St. Mary’s N.S.



Understanding and Managing Behaviours that Challenge Policy

INTRODUCTION

In keeping with the ethos of St. Mary’s N.S., Oldtown, this policy reflects our commitment to providing a safe and secure learning environment for all pupils. It applies to all staff in St. Mary’s N.S. and promotes the use of positive approaches with children with behavioural support needs. On occasion, the use of restrictive interventions may be required as a very last resort for the purpose of protecting a child's wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. This is always the least restrictive approach possible, for the shortest period of time possible, and proportionate to the risks. St. Mary’s N.S. categorises restrictive practices as mechanical, physical and environmental.

RATIONALE

Our school, in the first instance, applies the principles outlined in our Code of Behaviour which provides guidelines to staff in the area of behavior management. Every pupil who presents with behaviours of concern has a Behaviour Support Plan (BSP). This plan is specific to the pupil, developed by the teacher in consultation with the pupil's parent(s)/guardian(s), whose signed consent is sought for the plan. Behaviour Support Plans outline all the proactive strategies to be put in place to reduce a pupil's challenging behaviour. If these strategies and supports are not always sufficient to maintain the safety and wellbeing of the child or others, the plan will include a reactive strategy for what to do when the behaviours are occurring. In exceptional circumstances, where there is a risk that a person may be in immediate danger as a result of aggressive challenging behaviour or from a health and safety point of view, the use of restrictive strategies may be necessary (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Act 37a). In such instances, this policy on the use of restrictive practice applies. If it is necessary to use a restrictive practice, it must be the lowest level of restriction that is effective for a particular intervention and should be applied for the least amount of time possible. The detail of how and in what circumstances the restrictive practices are used with the pupil is included in their Behaviour Support Plan. The guidelines below are followed which include constant monitoring and review. The Board of Management takes seriously its duty of care to pupils, employees and visitors noting that: The paramount concerns are for the safety and welfare of the pupils in the school as well as for the safety and welfare of the adults who look after them. Therefore, we will aim to implement our duty of care to all affected by our work at all times.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This policy is based on guidance from the following:

- Education and Welfare Act 2000

- Safety, Health and Welfare At Work Act, 2005

- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application)(Amendment) Regulations 2007 (as well as other statutes and standards)

- Children First Guidelines 2017

- Department of Education Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2023 -Guidelines for Schools on Supporting Students with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties: An information guide for Primary Schools: DES 2013

- St. Michael’s House: Policy on the use of Restrictive Practices

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- NCSE (2015) Policy advice paper No. 5: Supporting children with ASD in schools

- Mental Health Commission (2010) Code of Practice: Guidance for persons working in mental health services with people with intellectual disabilities. Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) (2016). Guidance for designated centers on restraint procedures 2016

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies and structures:

• Safeguarding Statement

• Anti-Bullying Policy

• Code of Behaviour

• Health and Safety Statement

• Admissions Policy

• Intimate Care policy

• Data Protection Policy

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

-To provide clear guidelines to staff, pupils and parents regarding the use of restrictive practices/physical interventions in our school, including the use of time away and withdrawal from class.

-To create a culture within the school of where, as a last resort, there is minimal use of physical interventions/restrictive practices.

-To manage serious incidents when they occur.

-To reduce the risks associated with serious incidents such as injuries to self or others or serious damage to property.

DEFINITIONS

Restrictive Practices

The term Restrictive Practices refer to the use of mechanical restraint, physical restraint or environmental restraint for the purpose of requiring a child to refrain from behaviour that may cause damage or injury.

Mechanical Restraint

The application and use of materials or devices on or close to a child’s body that he/she cannot easily remove and that restrict freedom of movement of a part or all of their body or that restrict his/her normal access to the body or parts thereof. Some examples of mechanical restraints are: modified seatbelts (guards/locks/harnesses), restrictive clothing and weighted blanket.

Physical Restraint

The use of physical interventions such as holding or guiding/blocking a child or part of his/her body, for the purpose of preventing his/her free movement. Examples of such interventions are: standing in the way of a child so as to block/guide them in another direction and certain restrictive techniques similar to CALM. These techniques include escape techniques to use if a staff member is being bitten or hair is being pulled. Small hold techniques are also used to restrict movement of arms during situations where the child’s movements are deemed to be a danger to themselves or others.

Environmental Restraint

The use of environmental design or barriers to intentionally restrict a child’s movement in an area. Such measures include, but are not limited to: locked doors, handles/catches out of reach and strategies that involve the withdrawal or separation of the person from others. Various terms can be used to describe environmental restraint strategies that involve separating or withdrawing a child from others e.g. time out, time away, withdrawal, use of quiet space and single separation.

CATEGORIES OF SEPARATION STRATEGY

**Access to a Separate Area**: When a child goes into a separate unlocked area by choice. This may be scheduled, as part of their routine, by use of a break card or communication book/device. These areas include the sensory room, the yard and the water play area. Access to a separate, unlocked area is not a restrictive strategy.

**Withdrawal:** When a child is encouraged into a separate unlocked area or others are moved out of the area he/she is in. This is not considered a restrictive strategy. For example, if a child’s behavior is deemed to be a safety issue for the other children in the classroom. These children are calmly removed from the classroom to an alternative room or to the yard until it is safe to return. Another example, if a child is distressed in the classroom. In this situation, the child is encouraged to go to the sensory with an adult or for a walk with an adult to take a break from the room.

**Single Separation:** When a child is alone in a separate area. Single separation is a highly restrictive strategy of last resort. It should only be considered when all other less or non-restrictive strategies have been ruled out. Any use of single separation must be recorded in the child’s Behaviour that Challenges Running Record which is kept in their file. The child must be continuously monitored and supervised during any period of single separation and the strategy must be discontinued at the earliest possible safe time. Single separation occurs in a ‘small safe space’ on the school grounds such as the wet play area or the sensory room area. In such incidences the child is brought to the area by an adult. The adult adopts the low arousal approach to give the child time and space to regulate. The child is supervised for the duration of time in this area. An opportunity to return to the classroom is given as soon as the child is ready to do so and as soon as the adult feels it is safe to do so.

Note: Access to a Separate Area and Withdrawal are not restrictive strategies in and of themselves, but they become restrictive if physical restraint (as defined above) is used when bringing the child to a separate area or when removing others from the area. It is important to note that blocking or physical guiding are forms of physical restraint when they are used to control or direct a child's movement.

NON-RESTRICTIVE PHYSICAL AND HEALTHCARE INTERVENTIONS

Some interventions used in St. Mary’s N.S. to support children's physical or healthcare needs may appear similar in design or approach to restraints, but are not restrictive. Such interventions include:

-Supporting/holding limbs during personal care or exercises and transitions

-Providing a child with physical prompts through an activity, including physical reassurance where appropriate e.g. in busy/dangerous environments.

-Arm splints, body suits and harnesses that may be prescribed for orthopedic or tone management purposes.

The above interventions are not considered to be physical restraints or restrictive practices provided they are required for the purpose of improving or maintaining a child’s health or comfort and not used with the intention of restricting the child's freedom of movement.

TRAINING

The Board of Management endeavors to ensure that as many staff as possible have access to suitable training. The absence of guidelines and funding has presented difficulties for the Board in providing whole school training in this area. Where possible, staff have availed of the following training:

-Training for teachers provided by NCSE and Middletown Centre of Autism

-Teachers regularly participate in online and face to face courses during the summer

-Teachers attend seminars, conferences and workshops

-Training in restraints, manual handling and other physical interventions such as escape techniques and low arousal strategies

WHOLE SCHOOL POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT APPROACHES

Whole school positive behaviour support approaches are non-restrictive and are appropriate in a context of a school setting. Examples of these are listed below:

Education Based

Proactive strategies (non-restrictive) e.g. Sensory breaks, visual schedules, use of rewards, verbal supports, praise, reassurance, positive reminders, offering choices, short tasks only, low arousal approach, careful use of tone of voice and choice of words by staff, planned ignoring, change of staff, distraction/diversion, use of humour, negotiation, outlining limits/boundaries, selective attention, time given to process/cool down, close supervision, relaxation music, hand or foot massage, deep pressure, messy play, movement breaks.

- Reinforcement Strategies e.g. token systems, First/ then cards, visual schedules

- Physical touch and hugs for the purpose of comforting a pupil when upset

- Physical touch for the purpose of sensory programmes, P.E., oral motor programmes, high fives, pats on the arm, hand-over-hand support for encouragement/reward/prompting

- Low arousal strategies

- Access for pupils to a separate area, such as sensory room, exercise areas, yard, water play area

- Access to 1:1 teaching areas, individual workstations, timetables

- Removal of possessions from a pupil during the school day (if required to help the pupil with focus and attention)

- Use of a break card by a pupil to indicate the need for a break from normal school activity to a less demanding task either inside or outside the classroom, as indicated on a choice board, or previously agreed

- De-escalation strategies, i.e. what staff do in response to the early warning signs to help intervene as early as possible. This will be individual to the child. Examples include redirecting to a different activity, distraction, remove any possible triggers as early as possible, low arousal strategies

Environmental

In all school settings, some environmental restrictions are necessary for the safe operation of the school and for the safety and wellbeing of the children. The environmental strategies used in this school are listed above. These are undertaken to safeguard vulnerable pupils from leaving the school building unsupervised or to prevent access to unsafe areas or equipment. The non-restrictive strategies of separate areas and/or withdrawal strategies are used with individual children on occasion, if appropriate and when necessary, in order to support them to regulate and to maintain their safety and wellbeing and that of others.

RESTRICTIVE PRACTICES

These practices are restrictive in nature and therefore must be discussed with the Principal in the first instance. They require parental consent and approval of the School Principal, and, in certain instances, the Board of Management. If any new or additional general environmental restrictions not already listed in the school policy are proposed, these must be considered by the BOM as an amendment to the policy. Any policy amendments are submitted to the BOM for approval.

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| Intervention | Action Taken |
| Interventions to avoid personal injuries or infections resulting from kicking, punching, slapping, biting, spitting, grabbing, hair-pulling etc | - Behaviour Support Plan put in place by class teacher- Any interventions used must be recorded in the Behaviour Support Plan - Any incidences must be recorded in the Behaviours that Challenge Running Record  |
| Escorting a resisting pupil to a safer location | - Behaviour Support Plan put in place by class teacher. - Any interventions used must be recorded in the Behaviour Support Plan - Any incidences must be recorded in the Behaviours that Challenge Running Record |
| Controlling the movements of a pupil to prevent self- harm, harm to others, absconding, destruction of property, socially unacceptable behaviour. | - Behaviour Support Plan put in place by class teacher-Any interventions used must be recorded in the Behaviour Support Plan - Any incidences must be recorded in the Behaviours that Challenge Running Record |
| Single separation  | -Behaviour Support Plan put in place by class teacher- Any interventions used must be recorded in the Behaviour Support Plan - Any incidences must be recorded in the Behaviours that Challenge Running Record |

Emergency Use of Restrictive Practices:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Intervention | Documentation and recording | Persons responsible |
| Best practice guides that restrictive practices should only be used as part of a planned approach, with appropriate documentation, recording and approval. On occasion, however, emergency situations arise which require an immediate decision to be made by those caring for, or supporting, the pupil to use a restrictive practice in order to safeguard the safety and wellbeing of the pupil or others. | -Record the use of the intervention in notes.-Include when and for how long the strategy was used for.-Note any adverse effects.-Keep a copy of these notes in the child’s file.  | If restrictive strategies are used in an emergency situation, with a pupil for whom they are not detailed in a written BSP: -The parent/guardian must be notified on the day.-Reported to the principal |

BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PLANS

These are devised for pupils who present with behaviours of concern. These are written by the teacher. This plan should ideally contain the following:

- A brief history of the pupil

- A brief outline of likes/dislikes

- An outline of what strategies work well for the pupil

- An exact description of the behaviours of concern

- An outline of known triggers and frustrations

- Physical interventions which may be employed

- Parental signature

This document is displayed in the classroom but covered with a photo of the child.

This policy recognises that each staff members’ understanding of behaviours and all prevention techniques are essential to ensure behaviours do not escalate.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN USING PHYSICAL RESTRAINTS

The school seeks in the first instance to be proactive at all times to prevent and minimise the need for physical interventions and restrictive practices by employing ‘first resort’ strategies i.e. de-escalation strategies and environmental alterations as follows:

De – escalation strategies

Sensory breaks, visual schedules, use of rewards, verbal supports, praise, reassurance, positive reminders, offering choices, short tasks only, low arousal approach, careful use of tone of voice and choice of words by staff, change of staff, distraction/diversion, use of humour, negotiation, outlining limits/boundaries, selective attention, time given to process/cool down, close supervision.

Environmental alterations

1:1 teaching areas, individual workstations, access to preferred activities where possible, additional staff at high risk times, timetables organised to minimise risks, reduced pupil/staff ratios, comfort areas, sensory room, opportunities provided to ‘burn off energy’, locks on some doors, reduced access to equipment in some rooms, fenced in playgrounds.

Last Resort / Early intervention

All restrictive practices including restraints should be used as a last resort. This does not mean that all other possible strategies must be tried and tested beforehand; it means that staff must make a considered judgement balancing the risks involved, thus allowing informed decisions to be made. Some pupils may have stereotypical patterns of behaviour which alert staff to a developing crisis. Early action may prevent a risk of injury, thus justifying the use of the physical intervention. All staff working with the child will be made aware of this and of the procedures to follow to avert a crisis. If a restraint is used staff must ask themselves the following questions:

* Am I using the minimum force for the shortest time?
* Can I reduce the amount of pressure?
* How best can I communicate with the pupil and with other staff?
* Should I ask someone else to take over?

POST INCIDENT SUPPORT

Following an incident, the priority is to look after the pupils and staff involved before reports are filled out and reviews held. Useful strategies to assist a pupil to recover should be identified in the pupil’s BSP. Staff may need to take a break from the site of the incident to recover. This time is afforded to them, particularly when dealing with a very stressful situation, by calling on support from other staff members in the school. Ideally time should also be set aside at a later stage to document the incident and to make sure all necessary people are informed.

Incident Reports

Incident reports should be filled out by the staff after an incident. School management can also be contacted for guidance. The best time to fill out an incident report is when the situation has settled and the pupil and staff have had time to recover. The report is signed by the Principal or Deputy Principal who will review the interventions used by staff, and decide if any further action is required to provide any further care or reassurance to pupils or staff, and to inform any future recommendations.

COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS

The school seeks to engage positively with parents regarding all aspects of their pupil’s education, care and management. Parents of pupils who engage in high risk, challenging behaviours are prioritised for meetings/phone calls with the Principal or Deputy Principal. The school will endeavour to keep parents informed in a manner that is reasonable and in the best interests of their pupil. This will take the form of meetings, phone calls, emails or notes in the bag.

How to make a Complaint

Parents or staff wishing to make complaint should in the first instance contact the Principal who will furnish the parent with a copy of the Complaints Procedure. Should the complaint concern the Principal, contact the Chairperson, Board of Management who will provide a copy of the Complaints Procedure.

REVIEW AND MONITORING

The principal will discuss any extreme behaviours at Board of Management meetings and the Behaviour Support Plan and Restrictive Practice Running Record of the child in question may be reviewed.

This policy will be reviewed every two years.

IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION OF THIS POLICY

All stakeholders in the education of the pupils will take responsibility for implementing this policy. At the outset of the introduction of this policy, all parents/guardians will be informed about the policy. It is available to all parents on request and will be put on the school website. Use of restrictive practices with specific pupils are detailed in their individual Behaviour Support Plan and discussed with parents/guardians in advance.

This policy was ratified by the board of Management on 12th June 2024 and amended on 20th November 2024

Signed: 

 Chairperson, Board of Management