

POSITIVE TOUCH POLICY



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Signed:	Alex Bone
Position:	Safeguarding Governor
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Spinfield School

Positive Touch Policy

Applies to: All staff, volunteers and governors.

This Policy must be read in conjunction with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies.

Members of staff in a caring school recognise physical contact as an important part of child development and guidance. Whilst this Policy relates to the whole school, practitioners should relate intuitively to the child in a developmentally appropriate way. Practitioners understand physical contact may be communication and they recognise the importance and significance of non-verbal communication and respond appropriately.

Should a child shun the comfort offered through touch, the child's wishes will be respected by the member of staff dealing with the situation.

1. Purpose

This policy clarifies when and how positive, appropriate physical contact with pupils may be used in our primary school to promote wellbeing, emotional regulation and learning while protecting pupils and staff and meeting statutory safeguarding and legal requirements.

2. Principles

- Children benefit from safe, respectful, developmentally appropriate touch as part of everyday care, comfort and teaching. Evidence from psychology and neuroscience shows that warm, reassuring touch can help calm distress, support attachment and learning, and reduce stress responses in children. PMC+1
- Physical contact must always be purposeful, minimal, non-sexual, culturally sensitive and explained to the child where possible. Staff must use the least intrusive response necessary. [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)
- The child's wishes and best interests are paramount: no touch should happen if a child says "no" or clearly withdraws consent, unless a necessary safeguarding intervention or reasonable force is required to prevent harm.

3. Legal & statutory framework

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (statutory guidance) Schools must safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils and ensure staff are trained and aware of safeguarding responsibilities. Physical contact must be managed within these safeguarding duties.
- Use of Reasonable Force (DfE guidance) Staff may use reasonable force to prevent harm, remove a pupil from danger, or to maintain safety, but any force must be reasonable, proportionate and recorded; routine comforting or guidance is distinct from restraint.

[Use of reasonable force in schools - GOV.UK](#)
[Consultation on the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions guidance](#)

- Other statutory duties (Education Act duties on safeguarding; local child protection procedures and reporting) also apply. Schools must follow local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and keep accurate records of incidents.

Note: This policy is written to align with KCSIE and DfE guidance and will be updated to reflect any new statutory changes (for example forthcoming reporting requirements for restrictive interventions from Sept 2025).

4. Definitions

- Positive touch / safe touch: brief, open-handed, non-sexual contact used to reassure (e.g., a pat on the shoulder, arm around to steady a child, hand on back) where it is appropriate to a child's age, culture and the context. Examples are in section 6.
- Restraint / restrictive intervention: any use of force to control or restrain movement; only used when necessary and in line with DfE guidance and school policy. [Use of reasonable force - GOV.UK](#)

5. When positive touch is acceptable (examples and guidance)

Staff may use gentle, appropriate touch in the following typical situations, provided it is in the child's best interests, explained where possible, and consistent with this policy:

- Comforting a distressed child (e.g., who is crying after upsetting news or a fall) a brief hug or hand on the arm if the child is receptive. Inform the pupil's, where appropriate, parents. (Acceptability depends on the child's response and any known family/cultural preferences.)
- Emotion coaching / de-escalation - a light touch on the arm to gain attention or offer reassurance during a regulated de-escalation strategy (only when the child is comfortable with this). [edpsy.org.uk](#)
- Supporting physical tasks - guiding a child physically (e.g., supporting a child with mobility needs, helping a younger child put on a coat) with their clear consent where possible.
- First aid and intimate care - necessary physical contact to provide first aid or intimate care (see separate First Aid and Intimate Care policies); only staff with appropriate training should perform intimate care.
- Curriculum contexts - appropriate contact for teaching (e.g., physical education, dance, drama, music tuition) where contact is part of the activity and necessary, and where pupils and parents have been informed.
- Special educational needs (SEND) - where individual pupils have behaviour or care plans that include touch as a calming strategy, this must be documented, agreed by parents, and staff trained.

Practical safeguards:

- Always explain what you will do and why (age-appropriate language).
- Use open-handed, visible contact and avoid lingering.
- Avoid one-to-one isolated situations where possible; ensure others are nearby or inform another colleague.
- Be mindful of cultural, religious or individual boundaries; follow any expressed parental wishes.
- Keep records: date/time/reason/brief description of the contact and who witnessed it. For any incident involving restraint, follow the DfE recording/reporting procedures. [Use of reasonable force - GOV.UK](#)

6. When positive touch is NOT acceptable

Touch must never be used in the following ways:

- To punish or discipline a child.
- In a sexualised way or any contact with intimate areas.
- Where a child clearly refuses, withdraws or shows visible discomfort.
- Where it would contravene a child's known cultural, religious, medical or parental wishes.
- In private one-to-one situations where it cannot be seen or there is no reasonable justification.
- For staff's own emotional needs (staff must seek appropriate supervision/support).
- Any contact that could be reasonably interpreted as grooming, exploitative or abusive.

If a child makes an allegation about inappropriate touch, staff must follow the school's safeguarding procedures immediately (report to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), record, and involve local authority/designated officer (LADO) as required).

7. Consent, parental notification and culture

- Parents must be informed of the school's Positive Touch Policy through the school website/handbook and at admission.
- For routine or planned uses of touch (e.g., for a pupil with a behaviour plan), Spinfield will obtain written agreement from parents/carers and include the strategies in the child's plan.
- When an unplanned comforting contact is used, staff should inform the class teacher (if it is not the class teacher) and, where appropriate, the parent/carer on the same day or at the next reasonable opportunity.

8. Record-keeping and reporting

- All incidents involving physical contact beyond routine (e.g., comforting that may be out of the ordinary, or any use of restraint) must be recorded on the school's incident form and logged centrally. Records must include: date/time, persons involved, description, reason, child's response, witnesses, follow-up actions and whether parents were informed. [Use of reasonable force - GOV.UK](#)
- Restraint incidents must be reported in line with DfE guidance and local authority requirements. (From Sept 2025 new statutory reporting for 'significant incidents' may apply — the school will update procedures accordingly.)

9. Staff training & supervision

- All staff will receive safeguarding training (KCSIE Part One) and specific training on positive touch, de-escalation and the use of reasonable force as part of induction and annual refreshers.
- Staff must be supervised and given access to reflective practice and wellbeing support. Any concerns about boundaries should be raised with a line manager or the DSL immediately.

10. SEND, vulnerable pupils and individual risk assessments

- For pupils with SEND or complex needs, the school will create individual risk/care plans that detail appropriate touch strategies, who is authorised to use them, parental consent and required training. These plans must be reviewed regularly.

11. Complaints and allegations

- Any complaint or allegation about a member of staff's use of touch will be handled under the school's safeguarding and disciplinary procedures, reported to the LADO and local authority where required, and recorded. The welfare of the child will be the priority.

12. Monitoring and review

- The Governing Body will review this policy every year and after any serious incident. Records of incidents will be reviewed to identify training needs or policy changes.

13. Practical examples

Likely acceptable if child is receptive: hand on shoulder to calm; side-by-side guiding of hand; brief arm-around when a child is upset (if permitted by parent/plan).

- Respecting the personal privacy and personal space of children.
- Responses affecting the safety and well being of the child (e.g. holding the hand of a child while crossing the street, holding a child gently but firmly during a temper tantrum).
- Knee sitting for younger children, one armed hug, reassuring touches on the shoulder, back rubs, and touch for health and hygiene (i.e changing plasters, wiping knees, toileting)

Not acceptable: prolonged hugging after the child expresses dislike; touching intimate body parts; secretive one-to-one contact. Coercion or other forms of exploitation of the child's lack of knowledge.

- Satisfaction of adult needs at the expense of the child.
- Violation of laws against sexual contact between adults and children.
- Any attempt to change child behaviour with adult physical force, often applied in anger
- Forced kisses, corporal punishment, slapping, striking or pinching, tickling for prolonged periods, fondling or molestation.

When appropriate touch is not encouraged, as often happens, then all touch has the potential to become sexualised. Children don't learn to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touch. They miss out on a whole range of valuable touch experiences – friendly, nurturing, reassuring, comforting and healing. We should be instilling a sense of what appropriate touch is. Research shows that touch is critical for human development and well-being.

Therapeutic touch is used in situations where children are distressed. In these situations research has shown that it would be unkind or increase the child's distress if touch was not employed. When children are very distressed they often ignore information provided by their senses. For example, they may no longer see or no longer hear. When a child is distressed, touch can be the only means of maintaining a connection with the child.

Gentle safe holding is appropriate if a child is hurting either him/herself or others or is damaging property and is so distressed and out of control that all verbal attempts to reduce/stop the behaviour have failed. Such interventions are supported and documented in the government documents including:

[Use of reasonable force in schools - GOV.UK](#)

Safe holding can be the safest and gentlest means of holding a child to feel safe and soothed and to calm them down when they are very distressed. These techniques are used to prevent the child from exposing themselves or others to physical or psychological harm.

14. Evidence base

- Attachment & regulation: Research shows early physical contact supports bonding and regulation via neurohormones (e.g., oxytocin), which contributes to emotional security and better stress regulation. This underpins why responsive, warm touch can support emotional learning in children.
- Neurobiological benefits: Affective touch activates sensory systems that reduce stress responses and promote wellbeing — important when children are distressed and need immediate, humane support.
- Practical consensus: UK sector guidance and many school trusts include controlled, consent-based touch as part of caring practice, when used with appropriate safeguards.

15. Contacts & further reading (key documents)

- Keeping Children Safe in Education — Department for Education (statutory guidance).
- Use of reasonable force in schools — Department for Education. GOV.UK
- NSPCC safeguarding in schools guidance — NSPCC. NSPCC Learning
- Systematic reviews on touch, oxytocin and attachment — Scatliffe et al., 2019; Carozza et al., 2021. PMC+1