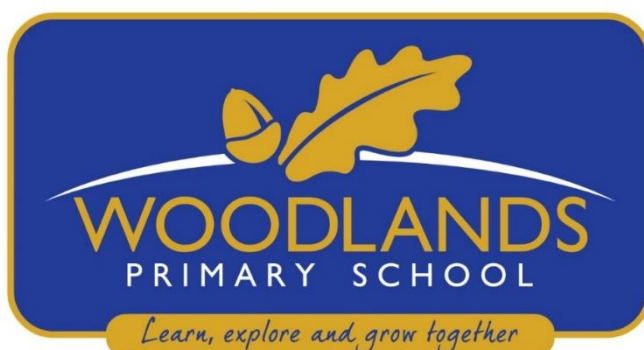


# Woodlands Primary School

## Physical Contact Policy



Written by	Amy Adams
Ratified by Governors	July 2024
Date for Review	July 2027
Signed – Chair of Governors	
Signed – Headteacher	
Is this an internal or external policy?	External
Is this based on a model policy?	No

This policy has been impact assessed by Vicki Lonie in order to ensure that it does not have an adverse effect on race, gender or disability equality

## 1. Policy Statement

We believe that children's experience of touch should be positive and that educating them will allow them to safeguard themselves now and in their future lives.

Our policy on touch reflects our shared understanding that touch is essential to child development and has been developed with due consideration of neuro-biological research and child development studies that identify safe touch as positively contributing to brain development, mental health and the development of social skills.

At Woodlands Primary School, we have adopted an informed, evidence-based decision to allow safe touch as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

We, therefore, aim to ensure that all staff and people whom the headteacher has temporarily put in charge of pupils (including unpaid volunteers or parents accompanying pupils on a school-organised visit) know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Staff need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference and feel confident to teach accordingly. Equally, when a child is in deep distress, staff are trained to know when and how sufficient connection and emotional support can be provided without touching. Through this proactive approach, we intend that young people are empowered to identify, communicate about and respond to both appropriate and inappropriate touch.

## 2. Aim of the Policy

- To ensure that all learners are treated fairly and shown respect
- To help learners take control over their behaviour and be responsible for the consequences of it
- To build a community which values kindness, care, good humour, good temper and empathy for others
- To promote community cohesion through improved relationships

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Behaviour policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- SEND/Inclusion policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Anti-bullying policy

It has been written with reference to the following legislation:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education Sept 2023
- The DfE - Use of Reasonable Force – Advice for Head teachers, Staff and Governing Bodies' Feb 2024
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education July 2015

## 3. Purpose of the policy

- To ensure we are able to carry out our duty of care towards all of our children and place the best interests of the child as our paramount consideration
- To promote the well-being of children in the knowledge that nurturing touch is a basic need and a powerful tool to help children develop into healthy, well-balanced human beings
- To promote an ethos of respect for self and others

### **3. What does the research tell us about touch and development?**

- Biologically, touch is the first sense to develop and the last to leave us. By the 7th week of pregnancy, a baby reacts to touch
- Feel-good chemicals are released in the brain through caring interactions
- The body and brain will stop growing if there is a lack of touch in infancy
- Families and cultures that express warm physical affection have fewer issues with anger and aggression
- Many children often learn best through touch and movement

For many of our young people, there are times when they are unable to regulate their own emotions and may act out their emotions physically. At these times, use of reasonable force may be necessary to calm a young person to keep them and others safe. The staff at Woodlands Primary School are trained in positive handling in order to minimise risk and to ensure staff are empowered to act in the best interests of the child at all times. (see Behaviour Policy and later in this policy)

Instances of positive handling can be traumatic for both the young person and staff involved and so we recognise the importance of effective debriefing. We also know that there may be occasions where young people have actively sought physical containment in the only way they know how. Research shows that physical proximity can calm a child. Sometimes it really helps to hold a distressed child as long as the adult remains calm and in control. Being next to a calm body will bring an over-aroused body and brain systems back into balance and release natural, calming hormones. (Margot Sunderland)

#### **The impact of positive touch:**

Access to physical proximity and positive touch has been shown to:

- improve concentration
- improve cooperation
- increase a stronger sense of self and higher self-esteem/confidence
- reduce aggressive behaviour
- encourage a calmer classroom environment
- encourage empathy and respect for their peers
- enable the children to recognize difference between good and bad touch
- encourage a more relaxed and focused feeling in the school
- discover differences between people
- encourage and develop the imagination
- improve communication

### **4. Children's rights and appropriate touch**

All children have the same rights. These rights are listed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A recurrent theme throughout is that of respect. Except during positive handling, all physical contact should be with the young person's consent.

Our procedures adhere to the belief that every individual needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. There are a number of factors that can affect how we interpret

‘appropriate’ touch. Social rules that say what behaviour is appropriate around other people can be difficult for some children to pick up. Many of us learned these social rules by observation but some children will not be able to do this and they will need to be explicitly taught these skills. ‘Appropriateness’ is dependent on relationships, situations, past experiences and gender as well as specific special needs including sensory sensitivity, and attachment.

In Western culture, it is generally accepted that appropriate places to touch are the shoulders, arms and back. However, we need to be aware that there are considerable cultural differences that may be applicable to both young people and staff in the school. Assumptions should not be made about this. We also know that touch zones vary according to the gender of both parties. Again, staff need to show an awareness of this in their interactions with the young people in their care.

Some forms of touch are generally agreed as tools we use intentionally and strategically to enhance a sense of connection with a young person to soothe, greet, relax, quiet down or reassure them. Following are examples of different types of touch:

1. **Greeting and departure gestures:** handshakes, greeting or departing embraces. These gestures vary from culture to culture.
2. **Conversational markers** such as a light touch on the arm, hand, back or shoulder to enhance other forms of communication.
3. **Consolation touch:** providing a comforting hug, holding hands or shoulders in response to grief, sorrow, distress, anguish, agony, sadness or upset.
4. **Reassuring touch:** a pat on the back or shoulders encourages and reassures
5. **Grounding or reorienting touch:** touching the hand or arm to help reduce anxiety or dissociation by helping a young person be aware of his or her physical body.
6. **Task-oriented touch:** offering a hand to help someone stand up or stop the young person from falling.
7. **Instructional or modelling touch** such as demonstrating how to give a firm handshake or how to respond to unwanted touch.
8. **Celebratory or congratulatory touch:** ‘high-fives’, a pat on the back or a congratulatory hug for the young person who has succeeded with a goal or good effort toward a goal.
9. **Inadvertent touch:** This refers to touch that is unintentional or involuntary.

At Woodlands Primary School, by ‘appropriate touch’ we mean touch that is not invasive, hostile, punishing, humiliating or could possibly be considered as eroticising or flirtatious. Naturally, staff are also fully aware of touch that is invasive or which could be confusing, traumatising, or experienced as eroticising in anyway whatsoever. Should any such touch be used, it would be deemed as the most serious breach of the Code of Conduct warranting the highest level of disciplinary action. Our Safeguarding Policy outlines the necessity to ensure all young people are safe in their bodies and their feelings and how the staff work together to ensure this is the case. Where staff are acting in the best interests of the young person, they will be supported by the school.

## 5. Safeguarding

Staff should always consider and abide by the Staff Code of Conduct. Any member of staff who is concerned about another member of staff’s practice should discuss their concerns with headteacher, or chair of governors in the case of concerns about the headteacher.

## 6. Positive Handling and Reasonable Force

At times, some pupils become dysregulated. They can become a danger to themselves or others, or have a negative impact on the learning of others. This may require adults to support children with positive handling.

What is reasonable force?

- The term 'reasonable force' covers the broad range of actions that involve a degree of physical contact with pupils.
- Force is usually used either to control or restrain. This can range from guiding a pupil to safety by the arm through to more extreme circumstances such as breaking up a fight or where a pupil needs to be restrained to prevent violence or injury.
- 'Reasonable in the circumstances' means using no more force than is needed.
- Schools generally use force to guide and support pupils and to restrain them. Control means either passive physical contact, such as standing between pupils or blocking a pupil's path, or active physical contact such as guiding a pupil out of a classroom.
- Restraint means to hold back physically or to bring a pupil under control. It is typically used in more extreme circumstances, for example when two pupils are fighting and refuse to separate without physical intervention.
- School staff should always try to avoid acting in a way that might cause injury, but in extreme cases it may not always be possible to avoid injury to the pupil.

### Staff Authorisation

Permanent authorisation:

All teachers and support staff who have control or charge of pupils automatically have the statutory power to use force. This includes teachers, teaching assistants and pupil welfare staff.

Temporary authorisation:

This may be issued by the Headteacher to other members of staff involved in supervising pupils, e.g. site staff, office staff or volunteers. Any such authorisation will be given in advance and will be time limited – for example on a school trip. It is not expected that volunteers would have sole charge of pupils with a behaviour plan or risk assessment – but volunteers may need to exercise force to prevent an accident. This is legal and expected.

### Deciding whether to use force.

Force may be considered when:

- There is a need to prevent injury to another pupil and/or member of staff or to the pupil themselves
- A pupil fails to comply with a reasonable instruction to stop an action that is potentially dangerous to themselves or others
- A pupil's actions place in jeopardy the health and safety of others
- A pupil's behaviour seriously prejudices good order and discipline in the school

Members of staff should use the following guidelines to decide whether or not force should be used in particular circumstances:

- The potential consequences of not intervening were sufficiently serious to justify considering using force.
- The chances of achieving the desired result by other means were judged to be low.
- The risk associated with not using force outweighs those of using force.
- There was identifiable risk to other pupils and/or members of staff and/or school property.

Proper account should be made of any particular Special Education Need and/or disability that a pupil may have.

It is worth noting, however, that decisions often need to be made quickly and that the professional judgement of the member of staff involved is key.

Staff should seek to minimise the most serious risks, for example calling the police for assistance if necessary and ensure that any force used is necessary, reasonable and proportionate.

### **Using force:**

- It is important to use the minimum force necessary to achieve the desired result. It is always unlawful to use force as a punishment.
- A clear verbal warning should be given to the pupil that force may have to be used.
- Restraint that is likely to injure a pupil (particularly anything that could constrict breathing) should only be used in extreme cases or where there was no viable alternative.
- Wherever possible force should not be used unless there is another responsible adult present to support, observe and call for assistance.

The types of force used could include:

- Passive physical contact resulting from standing between pupils or blocking pupils
- Active physical contact such as:
  - leading a pupil by the hand
  - ushering a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of the back
  - in more extreme cases using appropriate positive handling and physical restraint

Where there is a high and immediate risk of death or serious injury, a member of staff is justified in taking any necessary action (consistent with seeking to use the minimum force required to achieve the desired result) e.g., preventing a pupil running into a busy road or preventing a pupil hitting someone with a dangerous object such as a hammer or glass bottle.

Examples of situations that call for judgements on positive handling will include:

- A pupil attacking a member of staff, or another pupil
- Pupils fighting
- A pupil deliberately damaging property
- A pupil causing, or at risk of causing, injury or damage by accident, rough play, or by misuse of materials or objects
- A pupil persistently refusing to follow an instruction to leave a classroom
- A pupil behaving in a way that seriously disrupts a lesson, school event or visit
- A pupil placing him/herself at risk by leaving school without permission

In these examples the use of force would be reasonable if the behaviour was sufficiently dangerous or disruptive to warrant physical intervention and could not realistically be dealt with by other means.

## Recording incidents

CPOMS should be used for recording incidents – when ‘Behaviour incident’ is selected

### De-escalation strategies used

- Verbal Advice, support and reassurance
  - Humour
  - Distraction
  - Offer of a job or responsibility
  - Change of face
  - Safe space offered
  - Two closed choices
- Indicate which de-escalation strategies were used

### Positive Handling - description of hold

- Friendly hold
- Show and go
- Offering a hand or arm
- Caring c guide
- Turn, gather, guide walking
- Shield guide
- 2 person - single elbow
- 2 person - figure of four
- 2 person seated chair, beanbag, floor
- Standing dead weight to ground

### Positive handling - Duration (minutes)

Add in time in minutes that positive handling was used for

### Positive handling - first aid or injury

Give specific information of any first aid or injury received or given to child or adult involved

### Positive handling - debrief

- Adults involved have had debrief opportunity
- Parents have been made aware positive handling has been used
- Child has had debrief opportunity
- Child has risk assessment put in place as a result of incident or current risk assessment is updated

## 7. Complaints

All complaints made relating to the use of force will be dealt with according to the school’s complaints procedure. Allegations about a member of staff will follow Kent County Council guidelines.

## 8. Training

All teaching staff will receive regular training as part of INSET provision on the appropriate use of force. Identified staff will also have additional training in types of restraint.

## 9. Monitoring and Review

The Headteacher and members of the Leadership Team will monitor the use of this policy on a day to day basis. Periodic reports will be made to the Governing Body about the use and implementation of this policy.

The policy is subject to regular review, according to the cycle of policy review determined by the Governing Body.

## **9. Equal Opportunities:**

The governors and staff are committed to providing the full range of opportunities for all pupils, regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, social, cultural or religious background. All pupils have access to the curriculum, and the right to a learning environment, which dispels ignorance, prejudice or stereotyping.