Transform Trust

Restrictive Physical Interventions & Use of Reasonable Force Guidance

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206	Director of Inclusion/SEND Associate	V6 March 2026	Bi-annually

Introduction

This guidance is based on DfE Restrictive Interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools Guidance for schools in England April 2026 and best practice provided by Nottingham City RPI Solutions on de-escalation and positive handling. It should be referred to by all schools within Transform Trust. Staff should also refer to their own school behaviour policy.

Best Practice De-escalation Skills and Techniques

Underpinning the success of managing the diverse needs that will be present in each classroom is the skill of the teacher and support staff in intervening early to **de-escalate** situations calmly when they arise. Remaining calm and professionally detached is not natural and therefore it is a skill that will need to be practiced. Below are some examples of techniques that can be used:

- Stay calm
- Keep a neutral facial expression
- Be aware of personal space
- Distract/divert
- Reassure pupil
- Use a low voice
- Use non-judgemental language
- Give them a 'way out'
- Give them time to follow instructions

Things to avoid

- Do not make threats you cannot carry through, such as threatening to exclude the child.
- Do not be defensive or take it personally. What is being said may seem insulting and directed at you, but this level of aggression is not really about you.
- Do not use humour unless you are sure it will help and you have a very good relationship with the child.
- Do not use sarcasm or humiliate the child.

The Use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI)

The use of RPI will always be a planned response where possible, however there may be times it is used under a dynamic risk assessment. All other behaviour management strategies will be used before physical intervention.

When determining whether the use of RPI is appropriate you must consider:

Is it necessary?

- Are there other more effective, less restrictive ways to manage the situation?
- Is RPI likely to successfully reduce the relevant risks, or is its use going to escalate the situation further or cause more harm than the behaviour itself?
- Staff should communicate with other staff members to understand any broader risks in the environment.

Is it proportionate?

- Staff should use the least amount of RPI necessary for the least amount of time required to reduce the relevant risks.
- If the intervention itself is escalating the situation, staff should reconsider their approach and attempt an alternative strategy.
- 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.

Has the pupil's welfare been considered?

Staff should consider the impact on the pupil's overall welfare, balanced against any actions taken.

- Pupils may find the use of RPI particularly distressing if they have experienced an adverse life event or past trauma or neglect, or if they have a diagnosed or undiagnosed medical condition, sensory impairments, communication difficulties or other additional needs.
- 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 restrictive intervention should be, or continue to be, applied, reduced or stopped.

All members of school staff have the legal power to use reasonable force in certain circumstances as listed below.

The use of RPI is only necessary to prevent a pupil from:

- Causing injury to themselves or others
- Committing a criminal offence
- Damaging property
- Causing disorder among pupils at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise

It is good practice for all staff to receive Legal and Ethical training. However, named individuals are trained in de-escalation and RPI techniques. This training will be refreshed annually, and a record of their training will be kept in the school.

In the event of using RPI then only the trained techniques will be used as part of a planned response. It should be used only to control or restrain and never with the intent to cause pain or harm or used as a punishment. Staff should always avoid touching or holding a pupil in a way that might be considered inappropriate.

Knowledge of the pupil is a key factor in the professional judgements that will be made.

The 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 legally prohibited item. 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. Staff should refer to the Searching, Screening and Confiscation in Schools guidance document for detailed advice on searching a pupil.

Individual Risk Assessments and Individual Handling Plans

Where there is an identified risk, such as increased likelihood in the need to use reasonable force and/or RPI, a risk assessment must be in place. The risk assessment can be used to inform decisions around de-escalation and preventing the use of RPI. Children who require RPI will have an Individual Handling Plan (IHP) detailing strategies and techniques used. The IHP and outcomes of the risk assessment will be shared with parents/carers and other relevant external agencies.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)

Some pupils 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 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 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.

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

Behaviour Support Plans

Where appropriate, school staff will 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 people, such as teachers, parents, the pupil, pastoral staff or health professionals, and parameters around its use stated clearly in the plan.

Whether the use of RPI 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 so 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.

Other Physical Contact with Pupils

Schools should not have a 'no contact' policy. Additionally, schools should not grant requests by parents or staff members not to use reasonable force and/or RPI.

There are circumstances where 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 RPI. 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 moving around school or a different space, 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

In assessing whether physical contact is appropriate in a given situation, the member of staff should use their professional judgement and have regard to:

- The school's child protection policy (or other relevant policy)
- The applicable circumstances, such as whether there are other adults present
- The individual pupil's age and if the pupil has SEND
- If any alternative strategies that do not include physical contact could be used.

The Use of Seclusion

Seclusion is a non-disciplinary safety measure for pupils experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation.

- Seclusion should only be used to prevent harm, not as a punishment.
- The confined space must be safe, non-threatening and supervised at all times.
- Pupils should be allowed to leave once the immediate risk reduces.
- The use of seclusion must be recorded and reported to parents/carers ideally on the same day.

Recording Incidents

When RPI has been used, check both the child and adult are ok and no further assistance is needed; and where necessary report any injuries. The following process then needs to take place:

1. The incident must be reported immediately to the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher/appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team.
2. The RPI log must be completed by the staff involved as soon as possible after the incident, in line with the processes and procedures that the school has in place. For example, inputting the data onto Arbor.
3. Following the incident, the child's provision will need to be reviewed, and time given to reflect on why RPI was used, the impact on pupils and staff, any patterns and trends and how RPI may be avoided in the future.
4. In the event of an injury occurring, the appropriate accident/personal contact incident reporting procedures must be followed.
5. Any pupil who witnesses an incident of RPI where a peer may have been injured or become distressed should also be provided with appropriate support where necessary.

Recording the Use of RPI and Reasonable Force (Statutory Guidance)

Incidents must be recorded as soon as practicable after the event and no later than the same day.

Schools must record the following details as a minimum:

- **Names of pupils and staff directly involved**
- **Any relevant needs or circumstances of the pupil, including if the pupil has an identified SEND 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, what type of reasonable force was applied and details of any physical injuries sustained**
- **Brief account of why the use of force was assessed as necessary in that instance**
- **Post incident support, such as details of any medical treatment for injuries.**

Schools may also record additional details including:

- The pupil's views
- When and how parents were notified
- What follow up has taken place

Reporting the Use of RPI and Reasonable Force to Parents/Carers (Statutory Guidance)

Parents/carers of the pupils involved must be informed in writing (via email or online messaging system) as soon as practicable after the event and no later than the same day as long as this will not put the child at any risk of serious harm.

A report of the incident made to parents/carers in writing must include the following details as a minimum:

- **Time, date, location and approximate duration of the intervention**
- **Brief account of why the intervention was assessed as necessary in that instance**
- **Brief account of what type of force was applied**
- **Details of any physical injuries sustained, if applicable**

Best practice should involve inviting parents/carers to have a follow-up discussion about the incident where appropriate.
This could involve a discussion about:

- Any behavioural triggers or 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
- What might be done differently in the future

Recording & Reporting the Use of Seclusion (Statutory Guidance)

The use of seclusion must be recorded and reported in writing (via email or online messaging system) to parents/carers of the pupils involved as soon as practicable after the event and no later than the same day, as-long as this will not put the child at any risk of serious harm.

Schools must record the following details as a minimum:

- **Names of pupil and staff directly involved**
- **Time, date, location and approximate duration of the seclusion**
- **Any relevant needs or circumstances of the pupil, including if the pupil has an identified SEND and their SEN status code**
- **Brief account of why the seclusion was assessed as necessary**
- **Details of any injuries sustained, if applicable**
- **Any post-incident support, such as any medical treatment for injuries or other adverse impacts**

A report of the seclusion made to parents/carers in writing must include the following details as a minimum:

- **Time, date, location and approximate duration of the seclusion**
- **Brief account of why the seclusion was assessed as necessary in that instance**
- **Details of any physical injuries sustained, if applicable**

Best practice should involve inviting parents/carers to have a follow-up discussion about the incident where appropriate.
If one incident requires the use of both RPI and seclusion, only one report combining all of the relevant information should be shared in writing to parents/carers.

Responsibilities of Governing Bodies-Recording and Reporting Duties:

Recoding the use of force (statutory guidance)
Governing bodies 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.

Reporting the use of force (statutory guidance)
Governing bodies must ensure that a procedure is in place for reporting each significant use of force to the parents/carers of the pupil involved as soon as practicable after the incident, and they should endeavour to do this no later than the same day.

Recording and reporting the use of seclusion
Governing bodies must ensure that a procedure is in place for recording each seclusion as part of the school's duty under the Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025.

Incidents must be recorded as soon as practicable after the event. It should be recorded by the staff member(s) involved and they should endeavour to do this no later than the same day. 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 seclusion or restraint in certain circumstances is agreed with parents as part of a pupil's behaviour support plan.

Guidance for Governing Bodies on using data:

The governing body must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the school's procedures for recording and reporting the use of 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, particularly where approaches have been used for some time but have not been effective.
- identify areas of learning and development for school staff 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 restrictive interventions in relation to pupils who share protected characteristics, have SEN, or other types of vulnerability.

Monitoring and Review

This guidance may be amended at any time to take account of changes in legislation. The normal cycle of review for this guidance is bi-annual. It should be read in conjunction with the school's behaviour, safeguarding and health and safety policies.

Definitions of Key Terms

Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI)

Methods used to prevent or restrict the movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil.

Reasonable Force

A term used in legislation which includes restrictive physical 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.

Seclusion

A non-disciplinary intervention for pupils experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation, involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others for safety reasons. It may involve preventing them from leaving either by physical obstruction, blocking, or making them believe they will be punished if they try to leave.

- Seclusion is used to prevent harm, not as a punishment.
- The confined space must be safe, non-threatening and supervised at all times.
- Pupils should be allowed to leave once the immediate risk reduces.
- The use of seclusion must be recorded and reported to parents/carers ideally on the same day.

Physical Contact

Appropriate actions such as administering first aid, guiding, comforting, praising or demonstrating.