

Response ID ANON-M8XT-3PSQ-R

Submitted to Use of reasonable force and restrictive practices in schools - Call for evidence

Submitted on 2023-05-11 21:17:45

Introduction

What is the purpose of this call for evidence?

Who is the call for evidence for?

Current duties and guidance

Definitions

About you

Do you consent to the data you provide being held in accordance with UK GDPR as covered in the Department for Education's personal information charter?

Yes

What is your name?

Name:

Claire Fisher

Do you consent for the Department for Education (DfE) to contact you via email about your response?

Yes

If yes, please provide your email address.

Email:

consultation@nnpcf.org.uk

Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

No

Reason for confidentiality:

What is your role? (Please select the capacity in which you are responding to this survey)

Dropdown list of role types:

Other

Open text:

CIC representing parent carers of children and young people with SEND

If applicable, what is the name of your school/organisation/representative body and what local authority does your response relate to? Please comment or select the relevant option below.

Open text:

National Network of Parent Carer Forums

Not Answered

If you are responding on behalf of a school, college or alternative provision provider, please specify further below. Select all that apply:

Open text:

If you are answering as a parent/carers, please specify all that apply that relate to your responses. Select all that apply:

Open text box:

Questions for all respondents

Question 1 asks about personal or professional experiences of reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practices.

Question 1: What are your or your child's experiences of incidents of reasonable force including restraint or restrictive practices in school? Please provide any lessons learned from these experiences.

Open text (state your response)

Open text:

The NNPCF surveyed its parent carers members and had 32 responses. Parent carers highlighted that lack of training of staff, as well as the staff not understanding the needs of the child often resulted in restraint, and questioned whether restraint would have been needed if staff understood their child's needs. A number of parent carers responded to say physical restraint had caused physical injury to their child.

Parent carers comment that the use of restraint has "traumatising lasting effects" which then increase anxiety and reduce school attendance in the long term. In the short term restraints "frightens them" and "escalates behaviours". One parent carer comments that at aged 6 her daughter often had "5/6 adults stood over her" restraining her on a daily basis.

Very few parent carers commented the force or restraint used on their child would come under their definition of reasonable. One example was "during a meltdown he was given hugs to relax him", another was in a "time out area, supervised without being enclosed".

Aside from these exceptions parent carers responded that the use of force or restraint on their child was not helpful, and escalated the situation, putting both the child, their peers and adults at further risk.

Parent carers also felt their children were then punished for their behaviours that were a result of staff escalating the problem. "My child can't communicate his experience of this practice but I always know when this happens because he fights back and gets excluded as a result".

Overall, parental experiences of force or restrictive practice are negative, with escalation caused due to lack of staff training and understanding, and the use of force escalating the situation further. Children are then punished for their behaviours, and suffer long term emotional trauma, both of which often lead to reduced school attendance.

Questions 2-8 cover best practice in early intervention, training and support for teachers and pupils.

Question 2: What are the most effective early interventions schools can use to help prevent the need to use reasonable force, restraint or a restrictive practice? If applicable to your experience, please refer to effective interventions used to support pupils with SEND. Please comment below.

Open text:

Without a doubt, better understanding and supporting of the child's needs was the main answer respondents suggested. Parent carers believe if staff understood their child's needs, understood their child's triggers and how to reduce them, and had increased training then there would be a significantly reduced need for restraint. The way staff talk to the child and using a "positive tone" can deescalate a situation, rather than using controlling or threatening approaches. Parent carers also highlighted the need to listen to the child and the parent so the child's triggers and needs can be understood better.

Reasonable adjustments need to be better understood by schools, and further training would help with schools understanding sensory opportunities or relaxing opportunities can help children, but they normally need to be done to the child's timescales and needs, and not be dictated to by school timetabling.

Very few suggested interventions, but those that did suggested emotional literacy interventions. Another considered looking at the placement of the child and if it was suitable.

Overall, the most effective intervention schools can put in place is to increase awareness of the child's needs and triggers to staff by increasing training and listening to both the child and parents.

Question 3: Do you think national training standards on the use of reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practices should be developed or adopted?

Dropdown list:

Please explain the reasons for your choice. If you selected yes, what should be included in these standards?:

54.84% yes

29.03% no

16.13% don't know

Many parent carers believe that national standards should be developed and adopted. "I don't think this can be left to individual schools as some are not employing good practices. I feel this needs to be overseen and inspected regularly". Additionally, "Schools need to be accountable. A national standard can give them clear consistency in approach".

Respondents to this question were very clear that increased training needs to focus on the needs of the child and de-escalation as well as restraint techniques.

No parent carers clarified why they had chosen no or don't know. Some parent carers did use this answer to say they didn't agree with restraint as it "breached their human rights" and is discouraged in other settings such as care homes and prisons. "As an ex prison officer I was (rightly so) subject to many rules in regard to C and R. I had to document the event thoroughly. It seems that our most vulnerable members of society (disabled children) do not have the same protection criminals have".

Question 4: Aside from training, what are the best ways school staff can be supported to feel confident in knowing how to use reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practices appropriately and proportionately, and when it is inappropriate to do so? Please comment below.

Open text:

Overwhelmingly, parent carers responded to this question feeling it was inappropriate to use restraint, with lots of references to “zero restraint” policies. Parental responses were very much answering the question of how can school staff feel supported to not need to use reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practice.

There was a sense here that parent carers feel too much emphasis is put on using reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practice. “It’s less about knowing how and when to use restrictive practice and much more about meeting a child’s needs, validate their experience and seeing from their perspective. Many issues are caused by adults not attempting to understand from another’s perspective “

There was a clear feeling that teacher training in SEN in general would help reduce the need for restraint. “They need to have clear information about individual needs and appropriate support and the resources to provide it. My son moved to a specialist autism school where the staff are highly trained... They have very rarely had to restrain any child despite knowing better than anyone how to restrain etc because they approach things differently. They treat pupils as equals and use conflict resolution practices”.

Parent carers reflected that reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practice was nearly always inappropriate: “for me it is simple, unless there is imminent danger alternatives should be used. Being short staffed or under funded is not grounds for restraint”.

Parent carers also felt “behaviour is communication” and staff should be supported to understand how children were communicating and why. Episodes of restraint should be “documented and shared with mental health professionals and parents” so that the what the child is trying to communicate can be established and response to the triggers put in place, so that the need for restraint decreases in the future.

Answers reflected a parental desire for staff to understand their child’s needs by having strong relationships with both parents and the child. “Building positive relationships with children is incredibly important as is working with a child collaboratively rather than trying to purely control”. “I never need to lay hands on my severely disabled child who is non-verbal. There are so many ways to help him settle but they just don’t want to listen”.

Question 5: What types of physical contact or restraint, if any, do you consider inappropriate under any circumstances? Please comment below.

Open text:

All of the parent carers reported physical contact or restraint was always inappropriate in the way it is commonly used.

Over a quarter of parent carers reported any type of physical contact or restraint was inappropriate. A further 20% said any form of restraint using physical touch was inappropriate. 30% suggested restraint was inappropriate when it caused injury or emotional distress to the child, with 2 parents carers commenting it was not appropriate when it escalated the situation further.

Only 27% of parent carers mentioned appropriate situations to use restraint and were focused around the safety of individuals giving examples such as walking out in front of a car.

Question 6: What do you think are the most effective methods of de-escalation? If applicable to your experience, please refer to de-escalation approaches used to support children with SEND. Please comment below.

Open text:

Again here, parent carers referenced the need for staff to understand the child, their triggers, and understanding their needs to avoid situations which may escalate.

Parent carers emphasise the importance of a positive interaction from staff first: “ones that do not involve threats i.e. if you don’t stop now you will be placed in a hold. If you don’t stop that now you will be moved into isolation... reward and punishment creates more stress and anxiety in neurodivergent children and can have an opposite effect. Stress of continuously having to meet expectations can escalate behaviours and emotions”. Positive interactions could include things like “getting down to his level, asking if he wants a hug, letting him cry and asking if he wants a hug again. Not saying too many words, not reminding him what he has done until he has calmed down.” Positive interactions also include things like “compassion, understanding and kindness”.

Parent carers also comment on the need to remove or reduce the impact of the trigger. For some this may mean “removal of, or from sensory triggers – noise, smells, lights, overcrowding”, for others “create a quiet, calm space with low level lighting and minimal sensory stimuli. Remove the ‘audience’”. Others talked about the need for distraction possibly by providing a “sensory or favourite item of the child or young person.” Some recommended outlets for excess energy in alternatives such as exercise, or punching a pillow. Others suggested “reading a story, listening to music, watching lights, playing with a fidget toy”.

Parent carers also mentioned the need to feel safe around staff: “make them feel calm and trustful of staff”, “relationships build with staff so he feels safe in their presence”.

Question 7: How can schools practically ensure they meet their legal duties towards pupils with SEND or in relation to other protected characteristics when assessing the need to use reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practices and the impact of its use? Please comment below.

Open text:

Overwhelmingly, parent carers felt training to ensure reasonable force, restraint or other restricted practices didn’t need to be used was key to ensuring pupils with SEND aren’t negatively impacted due to their disability. Restraint should only be allowed by highly trained staff.

Parent carers also felt that ensuring all staff knew the needs of the child was vital to ensure they were not disadvantaged by disability.

Monitoring in various forms, including CCTV, was suggested as a way to ensure children with SEND aren’t disproportionately affected by restraint. Several respondents suggested making the use of reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practice reportable. One parent carer suggested it should be someone independent of the school who should be responsible for monitoring restraint in school.

Parent carers also answered “ensure that there is an environment where reasonable force, restraint and restrictive practices are not required” suggesting parents think schools should look at their settings and how they are set up to reduce the need for restraint in order to ensure children with SEND aren’t disadvantaged.

Parent carers also believe staff should have training on the impact of restraint on the child, particularly the damage it can do to their mental health, so that they are aware of the negative implications of restraint for the child.

Question 8: What support, if any, should be provided to pupils, parents and school staff involved after an incident of force, restraint or other restrictive practice? This may include witnesses of an incident. Please comment below.

Open text:

Parent carers believe each incident should be analysed in collaboration with parents to plan for "alternative action for future incidents". This could be in the form of "a debrief meeting [or] written account: what? Who? Why? For how long? Who was consulted? Who else was there?" Currently "CPOMS only report the behaviour and consequences. The antecedents are never discussed or recognised when you get informed of your child's meltdowns/violence. Schools should record and risk assess what caused the child to become dysregulated".

Parent carers felt too they should be more supported: "yes more support as a parent they kind of blame you, and not look at why it only happens at school. Then you have to go through that your child will be excluded...". Parents also need to believe "the school has their child's welfare and best interest as it's priority".

There also needs to be a conversation with the child explaining "what happened and why." Further to this "reflective and restorative work needs to be done" with the child. "My son doesn't like and trust individuals involved in restraints". It is "imperative that trust is rebuilt". This may mean that there is "no punishment/consequences" for the child.

Some parent carers reported there should be "emotional support from a therapist" for the child due to the trauma children experience when being subject to restraint. Parent carers also request that school recognise the traumatic experience of restraint and "should not underestimate the impact of restraint on a child. It can destroy lives.... Even if it is to preserve life it is a physical assault - it may be the lesser of two evils but it is still evil. It shouldn't be dismissed or brushed under the carpet".

Questions 9-11 relate to issues around reporting and recording instances of reasonable force, restraint and other restrictive practices.

Question 9: In what circumstances, if any, do you think schools should record the use of force or restraint? Please give details in the box below.

Other (specify in open text box)

Open text:

64% every instance of physical contact

36% every notable instance, for example, physical restraint rather than redirection such as guiding a pupil by the arm.

"Prisons must document the use of force, why not children?"

Question 9a: Following on from the previous question, what details about such incidents should be recorded? Select all that apply.

Type of incident, What happened prior to the incident including any triggers for the incident, Why it was used, Who was involved, Whether the pupil has SEN and which protected characteristics they have, Lesson/location, Time/date including how long incident lasted, It should not be recorded, Other (specify in open text box)

Open text:

Overall, parents reported all of these should be reported

Question 10: To whom do you think schools should report the data they collect on incidents involving use of reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practices? Select all that apply.

Other (specify in open text box)

Open text:

Headteacher 79%

Parents 90%

Governors and/or trustees 72%

Department for education 50%

LA for any child 69%

LA for child with EHCP or social worker 59%

Other suggestions LA inclusion team, police, social services and mental health services.

Question 11: If you have any further comments on best practice, please outline them here.

Open text:

Our survey revealed parent carers believe restraint and restrictive practice is too widely used in schools and is negatively impacting children and young people with SEND. Parent carers highlighted a concern that needs not being met in school, nor recognised properly leads to unnecessary escalation of behaviours. Staff are not adequately trained in identifying triggers or de-escalation techniques, and restraint or restrictive practice relied upon to readily. Parent carers throughout our survey overwhelmingly felt best practice would avoid the need for restraint and restrictive practice, with many suggesting it is never acceptable.

Parent carers reported the use of restraint or restrictive practice made their child's behaviour deteriorate both in the short and the longer term: "it formed part of a negative spiral for half a term". Others report "long term trauma, now distrusting of all adults, permanent state of anger and stuck in 'fight' mode as he feels the world is out to attack him"; "Our child ...struggles to trust adults in authority"; "It completely traumatises him. He is now not able to access mainstream school and has difficulties trusting adults"; "severe trauma, complete school refusal for three years"; "he has school based

trauma, no longer trusts adults, no longer can engage with education and has severe anxiety and depression which he didn't have before."

The NNPCF strongly believes best practice for restraint and restrictive practice should be based around techniques and training to reduce the need for restraint and restrictive practice to near zero. "Most incidents if dealt with calmly and appropriately don't have any lasting effects. However, where staff are not calm and have acted suddenly without warning and where restraint has not been the best option, have had a bad effect. Such as school refusal, damage to pupil teacher relationships, more incidents of dysregulation, self-esteem issues, mental health issues. Occasional injuries".

Additional questions for school staff

Question 12: How is reasonable force, restraint and other restrictive practices used in your school? Where possible, outline who is authorised to use these practices and why these practices are most often used.

Not Answered

Open text:

Question 13: How does your school follow up with the people involved in an incident of reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practice, including the pupil, staff, parents and other pupils who are witnesses?

Not Answered

Open text:

Question 13a: If you chose 'no follow up' - what are the barriers, if any, preventing schools from following up with parents, pupils and school staff? Please comment below.

Open text:

Question 14: What are the challenges, if any, involved in recording data on the use of reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practices? Please comment below.

Open text:

Question 15: Who at your school, if anyone, is trained on how to use reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practices appropriately, safely and proportionately?

Not Answered

Open text:

Question 15a: Following on from the previous question, if known, what did this training cover?

Not Answered

Open text:

Question 16: How confident are you that you know how, when and how long it is appropriate and lawful to use reasonable force, restraint or another restrictive practice on a pupil?

Not Answered

Please explain your choice:

Question 17: What, if anything, do you consider to be the main challenges regarding the use of reasonable force, restraint or other restrictive practices in your school?

Not Answered

Open text:

Additional questions for parents

Question 18: How well do you feel your child's school communicates school policies with you?

Not Answered

Question 19: How confident are you in your child's school's behaviour policy and use of reasonable force?

Not Answered