

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The EQIA Consultation Report on the proposed ‘Restrictive Interventions: Guidance for educational settings’

12 March 2026

If you require this document in an alternative format (such as in large print, in Braille, or electronic) and/or language, please contact the Additional Education Needs Team as follows:



E mail : restrictiveinterventionsconsultation@education-ni.gov.uk

Contents	PAGE
1.Introduction	1
2.Section 75 and the Statutory Duties	2
3.Executive Summary of the Consultation Report	4
4.Defining the aims of the policy	7
5.Consideration of available Data and Research	9
6.Assessment of Impacts	21
7.Consideration of measures which might mitigate any adverse impact and alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.	25
8.Formal Consultation on the actual impacts of existing policies and the likely impact of proposed policies	26
9.Publication	27
10.Monitoring	28

1. INTRODUCTION

About the Department of Education

The Department of Education is responsible for the central administration of all aspects of education and related services in Northern Ireland – excepting the higher and further education sector, responsibility for which is within the remit of the Department for the Economy.

The Department's main areas of responsibility are in pre-school, primary, post-primary and special education; the youth service; the promotion of community relations within and between schools; and teacher education and salaries. Its primary statutory duty is to promote the education of the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure the effective implementation of education policy. Its key functions include:

- advising ministers on the determination of education policy
- framing legislation
- accounting for the effectiveness of the education system
- allocating, monitoring and accounting for resources
- through the Education and Training Inspectorate, evaluating and reporting on the quality of teaching and learning and teacher education

The Department also aims to ensure that children, through participation at schools, reach the highest possible standards of educational achievement. In pre-school settings, schools and through the Youth Service the Department also promotes personal well-being and social development, so that children gain the knowledge, skills and experience to reach their full potential as valued individuals.

2. SECTION 75 AND THE STATUTORY DUTIES

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires Public Authorities, including the Department of Education when carrying out their functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine categories of persons, namely:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without

Without prejudice to the above obligations, the Department must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland approved the Department of Education's Equality Scheme in September 2013. The Scheme outlines how the Department proposes to fulfil its statutory duties under Section 75.

Under the statutory duties contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Department undertakes to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA) on each policy or group of co-joined policies where screening has indicated that there may be significant implications in relation to one or more of the nine Section 75 categories.

Part of the EQIA Process is Consultation.

This EQIA consultation report has been made available as part of the Formal Consultation stage of the EQIA relating to 'Restrictive Interventions: Guidance for educational settings' and we would welcome any comments which you may have in terms of this EQIA and our preliminary recommendations with regard to measures to mitigate adverse impact and alternative policies.

If you have any queries about this document, and its availability in alternative formats then please contact Additional Educational Needs Team as follows:

E-mail: restrictiveinterventionsconsultation@education-ni.gov.uk

Write to: Additional Educational Needs Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

Deadline for comments is 4 June 2026

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION REPORT

The EQIA assesses the equality impacts of the Department's proposed new 'Restrictive Interventions: Guidance for educational settings', drawing on available evidence about existing practice to identify potential impacts and mitigation needs.

The primary function of this draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is to determine the extent of any differential impact of changes proposed by the introduction of the new guidance on Section 75 categories, and groups within those categories, and to determine whether that impact is adverse, i.e. whether the policy change negatively affects people within one or more of the equality groups.

The purpose of the guidance is to provide clarity to educational staff on the use of restrictive interventions, particularly regarding the requirement to record and report serious incidents of physical restraint and all incidents of seclusion.

The guidance aims to reduce and minimise the use of restrictive interventions wherever possible, ensuring they are used only, as a last resort, in a proportionate, lawful, trauma-informed and child-centred manner.

The overall objective is to safeguard children and young people, promote their dignity and wellbeing, support inclusive practice, and ensure consistent standards across all educational settings.

Although the guidance is intended to strengthen safeguarding and reduce the use of restrictive interventions, an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been undertaken because restrictive practices more broadly can have significant and sometimes disproportionate impacts on particular groups of children and young people. The EQIA therefore assesses not the guidance as a negative intervention, but the broader context in which restrictive practices occur.

The Department of Education (DE) last issued guidance on the use of reasonable force in 2004. Existing policy (contained in DE Circular 1999/09 and its associated policy framework) provides clarification and guidance on the use of reasonable force, by teachers and other authorised staff, to restrain or control pupils in certain circumstances. It gives guidance about who can use reasonable force, when it is appropriate to use it, and the procedures for recording incidents where reasonable force was used. It also advises that schools should have written policy about the use of reasonable force which should be made known to parents.

The Department's existing guidance in relation to the use of restrictive practices/reasonable force and the underpinning legislation however does not prescribe mandatory recording and reporting of such incidents.

At the request of the then Education Minister, Departmental officials began a formal review in early 2020 of the wider use of restrictive practices, in educational settings with a view to developing new guidance. The Minister's request was on foot of correspondence on this issue from: parents with lived experience of the use of restraint and seclusion in educational settings; Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly (MLAs) including the NI Assembly's Committee for Education; and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) on

the use of restrictive practices relating to pupils with special educational needs (SEN) helped inform the review. An Inter-Departmental Working Group was established to take forward the review as well as a Reference Group which acted as a critical friend.

Whilst the review was ongoing, the Department published interim guidance in May 2021, which provides educational settings with the Department's position in relation to the use of reasonable force/restraint and seclusion and an overview of the existing support and training available to schools from the Education Authority. The overarching principle is that the best interests of the child should guide all decisions taken by staff in relation to children in their care.

The Department published a report on the Review of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings on 25 March 2022¹. Recommendation 2 and 3 of the Review recommended the Department issues guidance on the use of restrictive and supportive practices for educational settings.

In order to progress these recommendations, the Department engaged with the Working Group and Reference Group who had previously supported the review. This Working Group subsequently supported the development of the draft statutory guidance through co-production. Membership of the Working Group was drawn from a range of statutory bodies including the Education Authority, the Departments of Justice and Health, and the Public Health Agency. The Department also engaged with a Reference Group, made up of representatives from a range of key stakeholder organisations including NICCY, the Children's Law Centre (CLC), the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC). Further engagement also took place with other key stakeholders including teachers/staff from educational settings, teaching unions and parents of pupils with lived experience of these issues.

This work resulted in the draft Statutory Guidance on the Reduction and Management of Restrictive Practices in Educational Settings in Northern Ireland², which the Department published for consultation on 5 September 2023. The consultation closed on 10 November 2023. Stakeholders were broadly supportive of the development of statutory guidance and welcomed the opportunity to comment on the draft; however, there were a wide range of divergent views submitted and it proved challenging to identify areas of consensus on specific changes.

In light of this and at the Minister's request, a Task and Finish Group was commissioned in December 2024, comprising education practitioners, health professionals, and children's rights advocates, with the aim of revisiting the guidance, exploring the differing perspectives raised through the consultation, and working towards a revised version that better meets the needs of children and young people across the education system.

In the course of drafting the revised guidance, the Department engaged stakeholders through the Task and Finish Group. During the later stages of development, it became clear that the Department was unable to secure the breadth of cross-sectoral engagement originally intended. In light of this, the Department considered it appropriate to proceed to public

¹ [Report on the Review of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

² [Statutory Guidance on the Reduction and Management of Restrictive Practices in Educational Settings in Northern Ireland | Department of Education](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

consultation to ensure that all relevant views could be captured in a transparent and inclusive manner.

A second consultation on 'Restrictive Interventions: Guidance for educational settings' is therefore now being carried out to ensure the Department can gather a wider range of perspectives and provide all interested parties with an additional opportunity to contribute to the development of the guidance. The name of the guidance has been updated to improve clarity and accessibility, and ensure the title more accurately represents the intent and scope of the revised guidance.

The draft guidance has been based on the following underlying principles:

- **Best Interests of the Child:** All decisions about restrictive interventions should be centred on the child's welfare, in line with the UNCRC and UNCRPD.
- **Minimisation of Restrictive Interventions:** Schools should prioritise de-escalation, early intervention, and child-centred planning to avoid the need for restrictive interventions.
- **Least Restrictive Option:** Any intervention should be the least restrictive available, used for the shortest possible time, and involve the minimum degree of force.
- **Proportionality & Necessity:** Use of force is only lawful where strictly necessary to prevent harm or serious disruption and should be proportionate to the situation.
- **Human Rights & Dignity:** Interventions should never cause humiliation, pain, unnecessary distress, or be used as punishment. Practice should comply with the Human Rights Act 1998 and ECHR.
- **Equality & Non-Discrimination:** Interventions should not disadvantage pupils with disabilities or SEN; reasonable adjustments should be in place.
- **Trauma-Informed, Child-Centred Practice:** Staff should understand emotional, sensory, and behavioural needs and tailor de-escalation strategies accordingly.
- **Transparency & Accountability:** Serious physical restraint, any mechanical restraint outside an agreed plan, and all seclusion should be recorded and reported to parents and Boards of Governors.
- **Learning & Continuous Improvement:** Post-incident reviews should be undertaken to understand root causes and prevent recurrence.
- **Safeguarding Priority:** Misuse or inappropriate use of restrictive interventions is a safeguarding concern and should be reported.

Your comments and feedback on the impacts are sought through this consultation. The consultation activities will inform decision-making, and every response received by the deadline will be considered.

4. DEFINING THE AIMS OF THE DE POLICY

Aims and objectives of the policy

The aim of the guidance is to ensure that restrictive interventions in educational settings are used only as a last resort, in the safest, most proportionate, and least restrictive way possible. It seeks to protect the rights, dignity and wellbeing of children by promoting preventative, trauma-informed and child-centred approaches that minimise the need for restraint or seclusion

The objectives of the guidance are to:

The guidance aims to provide clarity for staff on the legal and ethical requirements for using restrictive interventions, ensuring decisions are justified, proportionate and always in the best interests of the child. It also sets out clear expectations for recording, reporting and monitoring incidents so that schools can safeguard pupils, maintain transparency, and reduce the future use of restrictive practices through improved planning and support.

Expected outcomes

The guidance is expected to deliver greater consistency, transparency, and safeguarding across all educational settings. It will support a significant reduction in the use of restrictive interventions through strengthened definitions, clearer legal parameters, and a stronger emphasis on prevention and de-escalation. The guidance will also improve the quality and reliability of recording and reporting, enabling Boards of Governors, the Education Authority, and the Department to monitor trends more effectively and take appropriate action where required.

Educational staff will benefit from improved clarity on their roles and responsibilities, leading to more confident and rights-respecting practice. Children and young people—particularly those with additional needs—are expected to experience safer, more nurturing and trauma-informed environments, with improved protections, reduced risk of harm by reducing the risk of misuse, and more consistent support.

Overall, the guidance is anticipated to enhance safeguarding, strengthen accountability, and embed a rights-based culture that prioritises the welfare and dignity of every child and young person.

Who owns the policy?

The policy is owned by the Department's Additional Educational Needs Team, which is part of the Raising Aspirations and Supporting Learning Directorate.

The Department has produced the new guidance and it will be the responsibility of schools and other educational settings to ensure their policies, guidance and interventions around the use of restraint and seclusion are amended accordingly to align with the new guidance.

The Education Authority will be responsible for assisting educational settings in amending existing policy and practice to align with the new guidance and for organising the delivery of any required training for the educational workforce.

Schools and Educational Settings will deliver the guidance with assistance from the Education Authority.

5. CONSIDERATION OF AVAILABLE DATA AND RESEARCH

Extensive research was undertaken, including a review of existing policy, published data, and reports and analysis from relevant oversight bodies. This was complemented by feedback gathered through engagement sessions with a wide range of stakeholders, including children and young people, parents and carers, educational settings, sectoral bodies, and advocacy organisations.

Reducing Restrictive Intervention of Children and Young People - Case study data

Case study data collected from parents of 720 children and young people across the UK, who were reported to have experienced restrictive intervention, including restraint and/or Seclusion.

The data is not disaggregated for Northern Ireland

Of the 720 case studies, 87.6% of the families reported that, to their knowledge, their child had been restrained at school at least once.

The report suggests that around 25% of cases investigated involved children of the age of 6 years old when the restrictive intervention started, with 93% of cases involving primary school age children (age 5-11) when the restrictive intervention started. This data suggests younger children may be disproportionately affected.

The most commonly reported needs of the children and young people included in the case studies were:

- autism (61%),
- speech, language and communication needs (including children who were non-verbal or mute) (51%),
- sensory needs (30%),
- mental health needs (including anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, trauma and attachment needs) (30%), and
- learning disabilities or developmental delays (including Down syndrome) 22.6%).

The report suggests that 85% of children and young people who have experienced restrictive intervention are male.

Neither Seen Nor Heard' 2021 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)³

In 2021 NICCY undertook a review on the use of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings. The review provided evidence from a range of stakeholders including schools, professionals and parents regarding Restraint and Seclusion in schools in Northern Ireland and made 15 recommendations to improve policy, legislation, training, communication, reporting and monitoring of restrictive practices.

³ [NICCY Review of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings](#)

The review identified concerns about inconsistent practice, lack of transparency, and the absence of a robust regulatory framework.

Key Findings

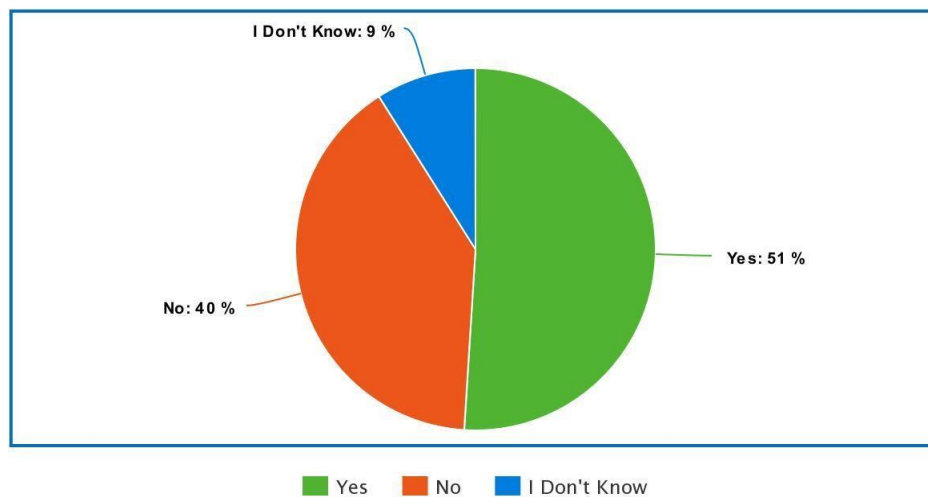
- Seclusion is being used in some schools, despite the absence of any formal policy permitting it.
- Restraint is used inconsistently across settings, with unclear thresholds, variable staff training, and inadequate understanding of when it is legally and ethically justified.
- There is frequent under-reporting and inconsistent recording of incidents, which prevents effective oversight and safeguards.
- Children and parents often reported that they were not informed when restrictive practices were used, undermining transparency and trust.
- The review found a lack of independent monitoring, meaning that neither DE nor EA had reliable system-wide data on the scale, nature, or impact of restraint or seclusion

The following charts and tables provide a brief overview of current practice in schools regarding restraint and seclusion, highlighting key differences between special and mainstream settings. They summarise how consistently schools include essential guidance in their policies and illustrate the wider issues identified.

School Policies for Restraint and Seclusion

Does your school currently have a policy on physical intervention that focuses on restraint? Total Response =199

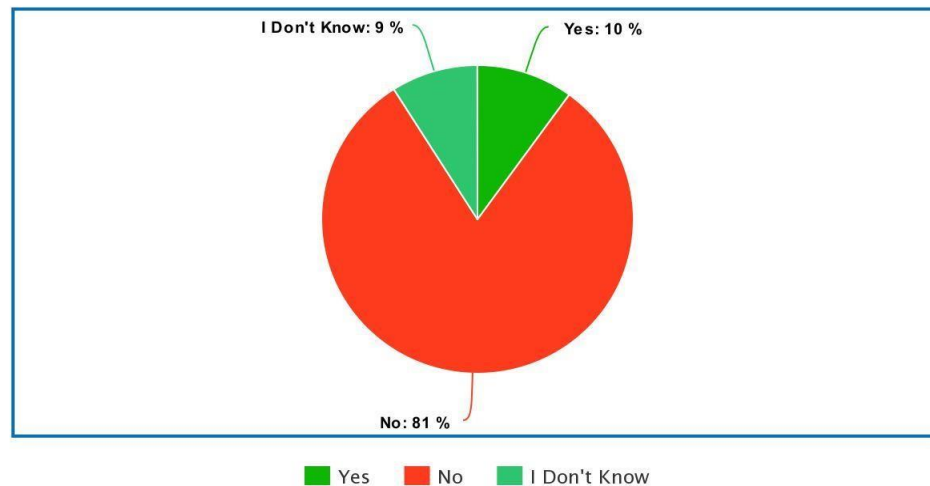
NICCY (2021) School Survey on Restrictive Practices



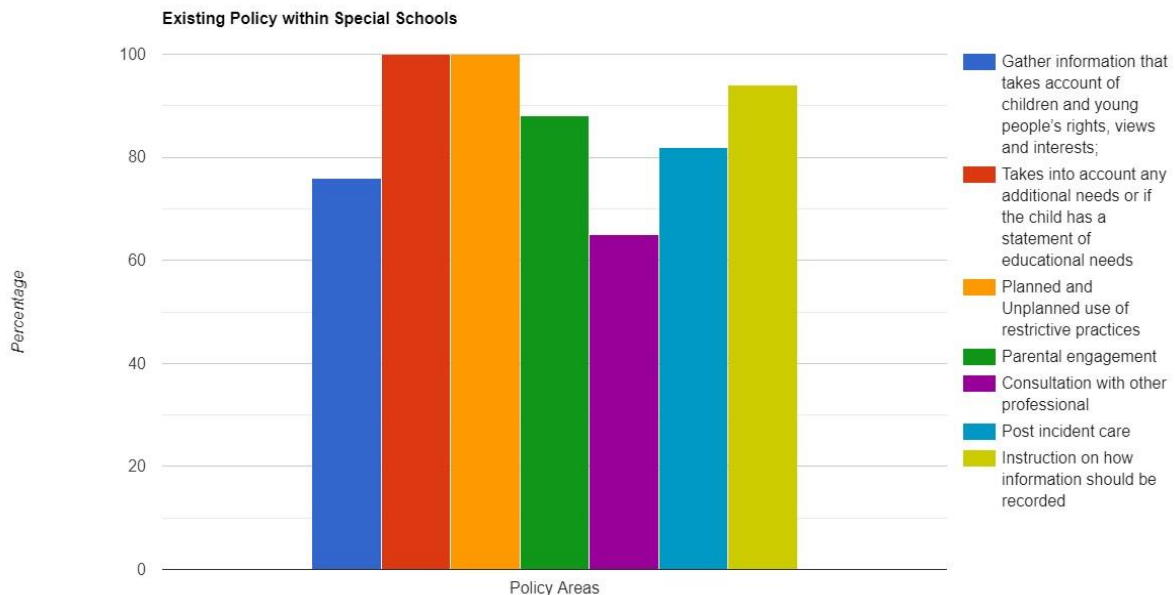
School Policies for Seclusion

Does your school currently have a policy on physical intervention that focuses on seclusion? Total Response=176

NICCY (2021) School Survey on Restrictive Practices



Existing Policy within Special Schools (n=17)

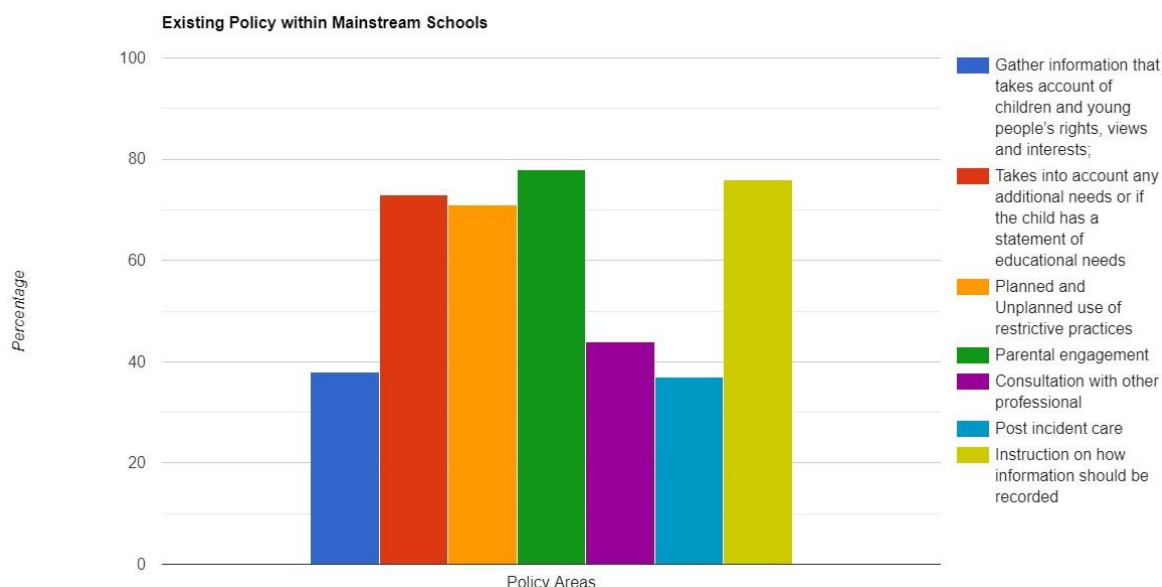


NICCY received a total of 21 responses from participants who identified as a school Principal or senior staff member from Special Schools. Of these, 17 reported that their school's policy specifically contained one or more of the following:

- 76% included how to gather information that takes account of children and young people's rights, views and interests;
- 100% take into account any additional needs or if the child has a statement of educational needs;
- 100% include guidance for planned and unplanned use of restrictive interventions;
- 88% include guidance on engaging with parents;
- 65% include guidance on consulting with health professionals, i.e. allied health professionals, social workers etc.;

- 82% include guidance on care to the pupil post incident; and
- 94% include instruction on how information should be recorded in school

Existing Policy within Mainstream Schools (n=63)



From the school survey, 63 mainstream schools stated that the following sections were included in their school policy on restraint:

- 38% include how to gather information that takes account of children and young people's rights, views and interests;
- 73% take into account any additional needs or if the child has a statement of educational needs;
- 71% include guidance for planned and unplanned use of restrictive interventions;
- 78% include guidance on engaging with parents;
- 44% include guidance on consulting with health professionals ie. Allied health professionals, social workers etc;
- 37% include guidance on care to the pupil post incident; and
- 76% include instruction on how information should be recorded in school.

Overall, special schools were more likely than mainstream schools to include key elements in their restraint and seclusion policies, such as guidance on planned and unplanned interventions, engagement with parents, and recording requirements. The data reflects broader concerns about inconsistent practice, variable staff training, and gaps in oversight, reinforcing the need for clearer, standardised policy across educational settings.

The NICCY report documented that children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are disproportionately affected by the use of restraint and seclusion in educational settings. NICCY engaged with Educational Psychologists, SENCOs, Allied Health Professionals and other professionals who work directly with children with SEN, confirming that a significant proportion of children subjected to restraint or seclusion had identified learning difficulties or additional needs. Case examples in the report include instances where children with

additional needs experienced repeated restraint and/or seclusion, leading to distress, trauma, and in some cases the need to move school.

NIPSO – Overview Report on Restrictive Practices (2021)⁴

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) produced an overview report 2021 in response to a pattern of complaints about the use of restraint and seclusion in schools. These complaints highlighted cases where restrictive practices were used inappropriately with children.

NIPSO's investigations found recurring themes of maladministration, including:

- Lack of appropriate record-keeping for incidents of restraint or seclusion.
- Insufficient consultation with or information provided to parents when restrictive practices were used.
- Outdated or inadequate policies and procedures within schools regarding the use of restrictive practices.

Evidence contained within the NIPSO overview report stated that incidents of restrictive practices frequently involve children with disabilities. NIPSO reports investigations where children with additional needs, including autistic children and children with global developmental delay, were subjected to inappropriate restraint or seclusion, including the use of equipment without proper assessment or oversight

NIPSO Case – Harry's Law (2024)⁵

Evidence from the NIPSO investigation report highlights significant failings in how a disabled child was assessed, supported, and safeguarded while using specialist seating equipment in school. The report documents inadequate clinical assessments, lack of informed consent, poor record-keeping, and insufficient communication with both school staff and the child's parent, all of which contributed to the child being subjected to inappropriate and avoidable restrictive practices. These findings provide clear evidence of disproportionate impact on disabled children, who may be particularly vulnerable due to communication or mobility needs.

DE Review of Restraint & Seclusion (2022)⁶

The Department of Education's review highlights significant inconsistencies in how restraint and seclusion are used and recorded across educational settings, with clear evidence gaps, limited oversight, and variation in staff training and practice. The report emphasises the need for a child-centred, rights-based approach, strengthened guidance, and improved recording and reporting to ensure the safety, dignity and wellbeing of children and young people.

Feedback provided by Special Schools through engagement with the Department

- Children and family needs are becoming increasingly more complex.
- School staff focus on de-escalation and distraction techniques.

⁴ [Overview report – the use of restrictive practices in schools | NIPSO](#)

⁵ [Child unnecessarily restrained after Trust failed to monitor use of specialist seating | NIPSO](#)

⁶ [Report on the Review of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings | Department of Education](#)

- All issues are equal and interconnected – accommodation, complexity of need, behaviour support, health provision, pressure of training requirements, no oversight of the use of restrictive practice, funding, legislation.
- Behaviour management and support is everything, however services are fragmented.
- Restrictive practice / reasonable force should only be used in emergency/ crisis situations and a plan should be in place if there is a pattern of behaviour.
- Incidents are reported to the EA's accident reporting system however highlighted there should be a bespoke recording system in place.
- The complex needs are not just pure behaviour support needs due to the complexity and breadth of need mixed with medical interactions of need and mental health difficulties.

Health and Education online stakeholder event

Summary of feedback received from an online stakeholder event held by the Department during the consultation on the first draft of the guidance. In attendance were representatives across Mainstream Schools, Special schools and Allied Health professionals working in schools. Representatives included school leaders, teachers, non-teaching staff, Boards of Governor's (BoGs).

- Strategically delivered training to parents needs to be provided to support a consistent approach across all Special Schools.
- The recording and reporting proforma should be a simple consistent proforma that appreciates a school's busy workload.
- Welcome the development of a template policy which would provide the opportunity for consistency across schools.
- Clear guidance regarding Deprivation of Liberty (DOL) is required in these situations.
- There should be a bespoke recording system in place, overseen by appropriate experienced staff.
- Queries on terminology and suggestions made.

Parents surveys and meetings ⁷

- The use of restrictive practices often results in extremely negative, long lasting traumatic experiences for all involved, particularly for the child who experienced it.

⁷ A Qualitative Research Report produced by NICCY and commissioned by the Department of Education. Engagement with Parents and Carers on the Use of Restrictive Practices in Educational Settings (November 2021) This has not been published.

- There is a lack of support available to help individuals who have experienced restrictive practice.
- The majority of children with lived experience were identified as having Autism (ASD), ADD, ADHD, and/or a learning disability.
- Restrictive practice should be used as a last resort and should only be used to prevent serious harm.
- No consistent method on how schools communicate with parents regarding these incidents.
- A lack of understanding of some schools understanding the environmental, social and/or emotional support required by children with special educational needs, with schools focusing instead on 'behaviour' and discipline.
- A lack of available information and communication in relation to the complaints process.
- A lack of clarity from schools and a lack of understanding and knowledge of restrictive practices by the Board of Governors.
- Concerns restrictive practices could be administered to a child without consultation or consent of a parent/carer and without a statutory obligation to record and report on such incidents.
- Ambiguity in understanding of restrictive practices leading to different interpretations and the lack of available information on policy and guidance on restrictive practices.
- The need for statutory guidance to make it enforceable and hold those involved to account.
- The need for training for school staff on reducing restrictive practices.

Children and Young People

Summary of feedback provided to the Department during an online engagement session specifically for children and young people which was held during the consultation on the previous draft of the guidance:

- Stakeholders strongly supported the introduction of statutory guidance and emphasised the importance of ensuring that children and young people's voices are central to its implementation. They highlighted the need for clear communication channels for children to raise concerns and suggested accessible, child-friendly materials, such as visual posters or simplified versions to support understanding, particularly in special school settings.
- Respondents also stressed the importance of transparent processes for incident reporting, parental notification, and children's well-being checks. Additional comments related to wider issues, such as how certain practices (e.g. suspension or expulsion) are considered within broader departmental review work.

Health and Education Workshop

Summary of views from a multi-agency workshop, including representatives from the Task and Finish Group and colleagues from both health and education, which was held by the Department on 16 June 2025 to collaboratively address key issues identified in relation to the draft guidance, arising at the intersection of health and education within school settings:

- Stakeholders highlighted significant inconsistencies in how restrictive practices are defined, understood and applied across educational settings. Clearer, education-appropriate definitions are required, especially to distinguish restraint, seclusion, environmental restrictions, and supportive behaviour strategies.
- There was broad agreement that restrictive practices should be minimised, used only when necessary to ensure safety, and embedded within a trauma-informed, child-centred framework. Participants emphasised that terminology—particularly the word restraint—creates anxiety and stigma, affecting both reporting and practice.
- Schools are managing increasingly complex needs, with mainstream settings often under-resourced compared to special schools. Staff described concerns about legal risk, inconsistent training, and lack of cross-sector alignment between education, health and social care.
- A strong theme was the need for comprehensive and consistent training, particularly in de-escalation, behaviour understanding, trauma-informed approaches and safe intervention. Stakeholders noted wide variation in recording and reporting systems and called for a unified, cross-sector incident-recording framework with clear oversight and review processes.
- Participants stressed that effective policy must support professional judgment, embed least-restrictive approaches, and ensure compliance with human rights obligations. The voice of the child, improved communication with families, and better multi-agency collaboration were identified as essential elements for safe, equitable implementation.
- Overall, the workshop reinforced the need for clear definitions, system-wide consistency, robust training, improved recording and oversight, and a strong cultural shift toward therapeutic, preventative and rights-based practice.

Religious Belief

As reported in the 2021 Census⁸, the main current religions in Northern Ireland were: Catholic (42.3%); Presbyterian (16.6%); Church of Ireland (11.5%); Methodist (2.3%); Other Christian denominations (6.9%); and Other religions (1.3%). In addition, 17.4% of our population had 'No religion' – this is a marked increase on 2011 when 10.1% had 'no religion'.

While the 2021 Census provides an up-to-date demographic profile of religious affiliation in Northern Ireland, there is no evidence to indicate that the proposed policy will have a differential or adverse impact on individuals from any particular religious background. The guidance applies equally to all children, young people and staff across educational settings, regardless of religious identity. As such, no specific issues relating to religion have been identified through the available data or evidence.

Suspended pupils were 46.0% Roman Catholic, 33.2% Protestant, and 20.8% other/no religion, broadly reflecting the wider pupil population distribution. Based on this comparison, religion does not demonstrate disproportionate impact.

Political Opinion

The political opinion of children and young people is not collected within the school census. Religion is often taken as a proxy for political opinion. Therefore, the data referred to above for religious belief is used to inform the impact on political opinion.

As political opinion is not recorded in the school census, and religion is commonly used as a proxy indicator, the available data on religious belief has been used to assess potential impacts, with no differential effect identified.

Racial Group

As detailed in the 2021 Census data, 86.5% of respondents noted country of birth as Northern Ireland.⁹

Schools are increasingly becoming more ethnically diverse. As reported in Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2024/25¹⁰ there has been an increase in the number and proportion of newcomer pupils in schools in Northern Ireland with 7.3% of pupils having ethnicity other than 'white' (including Irish Traveller). A newcomer pupil is one who has enrolled in a school but who does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum. In 2024/25, there were over 21,350 newcomer pupils accounting for 6.0% of the school population. This has risen by over 3,960 pupils since 2019/20.

While schools are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse and the number of newcomer pupils is rising, there is no evidence that the proposed guidance will have a differential or

⁸ [Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Religion](#)

⁹ [Census 2021 statistical bulletins | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

¹⁰ [Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 202425](#)

adverse impact on pupils from any racial group, as it applies equally to all and supports inclusive, rights-based practice.

Minority ethnic pupils represented 7.6% of suspended pupils, which broadly aligned with their share of the total school population. This suggests that ethnicity does not demonstrate disproportionate impact based on this proxy dataset.

Age

As reported in Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2024/25¹¹ there are 22,042 funded pupils in the Pre-School Education Programme and reception, a decrease of 430 on last year.

There are 167,523 pupils in primary schools (years 1-7); this has fallen by over 1,940 pupils this year.

In total 156,889 pupils are enrolled in post-primary schools, increasing by nearly 490 pupils from 2023/24. There are approximately 29,550 pupils in sixth forms in schools, 58% of all 16-17-year olds in Northern Ireland.

Gender

Pupils enrolled in special schools

2024/25	Female	Male	Total
Total Pupils	2220	5242	7462

In the special school sector, 70.2% of pupils are male, indicating that boys are both more likely to attend settings where restrictive interventions occur.

Marital Status

In 2022, there were 8,564¹² marriages in Northern Ireland; in the age band 16-19 there were 47 males and 73 females. From 13 January 2020, same-sex marriage became legally recognised in Northern Ireland and these numbers are included in the totals above. There is no data available that identify how many individuals aged 18 are married and attending school and/or have SEN.

Available demographic data indicates that very few individuals aged 16–19 in Northern Ireland are married, and there is no evidence to suggest that marital status has any bearing on the experience of children or young people in educational settings, including those with SEN. No data exist to indicate that pupils aged 18 who may be married face different impacts in relation to the proposed guidance. As the policy applies equally to all learners regardless

¹¹ [Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 202425](#)

¹² Source: www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/registrar-general-annual-report-2022

of marital status, no differential or adverse impact has been identified for this Section 75 category.

Sexual Orientation

Data is not collected or available that could provide a break-down of sexual orientation of children and young people.

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposed guidance will have a differential or adverse impact on children or young people on the basis of sexual orientation. The guidance applies equally to all pupils and aims to promote safe, rights-respecting environments for every learner.

Dependency

In the 2015 YLT Survey (of 16 year old young people), 9% of respondents stated they had caring responsibilities. The December 2017 report by Barnardo's "Still Hidden Still Ignored"¹³¹⁴, identified that the average age of a young carer was 12.

At 31 March 2025, 4,188 children and young people were in care in Northern Ireland. This was the highest number recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2024/25 | Department of Health)¹⁵.

Available evidence shows that a proportion of children and young people in Northern Ireland have caring responsibilities, and that young carers may experience increased stress and emotional or behavioural pressures. Additionally, a significant number of children are in care, which may increase their vulnerability. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the proposed guidance will have a differential or adverse impact on children or young people on the basis of dependency. The guidance applies equally to all learners and is designed to promote safe, trauma-informed and rights-respecting practice. For young carers and children in care, the emphasis on preventative, de-escalation and supportive approaches may offer a potential indirect positive impact. No adverse impacts relating to dependency have been identified through the available data.

SEN

Information drawn from the annual school census exercise (2024)

In 2024/25 over 70,230 pupils in Northern Ireland schools have some form of Special Educational Need. This represents 19.8% of the entire school population.

Nearly 29,500 pupils have a statement of Special Educational Needs, accounting for 8.3% of all pupils.

¹³ [Still Hidden Still Ignored](#)

¹⁴ [Young carers | Barnardo's](#)

¹⁵ [Children's social care statistics for Northern Ireland 2023/24](#)

11.5% of pupils are recorded at SEN Stages 1–2 (school-based provision without a statement).

There is an even distribution of males and females within the overall school population, with 50.8% male pupils and 49.2% female. However, it is notable that 70.2% of the Special School population are male and 29.8% female. c70% of children who have a statement of SEN are male and c60% of children at either stage 1 or 2 of the Code of Practice are male. It is likely that all children with SEN, males in particular will be positively impacted.

6. ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

The proposed policy has been considered and the following assessments made as to whether or not there will be an adverse impact on any of the nine Section 75 categories or any of the multiple identity groups:

	Group	Adverse Impact on specific subgroup
3.1	Religious Belief	There is no evidence to suggest that restrictive interventions disproportionately affect children or young people from any particular religious background. There is no evidence to indicate that the proposed guidance will have a differential or adverse impact on individuals from any particular religious background. The guidance applies equally to all children, young people and staff across educational settings,
3.2	Political Opinion	There is no evidence to suggest that restrictive interventions disproportionately affect children or young people from any particular political background. There is no evidence to indicate that the proposed guidance will have a differential or adverse impact on individuals from any particular political background. The guidance applies equally to all children, young people and staff across educational settings,
3.3	Race	There is no evidence to suggest that restrictive interventions disproportionately affect children or young people from any racial group. There is no evidence to indicate that the proposed guidance will have a differential or adverse impact on individuals from any particular racial group. The guidance applies equally to all children, young people and staff across educational settings.
3.4	Age	<p>While recognising the wider impact on teachers, staff and parents, the guidance applies to all school-age children and young people. On this basis, there is assessed to be a Minor Differential Impact on children and young people when compared with the adult population as a whole.</p> <p>The evidence from case studies indicates that restrictive interventions are disproportionately used on younger children. Around 25% of cases involved children as young as 6, and 93% of all cases involved children aged 5–11 when the intervention first occurred Overall, the data indicates a potential adverse impact on the age group 5–11, with the youngest children being most disproportionately affected.</p> <p>However, this potential impact is assessed as minor.</p>

		<p>The case-study data is drawn from a self-selecting sample meaning the scale of any age-related disparity cannot be confirmed. The guidance applies equally to all school-aged pupils, and there is no strong evidence of systemic or intentional age-based unequal treatment. Therefore, while younger children may be more frequently represented in reported cases, the overall differential impact by age remains minor.</p>
3.5	Marital Status	<p>The guidance is for use within schools and educational establishments and therefore applies only to children and young people of school age. Not applicable.</p>
3.6	Sexual Orientation	<p>Data is not collected or available that could provide a break-down of sexual orientation of children and young people.</p> <p>There is no evidence to suggest that restrictive interventions disproportionately affect children or young people based on sexual orientation. There is no evidence to suggest that the proposed guidance will have a differential or adverse impact on children or young people on the basis of sexual orientation. The guidance applies equally to all pupils and aims to promote safe, rights-respecting environments for every learner.</p>
3.7	Gender	<p>Case study evidence suggests that up to 85% of children and young people who experienced restrictive intervention were male, this finding comes from a self-selecting sample and is not representative of the wider school population. In the special school sector, 70.2% of pupils are male, indicating that boys are both more likely to attend settings where restrictive interventions may occur. Therefore, while boys appear more frequently in situations where restrictive interventions may occur the overall impact by gender is considered minor. This is because the available evidence does not show that boys are being treated differently because of their gender, nor that restrictive interventions are being applied in a systemic or intentional way based on sex.</p> <p>On this basis, there is Minor Differential Impact for gender in relation to the likelihood of experiencing restrictive interventions. However, the introduction of the guidance is expected to have a positive direct impact, as it strengthens safeguards, improves consistency, and aims to reduce the use of restraint for</p>

		all children and young people, regardless of gender.
3.8	Disability	<p>Available evidence demonstrates a Major Differential Impact for children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities.</p> <p>NICCY's <i>Neither Seen Nor Heard</i> review similarly identified that disabled and neurodivergent children were among those most likely to experience restraint or seclusion, and highlighted inconsistencies in safeguards and practice across educational settings. Additional lived-experience evidence received by the Department, alongside findings from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, further demonstrates the heightened vulnerability of neuro-atypical children and the inadequacy of existing protections in some contexts.</p> <p>Children with physical or neurological disabilities may experience communication barriers, sensory sensitivities and require intimate or continuous support with everyday activities. These needs can intensify distress when unmet, increasing the likelihood of behaviours that challenge and the risk of inappropriate intervention. Engagement with special and mainstream schools confirms that restrictive interventions are more prevalent for pupils with complex needs, including autism, learning disabilities and neurological conditions.</p> <p>The guidance has therefore been drafted with the specific needs of disabled and SEN pupils at the forefront. Extensive engagement with special schools, SEN staff, parents and pupils has ensured that lived experience directly shaped the guidance. The guidance strengthens protections by emphasising distress-based behaviour, root-cause analysis, communication needs and the requirement for trained, trauma-informed practice.</p> <p>Overall, the guidance is expected to have a strong positive differential impact, by improving protection, transparency and consistency for children with SEN and disabilities, while acknowledging that this group continues to face elevated risk compared with peers due to their underlying needs.</p>
3.9	Dependency	There is no evidence to suggest that restrictive interventions disproportionately affect children or young

		<p>people on the basis of dependency. There is no evidence to suggest that the proposed guidance will have a differential or adverse impact on children or young people on the basis of dependency. The guidance applies equally to all learners and is designed to promote safe, trauma-informed and rights-respecting practice. No adverse impacts relating to dependency have been identified through the available data.</p>
3.10	Multiple identities	<p>The evidence presented demonstrates that certain groups, particularly boys, younger children, and children with Special Educational Needs or disabilities are each affected differently. Where these identities overlap, the potential for differential impact increases. For example, a male pupil with SEN or a younger neurodivergent child may face a higher risk of experiencing behavioural crises that could escalate to restrictive interventions. The guidance is therefore expected to have a positive differential impact for those with intersecting vulnerabilities, by strengthening safeguards, promoting trauma-informed practice, and ensuring consistent, rights-based protections across all educational settings.</p>

7. CONSIDERATION OF MEASURES WHICH MIGHT MITIGATE ANY ADVERSE IMPACT AND ALTERNATIVE POLICIES WHICH MIGHT BETTER ACHIEVE THE PROMOTION OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

In respect of the identified adverse impacts, DE considers that the following actions will reduce or justify the impacts:

	Adverse Impact	Mitigation which improves equality of opportunity
	<p>Existing evidence indicates that the current use of restrictive interventions in schools has a disproportionate impact on boys, younger children and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). These impacts arise from existing practice and behavioural-related responses in schools, not from the proposed guidance. No new adverse impacts are created by the policy, as the guidance is designed to reduce, not increase, the use of restraint.</p>	<p>The introduction of the new guidance is expected to have a positive differential impact, as it aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthen safeguards for all children, particularly those already disproportionately affected; • promote trauma-informed, rights-based and needs-led responses; • requires staff training, improved communication, and consistent reporting; • reduce reliance on restrictive interventions through prevention, early de-escalation, and understanding distress-based behaviour. <p>These measures are specifically designed to address and mitigate existing adverse impacts, improving equality of opportunity across all school-age children and young people.</p>

8 THE FORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE ACTUAL IMPACT OF EXISTING POLICIES AND THE LIKELY IMPACT OF PROPOSED POLICIES

The Department wishes to engage with as wide an audience as possible on the findings and proposals to date as described in this report. We are committed to seeking the views of those who are affected by the decisions that it will make in relation to the new guidance.

We are keen to hear from individuals and organisations about their views on the equality implication of the decisions being made and about any mitigations that the Department could put in place to address any adverse impacts.

Consultation responses received will be used to inform mitigation measures and further development of the new guidance.

A copy of this report and the consultation response form will be posted on the DE website.

A consultation response form is included at **ANNEX A**.

The Department welcomes comment on any aspects of this document.

Interested parties are encouraged to make responses by 4 June 2026.

Any enquiries about the consultation should be addressed to the Additional Educational Needs Team whose contact details appear on Page 2.

9. PUBLICATION

The outcomes of this formal EQIA consultation will be published on the Department website or can be obtained in other formats from the Additional Educational Needs Team whose contact details appear on Page 2.

10. MONITORING

In keeping with this Department's commitments under its Equality Scheme, any adverse differential impact on equality of opportunity or good relations that may be identified through this assessment process will be taken into account in informing this guidance.

Any such findings will be used to inform further development of mitigations and revisions to the guidance if necessary.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will consider compliance with this guidance when they carry out inspections on educational settings. The timescale is to be confirmed.



Department of Education Consultation Response Form for Proposed ‘Restrictive Interventions: Guidance for educational settings’

The closing date for responses is 4 June 2026

Your Details:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____

Contact Phone number _____

If you are the official respondent for a group or organisation please state its name:

If you require this document in an alternative format (such as in large print, in Braille, or electronic) and/or language, please contact the Additional Education Needs Team as follows.:



E mail: restrictiveinterventionsconsultation@education-ni.gov.uk

Consultation Response Form Questions:

In consulting on the Department's Proposed "Restrictive Interventions: Guidance for educational settings", views are welcomed on the following:

1. Are there any data needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in Section 5 and 6 of the EQIA consultation document? If so, what are they? Please provide details?
2. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in section 6 of the EQIA Consultation document? If so, what are they?
3. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts of the guidance?
4. Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to the consultation process generally?

The Department welcomes comment on any aspects of this document. Interested parties are encouraged to make responses by **4 June 2026** which will be used to inform further development of this guidance.

Please return the completed document, preferably by E-mail to

restrictiveinterventionsconsultation@education-ni.gov.uk

Or

Alternatively by posting it to:

Additional Educational Needs Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR
BT19 7PR