



# DEVONPORT HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

## Restrictive Interventions and Use of Reasonable Force Policy

Named person: Alan Thomas

Category: School

Review: Bi-annually or when there are significant changes

Date to be reviewed: Spring 2028

**This policy has been reviewed with regard to the work-life balance of staff.**

Ratified By the Head Teacher on behalf of the Trustees: 23/03/2026

# Restrictive Interventions and Use of Reasonable Force Policy

## Scope

This policy applies to Devonport High School for Girls' staff. It applies to all teaching and support staff, including those supervising students on school trips, visits, and extracurricular activities. All staff have a duty to intervene if a student is at risk of harm, even if they have not received formal restraint training.

## Definition of Reasonable Force

The term 'reasonable force' covers a broad range of actions that involve a degree of physical contact with students used either to control or restrain. This can range from guiding a student 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 to themselves or others. 'Reasonable' means using no more force than is necessary and for the minimum time required to de-escalate and the student respond to verbal instructions. It is not a form of corporal punishment which is not allowed under any circumstances, nor should it be confused with other means of influencing students' behaviour through physical contact, such as the use of physical prompts to assist a student in acquiring particular motor or other skills.

Only staff authorised by the Head Teacher are permitted to use planned physical interventions. All staff are expected to act proportionately and to exercise professional judgement in emergency situations.

In many situations involving reasonable force it is not possible to provide definitive guidance covering every eventuality and those authorised to use it will be expected to exercise their own judgement and to act reasonably and proportionately.

## Further Definitions

- Restrictive intervention: deliberate action restricting movement/liberty to prevent harm
- Individual risk assessments and behaviour support plans must inform any restrictive intervention, particularly for students with disabilities or SEND
- Physical restraint: direct physical contact preventing movement
- Seclusion: supervised isolation where a pupil cannot leave
- Reasonable force: proportionate and necessary force

## Policy Statement

In order to maintain the safety and welfare of our students, it may sometimes be necessary to use reasonable force on a student, as permitted by law.

This policy is written in accordance with the Department for Education guidance *Restrictive Interventions: The Use of Reasonable Force in Schools (2025)* and takes account of the School's public sector equality duty set out in section 149 of the *Equality Act 2010* and *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025* and searching, screening and confiscation July 2022.

Restrictive interventions will only be used where necessary to prevent harm, after de-escalation has been attempted, and for the shortest possible time.

The school does not use restrictive interventions as a form of punishment

The use of restrictive interventions is a safeguarding matter and will always be considered within the context of the school's safeguarding responsibilities.

### **Use of Reasonable Force**

Any use of force by staff will be reasonable, proportionate and lawful. Staff must ensure that the level of force is consistent with the seriousness of the behaviour and any potential harm. Reasonable force must never be used as a form of punishment or discipline. Reasonable force is force used in necessity i.e. there are no other options or all other options have been exhausted. Proportionate use of force is force equal to or less than the seriousness of the likely outcome if no force was used. Reasonable force will be used only for the minimum time necessary to prevent a student from doing or continuing to do any of the following:

- Committing a criminal offence;
- Injuring themselves or others;
- Causing damage to property, including their own;
- Engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to good order and discipline, at the school or among any of its students, whether that behaviour occurs in a classroom or elsewhere.

Force will never be used as a punishment. Staff must be mindful that they are equally accountable for decisions to use restrictive intervention (including the use of reasonable force) and for decisions not to intervene

We may use reasonable force when there is significant risk of harm to:

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

Any planned use of physical restraint should involve at least two trained staff wherever possible.

### **Use of Seclusion**

The school does not use seclusion as a behaviour management strategy unless it forms part of an agreed individual plan and is continuously supervised. Seclusion will never exceed 30 minutes without review by a senior member of staff. Students must be continuously observed and allowed access to basic needs (water, toilet breaks). Seclusion is always used to prevent harm, never as a punishment.

### **Power to search students 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, 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 the school rules.

Please consult the relevant sections in the behaviour for learning and safeguarding policies for further guidance. The DSL/DDSL or Head Teacher must be consulted prior to any decision to search students. The exception to this is only where there is a significant risk of immediate harm. Any use of force during a search must be proportionate to the risk presented by the prohibited item.

### **De-escalation Strategies**

The following strategies may help to de-escalate a situation and avoid the use of physical restraint:

- calm communication throughout an incident using non-threatening verbal and body language;
- seeking colleagues' support;
- ensuring that the student does not feel trapped;
- offering the student the chance to move away from the incident;
- offering the student the opportunity to sit down and to have a drink of water;
- offering to call a member of staff well known to the student;
- offering to call a friend or family member to help to defuse the situation.

These strategies must always be considered and used wherever possible prior to any restrictive intervention unless there is an immediate risk of serious harm.

### **How to Apply Reasonable Force**

Staff are only authorised to use reasonable force in applying physical restraint. However, there is no absolute definition of this, given that what constitutes reasonable force depends upon the particular situation and the student to whom it is being applied. As a general rule, only the force necessary to stop or prevent the behaviour should be used, in accordance with the guidelines below.

There are some forms of physical intervention, which may involve minimal physical contact, such as blocking a student's path, or the staff member physically interposing him or herself between the student and another student or object. However, in many circumstances, direct physical contact may be necessary.

### **Physical Restraint is a Last Resort**

Physical restraint is a last resort and will only be used where necessary to prevent harm, where de-escalation has been unsuccessful or is not possible, and for the shortest possible time

We recognise that use of reasonable force can be both an instinctive reaction e.g. grabbing a student who might be running unaware in front of a car, as well as planned, e.g. senior staff responding to a call for support to extreme behaviour. Where a response is planned two members of staff should manage the situation together. This may mean a colleague needs to **seek support** from a neighbouring classroom teacher.

### **If it is necessary to apply restraint:**

#### **DO**

- Tell the student what you are doing and why;
- Use the proportionate force necessary;
- Involve another member of staff if possible;

- Tell the student what s/he must do for you to remove the restraint (this may need frequent repetition);
- Use simple and clear language;
- Hold limbs above a major joint if possible e.g. above the elbow;
- relax your restraint in response to the student's compliance.

#### **DON'T**

- Act in temper (involve another member of staff if you have lost control of your emotions);
- Involve yourself in a prolonged verbal exchange with the student;
- Involve other students in the restraint;
- Touch or hold the student in sexual areas;
- Twist or force limbs back against a joint;
- Bend fingers or pull hair;
- Hold the student in a way which will restrict blood flow or breathing e.g. around the neck;
- Slap, punch or kick;
- Trip up the student;
- Hold a student in a prone position (face down);
- Use "basket holds".
- Use mechanical or chemical restraint.

Physical restraint should be applied as an act of care and control with the intention of re-establishing verbal control as soon as possible and, at the same time, allowing the student to regain self-control. It should never take a form which could be seen as a punishment.

Where there is a high and immediate risk of death or serious injury, any member of staff would be justified in taking any action (consistent with the principle of using proportionate force to achieve the desired result). Such situations could include preventing a student running off the pavement onto a busy road or hitting someone with a dangerous object.

#### **Staff Training**

All members of staff will receive training in relation to this policy appropriate to their role to enable them to carry out their responsibilities. This will include training on any restraint techniques which must not be used because they are known to present an unacceptable risk when used on children and young people. Additional and refresher training will be provided where necessary.

Training will include de-escalation strategies, trauma-informed practice and safe use of restrictive interventions.

#### **Disabilities and Special Educational Needs**

Those exercising the power to use reasonable force will take into account any Special Educational Needs or disabilities (SEND) a student may have. Reasonable adjustments will be made to ensure that a disabled student is not treated less favourably than other students because of his/her disability.

The SENCO will discuss the needs of such students with the parents/carers and the members of staff who work with them to ensure that clear guidelines are in place as to the student's needs and when physical intervention may be necessary. If physical restraint is likely to be necessary because of a student's disability or Special Educational Needs, a written plan will be put in place following consultation with the parents/carers setting out the techniques that should normally be used, taking into account the student's statement of Special Educational Needs where appropriate.

The school will ensure that all members of staff involved with such students have received the appropriate training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities.

Where appropriate, individual risk assessments and behaviour support plans will be developed to reduce the likelihood of restrictive intervention

### **Recording and Reporting Incidents**

Where a member of staff is involved in any incident in which reasonable force is used on a student, he/she should report the incident to the Head Teacher. Incidents involving reasonable force must be recorded in CPOMS providing a narrative context and completing and uploading a 'Use of reasonable Force incident Log' to the document vault within the CPOMS Log – this document can be found in the annex of this policy.

All incidents must be recorded as soon as possible and no later than the end of the same school day.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will review all incidents involving restrictive intervention within 48 hours to identify safeguarding concerns, trends, or the need for further staff training.

While the school is not required to obtain the consent of parents/carers to apply reasonable force on a student, parents/carers will be informed of incidents involving the use of reasonable force. Parents/carers will be informed in writing as soon as reasonably practicable and normally on the same day.

Records must include witness statements, the context of the incident, actions taken, and any injuries or follow-up support

Any complaints in relation to the application of this policy will be investigated in accordance with the school's complaints procedures.

### **Post-Incident Review**

Following any incident, the school will consider whether behaviour plans, risk assessments or support strategies require updating and whether any further staff training or safeguarding action is needed.

Where appropriate, incidents will be reviewed to identify any safeguarding concerns or patterns of behaviour

**USE OF REASONABLE FORCE INCIDENT RECORD**

<b>Details of student or students on whom force was used by a member of staff (name, class):</b>	
<b>Date, time and location of incident:</b>	
<b>Names of staff involved (directly or as witnesses):</b>	
<b>Details of other students involved (directly or as witnesses), including whether any of the students involved were vulnerable for SEN, disability, medical or social reasons:</b>	
<b>Description of incident by the staff involved, including any attempts to de-escalate and warnings given that force might be used and details of how the staff member perceived the circumstances to be:</b>	
<b>Reason for using force and description of force used:</b>	
<b>Any injury suffered by staff or student and any first aid and/or medical attention required:</b>	
<b>Follow up, including post-incident support, and any disciplinary action against student:</b>	
<b>Any information about the incident shared with staff not involved in the incident and external agencies:</b>	
<b>When and how those with parental responsibility were informed about the incident and any views they have expressed:</b>	
<b>Has any complaint been lodged (details should be recorded here)?</b>	
<b>Report compiled by:</b> Name and role: Signature: Date:	<b>Report countersigned by:</b> Name and role: Signature: Date: