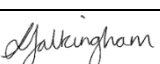
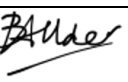


PHYSICAL HANDLING POLICY

Date ratified: June 2026

Period: June 2026 – 2027

Headteacher Signature:  Lynsay Falkingham

Chair of Governors Signature:  Briony Alder

Review Date: June 2027

Connecting, Regulating, and Thriving Together

1. Aims and Scope

At Lanterns Nursery School, we are committed to creating a positive, warm, and nurturing ethos that supports the social and emotional development of all children and prioritises emotional health and well-being. We prioritise strong adult-child relationships based on trust, empathy, and respect, recognising that a child's sense of safety within a relationship is the prerequisite for all learning.

Young children are at the early stages of learning to relate to others and to understand and manage their feelings. We adopt a neuro-affirming approach that celebrates different ways of thinking, moving, and communicating. We recognise that atypical development is not disordered development, and we adapt the environment to fit the child, rather than demanding the child mask their needs to fit the environment. We move away from traditional models of managing behaviour and instead focus on supporting co-regulation, where adults provide the calm, stable presence a child needs when overwhelmed.

There are rare and exceptional times when the use of restrictive interventions, including reasonable force, is necessary as an emergency safety measure to protect a child or others from immediate physical harm.

This policy aims to:

- **Minimise the need to use restrictive interventions** through early support, proactive environmental design, sensory diets, and neuro-affirming co-regulation strategies.
- **Ensure clear guidelines** for school staff to understand the safe, appropriate, and lawful boundaries of physical interaction.
- **Establish strict same-day workflows** for recording and reporting incidents of reasonable force, restraint, or restrictive intervention.
- **Protect the safety, wellbeing, and dignity of all pupils and staff**, ensuring relationship repair is embedded after any high-arousal event.

2. Legislation and Guidance

This policy is based on the Department for Education statutory guidance *Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools* (effective 1 April 2026). It complies with the following legal and local frameworks:

- Section 93 and Section 93A of the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*
- *The Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025*
- *Equality Act 2010* (specifically the duty to make reasonable adjustments)
- *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974*
- *Human Rights Act 1998*
- Statutory guidance *Keeping Children Safe in Education*
- Statutory Framework for the *Early Years Foundation Stage*
- Hampshire County Council's *Restrictive Physical Handling Guidance for Early Years Settings*

3. Definitions

To maintain complete clarity and protect our inclusive ethos, Lanterns Nursery School adopts precise definitions separating non-restrictive supportive touch from restrictive emergency steps:

- **Restrictive Interventions:** Used as an umbrella term to describe physical and non-physical actions aimed at preventing, restricting, or subduing the movement of a pupil's body or part of their body against their will.
- **Reasonable Force:** A broad range of actions that involve a degree of physical contact to restrain children, using no more force than is needed for the least amount of time required to reduce the risk of immediate harm.
- **Restraint:** A form of non-disciplinary intervention which completely immobilises a child or limits their movement against their will.
- **Seclusion:** A non-disciplinary intervention that keeps a pupil confined to a place away from others where they are physically prevented from leaving, or perceptually believe they are prevented from leaving. **Lanterns Nursery School strictly rejects the use of involuntary seclusion.**
- **Significant Incident Involving Force:** Any incident where the use of physical force goes beyond appropriate, developmentally normative physical contact between a practitioner and an early years child. This triggers the mandatory same-day statutory reporting pathways.

3.1 Appropriate Physical Contact and Positive Handling

Lanterns explicitly rejects a "no contact" policy. In an inclusive, trauma-informed early years setting, positive handling and the responsive use of touch are a normal and essential part of human interaction. Touch at Lanterns is guided by professional judgment, attachment theory, co-regulation, and attunement.

Examples of appropriate, non-restrictive physical contact include:

- **Emotional Co-Regulation:** Offering a cuddle or hug to settle a distressed child, or snuggling up together for a story to help a child feel a sense of felt safety.
- **Personal Care and Hygiene:** Direct touch required to change nappies, assist with toileting, wipe noses, dress, or administer first aid.
- **Learning and Physical Guidance:** Holding hands during transitional walks, supporting a child to safely navigate climbing or balancing equipment, or providing hand-over-hand support to help a child master physical skills like cutting or painting.
- **Positive Affirmation:** Offering a gentle pat on the back, an enthusiastic high-five, or an affectionate handshake to convey praise and connection.

3.2 Environmental Safety Measures vs. Mechanical Restraint

To keep our nursery environment safely structured and predictable for young children, we implement environmental and mechanical safeguards uniformly across our spaces. These include:

- Fences, safety gates/stair gates, child-proof cupboard locks, and adult-height door handles.
- Specialised postural equipment, such as supportive chairs fitted with lap belts, used strictly to support a child's fine motor control or physical seating balance during activities.
- Buggies used deliberately during community outings or external transitions where a child might find navigating the wider environment unsafe or overwhelming.

These measures are structural baselines used uniformly across our early years spaces to prevent environmental dangers; they are never applied reactively to penalise an individual child's dysregulation.

3.3 Rejection of Involuntary Seclusion

Involuntary seclusion - confining an emotionally dysregulated or overwhelmed young child alone in a locked room or an area they are physically barred from leaving - is psychologically harmful, counter-regulatory, and contrary to our trauma-informed values.

- **Lanterns does not use involuntary seclusion or isolation as a behavioural or safety strategy.**
- This is completely distinct from a child *voluntarily* choosing to access a low-arousal space, a quiet sensory den, or a designated "wellbeing zone" to decompress. When a child accesses a quiet space to self-regulate, **they are always accompanied and supported by an emotionally available, co-regulating adult** who remains present to act as their safe base.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 The Governing Board

The Governing Board is responsible for:

- Reviewing and approving this policy annually.
- Ensuring rigorous procedures are in place for recording and reporting every significant incident involving force, restraint, or restrictive intervention.
- Systematically reviewing and interrogating anonymised data on the use of restrictive interventions at least termly to identify patterns, ensure effectiveness, and check that no disproportionate impact occurs regarding children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or specific vulnerabilities.

4.2 The Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- Overall implementation and oversight of this policy across Lanterns and Extended Services.
- Ensuring all nursery staff receive high-quality training focused primarily on early prevention, environmental triggers, and neuro-affirming de-escalation.
- Ensuring safe staffing ratios that facilitate attentive, relational co-regulation.
- Handling any complaints regarding the use of physical force in line with the School Complaints Policy and activating statutory safeguarding workflows under *Keeping Children Safe in Education* if an allegation of inappropriate force is made against a practitioner.

4.3 All Practitioners and Staff

Every staff member has a duty to:

- Read, intimately understand, and embed the core principles of this policy.

- Actively employ de-escalation techniques and relational practices to minimise and prevent the need for physical restriction.
- Accurately document and report any significant incident involving force to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) on the exact day it occurs.
- Engage in reflective post-incident debriefs to evaluate triggers, protect staff wellbeing, and facilitate relationship repair with the child.

4.4 The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCo)

The SENDCo is responsible for:

- Collaborating with parents, carers, and key practitioners to design neuro-affirming **Relational Support Plans** and proactive risk assessments for children whose sensory profiles or processing needs indicate an increased likelihood of high-arousal safety incidents.
- Ensuring staff understand individual sensory profiles, adapting environmental inputs (noise, light, textures) to accommodate needs without resorting to physical restriction.
- Advising on reasonable adjustments under the *Equality Act 2010* and reviewing any restrictive intervention data involving a child with SEND.

5. Acceptable Uses of Force (Emergency Last-Resort Measures)

While all school staff possess a power to use reasonable force under the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*, within Lanterns Nursery School, mainstream thresholds such as using force to maintain "good order" or "prevent property damage" are heavily restricted.

Staff may **only** use a Restrictive Physical Intervention when it is absolutely necessary as an emergency measure to prevent **immediate, significant physical harm**. Examples include:

- Intercepting or physically holding a child who is running directly toward an immediate environmental danger (e.g., a busy public road, an un-fenced water hazard, or an open flight of stairs).
- Moving between children or gently holding a child's limbs if they are engaged in high-intensity physical actions that are causing immediate physical injury to another child or themselves (e.g., severe biting, head-banging, or striking).

Any emergency hold must apply the **least amount of force or the least restrictive intervention for the shortest possible duration** required to restore physical safety. If the intervention itself is escalating the child's distress, staff must immediately reconsider their approach and attempt alternative strategies.

6. Unacceptable and Prohibited Uses of Force

The following interventions carry catastrophic physical and psychological risks, run entirely counter to our neuro-affirming values, and are **strictly prohibited** under any circumstances:

- **Force as Punishment:** Using force or physical restriction as a sanction, threat, deterrent, or means to compel compliance.
- **Airway Restrictions:** Any hold that impacts, impedes, or places pressure upon a child's airway, breathing, or cardiovascular circulation. Staff must never cover a child's nose or mouth, apply pressure to the neck, throat, or collarbone, or apply downward pressure to the chest or abdomen.
- **Ground Restraint:** Intentionally forcing a child to the ground or maintaining a hold while a child is on the floor is strictly prohibited. If a young child incidentally ends up on the floor during an emergency safety hold, the practitioner must immediately release their hold or shift into a non-restrictive, protective position.
- **Forcible Searching:** While generic school policy frameworks allow force to search for prohibited items, it is completely developmentally inappropriate for a nursery setting. Staff at Lanterns **will never use physical force to search a nursery-aged child or**

their belongings. If an object presents an immediate safety risk, staff must use relational redirection, parent partnership, or isolate the object environmentally.

7. Prevention and De-escalation Strategies

At Lanterns, minimising the need for restrictive interventions is achieved by structuring an environment tailored to early childhood development and the needs of neurodivergent children.

7.1 Whole-School Proactive Measures:

- **Predictable Environments:** We provide structured, consistent, and predictable classroom routines. To support neurodivergent learners, we supplement this with visual schedules, "Now and Next" boards, and clear transition cues to reduce anxiety.
- **Proactive Sensory Diets:** We recognise that some children display physical behaviours (climbing, jumping, throwing) to meet their physical and sensory needs. We proactively manage sensory inputs (noise, light, textures) and integrate specific "heavy work" and sensory diet opportunities directly into the nursery day to satisfy these needs safely before dysregulation occurs.
- **Neuro-Affirming Communication:** Adults get to know children deeply, understanding their specific joys, communication styles, and individual needs, moving beyond a one-size-fits-all model of social communication.

7.2 Reactive De-escalation Techniques (When Dysregulation Occurs):

When a child shows signs of intense emotional distress or sensory overload, practitioners prioritise **Emotion Coaching** and co-regulation over direct demands. Staff utilise:

- **Attuned Body Language:** Maintaining open body language, dropping below the child's eye level, and being highly mindful of the child's personal space rather than cornering them.
- **Calm Verbal Scripting:** Reducing verbal input, speaking in a slow, low, and reassuring vocal tone, and allowing extended processing time.
- **Validating Boundaries:** Validating the emotion first ("*I can see you are very frustrated*"), while using positive, functional reminders focused on safety ("*Feet on the floor*" or "*Safe hands*").

8. Considerations for Children with SEND (Relational Support Plans)

Lanterns acknowledges that children with special educational needs, communication differences, or a history of trauma may find physical handling highly distressing or psychologically re-traumatising. Children who have difficulty communicating verbally might show their needs and discomfort through their physical actions.

When a child is struggling, staff use an **Iceberg Approach** to look beneath the surface to think about what might be driving the distress. Practitioners utilise relational monitoring tools to discover patterns, asking: "*What is the environment or interaction asking of this child that they cannot currently do?*"

For children identified as needing extra support, the SENDCo will collaborate with parents and carers to establish a **Relational Support Plan**. This plan will be reviewed regularly and immediately following any significant incident. The plan must:

- Outline any reasonable adjustments made to the nursery environment to eliminate identified sensory or emotional triggers.
- Detail the child's unique communication preferences (e.g., total silence, visual communication symbols, or Makaton).
- Specify proactive calming and emotional literacy strategies (such as noticing physical body sensations to support self-awareness).
- Explicitly define situations where the child safely seeks deep physical contact (such as deep pressure or firm hugs) for regulation, ensuring this is clearly distinguished from a restrictive emergency hold.

9. Recording and Reporting Arrangements

9.1 Same-Day Digital Recording

Under national recording regulations, any significant incident involving force or reactive emergency restraint must be recorded in writing on the school's safeguarding management system (CPOMS) **on the exact day the incident occurs**.

The digital record must factually document:

- The names of the child and staff members directly involved, alongside the child's relevant SEND status code.
- The precise date, time, specific location within the nursery, and approximate duration of the intervention.
- A chronological description of what happened, explicitly capturing:
 - The observed environmental or sensory triggers.
 - The specific non-physical co-regulation and de-escalation strategies attempted first.
 - The exact hold applied and the degree of force used.
 - A clear justification explaining why the hold was necessary to prevent immediate injury.
- A formal record of any physical injuries sustained by the child or staff, alongside confirmation that a health and safety check or first aid was administered.

9.2 Mandatory Same-Day Parental Notification

Lanterns Nursery School operates in absolute transparency with families. If a significant incident involving force or emergency restrictive handling occurs, **the child's parent or carer must be informed on the exact same day**.

- **Immediate Verbal Notification:** The Headteacher, Designated or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead will contact the parent/carers via telephone or in person as soon as is practically possible on the day of the occurrence.
- **Written Follow-Up:** A comprehensive, written copy of the incident log detailing the timeline, justification, and force used must be securely shared with the parents within 24 hours.
- **Statutory Exception:** The only exception to notifying a parent is if a member of staff has reasonable grounds to assess that informing a specific parent/carers of the use of restraint would put that child at risk of significant harm. In that highly exceptional scenario, the parent notification is paused, and the incident is reported directly to the Hampshire County Council child protection team.

10. Post-Incident Support and Relationship Repair (Debriefing)

Any incident requiring emergency physical restraint represents a point of vulnerability for both the child and the practitioner. Lanterns Nursery School implements a mandatory, multi-layered debriefing workflow within 48 hours of any incident:

10.1 For the Child:

- The child must receive an immediate gentle physical check by a first aider to ensure physical welfare.
- Once the child's nervous system has fully returned to a baseline of felt safety, a familiar and trusted practitioner will support them. Using developmentally appropriate communication (such as through play, drawing, or visual emotion cards), they will help the child process how they are feeling, focusing entirely on reassurance, comfort, and re-establishing emotional safety.

10.2 For the Staff Member:

- The practitioner involved must be given operational space to step away from the floor to regulate their own nervous system.
- A reflective debrief conversation will be facilitated by a senior leader (ideally one **who was not involved in the physical incident**) to unpack what happened, explore

unexpected triggers, ensure staff emotional welfare is protected, and look at how future incidents could be avoided.

10.3 Collaborative Problem Solving with the Family:

- Parents/carers will be invited into a supportive, collaborative follow-up discussion. The focus of this meeting is never blame; instead, it centres on **Collaborative Problem Solving**, reviewing the child's Relational Support Plan, modifying environmental sensory factors, sharing co-regulation strategies, and strengthening the home-school link to prevent future escalation.

11. Complaints and Monitoring

11.1 Complaints Handling

Any complaint raised by a parent, carer, or staff member regarding the use of restrictive physical handling or force will be formally processed under the *Lanterns Nursery School Complaints Policy*.

If a complaint involves an allegation of inappropriate force or a breach of prohibited holds by a staff member, the setting will immediately activate its statutory safeguarding protocols in strict accordance with *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, including notifying the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

11.2 Data Monitoring

The Headteacher and SENDCo will maintain an ongoing, centralised log of all significant incidents involving force. This data will be reviewed systematically to:

- Evaluate the long-term effectiveness of our Relational Support Plans.
- Identify structural adjustments needed within the nursery classrooms, playgrounds, or routines.
- Pinpoint specific staff training needs across the wider team.

12. Links with Other Policies

This policy operates in direct structural alignment with the following institutional frameworks:

- *Relational Policy (previously known as Behaviour Management Policy)*
- *Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy*
- *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy & Local Offer*
- *Health and Safety Policy*
- *School Complaints Policy*

Lead person for Physical Intervention (Education) on behalf of the Physical Intervention Steering Group:

Helen Carlow, Educational Psychologist

Tel: 01962 876239:

Email: helen.carlow@hants.gov.uk

Linked documents and guidance

DofE (2025) Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage.

Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework – GOV.UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

DfE & DHSC (2019) Reducing the need for restraint and restrictive intervention.

Reducing the need for restraint and restrictive intervention – GOV.UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-the-need-for-restraint-and-restrictive-intervention>

Department for Education (2015) Use of Reasonable Force – DfE advice.

Use of Reasonable Force – GOV.UK

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a819959ed915d74e6233224/UseofreasonableforceadviceReviewedJuly_2015.pdf

Hampshire County Council (2018 and 2024) Restrictive physical intervention in schools.

Restrictive physical intervention in schools – Hampshire County Council

<https://pbs.hants.gov.uk/team-teach>