Behaviours of Concern Policy

St. Clare's School

19233E

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" (Chan et al., 2012) "Behaviours of concern" replaces the term "challenging behaviour" which has over time served to stigmatise those who engage in such behaviours.

Continuum of Support: A graduated problem-solving model of assessment and intervention in schools. The model is underpinned by the recognition that special educational needs occur along a continuum from mild to severe/profound and from transient to long-term. Using this framework helps to ensure that interventions are incremental, moving from wholeschool and class-based to more intensive and individualised support, and that they are informed by careful monitoring of progress and response to intervention.



Introduction

This policy has been developed in the context of the Department's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2018, revised 2019), which acknowledges the role of schools in the promotion of wellbeing. This **Behaviours of Concern Policy** is designed to be used concomitantly with St. Clare's **Code of Behaviour Policy**.

This document is underpinned by the following core values: Child Focus | Wellbeing | Respect | Collaboration | WholeSchool | Safe Environment | Legal

Core Values

Drawing on lessons learned nationally and internationally about good practice in supporting students who present with behaviours of concern, a number of core values underpin this policy document:

• **Child Focus:** The voice of the child should permeate every decision-making process. All decisions made in respect of a child should be underpinned by what is in the child's best interests, take account of their evolving capacity and be guided and underpinned by the need to uphold their right to dignity.

• **Wellbeing:** Policies, procedures and practices in St. Clare's School will support the wellbeing of all.

• **Respect:** Students, parents/guardians and school staff have a right to be treated with respect, care and dignity at all times.

• **Collaboration:** Parents/guardians are valued as key members of the team supporting the student.

• **Wholeschool Leadership:** Wholeschool approaches to supporting students who demonstrate behaviours of concern offer the greatest likelihood of good outcomes for all. These include access to communication systems, appropriate and nurturing environments and development of positive relationships with peers, school staff and community. These should build on an existing comprehensive approach to behaviour support that is designed to teach, nurture and encourage positive social behaviour and rewarding relationships. School leadership of St. Clare's School play a unique role in supporting this endeavour.

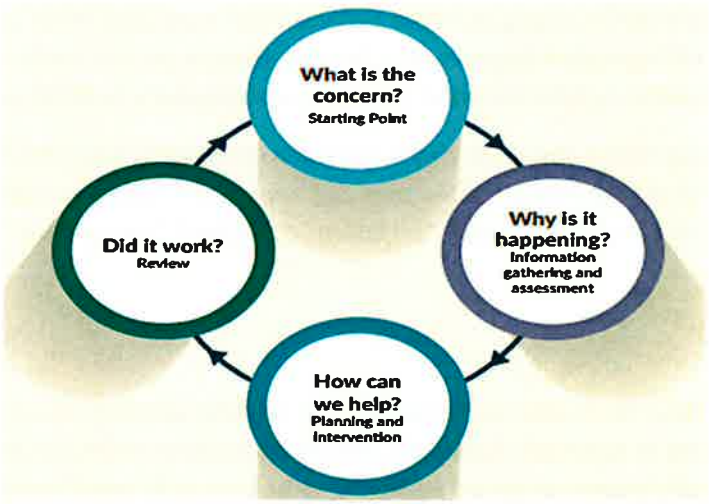
• **Safe Environment:** Minimising the risk of harm to students and staff should be a key priority and result in appropriate and enabling school environments where students feel cared for and staff and students feel effectively supported.

• **Legal:** St. Clare's School is cognisant of their legal responsibilities to ensure the safety of students and staff.

A culture of wholeschool support and ongoing engagement with parents/guardians, are necessary when supporting a student in a crisis situation.

Continuum of Support:

The Continuum of Support framework recognises that needs occur along a continuum. Using this framework helps to ensure that interventions are incremental, moving from wholeschool and class-based to more intensive and individualised support, and that they are informed by monitoring of progress and response to intervention. **The Continuum of Support framework** suggests the following levels of support:



For those students displaying behaviours of concern, the problem-solving framework provides St. Clare's School with a model to consider what the student is trying to communicate through their behaviour, what supports they need and how the St. Clare's school community might respond with planned and targeted interventions across the continuum of support. It also requires all those involved to review the outcomes of interventions and consider next steps. Details of this process are recorded in the Student Support File, which contains the student's support plans and details of their response to intervention.

Multitiered responses

Positive behavioural support models and frameworks for practice aim to provide multitiered responses that are interactive and cumulative in nature and which reflect the Continuum of Support approach in operation in St. Clare's School.

Support for All

Wholeschool and classroom-level approaches are universal level supports that aim to create nurturing and enabling environments for all students. Such environments prioritise building strong relationships, emphasise personal agency, develop competency, focus on strengths and choice, establish clear and consistent boundaries, and model positive problem-solving.

In this way, enabling environments also support students to self-regulate a process involving the interaction of emotion and behaviour, which allows the achievement and maintenance of a calm and alert state optimal for learning. Over time, and with support, most students will be able to self--regulate when distressed, but some with additional complex support needs or younger children will require adults to support them through co– regulation. Research indicates that students with special educational needs are more prone to struggle with self-regulation in the typical school classroom (CDC, 2014) highlighting the need for a good student-environment fit.

One practical environmental adaptation is to make **self-regulation spaces and activities** available to students during the school day. These spaces and activities are designed specifically to support students to process their thoughts, feelings and behaviours and, as such, represent a proactive approach to reduce the likelihood of behaviours of concern occurring. Examples already in use in St. Clare's School include access to the Astro-turf, quiet learning support rooms, a reading corner, sensory rooms, sensory gardens and separate class spaces with inviting furniture. Students can choose to access the spaces or activities, be supported by a teacher/SNA to do so or have time in these spaces scheduled as part of their daily timetable. Students voluntarily enter and exit the self-

regulation spaces. Students like engaging in the activities there and find these spaces free of demands. Access to self-regulation spaces and activities depends on the needs of the individual student. For some students a preferred adult can act as a coregulator in times of distress.

Access to such spaces/activities should be made available to students who present with behaviours of concern at all levels of the Continuum of Support. Self-regulation spaces as presented above should not be confused with "Seclusion" as defined in this policy.

Support for Some

Small group and individual level approaches build upon existing supports and prioritises early intervention with a view to successful reduction and/or elimination of the behaviour of concern. These processes typically involve evidence gathering to help identify need, targeted enhancement of school experiences, exploration of competencies to be developed and reshaping of systems that may contribute to behaviour.

Support for a Few

Intensive support approaches are needed where behaviours of concern continue to occur due to a mismatch between student needs and environmental or interpersonal supports and/or the skills students may require to have their needs met. This level of support provides individualised responses to address unmet need. This may include **proactive strategies** (such as environmental adaptations, interpersonal supports, skills competency development, 1:1 support) as well as planned reactive strategies, to help calm and deescalate.

To support our understanding of how and why behaviours of concern continue, this policy advocates the adoption of a **biopsychosocial model which recognises that humans are complex beings whose behaviour occurs in and is maintained by context.**

Using this lens, **all behaviour is purposeful and meaningful (i.e. functional)** and is the product of the **interaction between multiple biological, psychological and social contexts and systems e**.g. physical pain and sensory difficulties, trauma and adversity experiences, family stress, community and communication factors.

This lens allows for the application and integration of a range of approaches at St. Clare's in considering a student's support needs and the production of a multicomponent support plan bespoke to the student.

Assessment of the student's needs

Partnership

Such assessment begins with collaboration with those most directly impacted by the behaviours of concern. **This policy recognises that students and those who support them are experts in their own lives: they understand their own strengths and needs, which strategies are likely to work most effectively and what outcomes will enhance their quality of life.** Hence, a positive behavioural support approach seeks to actively engage and collaborate with the student and those who support them in the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of individualised supports.

Students with specific communication support needs may require supports to enable them to be active participants in decision making.

Communicative Intent

An evidence-informed approach to understanding behaviour involves determining what the student is communicating with their behaviour and the purpose of their actions.

For some students, behaviours of concern are often the only means available to them to express their needs and change something within their current environment.

While there are many reasons why a student may engage in behaviours of concern, common communications include, 'I am in pain', 'I am bored', 'I am overstimulated', 'I need your attention', 'I don't want to do this now', 'I don't understand'.

It is important to note that these behaviours are not deliberate or planned but, **in situations of need they are often an automatic response** that has been successful in the past and/or an emotional response which is difficult to control in the moment.

Systematic data gathering and identification of student need

As noted above, **behaviour is a communication of need.** In situations where a student's needs are not readily understood, a systematic approach to assessment of this need is required. Such an approach helps adults to best understand whether a student may be experiencing sensory integration difficulties, a trauma trigger, or stress due to the cognitive load of a task being too high. To ensure personalised and effective support, planning must be based on good quality data.

Collaboration with parents/guardians, is a critical factor in enhancing outcomes for children with special educational needs. This is recognised by St. Clare's School and is evident in the many good practices and initiatives used to promote parental involvement. Parental engagement is enhanced when parents are consulted in relation to their child's needs and strengths, on the supports and strategies developed to support their child, and when they are involved in regular reviews of progress.

Student Support Plans

Student support plans should:

- Be personalised, realistic to the context and multicomponent.
- Be developed collaboratively with the student, parent/guardian and school staff who know the student best.

• Contain clear goals, proactive environmental adaptations, and personal level intervention strategies.

• Include ethical and non-aversive reactive strategies.

• Incorporate collaborative planned reviews of student's response to intervention.

• Be available to all school staff working with the student and contain clear guidance regarding respective roles.

It should be noted that in some situations, the reasons for the behaviours of concern may not be easily discernible (the child could be pre-verbal for instance).

Behaviours of concern could be caused by internal triggers such as physical pain, emotional distress, withdrawal of medication, withdrawal of rituals and feelings of hunger or thirst. Building a trusted, supportive relationship with the student and family, knowing the student's needs, rituals and routines and using alternative forms of communication are all ways to reduce the risk of behaviours of concern occurring.

Note: There may be exceptional circumstances where, despite significant investigation, there is an unresolved risk to the health and safety of students and staff. In these instances, the function of the behaviour will not have been established and, to minimise harm, an interim safety response is developed. (see Crisis Situations - Prevention and Response below)

Key Messages:

- **Students who have a sense of belonging, feel connected, feel listened to and are actively engaged in their social, emotional, academic and physical learning are less likely to present with behaviours of concern.**
- **The implementation of least restrictive and evidence-informed support practices should be delivered on a continuum.**
- **The involvement of the student and strong home-school collaboration in the planning process are important in assessing the causes of, and responses to, behaviours of concern.**
- **Behaviour is communication and often reflects an unmet need. It is important to establish the most likely unmet need being communicated through a behaviour of concern.**
- **Biological, psychological and social factors can affect a student's behaviour.**
- **Self-regulation spaces and activities can be used to support a student in having their needs met thus preventing behaviours of concern.**
- **Appropriate support strategies are based on evidence-informed decision making.**

Crisis Situations – Prevention and Response

Prevention

Taking action immediately before, or, as behaviour escalates can be **highly effective in reducing the student's distress** and minimising behaviours that may lead to a crisis situation. **Wherever possible, de-escalation techniques should be used before any other responses are considered.**

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.

This provides staff with the **opportunity to apply strategies that reduce the intensity of an emerging situation** and in turn **reduce the likelihood of using physical restraint**.

De-escalation Techniques.

Common de-escalation techniques include:

Active listening.

Acknowledging what the student is experiencing emotionally.

Reducing the communication load on the student.

Using a preferred mode of communication by the student, e.g. objects of reference, choice board, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

Physical redirection to an alternative activity.

Problem solving if appropriate (if the student is able).

Offering clear simple choices, which would include self-regulation options.

Allowing adequate personal space.

Adopting non-threatening body language such as hands by your sides or in pockets.

Avoiding direct or sustained eye contact in most cases.

Going to an alternative space with the student that is less stimulating or which removes access to the triggers.

As noted above, de-escalation techniques are **tailored to individual needs**.

Appropriate responses to known sequences of behaviours of concern should be recorded in the Student Support Plan. **Staff must be attuned to the student's needs and monitor the impact of their actions in the moment.**

- It is particularly important that staff who do not work with a student regularly or who do not know a student well **familiarise themselves with strategies and interventions detailed in the student's Student Support Plan.**



Actions which may heighten agitation in a student whose behaviour is escalating includes:

Loud or aggressive tone of voice.
Disagreeing with the student's statement.
Moving closer into the student's personal space.
Crouching in a threatening way.
Embarrassing the student.
Giving either/or scenarios with only one right option leads to confusion.
Any form of physical contact when the student is already highly agitated.
Correcting the behaviour in crisis situations.
Asking for an apology.
Removal of communication systems.

Staff must immediately cease any action that escalates the situation.

All communication, including nonverbal, needs to be non-judgemental and based on unconditional positive regard for the student.

In situations where the use of de-escalation techniques *fails* to reduce the negative impact of the student's behaviour, staff should:

- Move into a safer position within the space.
- Enact a pre-planned exit strategy for peers and adults to ensure the safety of all concerned.
- Access support as outlined in school behaviour policy and practices for crisis situations.

Response

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

It is acknowledged in this policy that there are exceptional occasions when the use of **physical restraint in a crisis situation may occur in St. Clare's School**.

The term physical restraint describes a wide range of actions that involve the use of direct or indirect force, to limit another person's movement. **The use of physical restraint must be proportionate to the risk posed by the student's behaviour.**

Two kinds of response to crisis situations are considered in this policy:

- seclusion
- and physical restraint.

Some reference is also made to **mechanical restraint** (the use of equipment that restricts movement such as safety belts and harnesses) and **chemical restraint** (the use of prescribed medication to limit a student's capacity to move).

Seclusion

Seclusion should not be used under any circumstances in St. Clare's School.

Seclusion is placing a student involuntarily in any environment in which they are alone and physically prevented from leaving.

Seclusion, however carried out, is always experienced by the student as punitive/punishment. It does not involve any agency on the part of the student. 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. Seclusion is also a situation where a student believes they cannot leave a space although no physical block is evident.

What is NOT seclusion?

• Blanket restrictions (that apply equally to all students) regarding some restrictions on movement. For example, in the interest of student safety, there are restrictions about leaving the school grounds, and break times.

• Proactive strategies that involve redirecting a distressed, overstimulated or overwhelmed student into a low stimulus environment as long as they are free to leave this space and this is an agreed strategy in their support plan.

- If a student independently takes themselves to a space or room. However, vigilance is needed to ensure they do not isolate themselves for extended periods of time.

Physical restraint

Physical restraint, as defined in this policy, is not permitted except in a crisis situation where there is imminent risk to students' physical safety or the safety of others.

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

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 others.

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.

What is not considered physical restraint?

Where St. Clare's School is following the guidance and recommendation of the relevant professional, for example, in using a standing frame with a harness restraint to support a student with physical needs, using a school bus seatbelt/harness for safety during transportation, or using a weighted vest for deep pressure or other sensory processing interventions, it should be noted that this does not constitute physical restraint as defined in these guidelines. However, it is important that the use/involvement of all equipment is monitored and kept under regular review.

Physical restraint in crisis situations

If it appears that a behaviour is escalating to the point that it is placing the student or others at imminent risk of serious physical harm, this is a crisis situation that may require physical restraint. Staff must use professional judgement to decide if the unique situation constitutes a serious and imminent risk to the safety of the individual and others.

Examples of crisis situations where there is an imminent risk to the student's safety or to that of others:

- A student is putting themselves in danger, for example running into a road or towards explicit danger.
- A student starts to self-injure by banging his/her head with force on a hard surface.
- A student starts to throw large items, such as computers or furniture at peers or adults.
- A student physically attacks another person.

Any use of physical restraint must be:

• **Timely.** Physical restraint should NOT be the first option, nor done at the onset of a known escalation sequence.

• **Measured.** Use only enough physical contact and force to maintain or re-establish safety for the student, peers or adults, and **remove physical contact in favour of shadowing** as soon as the student can regain control of him/herself (Shadowing is moving one step back from physical contact and staying close enough to make physical contact if needed).

• **Appropriate.** Consider the least amount of touch and force needed to manage the emergency and safety of all concerned. Take into account any additional needs the student may have including self-management, language difficulties, sensory needs, medical considerations (such as stability issues, unsteady footing or coordination difficulties) and social differences. Consider the vulnerability of the student in relation to their experience of trauma.

• **Implemented** by appropriately trained persons, if at all possible.

• **Reviewed** subsequent to the event and a report prepared.

The use of physical restraint in a school is a very serious occurrence. It is important that all staff are clear about the potential risks to the wellbeing of all involved and the human rights implications of its use.

The following approaches may **NOT be used in ANY** circumstances:

- Restraint of a student in a prone (face down) or supine (face up) position that may inhibit the student's breathing.
- Mechanical restraints: the use of any device such as a belt or item of clothing that restricts the student's capacity to move, other than for safety concerns during transport.
- Pressure points and pain holds.
- Hyperextension of joints such as forcing arms backwards.
- Headlocks.
- Using force to drag or push a student from one location to another.
- Chemical restraints such as the use of medicine to limit a student's capacity to move.

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 everchanging 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. St. Clare's School also has an Emergency Call Button for such situations.

• **Evaluate options**: Is there another option available in the circumstances for preventing harm? De-escalation 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.

Actions to be taken in the immediate aftermath of the incident:

Action	To be carried out by:	Completed (Tick)
Check that all parties involved are safe.		
Ensure any injuries are cared for (e.g., medical attention if necessary).		
Clear the area of bystanders.		
Remove peers if possible.		
Have a supporting adult remain with the student involved (a preferred person if possible).		
Give the student space and time to regain composure. Keep language to a minimum.		
When possible, guide the student to a self-regulation space. Show care in a practical way e.g., offer a drink, access to a calming activity, space to pace.		
Inform the parents/guardians that an incident has occurred and make initial arrangements for a follow-up meeting.		
Inform the school principal. Inform the Board of Management/ETB of the school.		
If possible and where appropriate, the student(s) involved should remain in school for the remainder of the day with opportunities to engage in positive activities with preferred staff. At the earliest appropriate time, make efforts to repair the impacted relationships. Try to re-establish routines. Make things as clear and predictable as possible.		
If at all possible, all staff members involved and those who observed the incident complete the Record of Physical Restraint before the end of the working day (see Resource 1).		

Further actions:

Action	To be carried out by:	Completed (Tick)
Maintain regular contact with all involved: parents, students, school staff to ensure the wellbeing of all concerned.		
Hold a review meeting with relevant staff to review the incident and to plan for the future (see Staff Reflection Form in Resource 2). This will inform the drafting or review of the Support Plan.		
Conduct a follow-up meeting with parents/guardians to review the Incident Report and the staff reflection forms. This meeting should be documented and any changes to the Support Plan agreed, recorded and added (with all the above forms) to the Student Support File.		
Make parents aware of appropriate avenues to follow should they have concerns following the meetings.		
Make staff members aware of the services provided by EAS (Employee Assistance Service "Wellbeing Together").		
Inform the Designated Liaison Person (DLP), if necessary, and adhere as appropriate to the Child Safeguarding Statement.		
Inform any outside agencies which may be required, (e.g. HSA, Gardai).		
Consult with outside agencies as appropriate (NEPS, CNDT, HSE etc.).		
Register the incident in the school's incident report book.		
Report the incident to the NCSE.		

Recording and Reporting of Physical Restraint in Schools

Reporting Process to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

Introduction

Where a physical restraint has been used in St. Clare's School, the incident must be reported to the school principal and, subsequently, to the Board of Management.

As outlined previously, restrictive practices may include, but are not limited to physical restraint.

Physical restraint is defined as: 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 others.

From September 2025, St. Clare's School is also required to report instances of physical restraint to the NCSE.

The purpose of reporting of such instances to the NCSE is to allow for:

• The collation of quarterly reports on the extent of the practice being deployed in schools, including incidents involving students with special educational needs (SEN)

• Engagement between NCSE and individual schools in circumstances where a physical restraint has been used involving students with SEN.

The availability of this information will also inform the NCSE's overarching approach to its professional learning and training support programmes for schools.

The NCSE will have no role in investigating instances of the deployment of a physical restraint in schools.

Supporting school staff

"The primary purpose of school leadership and management is to create and sustain an environment that underpins high quality student care, learning and teaching. Good leadership increases the overall effectiveness of the school ..... and the creation of a positive and inclusive school culture and climate for all students and staff" (Governance Manual for Primary Schools 20232027 p.9).

Everyone's response to stress is different. St. Clare's Management will ensure affected staff receive immediate support following an incident of physical restraint in a crisis situation. Support could include debriefing, medical assistance, emotional support, and/or practical help. The physiological effects of such incidents make debriefing when staff are in a calmer state optimum. Should staff require additional confidential supports, staff should be directed to the Employee Assistance Programme. Staff have a responsibility for their own safety and need to adhere to any guidelines relating to personal safety e.g., lone working procedures.

To ensure that physical restraint is not used in St. Clare's School except in the case of a crisis situation where there is a serious risk of imminent physical harm to the student concerned and/or others within the school environment, school leaders should:

• Demonstrate commitment to early intervention and prevention through the implementation of preventative wholeschool approaches as outlined in the Wellbeing Policy and Framework for Practice (2018).

• Encourage staff to engage in selfcare to build resilience.

• Complete regular training audits and facilitate training needs to ensure staff, including school leaders, feel skilled and confident when supporting all students and in particular when supporting students with behaviours of concern.

• Ensure staff are supported immediately following an incident of physical restraint in a crisis situation to acknowledge such incidents can be stressful and plan for follow up support.

• Complete documentation related to an incident involving the use of physical restraint in a crisis situation and report to the relevant persons.

• Use data about physical restraint used in a crisis situation to inform school practice and plan to avoid a reoccurrence of physical restraint as a response to a behaviour of concern.

• Amend school behaviour policy and include exit strategies and interim safety procedures in the case of a crisis situation.

• Review resources needed to effectively support the student and staff.

St. Clare's School Leadership is directed to the following documents: Looking at our School - A Quality Framework for Post-Primary (and Primary Schools) (2016), Cosán, the National Framework for Teachers' Learning (2016), The Professional Code of Conduct for Teachers (2012) and School Self-Evaluation Guidelines (2016-2020), the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2019).

Implementation Date:

This policy is to be implemented immediately

Timetable for Review:

This policy is to be reviewed during the school year 2026-2027

Ratification:

Date

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Signed

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Chairperson, Board of Management

St. Clare's School