Department for Education

Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools

Guidance for schools in England

April 2026

Contents

Summary 3

- Status of this guidance 3
- Relevant legislation 3
- Who this guidance is for 4
- Main points 4
- Document history 4
- Terminology 5

Understanding restrictive interventions 6

- Who can use reasonable force? 6
- Use of reasonable force to search pupils 6
- Unacceptable uses of force 7
- Other physical contact with pupils 7
- Seclusion 8

Policy and practice 9

- Developing a policy on the use of restrictive interventions 9
- Determining when use of restrictive interventions is appropriate 10
- Consideration for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) 11
- Pupil and staff support 12

Recording and reporting duties 14

- Recording the use of force (statutory guidance) 14
- Reporting the use of force (statutory guidance) 15
- Recording and reporting the use of seclusion and non-force related restraint 16
- Guidance for governing bodies and proprietors on using data 17

Complaints and allegations 19

Annex: Further information 20

Summary

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

This document aims to help schools proactively minimise the need to use restrictive interventions through early support, prevention and de-escalation strategies, and when necessary, to help school staff feel more confident in knowing how to use these interventions safely, appropriately and lawfully.

Status of this guidance

- Page 14 of this document contains 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.

Relevant legislation

The principal legislation to which this guidance 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

Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for:

- proprietors, school leaders, school staff and governing bodies of all schools in England[1]
- local authorities

The power to use reasonable force for Further Education settings is found in Section 85C of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. While this guidance is not intended to explain this power, Further Education staff may find the advice in this guidance helpful and relevant.

Main points

The document has been updated to:

- provide new statutory guidance about recording and reporting the use of force effective from April 2026[2]
- provide advice about the new legal duty to record and report the use of seclusion effective from April 2026[3]
- provide additional clarification on the use of reasonable force to help school staff use this power safely and appropriately
- provide advice on the use of seclusion
- provide advice on how schools can minimise the need to use restrictive interventions
- 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.

[1] 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.

[2] Section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006

[3] Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025

Terminology

For clarity, this guidance will use the following definitions:

Restrictive intervention: a means to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil. This guidance uses 'restrictive interventions' as the umbrella term to describe both physical and non-physical actions aimed to restrain pupils in different ways.

Reasonable force: a term used in legislation which includes physical restrictive interventions. All members of school staff have the legal power to use reasonable force in limited circumstances.[4] Reasonable means using no more force than is necessary for the least amount of time, the application of which will depend on the circumstances.

Significant incident:[5] any incident where the use of force goes beyond appropriate physical contact between pupils and staff as described in 'Other physical contact with pupils' within this document. This includes when physical force is used to implement a non-physical restrictive intervention.

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.

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.

The various restrictive interventions above have been defined for completeness and should not be construed as an endorsement or otherwise for their use in schools. Some will not be relevant to most schools.

[4] Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and section 550ZA(3) of the Education Act 1996

[5] 'Significant incident' is in reference to section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which requires schools to record and report significant incidents of use of force to parents.

Understanding restrictive interventions

Who can use reasonable force?

All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force in certain circumstances.

To prevent or stop a pupil from:

1. causing injury to themselves or others
2. committing a criminal offence
3. damaging property
4. causing disorder among pupils at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise[6]

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.[7]

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.[8] 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.[9] Staff should refer to the Searching, Screening and Confiscation in Schools guidance document for detailed advice on searching a pupil.

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[6] Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

[7] Health and safety: responsibilities and duties for schools

[8] In this context, "prohibited item" specifically means an item listed in section 550ZA(3) of the Education Act 1996.

[9] Section 550ZB(5) of the Education Act 1996

Unacceptable uses of force

It is illegal to use force on a pupil for the purpose of punishment.

Pupils should not be 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 appropriate, 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
- to guide or escort pupils, such as 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, 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 judgement and have regard to:

- the school's child protection (or any other relevant) policy
- the applicable circumstances, such as whether there are other adults present
- the individual pupil's age

- any other material factors, including but not limited to whether:
    - the pupil has SEND or other vulnerabilities
    - any alternative strategies that do not include physical contact can be used

Seclusion

Seclusion - a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others and prevented from leaving - should only be used as a safety measure to protect others from harm when a pupil is experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation. In such circumstances, the pupil is not acting with intent. Seclusion should not be implemented by staff through threat of punishment.

The place to which the pupil is confined should be safe and not feel threatening or intimidating to the pupil. The pupil should be supervised at all times during the period of seclusion. As soon as the immediate risk of harm has reduced, the pupil should be allowed to leave.

An incident involving the use of seclusion must be recorded and reported in accordance with the procedures outlined in the section on ‘Recording and reporting duties’.

Seclusion, as defined in this guidance, is not a disciplinary response to deliberate or wilful misbehaviour. There are disciplinary measures that are similar, such as removal from the classroom. Schools should refer to the Behaviour in schools guidance for further information on these and other disciplinary measures.

Policy and practice

Developing a policy on the use of restrictive interventions

School leaders should develop and implement a policy on the use of restrictive interventions, aligned with the school's legal duties. This includes obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998,[10] Equality Act 2010,[11] and requirements for recording and reporting incidents where staff use force or seclusion on a pupil.[12]

The policy may be part of the school's behaviour policy or a standalone document, but it should be accessible, consistent, and straightforward to follow. It should clearly set out the circumstances in which staff may use reasonable force[13] and seclusion and the procedures for recording and reporting such incidents.

The policy should emphasise the importance of minimising the need to use restrictive interventions, such as through prevention and de-escalation. It should set out the specific whole-school measures the school will employ, 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 restrictive interventions to inform improvement planning

Individual approaches can include:

- working closely with parents to support individual pupils
- 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

[10] Human Rights Act 1998

[11] Schools must ensure its policies and procedures comply with its duties under the Equality Act 2010, including the public sector equality duty where relevant: Equality Act 2010: advice for schools

[12] Section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025

[13] See page 6

- giving pupils time, space and strategies to calm down before their behaviour escalates

Communicating the school's policy on the use of 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.

Determining when use of restrictive interventions is appropriate

There will be times when school staff may need to use restrictive interventions, and they should know this option may be available to them. The decision on whether it is reasonable to use a restrictive intervention depends on the individual circumstances of each situation. To make this assessment, the member of staff should consider the following:

Is it necessary?

- Staff should consider whether there are other more effective, less restrictive ways to manage a situation.
- Staff should assess whether a restrictive intervention is likely to successfully reduce the relevant risks, or whether its use would escalate the situation further or cause more harm than the behaviour itself.
- Where possible, 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 force or least restrictive intervention 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.[14]

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,

[14] Equality Act 2010

past trauma or neglect, communication difficulties, or other needs, may find the use of 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 restrictive intervention should be, or continue to be, applied, reduced or stopped.

This list of factors is not exhaustive, and staff should also take into account other relevant considerations. Training on the use of restrictive interventions should equip staff to judge when it is appropriate to use restrictive interventions, including in situations where quick decisions are needed. It should also help staff understand how to assess whether their response is reasonable under pressure.

If an assessment has been made to use restrictive interventions, staff should be supported in their decision making.

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 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. 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 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 people, 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.[15] Whether the use of 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 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.

Pupil and staff support

Schools should evaluate all incidents involving the use of restrictive intervention as soon as practicable after the event to understand why it was used, the impact on pupils and

[15] Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

staff, any patterns and trends, and how the use of restrictive interventions might be avoided in future, for example by amending or introducing a behaviour support plan.

If appropriate, the pupil and staff member involved should receive a medical assessment and treatment for any injuries as soon as possible. Incidents in which a member of staff uses reasonable force or seclusion on a pupil must be recorded as described in 'Recording and reporting duties' 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.[16]

Schools should also 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 repair and rebuild 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.

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 restrictive intervention where a peer may have been injured or become distressed should also be provided with appropriate support where necessary.

[16] Incident Reporting in Schools: Guidance for Employers.

Recording and reporting duties

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 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 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 for recording use of force incidents, 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 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, 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 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 use of force to the parents[17] of the pupil involved as soon as practicable after the incident, and they should endeavour to do this no later than the same day.

Exceptions to the requirement to report are where:

- the pupil is aged 20 or over; or
- 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 report of the incident made to parents should 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, and the degree of force
- details of any physical injuries sustained, if applicable

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

Schools should communicate this information to parents in writing. For example, via 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 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

The school may use this information to amend any existing behaviour support plans, as needed.

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[17] In relation specifically to these reporting duties, 'parent' includes not only carers and persons with parental responsibility but also a local authority who are providing accommodation for the child under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Recording and reporting the use of seclusion and non-force related restraint

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

As outlined in these regulations, an incident of restraint may occur with or without direct physical contact. For restraint incidents that occur without direct physical contact, for example, the removal of a walking aid, these must be recorded under the procedures outlined in this section.

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.

Schools should record the following details as a minimum:

- names of pupil and staff directly involved
- time, date, location and approximate duration of the intervention
- 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
- brief account of why the intervention was assessed as necessary in that instance
- details of any physical injuries sustained, if applicable
- any post-incident support, such as details of any medical treatment for injuries or other adverse impacts

Governing bodies of schools maintained by local authorities must ensure there is a procedure for supplying a copy of the written record of the seclusion or restraint incident to parents. Independent schools and non-maintained special schools must ensure there is a procedure for providing information about the seclusion or restraint incident in writing to parents.

Parents must be informed as soon as practicable after the incident and schools should endeavour to do this no later than the same day.

Exceptions to the requirement to report are where:

- the pupil is aged 20 or over; or

- 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.

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

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 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

The school may use this information to amend any existing behaviour support plans, as needed.

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 above. The same information does not need to be reported twice. However, if a restraint incident does not constitute a significant incident of use of force, for example, the removal of a walking aid, this must be reported under the procedures outlined in this section.

Guidance for governing bodies and proprietors on using data

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

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 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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