

# **BALLYKEEL PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY UNIT**

## **Safe Handling and the Use of Reasonable Force Policy**



**August 2023**

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### **Rationale**

Ballykeel Primary School and Nursery Unit aims to deliver a broad and balanced education for each of its pupils. The paramount responsibility of every person connected with the school is the safety and welfare of its children. Through a sense of order and a sense of purpose, the care and education of our children are made more effective.

It is within this context that safe handling and the use of reasonable force may, on occasion, be necessary. Accountability for the use of reasonable force/restraint will lie within the aims which we have made clear for such circumstances.

### **Links with Other Policies**

This policy is one of the overall pastoral policies and dovetails into the school's existing positive behaviour policy, anti-bullying policy, child protection policy, special needs policy, health and safety policy and complaints policy. It also takes account of the staff development and welfare policy, teaching, learning and assessment policy and curricular policies.

### **Aims in Relation to Safe Handling and the Use of Reasonable Force**

1. To protect every person in the school community from harm.
2. To create a learning environment in which children and adults feel safe.
3. To protect all pupils against any form of physical intervention, that is unnecessary, inappropriate, excessive or harmful.
4. To provide both teaching and non-teaching staff with guidance relating to circumstances in which reasonable force might be used and how such reasonable force might be applied.
5. To maintain a clear detailed record of when and why reasonable force has to be applied.

### **Reasonable Force as a Possible Necessity**

The Department of Education Circular 1999/9 quotes Article 4 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. On any occasion where a member of staff has responsibility for a pupil (in school or outside the premises) this order permits the member of staff to use 'such force as is reasonable in the circumstances to prevent a pupil from:

- a) committing an offence
- b) causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself)
- c) engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any of its pupils, whether 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 which attempts to preserve the dignity of all concerned.

At Ballykeel Primary School we actively promote positive behaviour management strategies thus reducing the need for any form of physical intervention. The use of reasonable force with children will always be as a last resort or in an emergency where it is possible that significant harm will occur if action is not taken immediately. **It will never be used as a punishment.**

### **Situations where reasonable force might be necessary include:**

- a pupil attacking another pupil or a member of staff
- to stop pupils fighting
- a pupil causing, or likely to cause damage or injury by rough play, accident, wilful action or misuse of dangerous materials and items
- a pupil running in a corridor where there is a risk of an accident likely to injure self or others
- a pupil trying to leave school
- a pupil defying repeated instructions to leave a classroom
- a pupil seriously disrupting a lesson

### **Definition of Safe Handling and Reasonable Force**

The use of reasonable force is only lawful if circumstances warrant it. The degree of force used will be the minimum appropriate to the seriousness of the behaviour or incident that it is intended to prevent. It will be employed calmly and in a professional manner. This might include: -

- physically separating pupils
- blocking a pupil's path
- holding
- leading a pupil by the hand or arm
- shepherding a pupil with a hand on the back or shoulder
- (in extreme circumstances) using more restrictive holds

### **Unacceptable and Unreasonable Force**

The following uses of force will always be considered unreasonable and therefore will not be used in Ballykeel Primary School:

- holding around the neck
- any hold that might restrict breathing
- kicking, slapping or punching
- forcing limbs against joints
- tripping
- holding by the hair
- holding the pupil face down on the ground

When used, physical intervention should avert danger by preventing or deflecting a pupil's action or perhaps by removing a physical object which could be used to harm him/herself or others. It should, at all times, be carefully applied and may be eased by degrees as the pupil calms down in response to the physical contact. The child should be advised throughout that physical intervention will cease when he/she calms down.

The use of restraint is only likely to be needed in exceptional circumstances if a pupil appears to be unable to exercise self-control of emotions and behaviour and is presenting a threat to him/herself or others. The use of reasonable force should involve a calm and measured approach at all times and be in accordance with agreed strategies and action steps (see Appendix 1).

There may be times when members of staff should not intervene in an incident without help (unless it is an emergency) (see Appendix 2).

### **Anticipating the Use of Reasonable Force**

All staff will be encouraged to report concerns relating to routines, individuals and situations that have the potential to lead to incidents requiring the use of reasonable force. In particular, all members of staff have been briefed on the necessity for monitoring risk in their own teaching environment.

If it is considered likely that a pupil will be sufficiently disruptive to require the use of reasonable force (whether for medical, special needs or another reason), the parents/carers will be consulted and an appropriate action plan agreed.

Having completed both an individual risk assessment and an environmental risk assessment for the purposes of pupil safety and promoting positive behaviour, the situation will continue to be monitored.

### **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, eg teachers, classroom assistants, supervisory assistants.

The use of reasonable force should only be exercised in extreme circumstances, however, in an emergency any member of staff will have the authority to use reasonable force.

### **Joint School Activities**

At Ballykeel we actively promote contact with other schools most notably, but not exclusively, through our Shared Education work. The policies and procedures outlined within this policy cover all such situations when school staff share responsibility for children from both their own and other schools. As a general rule when difficulties arise in such circumstances staff will look initially to colleagues from the child's own school to intervene. At times this will not be possible and as such, staff from Ballykeel have permission to intervene, adopting fully the procedures outlined in this policy. In short in these circumstances they should act as if the pupils involved are attending their own school. Should a Ballykeel staff member become involved in the use of reasonable force/ safe handling concerning children from another school, full details of the

incident, including their involvement, should be shared with appropriate staff from the other school immediately.

### **Nursery Unit**

Ballykeel Nursery Unit aims to deliver a broad and balanced pre-school education for every child. The paramount responsibility of every person connected with the nursery is the safety and welfare of the children. Young children benefit greatly from the security of nursery routines, order and structure.

Therefore, it is within this context that safe handling and the use of reasonable force may, on occasion, be necessary. For example, during the settling in period some children may cling to their parent or main caregiver, display temper tantrums or a child with special educational, behavioural or physical needs may present more challenging behaviours such as hitting out or refusing to comply with nursery rules and routines. Reasonable force should be limited to emergency situations and used only as a last resort when all other behaviour management strategies have been exhausted.

### **Record Keeping**

All incidents involving the use of reasonable force must be recorded in the school's incident form (RF1). The Principal will keep an accurate up to date record of all such incidents. Immediately following any incident, the member of staff concerned must inform the Principal or a senior member of staff and provide the written report.

### **Complaints**

Any complaint following the use of reasonable force will be considered according to the procedures outlined in the school's policy for dealing with complaints made against a teacher (contained in Child Protection Policy).

### **Review**

This policy has been written and agreed in response to the Department of Education Circular 1999/9 and updated in light of guidance materials issued by DENI and the EA. It will be reviewed regularly in relation to ongoing individual and environmental risk analysis, advice and training. It will be available to parents/carers on request.

### Ballykeel Primary School Incident Requiring the Use of Reasonable Force (RF1)

Pupil:

Class:

Member(s) of staff who employed reasonable force:

Date:

Time:

Name of adult witness(s):

Status:

Reasons for use of reasonable force

To ensure safety

☐

To preserve order

☐

To prevent destruction

☐

Account of incident (include description of incident, reasonable force, pupil response, outcome)

Details of injury and/or damage:

Details of any measures introduced following the incident:

Signatures of staff involved:

Principal's Signature:

Copies to:

1. child's file ☐

2. staff involved ☐

3. Chairman of B of G ☐

4. Parent/Carer  
(if required) ☐

Date .....

## *Appendix 1*

### **PREVENTATIVE STRATEGIES**

All teachers need to be aware of strategies and techniques for dealing with difficult pupils and steps, which they can take to defuse and calm a situation.

The strategies listed below as examples will be influenced by the age of the pupil(s) and the context in which they are applied.

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 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:
  - providing medical support;
  - providing respite for those involved; and
  - accessing external advice/support

## *Appendix 2*

### **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 the 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
  - Inform the Principal/Vice-Principal/Member of the Senior Leadership Team
  - where necessary, contact the police
  - inform the pupil(s) that help will be arriving
- and
- continue to attempt to defuse the situation orally, and try to prevent the incident from escalating.