

Riverstone Academy

Positive Handling and Restrictive Interventions Policy

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Signed: K Bowe

Contents:

Statement of intent

1. [Legal framework](#)
 2. [Roles and responsibilities](#)
 3. [Definitions](#)
 4. [Positive handling](#)
 5. [Reasonable force](#) Reasonable force and restrictive interventions
 6. [Pupils with SEND](#)
Seclusion
 7. [Post-incident support](#)
 8. [Reporting incidents](#)
 9. [Complaints](#)
 10. [Safe touch](#)
 11. [Monitoring and reporting](#)
-

Statement of intent

Riverstone Academy is an independent special school for pupils aged 5 to 11 with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. The school is committed to providing a safe, secure and nurturing environment in which pupils can learn, develop and thrive. Restrictive interventions are minimised through relational practice, reasonable adjustments, early support, prevention and de-escalation. Physical contact, reasonable force, restraint or seclusion will only be used when lawful, necessary, proportionate and in the pupil's best interests.

The school understands that behaviour is often a means of communication which may signal that a pupil needs support but does not know how to express this; therefore, the school takes a proactive approach to anticipating, managing and minimising potential triggers of distressed behaviour that may cause harm.

This policy explains when staff may use appropriate physical contact, reasonable force, restraint or seclusion; how staff will minimise their use; and how incidents will be recorded, reported, reviewed and followed up.

Its purpose is to safeguard pupils and staff, protect dignity and welfare, support consistent lawful practice, and meet the recording and reporting duties that apply to independent schools in England.

1. Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education and Inspections Act 2006, sections 93 and 93A
- Education Act 1996, sections 550ZA and 550ZB
- Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Equality Act 2010

This policy has due regard to the following guidance:

- DfE (2026) 'Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools'
- HM Government (2023) 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (as amended)
- DfE (2026) 'Keeping children safe in education 2026'
- DfE (2025) 'Behaviour in schools'
- DfE (2022) 'Searching, screening and confiscation at school'
- HM Government (2019) 'Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Behaviour Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy
- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding Policy

2. Roles and Responsibilities

The proprietor and directors are responsible for:

- Ensuring that the school has effective procedures for the lawful use, recording and reporting of restrictive interventions, including significant uses of force, restraint and seclusion.

- Ensuring this policy and the Behaviour Policy clearly set out the circumstances in which reasonable force and seclusion may be used.
- Regularly reviewing incident data, including patterns, repeat incidents, protected characteristics, SEND and other vulnerabilities, and ensuring that proportionate improvement action is taken.
- Reviewing this policy on an annual basis.
- Responding to any complaints, in liaison with the Head Teacher, from pupils or parents regarding the use of reasonable force.

The Head Teacher is responsible for:

- Deciding whether members of staff require additional training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities, considering the needs of pupils.
- Ensuring all members of staff understand the correct conduct in terms of positive handling.
- Handling any allegations of abuse in line with the Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy.
- Maintaining the records of the use of reasonable force and evaluating on a termly basis how reasonable force and physical intervention is used.
- Ensuring that any member of staff who uses reasonable force completes the appropriate log on CPOMS.
- Ensuring that the Behaviour Policy sets out the circumstances in which force might be used.
- Responding to any complaints, in liaison with the directors, from pupils or parents regarding the use of reasonable force.

The SENCO is responsible for:

- Providing training to members of staff on how to handle the needs of pupils with SEND.
- Ensuring staff understand how pupils with SEND may react differently to reasonable force.
- Ensuring that staff understand the additional vulnerability of pupils with SEND or medical conditions.
- Developing individual risk assessments for pupils with SEND or medical conditions that are agreed with the pupil's parents, and ensuring teaching staff are aware of these.
- Ensuring that staff understand how reasonable force principles may need to be adapted for pupils with medical conditions.
- Evaluating on a termly basis how reasonable force and physical intervention is used with regard to pupils with SEND, in collaboration with the Head Teacher.

The DSL is responsible for:

- Supporting the Head Teacher to ensure that staff who may need to use restrictive interventions receive suitable, role-appropriate training in prevention, de-escalation, safe and lawful intervention, recording and post-incident support.
- Ensuring all members of staff use reasonable force in accordance with this policy.
- Reviewing this policy in liaison with the Head Teacher and directors.

3. Definitions

'Restrictive intervention' means an action used to prevent, restrict or subdue movement of a pupil's body or part of their body. It includes physical and non-physical restraint, reasonable force and seclusion. Ordinary appropriate physical contact, such as first aid, guidance or comfort, is not automatically a restrictive intervention.

For the purposes of this policy, '**positive handling**' is defined as the overall, graduated approach of responding to pupils' behaviour and emotions with the intention of protecting pupils and staff and limiting damage to others and property. Positive handling adopts the least intrusive intervention techniques in response to situations, before using gentle physical intervention and reasonable force as a last resort.

‘Reasonable force’ is the use of no more force than is necessary, for the least amount of time, in the circumstances. School staff may use it to prevent or stop a pupil causing injury, committing a criminal offence, damaging property or causing disorder among pupils at school. Force must never be used as punishment.

There are two key types of reasonable force:

- **‘Control’** – actions used to direct a pupil’s movements; this includes passive physical contact, e.g., standing between pupils or blocking a pupil’s path, or active physical contact, e.g., leading a pupil out of a classroom by their arm.
- **‘Restraint’** – actions used in an attempt to physically bring a pupil under control. This type of force is typically used in more extreme circumstances, e.g., where two pupils are fighting and refuse to separate, causing staff to intervene to hold them back from one another physically.

‘Seclusion’ is a non-disciplinary intervention in which a pupil is kept away from others and prevented from leaving by physical obstruction, blocking or a belief that they will be punished if they leave.

‘Appropriate physical contact’ means non-restrictive contact that is reasonable in the circumstances, respectful of the pupil’s dignity, age, communication, wishes, SEND, medical needs, culture and any known trauma or safeguarding considerations.

4. Positive handling

The principle of positive handling means that the school expects staff to assess whether the incident requiring a response can be resolved without physical intervention.

The school uses a prevention-first approach informed by its approved positive-handling training. Staff recognise early signs of distress, communicate empathetically, support co-regulation and make reasonable environmental adjustments to reduce triggers. Only staff who have received training appropriate to their role should use planned restrictive techniques; in an unforeseen emergency, any member of school staff may use reasonable force if the legal test is met.

Teaching staff will be aware of the behavioural patterns, medical conditions and levels of need of pupils in their class and will ensure that incidents of disruptive or aggressive behaviour in the classroom are handled in line with individual pupils’ needs.

Staff will not generally resort to physical contact or reasonable force immediately without first questioning whether there is a need to use physical intervention. Staff will question whether:

- Verbal de-escalation can be attempted.
- There are actions that can be taken to remove triggers from pupils, e.g., dimming the lights and encouraging quiet where a pupil is dysregulated in response to sensory overstimulation.
- The pupil can be removed from the situation without physical intervention, e.g., if they will follow a member of teaching staff out of the classroom.
- The pupil has a condition or support needs that mean physical intervention would be inherently more dangerous, e.g., asthma which may be made worse by restrictive holds or sensory issues where physical touch would contribute to sensory overload and may provoke aggressive behaviour.
- They have the ability, training and adequate support to physically intervene safely without causing unnecessary harm to the pupil or themselves.

Before using a restrictive intervention, staff will consider whether it is necessary, proportionate and likely to reduce the risk; whether a less restrictive option is available; the pupil’s welfare and dignity; relevant SEND, disability, medical, communication and trauma-related needs; and whether the intervention itself could escalate the situation. The least restrictive effective intervention will be used for the shortest necessary time.

The school understands that, in some cases, action may be required very quickly, e.g., in the event that a pupil attempts to run out into a busy road, or where pupils begin a violent fight with one another, and staff are forced to pull the pupils apart. Staff will not be penalised for resorting to the use of physical intervention or reasonable force in such situations where it is justified and perceived necessary to prevent harm to others or property in the circumstances.

Restrictive intervention will cease as soon as the immediate need has passed. It will never be used to punish, humiliate, cause pain, secure compliance where the legal conditions are not met, or substitute for appropriate staffing, teaching, support or reasonable adjustments.

5. Reasonable force and restrictive interventions

Staff members will use actions that are appropriate and in proportion to the circumstances. Physical restraint will never be used routinely. Where reasonable force is required, the degree and type of force that is used will depend on the pupil's circumstances, e.g., their age or SEND. The following list is not exhaustive, but provides examples of situations where the school may decide to use reasonable force where other methods of defusing a situation have been exhausted or are not appropriate:

- Members of staff need to control pupils risking the safety of themselves or others outside of school premises where the same range of support options are not available, e.g., on school trips.
- Members of staff must prevent a pupil from leaving an area, e.g., the classroom or school grounds, where doing so would risk their safety or the safety of others.
- A pupil is attacking a member of staff or another pupil.
- A pupil is at serious risk of harming themselves and a member of staff must intervene to prevent this.
- A pupil is causing disorder among pupils and the use of force is necessary and proportionate to prevent or stop it; removal must not be used as a pretext for punishment.
- The Head Teacher or an authorised member of staff is searching for an item listed in section 550ZA(3) of the Education Act 1996. Force must not be used to search for an item banned only by school rules.

All members of school staff have the statutory power to use reasonable force in the limited circumstances set out in this policy. The decision is a matter of professional judgement based on the individual circumstances and the pupil's needs. Planned techniques must be consistent with current school-approved training and the pupil's support and risk-management plans.

The power may also apply to another person whom the Head Teacher has lawfully authorised to have control or charge of pupils. Any such authorisation must be explicit and the person must understand this policy and the limits of the power.

Where intervention is required, staff will begin with the least restrictive effective response. Guidance or escorting that becomes coercive or restricts movement will be treated, recorded and reviewed as a restrictive intervention where applicable.

Reasonable force techniques that involve restraint will only be used where the staff member in charge feels it is necessary to prevent serious harm. In general, restraint will only be used briefly, and prolonged restraint will not be used, i.e., restraint beyond that which is necessary to remove the immediate threat a pupil is posing to themselves or others.

Where staff determine physical intervention is necessary, they will calmly communicate the reasons for their actions to the pupil and explain why it is necessary in a non-threatening manner. In most cases, staff will communicate this to pupils before making physical contact to minimise distress and/or further aggressive behaviour from the pupil; however, the school recognises that this is not possible in some emergency situations.

Staff will never give the impression that they are acting out of anger or are punishing the pupil. Staff members will always avoid acting in a way that could cause injury; however, the school understands that accidental injury may occur in emergency situations where there is not sufficient time for a considered response, e.g., bruising on a child's wrist where a staff member has grabbed them to prevent them running onto a busy road.

Where a member of staff believes that they are at risk, e.g., where an injury is likely to occur, they will not intervene in an incident without the help and assistance of another staff member.

Staff must not use any intervention that deliberately affects a pupil's airway, breathing or circulation, applies pressure to the neck or abdomen, deliberately inflicts pain, or creates an unjustifiable risk of physical or psychological harm. The following techniques are prohibited:

- The 'seated double embrace' where two staff members force a pupil into a sitting position and lean them forward whilst a third staff member monitors their breathing.
- The 'double basket-hold' in which a pupil's arms are held across their chest. Covering a pupil's mouth or nose, applying pressure to the neck or abdomen, or deliberately taking a pupil to the ground.
- The 'nose distraction technique' which involves a sharp upward jab under the pupil's nose.

Staff will also be aware that, in some instances, it will cause more distress to a pupil and may increase the risk of harm to their peers, if they are prevented from leaving an area, e.g., their classroom, using physical intervention. Where it is not dangerous to allow them to leave, the staff member in charge of the situation should use their judgement in allowing a pupil to remove themselves from the area, as environmental factors in the area specifically may be provoking their behaviour.

Any subsequent behaviour response will be considered separately, fairly and in accordance with the Behaviour Policy. The use of a restrictive intervention will not itself be treated as a disciplinary sanction, and staff will consider whether the behaviour arose from distress, disability, unmet need or circumstances requiring additional support.

6. Pupils with SEND

The school will have due consideration to the risks posed by the additional vulnerability of pupils with SEND in terms of physical intervention and reasonable force.

The SENCO will support compliance with the Equality Act 2010, including reasonable adjustments and non-discrimination. As an independent school, Riverstone Academy will also have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty where that duty applies to the relevant function or arrangement. Staff will understand how pupils' needs can be met proactively and without restrictive intervention wherever possible.

The school is aware that pupils with SEND may sometimes experience dysregulation, which can sometimes manifest in behaviour which may be aggressive or seem uncontrollable. Where it is known that a pupil is prone to such behaviour, the SENCO and Head Teacher will draft a risk assessment to determine planned strategies for managing the pupil's actions that are tailored to the pupil's specific needs, to avoid the use of reasonable force. These risk assessments will be conducted in collaboration with the pupil and their parents, where appropriate.

Some pupils may seek or benefit from increased physical contact when overwhelmed or stressed. Any planned contact will be co-produced where appropriate, clearly described in the pupil's behaviour support plan or other relevant plan, informed by the pupil's communication and wishes, and reviewed with parents and relevant professionals. Agreement in a plan does not remove the need for staff to judge each situation lawfully and proportionately.

Staff members will not assume that a technique employed for one pupil with SEND will be applicable to other pupils with SEND.

Staff will also be aware that pupils with SEND may engage in frequent, repetitive self-stimulatory behaviour, known as 'stimming', and that some pupils may engage in self-injurious stimming, e.g., repeatedly hitting or scratching themselves. While this can be alarming, staff will be aware that stimming is often carried out as a means of emotional regulation or self-soothing in response to stressful or overwhelming stimuli. Staff members will aim to remove distressing stimuli from the environment, where possible, or will support pupils to engage in less harmful stimming methods, e.g., by providing them with something to play with or demonstrating a less harmful stim, such as hand flapping.

Staff will be aware that restraining a pupil in a way that prevents them from stimming entirely can cause extreme distress and lead to further aggressive behaviour. Self-injurious stimming and tactics to support a pupil to engage in safer stims will be included as part of the pupil's risk assessment.

Individual risk assessments and behaviour support plans will be developed where there is an identified likelihood of restrictive intervention. They will record triggers, communication needs, reasonable adjustments, prevention and de-escalation strategies, any agreed increased physical contact, medical risks and post-

incident support. Plans will be reviewed with the pupil and parents periodically and after every significant incident.

The school will adhere to its Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy at all times.

Seclusion

Seclusion will only be used as a safety measure to protect others from harm when a pupil is experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation. It will not be used as punishment, through threat of punishment, for convenience or as routine behaviour management.

The space used must be safe and must not feel threatening or intimidating. The pupil will be supervised continuously, their welfare and communication needs will be monitored, and they will be allowed to leave as soon as the immediate risk of harm has reduced. Seclusion must be recorded and reported in accordance with this policy.

7. Post incident support

After any restrictive intervention, the school will check the welfare of the pupil, staff and witnesses. Medical assessment, first aid and treatment will be arranged as soon as appropriate; injuries and any other adverse impacts will be recorded and reported under the school's health and safety and safeguarding procedures where required.

The pupil and staff involved will be offered separate, developmentally appropriate opportunities to reflect on what happened, learn from the incident and repair relationships. Wherever practicable, the debrief will be facilitated by a member of staff who was not directly involved. Communication methods will be adapted to the pupil's age and needs.

It will be explained to the pupil involved the reason that such intervention was used and reassured that the use of the intervention was not a punishment for their behaviour, but rather a method of defusing the situation and preventing them from harming themselves or others. The pupil will be asked about the reasons for their behaviour, including:

- Why their environment was causing such distress for them, e.g., in an instance of sensory overstimulation leading to dysregulation.
- Whether they felt there was anything that could have been done to meet their needs before the situation escalated.
- Whether, and how, staff actions were helpful or unhelpful.

Staff will be encouraged to reflect on their actions and how they handled the situation, and will be reassured, where appropriate, that they have done nothing wrong and acted in what they perceived to be the best interests of pupils.

8. Reporting incidents

A written record will be made of every significant incident in which force is used and of every incident of restraint or seclusion, including non-contact restraint. Riverstone Academy will also record other restrictive interventions where this supports safeguarding, welfare, review and improvement. Planned interventions remain subject to these recording requirements.

The staff member or members involved will notify the Head Teacher or designated senior leader immediately and complete the written CPOMS record as soon as practicable, normally on the same day. The record will include: the pupil and staff involved; the pupil's relevant needs, circumstances and SEN status; date, time, location and approximate duration; what happened before, during and after; known or potential triggers; prevention and de-escalation used; the type and degree of intervention; why it was necessary and proportionate; injuries or adverse impacts; medical attention; the pupil's voice where obtainable; witnesses; post-incident support; parent notification; and follow-up action.

The Head Teacher and SENCO will review each incident as soon as practicable and analyse data at least half-termly. The proprietor and directors will receive regular, appropriately anonymised oversight information. Analysis will consider repeat incidents, triggers, duration, injuries, effectiveness of plans and de-escalation,

staff training needs, protected characteristics, SEND and other vulnerabilities. Small cohorts will be interpreted cautiously, and actions will be documented and monitored.

Failure to follow the school's recording and reporting procedures will be addressed promptly and may be managed under the school's staff procedures, taking account of the circumstances and any safeguarding implications.

Parents will be informed in writing of every significant use of force and every restraint or seclusion incident as soon as practicable, normally on the same day. This applies even where an intervention is included in an agreed plan. If informing a parent would be likely to result in serious harm to the pupil, the incident will be reported to any other parent who can be informed without that risk or, if there is none, to the local authority where the pupil ordinarily resides. The DSL will be consulted and safeguarding procedures followed.

- The written information to parents will include the date, time, location and approximate duration; why the intervention was necessary; the type and degree of force or other restrictive intervention; and any injury. Parents will be invited to discuss triggers, the effectiveness of plans and de-escalation, and any changes needed.
- Parents will be reminded that concerns or complaints may be raised under the school's Complaints Procedures Policy.

If a member of staff witnesses or suspects the use of reasonable force, where another member of staff is actively involved in physical intervention, they will report this to the Head Teacher immediately.

Any allegations against staff will be dealt with as a matter of urgency, and in accordance with the procedures outlined in the school's Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy.

The Head Teacher will be responsible for conducting a thorough investigation to find out the correct details of what occurred; this may include talking to other pupils about the incident, for instance those who witnessed the event.

9. Complaints

All members of staff will be made fully aware of the consequences and legal retributions that can occur following the incorrect use of physical intervention and force.

Complaints will be considered promptly, fairly and impartially under the school's Complaints Procedures Policy. Safeguarding concerns or allegations about a member of staff will be managed in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education and the school's safeguarding procedures; no complainant will be required to prove an allegation before it is considered.

The school will preserve relevant records and cooperate with the local authority designated officer, police, regulator or other agencies where required. Staff will be supported while ensuring that the pupil's welfare and a fair process remain central.

Suspension will not be an automatic response. The school will follow the case-management and suspension considerations in Keeping Children Safe in Education and its Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy:

- Careful consideration will be given to whether the case warrants a person being suspended until the allegation is resolved.
- The directors will always take into account whether a staff member has acted within the law when considering whether or not to take disciplinary action against a staff member involved in an incident.
- Where a member of staff is suspended, the school will ensure that the staff member has access to a named contact that can provide support and guidance.
- The school will provide pastoral care to any member of staff who is subject to a formal allegation.

Where a safeguarding allegation is made against a member of staff that involves physical contact, e.g., restraint, the strategy discussion or initial evaluation with the LADO will take into account that teachers and other school staff are entitled to use reasonable force to control or restrain pupils in certain circumstances, including dealing with disruptive behaviour.

10. Safe touch

The school understands that the following examples are instances of safe touch which may occur between staff and pupils:

- Comforting an upset or distressed pupil.
- Congratulating or praising a pupil.
- Holding the hand of a pupil to guide them, such as when crossing a road or walking to assembly.
- Giving first aid to a pupil.
- Demonstrating exercises or techniques during PE lessons.
- Administering medicine.
- Using musical instruments.

The school understands that certain types of physical contact between staff and pupils are inappropriate, e.g., cuddling, lap-sitting and some instances of holding hands, and that safe touch should never be invasive, humiliating or flirtatious.

There is no universal list of body areas or forms of touch that is appropriate in every situation. Staff must use professional judgement, follow the Staff Code of Conduct and safeguarding procedures, consider the pupil's preferences and communication, and use only contact that is necessary, proportionate, respectful and observable or explainable.

Comforting touch will be led by the pupil's needs and cues, not imposed as a standard technique. Staff will use the least intrusive contact, seek assent where possible, stop if the pupil shows discomfort, and take account of any individual plan, trauma history, sensory profile or safeguarding concern.

Staff may hold or guide a pupil's hand where appropriate, for example when crossing a road, moving around school or supporting access to a chosen regulation space. If contact becomes coercive or prevents the pupil from leaving, staff will recognise that it may amount to restraint and apply the safeguards, recording and reporting requirements in this policy.

Staff will teach and model safe, respectful boundaries in a calm and developmentally appropriate way. Where a pupil initiates contact that is not appropriate, staff will redirect sensitively, explain the boundary and offer an appropriate alternative that meets the pupil's underlying need.

Staff will stop non-essential touch immediately if a pupil indicates discomfort. In an emergency, lawful and proportionate intervention may still be necessary to prevent injury, crime, property damage or disorder; staff will explain what is happening in a way the pupil can understand and stop as soon as the need has passed.

Appropriate touch involving a pupil with SEND will take account of their EHC plan, individual healthcare plan, behaviour support plan, risk assessment, communication needs and reasonable adjustments, where applicable.

Any concern that a member of staff has used inappropriate touch will be reported immediately and managed under the Staff Code of Conduct, safeguarding procedures and the Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy, including referral to the LADO where the harm-threshold criteria may be met.

11. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually by the Head Teacher, DSL, SENCO, proprietor and directors, and sooner following a significant incident, material change in law or guidance, identified pattern, safeguarding concern or learning from review. Changes will be communicated to staff, pupils and parents in accessible ways.