Health and Safety

Reducing Student Distress Policy

Rationale
To guide the Board, Principal and staff in ways to reduce student distress related to restraint.

Purpose
To ensure that Northern Health School provides a safe physical and emotional environment for all staff, students, their families and that student distress, especially as it relates to restraint is recognised and reduced wherever possible.

Guidelines
a) School staff will be alert to signs of student distress, including:
   - Disengaging from school activities or interactions
   - Making noises, speaking quickly, or repeating other people's words
   - Agitated physical actions (e.g. rocking, pacing, clenching fists)

b) When planning support or plans, the school will work with students and their parents/caregivers and whānau to:
   - Agree on shared protocols (including for communication)
   - Create a shared understanding of privacy requirements
   - Share details of any support

c) Where it appears a student is overwhelmed or not coping, NHS staff will take a calm approach and be aware of our own responses.

d) Should a situation continue to escalate, NHS staff will take appropriate steps to ensure the safety of all students and staff.

e) In situations of student distress NHS Teachers or authorised staff may use physical restraint if all three of the following conditions are met:
   - Physical restraint is necessary to prevent imminent harm, including significant emotional distress to the student or another person
   - The teacher or authorised staff member reasonably believes there is no other option available in the circumstances for preventing harm
   - The physical restraint is reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances. This means only applying as much force as is necessary, and for the minimum amount of time necessary

f) After a challenging incident, or a situation involving physical restraint NHS will:
   - Take restorative action to support and monitor the wellbeing of anyone affected by the situation
   - Refer to any actions included in individual support plans
   - Support all students to re-engage to learning programmes

g) Staff involved in a challenging incident take the following steps:
   - Inform the Unit leader, or the principal, and decide together on next steps and any support needed

- Share information with parents/caregivers and whānau, and follow up on an existing support plan or consider if one is needed
- Take time to reflect individually, debrief with other relevant staff members, and reflect as a team on any further action that is needed

h) Individual support plans will be in place for specific students where:
- The student is highly likely to be involved in a situation where physical restraint may be used
- The student has been physically restrained more than once in a term
- A support plan is requested by parents/caregiver, or the medical team

i) Student wellbeing will be monitored by watching for signs of ongoing distress, such as absences from usual activities, or changes in their interactions with other students and staff.

j) Concerns raised by other members of the school community, including students will be responded to.

k) Affected staff will receive appropriate support. This may include debriefing, emotional support, an employee assistance programme, additional breaks, or help with workload.

Legislation and associated documentation
The Education and Training Act 2020.

Definitions
Distress: is an expression of an unmet need or want. It occurs when the level of stress exceeds student ability to cope and recover without support. Distress can present as visible behaviours to others. The factors that lead to distress may seem unremarkable to other people.

Physical Restraint: in the context of this policy, means to use physical force to prevent, restrict, or subdue the movement of a student (or any part of their body) against their will.

Challenging Incident: any incident outside physical restraint that may lead a student to become distressed.

Adopted   August 2023

Presiding Member _____

Review Date   August 2026