

Springside School

Restrictive Physical Intervention Policy
(Use of Reasonable Force Policy)



March 2026

1. Introduction

This policy reflects the principles of the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, particularly:

- **Article 12** – the right for children to express their views and have them taken seriously
- **Article 13** – the right to freedom of expression
- **Article 16** – the right to privacy and protection of reputation

At Springside School, we recognise that learners must be supported to express their feelings and needs safely, and that staff must respond in ways that preserve dignity, safety and respect.

Rochdale **Local Authority** takes seriously its duty of care towards learners, employees and visitors. Touch is a sensitive issue requiring careful judgement. In order to safeguard both learners and staff, the Authority aims to provide clear guidance and appropriate training within the resources that can reasonably be made available.

This policy has a clear focus:

- safeguarding the welfare of the learner
- safeguarding the welfare of staff and others working in good faith

The **Children Act 1989** places a duty on staff to consider the welfare of the child first. Preventative approaches to risk reduction involve identifying early warning signs, relevant situations and other factors which may influence behaviour, then taking steps to divert behaviour away from foreseeable risk.

Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 describes the circumstances in which teachers and others authorised by the Headteacher may use reasonable force to control or restrain learners. The 2026 DfE guidance also makes clear that schools should not operate a '**no contact**' policy and should not agree blanket requests not to use reasonable force where it is needed to keep pupils safe.

The **Children Act 2004** places a duty on key partners to cooperate in the safeguarding of children. Risk assessments and relevant plans will therefore be shared with appropriate partners to promote consistent approaches for individual learners.

Parents/carers are encouraged to view this policy and are included in consultation upon its review.

Restrictive interventions are actions which prevent, restrict or subdue a pupil's movement. These may include physical restraint, non-physical restraint and seclusion. Restrictive interventions should only be used when necessary to prevent harm, and must always be proportionate and for the shortest possible time.

Examples of physical contact which would not usually give rise to concerns about reasonable force include:

- giving first aid
- guiding or escorting a learner
- comforting a distressed learner
- congratulating or praising a learner
- demonstrating how to use an instrument, exercise or technique

This policy is intended to safeguard learners and protect staff by describing when physical contact may be necessary and how to act safely while preserving the learner's dignity.

2. Aims

This policy aims to:

- promote positive relationships and de-escalation to minimise the need for reasonable force
- provide clarity for staff so there is a consistent and safe approach across school
- ensure staff can meet learners' needs confidently while safeguarding themselves and those in their care
- make clear that reasonable force is a **last resort**
- support staff to use respectful, supportive and dignified approaches at all times

At Springside School, we recognise that good relationships are at the heart of effective behaviour support. Skilled behaviour management is essential to creating a calm, safe and effective learning environment.

We aim to reduce the need for force by creating a calm, orderly and supportive environment. Staff are encouraged to offer and accept help. Sometimes a new face can help divert a situation away from crisis and reduce the likelihood of force being needed.

3. Positive Relationships

Staff develop effective working relationships with learners to promote positive outcomes. Through these relationships, staff are able to recognise early signs of distress, including:

- distress
- agitation
- anxiety
- increasing anger or aggression

Because staff know learners well, they are often able to recognise the difference between a learner's usual presentation and a developing crisis.

Early intervention is essential. Staff should use proactive behaviour management strategies to de-escalate, diffuse and divert situations before they escalate. A member of staff who chooses not to make a physical intervention can still take effective action to reduce risk.

This may include:

- acknowledging unacceptable behaviour calmly
- requesting alternatives using negotiation and reason
- giving clear directions
- reminding learners about expectations and likely outcomes
- removing an audience or moving vulnerable learners to safety
- making the environment safer
- using positive touch to guide or escort learners
- ensuring colleagues know what is happening
- getting help quickly if needed

All staff should have a working knowledge of relevant individual plans and follow them consistently, particularly **Barriers to Learning Plans** and **SMART Plans**.

Staff should only use reasonable force where the risks involved in doing so are outweighed by the risks of not doing so.

All school staff who are authorised to be in control of learners are automatically authorised to use force where necessary. Others, such as therapists, volunteers or colleagues temporarily in charge of learners, may also do so where appropriate under section 93.

Staff have a duty of care to act in the best interests of learners. Staff **do not** have a duty to use force. Staff should use their judgement and undertake a dynamic risk assessment before acting.

Where staff are not expected to be in charge of learners, this should be clear in their role. Visitors and others not expected to be in control of learners should be accompanied by authorised staff.

If staff are unsure about any aspect of care and control, they should seek clarity from senior leaders.

4. When Can Reasonable Force Be Used?

This policy does not replace the law, and interpretation of the law remains a matter for the courts.

Factors which may influence a dynamic risk assessment include:

- the staff member's health and fitness
- physical stature
- competence and confidence
- experience
- relationship with the learner

All staff need to be aware of their own physical and emotional abilities and limitations. If necessary, they should seek support from another member of staff.

Staff should pause and undertake a dynamic risk assessment, considering the risks of acting versus not acting and ensuring any intervention is proportionate and in the learner's best interests.

5. Legal Framework

The strongest justification for the use of reasonable force is that it is in the best interests of the child. The Children Act 1989 states that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.

Under **Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006**, staff may use reasonable force to prevent a learner from:

- committing a criminal offence
- causing injury to self or others
- damaging property
- prejudicing the maintenance of good order and discipline at school or among learners receiving education there

Any physical intervention must use the **minimum degree of force necessary** for the **shortest possible time**. There is no fixed legal definition of reasonable force, so staff must use their professional judgement, supported by a dynamic risk assessment, to assess the risk presented and the level of intervention required.

Staff should be able to answer these three questions:

- How was this intervention in the best interests of the learner?
- Why was it absolutely necessary?
- How was it reasonable and proportionate?

6. Use of Reasonable Force

At Springside School, the use of reasonable force is always viewed as a **last resort** to keep people safe and maintain a safe environment.

Even where physical intervention may be legally justifiable, it may not always be the safest or best option. Staff may need instead to remove others from harm or make the environment safer.

Before using reasonable force, staff should take into account the learner's:

- age
- gender
- physical, emotional and intellectual development
- additional needs
- social context
- medical needs

Staff should use a gradual, graded response. The degree of force used should be the minimum necessary to achieve the desired result.

Restrictive physical intervention is a supportive and protective response to crisis behaviour. It must never be used as punishment, as a threat, or in anger. Safety is paramount, and staff are not required to use reasonable force if doing so would place themselves or others at significant risk.

Where possible, learners should be told to stop and warned that reasonable force may be used if they do not do so.

Staff who have, or acquire, a medical condition which may affect their ability to carry out learners' **Barriers to Learning Plans** or **SMART Plans** safely must report this to the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher.

During the use of reasonable force, staff should:

- use the minimum force for the shortest time
- call for support
- ensure holds are correct
- communicate calmly
- support each other

At Springside School, staff are committed to the use of **Team Teach**. This approach avoids techniques that may impair breathing. All staff are trained to recognise and respond to signs of positional asphyxia, including releasing the learner and calling emergency services immediately where necessary.

Staff should make every effort to avoid causing injury. However, in some extreme circumstances, accidental bruising or scratching may occur. Some disengagement techniques may involve brief, minimal discomfort, but only where this presents less risk than the behaviour being responded to.

Appropriate Physical Contact

There are circumstances where physical contact may be necessary to meet a learner's emotional, safety or care needs. Staff should always act safely, respectfully and in ways that preserve dignity. Where possible, staff working closely with younger learners should avoid having learners sit on their lap. If sitting on the floor to support a learner, staff should position the learner to the side rather than between their legs.

Some learners may find touch particularly difficult or distressing due to sensory needs, communication differences, cultural background or past experiences. Relevant information about this must be shared with staff who work with the learner.

7. Barriers to Learning Plans, SMART Plans and Risk Assessments

Everyone in school shares responsibility for identifying, communicating and reducing risk wherever possible.

Where a learner presents a foreseeable risk to themselves or others, there must be an assessment of that risk and a plan to reduce it. It may not always be possible to eliminate risk, but staff should be able to show that reasonable steps have been taken to reduce it.

Learners who present a risk should have a **Positive Handling Plan**, which is now known as a **SMART Plan**. Staff likely to come into contact with that learner must have access to appropriate guidance and training.

Where appropriate, learners may also have a **Barriers to Learning Plan** that does not include reasonable force, in order to guide consistent support from all adults. Where reasonable force is likely to be required, a **SMART Plan** must be written, authorised by SLT, and shared with parents/carers wherever possible.

From September 2025, plans are written using **Behaviour Smart**, and Positive Handling Plans are referred to as **SMART Plans**. Learners who benefit from them may also retain a **Barriers to Learning Plan**. These plans are reviewed automatically following incidents.

Where reasonable force is likely to be used, or has been used previously, it is good practice to share this with parents/carers. Following incidents, parents/carers should be informed of any changes to strategies or techniques felt necessary in the future. KCSIE 2025 also supports the use of agreed individual behaviour plans and parental collaboration to reduce the need for reasonable force.

Where possible, plans should be developed through multi-agency collaboration. Staff should consider the physical and emotional wellbeing of both learners and staff when writing and reviewing plans.

Staff must use the de-escalation strategies detailed in individual plans to secure the best possible outcome. All staff involved with a learner should be familiar with their plan. Plans should be accessible to staff and uploaded to CPOMS where required.

Behaviour Smart also supports staff by analysing recorded incidents and suggesting strategies based on previously successful and unsuccessful approaches used within school. Plans update automatically following incident reporting and staff input.

Developing a Plan

If it is felt that reasonable force may be required, or if it has already been used, a **Barriers to Learning Plan** and/or **SMART Plan** should be completed.

Where a learner has a medical condition which may make them more vulnerable to injury, medical advice must be sought about the safest approach. Parents/carers must be involved in this planning.

When completing plans, school should consider the views of:

- the learner
- parents/carers
- staff working closely with the learner
- relevant external professionals

These plans may also be discussed through EHCP review processes and termly progress meetings.

Staff must complete incident reports as soon as possible following incidents so that plans remain current. Incident reports should be completed the **same day wherever possible**.

It is the responsibility of each member of staff to ensure they can access and use Behaviour Smart. If they cannot, they must seek support as soon as possible and review or amend incidents once access is available.

Withdrawal, Time Out and Seclusion

As part of a learner's plan, **withdrawal** or **time out** may be used where appropriate.

Withdrawal means removing attention or access to something rewarding, or diverting the learner to another group or space, while allowing them freedom to leave.

Time out means supporting a learner to move away from a situation causing distress to a space where they can be observed and supported until ready to return. This must be part of a planned approach.

Seclusion is a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others and preventing them from leaving. It should only be used as a safety measure to protect others from harm when a learner is experiencing significant emotional or behavioural dysregulation. It must never be used through threat of punishment. The 2026 DfE guidance and the 2025 regulations require incidents of seclusion to be recorded and reported in line with the statutory process.

The space used must be safe and not feel threatening or intimidating. The learner must be supervised at all times and allowed to leave as soon as the immediate risk has reduced.

Seclusion is not a disciplinary response to deliberate or wilful misbehaviour. It can never be used as a planned intervention. If it is used, it must be in a **one-off emergency**, and an alternative strategy must then be identified for any future recurrence.

Seclusion should only be considered where there is a clear and significant risk to others from unexpected or previously unseen severe behaviour, and where the situation cannot be managed more safely in any other way.

8. Staff Training

We recognise that it is not possible to remove entirely all need for reasonable force. Governors and senior leaders must therefore ensure that staff have the training and skills needed to identify, reduce and communicate risk.

The Headteacher is responsible for organising training, though this may be delegated to the Deputy Headteacher as an in-house Team Teach trainer.

All staff trained receive training in:

- behaviour support
- de-escalation
- Team Teach techniques
- preventative strategies
- risk assessment
- post-incident learning

Staff receive regular refresher training and may request additional training where required.

Whole-school training is the preferred model, though further training may be provided based on role and level of risk.

9. Post-Incident Support

Immediate action should be taken where medical help is needed beyond basic first aid. All injuries must be reported and recorded through school systems. Learners and staff must have prompt access to first aid where required. Where an injury has occurred, the online schools' incident report form must also be completed.

Learner Support

At the time of an incident, it can be helpful to reiterate simple messages such as:

- We hold learners to keep them safe from harm.
- We hold learners when they cannot hold themselves safely.
- We hold learners to prevent them from doing something they may regret.
- "I care enough about you not to let you be out of control."

Post-incident learning is an important part of behaviour support. Staff should support the learner to reflect on what happened, understand the impact of their behaviour and develop strategies that may help them in future.

Where it is not possible to speak to the learner on the same day, this should happen as soon as possible after they return.

Once immediate needs have been addressed, staff should support the learner to repair relationships and resolve the situation positively.

Staff and Learner Support

Following incidents involving reasonable force, learners and staff will be offered appropriate support and a debrief where needed.

Any learner or member of staff involved in, or witnessing, a significant incident may require additional support afterwards.

Staff involved in incidents will be given time to debrief and recover where appropriate. Support will be provided by senior leaders and external support may be accessed if required.

Incidents should be reviewed to identify learning and improve support plans, reducing the likelihood of future incidents.

10. Recording and Reporting

In line with the **Education and Inspections Act 2006** and the **Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (England) Regulations 2025**, the school must record all significant incidents involving:

- use of reasonable force
- restraint
- seclusion

This area requires judgement. Staff should not spend unnecessary time on paperwork at the expense of looking after learners, but staff must understand that recording incidents safeguards them as well as learners.

The purpose of recording incidents is to:

- support learners
- inform parents/carers
- review plans
- protect staff by ensuring there is a clear and accurate account of what occurred

When recording the use of reasonable force, staff must:

- record the incident on CPOMS/Behaviour Smart as soon as possible and inform a member of SLT
- ensure incidents are recorded on Behaviour Smart as soon as practicable and **endeavour to do so no later than the same day**
- ensure the staff member who initiated the use of reasonable force completes the report
- ensure any staff involved, including witnesses, collaborate on the incident
- consider whether the learner's **Barriers to Learning Plan** and/or **SMART Plan** remains effective and amend it if necessary
- inform parents/carers of any significant use of reasonable force as soon as practicable and **endeavour to do so no later than the same day**
- provide written information to parents/carers following the incident

Information shared with parents/carers must include:

- time, date and location of the incident
- why the intervention was necessary
- type and degree of force used
- any injuries sustained

This should be followed up with a written report. Staff may use Behaviour Smart to draft this communication and should upload a copy of the written communication to CPOMS.

A record should also be kept of:

- communication with parents/carers
- any medical examination or first aid
- the structured use of reasonable force form completed through Behaviour Smart

Storing Records

From September 2025, paper copies will no longer be stored. Electronic records will be held on Behaviour Smart and, where relevant, CPOMS.

Records are archived at the end of each academic year together with current relevant policies.

These records form part of the learner's education record and are retained in line with the school's retention arrangements.

Any incident which could be open to misinterpretation or place staff at risk of allegations should be recorded.

Reporting Incidents

The Headteacher should be informed of incidents at the earliest possible opportunity. Following post-incident actions, the Headteacher will ensure relevant reporting to governors.

Parents/carers should be informed as soon as practicable after the incident. The person informing parents does not need to have been directly involved, but a record of the communication must be kept.

If informing a parent is likely to place the learner at risk of harm, the matter must be referred to the designated safeguarding lead and managed in line with safeguarding procedures, including consultation with the LADO where appropriate.

Monitoring and Reviewing

The use of reasonable force will be monitored to support staff learning, promote learner wellbeing and inform school organisation and training. Monitoring also helps identify trends, emerging concerns and any specialist support needed.

The school uses CPOMS and Behaviour Smart to record incidents. These systems provide an audit trail and allow senior leaders to monitor patterns, practice and training needs.

Incidents involving reasonable force should also prompt review of relevant **Barriers to Learning Plans** and **SMART Plans**.

11. Complaints and Allegations

Complaints and allegations will be investigated in line with current guidance on dealing with allegations against teachers and other staff in schools. A copy of this guidance can be obtained from senior leaders.

12. Further Information

This policy should be read alongside other relevant school policies, including:

- Behaviour
- Health and Safety
- SEN
- Equal Opportunities
- Complaints and Allegations
- Safe Working Practice
- Safeguarding

This policy is consistent with the school’s safeguarding and child protection arrangements and safe working practice expectations for staff.

13. Violence and Aggression at Work (HSE)

We cannot remove all risk. Staff recognise that working in a special school means learners’ understanding, needs and conditions can affect this.

The school’s risk reduction measures include:

	Measure	Responsibility
Policies	Barriers to Learning Policy (Behaviour Policy)	Mark Hitchen (Barriers to learning lead and DSL)
	Use of Reasonable Force Policy (Restrictive Physical Intervention Policy)	Melody Fierro (Headteacher and DDSL)
	Other relevant policies as identified in the above policies.	
CPD/ Training	Induction	Leadership Team
	Rolling programme of CPD as relevant to the individual member of staff	Leadership Team
	Positive Behaviour Training (Team Teach Training)	Delivered by in-house tutors
Organisational	Learners are grouped according to need.	Leadership Team
	Lessons to be engaging, tailored to the needs and interests of learners.	Class Teacher in conjunction with class team
Documentation	Communication Passports Intimate Care Plans Moving and Handling	Class Teacher in conjunction with class team

	PEEPs Barriers to Learning Plans (Risk assessment) Positive Handling (SMART) Plans (Risk assessment) Personal Learning Plans	
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This list is not exhaustive. The school's ethos is to identify and manage barriers to learning and support learners to regulate safely and as independently as possible.

14. Key References

- **Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools (DfE, 2026)**
- **The Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (England) Regulations 2025**
- **Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025**
- **Behaviour in Schools**
- **Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention**
- **SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years**
- **Violence and aggression at work (HSE)**