

DE/2026-065– Freedom of Information Request

Request:

For the last five academic years, can DE/EA (whoever is responsible for recording this information) please detail how many children were restrained at Northern Ireland schools? Please break that down into each year and provide data up to the latest date possible, if it exists for the 2025/26 year so far. If none exists for this year, please provide it up to 2024/25.

If guidance relating to restraining pupils has changed over that period, please note the changes and when they came into effect.

Department Response:

Thank you for your request for information relating to restraint in Northern Ireland schools. The request was received on 13 April 2026.

The Education Authority (EA) operates as a separate public authority for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act. The Department is therefore responding to this request only in respect of information held by the Department.

Responsibility for recording incidents of restraint in schools' rests with individual schools, and such records are retained at school level rather than held centrally.

The Department is aware of the use of restraint in educational settings through independent reviews, including the NICCY *Neither Seen Nor Heard* review and investigations undertaken by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

The Department has searched its records and holds information relevant to your request.

In response to the first part of your request, while incidents involving restraint are recorded at school level, in some cases the Department may also have been contacted directly regarding specific incidents or related concerns. For the purposes of this response, the last five academic years are taken to be 2021/22 through to 2025/26. A review of Departmental records has identified four incidents of restraint reported to the Department in the last five years. Due to data protection and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements, it is not possible to disclose further details. Furthermore, due to the low numbers involved, it may be possible to identify the individual pupils concerned, particularly if that information was broken down by year as requested.

In response to the second part of your request, the Department holds information relating to guidance on restraint in educational settings, however under Section 21 of the act, the Department is not required to provide information that is already available in a form accessible by the public. Please see links to guidance in the following paragraphs.

The Department of Education last issued formal guidance on the use of reasonable force in 2004, set out in DE [Circular 1999/09](#), which provides advice on when reasonable force may be used.

At the request of the then Education Minister, the Department commenced a formal review of restraint and seclusion in educational settings in early 2020. While this review was ongoing, the Department published [Circular 2021/13](#) interim guidance in May 2021, which set out the Department's position on the use of reasonable force, restraint and seclusion, highlighted existing supports and training available to schools, and reiterated that decisions must be guided by the best interests of the child.

The Department published the Report on the Review of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings on 25 March 2022, which recommended the development of updated guidance. Draft statutory guidance was subsequently published for consultation on 5 September 2023, with further work ongoing. A further public consultation on revised guidance, now titled "Restrictive Interventions: Guidance for educational settings", is currently underway. The consultation period runs from Thursday 12 March 2026 to Thursday 4 June 2026. [Restrictive Interventions: Guidance for educational settings | Department of Education](#).

If you do not have access to the Internet at home, you may be able to use facilities at your local public library, or you can request a paper copy. As Section 21 is an absolute exemption, the Department is not required to carry out a Public Interest Test.