



Ashfield Girls' High School



“Each different. Each talented. All valued.”

Use of Reasonable Force Policy

Author:	Mrs L Hanvey - Principal
Adopted Date:	March 2025
Review Date:	March 2027



Use of Reasonable Force Policy



Contents Page

Page	Contents
2	Executive Summary
3	Section A – Aims of the Policy
4	Section B – Legislative Context and Linked Policies
5	Section C – Policy Procedures
9	Section D – Roles and Responsibilities
11	Section E – Consultation, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation
Appendices	Appendix 1: Use of Reasonable Force - Record



Executive Summary

Ashfield Girls' High School is committed to providing a safe and secure learning environment where every pupil can achieve their true potential. This commitment includes ensuring the safety of all individuals within the school community, including pupils, staff, and visitors.

To maintain this environment, the school has established guidelines for the use of reasonable force, when necessary. This includes the school staff using force to prevent, injury or damage. However, the use of reasonable force is strictly regulated and must be reasonable, proportionate, and necessary considering the circumstances of each incident.

The school uses preventative strategies and positive behaviour management to minimize the need for reasonable force. Staff members are trained to handle difficult situations calmly and confidently, employing clear communication and early intervention techniques.

Reasonable force may be used in specific situations to prevent harm, but it is always considered a last resort. Examples of appropriate use include breaking up a fight, preventing an accident, or stopping a pupil from leaving school premises when it poses a risk to their safety. Staff members are instructed on what constitutes reasonable force and are encouraged to seek assistance when dealing with challenging situations.

Following any incident where reasonable force is used, a written record must be made and provided to the Principal. Parents are promptly informed, and any complaints are addressed according to the school's policies. Staff members are supported in taking legal action if they are subjected to physical violence or assault. Regular training and review of policies ensure that all staff members are aware of their responsibilities and the proper procedures regarding the use of reasonable force.

By maintaining a proactive approach to safety and discipline, Ashfield Girls' High School strives to uphold its commitment to providing a secure and respectful learning environment for all.



Section A (Aims of the Policy)

The Reasonable Force Policy aims to:

1. **Ensuring a Safe Learning Environment:** The primary aim of the policy is to maintain a safe and secure learning environment for all individuals within the school community, including pupils, staff, and visitors.
2. **Protection of Individuals:** The policy aims to protect individuals from harm by establishing guidelines for the reasonable use of force when necessary, ensuring that all actions taken are in the best interest of safety and preventing harm.
3. **Promotion of Positive Behaviour Management:** The policy emphasises the promotion of positive behaviour management strategies to minimise the need for physical intervention, fostering a culture of respect, responsibility, and readiness within the school community.
4. **Last Resort Approach:** Reasonable force is considered a last resort, and the policy aims to ensure that all other measures are exhausted before resorting to physical intervention, maintaining dignity and respect for all individuals involved.
5. **Proportionate and Necessary Response:** The policy aims to ensure that any use of force is reasonable, proportionate and necessary considering the circumstances of each incident.
6. **Preventative Strategies:** The policy focuses on implementing preventative strategies to reduce the likelihood of situations requiring physical intervention, including early intervention, clear communication, and maintaining positive relationships.
7. **Individual Risk Assessment:** When necessary, the policy aims to conduct individual risk assessments for pupils who may present challenging behaviour, involving consultation with parents and proactive planning to address concerns appropriately.
8. **Transparency and Accountability:** The policy emphasises the importance of transparency and accountability by requiring written records of any occasion where reasonable force is used, ensuring clear documentation and communication with parents and relevant stakeholders.



Section B (Legislative Context and Linked Policies)

Children (NI) Order 1995
Education (NI) Order 1998 (Part II Article 4(1))
Human Rights Act 1998
Children's Services Co-operation Act
Articles 3 and 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights
Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (2005)
Equality Act 1995
Health and Safety at Work Act (NI) Order 1978 • Education (NI) Order 2003
DENI: Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour
DENI: Every School a Good School (2009)
DENI: Every Child (2023)
ETI: Inspection and Self Evaluation Framework (2017)
Children and Young Peoples' Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework (2021)
Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030
Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools (Updated September 2023).
DENI Circular 2021/13 – Restraint and Seclusion
DENI Circular 1999/9 – Guidance on the Use of Reasonable Force to Restrain or Control Pupils
DENI Circular 1998/25 – Promoting and Sustaining Good Behaviour In Schools: Summary of New Legislative Provisions
DENI Circular 2015/19 – Notification of Pupil Suspension to the Education Authority
DENI Good Behaviour At School leaflet: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/english.pdf>
Guidance on Identifying and Supporting Learners with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (2014)

Linked Policies

Behaviour for Learning and Positive Behaviour Policy
Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
School Uniform Policy
Health and Safety Policy
Anti-Bullying Policy
Pupil Wellbeing Policy
Mobile Phone Policy
Medical Needs Policy
Substance Misuse Policy
Equality and Inclusion Policy
Online Safety Policy
Pupil Voice Policy



Section C (Policy and Procedures)

Ashfield Girls' High School believes that every pupil must be supported to achieve her true potential and can only do so in the following circumstances, where:

- Each pupil has the right to be educated in a safe and secure environment
- Parents and carers are informed and reassured that their children are being educated in a safe, caring and respectful atmosphere
- All staff have the right to work in a safe and secure environment

The school seeks to create such a learning environment in keeping with the ethos of the school and to protect all people in its community from harm.

Our ethos is that behaviour is underpinned by the 3Rs. Everyone should within the school community should:

- Be Respectful
- Be Responsible
- Be Ready

All SLT, the Pastoral Team, SENCo and Assistant SENCo are authorised by the Principal to use reasonable force to prevent a pupil from:

- Committing an offence or engaging in conduct that could be an offence
- Causing personal injury to or damage to the property of herself or another person
- Causing disorder in school or engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to good discipline or when a pupil is in the charge of staff (e.g. on a school trip)

All staff (including those temporarily in charge of pupils) are authorised in an emergency to use reasonable force to prevent anyone causing personal injury to or damage to the property of herself or another person.

The right to use such reasonable force applies only on school premises or on field trips or other out of school authorised activity, sporting event or educational visit or whilst pupils are within the local community before and after the school day.



Definition

The use of force can be regarded as “reasonable” only if:

- The circumstances of the particular incident warrant it.
- The degree of force is used in proportion to the incident and is no more than is needed.

Otherwise, any use of force is unlawful

Force is used either to control or restrain and can range from leading a pupil by the arm through to more extreme circumstances such as breaking up a fight or restraining a pupil to prevent violence/ injury.

Reasonable force should not be used automatically in situations or as a form of discipline.

Physical intervention to force compliance with staff instructions should never be used as a substitute for good behaviour management.

Reasonable force might involve staff:

- Physically interposing between pupils
- Blocking a pupil's path
- Leading a pupil by the hand or arm
- Shepherding a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of her back
- In extreme circumstances using distraction techniques (e.g. patting/ slapping a student on the back), holding, pushing or pulling a pupil (e.g. separating pupils in a fight)

Preventative Strategies

The school actively promotes positive behaviour management strategies and seeks to develop good relationships at all levels thus reducing the need for use of physical intervention wherever possible.

All staff will seek to follow strategies likely to reduce the need for force in dealing with difficult pupils, based on the age of the pupil and context in which they are applied. They will endeavour at all times to:

- Move calmly and confidently
- Make clear, simple statements, telling the pupil to stop and the consequences of failing to do so
- Intervene early. Communicate with the pupil throughout the incident
- Try to maintain eye contact
- If necessary, summon another adult before the problem escalates
- If necessary, remove the audience from the immediate location

Staff should never give the impression that they have lost their temper or are acting from anger or frustration.

When the school is aware that an individual pupil is likely to behave in a disruptive way that may require the use of reasonable force, the school will draw up an individual Risk Assessment, consult parents and plan proactive and reactive measures appropriately.



When reasonable force can be used

Calm and measured responses will be considered before any force is applied in any situation. It is often inappropriate for a member of staff to intervene in an incident without help if he/ she may be at risk of injury. In this event, he/ she will remove other pupils who may be at risk and summon help from a colleague.

Reasonable force may be appropriate to restrain a pupil where action is necessary for self-defence; where there is an imminent risk of injury or damage to property or where a pupil is compromising good discipline.

Examples are:

- A pupil attacks a member of staff or another pupil
- Pupils are fighting and physical intervention is required to separate them
- A pupil is in danger of causing injury or damage by accident, rough play, misuse of dangerous materials/ substance
- A pupil attempts to leave school (only if this places pupil at risk)

In exceptional circumstances, where there is an immediate risk of injury, a member of staff may need to take any necessary action consistent with the use of reasonable force, for example, to prevent a pupil running into the path of oncoming buses or throwing something that might hit someone.

The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the judgement of the member of staff concerned and should always depend on individual circumstance.

Staff should never act in a way that might reasonably be expected to cause injury, for example by:

- Holding a pupil around the neck or collar is likely to restrict breathing
- Hitting, kicking, slapping or punching
- Throwing an object at a pupil
- Twisting or forcing limbs against a joint or tripping a pupil up
- Holding or pulling a pupil by the hair or ear
- Holding a pupil face down on the ground

Staff **should not intervene without help when dealing with an older pupil, a physically large pupil, more than one pupil or where there is a serious risk of injury**. Instead, they should remove other pupils who might be at risk, summon assistance from colleagues, inform pupils that this is being done and continue to defuse the situation orally.

Reasonable force should not be used to control a pupil in routine disciplinary situations for example:

- To block a pupil's path to stop an angry pupil walking away from a member of staff. if that pupil does not pose a threat to self or others
- To prevent a pupil exiting a room to avoid detention

In such cases, the pupil can be dealt with at a later using the school's behaviour management policy.



Use of Reasonable Force Policy

In situations where pupils refuse to leave a classroom and are prejudicing good order and discipline, staff should send for assistance from senior staff. If necessary, reasonable force will be used to remove a disruptive student if they refuse to follow an instruction to do so by senior staff.

In keeping with the ethos of the school, reasonable force will only be applied as a last resort and in a way that preserves the dignity and respect of all concerned.

A short-written record must be made of any occasion on which reasonable force is used to restrain a pupil and must be passed to the Principal by the end of the day.

The written record must include:

- Name(s) of pupil(s) concerned and when/ where incident occurred
- Names of witnesses/pupils or staff
- Reason why force was necessary
- The degree of force used and for how long
- The pupil's response and outcome of the incident
- Details of any apparent injury to the pupil or damage to the property

A member of SLT/ Pastoral Team will inform parents of the incident as soon as possible and offer them an opportunity to discuss it. Any incident will be recorded and retained and reported to the Chair of the Board of Governors. Records will be kept until the date of the child's twenty-first birthday. Staff may retain their copy of the report/ record.

Managing an incident

Staff and pupils will be given any necessary emotional support or medical aid required. Members of staff trained in first aid will check for any injuries where appropriate.

Parents will be contacted as soon as possible after any incident and any complaints by parents dealt with in accordance with the school's Complaints Policy, bearing in mind the following key points:

- School staff have a legal power to use force and lawful use of the power will provide a defence to any related criminal prosecution or other legal action
- Suspension will NOT be an automatic response when a member of staff has been accused of using excessive force
- The Principal will support the staff member if they use this power

A member of staff who is subjected to physical violence or assault will be supported in taking any necessary action against an assailant.

Training and Awareness

Regular training and awareness-raising sessions for all staff members will ensure that they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to implement the contents of this policy effectively and handle challenging situations appropriately.

This policy is one of the school's pastoral policies and should not be read in isolation from the whole school behaviour policy



Section D (Roles and Responsibilities)

Board of Governors:

- Have a written Reasonable Force Policy in place.
- Outline the strategies / guidelines to be followed.
- Ensure that the expected standards of the Reasonable Force Policy is upheld.
- Ratify the policy and ensure that it is reviewed every two years, or when guidance changes.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the policy

Principal:

- Has operational responsibility for the policy and its implementation.
- Ensure that the policy follows the appropriate DENI guidance.
- Ensure that staff are aware of the policy and its procedures.
- Ensure that the policy follows the appropriate DENI guidance.
- Provide professional learning opportunities.
- Ensure that responses are provided, including by other staff, about any concerns about the use of reasonable force.
- Ensure the review of this policy, updating it when there is new guidance.

Vice-Principals:

- Ensure that the procedures outlined in this policy are followed.
- Provide professional learning about the use of reasonable force.
- Support staff when dealing with behaviour concerns.
- Monitor and evaluate the policy's effectiveness and ensure that it is being followed.
- (Pastoral) report annually to governors regarding reasonable force incidents.
- (Pastoral) review the policy, updating it when there is new guidance released.
- (Pastoral) ensure the completion of the Education and Training Inspectorate's Annual Safeguarding Proforma, which reports on incidents involving reasonable force.

Staff:

- To intervene in instances where the use of reasonable force is considered necessary
- To demonstrate professional conduct
- To demonstrate and role model the 3Rs behaviour (respectful, responsible, ready)
- To promote and safe and caring environment
- Are aware of this policy, linked policies, and their application.
- Manage behaviour both inside and outside of the classroom
- Should communicate the school expectations, routines, values and standards
- To respond to any concern raised by pupils or parents



Use of Reasonable Force Policy

Parents:

- Should be aware of the contents of this policy (and linked policies)
- Encourage their child to display '3R' (respectful, responsible, ready) behaviours
- Encourage their child to follow the school rules
- Should report any concerns they may have regarding the behaviour of their child, promptly.
- Should report any concerns they may have regarding the behaviour of another child, promptly.
- Adjust their own behaviour towards staff.
- Accept that rules at home may differ from agreed rules in school – school rules apply to all.

Pupils

- Should be aware of the school rules – available in their planner.
- Should demonstrate the 3Rs.
- Should be aware of the expected high standards of positive behaviour and how this affects the rights of others.
- Should avoid situations which could escalate, instead seeking support from staff.
- Treat others with respect and value all members of the school community.
- Accept ownership of their own behaviour and learning and develop the skill of working independently.
- Respect school property.
- Reflect on their behaviour.



Section E (Consultation, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Policy)

This policy has been developed in consultation with governors, staff, pupils and parents.

The policy will be monitored via a range of methods. It is based on addressing presenting issues, established by a range of methods including following Department of Education Northern Ireland guidance, pupil surveys, pupil discussions, post-incident reviews, those issues raised at Student Council meetings and parent discussions.

The Reasonable Force Policy will be reviewed by all stakeholders and, if required, updated:

- following any incident which highlights the need for such a review.
- when directed to by the Department of Education Northern Ireland and in light of new guidance
- Every two-years (as identified on the front cover of this policy)

To appropriately monitor the effectiveness of the policy, the Board of Governors shall:

- be updated regularly on any regulation changes, respective of behaviour in school
- identify current issues, trends and priorities for action
- assess the effectiveness of strategies aimed at ensuring that pupils' needs are met in relation to the use of reasonable force.

Date of meeting when policy accepted by Governors	Signed by Chair or Vice Chair	Principal



APPENDIX1: Use of Reasonable Force - Record

Name(s) of pupils(s) concerned	
Date of incident	
Where incident occurred	
Staff involved	
Names of witnesses (pupils and/or staff)	
Reason why force was necessary	
The degree of force used and for how long	
The pupil's response and outcome of the incident	
Details of any apparent injury to the pupil	
Details of any damage to the property	



Challenging girls today; creating women of value in the future



Principal: Mrs Louise Hanvey BSc (Hons) PGCE, PQHNI, PGDH

Hollywood Road, Belfast
BT4 2LY

Tel: 028 9047 1744

www.ashfieldgirls.org
info@ashgirls.belfast.ni.sch.uk