



School Policy



Using Reasonable Force

2025-2026

Aims

This policy is written using non-statutory advice from the Department for Education. It is intended to provide clarification on the use of force to help our school staff feel more confident about using this power when they feel it is necessary and to make clear the responsibilities of Headteachers and governing bodies in respect of this power.

This advice is for:

- School leaders and school staff in **all schools** in England.

Key points

- School staff have a power to use force and lawful use of the power will provide a defence to any related criminal prosecution or other legal action.
- Suspension should not be an automatic response when a member of staff has been accused of using excessive force.
- Senior school leaders should support their staff when they use this power.

What is reasonable force?

1. The term 'reasonable force' covers the broad range of actions used by most teachers at some point in their career that involve a degree of physical contact with pupils.
2. Force is usually used either to control or restrain. This can range from guiding a pupil 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.
3. 'Reasonable in the circumstances' means using no more force than is needed.
4. As mentioned above, schools generally use force to control pupils and to restrain them. Control means either passive physical contact, such as standing between pupils or blocking a pupil's path, or active physical contact such as leading a pupil by the arm out of a classroom.
5. Restraint means to hold back physically or to bring a pupil under control. It is typically used in more extreme circumstances, for example when two pupils are fighting and refuse to separate without physical intervention.
6. School staff should always try to avoid acting in a way that might cause injury, but in extreme cases it may not always be possible to avoid injuring the pupil.

Who can use reasonable force?

- All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force.
- This power applies to any member of staff at the school. It can also apply to people whom the Headteacher has temporarily put in charge of pupils such as unpaid volunteers or parents accompanying students on a school organised visit.

At Lightmoor we also have staff trained in MAPA training which includes training on how to 'hold' and 'restrain' a child safely'. Children will only be held or restrained when they are putting themselves or others at risk or damaging property. Three members of named staff were MAPA trained last year Mr Newton, Miss Robson and Mr Gibbs and where appropriate they will be called to assist in any incidents where children need to be physically taken from parents / carers or moved to a safe space or

to respond to an incident in school. Physical contact will always be the last resort and children will always be given opportunities to move themselves to safe spaces. See Appendix A with more detailed information.

When can reasonable force be used?

- Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from **hurting themselves** or **others, from damaging property**, or from causing disorder.
- In a school, force is used for two main purposes – to control pupils or to restrain them.
- The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned and should always depend on the individual circumstances.
- The following list is not exhaustive but provides some examples of situations where reasonable force can and cannot be used.

Schools can use reasonable force to:

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

Schools cannot:

- use force as a punishment – it is always unlawful to use force as a punishment.

Power to search pupils without consent

- In addition to the general power to use reasonable force described above, Headteachers and authorised staff can use such force as is reasonable given the circumstances to conduct a search for the following “prohibited items”³:
- 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. Separate guidance is available on the power to search without consent – see the 'Further sources of information' 3 Section 550ZB(5) of the Education Act 1996

Communicating the school's approach to the use of force

Every school is required to have a behaviour policy and to make this policy known to staff, parents and pupils. The governing body should notify the Headteacher that it expects the school behaviour policy to include the power to use reasonable force.

- There is no requirement to have a policy on the use of force but it is good practice to set out, in the behaviour policy, the circumstances in which force might be used or a link to this policy.
- Any policy on the use of reasonable force should acknowledge their legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and children with special educational needs (SEN).
- Schools do not require parental consent to use force on a pupil.
- Schools should not have a 'no contact' policy. There is a real risk that such a policy might place a member of staff in breach of their duty of care towards a pupil, or prevent them taking action needed to prevent a pupil causing harm.
- By taking steps to ensure that staff, pupils and parents are clear about when force might be used, the school will reduce the likelihood of complaints being made when force has been used properly.

Staff training

Schools need to take their own decisions about staff training. The Headteacher should consider whether members of staff require any additional training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities and should consider the needs of the pupils when doing so. Some local authorities provide advice and guidance to help schools to develop an appropriate training programme.

Telling parents when force has been used on their child

It is good practice for schools to speak to parents/carers about serious incidents involving the use of force and to consider how best to record such serious incidents. It is up to schools to decide whether it is appropriate to report the use of force to parents.

In deciding what a serious incident is, teachers should use their professional judgement and consider the:

- Pupil's behaviour and level of risk presented at the time of the incident
- Degree of force used
- Effect on the pupil or member of staff
- The child's age

Reporting incidents.

All incidents should be logged onto CPOMs and parents informed. Any injuries or physical contact should be logged with Calore Ballisch SBM on the day.

What happens if a pupil complains when force is used on them?

All complaints about the use of force should be thoroughly, speedily and appropriately investigated.

Where a member of staff has acted within the law – that is, they have used reasonable force in order to prevent injury, damage to property or disorder – this will provide a defence to any criminal prosecution or other civil or public law action.

When a complaint is made the onus is on the person making the complaint to prove that his/her allegations are true – it is not for the member of staff to show that he/she has acted reasonably.

Suspension must not be an automatic response when a member of staff has been accused of using excessive force. Schools should refer to the “Dealing with Allegations of Abuse against Teachers and Other Staff” guidance (see the ‘Further sources of information’ section below) where an allegation of using excessive force is made against a teacher. This guidance makes clear that a person must not be suspended automatically, or without careful thought.

School will consider carefully whether the circumstances of the case warrant a person being suspended until the allegation is resolved or whether alternative arrangements are more appropriate. If a decision is taken to suspend a teacher, the school should ensure that the teacher has access to a named contact who can provide support.

Governing bodies should always consider whether a teacher has acted within the law when reaching a decision on whether or not to take disciplinary action against the teacher.

As employers, schools and local authorities have a duty of care towards their employees. It is important that schools provide appropriate pastoral care to any member of staff who is subject to a formal allegation following a use of force incident.

What about other physical contact with pupils?

It is not illegal to touch a pupil. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, with a pupil is proper and necessary.

Examples of where touching a pupil might be proper or necessary:

- Holding the hand of the child at the front/back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school
- When comforting a distressed pupil
- When a pupil is being congratulated or praised
- To demonstrate how to use a musical instrument
- To demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching; and
- To give first aid

Reviewed: November 2025

Next Review: November 2026

Reviewer: Lucy Cowan

Appendix A

MAPA Trained Staff – 2025	
New Staff to be trained Spring 2026 - Lucy Cowan HT and Susie Edwards Reception Teacher	
Currently Trained	
Mr Newton	DHT

- In an emergency or when a child is a risk to themselves or others and there is no time, any members of staff are allowed to use reasonable force as policy above.
- Where possible the named staff are called to support. Two members of staff must be present when moving any child to ensure that no one gets hurt.
- The first course of action should be to calmly and firmly ask the child to stop and / or to come to a safe area inside school. This should be done using two choices so that the child can have some control. For example: "I need you to come with me to the Acorn room or to the Treehouse, you can choose" "We have to move from here as we are not safe".
- The Treehouse, Cosy space, Acorn room, (DHT or HT room) can be used as a choice as well as other comfortable places that the child may be familiar with.
- If a child is being dysregulated and is not able to make the decision they will be moved carefully to a space of safety.
- Staff are not to re-enter a room or talk to the child if they need space unless they are putting themselves at risk and they may be held to calm down.
- Children will need at least 50 minutes of calming down time when they have become dysregulated. Calm boxes can be used once they have stopped the destruction phase and calm music or fleecy blankets, offers of food and drinks. If appropriate, the child will need to complete a behaviour reflection sheet once calm/ or take home if appropriate. The reflection sheet would not be appropriate for a child that arrives at school angry or unsettled, only if there has been challenging behaviour in class or in school prior to the anger outburst or defiance.

Actions in the case of an emergency in a classroom.

Each class has a phone that can be used to alert any staff if there is an emergency in the classroom.

If there is no time to call, a child can also be sent to the closest adult in another room with their class **red card**. This will signal that they need urgent adult assistance and can be passed to any adult at all in school.

The job of the adult is to respond instantly to the room on the card and to let the child know they must go and find Mrs Cowan, Mr Newton or head to the office.

If there are two adults in the room with the emergency, they should both remain.

If possible one adult should remove the children quickly out of either classroom door. The other adult needs to talk calmly and clearly to the dysregulated child but with the main aim of keeping them and any risk away from the other children until the next adult comes.

If a child is not able to communicate but is highly dysregulated, they may need to be kept inside a room away from the other children or be taken out quickly (when there are enough adults to do this safely) any objects must be removed from the child.

If you see an incident building, please send the red card straight away and not your staff member, stay in the room.

If you are on your own with a child that has left a room dysregulated, call for someone else so that you are not on your own.

Please see the lockdown policy for bringing children quickly if an incident outside occurs (long blasts of whistle and children head to classroom doors quickly).