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Behaviours of Concern policy

Introductory Statement
This policy was developed during the 2026/2027 school year. This policy, along with Our Code of Behaviour and Bí Cineálta policy works to ensure that each individual pupil is afforded every opportunity to learn in a safe and orderly environment. This policy was developed through consultation with teachers and school staff. It was further developed and ratified at a meeting of the Board of Management on the **3rd of November 2026.**

Rationale
Our rationale takes account of best practice in managing Behaviors of Concern and is intended to complement '*Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations: Guidelines for Schools in Supporting Students (The Guidelines).'*

Staff have a duty to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of all students in their care at all times. This policy is designed to develop and enhance our staff's understanding and management of behaviours of concern regarding physical safety. It focuses on prevention, early intervention, and de-escalation measures when staff are managing crisis situations. Additionally, this policy sets out how our school will respond in crisis situations where behaviours pose imminent danger of serious physical harm to self or others within the school environment.

Mission Statement
In Swinford NS, we pride ourselves on promoting the full and harmonious development of all our children including those who present with behaviours of concern. We strive to provide a well - ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere in the school where minimising the risk of harm to students and staff is a key priority in ensuring our staff and students feel cared for and effectively supported.

As we base our positive school ethos on the quality of relationships between teachers and the ways in which pupils and teachers treat each other, physical intervention may be employed only as the last part of a comprehensive, positive, and planned approach by the school.

Policy Objectives
- To define terms relating to Behaviours of Concern.
- To set out clear protocols for staff in managing Behaviours of Concern in crisis situations.
- To establish a system of reporting incidents where restrictive physical interventions were used
- To outline the school's policy on staff training for managing Behaviours of Concern and Positive Handling.

Physical Contact
Physical contact between staff and a student is not unlawful. Physical contact to support students is an everyday occurrence in schools and should not be avoided, if in a supportive capacity and in some cases where it is entirely necessary. For example, for some students, close contact is important when tending to care needs, or for others, a gentle hand on shoulder can be comforting when upset. It is important that such contact with students is appropriate to the adult's professional role.

Behaviours of Concern
All behaviour is communication. Behaviours of concern can be defined as "*behaviours that indicate a risk to the safety or wellbeing of the people who exhibit them or to others*". (The Guidelines)

Behaviours of concern do not include behaviours that reflect cultural differences, neurodiversity, individual interests and unique expression or functioning where such behaviours do not negatively impact on safety, health, wellbeing and quality of life.

Crisis Situations
Crisis situations are defined in these guidelines as times when behaviours of concern present serious risk of imminent physical harm to the student concerned and/or others within the school environment.

Physical Restraint
Physical restraint is *any procedure where one or more adults restrict a student's physical movement or normal access to his or her own body. It is an intervention used in crisis situations when not to do so could result in serious physical harm or injury to the student or other*s.

Physical restraint, as defined in the guidelines, is not permitted within any of our school settings except in a crisis situation where there is imminent risk to students' physical safety or the safety of others. Where the use of physical restraint in a crisis situation occurs, physical restraint must be proportionate to the risk posed by the student's behaviour.

Physical restraint should be timely, measured, appropriate, carried out if at all possible by an appropriately trained person, proportionate to the risk posed by the student's behaviour, and reviewed after the event.

Physical restraint must not be used to punish a student for unacceptable behaviour under any circumstances.

Physical Restraint		
Should Always Be	**Sometimes**	**Should Never Be**
An act of care For Safety Reasons To manage behaviour in an emergency Used with the least amount of force necessary for safety For the shortest amount of time needed for the student to regain control.	Can lead to injury of the student or adults. Can lead to an increase in physical and emotional stress for student or adults. Can provoke a more intense physical reaction from the student or adults.	Punitive Used unless the situation is an emergency and safety is compromised. Used as a teaching strategy.

Using a Restraint.

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?

What is Not Considered Physical Restraint

Where schools are, for example,

- following the guidance and recommendation of a relevant professional, for example, in using a standing frame with a harness restraint to support a student with physical needs or
- using a school bus seatbelt/harness for safety during transportation
- using a weighted vest for deep pressure or other sensory processing interventions (this is not an exhaustive list)

It should be noted that this does not constitute physical restraint as defined in the guidelines. It is important that the use/involvement of all equipment is monitored and kept under regular review.

Seclusion

Seclusion should not be used under any circumstances in any recognised school setting. Seclusion is placing a student involuntarily in any environment in which they are alone and physically prevented from leaving. Physical prevention from leaving can be through the use of a locked door, a blocked door, or an exit held closed by a staff member.

Prevention

This school seeks to be proactive in preventing behaviours of concern at all times. As this policy cannot set out prescriptive advice for every crisis situation, professional judgement will be required based on the context at a particular moment in time.

However, to prevent and minimise the need to use physical interventions and restrictive practices the school employs the following Guidelines:

1. De-Escalation Strategies

De-escalation techniques should be;

- Cognisant of the student's individual early signs of escalation.
- Student – Specific
- Developmentally sensitive.
- Based upon an understanding of what is being communicated by the behaviour (e.g. ABC Charts etc).

2. Environmental Alterations

The environment may be used as a prevention strategy. This may include comfort areas, pupil support rooms, sensory break rooms, access to preferred activities where possible, timetables organised to minimise risks, increased access to specialist staff, opportunities provided to 'burn off energy', fixed furniture in some areas, adequate personal space, high handles on some doors, locks on some doors, reduced access to equipment in some rooms, coded access to front door and staff room, fenced-in playgrounds.

3. Positive Behaviour Supports

The school's Code of Behaviour outlines consistent routines and clear expectations for behaviour as well as a system of rewards and consequences. These structures help create a predictable and supportive environment where every child feels a sense of safety and belonging. By focusing on positive reinforcement and understanding the reasons behind behaviour, the school takes a proactive approach that prevents many crisis situations.

4. Supplementary Support - Behaviour Support Plan

Children who exhibit challenging behaviour may be more effectively supported through interventions from the Special Education Needs Teacher (SET). These interventions may be documented in the Student Support Plan, or a Behaviour Support Plan, which sets out specific behaviour targets for the pupil to work towards over a defined period. The Behaviour Support Plan would typically outline a structured, collaborative approach to identifying potential triggers (e.g. ABC Chart), guiding appropriate staff responses, and implementing both proactive and reactive strategies. This can be an effective approach to preventing challenging behaviour.

Interim Safety Response

In the event of an unexpected crisis situation or when the cause of a student's behaviour is not yet established, prioritising the safety of both the distressed student and those around them is crucial. To address such situations the following process is recommended:

Dynamic Risk assessment:

Conduct a brief, on the spot assessment to adaptively manage risks in the ever changing context. Key components of a dynamic risk assessment in crisis situations are:

• Step Back: Evaluate whether immediate intervention is necessary.

- Assess threat: Consider the student(s), staff, objects, environment and situational factors.
- Find Help: If required, seek assistance from colleagues or use the physical environment to reduce risks.
- Evaluate options: Is there another option available in the circumstances for preventing harm? Descalation approaches, diverting, changing staff to allow for co regulation involving a staff member who the student feels connected to, or use of physical restraint.
- Continual Monitoring: Re evaluate the situation and monitor risk levels.

Staff Training
Members of Staff will undertake Positive Handling training as deemed necessary. School staff will continue to undergo training to ensure any physical restraint used is appropriate and proportionate to the risk posed by the student's behaviour

Recording and Reporting of Physical Restraint in Schools
(Please see our school's Data Protection/Retention Records Policy GDPR Compliance) Any incident where a member of staff has used a physical intervention the following actions must be taken

1. The incident reported to the Principal, Board of Management and to the parents/guardians of the pupil(s) involved.
2. Record of Incident Involving Physical Restraint (Aladdin document) to be completed.
3. A risk assessment (Appendix B) carried out to put measures in place to prevent or reduce the need of physical interventions being needed again in the future.

NCSE
Instances of physical restraint will be reported to the NCSE. (See Appendix A)

Policy Review procedures
This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Principal and Board of Management.

Review and Ratification
This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on the 03.11.2026

Signature of Chairperson

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Appendix A

Resource 4: NCSE Record of Incident involving Physical Restraint Form
(In line with a rights-based approach the language used in this record needs to be objective, factual. and non-judgemental) No personal details of person/s involved should be included in this report. Information provided in Resource 4 may be shared with the Department of Education and Youth, as outlined on page 52 of the Guidelines.

https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/8282c711/Resource_4_NCSE_Record_of_Incident_involving_Physical_Restraint_Form.pdf

Please ensure the principal has signed this report before submitting to bocreports@ncse.ie

Appendix B POST-INCIDENT RISK ASSESSMENT

To be completed following an incident involving a behaviour of concern

Purpose: To review the circumstances surrounding an incident, identify hazards and contributing factors, assess current risk, and put proportionate measures in place to prevent or reduce the likelihood or impact of a recurrence. This assessment should inform the pupil's Student Support Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan where appropriate.

1. INCIDENT DETAILS

Date of incident	
Time / duration	
Location(s)	
Pupil(s) involved	
Staff involved / witnesses	
Completed by / role	
Date of assessment	

2. BRIEF FACTUAL DESCRIPTION

Record what happened objectively and factually. Avoid judgemental language or assumptions about intention. Include what was happening immediately before the behaviour, the behaviour observed, the impact/risk created, and how the situation ended.

3. RISK / HAZARD IDENTIFICATION

Tick or complete all relevant areas. Add others where required.

Potential hazard / behaviour	Who may be harmed?	Existing controls / protective factors	Initial risk
☐ Physical aggression / hitting / kicking / biting			
☐ Throwing / use of objects			
☐ Self-injury			
☐ Absconding / leaving supervised area			
☐ Unsafe interaction with environment / equipment			
☐ Significant distress / escalation			
☐ Risk to other pupils			
☐ Risk to staff			
☐ Other:			

4. CONTRIBUTING FACTORS / TRIGGERS

Consider the pupil, staff, objects, environment and situational factors. Consider known early signs of escalation and what the behaviour may have been communicating.

☐ Demand / task / transition ☐ Communication difficulty ☐ Sensory factors
☐ Noise / crowding / environment ☐ Change in routine ☐ Fatigue / illness / discomfort ☐ Social interaction / conflict ☐ Access to preferred item/activity ☐ Unclear / unknown
☐ Other: _____

Known early warning signs / escalation indicators	What appeared to help / reduce escalation?

5. RESPONSE USED DURING THE INCIDENT

De-escalation / co-regulation strategies used:

_____

_____

Environmental changes / removal of hazards / assistance sought:

_____

_____

Was physical restraint used? ☐ No ☐ Yes If yes, complete all required incident reporting and NCSE procedures.

Was any injury sustained? ☐ No ☐ Yes

Details / action taken:

_____

Were parents/guardians informed? ☐ No ☐ Yes By whom / when:

_____

6. RISK RATING

Use professional judgement. Consider both likelihood and potential severity. The rating should reflect the risk after the controls currently in place.

Likelihood	Severity	Risk level	Description
1 – Rare	1 – Minor	1–2 Low	Unlikely to recur / limited harm
2 – Unlikely	2 – Moderate	3–4 Moderate	Possible recurrence / some harm
3 – Possible	3 – Serious	5–6 High	Likely recurrence and/or significant harm
4 – Likely	4 – Severe	7–8 Very High	High likelihood and/or serious immediate harm

Initial risk level: ☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High ☐ Very High

Likelihood: ____ /4 Severity: ____ /4

7. ADDITIONAL CONTROL MEASURES / ACTION PLAN

Identify practical, proportionate measures to prevent or reduce the need for restrictive or physical intervention. Prioritise prevention, early intervention, de-escalation and environmental supports.

Action / control measure	Who is responsible?	By when?	Completed / review date

8. UPDATED / RESIDUAL RISK

Following the actions above, reassess the risk. If risk remains high or very high, consider whether additional specialist advice, environmental changes, staffing arrangements or a formal Behaviour Support Plan are required.

Residual likelihood	Residual severity	Residual risk	Further action required?
____ /4	____ /4	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High ☐ Very High	☐ No ☐ Yes
Review date	Reviewed by	Role	Signature

9. FOLLOW-UP / REVIEW

☐ Update Student Support Plan / Behaviour Support Plan where appropriate

☐ Review ABC information / identify patterns and triggers

☐ Review environmental arrangements / supervision / routines

☐ Consult relevant staff / SET / other professionals as appropriate

☐ Consider additional staff training or support

☐ Discuss with pupil, where appropriate, using a supportive and developmentally appropriate approach

☐ Review with parent(s)/guardian(s), where appropriate

☐ Other: _____

10. SIGN-OFF

Completed by	Role	Signature	Date

Important: This post-incident risk assessment does not replace the school's Record of Incident involving Physical
Restraint or other required reporting. Where physical restraint has been used, the policy requires reporting to the Principal, Board of Management and parents/guardians, completion of the Aladdin incident record, and a risk assessment to reduce the likelihood of physical intervention being required again. **The school's policy also states that seclusion must not be used and that physical restraint is only permitted in a crisis situation involving imminent risk to physical safety, and must be proportionate to the risk posed.**