

Practice Guidance for Schools on Positive Intervention - Preventing Restrictive and Physical Interventions

Why Have the Guidance

Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, restraint and seclusion, are among the most serious responses a school may use when managing behaviour that presents an immediate risk of harm. They involve deliberately limiting a pupil's movement or freedom and can have significant emotional, psychological and physical impacts for pupils, staff, parents and the wider school community. They must only be used where lawful, necessary, proportionate and as a last resort, after prevention and de-escalation have been considered or attempted wherever possible.

This guidance has been developed to support senior school leaders, governors and professionals working directly with children and their families to develop a school culture which prevents restrictive physical intervention from being required. The ethos of a school, its values, relationships and everyday practice directly shape the types of interventions that are needed. A positive, inclusive culture rooted in safety, trust, emotional wellbeing, relational practice, early help, de-escalation and trauma-informed approaches can significantly reduce the likelihood of behaviours escalating to crisis point.

The Department for Education's April 2026 guidance, *Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools*, aims to ensure compliance, enhance safety and support schools to manage restrictive interventions safely, lawfully and appropriately. It introduces a legal requirement for schools in England to record and report in writing every significant incident involving the use of force. The non-statutory advice should be followed unless there is a good reason not to.

This local guidance is rooted in the DfE guidance and aims to provide additional practical support for staff when considering prevention, de-escalation, physical intervention, recording, reporting and review. The practical examples and prompts included in this document are intended to support professional judgement and consistent practice, they do not replace certified training from specialist providers, individual risk assessments, school policies or statutory duties.

The guidance reflects a growing understanding of the emotional and psychological impact of restraint, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities, trauma, neurodivergence, or unmet social, emotional and mental health needs. As the DfE guidance states, "*Restraint of any kind can have a negative impact on a child's mental health and damage relationships between children and*

those who care for them." Restrictive practices can be traumatising and re-traumatising, damaging relationships, trust and wellbeing. It is therefore important that schools are clear about what restrictive interventions are, when they can and cannot be used, how they should be recorded and reported, and who is responsible for carrying out these procedures.

Who is this Guidance for?

This guidance is intended for all school staff to help promote and support a culture of prevention and to equip them with the knowledge, confidence and practical strategies to reduce the need for restrictive physical interventions through early identification, proactive support, de-escalation and lawful, proportionate responses where intervention is unavoidable.

Policy on Use of Force

Schools may set out their policy on the use of restrictive physical intervention as a standalone policy or as part of the behaviour policy. There is no requirement to have a separate policy on the use of force, but the school's approach should be clear, accessible and communicated to pupils, staff, parents, carers and governors. Schools should not adopt a "no contact" policy, and should not agree requests from parents, carers or staff that reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions will never be used. The adoption of a "no contact" policy can leave staff unable to intervene where it is reasonable in the circumstances to fully protect pupils. School leaders should adopt sensible policies which allow and support staff to make appropriate physical contact when required, as a last resort, and in line with the law, statutory duties and the principles set out in this guidance.

Definitions

The following definitions are used throughout this guidance:

- **Reasonable force:** the DfE defines reasonable force as covering the broad range of actions used by staff that involve a degree of physical contact with pupils. Force is usually used either to control or restrain. This can range from guiding a pupil to safety by the arm through to more serious circumstances such as breaking up a fight or restraining a pupil to prevent violence or injury. "Reasonable in the circumstances" means using no more force than is needed.
- **Restrictive intervention:** an action, planned or reactive, that limits a pupil's freedom of movement. It may or may not involve the use of reasonable force and may include physical restraint, seclusion, or other measures used to prevent harm or manage behaviour that challenges. Examples may include guiding a pupil away from danger, standing between pupils to prevent further escalation, or restricting movement where there is an immediate risk of harm.
- **Physical restraint:** holding a pupil back physically or bringing them under control to prevent violence, injury or serious harm. Examples may include leading a pupil

by the arm out of immediate danger, holding back a pupil to prevent them from harming themselves or others, or intervening to stop a fight.

- **Seclusion:** a non-disciplinary intervention where a pupil is confined alone in a space and prevented from leaving, whether by a physical barrier, blocking, or by making the pupil believe they will face punishment if they attempt to leave.
Seclusion must only be used as a safety intervention, never as punishment, and only for the very briefest possible time while the immediate risk of harm remains.

Positive and Proactive Approach to Behaviour

Schools should adopt an agreed approach to prevent physical interventions from being needed, as well as clear processes to distract from and de-escalate difficult and challenging situations. Acknowledging that using physical interventions can indicate a lack of success in understanding behaviour is an important step in initiating meaningful change.

- Know the pupil: identify triggers, communication needs, sensory needs, medical factors, trauma history and what helps them regulate.
- Plan early: use risk assessments, individual support plans, positive intervention plans and EHCP information where relevant.
- Review patterns: use incident data, pupil voice, parent/carers feedback and staff reflection to improve practice.

Understanding Behaviour

Behaviour is a form of communication with specific causes and purposes. Challenging behaviour may indicate a need for support and can stem from medical conditions, sensory needs, past or current trauma, neglect, unmet needs, neurodivergence, learning difficulties or social, emotional and/or mental health needs. Building relational approaches through solid and trusted relationships is fundamental so children feel understood, listened to and valued, and so plans for dealing with challenges are agreed with them where appropriate.

Reducing Restraint

To eliminate unnecessary and inappropriate use of restraint and minimise its need, schools should have a thorough understanding of the children in their care and be committed to meeting their needs through a systematic, positive and proactive approach to behaviour. This includes using evidence-based strategies, clear governance and accountability, high-quality staff training, effective risk assessment, and the active involvement of children, parents, carers and advocates where appropriate.

Schools should record and analyse incidents to identify patterns, future learning needs and policy updates. The aim is not only to respond appropriately after an

incident, but to understand what needs to change so that restraint, seclusion or other restrictive interventions are less likely to be needed in future.

Prevention

Prevention should be the starting point for all work on restrictive and physical intervention. Schools should seek to eliminate unnecessary and inappropriate use of restraint by developing proactive strategies that reduce challenging behaviour, strengthen relationships and minimise the need for restrictive interventions. This includes understanding children's needs, using evidence-based approaches, identifying risks early and making reasonable adjustments before situations escalate.

Whole School Approach

A whole-school approach helps ensure consistency, safety and dignity for all pupils. This should be embedded within the school's safeguarding, behaviour, SEND and inclusion culture and shaped by the voices of children, parents, carers, staff and relevant professionals.

- Establish a shared vision for preventing restrictive intervention, aligned with safeguarding, inclusion and behaviour policies.
- Use proactive risk assessment to identify triggers and avoid escalation to the point where restrictive physical intervention may be needed.
- Develop clear arrangements for governance and accountability in relation to behaviour and responses to behaviour that challenges.
- Use accessible communication methods as standard practice, not only for pupils with identified communication needs.
- Promote restorative and relational practice so pupils feel safe, listened to, valued and supported.
- Use pupil voice, staff debriefs and parent/carers feedback to learn from incidents and improve support.
- Review behaviour support plans, reasonable adjustments and individual risk assessments regularly and after any significant incident.
- Seek specialist input where restraint, seclusion or restrictive intervention is repeated or where needs are escalating.

De-escalation Techniques

De-escalation should be attempted wherever it is safe to do so and before physical intervention is considered. The aim is to reduce immediate risk, support emotional regulation and prevent the situation escalating to the point where restrictive physical intervention is needed.

- **Stay calm and regulate yourself:** use a calm tone, slow pace and non-threatening body language. Avoid raising your voice or showing frustration; pause, breathe and give the pupil time to process where it is safe to do so. If the

pupil is safe, allow them time, their “top brain” will be flooded, and they will not be able to think clearly, rationalise, or regulate emotionally in this moment.

- **Reduce audience and pressure:** where safe, move other pupils away, redirect the class to another space, reduce demands and avoid making the situation about immediate compliance.
- **Use accessible communication:** use simple language, visuals, non-verbal cues and communication methods that support the pupil’s understanding. Keep instructions brief, repeat calmly if needed and avoid too many adults speaking at once.
- **Offer reassurance and choices:** use phrases such as “we are here to help” or “we can work this out together” and offer realistic choices such as moving to a quiet space, sitting nearby or taking time before talking.
- **Avoid power struggles:** consider whether a change of face, trusted adult or different approach may help reduce escalation, particularly where the current interaction is becoming confrontational.
- **Use distraction and redirection:** draw on what is known about the child, including interests, routines and what has helped previously. This may include referring to something they enjoy, something they are looking forward to, or an agreed calming strategy.
- **Provide time and space:** allow the pupil to safely withdraw or use a calm or agreed space if this reduces risk and supports regulation. Avoid crowding or following the pupil unless safety is at risk.
- **Seek support early:** alert a colleague or senior member of staff before the situation reaches crisis point, especially where there is increasing risk or a second adult may help maintain safety.
- **Listen and support recovery:** acknowledge what the pupil is communicating through words or behaviour and, when they are calmer, support reflection in a separate and accessible way.

Considerations Before Carrying Out Physical Intervention

Before physical intervention is used, staff should consider whether it is absolutely necessary, proportionate and in the pupil’s best interests. Physical intervention should only be used as a last resort, when there is an immediate risk of harm and non-physical methods are not sufficient to keep the pupil, other pupils or staff safe.

- **Necessary?** Consider whether not intervening would seriously endanger the wellbeing of any person, whether there are reasonable alternative ways to understand and manage the situation, and whether de-escalation has been tried on this occasion or previously and found to be ineffective.
- **Proportionate?** Ensure any physical intervention is proportionate to the situation and the risks involved. Use the least amount of force or the least restrictive intervention necessary, for the shortest time required, and consider whether the action is likely to reduce or escalate risk.

- **Pupil welfare:** Consider the pupil's SEND, medical needs, vulnerabilities, age, size, communication needs, trauma history, lived experiences and what has worked well previously. Maintain dignity, including considering the location and visibility of the intervention.
- **Communication:** Clearly and calmly explain what is happening, why it is happening and what the pupil needs to do. Use verbal, non-verbal and accessible communication methods appropriate to the pupil.
- **Support and safety:** Alert a colleague or senior member of staff, consider whether a change of face or trusted adult may reduce escalation, and ensure another adult is present to assist or witness where possible.

Physical Intervention

All members of school staff have the legal power to use reasonable force in certain situations under Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This also applies to people whom the headteacher has temporarily put in charge of pupils, such as unpaid volunteers or parents accompanying pupils on a school-organised visit. Staff who are likely to need to use reasonable force should be trained to do so safely, lawfully and in preventative strategies.

Although any member of staff may need to physically intervene where there is immediate danger, a trained member of staff should take over as soon as possible where this is the case. The headteacher is responsible for ensuring staff are aware of their statutory powers to use physical intervention and understand that it must always be considered a last resort.

- Stay calm and communicate clearly: explain what is happening, why it is happening and what the pupil needs to do for the intervention to end.
- Use only techniques that staff have been trained to use. Staff must follow the training given by specialist providers and should not improvise holds or methods outside that training.
- Use the minimum force necessary, for the shortest possible time, and release as soon as the immediate risk has reduced.
- Use practical steps to reduce risk where possible, such as moving objects out of reach, creating space, asking other pupils to move away, or positioning yourself to reduce the risk of injury.
- Where intervention is unavoidable, examples may include guiding a pupil away from immediate danger, separating pupils who are fighting, blocking movement to prevent immediate harm, or holding a pupil back to prevent injury.
- Monitor the pupil's breathing, distress, physical presentation and emotional state throughout.
- Do not use force to punish, humiliate or secure routine compliance where there is no immediate safety risk.

- Do not restrain in ways that affect airway, breathing or circulation, such as covering the mouth or nose or applying pressure to the neck or abdomen.
- Avoid holding a pupil on the ground. If this happens unintentionally, staff should release or reposition the pupil into a safer alternative as quickly as possible.

Unforeseen Circumstances

There may be situations where staff need to act swiftly because not all risks can be foreseen. Where physical intervention is required unexpectedly, staff should prioritise immediate safety, use the least restrictive response possible, follow their training and seek support from colleagues as soon as practicable. The incident should then be recorded, reported, reviewed and used to inform future planning, training and risk assessment.

Seclusion

Seclusion must only be used as a safety measure, never as a punishment or disciplinary action. It should only be used where absolutely necessary, for the very briefest possible time and only while the immediate risk of harm remains. As soon as the immediate risk of harm has reduced, the pupil should be allowed to leave.

- The pupil must never be left unsupervised.
- The space must be safe, appropriate to the pupil's needs and not threatening or intimidating.
- Locked doors or barriers that jeopardise the pupil's wellbeing or safeguarding must not be used.
- Schools must be able to show what reasonable adjustments and alternative strategies were considered or attempted before seclusion was used.
- Every use of seclusion must be recorded and reported in line with the recording and reporting section below.

Immediate Post-Intervention Support

Immediately after any physical intervention, restraint, seclusion or restrictive intervention, staff should prioritise safety, care and emotional regulation before moving into formal recording, reporting or review processes.

- **Immediate safety and care:** provide first aid or medical attention if needed. Move the pupil to a safe, calm space to help them emotionally regulate. Check whether staff, other pupils or witnesses need immediate support.
- **Post-incident reflection and support:** offer the pupil a choice in who supports them at this point. Use communication methods accessible to all pupils, such as visuals, simplified language, non-verbal communication or other agreed approaches. Ensure the pupil has a separate opportunity to reflect on the incident, distinct from staff debriefing.

- **Support for witnesses:** make sure that any pupil who witnesses an incident of reasonable force and/or restrictive intervention is provided with appropriate support where necessary.

Post-Incident Procedures

Schools should have clear post-incident procedures so that every incident is responded to consistently, transparently and with a focus on safety, learning and prevention. Recording and reporting responsibilities are set out below.

Recording Incidents of Force, Restraint and Seclusion

Schools have a statutory duty to record significant incidents involving the use of reasonable force. It is also a statutory requirement for settings to inform parents or carers about these incidents; reporting requirements and exceptions are set out in the section below. Schools should also record incidents involving restraint and seclusion, including non-force restraint, in line with the April 2026 DfE guidance. Records should be completed as soon as practicable after the incident and wherever possible on the same day.

Schools should record, as a minimum:

- Names of the pupil and staff directly involved.
- Time, date, location and approximate duration of the intervention.
- Relevant needs or circumstances of the pupil, including SEND, SEN status, medical needs, communication needs or other vulnerabilities.
- A brief account of why the intervention was assessed as necessary in that instance.
- Preventative and de-escalation strategies used, or why they could not be used safely.
- The type and degree of force, restraint or seclusion used.
- Any injuries, medical treatment or other adverse impacts.
- The pupil's voice, witness accounts and staff reflections where appropriate.
- Post-incident support provided and follow-up actions agreed.
- When and how parents or carers were informed, or why this was not appropriate.

Reporting Incidents of Force, Restraint and Seclusion

Schools have a statutory duty to report each significant incident where a member of staff uses reasonable force to each parent of the pupil as soon as practicable after the incident. The report should be made in writing and, wherever possible, on the same day. This applies even where the use of reasonable force has been agreed with parents as part of a pupil's behaviour support plan.

The duty to report to parents or carers does not apply where the pupil is aged 20 or over or where reporting the incident to parents or carers would be likely to result in significant harm to the pupil, including risk of abuse or neglect.

Where reporting to parents or carers is likely to result in significant harm to the pupil, staff must follow safeguarding procedures and report the incident to the local authority responsible for the area where the pupil resides.

Local authority reporting: Schools are no longer required to report the use of restrictive physical intervention to the local authority as a routine matter. The exception is where the pupil is a child in local authority care and the local authority is acting in the role of parent; in these circumstances, the school should ensure the relevant local authority is informed in line with the child's care arrangements and local procedures.

The written report to parents or carers should include, as a minimum:

- Time, date, location and approximate duration of the force, restraint or seclusion used.
- A brief account of the type and degree of force, restraint or seclusion used.
- Details of any physical injuries sustained, if applicable.
- A brief account of why the intervention was assessed as necessary in that instance.
- Any immediate post-incident support or medical treatment provided.

Follow-Up Discussions with Pupils, Parents and Carers

After reporting, schools should offer follow-up discussion where appropriate. This should focus on what happened before the incident, known or suspected triggers, whether agreed behaviour support plans were followed, what de-escalation strategies were used, what helped or did not help, and what should be done differently in future. Any new or revised relational support plans should be co-created with the pupil, parents, carers and relevant professionals wherever possible.

Post-Intervention Review and Support

- **Family and advocate involvement:** involve parents, carers or advocates in post-incident reviews wherever appropriate. If they are not involved, the reason should be recorded. Discussions should consider triggers and early warning signs, de-escalation strategies used, whether agreed behaviour support plans were followed, and what needs to happen next.
- **Reviewing and updating support plans:** reassess and revise all relevant individual plans, including risk assessments, behaviour support plans, positive intervention plans, reasonable adjustments and EHCP-linked provision. Consider environmental changes or additional support to reduce future risk.
- **Supporting staff:** staff involved should complete any required incident record promptly and be offered a structured debrief with a manager or senior leader not directly involved wherever possible. This should focus on emotional impact, professional reflection, learning and development opportunities. Staff should also

be supported through supervision, peer support, external support where needed and identification of any additional training needs.

- **Review and investigation:** the headteacher or relevant senior leader should review each incident and consider whether further investigation is necessary. Depending on the circumstances, this may include consideration of safeguarding procedures, staff conduct procedures, pupil disciplinary procedures, the school behaviour policy or exclusion procedures.
- **Process review:** where appropriate, facilitate a multi-perspective review involving the pupil, their family or advocate, staff involved and a neutral person not directly involved in the incident. This should explore what happened, what upset the pupil most, whether staff actions were helpful or unhelpful, and what could be done differently next time.
- **Identifying patterns and escalation:** if restraint, seclusion or restrictive intervention is repeated, seek specialist input to identify behavioural triggers, revise support plans and improve staff training.
- **Monitoring and policy review:** use aggregated incident data to identify trends, evaluate the effectiveness of current strategies, inform policy and training updates, and monitor for disproportionate use of restraint or restrictive intervention across protected characteristics, SEND and other vulnerabilities.

Training and Support

- **Role-appropriate training:** staff who are likely to need to use reasonable force or other restrictive interventions should receive comprehensive, role-appropriate training so they can act safely, lawfully and only where necessary as a last resort.
- **Prevention and de-escalation:** training should support staff to understand behaviour as communication, recognise early signs of escalation, use relational and trauma-informed approaches, and apply de-escalation strategies before physical intervention is considered.
- **Legal duties and thresholds:** staff should understand when force may lawfully be used, the meaning of necessary and proportionate, the requirement to use the minimum force for the shortest time, and the duties to record and report significant incidents.
- **Pupil needs, impact and individual plans:** training should take account of pupils' SEND, communication needs, medical conditions, trauma history, vulnerabilities and agreed support plans, including risk assessments, behaviour support plans, positive intervention plans, reasonable adjustments and EHCP-linked provision. Staff should be supported to understand the emotional and psychological impact of restraint on pupils, particularly those with SEND, and how to avoid re-traumatisation.
- **Risk assessment:** Schools should use proactive risk assessments to identify triggers, reduce escalation and prevent situations reaching the point where restrictive physical intervention may be needed. Risk assessments should also

help ensure staff can support pupils safely and should be reviewed regularly, and after any significant incident, alongside individual plans and reasonable adjustments.

- **Following specialist training:** staff must follow the training given by specialist providers when attempting physical intervention and should not use holds or methods outside that training. Training should include how to avoid techniques that restrict airway, breathing or circulation, and how to monitor distress and safety during any intervention.
- **Refresh and review:** training should be refreshed regularly and reviewed in response to incident patterns, pupil needs, changes in guidance, policy updates and learning from post-incident reviews.
- **Staff support:** leaders should recognise the emotional impact of restraint and restrictive intervention on staff as well as pupils. Staff should have access to debriefing, supervision, peer support and additional training where needed.
- **Governance and oversight:** leaders, governors and proprietors should use incident data to monitor frequency, proportionality, repeat use, protected characteristics, SEND and whether training and support are reducing future reliance on restrictive practice.
- **Reflective culture:** leaders should promote a culture where staff can raise concerns, learn from incidents, seek support and avoid normalising restrictive intervention.

Complaints and Allegations

Schools should have clear procedures for handling complaints and allegations related to the use of reasonable force or restrictive physical intervention. A robust school complaints policy provides a transparent and structured process for pupils, parents, carers and staff to raise concerns, and helps ensure complaints are managed fairly, consistently and in line with safeguarding expectations. The policy should explain how complaints are received, investigated, resolved, recorded and communicated, including referral routes to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and, where appropriate, the Local Authority Designated Officer.

Complaints procedures should align with relevant statutory and non-statutory guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education, Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and Department for Education guidance on the use of reasonable force and restrictive interventions. In cases involving serious allegations, leaders should seek appropriate safeguarding advice and involve the Local Authority Designated Officer where needed to support an impartial process and protect all parties involved.

A serious allegation may include any concern that a member of staff may have:

- Used excessive or unjustified force beyond what is reasonable, necessary or proportionate.
- Caused physical harm or psychological distress to a pupil during an intervention.
- Engaged in inappropriate physical contact, including any action that could be interpreted as sexually inappropriate.
- Breached safeguarding procedures or used prohibited or unsafe restraint techniques.
- Failed to follow school policy, training or statutory guidance, particularly where the pupil is vulnerable or has SEND.

References

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- **The Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025**. Available at:
[UK Legislation Website](#)
- **Education and Inspections Act 2006, Section 93**. Available at:
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- **Department for Education (2026)** *Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges*. London: Department for Education. Available at:
[Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)
- **HM Government (2010)** *Equality Act 2010*. London: The Stationery Office. Available at:
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- **Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Education (2019)** *Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention: Children and young people with learning disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions and mental health difficulties in health and social care services and special education settings*. London: DHSC/DfE. Available at:
[Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention \[gov.uk\]](#),
- **Department for Education and Department of Health (2012)** *Guidance for Restrictive Physical Interventions: How to provide safe services for people with*

learning disabilities and autistic spectrum disorder (Minimising and Managing Physical Restraint). Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-restrictive-physical-interventions-for-people-with-learning-disabilities-autistic-spectrum-disorder-and-mental-health-problems>

- **Department for Education (2022)** *Reasonable Force, Restraint and Restrictive Practices in Alternative Provision and Special Schools*.
- Available at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1096524/Alternative_provision_and_special_schools_guidance.pdf
- **Ofsted (2021)** *Positive Environments Where Children Can Flourish*. Manchester: Ofsted. Available at:
[Positive Environments Where Children Can Flourish](#)

Useful Links

- The North Yorkshire Council Inclusive Mainstream Toolkit - [Inclusive Mainstream Toolkit | NYES Info](#)

The Inclusive Mainstream Toolkit (IMT) supports North Yorkshire schools to identify and meet pupils' needs through high-quality teaching, reasonable adjustments and relational practice.

- The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) manages allegations and concerns about adults who work or volunteer with children - [NYSCP LADO](#).