



Education Trust

'Inspiring the individuals of today, for a better society tomorrow'

SAFE TOUCH AND PHYSICAL INTERVENTION POLICY

(Taking into account the restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools 2026)

Review Frequency	Annual
Reviewed	10 th March 2026
Next Review	10 th March 2027
Agreed by Trustees	10 th March 2026



Aims

The well-being, welfare and safety of all pupils and staff across the Riviera Education Trust (RET) is of paramount importance. Our approach used across the Trust is based on the teachings of Trauma Informed Schools UK (TISUK). This researched based approach is underpinned by the educational practice of 'Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect'. Therefore, children unable to control their actions or unable to appreciate danger, have a right to be protected; as do other children and staff; and staff have a duty of care to exercise.

The term 'physical contact' is used to describe the use of touch for many purposes in numerous different contexts. Our approach to physical contact within the context of safe relationships is underpinned by research and evidence.

'Social touch is a powerful force in human development, shaping social reward, attachment, cognitive, communication, and emotional regulation from infancy and throughout life.' (Cascio et al 2019)

Touch communication is associated with immediate reductions in both behavioural (Stack and Muir, 1990) and physiological (Feldman et al., 2010b) response to stress. Physical contact should always be about meeting the needs of the child. **Staff should always think before making any physical contact.** They should be clear about why their actions are in the best interest of the child concerned.

Rationale

Children learn who they are and how the world is, by forming relationships with people and things around them. The quality of a child's relationship with significant adults is vital to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing.

Our policy considers the extensive neurobiological research and studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, mental health and the development of social skills. We have adopted an informed, evidence-based decision in line with our Trauma Informed Schools UK training to allow safe touch as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

Our policy rests on the belief that **every member of staff needs to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch.**

There are circumstances when it is appropriate for staff to have some physical contact with pupils which does not give rise to any question over the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions. This will depend on the circumstance, but examples of occasions when physical contact is generally appropriate include:

- to give first aid
- to guide or escort pupils, such as holding the hand of a pupil at the front/back of the line when going to assembly, when walking together around the school or on a school trip, or when helping a pupil to a space they have chosen to access to self-regulate
- to comfort a distressed pupil
- to congratulate or praise a pupil, for example a pat on the back or a handshake

- to demonstrate how to use a musical instrument
- to demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching

In assessing whether physical contact is appropriate in each situation, the member of staff should use their judgement and have regard to:

- the school's safeguarding (or any other relevant) policy
- the applicable circumstances, such as whether there are other adults present
- the individual pupil's age
- any other material factors, including but not limited to whether: the pupil has SEND or other vulnerabilities
- any alternative strategies that do not include physical contact can be used

Different types of touch

There are four different types of touch and physical contact that may be used, these are:

1. Casual / informal / incidental touch

Staff use touch with pupils as part of a normal relationship, for example comforting a child, giving reassurance and congratulating. This might include putting an arm out to bar an exit from a room, taking a child by the hand, patting on the back or putting an arm around the shoulders. The benefit of this action is often proactive and can prevent a situation from escalating.

2. General reparative touch

This is used by staff working with children who are having difficulties with their emotions. Healthy emotional development requires safe touch as a means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, angry or sad child. Touch used to regulate a child's emotions triggers the release of the calming chemical oxytocin in the body. Reparative touch may include stroking a back or an arm, rocking gently, a hug and for younger children sitting on an adult's lap (a cushion can be used).

3. Contact/interactive Play

Contact play is used by staff adopting a role similar to a parent in a healthy child-parent relationship. This will only take place when the child has developed a trusting relationship with the adult and when they feel completely comfortable and at ease with this type of contact. Contact play may include an adult chasing and catching the child or an adult and child playing a game of building towers with their hands.

This sort of play releases the following chemicals in the brain:

- Opioids – to calm and soothe and give pleasure;
- Dopamine – to focus, be alert and concentrate;
- BDNF (Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor) – a brain 'fertiliser' that encourages growth.

4a. Positive handling (calming a dysregulating child)

All members of Trust staff have a legal power to use reasonable force (positive handling) when absolutely necessary. (Section 93, Education and Inspections Act 2006). Legislation that came into force on 1.9.98 (Section 550 of the Education Act 1996) together with national guidance 'Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools' (DfE April 2026) establishes the power of teachers and other staff to use reasonable force (positive handling) if required. DfE Guidance 2026 guidance states:

All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force in certain circumstances.

To prevent or stop a pupil from:

- causing injury to themselves or others
- committing a criminal offence
- damaging property
- causing disorder among pupils at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise

4b. Seclusion:

Seclusion is a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others and prevented from leaving. It should only be used as a safety measure to protect others from harm when a pupil is experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation. In such circumstances, the pupil is not acting with intent.

Seclusion should not be implemented by staff through threat of punishment. The place to which the pupil is confined should be safe and not feel threatening or intimidating to the pupil. The pupil should be supervised at all times during the period of seclusion. As soon as the immediate risk of harm has reduced, the pupil should be allowed to leave.

Legislation:

This policy reflects the DfE guidance on 'Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools' April 2026 and takes into account the relevant legislation in:

- the Education and Inspections Act 2006, especially sections 93 and 93A
- the Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025
- the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated regulations
- the Human Rights Act 1998
- the Equality Act 2010

We emphasise the importance of minimising the need to use restrictive interventions through whole school and individual approaches.

Whole-school Approaches:

- consideration of how the school and classroom environment can support all pupils to achieve and thrive
- sharing best practice for whole-class behaviour management, and for managing communal spaces such as corridors and playgrounds
- training staff in effective communication strategies to aid de-escalation
- development of working staff-pupil relationships and trust
- recording and analysing data on the use of restrictive interventions to inform improvement planning

Individual approaches can include:

- working closely with parents to support individual pupils
 - Giving pupils time, space and strategies to calm down before their behaviour escalates.
- strategies to support individual pupils based on their identified needs, including the development of behaviour support plans.

SEND

Where appropriate, staff should work with pupils with SEND and their parents in the co-production of any necessary behaviour support plans. Behaviour support plans should outline any adjustments, such as to



address aspects of the school environment which the pupil finds challenging and ways for pupils to communicate their needs effectively.

Behaviour Support Plans

Behaviour Support Plans will detail circumstances where it may be appropriate for staff to have increased physical contact with a pupil. This should be discussed in conjunction with the relevant people, such as teachers, parents, the pupil, pastoral staff or health professionals, and parameters around its use stated clearly in the plan. Whether the use of positive handling is appropriate will depend on the circumstances, irrespective of whether it has been considered as part of a behaviour support plan.

If a positive handling (restrictive intervention/seclusion) has to be used, we are guided by the following principles:

- Physical positive handling/seclusion should be used only as a last resort when other appropriate de-escalation strategies have failed.
- It must be used in ways that maintain the safety and dignity of all concerned.
- Staff know 'force' is not used as a punishment.
- Positive handling uses the minimum degree of force necessary for the shortest period of time to prevent a pupil harming themselves, others or property.
- The scale and nature of any physical intervention must be proportionate to both the behaviour of the pupil and the nature of the harm they might cause – to ask the question – is it necessary?
- Incidents must be recorded and reported to the Senior Leadership Team.
- Parents will be informed of each incident.

Consider, is it necessary? Is it proportionate? Have you considered the child's welfare?

Staff during the school day, or during other supervised activities, are acting in loco parentis and have a 'Duty of Care' to all children they are supervising. They must, therefore, take reasonable action to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all pupils, which may result in situations which results in positive handling strategies.

Following the DfE 2026 guidance, we cannot have a 'no contact' policy or grant any requests by parents or staff members not to use positive handling (reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions). The adoption of a 'no contact' policy at a school can leave staff unable to intervene where reasonable in the circumstances to fully protect pupils. This policy enables staff to make decisions about appropriate physical contact.

Steps to Take Before Positive Handling/Seclusion

Deescalation/prevention strategies and calming measures will be employed and the following action should be taken before a physical intervention is used.

- Applying the school's behaviour policy;
- Conversation, distraction, coaxing skills, gentle persuasion or redirection to other activities (e.g. touching the child's arm and leading him / her away from danger, gently stroking the child's shoulder);
- Be empathetic and non – judgmental.
- Avoid asking challenging questions
- Respect personal space, put distance between the child and others – move to a safer place;
- Calmly remove anything that could be used as a weapon, including hot drinks, objects, furniture;



- **Keep talking calmly to the child, explain what is happening and why, how it can stop, and what will happen next;**

Although these techniques to calm a dysregulated child are seen as best practice, individual children may require specific techniques to calm down. Reference to a child's Individual Behaviour Care Plan is required.

Staff who assess the situation as necessary in using positive handling strategies with a pupil should seek assistance from other members of staff as early as possible.

Staff who become aware that another member of staff is using positive handling with a pupil have a responsibility to provide a presence and offer support and assistance should this be required.

When positive handling/seclusion becomes necessary:

DO

- calmly tell the pupil what you are doing and why;
- use the minimum force necessary;
- involve another member of staff as soon as possible;
- tell the pupil what s/he must do for you to remove the restraint/hold (this may need

frequent calm repetition);

- use simple and clear language;
- hold limbs above a major joint if possible e.g. above the elbow to guide using the 'caring c's (open up facing palms and fingers together – avoiding a grabbing motion);
- relax your hold in response to the pupil's calming;

Wherever possible positive handling should be used by those with appropriate training (e.g. Team Teach). However, it is acknowledged this may not always be possible and positive handling may be used as an emergency measure by someone without training to ensure the safety of pupils in their care. Any physical intervention should also be conducted making reasonable adjustment for pupils with SEN or disabilities (Please refer to individual behaviour plans).

Actions after an incident that has required positive handling/seclusion

A member of the Senior Leadership team must be informed of any incident as soon as possible on the day the incident occurred, and will take responsibility for planning a debriefing once the situation has stabilised.

Debriefing:

The pupil and the member of staff will be checked for any sign of injury after an incident.

When the pupil is regulated, a senior member of staff will discuss the incident using a trauma informed approach. An appropriate member of staff should always be involved in debriefing the pupil involved, ideally someone they have an established relationship with, and any child involved with the incident should be offered support, and their parents informed.



This discussion should not take place whilst the child is still dysregulated. The child and member of staff will be given the opportunity to explain things from their perspective. All necessary steps will be taken to re-establish the relationship between the child and the school on the same day as the incident occurred, the debrief will take place as soon as possible after they return to school.

Parents will be contacted as soon as possible after the incident, to inform them of the actions that were taken and why, and to provide them with an opportunity to discuss it. Parents should be able to support their child with the debriefing session if this is appropriate for the child and situation.

A debrief will also be given to the member(s) of staff involved once an appropriate outcome has been decided.

Recording incidents which required positive handling or seclusion:

The Headteacher will be informed at the earliest possible opportunity of any incidents where positive handling was used. The Headteacher (or their nominee) will initiate the recording process as soon as practically possible after the event and review each incident.

All incidents should be recorded on the Pupil Incident Report Form – see Appendix A. All sections of this report should be completed by the member of staff involved in the incident and include full details of the event. The incident form needs to be passed to the member of SLT to continue dealing with the situation as soon as completed.

The requirement to record applies even if the use of restrictive interventions in certain circumstances is agreed with parents as part of a behaviour plan.

Use of reasonable force to search pupils

Headteachers and staff they authorise, have a statutory power to search a pupil or their possessions where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil may have a prohibited item listed in <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/550ZA>.

- (a) an article to which section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 applies (knives and blades etc);
- (b) an offensive weapon, within the meaning of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953;
- (c) alcohol, within the meaning of section 191 of the Licensing Act 2003;
- (d) a controlled drug, within the meaning of section 2 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which section 5(1) of that Act makes it unlawful for P to have in P's possession;
- (e) a stolen article;

A member of staff can use such force as is reasonable to search for legally prohibited items, but not to search for items banned under the school rules only. Staff should refer to the [Searching, Screening and Confiscation in Schools](#) guidance document for detailed advice on searching a pupil.

This policy should be read in conjunction with other Trust/School policies and guidance relating to interaction between adults and pupils, including:

Safeguarding Policy

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025

Anti-Bullying Policy



Health and Safety Policy

Code of Conduct, Special Educational Needs Policy and SEN Information Report(s)

Behaviour Policy

Complaints Policy

Whistle Blowing Policy

Dealing with Allegations against Staff.

Intimate Care Policy

It should also be read alongside the 'Use of Reasonable Force' advice document from the DfE July 2013.

Credit to Trauma Informed Schools UK and Torbay Virtual Schools Safe Touch Policy

Pupil Incident Report Form

Physical Intervention or Seclusion

Name:		DOB/Yr Group:	
Date of Incident:	Time of Incident:	Location:	
Member of staff involved:		Duration of Intervention:	
SEND Status: Y/N		SEND status Code:	
Pupil Witnesses:		Staff Witnesses:	
Reason for Intervention: please highlight: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Injury to person/self• Significant damage to property• Criminal offence• Serious disruption• Absconding putting self at risk• Other:			
External agencies informed: please highlight <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medical staff• Parent/carer• Social Care• Police• Other:			
Details of incident and events leading to the situation:			
Behaviours that occurred:			

Who was at risk?

Diversions, Distractions and De-escalation strategies attempted: (please highlight)

Verbal advice	Time out	Moving to a different location
Limited choice	Clear next steps	Success reminders
Clear directions	Clear consequences	Time given to thinking
Distraction	PACE	Reassurance
Time given	Change of staff	Space given
Reassurance		

Other:

Please detail reasons why physical intervention/positive handling approach was felt necessary and appropriate to the situation:

Was pupil told the physical intervention would take place before it happened? Y/N

Physical intervention used and outcome:

Was any medical treatment needed?

Action taken following incident:

Parent/Carer informed by phone

Parent/carer informed by letter

Date parent/carer informed of incident:

Informed by:

Outline of parent/carer response:

Please highlight:

Person responsible for safeguarding has checked this record and logged on CPOMS

Staff support



Relationship repair Debrief session held Behaviour plan reviewed and amended	
Name and signature of staff completing report:	Date:
Name and signature of SLT member:	Date:

Parent Report of Physical Intervention

Name:		
Time:	Date:	Location:
Why was intervention assessed as necessary?		
What happened? (Type of force and degree of force)		
Follow up discussion on:		
Follow up discussion:		
Triggers		
Behaviour support plan		
De escalation		
What can be done differently in the future?		



Terminology for clarity from the April 2026 guidance, 'Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools.

Restrictive intervention: a means to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil. This guidance uses 'restrictive interventions' as the umbrella term to describe both physical and non-physical actions aimed to restrain pupils in different ways.

Reasonable force: a term used in legislation which includes physical restrictive interventions. All members of school staff have the legal power to use reasonable force in limited circumstances.⁴ Reasonable means using no more force than is necessary for the least amount of time, the application of which will depend on the circumstances.

Significant incident: any incident where the use of force goes beyond appropriate physical contact between pupils and staff. This includes when physical force is used to implement a non-physical restrictive intervention.

Seclusion: a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others, and preventing them from leaving either by physical obstruction, blocking, or making them believe they will be punished if they try to leave.

Restraint: a term used in legislation referring to a non-disciplinary intervention which immobilises a pupil or limits their movement. This may or may not include direct physical contact. For example, holding a pupil's arms to their sides or removing a pupil's crutches would both be considered forms of restraint. The various restrictive interventions above have been defined for completeness and should not be construed as an endorsement or otherwise for their use in schools. Some will not be relevant to most schools.





DETAILS OF AMENDMENTS

September 2023

- New Policy adopted.

January 2025

- Reviewed without change.

March 2026

Reviewed and amended taking into account Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools Guidance for schools in England April 2026

