this will be if there is an imminent risk of serious harm to another person.

During any search only outer clothing will be asked to be removed. The definition of outer clothing means any clothing that is not next to the skin or immediately over a garment that is underwear. Outer clothing includes hats, shoes, boots, gloves and scarves.

The following guidance explains in more detail the screening, searching and confiscating powers that a school has.

7. General Principle of Behaviour Management

Because the use of force should only be a last resort, staff at the Trust recognise that they should minimise the possibility of force being needed by creating a calm, orderly and supportive school climate that lessens the risk and threat of violence of any kind. The Behaviour Policy is followed by all staff to ensure consistency of approach.

8. De-escalation and Physical Intervention

The Trust is committed to using a holistic approach to positive handling. Positive handling describes a broad spectrum of strategies to manage behaviour; these include policy, guidance, environment management, staff deployment, personal behaviour, diversion, diffusion and de-escalation. Physical intervention is only a small part of this framework.

- Use of space
- Safe environments
- Comfortable environments
- Diversions
- Calm Stances and Postures
- Non threatening Facial Expressions
- Low Tone, Volume and Pace in Communication
- Careful use of words
- Physical Reassurance and Prompts
- Effective Guides and Escorts
- Releases and holds with minimum drama and effort

It is envisaged that non-physical intervention will constitute at least 95% of all behaviour management intervention. It is an integral part of the approach to physical intervention that all staff share responsibility for assisting and supporting. It is undesirable and counter-productive that the responsibility for physical intervention is left to particular individuals.

10. Staff Training

Teaching staff and Support staff employed at the Trust academies will be trained in de- escalation techniques and physical intervention if deemed appropriate.

Although the absence of accredited training does not preclude a member of staff from using reasonable force where needed. A core team of staff wills receive Team Teach training. The programme is not just about the physical use of force. Its approach provides a framework to equip schools and individuals with attitudes, skills and knowledge to facilitate environments that are free from fear and safe from harm. The physical techniques are assessed by an expert risk assessment panel. Team Teach is approved by Ofsted and the Institute of Conflict Management (ICM). The Team Teach expectation is that people will communicate, assess, look and listen for opportunities to divert or de-escalate. A core team of staff are trained to intermediate level to ensure that ongoing training, advice and guidance is available to all staff involved.

11. Recording the use of significant incidents

From September 2010, Local Committees and Trustees must ensure that a procedure is in place for recording each significant incident in which a member of staff uses force on a pupil, and for reporting these incidents to the pupil's parents in writing as soon as practicable after the incident.

Our staff will use the Incident Report form set out in Appendix A. This is to ensure that parents are kept informed of serious events at school concerning their child. If reporting the incident to a parent would be likely to result in

significant harm to the pupil, then the incident must be reported to the local authority where the pupil normally lives.

Whether an incident is significant will vary on a case by case basis, but in determining whether it is, staff will need to consider factors such as the pupil's behaviour and the level of risk presented at the time, the degree of force used and whether it was proportionate in relation to the behaviour, together with the effect on the pupil or member of staff. Members of staff should not put themselves at risk. An individual would not be seen to be failing in their duty of care by not using force to prevent injury, if doing so threatened their own safety.

Such records may be required for future reference. Immediately following any such incident the member of staff concerned should inform the Principal, Head of School or Executive Headteacher or a senior member of staff and provide a written report. Parents/carers should be contacted as soon as possible and the incident explained to them and shared in writing, as should the child's social worker if relevant.

This action will also be recorded on the pupil's record.

12. Roles and Responsibilities

The Trust will endeavour to ensure that all staff know and understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to the management of pupils. Legislation allows 'members of staff 'to use 'reasonable force 'and defines a member of staff as 'any teacher who works at the school and any person who, with the authority of the Principal, Head of School or Executive Headteacher, has lawful control or charge of pupils at the school'. The Principal, Head of School or Executive Headteacher will confirm with all staff whether they meet the terms of this definition.

Regular training will be given to staff.

Staff should be made aware of individual pupils who are considered likely to pose serious behavioural problems or violence.

The SENCo will keep staff informed about pupils with special educational needs who may require special attention with regard to their physical management. Staff will consult with SENCo regarding any concerns that they have about the physical management of pupils with special educational needs.

13. Preventative Strategies

All staff at the Trust need to be aware of strategies and techniques for dealing with difficult pupils and steps, which they can take to defuse and calm a situation. The strategies listed below as examples will be influenced by the age of the pupil(s) and the context in which they are applied.

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

14. Action Steps

Tell the pupil who is misbehaving to stop and tell him/her the possible consequences of failure to do so.

Summon another adult. (Another adult should be present if physical restraint of any kind needs to be applied.) Send another pupil / message to alert a member of the senior leadership team.

Continue to communicate with the pupil throughout the incident.

Make it clear that physical intervention will cease as soon as it is no longer necessary.

Appropriate follow-up action should be taken, which may include:

- providing medical support;
- providing respite for those involved; and
- accessing external advice/support.

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. Whilst limiting damage to property and/or persons, it is advisable not to 'corner' or give the child a feeling of being 'trapped' in any way as this can often inflame reactions. Where possible, allow the child space to move.

15. Seclusion

Seclusion is defined as a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others and preventing them from leaving. Within the Trust, seclusion will only ever be used as a safety measure to protect the pupil or others from harm when a pupil is experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation. In such circumstances, the pupil is not acting with intent.

Seclusion in this instance will never be used as a punishment and it is not a response to deliberate, wilful or planned misbehaviour.

Any use of seclusion must be reasonable, proportionate and time-limited and only applied where other de-escalation strategies have been unsuccessful or are inappropriate due to the immediate risk of harm.

The place to which a pupil is confined must be:

- Safe, appropriate to the pupil's age, needs and vulnerabilities;
- Non-threatening and non-intimidating in appearance and use;
- Free from objects that could pose a risk to the pupil or others.

A pupil who is secluded must be supervised at all times by an appropriate member of staff. Staff must continue to use calm, reassuring communication and actively support the pupil to regulate. As soon as the immediate risk of harm has reduced, the pupil must be allowed to leave the space.

Seclusion should always be accompanied by professional judgement, taking into account:

- The pupil's individual needs, including any SEND, trauma history or medical considerations;
- The environmental factors contributing to the incident;
- The principle that restriction should be reduced at the earliest safe opportunity.

An incident involving the use of seclusion must be recorded and reported in line with the procedures set out in the section on The Significant Incident Report (Appendix A). Parents/carers will be informed as soon as practicable, unless doing so would place the pupil at risk of significant harm.

Seclusion, as defined in this policy, is not a disciplinary response. Where a disciplinary response is required, including measures such as removal from the classroom, these will be applied in accordance with the School/College's Behaviour Policy.

16. Dealing with complaints and allegations regarding the use of force

Parents and pupils have a right to complain about actions taken by Trust staff, including any use of force.

If a specific allegation is made against a member of staff then the Trust will follow procedures set out in the Trust's Complaints Policy and the Trust's Dealing with Allegations Against Staff Policy; with reference to the following DFE Guidance:

- Use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions in schools
- Keeping Children Safe in Education

Where an allegation is made that a member of staff has used force inappropriately or unlawfully school will follow the allegations to staff procedure. This means that the School will inform the Local Authorities Designated Officer on the same day that the allegation is made.

16. Physical contact with children in other circumstances

Schools should not have a 'no contact' policy. It is unnecessary and unrealistic to suggest that teachers should only touch children in emergencies. Particularly with younger children, touching them is inevitable and can give welcome reassurance to the child.

The adoption of a 'no contact' policy at a school can leave staff unable to intervene where reasonable in the circumstances to fully protect pupils. School leaders should adopt sensible policies which allow and support their staff to make appropriate physical contact.

There are circumstances when it is appropriate for staff to have some physical contact with pupils which does not give rise to any question over the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions. This will depend on the circumstance, but examples of occasions when physical contact is generally appropriate include:

- To give first aid
- to guide or escort pupils, e.g. holding the hand of a pupil at the front/back of the line when going to assembly, when walking together around the school or on a school trip, or when helping a pupil to a space they have chosen to access to self-regulate
- to comfort a distressed pupil
- to congratulate or praise a pupil, e.g. a pat on the back or a handshake
- to demonstrate how to use a musical instrument
- to demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching

Where a teacher has concerns that their actions may be misconstrued, it is essential that incidents are reported to the Principal, Head of School or Executive Headteacher immediately.

Appendix 1

SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT REPORT

Log Number:			
Name of Pupil:		Year Group:	
Details of any SEN/Disability/Vulnerability:			
Date of Incident:	Time:	Location:	
Name of Staff Members Involved:		Names of any Witnesses:	
Name of any other pupils involved:		Names of witnesses:	
Parents contacted in writing: ***Note the date and whether shared via email / Arbor / copy given face to face.***			
Reason for Intervention			
Danger to self		Danger to others	
Severe damage to property		Severe disruption to other pupils	
Describe Lead up to Incident including attempts to de-escalate:			
De-escalation techniques used & effectiveness rating (1 = not effective, 5 = very effective)			
Verbal advice & support		C.A.L.M. talking	
Distraction		Options offered*	
Time out offered		Planned ignoring	
Time out directed		Success reminded	
Transfer adult		Contingent touch	
Choices, limits & consequences		Persuasion	
Reassurance		Step away	
Appropriate behaviour reminder		Negotiation	

Praise points		Take up time*	
Other*		Please specify	

Details of incident: * include relevant details and learning points
Witness signatures:

Section B (to be completed if physical intervention used)

Physical intervention used & effectiveness rating (1 = not effective, 5 = every effective)			
Guided escort		Friendly hold	
Seated hold		Describe hold:* use extra sheet if necessary	
Breathing monitored		Number of staff involved	
Duration of physical intervention			

Section C (medical intervention)

Injury suffered by child	Yes/No	Please complete HS2 (NE) form
Treatment required	Yes/No	
Injury suffered by staff	Yes/No	Please complete HS2 (V) form
Treatment required	Yes/No	
Injury suffered by others	Yes/No	Please complete HS2 (NE) form
Treatment required	Yes/No	

**please complete incident log in all cases and accident log where applicable*

Action Taken					
Return to class		Restorative Justice		Referred to police	
Time-out room		Withdrawal room		Contacted home	
Suspension					
Seclusion		If Seclusion was required, please detail the amount of time required, names and number of adults and the specific room in the box below.			
Seclusion Detail -					
Other		Please specify:			
Potential refer to other service			Potential CAF		

Section D (follow up)

Pupil's points of view ***(if applicable)***
Pupil's behaviour target (amend IEP) ***(if applicable)***

Appendix 2

RESTRAINT MEDICAL ADVICE

It is important that staff involved in applying restraints are aware of the signs and symptoms that may indicate that a person is in distress. It may be the case that an incident should be treated as a medical emergency rather than a restraint incident.

When attempting to restrain a violent person, the team must be aware of the following:

Extreme excitement, agitation usually associated with drugs (excited delirium-psychosis)

- Exceptional or unexpected strength
- Unusual rises in body temperature
- Exceptional violence
- Abnormally high tolerance of pain
- Bizarre behaviour – as if high on drugs

Distress or sudden collapse during restraint

- Sudden, abnormal passivity
- Noisy or laboured breathing
- Coughing or foaming from the mouth
- Face, lips, arms or legs becoming blue/purple or very pale

One or more of theses signs will warn staff that they need to be particularly vigilant in monitoring the person's responses and be prepared to treat the incident as a medical emergency. Monitoring the persons breathing will also assist staff in judging whether the person is in need of urgent medical attention.