

## **Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force**

The use of restrictive interventions, including reasonable force and seclusion, can have a significant impact on the pupils, staff members and parents involved, as well as the wider classroom. However, there are times when the use of restrictive interventions will be lawful and necessary; for example, to keep individuals and the wider school community safe.

New guidance from the DfE comes into force from 1st April 2026 and, for the first time, includes statutory requirements in relation to reporting any use of restrictive intervention, reasonable force and seclusion. This replaces previous advice and applies to all schools.

### **Terminology**

The guidance uses the following definitions:

*Restrictive intervention:* a means to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil.

*Reasonable force:* a term used in legislation which includes physical restrictive interventions. All members of school staff have the legal power to use reasonable force in limited circumstances. Reasonable means using no more force than is necessary for the least amount of time, the application of which will depend on the circumstances.

*Significant incident:* any incident where the use of force goes beyond appropriate physical contact between pupils and staff as described in ‘Other physical contact with pupils’ within the document.

*Seclusion:* a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others, and preventing them from leaving either by physical obstruction, blocking, or making them believe they will be punished if they try to leave.

*Restraint:* a term used in legislation referring to a non-disciplinary intervention which immobilises a pupil or limits their movement. This may or may not include direct physical contact.

Within the guidance there is a focus on prevention, with a stronger emphasis on whole-school approaches and individual plans to reduce the need for physical interventions. This includes developing strong parental partnerships, and encouraging the co-production of behaviour support plans where there is an identified need.

In addition there is specific guidance for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), requiring reasonable adjustments and de-escalation before force.

### **Determining when the use of restrictive intervention is appropriate**

All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force in certain circumstances, but it is illegal to use force on a pupil for the purpose of punishment. School leaders should adopt sensible policies which allow and support their staff to make appropriate physical contact and staff who are likely to need to use reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions should be adequately trained in its safe and lawful use and in preventative strategies.

The decision on whether it is reasonable to use a restrictive intervention depends on the individual circumstances of each situation. To make this assessment, the member of staff should consider the following:

*Is it necessary?*

Staff should consider whether there are other, more effective, less restrictive ways to manage a situation, and whether restrictive intervention is likely to successfully reduce the relevant risks, or whether it would escalate the situation and cause more harm.

*Is it proportionate?*

Staff should use the least amount of force or least restrictive intervention necessary for the least amount of time required to reduce the relevant risks.

*Have you considered the pupil's welfare?*

Staff should consider the impact on the pupil's overall welfare, balanced against any actions taken. They should seek to understand how the pupil is feeling and use this information to determine whether the restrictive intervention should be, or continue to be, applied, reduced or stopped.

The list of factors is not exhaustive and staff should take into account other relevant considerations. Training on the use of restrictive interventions should equip staff to judge when it is appropriate to use them including in situation where quick decisions are needed. It should also help staff understand how to assess whether their response is reasonable under pressure. Under the updated guidance training decisions remain with schools. It states staff “who are likely to need to use reasonable force” should be “adequately trained in its safe and lawful use, and in preventative strategies”.

**Schools should not have a ‘no contact’ policy.** Additionally, schools should not grant any requests by parents or staff members not to use reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions. The adoption of a ‘no contact’ policy at a school can leave staff unable to intervene where reasonable in the circumstances to fully protect pupils.

There are circumstances when it is appropriate for staff to have some physical contact with pupils which does not give rise to any question over the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions. This will depend on the circumstance, but examples of occasions when physical contact is generally appropriate include:

- to give first aid
- to guide or escort pupils, such as holding the hand of a pupil at the front/back of the line when going to assembly, when walking together around the school or on a school trip, or when helping a pupil to a space they have chosen to access to self-regulate
- to comfort a distressed pupil
- to congratulate or praise a pupil, for example a pat on the back or a handshake
- to demonstrate how to use a musical instrument
- to demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching

**Consideration for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)**

Some children and young people with SEND may react to distressing or confusing situations by displaying behaviours which may be harmful to themselves and others. Triggers may include pain, sensory overload, unfamiliar situations or environments or feelings of fear and anxiety. In particular, pupils who are non-verbal or find verbal communication challenging may express their needs, discomfort or confusion through actions. This can lead to pupils with SEND being disproportionately subject to the use of restrictive interventions.

Schools should utilise staff who know individual pupils well to help identify and manage risk such as trigger points when challenging behaviour is more likely to occur, and develop proactive strategies to reduce the likelihood of restrictive interventions being used. They should also work with the pupil, parents and other professionals to develop prevention and de-escalation strategies.

### **Statutory Duty to Record and Report**

Schools must log every significant use of force, restraint or seclusion and inform parents as soon as possible (ideally the same day), with details on necessity, actions, and any injuries.

**Incidents must be recorded, in writing, as soon as practicable after the event, by the staff member(s) involved and they should endeavour to do this by no later than the same day.**

Schools should record the following details as a minimum:

- names of pupil and staff directly involved
- any relevant needs or circumstances of the pupil, including whether the pupil involved has an identified special educational need or disability and their SEN status code
- time, date, location and approximate duration of the intervention
- brief account of the incident, including what led up to the incident, identified or potential triggers if known, any preventative or de-escalation strategies used, and (where relevant) what type of reasonable force or restraint was applied, the degree of force, and details of any physical injuries sustained
- brief account of why the use of force was assessed as necessary in that instance
- any post-incident support, such as details of any medical treatment for injuries or other adverse impacts

### **Policy and practice**

Schools should develop and implement a policy on the use of restrictive interventions, aligned with the school's legal duties. The policy may be part of the school's behaviour policy or a standalone document, but it should be accessible, consistent and straightforward to follow. It should clearly set out the circumstances in which staff may use reasonable force and seclusion, and the procedures for recording and reporting such incidents.

### **Governor responsibilities**

The governing body of a maintained school and the proprietor of other schools must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the school's procedures for recording and reporting the use of force and seclusion and restraint are complied with. Governing bodies and proprietors should regularly review and interrogate data on restrictive interventions to ensure school leaders:

- identify and implement improvements to policies and practices
- identify areas of learning and development for school staff
- understand pupils' repeat patterns and triggers to interrogate the effectiveness of pupil support measures, share this information with teachers who work with those pupils to better support them and, where appropriate, their parents, to establish a behaviour support plan or revise an existing plan.
- identify any disproportionate use of restrictive interventions in relation to pupils who share protected characteristics, have SEN, or other types of vulnerability.

### **Searching pupils**

Head teachers and authorised staff members have a statutory (legal) power to search a pupil or their possessions if they reasonably suspect that a pupil may have a prohibited item, such as a weapon, controlled drug, alcohol or a stolen item and they may use reasonable force to do so. For items that are not prohibited but are banned only under school rules, staff members may search pupils and their possessions but may not use force or restraint.

### **Pupil and staff support**

Schools should evaluate all incidents involving the use of restrictive intervention as soon as practicable after the event to understand why it was used, the impact on pupils and staff, any patterns and trends, and how the use of restrictive interventions might be avoided in future, for example by amending or introducing a behaviour support plan.

If appropriate, the pupil and staff member involved should receive a medical assessment and treatment for any injuries as soon as possible.

Schools should also hold a follow-up conversation(s) to facilitate reflection, learning and to support pupil and staff wellbeing.

### **Complaints and allegations**

Any complaints regarding the use of restrictive interventions should be dealt with in accordance with the school's normal complaints procedure.

If an allegation regarding inappropriate use of force and/or other restrictive interventions is made against a member of staff, the procedures in Keeping Children Safe in Education should be followed. This includes the provisions regarding possible suspension of staff.

### **Additional guidance and further reading**

- Restrictive intervention, including use of reasonable force, in schools  
<https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/files/restrictive-interventions-including-use-of-reasonable-force-in-schools-guidance-from-april-2026.pdf>
- Your school's policy on the use of reasonable force
- Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2025
- Behaviour in Schools guidance  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-in-schools--2>
- Reducing the need for restraint and restrictive interventions  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-the-need-for-restraint-and-restrictive-intervention>
- Equality Act 2010: advice for schools
- Searching, Screening and Confiscation in Schools guidance  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/searching-screening-and-confiscation>
- Suspension and Permanent Exclusion guidance
- Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-behaviour-in-schools--2>
- Mobile Phones in Schools  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-phones-in-schools>