

MILLTOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL

SAFE HANDLING POLICY

It is the aim of Milltown Primary School to provide a safe and secure environment for the entire school community (pupils and staff) and to promote and sustain appropriate behaviour.

This policy and the procedures for the use of reasonable force/safe handling have been prepared for the guidance of all teaching and support staff. They have been developed in line with guidance from:

- Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour (2001)
- Pastoral Care in Schools: Child protection: Code of Conduct for Staff (1991/10)
- DE document: Towards a Model Policy in Schools on the Use of Reasonable Force (2002)
- DE Circular 1999/9
- DE Circular 2003/13 Welfare and Protection of Pupils

Legislative Framework

This policy has been formulated with due consideration to the following legislation:

- Children (NI) Order 1995 - duty to protect and child protection responsibilities / fulfilling responsibility
- Education (NI) Order 1998 (Part II Article 4 (1))
- Human Rights Act 1998 - Articles 3 and 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights
- Health and Safety at Work Act (NI) Order 1978
- Education (NI) order 2003

Purposes

The following purposes underpin the school's policy and practices:

- To create a learning environment in which young people and adults feel safe
- 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; and
- To provide guidance for staff (teaching and non-teaching) so that they are clear about the circumstances in which they might use reasonable force to restrain pupils and how such force might be applied.

Definition of Reasonable Force

The Education order (NI) 1998 (Part II Article 4(1)) states:

A member of the staff of a grant-aided school may use, in relation to any pupil at the school, such force as is reasonable in the circumstances for the purpose of preventing the pupil from doing (or continuing to do) any of the following, namely:

- *Committing any offence*
- *Causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself);*
or
- *Engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any of its pupils, whether that behaviour occurs during a teaching session or otherwise.*

Based on this legal framework, the working definition of "reasonable force" is the minimum force necessary to prevent a pupil from physically harming him/herself or others, or seriously damaging property, but used in a manner to preserve the dignity of all concerned.

The use of reasonable force/safe handling needs to be considered in the following contexts:

- Planned intervention in which staff employ, where necessary, pre-arranged strategies based upon a risk assessment and recorded within a pupil's behaviour plan; and
- Emergency or unplanned use of force/intervention, which occurs in response to unforeseen events e.g. pupil fights

PRACTICES

Preventative Strategies

The school actively promotes positive behaviour management strategies thus reducing the need for the use of any form of physical intervention, except in an emergency situation.

Preventative strategies for inappropriate behaviour(s) are outlined in the school's Behaviour Policy.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is a preventative strategy to minimise the risk of an incident escalating unnecessarily and is normal practice where a pupil or a small number of pupils are known to exhibit disturbing or distressing behaviour. Risk assessment will be considered only for those pupils where there is a foreseeable risk. This enables the school to plan and train accordingly.

Risk assessment will be considered from two perspectives:

- a) environmental risk assessment;
- b) individual risk assessment.

Roles and Responsibilities

Reasonable force/safe handling can be used by any member of staff who is authorised by the Principal to have lawful control or charge of pupils e.g. teachers, classroom assistants, supervisory assistants or any other professional, as appropriate, involved in working with the pupils.

Procedures

A member of staff may have to decide between making an intervention/using reasonable force by placing him/herself in a dangerous situation or standing back and thereby allowing colleagues or pupils to face potential danger. There will always be an element of personal judgement in these decisions and there is the possibility of someone being injured. However, it is reasonable to expect a member of staff to engage in some risk where there is evidence of danger to others and intervention has a good chance of being effective.

Staff **should not**, however,

- put themselves in personal danger merely to safeguard property;
- intervene in an incident without help if there is a risk that he/she may be injured or may endanger his/her life.

The use of reasonable force/safe handling can be employed by a teacher or other authorised person(s) on the school premises or, when authorised, elsewhere e.g. supervision of pupils in bus queues, a field trip or on other authorised out-of-school activities such as a sporting event or educational visit. The use of reasonable force should be limited to emergency situations and used only as a last resort when all other behaviour management strategies have been exhausted and where:

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

Forms of Reasonable Force

When other behaviour management strategies have failed, staff should summon additional support from another member of staff e.g. by sending a reliable pupil, and use the minimum intervention or force that can reasonably be employed depending on the age, sex, physical strength, size, understanding, medical condition and any special needs of the pupil. It should be used in a way that preserves the dignity and respect of all concerned. A calm and measured approach should be taken at all times. It should be appropriate to the particular pupil and be in accordance with the school's agreed strategies.

The following procedure must be adhered to at all times:

- Tell the pupil to stop the inappropriate behaviour;
- Ask the pupil to behave appropriately, clearly stating the desired behaviour;
- Tell the pupil that physical intervention will take place if inappropriate behaviour continues;
- Intervene in a measured way.
- During the incident, repeatedly reassure the pupil and tell her/him that physical contact will stop as soon as she/he is ready to behave appropriately;

If the staff member feels at risk he/she should seek support from the nearest staff member and continue to attempt to defuse the situation orally, and try to prevent the incident from escalating.

Forms of Reasonable Force

The forms of reasonable force used in school will depend on individual circumstances and may include:

- Physically interposing between pupils;
- Separating pupils who are fighting, or who are about to fight;
- Blocking a pupil's path;
- Holding a blazer or bag;
- Pushing / pulling (e.g. if a child steps into the path of oncoming traffic);
- Breakaway techniques (where a member of staff is grabbed by a pupil);
- Leading a pupil by the hand or arm;
- Shepherding a pupil away by placing hands on the backs of elbows; or
- Using more restrictive holds (in extreme circumstances).

Health and Safety

When using reasonable force/physical intervention/restraint/safe handling, the pupil's health and safety must always be considered.

Physical interventions should involve the minimum amount of force necessary to resolve the situation and calm the pupil.

Limits on the Use of Force

The law strictly prohibits the use of force which constitutes corporal punishment. The use of force as a punishment or to intentionally cause pain, injury or humiliation contravenes our Child Protection Policy. Staff should never act in a way that might reasonably be expected to cause injury, for example by:

- Holding around the neck;
- Adopting any hold that might restrict breathing;
- Kicking, slapping or punching or using any implement;
- Forcing limbs against joints;
- Tripping;
- Holding or pulling the hair;
- Holding a pupil face down on the ground;

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

Record Keeping

All incidents involving the use of reasonable force must be recorded.

- Immediately following any incident, the member of staff concerned must inform the Principal or a senior member of staff and provide a written record/report.

The principal will keep an accurate up-to-date record of all such incidents.

The Chairperson of the Board of Governors and the principal will review annually the entries in the incident book. Records of incidents will be kept until the date of the child's twenty-first birthday. In the event of the young person being over 18 when they leave school, records should be kept for 3 years after their date of leaving. Confidentiality and the young person's right to privacy will need to be ensured.

The pupil's view should also be recorded as soon as possible, preferably on the same day.

Contact with Parents

Parents/carers will be contacted as soon as possible and the incident explained to them. This must also be recorded. Any complaint from a parent will be dealt with according to the school's complaint policy as detailed below.

Complaints

If an incident involving the use of reasonable force/restraint/safe handling by a member of staff occurs in school, the procedures governing such incidents should be followed. This will include informing the parents/carers of the child as outlined above.

Any subsequent complaints made against a member of staff will be dealt with in accordance with the School's Complaints Policy and in accordance with the Circular 1999/10, Pastoral Care in Schools - Child Protection.

Staff, who themselves are subject to physical violence or assaulted will be supported, as appropriate, in taking any necessary action against an assailant.

The use of reasonable force is only to be employed in exceptional circumstances or in an emergency where a pupil appears to be unable to exercise self-control and whose behaviour is presenting a threat to him/herself or others.

Quick Guide for Staff

PREVENTATIVE STRATEGIES

The strategies listed below as examples will be influenced by the age, sex, physical strength, size, understanding, medical condition and any special needs of the pupil and the context in which they are applied. They should be used in a way that preserves the dignity and respect of all concerned.

1. Move calmly and confidently;
2. Make simple, clear statements;
3. Intervene early;
4. Try to maintain eye contact;
5. If necessary, summon help before the problem escalates;
6. If possible, remove audience from the immediate location.

ACTION STEPS

1. Tell the pupil who is misbehaving to stop and tell him/her the possible consequences of failure to do so.
2. If possible, summon / send for another adult;
3. Continue to communicate with the pupil throughout the incident;
4. Make it clear that physical intervention will cease as soon as it is no longer necessary;
5. Appropriate follow-up action should be taken, which may include:
 - a. Providing medical support;
 - b. Providing respite for those involved; and
 - c. Accessing external advice / support.

A calm and measured approach to a situation is needed and staff should not give the impression that they are acting out of anger or frustration when handling a problem.

INTERVENTION GUIDELINES

There are situations where staff should not intervene without help. Assistance should be sought when dealing, for example, with:

- An older pupil;
- A physically large pupil;
- More than one pupil;
- When one teacher believes that he/she may be at risk of injury.

In those circumstances where the member of staff has decided that it is not appropriate to restrain the pupil without help, he/she should:

- Remove other pupils who might be at risk;
- Summon assistance from colleagues;
- Where necessary, contact the police;
- Inform the pupils that help will be arriving; and
- Continue to attempt to defuse the situation orally, and try to prevent the incident from escalating.

Examples that fall into the above 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, substances or objects;

- A pupil is running in a corridor or on a stairway in which s/he might cause an accident likely to injure her/himself or others;
- A pupil absconds from a class or tries to leave school;
- 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.