



Department
for Education

Use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions in schools

Guidance for schools in England

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Summary

The use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions 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 reasonable force and other restrictive interventions will be lawful; for example, to keep individuals and the wider school community safe.¹

This document aims to help schools proactively minimise the need to use reasonable force and other restrictive interventions through early support, prevention and de-escalation strategies.

Status of this guidance

- Pages 14-15 of this document contain statutory guidance from the Department for Education issued under section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The governing body or proprietor of a school in England must have regard to this in relation to recording and reporting each significant incident involving the use of force by members of staff.
- The rest of this guidance is non-statutory.

This guidance should not be taken as a complete or definitive statement of the law, nor as a substitute for the relevant legislation. Legal advice should be sought as appropriate.

The terms “must” and “should” are used throughout the guidance. Where the text uses the word “must”, the person in question is legally required to do something. Where it uses the term “should”, the advice set out should be followed unless there is good reason not to.

Where the text uses the word “parent”, it should be read as inclusive of carers and any other person who has parental responsibility.

Legislation this publication refers to

The principal legislation to which this guidance relates is:

- the Education and Inspections Act 2006, especially sections 93 and 93A
- the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated regulations
- the Human Rights Act 1998
- the Equality Act 2010

¹ [Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)

Who this publication is for

This guidance is for:

- proprietors, school leaders, school staff and governing bodies of all schools in England²
- local authorities

Main points

The guidance has been updated to:

- provide new statutory guidance about recording and reporting the use of force, effective from September 2025³
- provide new non-statutory guidance about the use, recording and reporting of other restrictive interventions
- provide additional clarification on the use of reasonable force to help school staff use this power safely and appropriately
- provide specific support for staff who work with pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- make clearer the responsibilities of school staff, governing bodies and proprietors

Document history

This guidance replaces Use of reasonable force (2013) and will be kept under review and updated as necessary.

Terminology

For clarity, this guidance will use the following definitions:

Reasonable force: Physical contact by a member of staff on a pupil to control or restrain their actions/movements. Reasonable means using no more force than is necessary for the least amount of time, the application of which will depend on the circumstances. Any use of reasonable force is an example of a restrictive intervention and may or may not involve the use of restraint.

Restrictive interventions: Any planned or reactive action which limits a pupil's movement, liberty or freedom to act independently. Restrictive interventions may include

² For the purpose of this guidance, references to “schools” means all schools whether maintained, non-maintained or independent (including academy schools and alternative provision academies), maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units.

³ [Section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)

use of equipment, medication or seclusion.⁴ Restrictive interventions may or may not involve the use of reasonable force.

Restraint: A form of restrictive intervention involving direct physical contact and force where the intention is to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil. Restraint may also include mechanical or chemical restraint. Restraint may or may not involve the use of force.

As noted within the definitions, these terms are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories. For example, depending on the circumstances, if two members of staff briefly physically pull apart two pupils who are fighting, all three definitions could be relevant.

⁴ For the purpose of this guidance, we define seclusion to mean the supervised confinement and isolation of a pupil, away from other pupils, in an area from which the pupil is prevented from leaving of their own free will.

Using reasonable force

Who can use reasonable force?

All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force in certain circumstances.⁵ 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. We trust school leaders to make decisions on training based on their school's individual contexts and needs. When deciding what formal staff training is required, school leaders should ensure that the chosen training reflects the principles of this guidance.

Employers have a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees. Therefore, schools should carry out risk assessments to ensure that staff who regularly work alongside pupils where the use of reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions may be required can do so as safely as possible.⁶

Understanding when to use reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions

The decision on whether it is reasonable to use force and/or other restrictive interventions, as defined in the terminology section above, depends on the individual circumstances of each situation. In assessing whether force and/or other restrictive interventions are reasonable in a situation, the member of staff should use their professional judgement.

Factors staff might want to consider include:

- **Is it necessary?**

Staff should consider whether there are reasonable alternative ways to manage a situation and achieve the desired outcome. Staff should assess whether the use of reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions is likely to successfully reduce the relevant risks, or whether its use would escalate the situation further or cause more harm than the consequences of the behaviour that it intends to address. Where possible, staff should communicate with other staff members to understand any broader risks in the environment.

⁵ [Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006](#) details that reasonable force may be used to prevent or stop a pupil from causing injury to themselves or others, committing a criminal offence, damaging property, or doing something that prejudices discipline at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

⁶ [Health and safety: responsibilities and duties for schools](#)

- **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. Staff should consider the personal circumstances of the pupil such as medical conditions, special educational needs or other vulnerabilities, their characteristics such as age and size, and must consider relevant equality implications under the Equality Act 2010.⁷

- **Have you considered the pupil's welfare?**

Staff should consider the impact on the pupil's overall welfare, balanced against any actions taken. For example, pupils who have experienced an adverse life event, with diagnosed or undiagnosed medical conditions or sensory impairments, past trauma or neglect, communication difficulties, or other needs, may find the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions particularly distressing. Staff should seek to maintain respect for a pupil's dignity. This may include, where possible, considering the location and environment where any intervention is used, such as in front of their peers. Where possible, staff should clearly and calmly communicate to the pupil what is happening, why, and explain what the pupil needs to do. For pupils with difficulties with speech, language and communication, or with English as an additional language, verbal and/or non-verbal strategies should be used to ensure the pupil understands what is happening and has adequate time to process information and respond. Staff should seek to understand how the pupil is feeling and use this information to determine whether the use of reasonable force and/or other restrictive intervention should be, or continue to be, applied, reduced or stopped.

This list of factors is not definitive, and consideration must be given to all other relevant factors. Training on the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions should support staff in assessing when the need to use force and/or other restrictive interventions is reasonable, which may require a quick decision.

⁷ [Equality Act 2010](#)

Pupil and staff support

Following each significant incident involving the use of reasonable force and/or other restrictive intervention, schools should evaluate the incident to understand why reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions were used, the impact on pupils and staff, any patterns and trends, and how the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions might be avoided in future, for example by amending or introducing a behaviour support plan.

‘Significant incident’ refers to any incident where the use of reasonable force goes beyond appropriate physical contact between pupils and staff as described in [‘Other physical contact with pupils’](#) in this document. This includes when physical force is used to implement a restrictive intervention.

If necessary, the pupil and staff member involved should receive a medical assessment and treatment for any injuries as soon as possible. Any significant incident in which a member of staff uses reasonable force on a pupil must be recorded as described in [‘Recording the use of force’](#) in this document. In addition, any injuries should be recorded in accordance with the school’s procedures and reported as appropriate to the Health and Safety Executive.⁸

Following a significant incident in which reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions are used, schools should hold a follow-up conversation(s) to facilitate reflection, learning and to support pupil and staff wellbeing. This conversation should be framed as part of the overall debriefing process and look to understand what happened during the incident and why, based on separate reflections from both the staff and pupils involved; as well as to repairing and rebuilding relationships through dialogue. This process should ideally be facilitated by a staff member who was not involved in the incident and may also benefit from the presence of an additional person to ensure impartiality and support. By engaging in this process, schools can foster a culture of continuous improvement and consider how things might be improved in the future.

Schools should continue to monitor pupil and staff wellbeing and provide additional support if needed, for example through further follow-up conversations, counselling or other resources. Additionally, any pupil who witnesses an incident of reasonable force and/or restrictive intervention where a peer may have been injured or become distressed, should also be provided with appropriate support where necessary.

⁸ [Incident Reporting in Schools: Guidance for Employers.](#)

Use of reasonable force to search pupils

Head teachers and staff they authorise have a statutory power to search a pupil or their possessions where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil may have a prohibited item.⁹

A member of staff can use such force as is reasonable to search for legally prohibited items, but not to search for items banned under the school rules only. The decision to use reasonable force should be made on a case-by-case basis. Staff should refer to the [Searching, Screening and Confiscation in Schools](#) guidance document for detailed advice on searching a pupil.

Unacceptable uses of force

School staff must never use force on a pupil for the purpose of punishment. Pupils should not be deliberately restrained in a way that affects their airway, breathing or circulation, for example by covering the mouth and/or nose or applying pressure to the neck region or abdomen. The use of force can be dangerous, particularly where it occurs on the ground. If a pupil is unintentionally held on the ground, staff should release their holds or re-position into a safer alternative or standing position as quickly as possible.

Where needed, the pupil should receive a medical assessment and treatment for any injuries as soon as possible. For any form of restraint, including seated and standing, there is a risk of physical and psychological harm, and it should be avoided where possible.

Other physical contact with pupils

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. School leaders should adopt sensible policies which allow and support their staff to make appropriate physical contact.

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

⁹ A prohibited item is defined in section 550ZA(3) of the Education Act 1996.

- to guide or escort pupils, e.g. 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, e.g. 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

In assessing whether physical contact is appropriate in a given situation, the member of staff should use their judgement, have regard to the school's child protection (or any other relevant) policy, the applicable circumstances (e.g. whether there are other adults present), the individual pupil's age, and any other material factors, including but not limited to, whether the pupil has SEND or other vulnerabilities, or whether any alternative strategies which do not include physical contact can be used.

Policy and practice

Developing a policy on the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions

School leaders should develop and implement a policy on the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions. It must be aligned with the school's legal duties including those relating to the recording and reporting of significant incidents where a member of staff uses force on a pupil,¹⁰ the welfare of children, the Human Rights Act 1998¹¹ and the Equality Act 2010.¹² This policy can be contained within the school's behaviour policy or be a standalone document. It should be accessible, consistent and straightforward to follow. It should include details on the power of school staff to use reasonable force in certain circumstances¹³ and must include detail on the procedures for recording and reporting each significant incident where a member of staff uses reasonable force on a pupil.

The policy should emphasise the importance of prevention and de-escalation as a means of minimising the need to use reasonable force and other restrictive interventions. It should set out the specific whole school measures that the school employs to minimise the need to use reasonable force and other restrictive interventions as well as tailored approaches for individual pupils.

Whole-school measures can include:

- consideration of how the school and classroom environment can support all pupils to achieve and thrive
- sharing best practice for whole-class behaviour management, and for managing communal spaces such as corridors and playgrounds
- training staff in effective communication strategies, such as using appropriate tone of voice and empathy to aid de-escalation
- development of working staff-pupil relationships and trust
- recording and analysing data on the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions to inform improvement planning

Individual approaches can include:

- working closely with parents to support individual pupils

¹⁰ [Section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)

¹¹ [Human Rights Act 1998](#)

¹² Schools must ensure its policies and guidance comply with its duties under the Equality Act 2010, including the public sector equality duty where relevant. Further guidance on a school's duties under the Equality Act can be found in the departmental guidance: [Equality Act Advice Final.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹³ Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006

- strategies to support individual pupils based on their identified needs, including the development of behaviour support plans. Where a pupil has a disability, schools have a legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010 to support pupils with reasonable adjustments, making sure they can benefit from what the school offers in the same way as a pupil who is not disabled
- giving pupils time, space and strategies to calm down before their behaviour escalates

Communicating the school's policy on the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions to all members of the community is an important way of building and maintaining the school's culture and makes expectations transparent to all. School leaders should ensure that the policy is made available to all staff, pupils and parents.

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 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 reasonable force and other restrictive interventions.

Schools should seek to understand the underlying triggers of challenging behaviour so that they can provide proactive support, create an inclusive environment and consider the impact of school policies on pupils with SEND. For example, schools should consider how the school culture and environment may be experienced differently by pupils with SEND and seek to support pupils to cope with situations that they may find distressing. 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 reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions being used. They should also work with the pupil, parents and other professionals to develop prevention and de-escalation strategies.

Depending on the circumstances, examples of strategies may include:

- removing stimuli that may be causing distress
- changing body language, facial expression, and/or tone of voice
- supporting the pupil to express their emotions before getting overwhelmed
- engaging the pupil in an activity which can help them manage their feelings of anxiety
- distracting the pupil in something that interests them or by introducing familiar objects and activities to redirect their attention

Where appropriate, school staff should work with pupils with SEND and their parents in the co-production of any necessary behaviour support plans. Behaviour support plans should outline any adjustments, such as to address aspects of the school environment which the pupil finds challenging and ways for pupils to communicate their needs effectively. Behaviour support plans should detail circumstances where it may be appropriate for staff to have increased physical contact with a pupil. This should be discussed in conjunction with the relevant persons, such as teachers, parents, the pupil, pastoral staff or health professionals, and parameters around its use stated clearly in the plan. Where there is an identified risk, such as increased likelihood in the need to use reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions, schools must have risk assessments in place and where possible, mitigate risks such as through training and prevention strategies.¹⁴ Whether the use of reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions is appropriate will depend on the circumstances, irrespective of whether it has been considered as part of a behaviour support plan.

Any behaviour support plans should be reviewed with the pupil and their parent periodically and following any significant incident, so that changes can be made based on evidence of what has worked and what has not worked in practice for the individual pupil. Where a pupil has a disability, the school has a duty under the Equality Act 2010, to take reasonable steps to avoid disadvantage and ensure that the pupil can fully participate in the education provided by the school, and that they can enjoy the other benefits, facilities and services that the school provides for pupils.

¹⁴ [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#)

Recording and reporting the use of force by members of staff

Recording the use of force (statutory guidance)

Governing bodies of maintained schools and the proprietors of other schools must ensure that a procedure is in place for recording each significant incident in which a member of staff uses force on a pupil, as part of the school's duty under section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Incidents must be recorded by the staff member(s) involved as soon as practicable after the event.

The procedure must require that a record of any such incident is made in writing as soon as practicable after the incident. The requirement to record applies even if the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions in certain circumstances is agreed with parents as part of a pupil's behaviour support plan.

In discharging their duty to have a procedure in place, the governing body or proprietor must have regard to this guidance and any other relevant guidance issued by the Secretary of State for these purposes.

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 length of time the intervention was used
- 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, what type of reasonable force was applied, the degree of force, and details of physical injuries sustained, if applicable
- 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

Schools may also wish to record additional details to support their evaluation of incidents to identify best practices and areas for improvement. For example, the pupil's and/or witnesses' accounts of what happened, when and how parents were notified, and what follow-up has taken place.

Reporting the use of force (statutory guidance)

Governing bodies of maintained schools and the proprietors of other schools must ensure that a procedure is in place for reporting each significant incident in which a member of staff uses force on a pupil to each parent of the pupil as soon as practicable after the incident, except where:

- the pupil is aged 20 or over; or
- it appears to the staff member that doing so would be likely to result in significant harm to the pupil. This includes all forms of abuse and neglect. In this instance, the staff member must report the incident to the local authority within whose area the pupil is ordinarily resident.

A report of the incident made to parents should include the following details as a minimum:

- time, date, location and approximate length of time the force was used
- brief account of what type of reasonable force was applied, and the degree of force
- details of any physical injuries sustained, if applicable
- brief account of why the use of force was assessed as necessary in that instance

The requirement to report applies even if the use of reasonable force in certain circumstances is agreed with parents as part of a pupil's behaviour support plan.

Schools may choose how best to communicate this information to parents. For example, via phone call, email or online messaging system. Best practice would include inviting parents to have a follow-up discussion about the incident where appropriate. This could involve a discussion about any behavioural triggers, any warning signs of an impending incident, whether any agreed behaviour support plans were followed, what de-escalation strategies were used and how effective they were, and what might be done differently in the future. The school may use this information to amend any existing behaviour support plans, as needed.

Recording and reporting the use of non-force related restrictive interventions (non-statutory guidance)

Section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 does not require schools to record and report instances of restrictive interventions where force was not used. However, it is best practice for schools to apply the same recording and reporting policy to restrictive interventions where force is not used.

Guidance for governing bodies and proprietors on using data on reasonable force and other restrictive interventions

The governing body of a maintained school and the proprietor of other schools must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the school's procedure for recording and reporting the use of force is complied with.

Governing bodies and proprietors should regularly review and interrogate data on reasonable force and other restrictive interventions to:

- identify and implement improvements to policies and practices, particularly where approaches have been used for some time but have not been effective.
- identify areas of learning and development for school staff, supporting specific departments and teachers to improve understanding and practice.
- 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 reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions in relation to pupils who share protected characteristics, have SEN, or other types of vulnerability.

Governing bodies and proprietors should consider the limitations of data and what can be inferred from it. Analysis should be proportionate and avoid over-interpreting small subgroups of people.

Complaints and allegations

Any complaints regarding the use of reasonable force and other 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 suspension of staff.

Annex: Further information

[Behaviour in Schools guidance](#)

[Reducing the need for restraint and restrictive interventions](#)

[Equality Act 2010: advice for schools](#)

[Searching, Screening and Confiscation in Schools guidance](#)

[Suspension and Permanent Exclusion guidance](#)

[Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools](#)

[Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)

[Mobile Phones in Schools](#)



Department
for Education

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