

Safeguarding Blog:

What the new Restriction Interventions Guidance Means for Schools

From April 2026, schools will be working under new DfE guidance on Restrictive Interventions, Including the Use of Reasonable Force in Schools. This replaces the long-standing 2013 guidance and reflects a much clearer safeguarding lens on how schools manage risk, behaviour and crisis situations. A lot of the guidance will be familiar, but there are important updates that every school leader, DSL and governor needs to understand. This week's blog considers the new guidance, restrictive interventions, when reasonable force can be used, the stronger focus on prevention and de-escalation, recording and reporting, and the Top Tips for Best Safeguarding Practice.

The new guidance [Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools \(DfE\)](#), does not remove schools' ability to act decisively to keep people safe. It sets higher safeguarding standards and reinforces that restrictive intervention should be rare.

The guidance is an opportunity for schools to strengthen trust with children and families, and to ensure that when things do go wrong, children's dignity and safety are prioritised.

What are "restrictive interventions"?

The new guidance deliberately widens the language beyond physical restraint: Restrictive interventions include 'any action – physical or non-physical – that limits a pupil's movement, liberty or independence'. Reasonable force is one type of restrictive intervention, but not the only one.

This might include:

- Physically intervening to prevent injury
- Blocking a pupil's movement
- Guiding a pupil away from danger
- Seclusion (in very limited, safety-driven circumstances)

The key message is that restriction should always be a last resort, used only when necessary to keep children safe.

What is 'seclusion'?

The new guidance defines a new non-disciplinary safety measure, seclusion, in which a pupil is prevented from leaving a space and separated from others because they pose an immediate risk of harm to themselves or others. Seclusion must be supervised, proportionate, time-limited and used only as a last resort when de-escalation strategies have failed. Crucially, it must never be used as punishment or a behaviour management tool. From April 2026, incidents of seclusion are subject to mandatory recording and parental reporting, reflecting the strengthened safeguarding focus in the new guidance, and the recognition of the potential impact of seclusion on children's dignity, wellbeing and rights.

When can reasonable force be used?

All school staff have the legal power to use reasonable force, but only in specific, limited circumstances. The guidance is clear that reasonable force may be used to:

- Prevent injury to a pupil or others
- Stop a criminal offence
- Prevent serious damage to property
- Prevent significant disruption where safety is at risk

It is important to remember that all of these rely on professional judgement, based on the individual situation at that moment.

What has not changed is equally important:

- Reasonable force must never be used as punishment
- It must not be used to enforce compliance or routines
- It must always be proportionate, necessary and time-limited.

A stronger focus on prevention and de-escalation

One of the most welcome updates in the guidance is the emphasis on preventing situations escalating in the first place. Schools are expected to:

- Recognise that children behave well when they feel safe, understood and connected
- Understand the underlying causes of distress and dysregulation where behaviour is a form of communication, especially for pupils experiencing distress, trauma, SEND or unmet needs
- Use early intervention, reasonable adjustments and de-escalation strategies
- Plan proactively for pupils who are known to need support

For pupils with SEND, this is particularly important. The guidance highlights the need for personalised planning, reasonable adjustments and avoiding approaches that may re-traumatise or escalate behaviour.

Recording and reporting: what schools must do

This is where the guidance becomes statutory. From April 2026, schools 'must record and report each significant incident involving the use of force'. This requirement sits under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Records should include:

- Why the intervention was necessary
- The type and duration of force used
- Any injuries or medical concerns
- Whether the pupil has SEND
- How the incident was followed up.

Parents should be informed as soon as practicable, ideally on the same day, unless doing so would place someone at risk of serious harm. The focus is on transparency, safeguarding and learning, rather than on apportioning blame.

Top Tips for Best Safeguarding Practice

Update your policies now

- Behaviour, safeguarding and SEND policies should explicitly reference restrictive interventions, not just “reasonable force”.

Train staff beyond the legal basics

- Staff need confidence in de-escalation, emotional regulation and trauma-informed practice.

If you use seclusion

- If seclusion is used, pause and review. Ask not just what happened, but why, whether it was avoidable, and what needs to change to reduce future risk.

Plan for pupils, not incidents

- Use behaviour plans and risk assessments to reduce the likelihood of crisis situations, especially for pupils with known vulnerabilities.

Record with care and consistency

- Good quality and comprehensive recording protects pupils and staff. Ensure systems are clear, recorded in a timely way, and reviewed by senior leaders.

Use data intelligently

- Governors and leaders should look for patterns e.g. repeated incidents, particular times or environments, and ask whether anything needs to be tweaked, developed or improved.

Keep safeguarding at the centre

- There are important questions staff can ask themselves to ensure that there is a child centred approach to any restrictive intervention: Was this intervention necessary? Was it proportionate? Was it in the child’s best interests?

Reflective Learning

- If the answers are not clear, reflective learning can help to identify patterns and strengthen support so that restrictive interventions remain rare, proportionate and a last resort.