

CONSULTATION VERSION

Restrictive Interventions: Guidance for Educational Settings

12 March 2026

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The definitions used in this guidance¹:

Restrictive intervention:

Interventions which limit a person's movement, day to day activity or function.

Restrictive interventions in educational settings can involve the use of reasonable force. This is specifically defined under Article 4(1) of the Education (NI) Order 1998 and can be summarised as being such force as is reasonable in the circumstances for the purpose of preventing injury, damage, committing an offence, or serious disruption.

Types of restrictive interventions can include:

Physical restraint

Direct physical contact where a member of staff prevents, restricts, or subdues movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil.

Mechanical restraint

The use of a device to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement of a pupil's body, or part of the body, for the primary purpose of behavioural control.

Seclusion

Placing a pupil involuntarily in any environment in which they are alone and prevented from leaving.

Environmental restrictions

The use of obstacles, barriers, or locks to prevent movement (e.g., perimeter fences, locked external gates, high handles).

¹ See Section 5 for further detail.

Key messages of this guidance

The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration.

Restrictive Interventions

Educational settings should use support, techniques, training, and practices in order to reduce the use of restrictive interventions.

The focus of policy and practice in educational settings should be on the minimisation of restrictive interventions.

All restrictive interventions should be the least restrictive option, proportionate, used for the shortest possible time, carried out using the minimum force and never be used for reasons of convenience or to intentionally cause pain, suffering or humiliation.

Decisions to use restrictive interventions should be supported by robust, child-centred legal and ethical justification.

Restrictive interventions must never be used as punitive measures.

Restrictive interventions must not be used in a way that discriminates against pupils with disabilities.

Restrictive interventions should not be used to manage any pupil's non-harmful behaviours which are used to express their emotions.

Physical restraint²

When the decision is taken to use a physical restraint, it should represent the least restrictive intervention for the least amount of time possible and be a reasonable and proportionate response to the prevailing risks.

Seclusion³

Pupils should not be subject to seclusion. Seclusion of a pupil should only happen in educational settings as a last resort intervention in an emergency for the prevention of serious physical harm to individuals and where other less restrictive methods are deemed insufficient to manage an immediate risk.

² See Section 5 for further detail.

³ See Section 5 for further detail.

Mechanical restraint⁴

Mechanical restraint can only be used if: there is clear medical or safety justification; it is agreed in consultation with parents and / or healthcare professionals; and it is regularly reviewed and monitored.

Recording and reporting⁵

All serious incidents of physical restraint, any use of mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan, and all incidents of seclusion should be recorded and reported to parents at the earliest opportunity⁶.

⁴ See Section 5 for further detail.

⁵ See Section 8 for further detail.

⁶ Recording should always take place. If parents request alternative arrangements in relation to reporting, then that can be agreed in advance and should be documented.

Section 1: The purpose of this guidance

- 1.1 The purpose of this guidance is to provide clarity to educational staff on the use of restrictive interventions in educational settings, particularly around the requirement to record and report serious incidents of physical restraint, and all incidents of seclusion. This guidance has been written with the aim of reducing and minimising the use of restrictive interventions in educational settings, wherever possible.
- 1.2 This guidance sets out the requirements for the use of restrictive interventions and reiterates the legal requirements in the context of safeguarding children in the care of staff in educational settings.
- 1.3 This guidance encourages a commitment of dignity and safety for all pupils, as well as staff in education settings, through the promotion of trauma-informed, child-centred practice that supports inclusive environments where all pupils are supported to thrive.

Section 2: Overview

- 2.1 All children and young people have rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty which has been signed by the UK Government and sets out a range of rights for children. The principle of “the best interest of the child”, set out in Article 3(1) of the UNCRC and Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), underpins this guidance. The principle provides that “in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, a court of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
- 2.2 School staff are required to protect the rights of pupils in educational settings in Northern Ireland in preventing them from experiencing harm arising from any restrictive interventions and should promote measures that will lead to the reduction and minimisation of restrictive interventions. School staff are required to recognise the diverse needs of pupils and the varying contexts in which they operate. This involves understanding and responding to individual pupils' emotional, sensory, and behavioural needs, often detailed in behaviour plans or care plans.
- 2.3 Restrictive interventions limit a person’s movement, day to day activity or function. The use of restrictive interventions is not a neutral act and can have a significant physical and emotional impact on pupils, staff members and parents, as well as the wider classroom/setting. Such interventions must adhere to strict legal and ethical obligations to protect the rights and well-being of all those involved and always be in the best interests of the child. **Restrictive intervention without legal and ethical justification is unlawful.**
- 2.4 Planning should be in place, within the context of the educational setting, which safeguards pupils and those whom they interact with. Some pupils may react to certain situations by displaying behaviours which may be harmful to themselves and others and are at heightened risk of physical restraint to minimise the impact of their behaviour, on them and on other people.
- 2.5 Identifying any triggers and ensuring sensitivity to the needs of all the pupils involved will minimise the use of restrictive intervention. De-escalation is a critical component in reducing the need for any physical restraint. Effective de-escalation strategies include identifying early signs of distress or agitation, using calm, non-confrontational language and tone, demonstrating empathy and understanding and allowing the pupil time and space to self-regulate. De-escalation strategies should be adaptable and thoughtfully tailored to meet the unique needs of each pupil.
- 2.6 It is however recognised that there may be occasions when restrictive interventions may need to be used - with justification - for the pupil’s protection and to keep them

and/or the wider school community safe. Understanding when restrictive interventions should and should not be used is essential for anyone working with pupils. A restrictive practice should always be the least restrictive approach necessary. This means staff looking for solutions that respect every pupil's rights.

- 2.7 The General Teaching Council's (GTCNI) publication "Teaching – The Reflective Profession (2011)"⁷ sets out the key teaching competences and code of values and professional practice for the teaching profession in Northern Ireland. These values include, as part of a teacher's commitment to learners, that they maintain professional relationships with those pupils/learners entrusted to their care which respect the pupil/learner as a person and encourage growth and development and ensure that relationships with the parents, guardians or carers of pupils, in their capacity as partners in the educational process, are characterised by respect and trust.

⁷ [Teaching: The Reflective Profession | The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland \(gtcni.org.uk\)](http://teaching.org.uk)

Section 3: Status

3.1 Article 18(1)(c) of The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 places a duty on the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school to have regard to any guidance issued in the development of their own policies relating to 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. Whilst there is a statutory duty for all Board of Governors of grant-aided schools to have regard to this guidance, all other educational settings should nonetheless have regard to this guidance. All educational settings must, of course, comply with the law. The guidance will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and updated as necessary.

This guidance is for:

3.2 Staff working in educational settings whose role is primarily to educate or assist in the education of pupils. 'Member of staff'⁸ means any teacher who works at the school and any other person who, with the authority of the principal, has lawful control or charge of pupils at the school.

3.3 All schools have a safeguarding responsibility towards the young people in their charge and must take all reasonable steps to ensure that their welfare is safeguarded, and their safety is preserved.

3.4 There is a broad range of international and domestic legislation relating to child welfare and protection. Details of all relevant legislation are set out in Appendix 1 and schools must be aware of their responsibilities in this regard. As a starting point schools must be aware that when using and applying this guidance, the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in accordance with Article 3 of the UNCRC and Article 7 of the UNCRPD. All staff are required to act in accordance with human rights and equality law obligations and this guidance will assist them in doing so (Page 14 sets out relevant human rights provisions).

3.5 The Equality and Human Rights Commission provides a Human Rights Framework⁹ which sets out key principles of articles 3, 8 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), incorporated into domestic law by the Human Rights Act 1998, which govern the use of restraint.

3.6 The term 'child' has the same meaning as in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 i.e. a person under the age of 18.

⁸ [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998](#)

⁹ [Human rights framework for restraint](#)

- 3.7 In the case of a pupil with special educational needs the term ‘child’ should be interpreted as including any person who has not attained the age of 19 and is a registered pupil at the school. While a school has responsibility for all registered pupils, referral pathways and processes may differ for a young person over the age of 18 (Education (NI) Order 1996).
- 3.8 References to ‘parent’ have the same meaning as anyone with ‘Parental Responsibility’ as defined in Article 6 of the Children Order i.e. ‘all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property’. In practical terms, it means the responsibility to care for, and the right to make important decisions about, the child.
- 3.9 This circular replaces DE Circular 1999/9, Pastoral Care: Guidance on the Use of Reasonable Force to Restrain or Control Pupils; Towards a Model Policy on the Use of Reasonable Force; Regional Policy Framework on the use of reasonable force/safe handling; and Circular 2021/13, Interim Guidance on the Use of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings.
- 3.10 The following relevant provisions further underpin the basis of the guidance:
- Article 3(2)(b)(ii) of the Education (NI) Order 1998¹⁰
 - Section 2(1)(e) of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016¹¹
 - Article 4 of the Education (NI) Order 1998¹²
 - Article 6 of the Education (NI) Order 1998¹³

The contents of this guidance do not constitute, or purport to be, an authoritative interpretation of the law; that is exclusively a matter for the courts.

- 3.12 This guidance should be read in conjunction with:

[Pastoral care in schools](#)

[Safeguarding & Child Protection in Schools.pdf](#)

Further advice and support can be found on the Education Authority website – www.eani.org.uk

¹⁰ [Article 3\(2\)\(b\)\(ii\) Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998](#)

¹¹ [Section 2\(1\)\(d\) of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#)

¹² [Article 4 of the Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998](#)

¹³ [Article 6 of the Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998](#)

Section 4: Legal Framework

- 4.1 This section outlines the legal and ethical standards governing the use of reasonable force/restraint by school staff in Northern Ireland.

Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 - Article 4

Power of member of staff to restrain pupils

Article 4 of the Education (NI) Order 1998 contains the legislative powers that exist in relation to the use of reasonable force and for whom. All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force in any of the following circumstances¹⁴.

- (a) committing any offence;
- (b) causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself); or
- (c) engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any of its pupils, whether that behaviour occurs during a teaching session or otherwise.

Use of reasonable force must occur only:

- On school premises, or
- Elsewhere when the member of staff has lawful control of the pupil (e.g., school trips).

What is lawfully “reasonable”?

- 4.2 There is no precise legal definition of “reasonable force”. For this reason, it will always depend on the circumstances of each case. However, there are three relevant considerations to be borne in mind:

- the use of force can be regarded **as reasonable only if the circumstances of the particular incident warrant it**, such as to prevent serious physical harm where **no other option is available**. The use of any degree of force is potentially unlawful if the particular circumstances do not warrant the use of physical force. **Therefore, physical force could not be justified to prevent a pupil from committing a trivial misdemeanour, or in a situation that clearly could be resolved without force.**

¹⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1998/1759/article/4>

- the degree of force must be in **proportion to the circumstances** of the incident and the seriousness of the behaviour or the consequences it is intended to prevent. Any force used should **always be the minimum needed** to achieve the desired result; and
- whether it is reasonable to use force, and the degree of force that could reasonably be employed, will also **depend on individual circumstances of each pupil**.

4.3 Staff must uphold the following ethical principles:

- **Minimum Force:** Use the least amount necessary.
- **Proportionality:** The intervention must be proportionate and appropriate to the situation.
- **Last Resort:** The application of reasonable force is to be used as a last resort, only when other strategies have failed or are not possible to attempt.
- **Duty of Care:** Staff must ensure safety and wellbeing of all pupils.
- **Dignity and Respect:** Actions must not degrade or humiliate the pupil.

The use of reasonable force in educational settings is a measure of last resort, when the pupil, other pupils, members of staff, or property are at risk, or the pupil is seriously compromising good order and discipline, must be the minimum force necessary, and the best interests and welfare of the child must underpin any decision to use it. The needs and circumstances of pupils may differ, and reasonable adjustments must be in place in relation to pupils with SEN, disabilities or those pre-disposed to certain behaviours.

4.4 Staff are reminded of their responsibility to act in compliance with the convention rights set out in the Human Rights Act 1998 when they exercise any powers given to them by statute. Use of force as a punitive or disciplinary measure is unlawful as well as a breach of human rights standards.

4.5 In relation to Article 4(1)(a)¹ staff are reminded that the use of force must be reasonable and therefore proportionate to the nature of the offence.

Prohibition of Corporal Punishment

4.6 Under Article 36 of the 2003 Order¹⁵, corporal punishment is prohibited in all schools. The use of **physical force for punishment or disciplinary purposes is unlawful**.

Human Rights and International Conventions

4.7 Human Rights Act 1998 / ECHR

¹⁵ [The Education and Libraries \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2003](#)

- **Article 3 ECHR – Prohibition of Inhuman or Degrading Treatment** Restrictive interventions must not cause humiliation, unnecessary distress, or physical or psychological harm.
- **Article 8 ECHR – Right to Respect for Private and Family Life** Any use of restraint must respect a pupil's dignity and bodily integrity. It must be legally justified, proportionate, and necessary.
- **Protocol 1, Article 2 – Right to Education** Interventions must not interfere with a child's right to access a safe, supportive educational environment.

4.8 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

- **Article 3 – Best Interests of the Child** In all decisions and actions affecting children, the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration.
- **Article 19 – Protection from Violence, Abuse, and Neglect** Children have the right to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, or abuse.
- **Article 12 – Respect for the Views of the Child** Children have the right to express their views in matters affecting them, and these views must be given due weight.

4.9 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

- **Article 15 – Freedom from Torture or Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment** Persons with disabilities must never be subjected to abusive or degrading interventions.
- **Article 24 – Education** Persons with disabilities have the right to inclusive education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity.

4.10 This guidance prioritises **human rights, dignity, and non-discrimination** in line with the Human Rights Act 1998 and international best practice.

Disability and Equality Legislation

Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDO)¹⁶

4.11 This legislation prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability and requires schools to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities.

¹⁶ [The Special Educational Needs and Disability \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2005](#)

Section 5: Definitions

The following terms are used consistently throughout this guidance.

Restrictive Practice

Restrictive practice is an umbrella term that refers to the entire range of interventions that are considered restrictive and which infringe a person's rights. They are interventions which limit a person's movement, day to day activity or function.

Restrictive interventions in educational settings can involve the use of reasonable force. This is defined under Article 4(1) of the Education (NI) Order 1998 as such force as is reasonable in the circumstances for the purpose of preventing injury, damage, offence, or serious disruption.

Types of Restrictive Interventions

Physical restraint

Direct physical contact where a member of staff prevents, restricts, or subdues movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil .

Mechanical restraint

The use of a device to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement of a pupil's body, or part of the body, for the primary purpose of behavioural control.

Seclusion

Placing a pupil involuntarily in any environment in which they are alone and prevented from leaving.

Environmental Restrictions

Use of physical barriers, obstacles, or controls to limit movement (e.g., perimeter fencing, locked external gates, high door handles, restricted-access doors).

Guidance by Type of Restrictive Intervention

Physical Restraint

- May involve the use of reasonable force and when it does it is as a measure of last resort, when the pupil, other pupils, members of staff, or property are at risk, or the pupil is seriously compromising good order and discipline, must be the minimum force necessary, and the best interests and welfare of the child must underpin any decision to use it.

- In all cases it must be proportionate, used for the shortest possible time, and in the best interests of the child.
- **Recording requirement:** All serious incidents should be documented and reported (see Section 8).

Mechanical restraint

Mechanical restraint can only be used if: there is clear medical or safety justification; it is agreed in consultation with parents and / or healthcare professionals; and it is regularly reviewed and monitored.

As with all restrictive interventions, it must be the least restrictive option, proportionate, used for the shortest possible time, carried out using the minimum force and never be used for reasons of convenience or to intentionally cause pain, suffering or humiliation.

Outside of an agreed plan, mechanical restraint should **never** be used for behavioural control unrelated to safety or for medical reasons.

Conditions for use:

- It should be documented.
- Parental consent should be in place.
- It should be regularly reviewed.
- Staff should be trained in safe use and following professional instructions.

Any use which does not meet the requirements above should be recorded and reported as a serious restraint.

Seclusion

Seclusion will be subject to the following considerations:

- Seclusion of a pupil will only be permissible in educational settings as a last resort intervention in an emergency for the prevention of serious physical harm to individuals and where other less restrictive methods are deemed insufficient to manage an immediate risk.
- It should be recorded and reported.
- It should never be used as a routine behaviour-management strategy.

Environmental Restrictions

Examples include perimeter security, high door handles, or staff only access controls.

These restrictions should be:

- Proportionate.
- Risk assessed and regularly reviewed.
- Limited to what is necessary for safety.

Environmental restrictions should not amount to seclusion.

In summary:

Any restrictive intervention must be:

- used for the **shortest duration** possible;
- the **least restrictive** intervention;
- **Human Rights-Based;**
- **Proportionate** and **Necessary;**
- Protect the pupil's dignity and wellbeing at all times
- Regularly reviewed and minimised wherever possible.

Must not be used:

- as a **substitute** for other **less restrictive interventions;**
- as a **form of punishment;**
- to restrict movement **without legal, therapeutic or safety justification;**
- for **staff convenience;**
- **intentionally** involve any techniques that **inflict pain.**

Section 6: Non-Restrictive Physical Contact

This section provides staff with guidance on the use of non-restrictive physical contact, outlining actions that are not considered restraint or seclusion.

The following do not constitute restraint:

- Physical demonstrations for teaching (e.g., P.E., sports coaching).
- Administering first aid.
- Physical prompts or assistance.
- Comforting a distressed pupil.
- Carrying out essential care tasks.

Withdrawal

The following scenarios do not constitute seclusion:

- **Pupil-led:** this is when a pupil voluntarily steps away from a situation.
- **Staff-led:** this is when staff redirect a pupil to a different environment from which they remain free to leave.

Guidance on the use of withdrawal

- **Pupil-led:** voluntary and temporary; staff must monitor wellbeing and duration.
- **Staff-led:** redirection to an alternative environment, but the pupil remains free to leave.

While recording and reporting is not required, instances of withdrawal should be documented to identify frequent patterns and inform support planning.

Section 7: Policies and procedures in educational settings

- 7.1 Educational settings should ensure that they have policy and procedures in place in relation to the use of restrictive interventions. This is important to ensure that staff, pupils, and parents are clear about the educational setting's approach to the use of restrictive interventions. The Education Authority will consider the best approach to developing a framework for the use of restrictive interventions.

What needs to be taken into consideration when writing the policy / procedures for the use of restrictive interventions?

- 7.2 At the heart of every educational setting's policy and procedures on the use of restrictive interventions should be the protection of the safety and physical and emotional wellbeing of our children and young people, taking into account their individual needs and their best interests. The focus should be on the reduction and minimisation of restrictive interventions.

What approach should schools take regarding 'no contact' policies?

- 7.3 Schools should not adopt a 'no contact' policy. Such policies can prevent staff from intervening where reasonable in the circumstances to fully protect pupils. Similarly, schools should not agree to requests from parents or staff to prohibit reasonable force or other restrictive interventions. Educational settings should ensure policies support appropriate physical contact when required to safeguard pupils and maintain a safe environment.

Section 8: Recording, reporting and monitoring

- 8.1 Decisions to use restrictive interventions must be supported by robust, child-centred legal and ethical justification. Where relevant and appropriate, the use of such interventions should be discussed in advance as part of an individual's care or support plan, developed in consultation with relevant professionals, the individual, and their family or carers.
- 8.2 However, it is recognised there may be situations where interventions cannot be discussed in advance but are necessary to prevent immediate harm to a pupil or others¹⁷ and in the best interests and welfare of all pupils.
- 8.3 All educational settings should record and report serious use of physical restraint, any use of mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan, and any use of seclusion in accordance with the procedures set out in this section¹⁸.

All serious incidents of physical restraint should be recorded and reported.

Any use of mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan should be recorded and reported.

All incidents of seclusion should be recorded and reported.

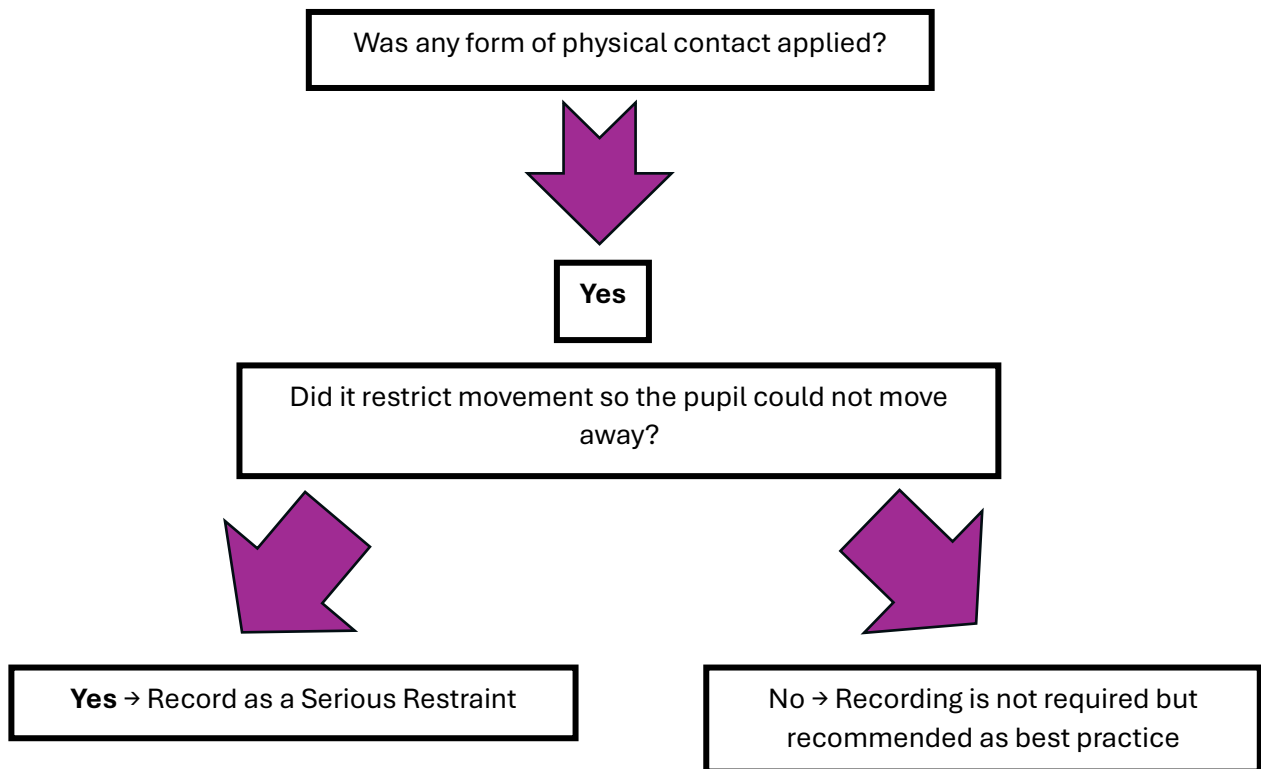
- 8.4 Direct physical contact varies in severity and level of restrictiveness. To ensure accuracy in reporting and recording the flow chart below will assist staff in determining if an incident should be recorded and reported.

¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1998/1759/article/4>.

¹⁸ Recording should always take place. If parents request alternative arrangements in relation to reporting, then that can be agreed in advance and should be documented.

Reporting and Recording Flow Chart

This flowchart outlines the decision-making process for recording serious incidents of physical restraint



8.5 Understanding what constitutes serious restraint is essential for ensuring compliance with what should be recorded.

What Counts as Serious Restraint and Should be Recorded?

- Restrictive intervention limiting movement where the pupil is unable to move away
- Any use of mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan.
- Any use of seclusion.

What Does NOT Need To Be Recorded?

- Guiding or escorting (e.g., holding hand)
- Restrictive intervention limiting movement where the pupil is able to move away.
- Physical redirection where the pupil is able to move away.
- Physical demonstrations for teaching (e.g., P.E., sports coaching).
- Administering first aid.
- Physical prompts or assistance.
- Comforting a distressed pupil.
- Carrying out essential care tasks.

Withdrawal¹⁹

- **Pupil-led:** when a pupil voluntarily steps away from a situation.
- **Staff-led:** when staff redirect a pupil to a different environment from which they remain free to leave.

Recording

- 8.6 A pro forma for the recording of physical restraint and seclusion is included in **Appendix 4** published alongside this guidance.

Educational settings are encouraged to use this form to record incidents requiring the use of serious physical restraint. The following details should be captured:

- Details of the incident and the events preceding it
- Details of all those involved in the incident
- Details of the physical restraint (type, duration)
- Details of the outcome of the incident and the actions taken to reduce the likelihood of recurrence
- The impact of the physical restraint including any injuries or risk to physical or mental wellbeing
- Details to explain why the physical restraint was believed to be necessary, proportionate and in the best interests of the child
- Communication with parents including any comments they wish to make

Reporting

- 8.7 Parents should be informed of any instances of serious use of physical restraint, any use of mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan, and all instances of seclusion²⁰.

¹⁹ While recording and reporting is not required, instances of withdrawal should be documented to identify frequent patterns and inform support planning.

²⁰ Recording should always take place. If parents request alternative arrangements in relation to reporting, then this is permitted. It should be agreed in advance and documented.

A report should be produced, and a copy sent to the Chair of the Board of Governors. It is best practice that the use of physical restraint / seclusion is a standing agenda item for Board of Governor meetings and that the Principal/Designated Teacher prepares a report for the meeting of all incidents and a full annual report for the Board of Governors. In the case of EOTAS settings, the report should be sent to the relevant EA Director. The report should also be shared with the parents of the pupil involved on request. It should include information on measures taken to support those involved in the incident and actions that will be taken to reduce the likelihood of further occurrences.

Monitoring

- 8.8 Boards of Governors should conduct a periodic review of all incidents to ensure overarching monitoring is conducted which includes number of incidents (with comparison with previous years), how incidents have come about, actions taken, outcome of the learning review and whether the necessary follow-up was taken.
- 8.9 Records should be maintained and monitored on a regular basis by educational settings in order to review events leading up to the incidents, with a view to reducing the likelihood of these in the future. The outcome of each periodic review and the follow-up actions should be retained. These records should be made available on request to ETI, the EA, and the Department in line with all relevant data protection legislation. Parents of pupils who are subject to the use of restrictive practice should have access to their own records on request.
- 8.10 A record should be kept of follow up actions including whether or not additional support was requested from EA by the school, the reason for this, and the outcome.
- 8.11 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.

Summary of Reporting Requirements

Physical Restraint	
Definition	Reporting Requirement
Direct physical contact where someone prevents, restricts, or subdues movement of the body, or part of the body, of a pupil.	<p>Serious incidents of physical restraint should be recorded and reported.</p> <p>Direct physical contact varies in severity and level of restrictiveness.</p> <p>To ensure accuracy in reporting and recording refer to the flowchart in section 8 for more information.</p>
Mechanical Restraint	
Definition	Reporting Requirement
The use of a device to prevent, restrict, or subdue movement of a pupil's body, or part of their body, for the primary purpose of behavioural control.	<p>Use of mechanical restraint (should be documented within a plan).</p> <p>The use of a device that restricts movement does not need to be reported if its use is in line with an agreed plan. Its use will be recorded as part of the plan and further reporting recording is not required.</p> <p>Any use of the device outside an agreed plan should be recorded and reported in line with serious restraint.</p>
Seclusion	
Definition	Reporting Requirement
Placing a pupil involuntarily in any environment in which they are alone and prevented from leaving.	Incidents of seclusion should be recorded and reported.

Environmental restrictions	
Definition	Reporting Requirement
The use of obstacles, barriers or locks to prevent a pupil from moving around freely.	Do not need to be recorded. Should be regularly reviewed and risk-assessed to confirm their necessity. No onward reporting requirement.
Pupil-led withdrawal	
Definition	Reporting Requirement
A pupil voluntarily steps away from a situation.	Best practice to record.
Staff-led withdrawal	
Definition	Reporting Requirement
Staff redirect a pupil to a different environment from which they remain free to leave.	Best practice to record.

Section 9: After an incident which requires recording and reporting

- 9.1 Educational settings should carry out a learning review with the aim of learning from the incident and reflecting on practice. These reviews should be an opportunity to discuss an incident that involved the serious use of physical restraint. any use of mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan, and all instances of seclusion. They should be carried out with the aim of reducing incidents of these types.
- 9.2 Educational settings should regularly review all serious uses of physical restraint, any use of mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan, and all instances of seclusion in order to gain a fuller understanding of events leading up to the incidents, and how this type of physical intervention can be avoided in future.
- 9.3 After incidents, including assaults on staff where someone sustains an injury, all schools can report to EA via the online accident reporting system.
- 9.4 In compliance with health and safety legislation the Department reminds educational settings of their obligation to report incidents involving major injuries, or injuries causing staff to be off work for three or more days to the Health & Safety Executive/enforcing authority under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (NI) 1997 ('RIDDOR').²¹
- 9.5 Schools can also refer directly to the EA to request staff professional development, pupil intervention and requests for placement within Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) through the respective EOTAS Panel. Details are available on C2k Exchange and the EA web page.
- 9.6 Alongside this, all schools have access to the EA Health and Wellbeing Hub for support in relation to Health and Wellbeing: <https://healthwell.eani.org.uk/>
The contact for all schools is healthandwellbeing@eani.org.uk .

²¹ [The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

Section 10: Safeguarding our Pupils

- 10.1 The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 Articles 17 and 18 place a statutory duty on the Board of Governors of a school to safeguard and promote the welfare of their pupils and to determine the measures to be taken at the school with a view to protecting pupils from abuse (whether at school or elsewhere).
- 10.2 The Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools - A Guide for Schools assists schools in fulfilling their responsibilities regarding their safeguarding and child protection role.
- 10.3 All grant-aided schools must have a child protection policy which includes the appointment of a Designated Teacher/Deputy Designated Teacher with responsibility for child protection. Requirements on other settings are a condition of grant.
- 10.4 Settings must ensure that staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and are familiar with the organisation's safeguarding policy and procedures. Safeguarding issues must be reported to social services or the police in line with requirements set out in the Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools Guide and relevant guidance:
- Where there is any indication that restrictive interventions are being used inappropriately this must be reported as a safeguarding concern.**
- 10.5 Settings should also ensure that practitioners are made aware of their whistleblowing policy.
- 10.6 Settings should ensure that pupils and/or their parents receive information about the policy on the use of restrictive interventions, their right to make a complaint and the relevant process for making a complaint. They should also receive clear information on how to report a safeguarding concern. This information should be in a fully accessible content and format, which includes identifying and making reasonable accommodation for specific needs to ensure accessibility.

Section 11: Whistleblowing

- 11.1 The EA Whistleblowing Protocol aims to ensure that employees and the general public have a mechanism, in which to raise concerns, identify wrongdoing, risk or malpractice.
- 11.2 Staff or parents who are concerned about an educational setting's use of restrictive interventions should also be aware they can request an investigation from the EA under their whistleblowing policy. [Whistleblowing | Education Authority Northern Ireland \(eani.org.uk\)](https://www.eani.org.uk/whistleblowing)

Section 12: Complaints

- 12.1 The complaints policy for schools sets out how any expression of dissatisfaction relating to the school will be managed. By taking concerns raised seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is hoped that issues can be resolved quickly and effectively by taking the appropriate action to rectify the issue and prevent it happening again.
- 12.2 Responsibility for taking decisions on school complaints rests with the Board of Governors. Each school is responsible for setting its own complaints policy and procedures which should be available on the school's website, or by contacting the school directly. An example of the school complaints process is available at Appendix 5.
- 12.3 If an incident occurs in school involving the serious use of restraint by a member of staff any use of mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan, and / or seclusion, the procedures set out in this guidance should be followed.
- 12.4 This will include informing the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child. Should they have any concerns around the incident, parents should also be provided with information on the complaints process.
- 12.5 In the event of a subsequent complaint made against a member of staff either by or on behalf of the child, this should be dealt with in accordance with the school's child protection complaints procedures, as set out in the latest Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools guidance issued by the Department.
- 12.6 This includes providing the parent/guardian making the complaint with full details of the school complaint process, the role of the Board of Governors, the Principal and the Designated Teacher for Child Protection and the right to escalate a complaint to Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman (NIPSO) should they remain unsatisfied with the outcome of the school complaints process. Details of how to make a complaint to NIPSO can be found on their website at [Northern Ireland Ombudsman](#). Please bear in mind that usually, before a complaint will be considered by the Ombudsman, the complainant will be expected to have exhausted the school's internal complaints procedure.
- 12.7 A dispute about the use of restraint, any use of mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan, or seclusion by a member of staff might lead to an investigation either under disciplinary procedures, or by the police and Social Services under child protection procedures.
- 12.8 Staff who themselves are subject to physical violence or assault should be supported, in taking any appropriate action in relation to an incident.

12.9 Educational settings will wish to consider if the incident should be reported to the police.

Appendix 1

Relevant articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

Article 2(1) (Non-discrimination)

Article 3, (Best interests of the child)

Article 6, (Right to life)

Article 12, (Child's right to express views)

Article 16, (Right to privacy)

Article 19, (Protection from violence)

Article 23, (Children with disabilities)

Article 28(2), (Right to dignity in context of administering school discipline)

Article 29, (Purpose of education)

Article 37, (Freedom from torture and right to liberty)

Article 39, (Right to recovery)

Full details of each article can be found at [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNICEF UK](#).

Relevant articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD):

Article 3, (General principles)

Article 4, (General obligations)

Article 5, (Equality and non-discrimination)

Article 7 (Children with disabilities)

Article 8, (Awareness raising)

Article 10, (Right to life)

Article 14 (Liberty and security of person)

Article 15, (Freedom from torture)

Article 16, (Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse)

Article 17, (Protecting the integrity of the person)

Article 22, (Respect for privacy)

Article 24, (Right to education)

Article 31, (Data collection)

Full details of each article can be found at [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – Articles | United Nations Enable](#)

Relevant article of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR):

Article 13 (right to education)

Further details of this article can be found at [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights | OHCHR](#)

Relevant article of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):

Article 10 (right to education)

Further details of this article can be found at [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979 | OHCHR](#)

Relevant article of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD):

Article 5(e)(v) (right to education)

Further details of this article can be found at [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination | OHCHR](#)

Appendix 2

RECORD OF THE USE OF SERIOUS RESTRAINT/SECLUSION PRO FORMA

Pupil Name: _____

Year Group: _____

Name of school: _____ Date and time of Incident: _____

SEN/any protected characteristics of the pupil.

Events Leading up to the restraint

Where did the restraint occur? _____

What was happening at the time?

Describe the Event that Occurred.

Provide details of the situation leading up to the restraint

What action was taken to try to de-escalate the situation before using restraint?

What do you believe could have happened if there had been no restraint?

How was the pupil restrained? And by whom?

How long did the pupil need to be restrained?

Describe the impact of the restraint on all those involved and the follow up support that will be provided to the individuals concerned

Implications for Future Planning

Does this pupil have an individual behaviour /education plan? YES/NO

Do changes need to be made to any of the following? *(Please tick appropriate box)*

The environment e.g., organisation, curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/>	Targets for teaching new skills	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reinforcement strategies	<input type="checkbox"/>	Defusing and calming strategies	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other Please specify.

Follow Up Action

Medical intervention was needed.

YES/NO

Please specify other recording procedures:

Accident book Record

Accident form

Child Protection

Parent/carer informed by

Telephone

Letter

Direct Contact

Any comments parents may wish to make.

Signature of person reporting to parent/(s)

Signed _____ Print name _____ Date _____

Signature of person submitting form

Signed _____ Print name _____ Date _____

Signature of Headteacher

***A copy should be sent to the chairperson of the Board of Governors
In the case of EOTAS settings, a copy should be sent to the relevant EA Director***

POST INCIDENT CHECKLIST ²²

Action	Carried out by:	Date Completed
Maintain regular contact with all involved: parents, pupils, school staff to ensure the well-being of all concerned.		
Hold a review meeting with relevant staff to review the incident and to plan for the future This will inform the drafting or review of any necessary support plans.		
Make parents/carers aware of appropriate avenues to follow should they continue to have concerns following the meetings		
Ensure parents/carers are aware of the school's complaints procedures.		
Ensure parents/carers are aware they can request an investigation from the Education Authority under their whistleblowing policy.		
Make staff members aware of the services provided by the Education Authority.		
Inform the Designated Safeguarding Person if necessary.		
Inform any outside agencies which may be required, (e.g., Social service, PSNI).		
Register the incident in the school's incident report book.		
Report the incident to the Board of Governors at the next Board meeting.		

A copy should be sent to the chairperson of the Board of Governors

In the case of EOTAS settings, a copy should be sent to the relevant EA Director

²² This checklist is not compulsory but is considered good practice.

Relevant legislation, policy and guidance

International conventions

UN Convention On The Rights Of The Child (UNCRC)

UN Convention On The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's general comments web pages offer guidance on how to interpret treaty provisions in practice. These can be accessed [here](#) and [here](#).

Legislation

Children (NI) Order 1995 – duty to protect and child protection responsibilities/ fulfilling responsibility.

Human Rights Act 1998 – bringing the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law.

Education (NI) Order 1998 Article 3 and 4.

Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 – Articles 17, 18 and 36

Education (NI) Order 1996

Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO)

Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Act 2016 (SEND).

Mental Capacity (NI) Act 2016

Children's Services Co-operation (NI) Act 2015

Northern Ireland Act 1998, section 75

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Addressing Bullying at Schools (NI) Act 2016

Policy & guidance

Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools guide

Circular 2017/04 - Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools - A Guide for Schools

Whistleblowing | Education Authority Northern Ireland (eani.org.uk)

Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and Supplement

Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour (2001)

Child Protection Support Service - School Governors Handbook (2021)

This is not an exhaustive list and settings should ensure they are up to date with the requirements placed on them through any non-statutory guidance or advice.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role of Department of Education

- Promote the education of children and young people in Northern Ireland and ensure the effective implementation of education policy.
- Develop guidance on the use of Restrictive interventions.
- Monitor the outcome of ETI assessment on the implementation of the guidance.

Role of ETI

- Assess compliance with the guidance when carry out inspections on educational settings.
- Review educational settings records on the use of restrictive interventions.

Role of EA

- Develop a model policy for all schools.
- Support Boards of Governors, school leaders and school staff in implementing the guidance to reduce the use of restrictive interventions and improve outcomes for all pupils.
- Regularly review relevant training to support the implementation of the guidance.
- Provide appropriate training to educational settings that is aligned to this guidance and will support the reduction on the use of restrictive interventions.
- Ensure all schools are aware and have access to appropriate training.
- Provide support to schools seeking advice on behaviour support to assist them in establishing early intervention, preventative, trauma informed and nurturing approaches to support behaviours that require intervention.

Role of Board of Governors

- Overall responsibility in relation to duty of care to pupils and staff, and health and safety, in their schools.
- Ensure the school has a restrictive interventions policy which is reviewed annually, and parents and pupils receive a copy of the policy in an accessible format.
- Ensure staff, parents and pupils are involved in the development of the school's policy and in any review.
- Ensure all staff working in their educational setting are aware of the guidance and of their individual responsibility to follow the guidance and offer the opportunity to discuss requirements and impact on roles and responsibilities.
- Overall responsibility for staff induction and the provision of additional training and development.

- Active monitoring, scrutiny and challenge of data and practice to minimise the use of restrictive interventions.
- Conduct a periodic review of all incidents to ensure overarching monitoring is conducted which includes number of incidents (with comparison with previous years), how incidents have come about, actions taken, outcome of the learning review and whether the necessary follow-up was taken.
- Investigate complaints in relation to the use of restrictive interventions and deal with outcomes.
- Provide parent/carer full details of the school complaints process and the right to escalate a complaint to Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman (NIPSO) should they remain unsatisfied with the outcome of the school complaints process.

Role of Principal/School Leader

- Ensure an experienced senior member of staff (the Principal, a senior teacher, or designated teacher for child protection) takes special responsibility for providing guidance to other staff on the use of restrictive interventions.
- Responsibility in relation to duty of care to pupils and staff, and health and safety, in their schools.
- Responsibility for the delivery of additional support for training and development.
- Local delivery of the school's policy.
- Ensure all staff know and understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting all pupils.
- Ensure, staff, parents and pupils are involved in the development of the policy and in any review.
- Ensure new staff are given a copy of the policy and a senior member of staff advises on its implementation.
- Overall responsibility to ensure parents are informed of any instances of the use of serious physical restraint and seclusion.
- Ensure a report on the use of restrictive interventions is produced and a copy sent to the Chair of the Board of Governors.
- Ensure the report is shared with the parents of the pupil involved on request.
- Ensure all staff are appropriately trained on the use of equipment and other therapeutic advice in line with pupil's individual care and/or learning plan.

Role of School Staff

- Responsibility to support the health, safety and wellbeing of pupils.
- Local delivery of the school policy.
- Following any serious physical restraint, mechanical restraint outside of an agreed plan, or seclusion, the member of staff concerned should tell the Principal or a senior member of staff.

- Seek advice from a senior colleague (e.g., the Principal or designated senior teacher) to provide training and guidance.
- Engage on the development of school policy.

Role of Parents

- Engage with the school on the development of policy.
- Engage with health professionals, schools and your child on the content and usage of the school equipment.
- Speak to the school or health professional to clarify any issues you may have in relation to restrictive interventions.

Role of Pupils

- Speak to a trusted adult in school or at home with any concerns.
- Engage with the school on the development of school policy.

School Complaints Process

Step 1 If you have any concerns or worried about your child's welfare, you can contact the **child's teacher**. If you feel unable to talk directly to the child's teacher you may wish to speak to **the head of year, head of key stage or the pastoral teacher**.

Step 2 If you can't resolve the problem with the teacher or you are not satisfied with their response you can talk to the **Principal**. You should be able to arrange a meeting or a telephone conversation with the Principal through the school office. If this isn't practical, you may wish to make a written complaint.

Step 3 If your complaint is not resolved by the Principal or you are not satisfied with their response the next stage is to approach the school **Board of Governors (BoG)**. If you want to complain to the BoG, you should request a copy of the school complaints procedure. All complaints to the governing body must be in writing.

It is important to note at this stage that some complaints have separate **established statutory procedures** and appeal mechanisms. e.g., child protection/safeguarding, employment matters, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) disability discrimination and suspensions and expulsion decisions. These examples are not exhaustive. The Principal or Chair of the Board of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when the complaint is raised.

Step 4 If following the BoGs review of the complaint you remain dissatisfied with the outcome you can refer the matter to **Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO)**.

The Ombudsman provides a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints about schools in Northern Ireland. Details of how to make a complaint to NIPSO are available at the following link [How do I make a complaint to NIPSO](#).