



—ST THOMAS—  
**AQUINAS**  
CATHOLIC MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

# Positive Handling Policy

**Approved by:**

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## 1. Introduction

The St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi Academy Trust (STACMAT) is committed to following the DFE Guidance 'Restrictive Interventions, including use of reasonable force in schools' (dated April 2026) which provides advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies:

*'The use of restrictive interventions, including reasonable force and seclusion, can have a significant impact on the pupils, staff members and parents involved, as well as the wider classroom. However, there are times when the use of restrictive interventions will be lawful and necessary; for example, to keep individuals and the wider school community safe.'*

Furthermore, the STACMAT schools will:

*'...proactively minimise the need to use restrictive interventions through early support, prevention and de-escalation strategies, and when necessary, to help school staff feel more confident in knowing how to use these interventions safely, appropriately and lawfully.'*

Further information regarding the DFE guidance can be found by clicking this link.

[Restrictive interventions including use of reasonable force in schools.pdf](#)

**1.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's Behaviour and Safeguarding & Child Protection Policies.** It details how we will implement guidance provided by DfE, Team-Teach and other relevant advice.

**1.2 The term 'positive handling' includes a wide range of supportive strategies** for managing challenging behaviour. A clear and consistent positive handling policy supports all pupils, including those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, within an ethos of mutual respect, care and safety.

**1.3 Staff have a duty to intervene** to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, damaging property, or to maintain good order and discipline. Furthermore, the school takes seriously its duty of care to pupils, employees and visitors to the school.

- The first and paramount consideration is the welfare of the children in our care.
- The second is the welfare and protection of the adults who look after them.

1.4 Staff at St Paul's are trained to look after pupils in their care and aim to focus on de- escalation techniques wherever possible. If a member of staff who is not trained in Team-Teach ever needs to intervene physically, they will follow the school's Positive Handling Policy. (see section 3)

**1.5 Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006** (the Act) enable school staff to use such force as is reasonable. There is no legal definition of when it is reasonable to use force.

**1.6 DfE guidance on the use of 'Restrictive Interventions including use of reasonable force in schools'** (2026) states that in addition to the general power to use reasonable force, headteachers and authorised staff can use such force as is reasonable given the circumstances to conduct a search for "prohibited items". Force cannot be used to search for items banned under school rules.

**1.7 DfE guidance and the Act make it clear that all members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force**, and that the power can also apply to people whom the headteacher has temporarily put in charge of pupils, such as unpaid volunteers or parents accompanying students on a school organised visit. However, in our school, wherever possible, staff trained in the pre-emotive and responsive positive handling strategy techniques of Team-Teach will use physical intervention techniques with children, and only when necessary.

**1.8 Any member of staff may be required to physically intervene** with a pupil for the following reasons:

1. Causing injury to themselves or others
2. Committing a criminal offence
3. Damaging property
4. Causing disorder among pupils at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise

Staff who are likely to need to use reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions will be Team Teach trained to employ safe and lawful use in addition to other preventative strategies.

Although any member of staff may be required to physically intervene with a pupil who is endangering themselves or others, damaging property or to maintain good order and discipline, we would expect Team Teach trained staff to take over as soon as possible.

**1.9 In March 2019 the Equality and Human Rights Commission** published the guidance document, ‘Human rights framework for restraint’. This guidance sets out key principles of articles 3, 8 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), incorporated into domestic law by the Human Rights Act 1998, which govern the use of restraint across all settings:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/human-rights-framework-for-restraint.pdf>

## **2. Team-Teach**

**2.1 Team-Teach is accredited through ICM** (Institute of Conflict Management). Staff undergo a one- or two-day course (depending upon the needs of the children they are working with) led by two qualified trainers with a refresher course undertaken every two years.

**2.2 Further details of the Team-Teach approach** can be found on the Team-Teach website. The website address is [www.team-teach.co.uk](http://www.team-teach.co.uk)

**2.3 School staff trained in Team-Teach techniques** should meet with DSL to share their experiences, and practice their techniques, to keep their knowledge and skills up to date.

## **3. Before using physical interventions**

### **3.1 We take effective action to reduce risk by:**

- Undertaking a dynamic risk assessment and showing care and concern by acknowledging unacceptable behaviour and requesting alternatives using negotiating and reasoning.
- Giving clear directions for pupils to stop.
- Reminding the pupil about rules and likely outcomes.
- Removing an audience or taking vulnerable pupils to a safe place.
- Making the environment safer by moving furniture and removing objects which could be used as weapons.
- Using positive guidance to escort pupils to somewhere less pressured.
- Ensuring that colleagues know what is happening and call for help.

**3.2 Whilst or before intervention, staff should speak calmly as a way of reassurance e.g. “I am doing this to keep you safe.”**

## 4. Use of Restraint, Restrictive Interventions and Reasonable Force

The DFE provides the following definitions as guidance:

**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. 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.

DFE guidance states that:

**'Seclusion 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.'**

**An incident involving the use of seclusion must be recorded and reported in accordance with the procedures outlined in the section on ‘Recording’ (Section 8)**

**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.

**4.1 The term ‘physical restraint’** is used when force is used to overcome active resistance.

**4.2** At this school, we only use physical restraint when there is no realistic alternative and for the shortest amount of time possible. We expect ***all*** staff to conduct either a dynamic risk assessment or use the written risk assessment where appropriate. We expect staff to think creatively about alternatives to physical intervention which may be effective. The paramount consideration is that the action is taken in the interest of the child and that it reduces rather than increases risk. Any response to challenging behaviour should be reasonable, proportionate and necessary. Physical restraint must only be in accordance with the following:

- The member of staff should have good grounds for believing the child is in immediate danger of harming themselves or another person, in danger of seriously damaging property or not maintaining good order or discipline.
- Only the minimum force necessary to prevent injury or damage should be applied.
- Every effort should be made to secure a minimum of two Team-Teach trained members of staff present before applying the restraint. Other staff can act as assistants or witnesses.
- Once safe, the restraint should be relaxed to allow the child to regain self-control.
- Restraint should be an act of care and control, NOT punishment.
- Physical restraint should not be used purely to force compliance with staff instructions when there is no immediate danger to people and property.
- After the event, the restraint should be discussed with the child, by Senior Leaders and/or DSL’s if appropriate, and the parents at the earliest and opportunity

### **4.3 Determining when use of restrictive interventions is appropriate**

There will be times when school staff may need to use restrictive interventions, and they should know this option may be available to them. The decision on whether it is reasonable to use a restrictive intervention depends on the individual circumstances of each situation. To make this assessment, the member of staff should consider the following:

#### **Is it necessary?**

- Staff should consider whether there are other more effective, less restrictive ways to manage a situation.
- Staff should assess whether a restrictive intervention is likely to successfully reduce the relevant risks, or whether its use would escalate the situation further or cause more harm than the behaviour itself.
- Where possible, staff should communicate with other staff members to understand any broader risks in the environment.

#### **Is it proportionate?**

- Staff should use the least amount of force or least restrictive intervention necessary for the least amount of time required to reduce the relevant risks.
- If the intervention itself is escalating the situation, staff should reconsider their approach and attempt an alternative strategy.
- Staff should consider the personal circumstances of the pupil such as medical conditions, special educational needs or other vulnerabilities, their characteristics such as age and size, and must consider relevant equality implications.

Staff should seek to understand the underlying triggers of challenging behaviour so that they can provide proactive support, create an inclusive environment and consider the impact of school policies on pupils with SEND.

Staff should develop proactive strategies to reduce the likelihood of restrictive interventions being used. They should also work with the pupil, parents and other professionals to develop prevention and de-escalation strategies.

- The definition of reasonable, proportionate, necessary and safe practice can change and evolve and that this will be kept under review.

#### **4.4 The use of reasonable force to search pupils**

The Head teacher 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. 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.

Prohibited items include:

Knives and blades

- Offensive weapons
- Alcohol
- Controlled drugs
- A stolen article
- An article a member of staff reasonably suspects has been or may be used to commit an offence or to cause personal injury to or damage the property of any person
- Any other item which the school rules identify as an item for which a search may be made.

The Searching, Screening and Confiscation in Schools guidance can be found here.

#### **5. Responding to unforeseen emergencies (Dynamic Risk Assessment)**

**5.1 Even the best planning system cannot cover every eventuality**, and the school recognises that there are unforeseen or emergency situations in which staff must think on their feet.

**5.2 An unforeseen event may require an emergency response** with a dynamic risk assessment. After that event, staff have a duty to plan ahead and prepare a risk assessment in the form of a Positive Handling Plan (PHP), Behaviour Support Plan etc. (Different schools within the Trust may have alternative names for this.)

#### **6. Positive Handling Plan (including risk assessment process)**

**6.1 Risk assessments are required for pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour.** Responsible staff should think ahead to anticipate what might go wrong. Parents will be consulted to give their views and contribute to with the ongoing risk

assessment which is an ever-changing document which will be reviewed when necessary.

**6.2 When considering a pupil's behaviour**, staff and parents will think about the following questions

- Can we anticipate a Health and Safety risk related to this pupil's behaviour?
- Have we got all the information we need to conduct the risk assessment?
- Have we provided a written plan?
- What further steps can we take to prevent dangerous behaviour from developing?

**6.3 Staff may also need to make an individual risk assessment** where it is known that force is more likely to be necessary to restrain a particular pupil, such as a pupil who is considered to be at greatest risk of needing positive handling interventions due to their special educational need (SEN) or disability. Positive Handling Plans/Behaviour Support Plans should be compatible with a pupil's EHCP, if they have one, and properly documented in the school records.

**6.4 An individual risk assessment is essential for pupils whose SEND are associated with:**

- Communication impairments that make them less responsive to verbal communication
- Physical disabilities and/or sensory impairments
- Conditions that make them fragile, such as haemophilia, brittle bone syndrome or epilepsy
- Dependence on equipment such as wheelchairs, breathing or feeding tubes.

**6.4 Risk management is regarded as an integral part of behaviour management planning.** All pupils who have been identified as presenting a risk, should have a PHP. The plan details strategies which have been found effective for that individual, along with any particular responses which are to be avoided. Any particular physical techniques which have been found to be effective should be named, along with any alerts to any which have proved to be ineffective, or which have caused problems in the past. PHPs should be considered along with the child's EHCP or any other planning document relevant to the pupil such as

an IHCP or Pupil Passport. The PHP should take account of the age, sex, level of physical, emotional and intellectual development, special needs and social context. Parents will be involved in the writing of each PHP and PHP review.

## **7. Post Incident Debrief**

**7.1 After any incident a full debrief should take place** so that learning can inform practice.

**7.2 Following an incident, it is the policy of the school to offer support to all** involved. This is an opportunity for learning, and time needs to be given for following up incidents so that pupils and staff have an opportunity to express their feelings, suggest alternative courses of action for the future and appreciate another person's perspective.

**7.3 It is difficult to devise a framework of support that meets the needs of all.** As individuals we all vary in how much support we need after an unpleasant incident. Generally, a member of senior staff would expect to talk to staff and children involved in any incidents involving any restraint. If the staff or pupils need time to rest or compose themselves, then the Headteacher, Deputy or Assistant Headteacher will make arrangements for this to happen.

**7.4 Following an incident,** consideration may be given to conducting a further risk assessment, reviewing the PHP, the school Behaviour Policy or this policy. Any further action in relation to a member of staff or pupil will follow the appropriate procedures.

## **8. Recording**

### **8.1 Good practice requires that:**

All incidents where restraints are used are to be recorded using a Trust wide Microsoft reporting form called Positive Handling and Physical Support. The link can only be opened by STACMAT colleagues.

This report will be saved as a PDF and uploaded to the young person's page on CPOM's under the Positive Handling category.

**8.2 Within these recording strategies, all details must be recorded on CPOM's,** as soon as practicable after the event and preferably by the end of the school day or, at the latest, within 24 hours of the incident. Parents will be informed of the incident and that a report has been written which they may request. The electronic version will be saved on the child's CPOMs profile. All staff involved in

an incident should contribute to the record which should be completed before the colleague leaves site that day or, in the event that is not physically possible, at the latest within 24 hours of the event occurring.

**8.3 A report of the incident made to parents should include the following details as a minimum:**

- time, date, location and approximate duration of the intervention
- brief account of why the intervention was assessed as necessary in that instance
- brief account of what type of force was applied, and the degree of force
- details of any physical injuries sustained, if applicable

**Best practice would include inviting parents to have a follow-up discussion about the incident where appropriate. This could involve a discussion about:**

- any behavioural triggers or warning signs of an impending incident
- whether any agreed behaviour support plans were followed
- what de-escalation strategies were used and how effective they were
- what might be done differently in the future

**8.4 Any injury/harm to staff or children involved in an incident must be reported to the Head Teacher and when deemed necessary, the STACMAT CEO and Director of Safeguarding.**

**8.5 All documentation must be held by the school for a certain period of time**  
Primary schools should keep documents until the pupil leaves the school. Records should then be transferred to the secondary school or another primary school.

Secondary schools should retain pupil records until the student's 25th birthday. If the file relates to child sexual abuse, it should be retained until the student's 75th birthday.

## **9. Monitoring and Evaluation**

**9.1** The Headteacher will ensure that each incident is reviewed and instigate further actions as required.

**9.2** Paragraph F2 of the Human rights framework for restraint states 'To know whether discrimination is occurring, public bodies should collect and analyse data on their use of restraint, to identify if restraint is being used disproportionately against people with particular protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, or who share other identifiable group characteristics, for example, women, ethnic minorities, or people with particular impairments such as learning disabilities.' The Headteacher will regularly review the use of restraint to avoid unintended discrimination.

## **10. Complaints and Allegations**

Any complaints will follow the school's Complaint Procedure.

## **11. Other Physical Contact with pupils.**

**Our schools do not have a 'no contact' policy.**

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. 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 child protection (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 o any alternative strategies that do not include physical contact can be used

This list is not exhaustive but provides some examples of situations where physical contact is proper and necessary.