

Great Bardfield Primary School



Positive Handling Policy

Approved by:	Elizabeth Crow Headteacher
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Ratified by Governors:	September 2026
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Next review due by:	September 2027
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1. Introduction

At Great Bardfield Primary School we endeavour to create the right atmosphere for children to work, grow and develop their individual potential, helping them to become competent and confident adults. We provide a climate in which children learn to co-operate with others and care for their peers and environment, respecting the differences between us.

High standards are set for behaviour. Children are encouraged to follow our school rules and promote our five key skills of respect, resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and responsibility.

The school is committed to minimising the need for restrictive interventions through positive relationships, clear expectations, appropriate support, prevention and de-escalation. Where restrictive intervention is necessary, it must be lawful, necessary, proportionate, dignified and used for the shortest time required to reduce the relevant risk.

This policy updates the school's previous Positive Handling Policy for the legal and guidance framework applying from April 2026. The Department for Education's 2026 guidance replaced the 2013 Use of Reasonable Force guidance and introduced statutory recording and reporting requirements for significant use of force, alongside requirements concerning seclusion and restraint.

2. Purpose and Scope

This policy sets out the circumstances in which staff may use reasonable force or other restrictive interventions, the school's preventative and de-escalation approach, and the arrangements for recording, reporting, reviewing and learning from incidents.

It applies to all pupils, staff, volunteers and other adults working under the school's direction, including during authorised off-site activities. It should be read alongside the Behaviour & Relationships Policy and Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.

The school does not operate a 'no contact' policy. Appropriate physical contact can be necessary and supportive in ordinary school life, including first aid, comforting a distressed child, guiding or escorting a pupil, and demonstrating activities.

3. Legislative and Guidance Framework

- Education and Inspections Act 2006, particularly sections 93 and 93A.
- Education Act 1996, including section 550ZA in relation to reasonable force when searching for prohibited items.
- Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025.
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated duties.
- Human Rights Act 1998.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.
- DfE Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools (April 2026).
- DfE Behaviour in Schools guidance and other current safeguarding and behaviour guidance.

The April 2026 DfE guidance states that the governing body/proprietor must have a procedure for recording each significant incident involving use of force and reporting each significant use of force to parents. It also sets out recording and reporting duties for seclusion and restraint.

4. Key Principles

- Restrictive intervention is a safety measure, not a punishment.
- Staff should seek to prevent escalation wherever reasonably possible.
- Reasonable force means no more force than is necessary, for the least amount of time required in the circumstances.
- Staff should consider whether a less restrictive strategy is likely to reduce the risk effectively.
- The pupil's age, size, understanding, medical needs, SEND, communication needs, trauma history and other vulnerabilities should be considered.
- The pupil's dignity and welfare must be respected.
- Staff should communicate calmly and clearly with the pupil where possible.
- Restrictive intervention must stop as soon as the relevant risk has reduced sufficiently for it to be safe to do so.
- Incidents must be recorded and, where required, reported to parents.
- Every incident should be reviewed so that the school can learn and reduce future need for restrictive intervention.

These principles reflect the 2026 DfE guidance, which emphasises necessity, proportionality, welfare, prevention and de-escalation.

5. Definitions

Term	Definition
Physical contact	Appropriate contact which does not constitute a restrictive intervention, such as first aid, comforting, guiding/escorting, praise or demonstrating PE/music.
Restrictive intervention	A means to prevent, restrict or subdue movement of a pupil's body or part of their body. It includes physical and non-physical actions aimed at restraint.
Reasonable force	A term used in legislation for physical restrictive interventions. It means no more force than is necessary and for the least amount of time required in the circumstances.
Significant incident	Any incident where force goes beyond appropriate physical contact. This includes physical force used to implement a non-physical restrictive intervention.
Restraint	A non-disciplinary intervention which immobilises a pupil or limits their movement,

	whether or not direct physical contact is involved.
Seclusion	A non-disciplinary safety intervention involving keeping a pupil confined away from others and preventing them from leaving by physical obstruction, blocking, or making them believe they will be punished if they try to leave.

Definitions above follow the April 2026 DfE guidance. [\[cite?turn1view0\]](#)

6. Physical Contact and Positive Handling

Physical contact is a normal part of primary school life and is not, in itself, a restrictive intervention. Appropriate examples include:

- administering first aid;
- comforting a distressed pupil;
- guiding or escorting a pupil;
- holding a hand when appropriate for safety during transitions or trips;
- helping a pupil access a chosen space for self-regulation;
- a handshake or appropriate gesture of praise;
- demonstrating musical instruments;
- demonstrating PE or sports techniques.

Staff must exercise professional judgement and consider the circumstances, whether other adults are present, the pupil's age, SEND or other vulnerabilities, and whether a non-contact strategy could be used

7. When Reasonable Force May Be Used

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

Reasonable force may therefore be used in classrooms, communal areas, playgrounds, on school trips and other authorised activities when the legal test is met. [\[cite?turn1view0\]](#)

The school will not use force simply because a pupil is refusing to comply, unless the circumstances also meet the legal and policy threshold for reasonable intervention. Force must never be used as a punishment.

8. Necessity, Proportionality and Welfare

Before and during an intervention, staff should consider three questions:

Question	Considerations
Is it necessary?	Are there safer, less restrictive or more effective alternatives? Is intervention likely to reduce the risk rather than escalate it?
Is it proportionate?	Use the least amount of force or least restrictive intervention necessary, for the shortest time needed. Reconsider if the intervention escalates the situation.
Have welfare and dignity been considered?	Consider medical conditions, SEND, trauma, sensory needs, communication, age, size, location and the impact on the pupil and others.

Where possible, staff should explain calmly what is happening, why it is happening and what the pupil needs to do. For pupils with speech, language or communication difficulties or English as an additional language, staff should use appropriate verbal and/or non-verbal strategies and allow processing time.

9. Preventing Escalation and De-escalation

The school's first response to challenging behaviour is preventative and relational. Staff should use strategies appropriate to the individual pupil and situation, including:

- calm, respectful communication;
- clear and simple instructions;
- appropriate tone, body language and personal space;
- time and space to calm;
- offering realistic choices;
- removing unnecessary stimuli;
- redirecting attention;
- access to agreed regulation strategies;
- seeking support from another adult;
- moving other pupils away from risk where appropriate;
- following the pupil's behaviour support plan or agreed adjustments.

The 2026 guidance expects schools to proactively minimise the need for restrictive interventions through early support, prevention and de-escalation.

10. Pupils with SEND and Other Vulnerabilities

The school recognises that pupils with SEND may be disproportionately subject to restrictive interventions if underlying needs, communication differences, sensory overload, pain, anxiety or environmental triggers are not understood.

- identify and understand known triggers;
- consider sensory, communication and environmental adjustments;
- use staff who know the pupil well where practicable;

- work with the pupil, parents/carers and relevant professionals;
- ensure reasonable adjustments are made where required;
- use behaviour support plans and risk assessments where appropriate;
- review plans following significant incidents.

A pupil's SEND or disability does not prevent reasonable force being used when legally necessary, but it is an important factor in determining whether an intervention is reasonable and in planning prevention and de-escalation.

11. Individual Behaviour Support Plans and Risk Assessments

Where there is an identified or recurring risk of restrictive intervention, the school should consider an individual Behaviour Support Plan and/or risk assessment. Plans should be developed with the pupil and parents/carers where appropriate and should identify:

- known triggers and early warning signs;
- preventative and de-escalation strategies;
- reasonable adjustments;
- communication and regulation needs;
- safe spaces or agreed strategies for self-regulation;
- circumstances in which increased physical contact may be appropriate;
- roles and responsibilities of staff;
- post-incident support;
- review arrangements.

Where increased likelihood of reasonable force or other restrictive intervention is identified, the school must have appropriate risk assessments in place and should mitigate risks through prevention and training. Plans should be reviewed periodically and after significant incidents.

12. Seclusion and Non-Force Restraint

Seclusion is a non-disciplinary safety intervention and must not be used as a punishment or as a routine behaviour-management technique. It should only be used as a safety measure to protect others from harm where a pupil is experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation.

Where seclusion is used, the space must be safe and non-threatening, the pupil must be supervised throughout, and they must be allowed to leave as soon as the immediate risk of harm has reduced.

Any seclusion or restraint incident must be recorded and reported in accordance with the statutory procedures described in this policy.

Ordinary disciplinary removal from a classroom is not automatically seclusion. Staff should distinguish a disciplinary behaviour response from confinement that prevents a pupil leaving.

13. Unacceptable Uses of Force

- Force must never be used for the purpose of punishment.
- Staff must not use force that is excessive or disproportionate to the circumstances.
- Staff must not deliberately restrict a pupil's airway, breathing or circulation.

- Staff must not cover a pupil's mouth or nose or apply pressure to the neck or abdomen.
- Force involving the ground should be avoided. If a pupil is unintentionally held on the ground, staff should release or reposition into a safer standing alternative as quickly as possible.
- Restraint should be avoided where possible because it carries physical and psychological risks.
- These prohibitions and safeguards reflect the April 2026 DfE guidance.

14. Staff Training and Competence

The Headteacher is responsible for determining appropriate training in light of the school's context and identified risk. Staff who are likely to need to use reasonable force or other restrictive interventions should receive appropriate training in safe and lawful use and preventative/de-escalation strategies.

The school will not require an untrained member of staff to use a formal restrictive technique merely because they have not received training. However, all staff retain the legal power to use reasonable force in circumstances where it is necessary and lawful; in an emergency, staff should use the least restrictive action reasonably available to protect people from harm.

Training decisions will consider the school's risk assessment, individual pupil needs, staff roles and the principles of the 2026 DfE guidance. Training records will be maintained.

15. Roles and Responsibilities

Governing Body

- ensure an appropriate procedure exists for recording and reporting significant use of force and relevant seclusion/restraint incidents;
- have regard to the 2026 DfE statutory guidance;
- monitor patterns and trends in restrictive interventions;
- consider whether practice is proportionate and whether any disproportionate use affects pupils with SEND, protected characteristics or other vulnerabilities;
- ensure leaders have appropriate arrangements, training and oversight.

Headteacher

- implement this policy;
- ensure staff understand the legal and safeguarding framework;
- ensure incidents are recorded and reported appropriately;
- ensure appropriate training and risk assessment;
- review incidents and decide whether further action is required;
- ensure concerns involving staff are managed under safeguarding/allegations procedures where necessary.

All Staff

- use prevention and de-escalation strategies;
- use reasonable force only when lawful, necessary and proportionate;

- record significant incidents promptly;
- report incidents to the Headteacher/DSL in accordance with school procedures;
- support pupil and staff wellbeing after incidents;
- follow behaviour support plans and risk assessments.

16. Responding During an Incident

- Remain calm and assess immediate risks to the pupil, other pupils, staff and property.
- Use de-escalation and preventative strategies where practicable.
- Seek assistance from another adult where possible.
- Move other pupils away from immediate risk where appropriate.
- If reasonable force or another restrictive intervention is necessary, use the least restrictive response for the shortest time required.
- Continue calm communication and stop the intervention as soon as it is safe to do so.
- Obtain medical attention where required.
- Inform the Headteacher/DSL and follow safeguarding procedures.
- Record the incident as soon as practicable, normally no later than the same day.
- Ensure parent reporting requirements are met.

17. Recording and Reporting

From April 2026, statutory guidance requires the school to have a procedure for recording each significant incident in which a member of staff uses force. The record should be made as soon as practicable and staff should endeavour to complete it no later than the same day.

At minimum, the school's record will include:

- names of the pupil and staff directly involved;
- relevant needs or circumstances, including identified SEND and SEN status code;
- date, time, location and approximate duration;
- what led up to the incident, known or potential triggers and preventative/de-escalation strategies used;
- type and degree of force used, where relevant;
- physical injuries sustained;
- why the intervention was assessed as necessary;
- post-incident support or medical treatment;
- witness accounts where appropriate;
- when and how parents were notified;
- follow-up and review actions.

The school will report each significant use of force to the pupil's parent(s)/carer(s) as soon as practicable and should endeavour to do so no later than the same day. The report will include the time, date, location, approximate duration, why force was necessary, type/degree of force and any physical injuries. Reporting may be in writing, including email or the school's online communication system.

The reporting duty has limited exceptions where the pupil is aged 20 or over or where the staff member considers reporting to a parent would be likely to result in serious harm to the pupil. In the latter case, the incident must be reported to an appropriate parent where this can be done safely or, where there is no such parent, to the relevant local authority. The DSL/Headteacher will ensure safeguarding advice is obtained where needed.

Seclusion and restraint incidents must also be recorded and reported in accordance with the statutory requirements. Where a restraint incident also constitutes significant use of force, the school does not need to duplicate the reporting process.

18. Parents and Carers

The school recognises parents and carers as partners in reducing the need for restrictive intervention. Following significant incidents, parents will be informed in accordance with statutory reporting requirements and, where appropriate, invited to discuss triggers, warning signs, the effectiveness of de-escalation strategies and possible changes to the pupil's support plan.

The school will not seek parental permission as a precondition for staff to use lawful reasonable force when necessary. Agreement with parents as part of a behaviour support plan does not remove the statutory recording and reporting duties.

19. Post-Incident Support and Review

Each incident will be evaluated as soon as practicable to understand why intervention was required, its impact, patterns and how future use might be reduced.

- check the physical and emotional wellbeing of the pupil;
- provide medical assessment/treatment where appropriate;
- support staff involved;
- support witnesses where needed;
- hold a reflective follow-up conversation with the pupil and staff member where appropriate;
- review the behaviour support plan/risk assessment;
- identify changes to prevention or de-escalation strategies;
- record any safeguarding, health and safety or disciplinary follow-up required.

Where possible, the follow-up should be facilitated by someone not directly involved in the incident to support impartiality and learning.

20. Monitoring, Data and Governance

The Headteacher will maintain oversight of restrictive intervention records and report relevant information to the governing body through normal safeguarding/behaviour reporting arrangements.

Governors should review data regularly enough to identify patterns, repeat triggers, ineffective approaches, training needs and any disproportionate use affecting pupils with SEND, protected characteristics or other vulnerabilities. Data must be interpreted cautiously where numbers are small.

The purpose of monitoring is improvement, prevention and safeguarding, not simply counting incidents. The 2026 DfE guidance specifically expects governing bodies/proprietors to take reasonable steps to ensure procedures are followed and to use data to identify improvements.

21. Safeguarding, Allegations and Staff Conduct

Any allegation that a member of staff has used inappropriate, excessive or unlawful force must be treated as a safeguarding matter and managed under Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 and the school's procedures for allegations against staff. This may include referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), where applicable.

The existence of an incident record does not determine whether staff conduct was appropriate. Each allegation or concern will be considered on its facts and managed fairly and promptly.

22. Complaints

Complaints about the use of restrictive interventions will be dealt with under the school's Complaints Procedure. The 2026 DfE guidance confirms that complaints should be handled under the school's normal complaints procedure. Where an allegation is made against a member of staff, the safeguarding/allegations procedure must also be followed.

The Chair of Governors will be informed where required by the school's complaints arrangements. Other governors will not become involved in an individual complaint where doing so could compromise their later role in a formal process.

23. Equality and Human Rights

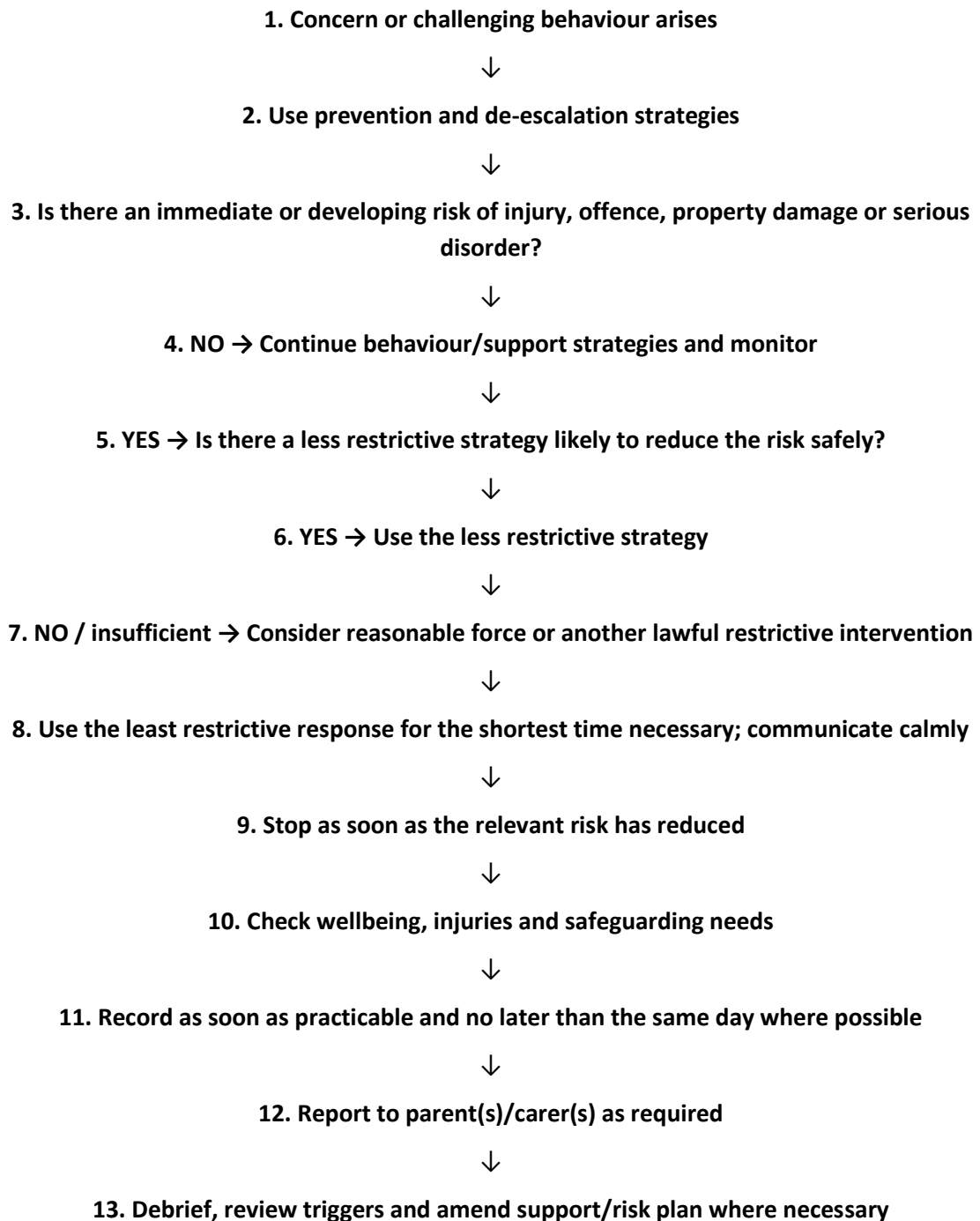
The school will apply this policy consistently with the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998. Reasonable adjustments will be considered for pupils with disabilities. Staff must consider the pupil's individual circumstances, dignity, welfare and communication needs when deciding whether and how intervention is necessary.

The school will monitor data for potential disproportionate use of restrictive interventions and will seek to understand and address any underlying causes

24. Review and Publication

This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner if legislation, statutory guidance or school circumstances change. It will be made available to staff, pupils and parents in an accessible form. The governing body will ratify the policy and maintain appropriate oversight.

Appendix 1 – Staff Decision-Making Flowchart



Appendix 2 – Incident Record Minimum Requirements

Field	Information to record
Pupil	Name; relevant needs/circumstances; identified SEND; SEN status code
Staff	Names of staff directly involved
Incident	Date, time, location and approximate duration
Antecedents	What happened beforehand; known/potential triggers
Prevention	Preventative and de-escalation strategies attempted
Intervention	Type and degree of force/restrictive intervention, where relevant
Necessity	Why intervention was assessed as necessary
Injury	Physical injuries to pupil/staff, if any; medical response
Support	Post-incident support and follow-up
Parents	When/how parents were informed and any follow-up discussion
Review	Decision-making, lessons learned, support/risk-plan changes

The record must be factual and objective. It should not include unnecessary speculation or diagnostic conclusions.

Appendix 3 – Individual Risk / Behaviour Support Plan Prompts

Pupil strengths, interests and preferred communication
Known triggers and early warning signs
Environmental/sensory factors
Communication and processing needs
Preventative strategies
De-escalation strategies
Reasonable adjustments
Agreed regulation/self-calming strategies
Adults who know the pupil well
Potential risks to pupil/others/property
Least restrictive responses likely to reduce identified risks
Any circumstances in which increased physical contact may be appropriate
Training requirements
Parent/pupil/professional input
Review date and review following any significant incident

Appendix 4 – Governor Assurance Checklist

Assurance question	Evidence / governor notes
Is there a current policy aligned with April 2026 DfE guidance?	
Are staff aware that force must never be used as punishment?	
Are prevention and de-escalation embedded in behaviour practice?	
Are pupils with SEND and other vulnerabilities appropriately supported?	
Are relevant individual risk/behaviour support plans in place?	
Are significant uses of force recorded promptly?	
Are parents informed as required?	
Are seclusion/restraint incidents recorded and reported as required?	
Are incidents reviewed for learning and prevention?	
Does governance monitoring identify patterns or disproportionate use?	
Are complaints and allegations handled under the correct procedures?	
Are staff training and competence arrangements appropriate?	