

Restrictive Interventions Including Use of Reasonable Force in Schools

Restrictive
interventions,
including use of
reasonable force, in
schools

Guidance for schools in England

April 2026

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Updated Guidance

FIND THE GUIDANCE HERE:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6943dad6501cdd438f4cf5aa/Restrictive interventions including use of reasonable force in schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6943dad6501cdd438f4cf5aa/Restrictive_interventions_including_use_of_reasonable_force_in_schools.pdf)

Comes into force in April 2026

The status of this guidance is that it is **non-statutory EXCEPT pg14 which contains statutory guidance** on the reporting and recording of using force.

1. Definition Updates

While the basic premise is the same, the 2026 guidance adds further specific detail:

- **Emphasis on Duration:** The 2026 definition explicitly adds that force must be used for the "least amount of time". This specific constraint was not part of the primary definition in the previous guidance.
- **New Umbrella Terminology:** The 2026 guidance now places "reasonable force" under the new umbrella term "**restrictive intervention**". This term describes both physical and non-physical actions intended to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement.
- **Categorisation of "Significant Incidents":** The new guidance introduces the term "significant incident" to distinguish between reasonable force and "appropriate physical contact" (such as first aid or comforting a pupil). This is a critical distinction because "significant incidents" now trigger **statutory recording and reporting duties** that did not exist in the 2013 version.
- **Unacceptable Actions:** It is now explicitly stated that pupils **must not be restrained** in any way that impacts their airway, breathing, or circulation.

1. Definition Updates

Contextual Application

The 2026 guidance provides more criteria for assessing if force is reasonable, requiring staff to consider not just if it is **necessary** and **proportionate**, but also how it impacts the **pupil's overall welfare** and whether it maintains their **dignity**. It also specifically highlights that for pupils with SEND, triggers like sensory overload or communication difficulties must be considered when determining if an intervention is appropriate.

2. Recording & Reporting

The most significant update is the introduction of statutory requirement around the recording and reporting of the use of force.

- **Recording:** Governing bodies and proprietors **must** ensure a procedure is in place to record every significant incident where force is used. This record should be completed as soon as practicable, ideally on the **same day**.
- **Reporting to Parents:** Schools are now legally required to report significant incidents of force to parents as soon as practicable, aiming for the **same day**. Previously, this was considered "good practice" rather than a strict statutory requirement.
- **Seclusion Duty:** There is a new legal duty under the 2025 Regulations to **record and report the use of seclusion**. Seclusion is now defined as 'an off-disciplinary safety measure used only to protect others from harm when a pupil is dysregulated, and it must never be used as a punishment.

3. Enhanced focus on SEND & Risk Assessment

There is now a greater emphasis on protecting pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), who are often disproportionately affected by restrictive interventions.

- **Mandatory Risk Assessments:** Schools **must** carry out risk assessments for staff who regularly work with pupils where the use of force or restrictive interventions may be required.
- **Co-production:** Leadership teams should work with parents and pupils to **co-produce behaviour support plans** that outline proactive strategies, triggers, and any necessary adjustments to the school environment.

4. Governance

Governing bodies and proprietors now have clearer, more active responsibilities:

- **Data Analysis:** Leadership **must** regularly review and **interrogate data** on restrictive interventions. This is to identify repeat patterns, evaluate the effectiveness of support measures, and detect any disproportionate use of interventions regarding pupils with protected characteristics or SEND.
- **Policy Development:** Schools **must** have a clear policy on restrictive interventions that is accessible to the whole school community and emphasises **minimising their use** through prevention and de-escalation.

5. Post Incident Support

The guidance provides more detail on what should happen after an intervention:

- **Debriefing:** Schools should hold follow-up conversations with **both staff and pupils** to repair relationships and facilitate learning. This process is ideally facilitated by a staff member not involved in the incident to maintain impartiality.
- **Wellbeing Monitoring:** There is a new emphasis on monitoring the ongoing wellbeing of staff, the involved pupil, and any peers who witnessed the incident.

Next Steps for Leaders

1. Update with **leaders / governors / trustees**
2. Agree where you will **record** any significant incident and what the record should contain. Would a new proforma be helpful?
3. **Review existing restrictive intervention policy** and procedures and amend by April 2026
4. Make the revised policy **accessible** to all in the school community – consider specific communication to parents and pupils
5. Review any children's individual **behaviour/ support plans** in line with this guidance
6. Agree your **risk assessment** process for staff who use force
7. Ensure staff have had **training** on:
 - Your reviewed policy
 - Terminology – ensuring there is consistent understanding of what reasonable force looks like and what a serious incident is. Scenarios would help with this.
 - Positive behaviour support strategies and deescalation strategies
 - Specialist training on restrictive interventions
 - Recording incidents
 - Leading debriefs

