Highcroft School

Positive Handling and Physical Intervention Policy

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Positive Handling and Physical Intervention Policy

Policy Number:	EDU.POL.020	Policy Owner Job Role	Quality Manager
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Contributors	Rob Arrowsmith		
Mandatory Policy	Yes		
Note	This policy must not be amended without prior approval of the Education Director		

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1. Supporting Documents

This policy should be read alongside:

- Behaviour Policy (EDU.POL.027)
- Safeguarding Children in Education Policy (EDE.POL.002)
- Anti-Bullying Policy (EDU.POL.007)
- Risk Assessment Policy
- SEND Policy (EDU.POL.022)

Related policies are held within RADAR in the School's policy folder.

2. Introduction

Highcroft School a special school, and we work every day with pupils whose needs can show themselves as distressed and sometimes unsafe behaviour. At Highcroft School, we are committed to a calm, nurturing and therapeutic environment where physical intervention is a last resort and never a punishment.

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We understand distressed behaviour as a sign of an unmet need. Our first response is always to understand the pupil, prevent the crisis and de-escalate. We work to reduce restrictive practice over time, and we hold ourselves to account for doing so.

Our practice is grounded in Keys Connect, our relational, trauma-informed and attachment-informed model. When we do have to use reasonable force, we use the least force needed for the shortest time, we protect the pupil's dignity, and we record and review honestly so that we learn from every incident.

3. Aim & Scope

This policy applies to all staff, including supply staff and volunteers, and to all pupils, parents and carers, and visitors at Highcroft School It sits alongside our Behaviour Policy (EDU.POL.027) and our Safeguarding Children in Education Policy (EDE.POL.002). It aims to:

- Set out when and how reasonable force and other restrictive interventions may be used, and the strict limits on their use.
- Put de-escalation and prevention first, so that physical intervention is needed as rarely as possible.
- Protect the safety, dignity and rights of every pupil, and the safety of staff.
- Meet our statutory duties to record every significant use of force and every seclusion or restraint incident, and to inform parents.
- Make sure staff are trained, supported and clear about what is expected of them.

4. Abbreviations and Definitions

We use the definitions set out in the DfE statutory guidance.

- Restrictive intervention: any means used to prevent, restrict or subdue the movement of a pupil's body, or part of it. This is the umbrella term and covers both physical and non-physical actions.
- Reasonable force: using no more force than is necessary, for the least amount of time. All staff have a legal power to use reasonable force in limited circumstances.
- Significant incident: any use of force that goes beyond the appropriate physical contact described in this policy, including force used to carry out a non-physical restrictive intervention. A significant incident triggers the recording and reporting duties in Appendix B.
- Seclusion: a non-disciplinary intervention that keeps a pupil confined to a place away from others and prevents them from leaving, whether by physically obstructing them, blocking the exit, or making them believe they will be punished if they try to leave.
- Restraint: a non-disciplinary intervention that immobilises a pupil or limits their movement. It may or may not involve direct physical contact. Holding a pupil's arms to their sides and removing a pupil's walking aid are both forms of restraint.
- Withdrawal: supporting a pupil to move away from a situation to a calmer space, where the pupil is not prevented from leaving. Withdrawal is not seclusion.

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- Disciplinary penalty: a formal sanction given under the Behaviour Policy (EDU.POL.027). A disciplinary penalty is not a restrictive intervention and is recorded through the behaviour system, not under this policy.

5. Policy Content

5.1 Principles and Approach

At Highcroft School our practice is guided by these principles.

Relationships first. We build trust through relational, trauma informed practice. Most incidents are prevented through knowing the pupil well.

De-escalation before intervention. We use preventative and de-escalation strategies before we ever consider physical intervention. Appendix A sets out our toolkit.

Last resort. We only use restrictive physical intervention when it is necessary to prevent injury, a criminal offence, damage to property, or serious disorder, and when other options have failed.

Minimum force. We use the least force needed, for the shortest time, and we stop as soon as the risk has passed.

Dignity and rights. We protect the pupil's physical and psychological safety and their rights under the Human Rights Act 1998 at all times.

Prohibited practice. We never use force as a punishment. We do not use corporal punishment, pain-inducing techniques, or prohibited holds. We do not use a hold that restricts a pupil's ability to breathe or communicate.

Honest recording. We record every significant incident and review it openly so that we learn and reduce restrictive practice over time.

5.2 When and How We Use Restrictive Interventions

When reasonable force may be used

Staff may use reasonable force only when it is necessary to prevent a pupil from:

- Causing injury to themselves or others.
- Committing a criminal offence.
- Damaging property.
- Causing serious disorder, whether in a lesson or elsewhere on site.

Any force used must be reasonable, necessary and proportionate to the circumstances. Before and during any intervention, staff weigh the pupil's age, level of understanding, and any special educational need or disability, and take a trauma informed approach to keep distress to a minimum.

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Prohibited techniques and practice

We never use force as a punishment. We do not use pain-inducing techniques, corporal punishment, or any prohibited hold. We do not use ground holds unless they have been agreed in advance with the placing authority and senior leadership as part of a pupil's plan. If a pupil falls to the floor, staff stop the hold unless there is an immediate risk of serious harm.

De-escalation and prevention

De-escalation comes first in every situation. Staff use calm, low-key, individualised approaches, remove triggers and audiences where they can, offer choices, and carry out dynamic risk assessment throughout. Appendix A sets out the de-escalation toolkit. Known risks and strategies for individual pupils are set out in their behaviour support plans and risk assessments.

Withdrawal and seclusion

Withdrawal means supporting a pupil to a calmer space where they are not prevented from leaving. It is used with continuous staff support and clear time limits.

Seclusion has a specific legal meaning. A pupil is secluded whenever they are detained apart from others and are prevented from leaving, including where they believe they will be punished if they leave. This means a cool-off room, a calm room, or any space a pupil is kept in against their will can be seclusion under the law, even where it has not felt like restraint in the past.

Every separation of a pupil from others must therefore be one of two things. It is either a formal disciplinary penalty, logged through the Behaviour Policy (EDU.POL.027) and the sanctions record, or it is genuinely voluntary, where the pupil can demonstrably leave whenever they choose. Anything in between, where a pupil is contained with an implicit threat of consequence if they leave, is seclusion. It must be recorded and reported as set out in Appendix B. Seclusion is only ever used in exceptional circumstances, with proper authorisation and safeguarding oversight, and never through the threat of punishment.

Post-incident support and debriefing

After every significant incident we offer the pupil time and space to recover, a medical check where needed, and a restorative review. The review is led by a member of staff who was not directly involved, to keep it objective. We also support the staff involved.

Some pupils find debriefing difficult or re-traumatising. Where this is a known risk, we note it in the pupil's individual risk assessment. Where a pupil declines a debrief, staff offer it at least three times within 48 hours and record each refusal before closing the process. Parents and carers may support reflection at home where this is appropriate.

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5.3 Recording, Monitoring and Reporting

We record every significant use of force and every seclusion or restraint incident on the group incident recording system, RADAR, as soon as practicable and, wherever possible, the same day. The full statutory recording and reporting duties, the information we capture, and how we inform parents are set out in Appendix B. Related procedures and forms are held at Radar.

Senior leaders review every significant incident. The proprietor and governors receive and interrogate termly data to identify patterns, learning for staff, and any disproportionate use of restrictive interventions in relation to pupils who share a protected characteristic, have SEND, or are otherwise vulnerable. We use this analysis to improve practice and to revise behaviour support plans.

Annual restraint reduction targets will be reviewed by leaders and governors as part of the school's quality assurance and safeguarding arrangements.

5.4 Equality and Inclusion

At Highcroft School, this policy is applied fairly and without discrimination, in line with the Equality Act 2010. Almost all of our pupils have special educational needs, and we adapt our practice to each pupil so that restrictive interventions are used as rarely and as safely as possible. We monitor the impact of this policy on different groups of pupils and act on what the data shows. Any concern that this policy disadvantages a pupil or group should be raised with the headteacher.

6. Responsibilities

6.1 Pupils

Pupils are supported to recognise their own triggers and to use agreed strategies, at a level appropriate to their understanding and needs.

6.2 Staff

All staff prioritise de-escalation, use only approved techniques they are trained in, keep pupils and colleagues safe, record incidents promptly, and support pupils after an incident. Staff who are not trained to physically intervene still support de-escalation and team safety.

6.3 Leadership

The headteacher and senior leaders oversee the use of restrictive interventions, make sure staff are trained and authorised, review every significant incident, and report to the proprietor and governors. The named senior lead for positive handling at Highcroft School is Stephanie Goddard, Headteacher.

6.4 Governance

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The proprietor and governors monitor the use of restrictive interventions, receive and interrogate termly data, make sure the recording and reporting duties are met, and complete training on their oversight responsibilities.

6.5 Parents and carers

We work openly with parents and carers. We inform them of every significant incident as set out in Appendix B, and we involve them in planning support and in reviewing behaviour support plans.

6.6 Designated Safeguarding Lead

The designated safeguarding lead is informed of every significant use of force and every seclusion or restraint incident, for safeguarding oversight. The DSL at Highcroft School is Stephanie Goddard.

7. Training Requirements

All staff at Highcroft School complete accredited physical intervention training and trauma informed de-escalation training and refresh it every year. Our accredited training provider is team teach, alongside Keys Connect.

Training covers the legal framework, approved techniques, the recording and reporting duties, the seclusion definition and the language staff use in the moment, safeguarding, and post-incident support. Only staff with current certification are authorised to use restrictive physical interventions. Staff who cannot physically intervene are trained in de-escalation and supportive roles. Governors' complete induction on their oversight duties.

8. Equality Impact Statement

All policies will be developed and implemented in a manner that promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all individuals. Policies must align with relevant equality legislation and reflect the expectations and standards set by our regulatory bodies. They will demonstrate a commitment to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering an inclusive environment that respects and values the diverse needs, backgrounds, and experiences of those we support, as well as our workforce.

9. Sources of Information / References

This policy reflects current legislation and statutory guidance, including:

- Education and Inspections Act 2006, sections 93 and 93A (the power to use reasonable force, and the duty to record significant use of force).
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Standards 16A and 32A (recording, and providing information to parents), inserted by the Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025.
- The Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025 (in force from 1 April 2026).

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- Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools (DfE statutory guidance, in force from 1 April 2026, which replaces Use of reasonable force 2013).
- Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention (DfE and DHSC, 2019).
- Behaviour in Schools: advice for headteachers and school staff (DfE, February 2024).
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2025, and the 2026 edition from 1 September 2026).
- Equality Act 2010.
- Human Rights Act 1998.
- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004.
- Mental Capacity (Amendment) Act 2019, where it applies to an individual pupil.
- We also have regard to the Restraint Reduction Network Training Standards (2023) and the BILD ACT Code of Practice as best practice.

10. Version Control

This document can also be found in Radar. This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if legislation or statutory guidance changes. The next review date and version history are recorded in the control table above. The named owner for review at Highcroft School is the headteacher.

11. Appendices

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11.1 Appendix A: De-escalation Toolkit

This toolkit gives staff practical strategies to prevent and manage incidents, in line with Keys Connect and our relational, trauma informed practice. Tailor these to the individual pupil and embed them in daily practice and in behaviour support plans.

Stay calm and present

- Use a neutral, supportive tone and relaxed body language, and regulate your own emotions first.
- Approach slowly, from the side where possible, and respect personal space unless safety requires otherwise.
- Watch for early signs of distress, such as fidgeting, pacing, a raised voice or withdrawal.

Adjust the environment

- Reduce triggers such as noise, bright light or crowding.
- Offer a designated calm space, and reduce the audience where it is safe to do so.

Communicate well

- Use short, clear sentences and avoid jargon.
- Acknowledge feelings, for example, "I can see you are upset. I am here to help."
- Listen actively, and offer limited, realistic choices.
- Use visual supports such as schedules, emotion cards or timers.

Redirect and co-regulate

- Change the focus, offer a sensory object where it is in the pupil's plan, and model calm, steady breathing.
- Use grounding techniques, for example counting together or using a grounding object.
- Notice and name any positive step, however small.

Seek help early

- If you cannot de-escalate alone or safety is at risk, call for support using the agreed signal or local protocol.
- After the situation, note which strategies worked, share the learning at the post-incident review, and update plans and risk assessments as needed.

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11.2 Appendix B: Recording and Reporting Schedule (Standards 16A and 32A)

This appendix sets out the statutory recording and reporting duties for restrictive interventions. It meets Standards 16A and 32A of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025, and the DfE statutory guidance Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools (in force from 1 April 2026).

Two recording duties

There are two separate recording duties, and staff need to know which one applies.

- Significant use of force. Every significant incident in which a member of staff uses force on a pupil is recorded under section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and Standard 16A(1)(a).
- Seclusion or restraint. Every seclusion incident, and every restraint incident, is recorded under Standard 16A(1)(b) and the 2025 Regulations. This includes restraint without physical contact, for example removing a pupil's walking aid, and it includes any seclusion as defined in section 4 of this policy.

Where one incident is both a significant use of force and a seclusion or restraint incident, we record it once, under the use of force procedure. The same incident is not recorded or reported twice.

How and when we record

All recording is done on RADAR. We do not keep a separate paper record. Records are made on RADAR by the staff involved, as soon as practicable after the incident and within the timescale RADAR requires, and wherever possible the same day. The duty to record applies even where the use of a restrictive intervention has been agreed with parents in a behaviour support plan. As a minimum, the record captures:

- The names of the pupil and the staff directly involved.
- Any relevant needs or circumstances of the pupil, including whether the pupil has a special educational need or disability and their SEN status code.
- The time, date, location and approximate duration of the intervention.
- A brief account of the incident, including what led up to it, any known or potential triggers, the de-escalation strategies used, and, where relevant, the type and degree of force used and any injuries.
- A brief account of why the intervention was judged necessary in that instance.
- Any post-incident support, including any medical treatment for injuries or other adverse effects.

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Informing parents (Standard 32A)

We provide information about every significant use of force, and every seclusion or restraint incident, to each parent of the pupil. We do this as soon as practicable and, wherever possible, the same day, and we do it in writing, for example by email or messaging system. Appendix C is a template we can use to give parents this information. As a minimum, the information given to parents covers:

- The time, date, location and approximate duration of the intervention.
- A brief account of why the intervention was judged necessary.
- A brief account of the type and degree of force used.
- Details of any injuries sustained.

The duty to inform parents applies even where the intervention has been agreed in a behaviour support plan. For these reporting duties, parent includes a local authority that provides accommodation for the pupil under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Exceptions

We do not have to inform parents where the pupil is aged 20 or over. We also do not inform a parent where doing so would be likely to cause significant harm to the pupil. In that case, we inform any parent to whom we can give the information without that risk, and if there is no such parent, we inform the local authority in whose area the pupil ordinarily lives.

Follow-up and review of data

We invite parents to a follow-up discussion where this is appropriate, to talk through triggers, whether the behaviour support plan was followed, the de-escalation used, and what could be done differently. The proprietor and governors take all reasonable steps to make sure these procedures are followed, and regularly review the data to improve practice, identify staff learning, understand individual pupils' patterns, and check for any disproportionate use of restrictive interventions in relation to pupils who share a protected characteristic or have SEND.

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11.3 Appendix C: Template Letter to Parents and Carers

We use this template to give parents, carers or guardians information about an incident, as required by Standard 32A. It covers both a significant use of force and a seclusion or restraint incident. We complete it for each incident and send it in writing, for example by email or our messaging system, as soon as practicable and, wherever possible, the same day. This is the information we share with the family. It is separate from the record we make on RADAR, and from any follow-up support plan.

Dear parent or carer,

I am writing to let you know that, at Highcroft School, we needed to use reasonable force or a restrictive intervention involving your child. We always do this only as a last resort, to keep your child or others safe, and we want to be open with you about what happened. The details are below.

Information for parents and carers	Details
Pupil's name	
Date and time of the incident	
Location	
Approximate duration	
Why the intervention was necessary	
Type and degree of force or intervention used	
Any injuries, and any medical attention given	
How your child was supported afterwards	
Who to contact to discuss this	
Sent by (name and role)	
Date sent	

We would welcome a conversation with you about what happened. This could include any triggers or warning signs, whether your child's behaviour support plan was followed, the strategies we used, and what we might do differently next time. We may use what we discuss to update your child's support plan. Please contact us using the details above.

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Yours sincerely,

[Insert name and role of the member of staff sending this here]

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11.4 Appendix D: School-Specific Annex

At Highcroft School the following local arrangements apply:

All staff are trained and authorised for physical intervention – Team Teach

1. Stephanie Goddard
2. Christine Wade
3. Matthew Homer
4. Clare Whitehead
5. Philip Davies
6. Eleanor Baldwin
7. Chris Elstob

Should pupils need time away from the classroom, or following a physical intervention, they can access the sensory room with a member of trusted staff. This space can be used for as long as needed until such time that the pupil is able to re-engage in their learning.

Upon joining Highcroft School, parents/carers or professionals from placing local authorities are asked to sign a number of consent forms. One of which is for the use of Team Teach. **Any** physical intervention is only used as a very last resort.

Highcroft Schools inspectorate is ISI - Independent Schools Inspectorate, a body approved by the UK Department for Education to inspect private and independent schools in England

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