North Star

Together, we are stronger. Together, we shine!

Positive Handling Policy

A Risk Reduction Approach

April 2026

Introduction

Oakwood School and Rushall School adopt a **positive, preventative and relationship-based approach** to behaviour. We prioritise **de-escalation**, **communication**, and **risk-reduction**, recognising that a small number of pupils may, at times, require **restrictive interventions** to keep themselves or others safe.

The **DfE Restrictive Interventions Guidance (April 2026)** emphasises that restrictive interventions should only be used when **lawful, necessary, reasonable, proportionate, for the shortest possible time and always in the best interests of the child or young person.**

This policy sits alongside our Positive Engagement Policy, Safeguarding Policy, Whistleblowing Policy and SEND Procedures.

What is included in this policy

- Key Definitions
- Statutory responsibilities
- Restrictive physical Interventions in context
- Reducing the need for restrictive intervention
- Positive touch
- Deescalation
- Recording and reporting
- Post-incident support
- Ensuring safe and inclusive practice for all
- Staff training
- Complaints

Key Definitions (DfE 2026)

To align with current legislation, the school adopts the following definitions:

- **Restrictive Intervention:** Any action that prevents, restricts, or subdues the movement of a pupil, physically or non-physically.
- **Reasonable Force:** The minimum degree of force needed in the circumstances, used for the shortest time possible.
- **Restraint:** Any intervention (physical or non-physical) that immobilises a pupil or restricts their movement, e.g., holding arms or removing mobility aids.
- **Significant Incident:** Any incident going beyond ordinary physical contact (e.g., guiding). These incidents **must be recorded and reported** under section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

- **Seclusion:** A **non-disciplinary** safety measure where a pupil is kept in a place away from others and prevented from leaving. Seclusion must be supervised, time-limited, and recorded. It must never be used as punishment. The space should feel safe and not feel threatening or intimidating to the pupil.

Statutory Responsibilities

Section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 gives staff the power to use reasonable force to prevent a pupil from:

- hurting themselves or others
- committing a criminal offence
- causing serious damage to property
- causing significant disorder

The 2026 guidance adds new statutory duties around **recording and reporting** all significant uses of force and **all seclusion and restraint incidents**.

As a school, we will:

- record and report **each use of force** to parents on the same day where possible (statutory)
- record and report **each seclusion or restraint incident** (statutory)

Restrictive Intervention in Context

At school, restrictive interventions may be used **only as a last resort** when a pupil:

- is at immediate risk of harming themselves or others
- is at risk of absconding
- is causing serious disruption where safety is compromised

All interventions must be:

- lawful
- necessary
- reasonable
- proportionate
- time-limited
- in the best interests of the child

Staff must conduct a **dynamic risk assessment** before acting.

Staff must never use any technique that restricts breathing or circulation, applies pressure to the neck, chest or abdomen, or intentionally holds a pupil on the ground.

Reducing the Need for Restrictive Intervention

In line with the DfE guidance, we prioritise:

- adapting environments to reduce triggers
- communication-friendly classrooms
- predictable routines
- sensory adjustments
- structured regulation breaks
- highly trained staff who know pupils well
- personalised deescalation strategies

We use:

- Universal Plans (Quality First Teaching + communication passports)
- Wave 1 Risk Reduction Plans
- Wave 2 Risk Reduction Plans following the use or foreseeable need for reasonable force, restrictive intervention and restraint.
- Wave 3 Risk Reduction Plans following the use or foreseeable need for reasonable force, restrictive intervention, restraint and seclusion.

Plans are co-produced with pupils, staff, families and professionals. The most up to date version of these documents are available in school.

Positive Touch

Positive touch is an important part of creating a safe, nurturing, and respectful environment. Staff may use appropriate, non-intrusive physical contact to provide comfort, reassurance, or guidance when it is in the best interests of the pupil. Examples include a light touch on the shoulder to gain attention, a supportive hand when a child is distressed, or guiding a child away from potential harm.

All positive touch must be:

• Respectful – sensitive to individual needs, preferences, and cultural considerations
• Proportionate – minimal and necessary for the situation
• Age-appropriate – reflecting the developmental stage of the pupil
• Transparent – open and observable by others
• In line with safeguarding expectations – never used as a substitute for verbal communication or as a response to challenging behaviour

Staff are responsible for ensuring that any physical contact promotes emotional wellbeing, maintains personal dignity, and supports positive relationships and engagement.

De-Escalation

The school prioritises de-escalation, such as:

- change of face
- change of activity or environment
- reduced language / visuals
- low arousal responses
- humour where appropriate
- distraction
- limited choices
- structured withdrawal (regulation breaks)
- emotional coaching

Strategies personalised to the pupil's needs are attempted before any restrictive intervention.

Recording & Reporting

Significant incidents involving force MUST be recorded and reported under section 93A. Our schools record as a minimum:

- names of pupils and staff involved
- SEN/disability status
- time/date/location/duration of intervention
- what triggered the incident
- what de-escalation was used
- why force was necessary
- type and degree of force
- any injuries
- post-incident support

Seclusion and restraint MUST also be recorded and reported, even without physical contact.

Parents must be informed **as soon as practicable** and ideally the same day, unless doing so would cause serious harm to the pupil, this will be via a phone call initially and subsequent written confirmation of the communication.

Records are stored securely in the school's bound and numbered book.

Both school's report and analyse data (including disproportionality of SEND) relating to restrictive interventions to our Trust's Governing Body on a termly basis.

Post-Incident Support

In line with DfE guidance:

- pupils and staff should receive timely medical checks following an incident
- both pupils and staff must receive a **debrief** led by an uninvolved adult
- relationships must be repaired through supportive conversations and communication appropriate to the child's level of understanding
- risk reduction plans must be reviewed after each significant incident

Pupils that may have witnessed and/or been impacted by the incident must also be offered support.

Ensuring Safe and Inclusive Practice for all

Pupils with SEND, particularly those with sensory, communication or trauma-related needs, are statistically more likely to experience restrictive interventions. The guidance requires that schools:

- understand individual triggers
- make environmental and sensory adaptations
- provide proactive support
- co-produce risk reduction plans with families
- ensure consistent communication strategies
- make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010

Restrictive interventions must only be used when deemed necessary, reasonable and proportionate and in the best interests of the pupil, regardless of disability-related behaviours.

Staff Training

Oakwood and Rushall use Team Teach Approach to equip staff with the skills, confidence, and shared language needed to support pupils. A core principle of this approach is that deescalation is always the primary response, with physical intervention used only when absolutely necessary to maintain safety.

All staff will be trained to:

• Prioritise deescalation strategies as the first and most effective way to reduce risk and support pupils

• Use early intervention techniques, such as calm body language, supportive tone, and nonthreatening positioning, to prevent escalation.

• Recognise individual triggers and signs of rising anxiety, responding with personalised strategies identified in risk reduction plans.

• Apply positive handling only as a last resort, when a pupil is at immediate risk of harm and deescalation has not been successful.

• Ensure any intervention is reasonable, proportionate, and necessary, in line with safeguarding and legal expectations.

• Maintain dignity, respect, and emotional safety, even during moments of crisis.

• Record all incidents clearly, including the deescalation strategies attempted prior to any physical intervention.

• Reflect on what worked and what didn't, identifying opportunities to strengthen preventative and deescalation approaches.

• Update risk reduction plans to ensure they remain responsive, personalised, and trauma informed.

Training promotes a culture where:

• Deescalation is everyone's responsibility, not just those directly involved in an incident.

• Consistency across the team helps children feel safe and reduces anxiety.

• Staff and pupil's wellbeing is valued, with opportunities for debrief and emotional support following challenging situations.

As part of annual training, Team Teach trainers will utilise the school's policy in the delivery of the approach in Positive Handling.

Complaints

Complaints follow our Mercian Trust's policy, available on the website or a paper copy is available on request.

This policy is available to all staff, parents and pupils on out school websites. A paper copy is available upon request.

Policy to be reviewed April 2027