



Restrictive Physical Intervention Policy

Adopted Summer 2026

Next Review Summer 2027

RESTRICTIVE PHYSICAL INTERVENTION POLICY

1. Scope, context & aims

This policy is written and approved at Full Governing Board level and applies to **all governors, staff, volunteers and contractors** working in Howe Dell School.

This policy sits alongside and should be read with each organisation's:

- Behaviour policy
- Child protection/safeguarding policy
- Health and safety policy
- SEND policy and information report
- Complaints policy

At Howe Dell, we believe pupils must be safe, understand expectations, and experience adults who can manage behaviour **confidently, calmly and lawfully**.

We recognise that restrictive interventions can have a significant impact on pupils, staff and parents/carers, and we therefore work proactively to **minimise their use** through prevention, early support and de-escalation.

This policy aims to:

- **Minimise the need** for restrictive interventions through whole-school prevention and de-escalation
- Ensure staff understand **when restrictive interventions may be lawful and necessary**, and how to use them safely and proportionately
- Protect the **safety, wellbeing and dignity** of pupils and staff
- Set out clear **statutory recording and reporting procedures** effective from April 2026
- Ensure robust governance oversight, including identification of trends and any disproportionate impact for pupils with SEND or protected characteristics

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy is informed by and should be implemented in accordance with:

- **Education and Inspections Act 2006** (sections 93 and 93A: reasonable force; recording/reporting significant incidents)
- **Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025** (recording/reporting seclusion and restraint)
- **Equality Act 2010** (reasonable adjustments; discrimination)
- **Human Rights Act 1998**
- **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974** (risk assessment; staff welfare)
- **Education Act 1996** (sections 550ZA/550ZB search powers)
- DfE guidance: **Restrictive interventions, including reasonable force, in schools (April 2026)**
- DfE guidance: **Searching, screening and confiscation** (for searches)
- DfE statutory guidance: **Keeping Children Safe in Education** (allegations)

3. Key principles and definitions

At Howe Dell, restrictive interventions:

- are an act of care and control, not punishment
- are used only when necessary, proportionate, and for the least time possible
- should be preceded by prevention and de-escalation wherever possible
- must preserve pupil dignity and welfare, taking account of vulnerabilities and SEND

The April 2026 DfE guidance uses the following definitions, adopted across the School:

Restrictive intervention - a means to prevent, restrict or subdue movement of the body (or part of the body) of a pupil, including physical and non-physical actions.

Reasonable force - includes physical restrictive interventions. It means using no more force than is necessary for the least amount of time, depending on circumstances.

All school staff have legal power to use reasonable force to prevent or stop a pupil from:

- causing injury to themselves or others
- committing a criminal offence
- damaging property
- causing disorder among pupils (in lessons or otherwise)

Restraint - A non-disciplinary intervention which immobilises a pupil or limits their movement, with or without direct physical contact (e.g. holding arms, removing a walking aid).

Seclusion - A non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined away from others, preventing them from leaving by obstruction, blocking, or making them believe they will be punished if they try to leave. Seclusion is only used as a safety measure when a pupil is experiencing high levels of emotional/behavioural dysregulation, not as punishment or threat.

Significant incident (use of force) - any incident where use of force goes beyond appropriate physical contact, including when physical force implements a non-physical restrictive intervention.

Appropriate physical contact (not force) - The school does not support a “no contact” approach. Schools should not adopt “no contact” policies, and should not agree blanket requests never to use reasonable force because this can leave staff unable to protect pupils. Appropriate contact may include first aid, guiding/escorting, comfort, praise, and curriculum-related contact (e.g., PE, music).

4. Roles and responsibilities

The Governing Board is responsible for:

- approving this policy and reviewing it annually (or sooner if needed)
- ensuring procedures exist for statutory recording/reporting of:
 - significant incidents involving force (s93A)
 - seclusion incidents
 - restraint incidents
- ensuring leaders analyse data to identify patterns, training needs, improvements, and any disproportionality (SEND/protected characteristics)
- scrutinising within Howe Dell, including termly review of restrictive intervention data and actions.

The Executive Headteacher is responsible for:

- implementing this policy and ensuring staff understand it
- ensuring appropriate training and staffing to support positive behaviour management

- ensuring risk assessments are in place where there is foreseeable need
- ensuring statutory recording/reporting compliance
- authorising staff to search pupils where applicable

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is responsible for:

- ensuring records are stored securely and appropriately
- ensuring parent reporting happens in line with statutory requirements and exceptions
- liaising with the local authority where statutory guidance requires it (see section 12)

The Assistant Head for Inclusion is responsible for:

- co-producing behaviour support plans/risk assessments with pupils/families and professionals where needed
- advising on reasonable adjustments and SEND-informed prevention strategies

All staff must:

- prioritise prevention/de-escalation and seek support early
- use restrictive interventions only when necessary and proportionate
- record incidents they are involved in as soon as practicable (aim same day)
- engage in post-incident debrief and support processes

5. Howe Dell practice: prevention and de-escalation

5.1 Hertfordshire Steps approach

Howe Dell adopts **Hertfordshire Steps** as our preferred approach to positive behaviour support:

- **Step On** (de-escalation training) – best practice for all staff
- **Step Up** (restrictive physical intervention training) – for staff where there is audited need and Step On is current

5.2 Whole-school prevention

Each organisation will maintain practices that reduce escalation, including:

- consistent classroom routines and relational practice
- environment adjustments (sensory and predictability)
- staff communication strategies (tone, empathy, space, audience removal)
- recording/analysing incident data to inform improvement planning

5.3 Individualised prevention

For pupils where risk is foreseeable, organisations will implement:

- behaviour support plans and proactive strategies, co-produced where appropriate
- reasonable adjustments for disability/SEND to avoid disadvantage
- risk assessments (see section 11 and appendices)

6. Determining when restrictive interventions are appropriate

The decision is always based on the **specific circumstances** and professional judgement, guided by necessity, proportionality and welfare.

6.1 Staff must consider:

A. Necessity

- Are there less restrictive options that would work?
- Will intervention reduce risk, or might it escalate and cause more harm?

B. Proportionality

- Use the **least restrictive** option for the **least time**.
- Reassess continuously; if escalating, change approach.
- Consider pupil age/size/health/SEND/vulnerability and equality implications.

C. Welfare and dignity

- Consider trauma, sensory needs, communication needs; maintain dignity and respect.
- Where possible, communicate calmly what is happening and what the pupil needs to do; adapt communication for need/EAL.

6.2 Operational expectations during incidents

Where possible staff will:

- summon support / use agreed signal systems
- move other pupils away from risk (if safer)
- give a clear warning at a level the pupil can understand (unless immediate danger prevents it)
- end intervention immediately when risk reduces

7. Acceptable uses of reasonable force (and examples)

Staff may use reasonable force only to prevent/stop the harms set out in section 3

Examples that may be reasonable depending on context:

- guiding a pupil away from danger by the arm
- breaking up a fight
- holding a pupil to prevent immediate injury to self/others

Howe Dell expectation: staff use **minimum force** to restore safety and stability.

8. Unacceptable uses of force (prohibited)

The following are **never acceptable** at Howe Dell School:

- using force as **punishment** (illegal)
- restraint that affects airway/breathing/circulation (e.g., covering mouth/nose, pressure to neck/abdomen)

- ground restraint: where a pupil is unintentionally held on the ground, staff must reposition/release as quickly as possible

Where injury is suspected/identified, a medical assessment and treatment must be sought as soon as possible.

9. Seclusion (Howe Dell requirements)

Seclusion is used only as a **safety measure** when a pupil is experiencing high dysregulation and poses risk to others; it is **not disciplinary** and must not be threatened as punishment.

During seclusion, school must ensure:

- the space is **safe** and not threatening/intimidating
- the pupil is **supervised at all times**
- the pupil is allowed to leave as soon as the immediate risk reduces
- the incident is recorded and reported under section 12

School must specify in its local annex:

- designated seclusion spaces (if any) [e.g., inclusion room]
- supervision arrangements [e.g., named roles permitted to supervise]
- how privacy/dignity and safety are maintained

10. Reasonable force for searches

Headteachers and authorised staff may search where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a prohibited item; reasonable force may be used to search for **legally prohibited** items, but not for items banned under school rules only.

Organisations must follow the DfE searching guidance and their local behaviour policy procedure.

11. Pupils with SEND: additional considerations

Pupils with SEND may be disproportionately subject to restrictive interventions if underlying triggers are not understood (e.g., pain, sensory overload, anxiety, communication barriers).

Therefore, school will:

- understand triggers and provide proactive SEND-informed support
- co-produce behaviour support plans with pupils/parents and professionals where appropriate
- identify when increased physical contact may be appropriate (clearly documented, agreed parameters)
- make reasonable adjustments under Equality Act duties
- review plans periodically and after significant incidents

12. Training and risk assessments

Staff who are likely to need to use restrictive interventions should be adequately trained in safe and lawful use and preventive strategies.

The School expects:

- Step On de-escalation training is best practice for all staff
- Step Up training is provided where there is audited need and appropriate certification status

Organisations must carry out risk assessments to ensure staff can work as safely as possible where intervention may be required, reflecting employer health and safety duties.

13. Recording and reporting arrangements (statutory from April 2026)

13.1 What must be recorded and reported

From April 2026, schools have statutory duties to ensure procedures exist for recording/reporting:

- each **significant incident involving force** (s93A)
- each **seclusion** incident and each **restraint** incident (Regulations 2025)

The duty applies even if restrictive interventions are part of an agreed behaviour support plan.

13.2 Recording: significant incidents involving force

Incidents must be recorded **as soon as practicable**, ideally **same day**, by staff involved, and must include:

- Pupil name / DOB / Year group
- SEN status code (if applicable) and relevant needs/circumstances
- Staff name(s) directly involved; witnesses (staff/pupil)
- Date / time / location / approximate duration
- Antecedents: what led up to incident; known/potential triggers
- Prevention/de-escalation attempted (what; in what order; impact)
- Force used: type and degree; how applied; when reduced/stopped
- Why force was necessary (risk prevented; necessity/proportionality rationale)
- Injury/distress: pupil/staff; first aid/medical; follow-up actions
- Post-incident support and debrief actions planned/completed
- Parent report: time/date sent; method; summary included; any follow-up meeting offered

13.3 Reporting to parents: significant incidents involving force

Parents must be informed **as soon as practicable**, aiming **same day**, and information should be communicated **in writing**.

Minimum information to parents:

- time/date/location/duration
- why it was necessary
- type and degree of force
- injuries (if applicable)

Exceptions (where reporting to parents is not required/limited):

- pupil aged 20+; or
- staff believe reporting would likely result in serious harm to the pupil—then report to any parent it can be reported to safely, or otherwise to the local authority where the pupil resides.

13.4 Recording and reporting: seclusion and non-force restraint

Seclusion and restraint incidents must be recorded as soon as practicable (aim same day) and include minimum details similar to those set out in the DfE guidance (names, time/date/location/duration, SEND details, necessity, injuries, post-support).

Parents must be informed as soon as practicable (aim same day), with the same exceptions regarding serious harm risk (or age 20+).

Where restraint also constitutes a significant use of force, schools do not need to report twice; they follow the significant incident reporting route.

Records must include:

- Pupil name / DOB / Year group
- SEN status code and needs/circumstances
- Staff involved; supervision arrangements
- Date/time/location/duration
- Why it was necessary; what risk was being managed
- For seclusion: confirmation of continuous supervision; when/how pupil was allowed to leave
- Injuries/medical support (if any)
- Parent report: time/date and method; copy of written record/information provided (as applicable)

13.5 School recording process (standard expectation)

Each school must define its local process, but it must meet statutory timescales and content requirements.

Trust minimum standard:

- **System:** incidents recorded on **CPOMS** and flagged to DSL/Executive headteacher same day
- **Quality check:** DSL/Executive headteacher reviews record for completeness within 24–48 hours
- **Parent report:** sent in writing same day where practicable, and logged
- **Storage:** secure retention in line with safeguarding and data protection procedures

13.6 Data protection

When reporting to parents, school must consider data protection and avoid identifying other pupils.

14. Post-incident support, debrief and learning

Following any restrictive intervention, schools should evaluate incidents as soon as practicable to understand why it occurred, impact, trends, and how to avoid recurrence.

Support should include:

- medical assessment/treatment where needed
- debrief conversations to facilitate reflection, learning and relationship repair—ideally facilitated by a staff member not involved, with impartial support if helpful
- wellbeing support for staff, pupils involved and (where appropriate) witnesses

15. Complaints and allegations

Complaints are managed via the school's complaints procedure.

Any allegation of inappropriate use of force/restrictive intervention against staff must be handled under **Keeping Children Safe in Education**, including appropriate consideration of suspension where necessary.

16. Monitoring, governance oversight and review

Governing bodies must take reasonable steps to ensure procedures are complied with.

The Governing Board will review restrictive intervention data at least termly to ensure leaders:

- identify and implement policy/practice improvements where approaches are ineffective
- identify staff learning and development needs
- understand repeat patterns/triggers and refine pupil support plans
- identify and address any disproportionate use (SEND/protected characteristics/vulnerability)

This policy will be reviewed annually (minimum) and sooner if national guidance or regulations change.

17. Links with other policies

This policy links to:

- Behaviour policy
- Child protection & safeguarding policy
- Health and safety policy
- SEND policy
- Complaints policy
- Staff code of conduct / safer working practice guidance