

St Wilfrid's CE Primary School



Parable of the Mustard Seed Mark 4: 30-32
“We will ensure children acquire the skills and knowledge our children need to thrive and flourish.”

Safe Touch Policy

Our Mission Statement is:

Our Christian school exists to provide a welcoming environment in which everybody is cherished and challenged to fulfil their potential.

Our three key values we embrace are:

Belonging, Believing and Becoming

Introduction

This policy has been prepared for the support of all teaching and support staff who come into contact with pupils who may need to be positively handled (also referred to as a 'safe touch'). This policy should be read in conjunction with other school policies relating to interaction between adults and pupils specifically the school's Behaviour Policy and the [DfE Use of Reasonable Force – Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies July 2013](#)

The Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to the following legislation, including, but not limited to:

- The Children Act 1989
- Equality Act 2010
- The 1996 Education Act

This policy will also have due regard to the following guidance:

- DfE 'Use of reasonable force in schools' 2013
- DfE 'Working together to safeguard children' 2023

The school will implement this policy in conjunction with our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Behaviour Policy and Equality Policy.

The 1996 Education Act (Section 550A) stipulates that reasonable physical intervention may be used to prevent a pupil from doing, or continuing to do any of the following;

- engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to maintaining good order and discipline at the school or among any of its pupils; whether the behaviour occurs in a classroom, during a teaching session or elsewhere (this includes authorised out-of-school activities)
- self-injuring or placing himself or herself at risk
- injuring others
- causing damage to property, including that of the pupil himself or herself
- committing a criminal offence (even if the pupil is below the age of criminal responsibility)

Definition of Positive Handling (safe touch) at St Wilfrid's Primary School

Positive handling is the positive application of force with the intention of protecting the child from harming himself or others or seriously damaging property.

Positive handling could also be defined as:

(a) **Physical Contact** - Situations in which proper physical contact takes place between staff and pupils, e.g. in games/PE, to comfort pupils or in supporting toilet training in EYFS.

(b) **Physical Intervention** - This may be used to divert a pupil from a destructive or disruptive action, for example guiding or leading a pupil by the hand, arm or shoulder with little or no force.

(c) **Positive Handling** - This will involve the use of reasonable force when there is a risk to pupils, staff or property or if good order is being seriously prejudiced. All such incidents will be recorded.

General Policy Aims

Staff at St Wilfrid's Primary School recognise that the use of reasonable force is only one of the last in a range of strategies available to secure pupil safety / well-being and also to maintain good order and discipline. Our policy on positive handling should therefore be read in conjunction with our Behaviour and Child Protection policies.

Specific Aims of the Positive Handling Policy

- To protect every person in the school community from harm.

- To protect all pupils against any form of physical intervention which is unnecessary, inappropriate, excessive or harmful.
- To provide adequate information and training for staff so that they are clear as to what constitutes appropriate behaviour and to deal effectively with violent or potentially violent situations.

Why Use Safe Touch (Positive Handling)?

Positive handling should avert danger by preventing or deflecting a child's action or perhaps by removing a physical object, which could be used to harm him / herself or others. It is only likely to be needed if a child appears to be unable to exercise self-control of emotions and behaviour.

It is not possible to define every circumstance in which positive handling/safe touch would be necessary or appropriate and staff will have to exercise their own judgement in situations which arise within the above categories. Staff should always act within the school's behaviour policy, particularly in dealing with disruptive behaviour. Staff should be aware that when they are in charge of children during the school day, or during other supervised activities, they are acting in loco parentis and should, therefore, take reasonable action to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

Failure to positively handle a pupil who is subsequently injured or injures another, could, in certain circumstances, lead to an accusation of negligence. At the same time staff are not expected to place themselves in situations where they are likely to suffer injury as a result of their intervention. Wherever possible staff should not work in isolated situations with pupils whose behaviour is such that the likelihood of confrontation is increased.

When might it be appropriate to use reasonable force?

Examples of situations that may require restraint are when:

- a pupil attacks a member of staff, or another pupil
- pupils fighting
- a pupil is causing, or at risk of causing, injury or damage by accident, by rough play, or by misuse of dangerous materials, substances or objects
- a pupil is running in a corridor or on a stairway in a way in which he/she might have or cause an accident likely to injure her/himself or others
- a pupil absconding from a class or trying to leave school (NB this will only apply if a pupil could be at risk if not kept in the classroom or at school)
- a pupil persistently refuses to obey an order to leave an area
- a pupil behaves in such a way that seriously disrupts a lesson.

In all cases, the amount of force that a staff member uses must be reasonable, proportionate and necessary and done in the best interests of the child and other children.

Alternative Strategies

There are some situations in which the need for positive handling/safe touch is immediate and where there are no equally effective alternatives (eg if a pupil is about to run across a road). However, in many circumstances there are alternatives. Staff should, wherever possible, take steps to avoid the need to physically intervene by discussion and diversion. The following are a list of assertiveness skills which may be attempted by staff:

- the *broken record* in which an instruction is repeated until the pupil complies
- use of a distracter, such as a loud whistle, to interrupt the behaviour (such as a fight) long enough for other methods of verbal control to be effective
- withdrawal of attention (audience) e.g. if an action such as damage to property is threatened
- other techniques designed to defuse the situation, such as the avoidance of confrontation, or use of humour (in these cases the incident can be dealt with later when emotions are no longer running high)
- the employment of other sanctions consistent with the School's behaviour policy.

Use of Positive Handling/Safe Touch

Positive handling/safe touch should be applied as an act of care and control with the intention of re-establishing verbal control as soon as possible and, at the same time, allowing the pupil to regain self-control. It should never take a form which could be seen as a punishment.

Named staff (Team Teach trained) are only authorised to use reasonable force in applying positive handling, although there is no absolute definition of this, as what constitutes reasonable force depends upon the particular situation and the pupil to whom it is being applied. However, as a general rule, only the force necessary to stop or prevent the behaviour should be used, in accordance with the guidelines below.

Adults dealing with confrontation should always try to present a calm exterior and model desirable skills of peaceful conflict resolution. Confrontation can usually be avoided: choosing not to make an issue in public, remaining calm and allowing space, restating expectations and giving choices. Staff should use minimum force required to control aggression and should apply it in a manner which attempts to prevent rather than provoke further aggressive reaction from the child.

De-escalation, once an incident has begun, requires the deliberate reduction of tension. This may be achieved by de-personalising, breaking eye contact, sitting down or moving away. If possible use a specific space for de-escalation purposes – a safe zone.

There are some forms of physical intervention, which may involve minimal physical contact, such as blocking a pupil's path or the staff member physically interposing him or herself between the pupil and another pupil or object. However, in some circumstances, direct physical contact may be necessary.

In all circumstances other methods should be used if appropriate or effective positive handling should be a last resort. When positive handling becomes necessary:

DO

- Tell the pupil what you are doing and why
- Use the minimum force necessary
- Involve another member of staff if possible
- Tell the pupil what s/he must do for you to remove the restraint (this may need frequent repetition)
- Use simple and clear language
- Hold limbs above a major joint if possible e.g. above the elbow
- Ensure the child can maintain dignity
- Relax your restraint in response to the pupil's compliance

DON'T

- Act in temper (involve another staff member if you fear loss of control)
- Involve yourself in a prolonged verbal exchange with the pupil
- Attempt to reason with the pupil
- Involve other pupils in the restraint
- Touch or hold the pupil in sexual areas
- Twist or force limbs back against a joint
- Bend fingers or pull hair
- Hold the pupil in a way which will restrict blood flow or breathing e.g. around the neck or abdomen
- Slap, punch, kick or trip up the pupil

Safer Practice

Where physical intervention is likely to be required, staff working in isolated situation should alert another staff member in whichever way possible. It is always desirable to have another adult as witness and for support.

Staff should consider seeking medical assistance following an incident where a pupil has been restrained if they feel it is appropriate: for instance where there has been prolonged hyper-activity or state of shock; where breathing patterns change during, or immediately afterwards, particularly if the person concerned uses an inhaler; or where there is evidence of physical injury.

If a pupil is directing aggression towards an individual member of staff, the staff member should seek intervention of another staff member and attempt to remove themselves from the situation.

Team Teach techniques seek to avoid injury to the child, but it is possible that bruising or scratching may occur accidentally, and these are not to be seen necessarily as a failure of professional technique, but a regrettable and infrequent “side-effect” of ensuring that the child remains safe.

Actions After an Incident

Positive handling often occurs in response to highly charged emotional situations and there is a clear need for debriefing after the incident, both for the staff involved and the pupil. **A member of the leadership team should be informed of any incident as soon as possible** and will take responsibility for making arrangements for debriefing once the situation has stabilised. An appropriate member of the teaching staff should always be involved in debriefing the pupil involved and any victims of the incident should be offered support, and their parents informed.

School leaders may need to consider offering counselling where this is appropriate.

If the behaviour is part of an ongoing pattern it may be necessary to address the situation through the development of an individual behaviour plan and risk assessment, and to be agreed by one of the SENCOs. It is also helpful to consider the circumstances precipitating the incident to explore ways in which future incidents can be avoided.

All incidents should be recorded immediately on CPOMS with full description of the restraint, triggers, who was involved, reasons for the restraint and of course the time, date and a body map highlighted if

appropriate. All adult witness will need to log a statement. A member of the leadership team will contact parents as soon as possible after an incident, normally on the same day, to inform them of the actions that were taken and why, and to provide them with an opportunity to discuss it.

For serious cases, school should advise their support officer in Support to Schools at Overseas House by sending a copy of the relevant CPOMs logs without delay.

Where a member of staff suffers an injury or is assaulted, the guidance in Guidance Note 47 should be followed and the appropriate record forms 1,2,3 and 4 as necessary should be completed forwarded and directed.

Parents/carers should be alerted to incidents which have required physical handling of their child as soon as possible. It is always advised that parents/carers are offered the opportunity to meet with school leaders to discuss the incident.

Risk Assessments

If we become aware that a pupil is likely to behave in a disruptive way that may require the use of reasonable force, we will plan how to respond if the situation arises. Such planning will address:

- Management of the pupil (e.g. reactive strategies to de-escalate a conflict, holds to be used if necessary)
- Involvement of parents to ensure that they are clear about the specific action the school might need to take
- Briefing of staff to ensure they know exactly what action they should be taking (this may identify a need for training or guidance)
- Identification of additional support that can be summoned if appropriate

Training

The staff at St Wilfrid's will undergo regular twilight training in de-escalation and positive handling (Team Teach) via a specialist adviser such as through Bridgelea PRU Outreach. Individual staff members will do the full day Team Teach training. The Team Teach system is recognised by the Local Authority and accredited through BILD – British Institute of Learning Disabilities. New members of staff will not be expected to undertake positive handling unless they have had appropriate training or given advice on actions to be taken.

Positive Physical Contact (holding hands, hugging, lap-sitting and carrying)

- The school understands that certain types of physical contact between staff and pupils are inappropriate, such as hugging, lap-sitting, carrying, holding hands or kissing.
- The school recognises that the only appropriate places to touch pupils are on the shoulders, arms and back.
- When demonstrating skills during sports lessons, and where necessary, we allow the following:
 - When demonstrating how to use sporting equipment or sports skills staff may need to touch children to support and guide them, for example in gymnastics, hockey, rugby and football.
 - When learning climbing skills staff will need to use a guiding hand to support younger children
 - When younger children are using the climbing equipment staff may need to support them getting up and down-this must be done in sight of others. Staff must lift from under the armpits and place the child down gently.

- Staff will limit lone-working, when this is necessary in the school hall the door is pinned open and there are glass windows allowing others to see in.

The school places the following restrictions on hugging:

- At our school we encourage staff using touch for reward or comfort to use the 'school-hug', rather than an embrace.
- The school-hug is a sideways hug whereby the member of staff places their hands on the pupil's shoulders.
- This type of hug prevents the pupil from turning themselves towards the member of staff and thus engaging in a 'front' embrace, which the school would deem inappropriate.

The school places the following restrictions on holding hands:

- At our school we understand that there are times when a member of staff will need to hold a pupil's hand, either to guide them or to prevent them from being physically harmed.
- Within our EYFS we will hold a pupil's hand when giving guidance, reassurance or to comfort them.
- We encourage the use of the 'school hand-hold'. This is done by the adult holding their arm out, and the child is encouraged to either hold the hand or arm of the adult or wrap their hand around the adult's lower arm. The adult's other hand can then be placed over the child's hand for a little extra security if it is required.

The school places the following restrictions on lap-sitting and carrying:

- The school recognises that all instances of lap-sitting and carrying children are inappropriate and therefore prohibits this interaction between members of staff and pupils.
- EYFS staff will allow pupils to sit on their lap if they require comfort or reassurance, particularly in the case of distress; this type of contact is only made with the consent of the child. The child must be sat sideways or facing outwards and never in a front embrace.
- The school understands that pupils are not always aware of the boundaries between staff and pupils and thus may try to engage in physical contact such as lap-sitting or inappropriate hand-holding and hugging.
- Should a pupil try to engage in any inappropriate physical contact, the member of staff must explain to the pupil why it is unacceptable and encourage them to engage in the school-hug.
- If a member of staff attempts to use one of the safe methods of touch and a pupil is unhappy with this, the member of staff will retract immediately in order to respect the pupil's wishes.

Complaints and allegations

A clear positive handling policy, adhered to by all staff and shared with parents, should help to avoid complaints from parents. It is unlikely to prevent all complaints, however, and a dispute about the use of force by a member of staff might lead to an investigation, either under disciplinary procedures or by the Police and social services department under child protection procedures. It is our intention to inform all staff, pupils, parents and governors about these procedures and the context in which they apply.

We will review this policy on a yearly basis.