



Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools

Guidance effective 1 April 2026

Introduction

The DfE guidance on the *Use of reasonable force* (2013) remains relevant in principle, but was formally replaced on 1 April 2026 by the updated statutory and non-statutory document [*Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools*](#). This policy reflects those new expectations.

At Beechcroft Infants School, all staff seek to foster an ethos where pupils feel valued, understood and safe. We believe that good, positive, caring and respectful relationships between pupils and adults are essential for the wellbeing, security and self-esteem of our children. This remains the core of our trauma-informed practice and underpins everything that happens in our school.

This policy should be read alongside our Behaviour Policy, Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, and “Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People”.

Corporal punishment is illegal and must never be used. Physical restraint must never be used as a punishment or to cause pain. This is both unlawful and inconsistent with the ethos of our school.

This policy reflects both the statutory duties set out on page 14 of the DfE guidance *Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools* (DfE, 2026), which schools *must* follow in relation to recording and reporting significant incidents, and the wider non-statutory expectations contained in the document.

Preventing the Need for Restrictive Interventions

The 2026 guidance places a strong emphasis on prevention, early support, de-escalation and relational practice to minimise the use of restrictive interventions wherever possible.

At Beechcroft we:

- Use positive relationships and predictable routines to help pupils co-regulate
- Identify early signs of distress and seek to reduce anxiety

- Use calm, non-confrontational approaches
- Model emotional regulation
- Use de-escalation strategies before considering any physical intervention

Restrictive interventions should only be used when necessary to keep individuals safe and only after other suitable strategies have been considered or attempted.

All preventative and de-escalation practices should be applied in a way that is consistent with the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010, as emphasised in the 2026 guidance, ensuring that pupil dignity, fairness, and non-discrimination are central to all decision-making.

Definition of Restrictive Intervention / Reasonable Force

“Restrictive intervention” refers to any intervention where a member of staff uses force to restrict a child’s movement. This may include physical restraint, guiding, holding, accompanied movement and, in limited circumstances, seclusion. The updated 2026 guidance provides an expanded and clearer definition of these terms.

Reasonable force may be used to prevent a pupil from:

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

The force used must always be proportionate, necessary, and applied for the shortest possible time. Staff must use no more force than is required in the circumstances.

When Restrictive Interventions May Be Used

In line with statutory guidance, staff may use reasonable force to:

- Remove a disruptive pupil from the classroom where they have refused to follow an instruction to do so
- Prevent a pupil disrupting a school event, trip or visit
- Prevent a pupil leaving a classroom or area where doing so would pose a risk to their safety or the safety of others
- Stop a pupil attacking another pupil or adult
- Prevent a pupil harming themselves during a period of high dysregulation

The DfE also states that schools must not adopt a “no contact” policy, as this limits staff’s ability to intervene to protect pupils. Schools must support staff to make appropriate physical contact where necessary.

Expectations During Restraint

If restraint becomes necessary, staff should:

- Use non-verbal and verbal de-escalation first wherever possible
- Seek to reduce audience pressure and separate other children from the situation
- Hold the child safely, without restricting breathing or forcing limbs against joints. Staff must never use techniques that apply pressure to the neck, chest, abdomen, joints, or pressure points, or any method that could affect breathing or circulation, reflecting the safeguarding boundaries emphasised in the 2026 guidance
- Keep calm and give clear, supportive reassurance
- Send for additional staff assistance immediately
- Reduce or release the restraint as soon as the child regains self-control
- Ensure both the child and staff member have time and support to repair and restore the relationship afterwards

For pupils who are likely to require positive handling, this should be planned in advance through an Individual Positive Handling Plan (PHP), developed with parents.

The 2026 guidance also requires leaders to ensure that staff who may need to use reasonable force are adequately trained in safe and lawful practice.

Recording and Reporting

Under the statutory duty introduced with the 2026 guidance, schools must:

1. Record every “significant incident” involving the use of force

A “significant incident” includes any use of force beyond typical classroom physical contact. Records must include:

- Staff and pupils involved
- Time, date and location
- Reason the intervention was necessary
- Nature of the force used
- Impact on the pupil

- Any injuries sustained
- Post-incident support provided

2. Report the incident to parents as soon as practicable

We continue to use our school CPOMs system for recording, but this is now supplemented by statutory requirements for detail, quality and timeliness of reporting.

Touching

Touch is a normal and healthy part of communication with young children. It may be used to express encouragement, comfort, empathy or guidance. Staff model pencil grips, support in PE, and provide a steadying hand when children need reassurance.

However, staff should remain mindful of context. Touch should occur only in open, visible environments and in ways that respect cultural background, personal space and individual pupil needs.

The 2026 guidance reaffirms that appropriate physical contact is acceptable and sometimes necessary in a school setting.

Seclusion

Seclusion refers to a situation where a pupil is supervised alone in a room or area from which they are prevented from leaving, used only to maintain safety during severe dysregulation.

The updated DfE guidance emphasises that seclusion:

- Must be used **only** when necessary to keep others safe
- Must **never** be used as a punishment or threat
- Must be supervised at all times
- Must take place in an area that is safe, calm and not intimidating
- Must be for the shortest possible time

Where seclusion is used, the pupil must be supervised continuously, and the space must never be locked or used in a way that the pupil perceives as punitive or intimidating.

Schools now have a legal duty to record and report every use of seclusion to parents, in line with new legislation aligning with force recording requirements.

Restricting Liberty

Pupils must never be locked in a room and all areas must have open access at all times. "Time out" spaces must never restrict a child's liberty.

Children must never be left unsupervised, particularly anywhere they could not exit easily in an emergency.

Where a child attempts to leave the school site in a way that poses a safety risk, staff may need to physically prevent this. Any such incident must be recorded as described above.

Searching a Child

Where staff reasonably suspect a child is carrying prohibited items such as weapons, stolen property or illegal drugs, they may ask the child to turn out pockets or remove outer clothing.

If necessary, reasonable force may be used to search for prohibited items, but not for items banned only by school rules, as clarified in the updated guidance.

A second adult should be present wherever possible, and actions should be done discreetly to protect dignity.

Treating / Intimate Care

Cleaning up an incontinent child or providing other personal care is considered intimate care. Staff should:

- Act promptly to prevent discomfort or health risk
- Use minimal necessary contact
- Ensure another adult is aware
- Work in an open area while preserving dignity
- Record all incidents in the school's changing book

Children needing regular intimate care will be supported through our Intimate Care Register.

The 2026 guidance emphasises sensitivity to the child's needs, SEND considerations, and safeguarding throughout.

Considerations for Pupils with SEND

Pupils with SEND may have communication, sensory or emotional needs that affect their behaviour. Staff should:

- Be aware of individual triggers

- Use adapted communication and calming strategies
- Provide structured, predictable routines
- Develop personalised plans (PHPs, EHCPs, behaviour plans)
- Involve parents closely in planning and review

The guidance notes that pupils with SEND may respond to distress with behaviours that could cause harm and therefore require thoughtful, tailored approaches.

Professional Judgement and Staff Support

No policy can cover every eventuality. Staff are expected to use their professional judgement in light of this guidance and the needs of the child.

Beechcroft Infants School is committed to supporting staff who act in good faith and in the best interests of pupil safety.

Governors and proprietors must ensure that the school's behaviour, safeguarding and SEND policies reflect the 2026 guidance. They must also ensure systems are in place for staff training, oversight of restrictive intervention data, and timely communication with parents following significant incidents.

School leaders will ensure that practice, training and systems for recording and reporting are regularly reviewed to remain fully aligned with national guidance effective from April 2026.