Scarning VC Primary School

Positive Handling and Reasonable Force Policy

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Positive Handling and Reasonable Force Policy

Introduction and Aims

At Scarning VC Primary School, our core priority is the safety, dignity, wellbeing, and rights of our pupils and staff.

This policy sets out the school's approach to the use of positive handling, restrictive interventions, including reasonable force and restrictive physical intervention (RPI), in line with:

- Department for Education guidance Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools (April 2026)
- Norfolk STEPs behaviour and safety training

Restrictive interventions can have a significant physical and emotional impact on both pupils and staff. The school therefore places strong emphasis on prevention, early intervention, de-escalation, and relational approaches, recognising that restrictive interventions must only ever be used as a last resort.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- Protect pupils, staff, and others from harm
- Ensure restrictive interventions are lawful, proportionate, necessary, and time-limited
- Minimise the need for physical intervention through proactive support and de-escalation
- Ensure statutory duties for recording and reporting are met
- Promote reflective practice, learning, and emotional repair following incidents

Legal Framework and Guidance

This policy has regard to the following legislation and statutory guidance:

- Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Sections 93 and 93A)
- Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No.2) (England) Regulations 2025
- Department for Education: Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools (April 2026)
- Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- SEND Code of Practice (2015)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education

Definitions

For clarity and consistency, the following definitions are used:

Appropriate Physical Contact with Pupils (Everyday Physical Contact – Not Reportable Use of Force)

Across the Federation, staff will support pupils who have complex special educational needs, communication differences, sensory processing needs, physical or developmental disabilities, SEMH and behavioural needs. In this context, appropriate physical contact is often necessary to support pupils' safety, wellbeing, communication, mobility, personal care and learning.

The Federation does not operate a ‘no contact’ policy, as such an approach could prevent staff from appropriately supporting or protecting pupils. Appropriate physical contact is a normal and expected part of working with children and young people, particularly in specialist settings.
Appropriate physical contact does not constitute the use of force or a restrictive intervention and therefore **does not** require recording or reporting as a significant incident, provided that the contact is reasonable, proportionate, and supportive in nature.
Staff must always ensure that physical contact:

- is in the best interests of the pupil
- is proportionate and appropriate to the situation
- is the least intrusive option available
- respects the pupil’s dignity, safety and individual needs
- is consistent with the school’s safeguarding and behaviour policies

Examples of Appropriate Physical Contact in School
The following examples represent normal, expected physical interactions across the Federation and do not constitute restrictive interventions.
Personal Care and Health Support
Physical contact may be required to support pupils with personal care and medical needs, including:

- supporting toileting, continence care, and changing
- assisting with dressing or undressing
- supporting pupils with feeding or drinking
- administering first aid
- supporting pupils with mobility aids or specialist equipment
- assisting with hygiene routines such as handwashing These interactions are carried out in line with the school’s Intimate Care Policy.

Guiding and Supporting Movement
Staff may use gentle physical guidance to support pupils to move safely around the school environment, including:

- holding a pupil’s hand when walking in corridors or outside
- guiding a pupil by the arm or shoulder
- supporting a pupil to move to another activity or space
- helping pupils access preferred or self-regulation spaces
- assisting pupils with balance or physical coordination

This type of support is particularly common where pupils:

- have visual impairments
- have mobility or coordination difficulties
- require adult support to move safely.

Supporting Regulation and Emotional Wellbeing
Some pupils require physical reassurance or sensory regulation to feel safe and calm. Appropriate contact may include:

- comforting a distressed pupil
- a side hug or supportive arm around the shoulder
- deep pressure or sensory regulation support where appropriate
- hand holding when a pupil seeks reassurance

- supporting a pupil to sit safely
- guiding a pupil to a calm or safe space they have chosen to access

Where relevant, this will be outlined in a pupil's Positive Behaviour Plan or sensory regulation plan.

Educational and Practical Support

- Physical contact may occur as part of teaching and learning, including:
- demonstrating how to use equipment or tools
- supporting hand-over-hand learning
- modelling physical tasks
- assisting pupils in PE or physical activities
- supporting pupils during practical or sensory learning activities.

Praise and Positive Interaction

Appropriate positive contact may include:

- a handshake
- high five
- pat on the shoulder
- congratulatory touch.

This should always be respectful and appropriate to the pupil's age, preferences and communication needs.

Safety-Based Physical Contact (Preventative Support)

Staff may occasionally need to use brief, low-level physical intervention to prevent immediate risk, which may include:

- stepping between pupils to prevent harm
- blocking a pupil's movement towards danger
- placing an open hand out to prevent a pupil running into a hazardous area
- guiding a pupil away from unsafe equipment
- gently moving objects out of a pupil's reach
- guiding a pupil away from another pupil to reduce escalation.

These actions are preventative safety responses, not restraint, provided that they:

- do not restrict the pupil's movement for longer than necessary
- do not immobilise the pupil
- use minimal physical contact
- are used only to reduce immediate risk

Such actions are considered reasonable protective responses within normal staff duties.

Restrictive Intervention

Any action or measure that prevents, restricts, or subdues the movement of a pupil's body, or part of their body. This is the umbrella term covering physical and non-physical interventions.

Reasonable Force

A legal term referring to the use of physical force to control or restrain a pupil, using no more force than necessary and for the shortest possible time, to prevent harm, damage, criminal offence, or serious disorder.

Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI)

A form of reasonable force involving physical contact intended to restrict a pupil's movement to prevent immediate harm.

Restraint

A non-disciplinary intervention that limits or immobilises a pupil's movement. This may occur with or without direct physical contact (for example, holding arms or removing a mobility aid).

Guides
Guides may be used when a pupil has refused to follow instructions, it is not restrictive as the pupil can walk away but would be deemed reasonable force.
Seclusion
A non-disciplinary intervention where a pupil is kept apart from others and prevented from leaving a space through physical blocking, obstruction, or the perception that they will be punished if they leave. Seclusion may only be used as a safety measure, not as a disciplinary response, when a pupil is experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation and poses a risk of harm.
Seclusion must:
- Be used only to protect from immediate harm
- Take place in a safe, non-threatening environment
- Be supervised at all times
- End as soon as the risk has reduced

Significant Incident Any incident where the use of force goes beyond appropriate physical contact. This includes physical force used to implement a restrictive intervention and is subject to statutory recording and reporting duties.

Principles and Ethos
The Federation follows the principles of Norfolk STEPs, underpinned by a belief that:
- Behaviour is a form of communication
- Relationships, predictability, and safety reduce escalation
- Emotional safety, predictability, and trusting relationships reduce escalation
- Our approach recognises that pupils may experience heightened stress responses, sensory overload, or trauma-related reactions, and that adult responses can either escalate or reduce distress.

Key principles:
- Restrictive interventions are always a last resort
- The least restrictive option is used for the shortest time necessary
- Dignity, respect, and pupil welfare are central at all times
- Interventions are never used as punishment
- Staff are supported when acting lawfully and in good faith

Prevention and De-escalation
The Federation prioritises strategies to reduce the likelihood of restrictive interventions, including:
Whole-School Approaches
- Predictable routines and clear expectations
- Visual supports and alternative communication systems
- Sensory regulation opportunities
- Environmental adjustments
- Consistent relational approaches
- Staff training and refreshers

These approaches are informed by an understanding that pupils may require additional processing time, reduced language demand, sensory regulation, or trusted relationships to remain regulated. De-escalation is viewed as a shared, relational process rather than a compliance-based response.

Individual Approaches

- Behaviour Support Plans and risk assessments are personalised for individual pupils and shared and agreed with parents/carers
- Reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 for pupils with SEND
- Co-production with parents and, where appropriate, pupils
- Use of known staff and trusted relationships
- Multi-agency working, where appropriate, to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to support. This may include collaboration with professionals such as Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, health services, social care, and behaviour support services. Multi-agency input is used to inform assessment, planning, preventative strategies, and review, particularly for pupils with complex needs or high levels of risk.

De-escalation Strategies which may be implemented at Scarning include;

- Calm, minimal, and supportive language, including declarative and non-demand phrasing where appropriate
- Non-threatening body posture and positioning, maintaining safe distances and a side-on stance
- Offering choices and allowing sufficient processing time, recognising that some pupils may require extended time to respond
- Use of visual supports such as now-and-next boards, schedules, symbols, timers, and written options to reduce verbal language load
- Distraction and redirection through preferred, familiar, or regulating activities
- Providing calm spaces to support regulation rather than as a sanction
- Co-regulation strategies, including calm adult presence, modelling regulation, and use of agreed scripts
- Sensory regulation strategies informed by individual needs, including movement breaks, deep pressure, access to sensory tools, and environmental adjustments
- Use of trusted adults and a change of face where helpful to reduce escalation
- Consistent, predictable routines and preparation for transitions, including countdowns and visual warnings

When Restrictive Interventions May Be Used

Restrictive interventions, including reasonable force and RPI, may only be used when necessary, proportionate, and reasonable to prevent a pupil from:

- Causing injury to themselves or others
- Committing a criminal offence
- Causing significant damage to property
- Creating serious disorder that compromises safety

Before intervening, staff must use their professional judgement and consider:

- Whether less restrictive strategies have been tried or would be effective
- The risks of action versus inaction; will the intervention reduce the risk or further escalate the situation?

- The pupil's age, size, medical needs, SEND needs or vulnerabilities, communication profile, and emotional state
- The likely impact on the pupil's dignity and wellbeing which should be maintained.
- Any known history of trauma, anxiety, sensory sensitivity, or mental health needs and safeguarding considerations
- The presence of other adults

Power to Search

Searching, screening and confiscation is conducted in line with the DfE's latest guidance on searching, screening and confiscation.
Any prohibited items found in a pupil's possession as a result of a search will be confiscated. These items will not be returned to the pupil.
These are:

- Knives or weapons
- Alcohol
- Illegal drugs
- Stolen items
- Any article a staff member reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be, used to commit an offence, or to cause personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil).

Use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI)

When RPI is unavoidable:

- The least intrusive technique will be used appropriate to the situation
- Force must be proportionate and time-limited
- Clear, calm communication should be used where possible
- Intervention must stop as soon as the risk reduces

Prohibited Practices

The following are not permitted:

- Holding a pupil on the ground- if this happens unintentionally, staff should release or reposition into a safer standing alternative as quickly as possible
- Other prone or supine restraint
- Any hold affecting breathing (covering nose or mouth), circulation, or applying pressure to the neck/abdomen
- Techniques that deliberately cause pain
- Punitive or retaliatory use of force

Seclusion

Seclusion may only be used as a safety measure, not as a disciplinary response, when a pupil is experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation and poses a risk of harm.
Seclusion must:

- Be used only to protect from immediate harm
- Take place in a safe, non-threatening environment
- Be supervised at all times
- End as soon as the risk has reduced

- Any incident involving seclusion must be recorded and reported in line with statutory requirements.

Post-Incident Support, Reflection, and Repair

Following any restrictive intervention:

- Pupils are supported to regulate and recover
- Medical attention is sought if required and recorded
- A reflective, restorative conversation takes place where appropriate to repair and rebuild relationships and foster a culture of continuous improvement
- Staff involved receive debrief and wellbeing support; witnesses may also need wellbeing support

The purpose of post-incident review is learning, repair, and prevention rather than blame.

Recording and Reporting (Statutory) Recording

When Physical Contact Becomes a Reportable Incident Physical contact moves beyond "appropriate physical contact" and becomes a recordable and reportable use of force when it involves:

- holding a pupil in a way that restricts their movement
- immobilising part or all of a pupil's body
- using physical force to control behaviour
- implementing a restrictive intervention
- holding a pupil to prevent them leaving an area
- when using a guide at the point at which the child resists.
- any intervention that goes beyond brief supportive contact.

These incidents must be recorded and reported in accordance with the DfE statutory guidance on recording and reporting significant incidents involving use of force.

The school maintains a statutory procedure for recording every significant incident involving the use of force, restraint, or seclusion. All such incidents must be recorded as soon as practicable and ideally on the same day by the staff member(s) involved using the template. Recording applies even where the use of reasonable force is agreed as part of a Positive Behaviour Plan.

Each record must include, as a minimum:

- Names of the pupil and staff directly involved
- SEN status code
- Date, time, location, and approximate duration of the incident
- Identified triggers and any preventative or de-escalation strategies used
- The type and degree of reasonable force applied
- A clear rationale explaining why the intervention was assessed as necessary at that time
- Details of any injuries sustained and post-incident support provided to the pupil and/or staff

Parents and carers must be informed on the same day in writing, wherever practicable, in line with statutory reporting duties.

DSLs/Senior Leadership Team (SLT) are automatically alerted through CPOMS and will:

- review the incident
- provide appropriate support to staff and pupils

- offer professional challenge where necessary
- ensure learning is identified and acted upon
- determine whether further review, adjustment to Positive Behaviour Plans, or multi-agency input is required

This process supports transparency, safeguarding, staff accountability, and continuous improvement in practice.

Reporting to Parents/ Carers

All Parents/carers will be informed by telephone as soon as practicable, normally on the same day. This applies even where interventions are agreed in a Positive Behaviour Plan.

Monitoring, Governance, and Review

School Senior leaders and DSLs:

- Monitor patterns, frequency, and proportionality of restrictive interventions
- Carry out CPOMs Dip dives and review data for trends and potential disproportionality
- Use findings to inform training, policy review, and pupil support Review Boards;
- Monitor patterns and frequency, and proportionality of restrictive interventions
- Review data for trends and potential disproportionality
- Use findings to inform training and policy review.
- To regularly review and interrogate data on restrictive interventions, to improve policies and practice.
- To make sure Scarning is complying with procedures and legal duties for recording and reporting restrictive interventions,
- Check for and address any disproportionate use of restrictive interventions for pupils with SEN, protected characteristics, or other vulnerabilities.

Training and Staff Support

All staff likely to use restraint are adequately trained in both safe use and preventative strategies : personalise for your school

- Norfolk STEPs Step On training
- Appropriate Step-Up training where required
- Regular refreshers and coaching
- Training includes an emphasis on trauma-informed practice, mental health awareness, recognising signs of distress or dissociation, and understanding the impact of restrictive interventions on wellbeing. Staff are supported when they act within this policy and the law.

Complaints

Scarning VC Primary School will deal with any formal complaints about restrictive interventions by following the usual complaints procedure.

Linked Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- SEND Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Mental health Policy

- Complaints policy