



Briefing Note

The Use of Reasonable Force in Schools Guidance December 2025



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Use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions guidance

The 2025 update to the Use of Reasonable Force in Schools guidance makes relatively modest but important changes compared to the 2015 version. The most notable change is the removal of sixth-form colleges from the scope of the guidance. It also places a stronger emphasis on staff confidence, safeguarding framing, and governance accountability, whereas the 2015 guidance was broader, more operational, and included detailed examples.

The 2025 document has been updated to:

- provide new statutory guidance about recording and reporting the use of force effective from April 2026
- provide advice about the new legal duty to record and report the use of seclusion effective from April 2026
- 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

There are notable language changes:

Terminology

The guidance uses the following definitions:

Restrictive intervention: a means to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil. The 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. 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: 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.

Scope of Application

- The guidance applies to Local Authority maintained schools, academies, free schools, pupil referral units, non-maintained special schools, and independent schools.
- Therefore Sixth-form colleges are no longer included in the scope.

Clarification of Responsibilities

- Governing bodies and headteachers must ensure staff understand when and how reasonable force can be used. The above language changes are not an endorsement of use of reasonable force and have been shared for clarity
- All school policies should make clear that reasonable force is a safeguarding measure, not a disciplinary shortcut.

Confidence for Staff

- The guidance emphasises that training should help staff feel confident about using reasonable force when necessary to prevent harm, maintain safety, or protect property.
- DSLs should ensure that staff know the boundaries of lawful intervention and how to record incidents factually, appropriately and timely.

Safeguarding Lens

- The updated guidance reinforces that use of force must always be proportionate, necessary, and in **the best interests of the child**.
- DSLs should ensure policies link use of force to wider safeguarding frameworks, including risk assessments and post-incident support.

DSL Actions

Policy Review

- DSL's should update policies to reflect the removal of sixth-form colleges from scope.
- DSL's should ensure policies clearly define when reasonable force may be used, emphasising proportionality and safeguarding.

Training & Awareness

- Staff training should include practical scenarios, lawful boundaries, and safeguarding considerations.
- DSLs should cascade updates to all staff, ensuring confidence in applying guidance consistently.

Incident Recording & Follow-Up

- Policies should include clarity on clear recording of incidents involving reasonable force.
- DSLs must ensure follow-up safeguarding checks, including pupil welfare and parental communication.

Governance Oversight

- Governing bodies should be briefed on their responsibilities under the updated guidance.
- DSLs should ensure governors understand how reasonable force fits within safeguarding and behaviour frameworks.
- DSLs should share an overview of any incidents that occur and demonstrate appropriate action taken on a half-termly basis.

From HH: Safeguarding Matters point of view, the guidance provides greater clarity around safeguarding expectations i.e. the language changes and when staff need to take action and how to do so safely in the best interests of the child. There is clearly greater emphasis on staff training, governor accountability and detailed record keeping and parental communication. Again, the changes to this document align themselves to the need for a strong culture of safeguarding in schools, where staff have confidence and understanding in policy and record information appropriately and timely and where the child's best interests remain at the heart of all actions take.