



Joint Communication : Changes to National Guidance on Use of Force

For Distribution: 23rd March 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are writing to you as a collective group of Headteachers from all special schools across Norfolk. We want to explain some important national changes regarding how schools record and report the use of "reasonable force" and physical intervention.

What is changing?

The Government has introduced new laws that all schools **must** follow. These rules change how we tell you about moments when a staff member has to physically guide or hold a child or use seclusion within our settings.

- **Written Reports:** In the past, we might have given you a quick phone call to let you know about a minor incident. Now, the law says we **must** inform you in writing every single time.
- **More Notifications:** Because the definition of "force" is now very broad, you will likely receive more emails from us. This includes simple things, like a staff member physically guiding a child away from a busy road if the child is not completely compliant with moving away from the traffic, or the potential use of a regulatory space to protect others from harm when a pupil is experiencing high levels of emotional or behavioural dysregulation.

Our practice remains the same

It is very important for you to know that **how we look after your children has not changed**. We still prioritise care, calm, and safety. You might feel like you are hearing about "physical intervention" more often, but this is only because the reporting rules have changed—not because we are using these methods more than before.

Expert Training and Support

All staff in our schools are experts in supporting your children. We work closely with the **Norfolk Steps Team** within the Norfolk County Council Inclusion Department.

- All staff are trained in a therapeutic approach to behaviour management.
- Staff are fully trained in Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) and receive regular refreshers.
- Physical intervention is used when it is necessary to prevent harm or to stop a situation from becoming more dangerous. Physical intervention is only used when reasonable, proportionate and necessary within a situation.
- Seclusion: This is not a punishment. It is simply a way to give a child a quiet, supervised space away from others until they feel calm and safe again. A staff member is always there to support them.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your child's school directly.

Yours sincerely,

The Norfolk Special School Headteachers

2. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Why am I getting more emails suddenly?

The law changed in April 2026. Schools are now legally required to tell you in writing every time a staff member uses "reasonable force." You are seeing more "paperwork," not a change in how we treat your child.

What counts as "Use of Force"?

It isn't just about "restraint." It includes **Safety Escorting** (helping a child move to a quiet space), or **Blocking** (standing in a way that prevents a child from running into danger).

When will the school use a physical intervention?

We always try to calm a situation down using de-escalation and space first. However, staff will use physical intervention when it is necessary to keep your child safe, to keep others safe, or to prevent a situation from escalating into something more serious.

3. Glossary of Terms

When you receive a report, you may see the following professional terms used:

Term	What it means in plain English
RPI	Restrictive Physical Intervention. Using physical force to limit a child's movement to prevent harm
Reasonable Force	The minimum physical contact needed to keep a situation safe or prevent a worse outcome.
De-escalation	The things staff do <i>support</i> a child to calm them down (e.g., quiet voices, giving space).
Norfolk Steps	Step On - the therapeutic training program schools use, focused on safety and positive relationships. Step Up - teaches safe restraint techniques to use with children to prevent harm

Advanced Steps	Specialised physical techniques used only by staff with high-level training for the most complex or high-risk situations.
Seclusion	Seclusion is only used to keep everyone safe during a crisis. It means a child is supervised in a room away from others and prevented from leaving for a short time.
Statutory Change	This means "it is the law." We are legally required to follow these new reporting rules.