

**FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER**

Mr Douglas Ross MSP  
Convener  
Education, Children and Young People Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh, EH99 ISP

Email: [ecyp.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:ecyp.committee@parliament.scot)



Rathgael House  
43 Balloo Road  
Rathgill  
BANGOR  
BT19 7PR

[private.office@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@education-ni.gov.uk)

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Dear Douglas

Thank you for your letter of 21 May in relation to restraint and seclusion in schools in Northern Ireland.

I have sought to address the queries raised by the Committee in turn below.

**In Northern Ireland, what guidance is provided to education providers on the use of restraint and seclusion in schools and whether it is statutory guidance?**

My Department is currently taking forward work to publish statutory guidance on the use of restraint and seclusion in educational settings. Work is at an advanced stage, and subject to my approval, it is hoped that statutory guidance will be in place in the 2025/26 school year.

The statutory guidance will be issued under Article 18 1(c) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which places a duty on the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school to have regard to the guidance when determining the measures to be taken at the school (by the Board of Governors, the staff of the school or other persons) to protect pupils from physical or mental abuse (whether at school or elsewhere).

The current guidance provided to schools on the use of reasonable force or restraint is set out in [Department of Education Circular 2021/13](#). This Circular provides educational settings with the Department's position in relation to the use of reasonable force/restraint and seclusion. This guidance is not statutory.

The Department published a report on the 'Review of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings' on 25 March 2022<sup>1</sup>, following the then Minister's endorsement of the recommendations therein. One of the key recommendations contained in the

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<sup>1</sup> [Report on the Review of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

report stated that the Department should issue statutory guidance on the use of restrictive and support practices in educational settings.

A public consultation which launched on 5 September 2023 and ran to 10 November 2023 sought views on draft Statutory Guidance on the Reduction and Management of Restrictive Practices in Educational Settings in Northern Ireland. Responses to this consultation have been analysed and officials are working with stakeholders to revise and refine the draft guidance, reflecting on the issues raised during the consultation process.

### **Are there specific training providers and programmes in relation to the use of restraint and seclusion in schools?**

The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for providing training to schools. The EA Primary and Post Primary Behaviour Support services have a full range of supports, advice and guidance and teacher professional learning in relation to the use of early intervention and preventative practices, legislative context and relevant support plans relating to the use of restraint and seclusion in schools. These can be reviewed on the EA website and Professional Learning Opportunities brochure.

A new training programme for mainstream schools, *Connecting & Caring Across the Whole School Community*, has also been developed and was initially delivered to a small cohort of mainstream schools with specialist provisions<sup>2</sup> in February 2024.

The whole school framework is a cross service, collaborative piece of training which focuses on building staff confidence in their role as educators, the development of relevant skills to help them respond to challenging situations, raise an awareness and understanding of certain profiles of need and how to appropriately support presenting needs so relationships are maintained, and pupils thrive in their education setting. This framework complements the messaging of other EA whole school emotional health and wellbeing programs.

In relation to training for specialist settings on the appropriate and safe use of restrictive practices as a last resort, the EA facilitates the delivery of accredited restricted physical intervention training, provided by an external provider, Team Teach Ltd, for staff working within special schools, Specialist Provisions for Early Years and Foundation Stage and Education Otherwise than at School (EOTAS) settings.

### **What data is collected in relation to the use of restraint and seclusion in schools and is this collated centrally?**

There is currently no mandatory requirement for schools to record incidents of seclusion and restraint. However, current guidance provides advice that incidents should be recorded. This information is held at school level. There is currently no requirement for schools to report to the EA or the Department of Education.

Additional monitoring arrangements are likely to be put in place in the new statutory guidance. The intention is that Boards of Governors should conduct a periodic review of all incidents to ensure overarching monitoring is conducted, and records should be

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<sup>2</sup> These are specialist classes (within mainstream schools) for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

made available on request to the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), the EA, and the Department in line with all relevant data protection legislation.

It is also the intention that the impact of this guidance will be monitored in accordance with the Department's Equality Scheme regarding the promotion of equality of opportunity, in relation to persons with and without disabilities.

**Are there any formal reporting duties to parliament in relation to restraint and seclusion in schools' data?**

There is no requirement to report restraint and seclusion data in schools to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Department of Education has agreed to consider commissioning a periodic review and publishing a report on the use of restrictive and supportive practices in educational settings once the new statutory guidance is in place.

I hope you find this helpful.

Yours sincerely

**Paul Givan MLA**  
**Minister of Education**