BERKHAMPSTEAD SCHOOL
AND DAY NURSERIES

Restrictive Interventions, including the use of Reasonable Force Policy

(Previously Physical Contact and Restraint Policy)

1. Context

This policy was revised and updated in September 2026 and is based on guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) on Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force in schools (April 2026) as well as KCSIE 2026.. It should be read in conjunction with the School's And Day Nurseries Behaviour Policy.

2. Introduction

At Berkhampstead School and Day Nurseries, we believe that pupils need to be safe, know how to behave, and know that the adults around them are able to manage them safely and confidently. For a very small minority of pupils the use of reasonable force may be needed, and, on such occasions, acceptable forms of intervention will be used. The vast majority of pupils behave well and conform to the expectations of our School and Nurseries. We have responsibility to operate an effective behaviour policy that encompasses preventative strategies for tackling inappropriate behaviour. The use of restrictive interventions, including reasonable force and seclusion, can have a significant impact on the pupils, staff members and parents involved, as well as the wider classroom. However, there are times when the use of restrictive interventions will be lawful and necessary.

All teaching staff and Day Nursery Practitioners need to feel able to manage inappropriate risk and behaviour, and to understand what and how challenging behaviours might be communicated. They need to know what the options open to them are, and they need to be free of undue worries about the risks of legal action against them if they use reasonable force or restrictive interventions.

3. Activities that require Physical Contact

There are occasions when it is entirely appropriate and proper for staff to have physical contact with children, but it is crucial that they only do so in ways that are appropriate to their professional role. Examples of times when physical contact is generally appropriate include:

• to give first aid
• to guide or escort pupils, such as 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, for example 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

Appropriate physical contact in the Day Nurseries may include:

• Comforting a distressed child (e.g. holding, cuddling, or reassuring)
• Supporting children with personal care needs (e.g. toileting, nappy changing, dressing)
• Guiding or supporting children during play or activities
• Holding hands for safety (e.g. outings, transitions)
• Administering first aid

All physical contact must:

- Be necessary and appropriate to the situation
- Take account of the child's age, developmental stage, and individual needs
- Be respectful and never intrusive
- Be carried out in a way that can be observed by others wherever possible

Restraint will only be used when:

• A child is at immediate risk of harming themselves or others
• There is a serious risk of significant damage to property
• All other de-escalation strategies have been tried and failed

A "no touch" approach is impractical for most staff and will in some circumstances be inappropriate. When physical contact is made with pupils this should be in response to their needs at the time, of limited duration and appropriate to their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity and background. Appropriate physical contact will occur most often with younger pupils.

It is not possible to be specific about the appropriateness of each physical contact, since the action that is appropriate with one child in one set of circumstances may be inappropriate in another, or with another child. Staff should, therefore, use their professional judgement at all times.

Physical contact should never be secretive, or for the gratification of the adult, or represent a misuse of authority. If a member of staff believes that an action could be misinterpreted, the incident and circumstance should be reported to the DSL or Head of School or Day Nursery Managers.

It is recognised that some children may seek inappropriate contact. Staff should be particularly aware of this especially when it is known the child has suffered previous abuse or neglect. In all circumstances where a child initiates physical contact, it is the responsibility of staff to sensitively help the child understand the importance of personal boundaries. Such circumstances should always be reported and discussed with SLT/SMT/Parents/Carers.

Staff who work in sport, drama, PE, music or outdoor activities will have to initiate some physical contact with children - for example, to demonstrate technique in the particular piece of equipment, adjust posture or perhaps support a child so they can perform an activity safely. Physical contact should take place only when it is necessary in relation to a particular activity. It should take place in a safe and open environment. Contact should be relevant to the child's age or understanding and staff should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the child. Staff will also consider any other material factors, including but not limited to whether: the pupil has SEND or other vulnerabilities or any alternative strategies that do not include physical contact can be used.

4. Terminology

Restrictive intervention: a means to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil. This guidance uses 'restrictive interventions' as the umbrella term to describe both physical and non-physical actions aimed to restrain pupils in different ways.

Reasonable force: a term used in legislation which includes physical restrictive interventions. All members of school staff have the legal power to use reasonable force in limited circumstances.4 Reasonable means using no more force than is necessary for the least amount of time, the application of which will depend on the circumstances.

Significant incident: any incident where the use of force goes beyond appropriate physical contact between pupils and staff as described in 'Other physical contact with pupils' within this document. This includes when physical force is used to implement a non-physical restrictive intervention.

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.

Restraint: a term used in legislation referring to a non-disciplinary intervention which immobilises a pupil or limits their movement. This may or may not include direct physical contact. For example, holding a pupil's arms to their sides or removing a pupil's crutches would both be considered forms of restraint.

5. Seclusion

Seclusion is a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others and prevented from leaving - should only be used as a safety measure to protect 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 should not be implemented by staff through threat of punishment. The place to which the pupil is confined should be safe and not feel threatening or intimidating to the pupil. The pupil should be supervised at all times during the period of seclusion. As soon as the immediate risk of harm has reduced, the pupil should be allowed to leave. An incident involving the use of seclusion must be recorded and reported in accordance with the procedures outlined in the section on 'Recording and reporting duties'. Seclusion, is not a disciplinary response to deliberate or wilful misbehaviour. There are disciplinary measures that are similar, such as removal from the classroom.

6. Understanding restrictive interventions

Berkhampstead School and Day Nurseries Behaviour Policy outlines specific whole-school measures to promote positive behaviour. We emphasise the importance of minimising the need to use restrictive interventions such as through prevention and de-escalation.

The Law allows for School and Day Nursery staff to use reasonable force in certain circumstances, to prevent or stop a pupil from doing or continuing to do any of the following: -

1) Causing injury to themselves or others
2) Committing a criminal offence
3) Damaging property
4) Causing disorder among pupils at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise

There will be times when School and Day Nursery staff may need to use restrictive interventions, and they should know this option may be available to them. The decision on whether it is reasonable to use a restrictive intervention depends on the individual circumstances of each situation. To make this assessment, the member of staff should consider the following: is it necessary? Is it proportionate? Have you considered the pupils welfare?

Is it necessary?

• Staff should consider whether there are other more effective, less restrictive ways to manage a situation.
• Staff should assess whether a restrictive intervention is likely to successfully reduce the relevant risks, or whether its use would escalate the situation further or cause more harm than the behaviour itself.
• Where possible, staff should communicate with other staff members to understand any broader risks in the environment.

Is it proportionate?

• Staff should use the least amount of force or least restrictive intervention necessary for the least amount of time required to reduce the relevant risks.
• If the intervention itself is escalating the situation, staff should reconsider their approach and attempt an alternative strategy.
• Staff should consider the personal circumstances of the pupil such as medical conditions, special educational needs or other vulnerabilities, their characteristics such as age and size, and must consider relevant equality implications under the Equality Act 2010.14

Have you considered the pupil's welfare?

• Staff should consider the impact on the pupil's overall welfare, balanced against any actions taken. For example, pupils who have experienced an adverse life event, with diagnosed or undiagnosed medical conditions or sensory impairments, 14 Equality Act 2010 11 past trauma or neglect, communication difficulties, or other needs, may find the use of restrictive interventions particularly distressing.
• Staff should seek to maintain respect for a pupil's dignity. This may include, where possible, considering the location and environment where any intervention is used, such as in front of their peers.
• Are there any SEND considerations that need to be made?

• Where possible, staff should clearly and calmly communicate to the pupil what is happening, why, and explain what the pupil needs to do.
• For pupils with difficulties with speech, language and communication, or with English as an additional language, verbal and/or non-verbal strategies should be used to ensure the pupil understands what is happening and has adequate time to process information and respond.
• Staff should seek to understand how the pupil is feeling and use this information to determine whether the restrictive intervention should be, or continue to be, applied, reduced or stopped.

This list of factors is not exhaustive, and staff should also take into account other relevant considerations. Training on the use of restrictive interventions equips staff to judge when it is appropriate to use restrictive interventions, including in situations where quick decisions are needed. It should also help staff understand how to assess whether their response is reasonable under pressure. If an assessment has been made to use restrictive interventions, staff should be supported in their decision making.

The definition of reasonable force can also include the use of forcible seclusion or use of locked doors to 'contain rather than restrain'. It is important for staff to note that, although no physical contact may be made in the latter situations, this is still regarded as a use of force.

7. When the use of restrictive physical interventions may be appropriate at Berkhampstead School and Day Nurseries

The safety and well-being of all staff and pupils are important considerations and are the subject of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and its associated regulations.

In some extreme circumstances the staff duty of care under health and safety law may be an overriding factor in a situation.

We take the view that staff should not be expected to put themselves in danger, and that containing rather than restraining pupils and/or removing themselves from a situation is the safest thing to do.

Reasonable force may be used when all other strategies have failed, and therefore only as a last resort.

There are clear situations when physical management may be necessary - for example, in a situation of clear danger or extreme urgency.

Certain pupils may become distressed, agitated and out of control, and may need to be kept safe during this time. We value staff efforts to rectify what can be very difficult situations and in which they exercise their duty of care for themselves and for their pupils.

8. Planning for the use of restrictive physical interventions

There are occasions when staff will have cause to have physical contact with pupils for a variety of reasons, as outlined in section 3.

In exceptional circumstances, staff may use force which is necessary and proportionate to restore safety to a situation.

The principles relating to use of force in physical intervention are as follows: -

1. Physical Intervention is an act of protection, not punishment. It is never used to force compliance with staff instructions.

2. Staff will take steps in advance to avoid the need for physical intervention through dialogue and diversion and at the level of understanding of the child or young person. Force is only used when all other viable options are not working or when there is an honest and reasonable belief that those options are not viable.

3. Staff will only use force when there are good grounds for believing that immediate action is necessary and, in the pupil's, (or other pupils') best interests to achieve safety.

4. Only the necessary and proportionate force will be used to prevent severe distress, injury or damage.

5. Staff will be able to show that the intervention used was in keeping with the circumstances of the incident.

6. Every effort will be made to secure the presence of other staff, and these staff may act as assistants and/or witnesses.

7. As soon as it is safe, any Physical Intervention which requires the pupil to be immobilised or restrained will be relaxed to allow the pupil to regain self-control as soon as it is viable.

8. Escalation will be avoided at all costs, especially if it would make the overall situation more destructive and unmanageable.

9. The age, understanding and competence of the individual will always be taken into account.

10. In developing Individual Behaviour Plans, consideration will be given to approaches appropriate to each pupil's circumstances.

11. Procedures are in place through the pastoral system of the school for supporting and debriefing pupils, parents and staff after every incident of Restrictive Physical Intervention, as it is essential to safeguard the emotional well-being of all involved at these times.

In all low-risk situations where physical contact between staff and pupils takes place, staff must consider the following:

- the pupil's age and level of understanding
- the pupil's individual characteristics and history
- the location where the contact takes place (it should not take place in private without others present)

Physical contact is never made as a punishment. All forms of corporal punishment are prohibited.

Policy Date: Sep 26 (A Stephenson)
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9. Reporting and recording duties

Recording the use of force

Any incidents involving a restrictive intervention (including seclusion) must be recorded as soon as practicable after the event. It should be recorded by the staff member(s) involved and they should endeavour to do this no later than the same day. A record of any such incident is made in writing as soon as practical after the incident. The requirement to record applies even if the use of restrictive interventions in certain circumstances is agreed with parents as part of a pupil's behaviour support plan. This will be recorded on a 'Recording Restrictive Interventions Form' and uploaded to CPOMs as a new incident, and any subsequent follow up actions.

Staff should record the following details as a minimum:
• names of pupil and staff directly involved
• any relevant needs or circumstances of the pupil, including whether the pupil involved has an identified special educational need or disability and their SEN status code
• time, date, location and approximate duration of the intervention
• brief account of the incident, including what led up to the incident, identified or potential triggers if known, any preventative or de-escalation strategies used, and (where relevant) what type of reasonable force was applied, the degree of force, and details of any physical injuries sustained
• brief account of why the use of force was assessed as necessary in that instance
• any post-incident support, such as details of any medical treatment for injuries or other adverse impacts.

Staff may also wish to record additional details to support their evaluation of incidents to identify best practices and areas for improvement. For example, the pupil's and/or witnesses' accounts of what happened, when and how parents were notified, and what follow-up has taken place.

Reporting the use of force

Staff have a duty to report each significant use of force to the parents of the pupil involved as soon as practicable after the incident, and they should endeavour to do this no later than the same day.

Exceptions to the requirement to report include if it appears to the staff member that doing so would be likely to result in serious harm to the pupil. In this instance, the staff member must report the incident to any parent(s) who it can be reported to without resulting in significant harm or, if there are none, to the local authority in line with our Safeguarding Policy.

A report of the incident made to parents should include the following details as a minimum:
• 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

The requirement to report applies even if the use of restrictive interventions in certain circumstances is agreed with parents as part of a pupil's behaviour support plan. Staff should communicate this information to parents in writing. For example, via email or online messaging system. Best practice would include inviting parents to have a follow-up discussion about the incident where appropriate. This could involve a discussion about:

• any behavioural triggers or warning signs of an impending incident
• whether any agreed behaviour support plans were followed
• what de-escalation strategies were used and how effective they were
• what might be done differently in the future
The school may use this information to amend any existing behaviour support plans, as needed.

6. Developing a positive handling plan

If a pupil is identified for whom it is felt that the need for Restrictive Intervention is likely, then an Individual Behaviour Safety Plan will be completed. This Plan will help the pupil and staff to avoid difficult situations through understanding the factors that influence the behaviour and identifying the early warning signs that indicate foreseeable behaviours may be developing.

The plan will include:
1. Involving parents/carers and the pupil to ensure they are clear about what specific action the school may take, when and why.

2. A risk assessment to ensure staff and others act reasonably, consider the risks, and learn from what happens.

3. A record needs to be kept on CPOMS of risk reduction options that have been examined and discounted, as well as those used.

4. Managing the pupil, strategies to de-escalate a conflict, and stating at which point a Physical Intervention may need to be used.

5. Identifying key staff who know exactly what is expected. It is best that these staff are well known to the pupil.

6. Ensuring a system to summon additional support.

7. Identifying training needs.

8. It may be necessary to seek advice on how to safely hold a child with a specific medical need.

11. Complaints

It is intended that by adopting this policy and keeping parents and governors informed we could avoid the need for complaints. All disputes that arise about the use of force by a member of staff will be dealt with according to our school's Safeguarding Policy and Complaints Policy.

12. Guidance and training for staff

Guidance and training are essential in this area. We need to adopt the best possible practice.
In Berkhampstead School and Day Nurseries this is arranged at a number of levels including:

1) awareness for governors, SLT/SMT and staff
2) behaviour management for all staff
3) specific training on Reasonable Force and Physical Intervention techniques for key staff.