

BURFORD SCHOOL



Burford School

Policy on the Use of Force to Control or Restrain Pupils



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE





Burford School

Policy on the Use of Force to Control or Restrain Pupils

This policy was approved by the governing body on 1st October 2007

This policy will be reviewed Summer 2009

Purpose

It is important that the school has a policy about the use of force to control or restrain pupils. All members of staff who may have to intervene physically with pupils must clearly understand the options and strategies open to them. They must know what is acceptable and what is not. The Governing Body, parents, and pupils, also need to know that.

The policy sets out the guidelines about the use of force to control or restrain pupils.

The Headteacher should discuss these guidelines with the staff that may have to apply them.

Planning for incidents

If the school is aware that a pupil is likely to behave in a way that may require physical control or restraint, a plan of how to respond if the situation arises should be in place. This planning needs to address:

- managing the pupil (e.g. reactive strategies to de-escalate a conflict, holds to be used);
- involving the parents to ensure that they are clear about what specific action the school might need to take;
- briefing staff to ensure they know exactly what action they should be taking (this may identify a need for training or guidance);
- ensuring that additional support can be summoned if appropriate;
- in some cases, particularly in SEN settings, the school may also need to take medical advice about the safest way to hold pupils with specific health needs.

Section 550A

Under section 550A of the Education Act 1996, teachers, and other persons who are authorised by the Headteacher to have control or charge of pupils, are allowed to use such force as is reasonable in all the circumstances to prevent a pupil from doing, or continuing to do, any of the following:

- committing a criminal offence (including behaving in a way that would be an offence if the pupil were not under the age of criminal responsibility);
- injuring themselves or others;
- causing damage to property (including the pupil's own property);
- engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to maintaining good order and discipline at the school or among any

of its pupils, whether that behaviour occurs in a classroom during a teaching session or elsewhere.

The provision applies when a teacher, or other authorised person, is on the school premises, and when he or she has lawful control or charge of the pupil concerned elsewhere e.g. on a field trip or other authorised out of school activity.

Authorised Staff

All teachers at the school may use reasonable force to control or restrain pupils. Other people may do so, in the same way as teachers, provided they have been authorised by the Headteacher to have control or charge of pupils. Those might include classroom assistants, care workers, midday supervisors, specialist support assistants, education welfare officers, escorts, caretakers, or voluntary helpers including people accompanying pupils on visits, exchanges or holidays organised by the school.

The Headteacher should identify people, other than teachers, whom she wishes to authorise to have control or charge of pupils and therefore be able to use force if necessary. Authorisation may be on a permanent or long term basis because of the nature of the person's job, or short term for a specific event such as a school trip. The Headteacher should explicitly inform the people concerned, and ensure that they are aware of and properly understand what the authorisation entails. An up-to-date list of authorised people should be maintained and the teachers be informed of who they are.

Action in self-defence or in an emergency

Everyone has the right to defend themselves against an attack provided they do not use a disproportionate degree of force to do so. Similarly, in an emergency, for example if a pupil were at immediate risk of injury or on the point of inflicting injury on someone else, any member of staff would be entitled to intervene.

Types of Incidents

There are a wide variety of situations in which reasonable force might be appropriate, or necessary, to control or restrain a pupil. They will fall into three broad categories:

- a. where action is necessary in self-defence or because there is an imminent risk of injury;
- b. where there is a developing risk of injury, or significant damage to property;
- c. where a pupil is behaving in a way that is compromising good order and discipline.

Examples of situations that fall within one of the first two categories are:

- a pupil attacks a member of staff, or another pupil;
- pupils are fighting;
- a pupil is engaged in, or is on the verge of committing, deliberate damage or vandalism to property;
- a pupil is causing, or at risk of causing, injury or damage by accident, by rough play, or by misuse of dangerous materials or objects;
- a pupil is running in a corridor or on a stairway in a way in which he or she might have or cause an accident likely to injure him or herself or others;
- a pupil absconds from a class or tries to leave school (N.B. this will only apply if a pupil could be at risk if not kept in the classroom or at school).

Examples of situations that fall into the third category are:

- a pupil persistently refuses to obey an order to leave a classroom;

- a pupil is behaving in a way that is seriously disrupting a lesson.

Reasonable Force

There is no legal definition of 'reasonable force'. So it is not possible to set out comprehensively when it is reasonable to use force, or the degree of force that may reasonably be used. It will always depend on all the circumstances of the case.

There are two relevant considerations:

- the use of force can be regarded as reasonable only if the circumstances of the particular incident warrant it. The use of any degree of force is unlawful if the particular circumstances do not warrant the use of physical force. Therefore physical force could not be justified to prevent a pupil from committing a trivial misdemeanour, or in a situation that clearly could be resolved without force.
- the degree of force employed must be in proportion to the circumstances of the incident and the seriousness of the behaviour or the consequences it is intended to prevent. Any force used should always be the minimum needed to achieve the desired result.

Whether it is reasonable to use force, and the degree of force that could reasonably be employed, might also depend on the age, understanding, and sex of the pupil.

Practical considerations

Before intervening physically a teacher should, wherever practicable, tell the pupil who is misbehaving to stop, and what will happen if he or she does not. The teacher should continue attempting to communicate with the pupil throughout the incident, and should make it clear that physical contact or restraint will stop as soon as it ceases to be necessary. A calm and measured approach to a situation is needed and teachers should never give the impression that they have lost their temper, or are acting out of anger or frustration, or to punish the pupil.

Sometimes a teacher should not intervene in an incident without help (unless it is an emergency). For example, when dealing with an older pupil, or a physically large pupil, or more than one pupil, or if the teacher believes he or she may be at risk of injury. In those circumstances the teacher should remove other pupils who might be at risk, and summon assistance from a colleague or colleagues, or where necessary phone the Police. The teacher should inform the pupil(s) that he or she has sent for help. Until assistance arrives the teacher should continue to attempt to defuse the situation orally, and try to prevent the incident from escalating.

Application of Force

Physical intervention can take several forms. It might involve staff:

- physically interposing between pupils;
- blocking a pupil's path;
- holding;
- pushing;
- pulling;
- leading a pupil by the hand or arm;
- shepherding a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of the back; or,
- (in extreme circumstances) using more restrictive holds.

In exceptional circumstances, where there is an immediate risk of injury, a member of staff may need to take any necessary action that is consistent with the concept of 'reasonable force': for example to prevent a young pupil running off a pavement onto a busy road, or to prevent a pupil hitting someone, or throwing something.

In other circumstances staff should not act in a way that might reasonably be expected to cause injury, for example by:

- holding a pupil around the neck, or by the collar, or in any other way that might restrict the pupil's ability to breathe;
- slapping, punching or kicking a pupil;
- twisting or forcing limbs against a joint;
- tripping up a pupil;
- holding or pulling a pupil by the hair or ear;
- holding a pupil face down on the ground.

Staff should always avoid touching or holding a pupil in a way that might be considered indecent.

Where the risk is not so urgent the teacher should consider carefully whether, and if so when, physical intervention is right. Teachers should always try to deal with a situation through other strategies before using force. All teachers need developed strategies and techniques for dealing with difficult pupils and situations that they should use to defuse and calm a situation.

That consideration is particularly appropriate in situations where the aim is to maintain good order and discipline, and there is no direct risk to people or property. As the key issue is establishing good order, any action that could exacerbate the situation needs to be avoided. The possible consequences of intervening physically, including the risk of increasing the disruption or actually provoking an attack, need to be carefully evaluated.

The age and level of understanding of the pupil is also very relevant in those circumstances. Physical intervention to enforce compliance with staff instructions is likely to be increasingly inappropriate with older pupils. It should never be used as a substitute for good behaviour management.

Recording Incidents

An up-to-date record of all such incidents, in an incident book, will be maintained.

Immediately following any such incident the member of staff concerned should tell the Headteacher or a senior member of staff and provide a written report as soon as possible afterwards. That should include:

- the name(s) of the pupil(s) involved, and when and where the incident took place;
- the names of any other staff or pupils who witnessed the incident;
- the reason that force was necessary (e.g. to prevent injury to the pupil, another pupil or member of staff);
- how the incident began and progressed, including details of the pupil's behaviour, what was said by each of the parties, the steps taken to defuse or calm the situation, the degree of force used, how that was applied, and for how long;
- the pupil's response, and the outcome of the incident;
- details of any injury suffered by the pupil, another pupil, or a member of staff and of any damage to property.

The member of staff involved should also keep a copy of the report.

The Headteacher will inform parents of an incident involving their child, and give them an opportunity to discuss it. The Headteacher will decide whether to inform the parents immediately or at the end of the school day, and whether this should be orally or in writing.

