



METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF CALDERDALE

# Woodhouse Primary School

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## MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTATION

### RESTRICTIVE INTERVENTIONS AND THE USE OF REASONABLE FORCE – APRIL 2026

	Date	Chair of Governors	Headteacher
Date Written	April 2026		
Review Date	April 2027		

# 1. Purpose and Scope

This policy sets out the school's approach to the safe, lawful and proportionate use of restrictive interventions, including reasonable force and seclusion. It also sets out the requirements for recording and reporting incidents where staff use force or seclusion on a pupil.

The policy supports the rights, dignity and welfare of pupils and staff, and reflects current Department for Education (DfE) guidance effective from April 2026.

The principal legislation to which this policy document relates are:

- the Education and Inspections Act 2006, especially sections 93 and 93A
  - the Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025
  - the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated regulations
  - the Human Rights Act 1998
  - the Equality Act 2010
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## 2. Principles

- Restrictive interventions should be **avoided wherever possible** through effective behaviour support, prevention, and de-escalation.
  - Any use of force must be **lawful, necessary, proportionate**, and applied for the **minimum amount of time**.
  - Force **must never be used as a punishment**.
  - The welfare, dignity and rights of the pupil must be central to all decision-making.
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## 3. Definitions

### 3.1 Restrictive Intervention

An action (physical or non-physical) that prevents, restricts, or subdues a pupil's movement to prevent harm or serious disruption. This includes "reasonable force," seclusion, or restraint.

### 3.2 Reasonable Force

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, required in the circumstances to prevent:

- injury to the pupil or others
- criminal behaviour
- serious damage to property
- serious disorder

Reasonable force must **not affect breathing or circulation**, and must not involve pressure on the neck, nose, mouth, abdomen, or forcefully holding a pupil on the ground.

### **3.3 Significant incident**

Any incident where the use of force goes beyond appropriate physical contact between pupils and staff. This includes when physical force is used to implement a non-physical restrictive intervention.

### **3.4 Seclusion**

A non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others, and preventing them from leaving either by physical obstruction, blocking, or making them believe they will be punished if they try to leave.

### **3.5 Restraint**

A term used in legislation referring to a non-disciplinary intervention which immobilises a pupil or limits their movement. This may or may not include direct physical contact. For example, holding a pupil's arms to their sides or removing a pupil's crutches would both be considered forms of restraint.

## **Measures and Approaches for Prevention and De-escalation Strategies**

**Staff can support the pupil effectively by:**

- Maintaining a calm, steady posture to offer reassurance and help reduce anxiety.
- Using gentle, steady vocal tones and a neutral facial expression, avoiding any body language that could feel confrontational.
- Listening carefully and allowing the pupil to express themselves, acknowledging their feelings to build trust.
- Communicating clearly and slowly, keeping language simple and using open questions to encourage cooperation.
- Setting clear, fair boundaries by explaining acceptable behaviour and outlining consequences in a calm, non-authoritative way.

- Giving the pupil space and time to settle so they do not feel crowded or pressured.
- Showing understanding by considering the underlying cause of the distress rather than focusing solely on the behaviour.

## **Considering the School and Classroom Environment**

Thoughtful adjustments to the environment can significantly reduce stress and help pupils remain regulated. This may include:

- Ensuring the classroom layout is clear, organised and free from unnecessary clutter.
- Providing predictable routines and visual timetables to support understanding of what will happen next.
- Reducing sensory overload by managing noise levels, offering quieter working areas, or allowing access to calm spaces when needed.
- Using consistent seating plans to provide security and minimise social or sensory challenges.
- Ensuring transitions between lessons are supported, especially during busy corridor times.
- Offering clear signage and structure around the school to help pupils navigate confidently.
- Minimising sudden changes where possible, and preparing pupils in advance when changes are unavoidable.

These environmental considerations help pupils feel safe, regulated and ready to engage with learning.

## **Practical Strategies to Support Positive Behaviour**

These approaches can be reinforced through:

- Polite requests
- Verbal warnings
- Repositioning the pupil
- Separating pupils where appropriate
- Rule reminders
- Sanction reminders
- Using a countdown
- Using consistent mantras such as:
  - "Our rule is..."
  - "This is how we do it here"
  - "At Woodhouse, we..."
  - "I need you to..."
  - "I've noticed..."

- “Yesterday you were brilliant at... I need to see this again today”
- Reminding the pupil of previous positive efforts
- Using distraction, diversion or diffusion techniques
- Praising positive behaviours shown by the pupil
- Actively looking for behaviours to praise
- Praising other pupils to model expectations
- Using a quiet, private word
- Stating behavioural choices alongside the consequences
- Redirecting the pupil calmly and clearly

**Additional strategies that further support regulation and engagement:**

- Providing a clear, calm narrative of what is happening and what will happen next
- Using visual prompts or cue cards to reinforce expectations without adding verbal pressure
- Offering choices to give the pupil a sense of control (e.g., “You can sit here or here”)
- Using planned ignoring for secondary behaviours while reinforcing the primary expectation
- Breaking tasks into smaller, manageable steps to reduce overwhelm
- Using humour appropriately to diffuse tension when the relationship allows
- Offering a short movement break or sensory break if regulation is slipping
- Using a calm, predictable script for repeated instructions to avoid escalation
- Modelling the behaviour you want to see (tone, posture, language)
- Using proximity support (Being present without being intrusive)
- Providing reassurance about routines, expectations or upcoming changes
- Using reflective language to show understanding (e.g., “It looks like this is frustrating for you”)
- Offering a reset opportunity (“Let’s take a moment and try again”)
- Using a sand-timer or visual countdown to support transitions
- Reinforcing effort as well as outcome to build confidence
- Providing a safe exit strategy (A quiet space or agreed signal for when the pupil needs time out)
- Using restorative conversations once the pupil is calm to rebuild connection and understanding
- Pre-correcting before known triggers (e.g., “Remember, when we go into the corridor, we walk and keep to the left”)
- Using positive phrasing (“Walk, please”) rather than negative phrasing (“Don’t run”)
- Keeping instructions short and sequential (“First... then...”)

## 4. When Restrictive Interventions May Be Used

Restrictive interventions may be used to prevent or stop 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

They must **not** be used to enforce compliance, manage low-level behaviour, or as a behavioural consequence. It is illegal to use force on a pupil for the purpose of punishment.

Requests from parents not to use reasonable force and/or other restrictive interventions will not be granted as it would leave staff unable to intervene where reasonable in the circumstances to fully protect pupils.

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## 5. Considerations for Pupils with SEND

Staff must consider how a pupil's SEND — including but not limited to trauma histories, communication differences, autism, learning difficulties, social-emotional needs, or sensory processing differences — may influence how they perceive situations, express distress, or respond to demands.

Failure to consider SEND-related needs can lead to disproportionate and avoidable use of restrictive interventions, and therefore must be actively addressed in all planning and decision-making.

### Understanding triggers and communication differences

- Many pupils with SEND communicate distress through behaviour when they cannot express needs verbally, especially those with limited or non-verbal communication. Staff must recognise behaviour as a form of communication and identify underlying causes before considering restrictive interventions.
- Staff must make every effort to identify predictable trigger points, such as sensory overload, transitions, pain, unfamiliar situations, or anxiety-inducing environments. These must be recorded in individual plans.

### Individualised prevention and regulation strategies

Staff should work proactively with those who know the pupil well (parents, SENCO, specialist staff) to develop personalised strategies such as:

- Adjusting sensory input (reducing noise, lighting, crowding, or providing sensory aids) to prevent dysregulation.

- Modifying body language, tone, proximity, and providing extra processing time to prevent escalation, especially for pupils with autism or developmental language disorders.
- Supporting the pupil to express emotions before they become overwhelmed (e.g., visual communication, check-ins, calm boxes).
- Offering structured choices, predictable routines, and advance warning of change where this reduces anxiety.

These strategies must be embedded in Behaviour Support Plans and reviewed regularly, and after any incident.

### **Duty to make reasonable adjustments**

Under the Equality Act 2010, schools must make reasonable adjustments for pupils with disabilities when applying de-escalation and prevention strategies. This includes adapting expectations, communication approaches, the physical environment, or staff responses to reduce the likelihood of harm.

### **Heightened risks for pupils with SEND**

Pupils with SEND are statistically more likely to experience distress behaviours and, without careful planning, may be disproportionately subjected to restrictive practices. Staff must therefore:

- Avoid interpreting behaviours as “defiance” without exploring unmet needs.
- Be aware that some restrictive interventions may be traumatising, particularly for pupils with a history of trauma or sensory vulnerabilities.
- Recognise that a restrictive intervention may escalate distress more rapidly for some pupils due to sensory sensitivity, past experiences, or difficulty understanding what is happening.

### **Decision-making during an incident**

When considering whether a restrictive intervention is necessary for a pupil with SEND, staff must:

- Consider whether additional adjustments (more time, communication support, different staff member, sensory break) could reduce the risk without physical intervention.
  - Assess whether the intervention itself is likely to cause disproportionate harm due to the pupil’s SEND profile (e.g., risk of sensory overload, previous trauma).
  - Ensure communication is clear, simple, calm, and tailored to the pupil’s needs, using visual/non-verbal strategies where appropriate.
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## 6. Staff Training

Staff who may need to use restrictive interventions must receive appropriate training in safe, lawful and trauma-informed practice. Training should include de-escalation, risk assessment and post-incident support.

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## 7. Recording and Reporting Requirements

Schools have a **statutory duty** under section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to record **all** significant incidents involving the use of force or seclusion.

### 7.1 Recording

- Every significant incident will be recorded on Arbor **as soon as practicable**, ideally the same day.
- A record must be made even if the use of seclusion or restraint is agreed with parents as part of a pupil's behaviour support plan.
- Records must include:
  - names of the 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 duration of 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, and (where relevant) what type of reasonable force was applied, the degree of force, and details of any physical injuries sustained
  - brief account of why the intervention was assessed as necessary in that instance
  - any post-incident support, such as details of any medical treatment for injuries or other adverse impacts
  - staff and pupil views
  - follow-up actions
  - when and how parents were notified

### 7.2 Reporting the use of force (statutory guidance)

Parents must be notified **as soon as practicable**, ideally the same day, unless it appears to the staff member that doing so would be likely to result in serious harm to the pupil. In this instance, the staff member must report the incident to any parent(s) who it can be reported to without resulting in significant harm or, if there are none, to the local authority within whose area the pupil is ordinarily resident.

A written report to parents should include:

- time, date, location and duration of the intervention
- brief account of why the intervention was assessed as necessary,
- brief account of what type and degree of force was applied
- details of any injury sustained if applicable

Notification must occur even when the intervention forms part of an agreed behaviour plan.

### **7.3 Reporting of seclusion and non-force related restraint**

The use of seclusion or restraint incident must be recorded and reported 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 and follow the same points listed at 7.2

In circumstances where a restraint incident also constitutes a significant use of force, schools only need to follow the reporting procedure for significant use of force incidents under section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 as outlined in 7.2 above. There is no requirement to record the same incident twice

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## **8. Post-Incident Support**

- Pupils must be offered emotional and, if necessary, medical support following any restrictive intervention.
- There will be a follow-up conversation with the pupil to facilitate reflection, learning and to support pupil wellbeing, ideally with a member of staff who was not involved in the incident.
- Staff will continue to monitor pupil wellbeing and provide additional support if needed.
- Staff involved must receive debriefing and supervision where appropriate.
- Senior Leaders will continue to monitor staff wellbeing and provide additional support if needed.
- Incidents should be reviewed to reduce future risk.

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## **9. Governance and Oversight**

The governing body will take all reasonable steps to ensure that these procedures for recording and reporting the use of force and seclusion and restraint are complied with.

The governing body will regularly review and interrogate data on significant incidents involving the use of force or seclusion 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, 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 restrictive interventions in relation to pupils who share protected characteristics, have SEN, or other types of vulnerability.

However, the governing body will consider the limitations of this data and what can be inferred from it. Analysis will be proportionate and avoid over-interpreting small subgroups of people.

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## 10. Use of reasonable force to search pupils

The headteacher 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.

A member of staff can use such force as is **reasonable** to search for legally prohibited items, but **force cannot be used** to search for items banned under the school rules only.

Prohibited items include:

- knives and weapons, alcohol, illegal drugs, stolen items, tobacco and cigarette papers, fireworks and pornographic images
- and:
- any article that a member of staff reasonable suspects has been, or is likely to be used to commit an offence, or cause personal injury to, or damage to property of; any person (including the pupil)

Under common law, school staff have the power to search a pupil for **any** item if the pupil agrees.

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## 11. Complaints and Allegations

Any concerns about the use of force or seclusion will be managed under the school's safeguarding, complaints and allegations procedures. Serious breaches may be reported to external agencies including the local authority or Ofsted.