

COGNITA



Oxford House School

Use of Reasonable Force and Pupil Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy

September 2024

1 Policy Statement

- 1.1 The school complies with all statutory requirements, as amended, from time to time. The principles of 'reasonableness' and 'proportionality' are used at all times in respect of the use of force and restraint.

2 Purpose

- 2.1 We use this policy to protect every person from harm, to protect all pupils against any unnecessary, inappropriate, excessive or harmful physical intervention, and to ensure all of staff, visitors, volunteers and third parties (known as 'staff' in this policy) know what constitutes appropriate use.
- 2.2 We are fully aware of, and are fully committed to, the school's legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff should always act within, and in consistent with our policy on behaviour and discipline.
- 2.3 We aim that this policy makes clear when such force might be used, so that all our parents, staff and pupils understand our policy and practice and can support us in the unlikely event that this form of control will be required.
- 2.4 We ensure that pupils have a right to respect for their private life in that they expect a reasonable level of privacy (European Convention on Human Rights), so any interference with this right by the school must be justified and reasonable.
- 2.5 Our school staff have a power to use 'reasonable' force to protect children/others from harm. Correct and lawful use provides a defence to any related criminal prosecution or other legal action.
- 2.6 Suspension should not be an automatic response when a member of staff has been accused of using excessive force (see Safeguarding Policy)
- 2.7 Our Senior Leadership Team will support staff when they use this power, including any person whom the Headteacher has put in charge temporarily of pupils, such as unpaid volunteers or parents accompanying our children on a school organised visit.

3 Introduction

- 3.1 Use of physical force is not usually necessary in our schools. However, should this ever be required then it is the aim of this policy to clarify the power of teachers and other staff who have lawful control or who are in charge of pupils.
- 3.2 The provision applies when a teacher or authorised person is on the school premises and when the person has lawful control or charge of the pupils elsewhere; for example, on a school trip.

This policy does not authorise the use of corporal punishment or threat of corporal punishment in any circumstances and nor is it intended to encourage the use of inappropriate force. Our school does not permit the use, or threatened use, of corporal punishment during any activity, whether on or off the school premises, under *any* circumstances. Moreover, the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2024) requires that corporal punishment is not given by any person who cares for or is in regular contact with a child, or by any person living or working in the premises where care is provided. We are aware that if we fail to meet this standard then we would be committing an offence. Referrals to external authorities will be made where appropriate (see Safeguarding Policy).

- 3.3 We will never threaten any punishment which could adversely affect a child's emotional well-being.
- 3.4 There are a variety of circumstances in which reasonable restraint may be appropriate or necessary in order to control or restrain a pupil. If this is anticipated (i.e. in situations where a child has created a situation previously where harm to self/others has occurred/likely to occur) appropriate steps must be taken beforehand to plan appropriate responses, and a safeguarding risk assessment completed (see section 8). A person will not be taken to have used corporal punishment (and therefore [will](#) not have committed an offence), where physical intervention was taken for the purposes of averting immediate danger of personal injury to any person (including the child) or to manage a child's behaviour if absolutely necessary (Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage 2024)

When using 'reasonable force' in response to risks presented by incidents involving children with SEND, mental health problems, or with medical conditions, schools should, in considering the risks, carefully recognise the additional vulnerability of these groups. The UK government guidance ['Reducing the need for restraint and restrictive intervention'](#) sets out how to support children and young people with learning disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions, and mental health difficulties who are at risk of restrictive intervention in special education settings, however all schools may find the information helpful.

- 3.5 There is no legal definition of when it is reasonable to use force.
- 3.6 This policy takes fully into account the most recent Department of Education ([DfE](#)) UK non-statutory guidance entitled [Use of Reasonable Force](#) (DfE, July 2013) and [Searching, Screening and Confiscation \(DfE 2022\)](#)
- 3.7 This policy also supports the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework (EYFS) 2024. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) applies to children from birth to the end of the Reception year. This policy applies to the whole school and the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- 3.8 It is not illegal to touch a pupil. There are occasions when consensual physical contact, other than reasonable force, is appropriate and necessary. For example, holding the hands of the child at the front/back of the line when walking in a group, to comfort a distressed pupil (do not kiss a student), to congratulate or praise a pupil, to demonstrate a musical instrument, and of course, to give first aid. It is, however, advisable to have an adult witness present. If any member of staff is unclear about what is appropriate, they should discuss it further with their Headteacher or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in order to alleviate any doubt or uncertainty. All staff should follow the Staff Code of Conduct.
- 3.9 We do not routinely screen pupils without physical contact, although we reserve the right to do so.

4 What do we mean by reasonable force?

- 4.1 This term refers to a range of actions used by most teachers at some point in their careers which involves a degree of physical contact with children.
- 4.2 Force is usually used to control or restrain. For example, guiding a pupil to safety by the arm or more extreme circumstances such as breaking up a fight, or where a pupil needs to be restrained to prevent injury or violence.
- 4.3 What we mean by 'reasonable' is using no more force than is needed.

- 4.4 Control is usually about passive physical contact such as standing between two pupils or blocking a pupil's path, or indeed guiding them out of the room by leading them by the arm/wrist (according to safe handling).
- 4.5 Restraint refers to holding back physically or bringing a pupil under control. We only use this strategy in more extreme situations where physical intervention is the only option to keep the child/others safe.
- 4.6 We always try to avoid acting in a way that might cause injury, but in highly extreme cases this may not always be possible.
- 4.7 The decision as to whether or not to intervene physically is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned and will always depend on the individual circumstances.
- 4.8 Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or from causing disorder. It is always proportionate to the circumstances and will be dependent on the age of the pupil.
- 4.9 Wherever possible, staff should have exhausted the full range of behaviour management strategies in the Behaviour Policy which are aimed at preventing the situation from reaching the point at which physical intervention becomes necessary. Restraint is a last resort after all efforts to defuse the situation have been taken.
- 4.10 There are many alternative strategies which should be used by staff initially in situations, such as:
- An instruction is repeated until the pupil complies;
 - Use of a distractor such as a whistle to interrupt behaviour long enough for verbal methods to take effect;
 - Withdrawal of attention from the rest of the class/group when they act as an audience;
 - Avoiding confrontation;
 - Use of humour until tempers have been alleviated; and
 - Other sanctions outlined in our Behaviour Policy.

5 When might we use reasonable force?

- To remove children from the classroom if they have refused to follow an instruction to do so in the interest of the safety of others and/or the child themselves.
 - To prevent a pupil behaving in a way that disrupts a school event or on a school trip or visit.
 - To prevent a pupil leaving a classroom/other area where, allowing them to leave would risk their safety, or lead to behaviour that disrupts the behaviour of others.
 - To prevent a pupil from physically harming a member of staff or another pupil, or to stop a fight in the playground.
 - To restrain a pupil at risk of harming themselves through physical /emotional outbursts (i.e. self-harming as a coping strategy).
- 5.1 We never use force when we need to punish a pupil because to do so would be unlawful.

6 Power to Search and Confiscate from Pupils

- 6.1 School staff can search a pupil for any item if the pupil agrees e.g. by asking them to turn out their pockets or by asking them if the teacher can look in their bag or locker. An appropriate disciplinary sanction can be applied if the pupil refuses to cooperate with a search for a prohibited item (unless 6.3), as laid out in the school's Behaviour Policy and Drug and Alcohol Policy. The parents/carers of the child will be informed and there will be a record made of the search.
- 6.2 We have powers to search pupils or their possessions without consent where there is good reason to do so, but we will always seek to carry out any such search with the pupil's consent [Searching, Screening and Confiscation \(DfE 2022\)](#)
- 6.3 Staff will only search **without** prior consent where we have reasonable grounds for suspecting a pupil may have a prohibited item. Prohibited items are knives and anything that could be used as a weapon, alcohol, illegal drugs, stolen items, tobacco, cigarette papers and vapes, oral tobacco products, fireworks, pornographic images, or any other article which has been or is likely to be used to commit an offence, cause personal injury or damage to property. The child will be isolated in a safe space, their items e.g. bags, removed from them, and the prohibited item will be seized. Two members of staff will be present, if we have just cause to believe that the child has a prohibited item hidden on their person that could cause harm to themselves or others, and the child refuses to provide it, then their parents/carers will be contacted and asked to collect their child. The child will remain in the safe space and supervised until their parents/carers arrive for collection. Their items (e.g. bags) will be removed from them. Referrals to external agencies will be made where needed (see Safeguarding Policy). A record will be made of this search,
- 6.4 Staff can use this power to search pupils or their possessions under the specific authority of the Headteacher only.
- 6.5 Items which the Headteacher or authorised staff have banned and can search for are specified in the school rules contained within the school's Behaviour Policy, and Drug and Alcohol Policy. It is always made clear in communications to staff, parents and children what items are banned.
- 6.6 Staff can confiscate any prohibited item found as a result of a search, as well as any items, however found, which they consider harmful or detrimental to school discipline.
- 6.7 Searching without consent can only be used if the member of staff is the same biological sex as the pupil being searched and in the presence of a witness staff member.
- 6.8 Only outer clothing that is not worn next to the skin can be requested to be removed.
- 6.9 No intimate search is permitted by school staff. No searches will take place on the child's body or under clothing.
- 6.10 Staff can use reasonable force to conduct a search for the prohibited items listed above (in 6.30).
- 6.11 Controlled drugs and stolen items must be delivered to the Police as soon as is reasonably practical.
- 6.12 Alcohol, tobacco, vapes, cigarettes, lighters, cigarette papers, oral tobacco products, and fireworks can be retained or disposed of (if applicable).

- 6.13 We can also search to tackle cyber-bullying, Pornographic images may be deleted (witnessed) once safeguarding concerns have been completed and parents informed. has taken place. The possession of child abuse images/videos constitutes a specified criminal offence, and must be referred to the Police immediately Images/videos found that are semi-nudes/nudes of children is also a criminal offence but may be managed in school, according to the situation (please see Safeguarding Policy for managing incidents).

7 How do we ensure our approach is effective?

- We always tell the pupil what we are doing and why.
- We involve another member of staff so that there is at least one witness
- We never act in temper or lose control.
- We always respect pupils' dignity, right to respect, privacy and confidentiality.
- We never involve other pupils in any restraint (we remove other children from the area)
- We always inform the parents of what happened and why.
- We record our interventions after the event,

8 Risk Assessment and Training for Staff

- 8.1 We will carry out a written safeguarding risk assessment for any individual pupil for whom we believe that control or restraint may be needed (usually when prior concerns about behaviour/incidents have arisen where they/others have been harmed/placed at risk). This risk assessment must be shared and developed in partnership with the child's parents and will be reviewed on a regular basis.
- 8.2 As appropriate to our school population, our Senior Leadership Team will consider the needs of any of our staff who should be trained in effective techniques. The Headteacher will consider carefully if any staff member requires any additional training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities and care for any individual pupil's needs. Where the use of physical restraint is likely to be needed, staff training will first involve specialist techniques, e.g. training via organisations such as Team Teach.

9 Recording Incidents

- 9.1 We are not required to inform parents before a search takes place or to seek parental consent to *search* their child (DofE 2022), however, parents will always be informed when a pupil has been searched.
We will also record when parents are informed and by whom, as well as making a note of parental responses (see above 7).
- 9.2 We will always speak to any parent about any serious incidents which involve the use of force or physical intervention; for example, in averting danger to a child or person or to manage a child's behaviour if absolutely necessary, including children of all ages. **We will always make a written record of such, noting any witnesses and staff names involved.** Also, we will outline the antecedents and consequences, including any injury sustained and subsequent treatment. The member of staff who completes the written record will sign it.
- 9.3 The Headteacher will fill out a Serious Incident Report Form (SIRF) and submit this to Cognita's Head of Health and Safety and Regional Safeguarding Lead, following current guidance.
- 9.4 With regard to the Statutory Framework for the Early Years (2024), we will ensure that we fully comply by informing parent/carer(s) on the same day, or as soon as reasonably practicable.

Use of Reasonable Force and Pupil Screening, Searching and Confiscation Policy

- 9.5 All complaints about the use of force will be thoroughly investigated in accordance with our Complaints Procedure. The onus will be on the complainant to prove that their allegations are true.
- 9.6 Should we receive an allegation about a member of staff in relation to use of force, screening, searching and/or confiscation, we will follow the relevant section of our Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, including informing the Designated Officer (local authority).
- 9.7 The decision to exceptionally suspend any teacher rests with the Headteacher, General Manager/Managing Director (Pod), RSL, and HofHR.

10 Monitoring and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed annually by Cognita centrally, and our Senior Leadership Team and revised in accordance with changing national requirements for independent schools. Incidents involving searching or the use of reasonable force will be reported to the Cognita General Manager/Managing Director (Pod), RSL, and HofHR on the day of the search.

Version Control:

Ownership and consultation	
Document Sponsor	Group Legal Counsel
Document Author / Reviewer	Assistant Director of Education Director of Education Regional Safeguarding Lead-Europe and North America (RSL) RSL review June 2024
Consultation & Specialist Advice	
Document application and publication	
England	Yes
Wales	Yes
Spain	Yes
Switzerland	Yes (planned for 2024)
Italy	Yes (planned for 2024)
USA	Yes (planned for 2024)
Version control	
Current Review Date	September 2024
Next Review Date	September 2025
Related documentation	
Related documentation	Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy Behaviour Policy Suspension, Exclusion and Removal in Other Circumstances Policy SEND Policy Complaint Procedure Educational Visits Policy Health and Safety Policy Code of Conduct Drug and Alcohol Policy