

Use Of Reasonable Force and Restrictive Physical Intervention

Foreword from the Headteacher

At Elms School, we are proud to be a nurturing place of learning with high expectations for all. Every aspect of our work is rooted in our belief that students thrive when they feel safe, valued, understood and challenged.

Our therapeutic, relational and rights-respecting approaches support students to develop self-regulation, responsibility, respect and emotional understanding. These are not optional extras; they are the foundations that enable learning, independence and positive relationships.

This policy reflects our commitment to safeguarding students and staff while maintaining dignity, care and professionalism in all circumstances. The use of reasonable force or restrictive physical intervention is never routine. It is a last resort safeguarding response used only when risk is immediate and other strategies are no longer sufficient.

We expect all staff to work in alignment with the Elms Approach, to prioritise prevention and de-escalation, and to engage in reflective practice so that restrictive interventions are reduced over time. Through this shared commitment, we ensure that our values are lived consistently across the school.

John Dexter
Headteacher
Elms School

1. Policy Statement and School Vision

Elms School is a nurturing place of learning with high expectations for all. We believe that students learn best when they feel safe, valued, understood and challenged to achieve their potential.

Our therapeutic and relational approaches nurture students so they are supported to:

- self-regulate
- demonstrate respect
- take responsibility for their actions
- understand their own emotions and those of others

Our curriculum enriches the experiences of our students, develops independence and promotes collaboration, preparing them for learning, relationships and life beyond school.

This policy is grounded in the school's vision and reflects our commitment to creating a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for all students and staff. Our approach is underpinned by a Rights Respecting framework, informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The use of reasonable force and other restrictive

interventions is a last resort and will only be used when necessary to prevent harm, maintain safety, or uphold good order and discipline. The school prioritises prevention, de-escalation and positive behaviour support.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff, including teaching and support staff, volunteers, and supply staff, who may have responsibility for students.

3. Legal and Safeguarding Framework

This policy is informed by and must be read alongside the school's safeguarding arrangements and statutory guidance, including:

- Education and Inspections Act 2006 (sections 93 and 93A)
 - Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) – statutory guidance
 - Working Together to Safeguard Children
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Human Rights Act 1998
 - Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
 - Department for Education, Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools (effective from 1 April 2026) Schools (Recording and Reporting of Seclusion and Restraint) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2025
- Policy states clearly that Elms School does not use seclusion and distinguishes this from supported regulation in supervised safe spaces

4. Definitions

Positive Touch (Non-restrictive physical support): Appropriate, non-restrictive physical contact used to support, reassure or guide a student without limiting their freedom of movement. Positive touch is used to promote regulation, safety and connection and does not involve restraint or force. Examples include supportive guides, help hugs, caring guides, holding hands, linking arms, or light physical prompting, where the student can move freely and disengage.

Reasonable force: Physical contact used to control or restrain a student's actions or movements, using the minimum force necessary for the shortest time possible.

Restrictive interventions: Planned or reactive actions that limit a student's movement, liberty or freedom to act independently. This includes physical restraint.

Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI): Direct physical contact intended to prevent or restrict movement to reduce risk of harm.

5. Principles

All use of reasonable force and restrictive physical intervention in this SEMH school is guided by the following rights-based principles:

- The best interests of the child are a primary consideration (UNCRC Article 3)
- Every student has the right to be safe from harm (Article 19)
- Pupils have the right to be treated with dignity and respect (Article 37)
- Pupils have the right to be heard and involved in decisions affecting them (Article 12)
- Any restriction of liberty is necessary, proportionate and time-limited
- Staff safety is a priority

6. The Elms Approach: Prevention, Regulation and Consistency

This SEMH school's approach to behaviour is rooted in The Elms Approach, a whole-school, relational and nurturing framework designed to ensure students feel safe, valued and able to learn.

The Elms Approach is founded on the belief that behaviour is communication and that students regulate best within predictable, consistent and relational environments. All staff are expected to work in alignment with the Elms Approach so that students experience the same calm, structured responses across the school.

Positive Behaviour Plans and the Stages of Distress and Support

Every student has an individual Positive Behaviour Plan. These plans are central to safeguarding, inclusion and risk management and are known and used consistently by staff.

Each Positive Behaviour Plan:

- Identifies the student's needs, triggers and protective factors
- Sets out de-escalation strategies aligned to the six stages of the Stages of Distress and Support
- Describes early intervention and regulation strategies at each stage of escalation
- Supports staff to respond predictably and proportionately
- Is regularly reviewed and updated following incidents or changes in need

Risk Assessment, Assessment Levels and Physical Intervention

Each Positive Behaviour Plan includes a graduated risk assessment informed by the school's Handling Plan Risk Assessment levels.

The purpose of these levels is to support anticipation, planning and staff preparedness, not to authorise automatic use of physical intervention. All decisions remain dynamic and based on immediate risk, necessity and proportionality at the time.

The assessment levels are used as follows:

Level 1

Non-physical strategies

Focus on prevention, relationships and regulation
No physical intervention anticipated

Level 2

Low-level physical intervention
May include positive touch and low-level guiding strategies
Used to support regulation and safety where risk is emerging

Level 3

Restrictive physical intervention
Restrictive techniques may be required where risk has escalated
Techniques are used to prevent harm and restore safety
Interventions remain time-limited and proportionate

Level 4

Restrictive intervention with increased risk
May involve two-person restrictive techniques and positional changes
Requires heightened monitoring of student welfare
Used only where risk is significant and immediate

Level 5

Advanced and ground recovery techniques
Indicates a foreseeable risk of severe dysregulation and serious harm
May include Team Teach ground recovery techniques
Used only by a small, specially trained staff team
Represents a safeguarding response of last resort

Assessment levels:

- Inform planning and staffing decisions
- Support consistency of adult response
- Are reviewed regularly and following incidents
- Do not remove the requirement for professional judgement at the point of intervention

Recording expectations are aligned to risk level, with higher-level interventions requiring enhanced recording, review and safeguarding oversight.

Where the Elms Approach is implemented effectively, the need for restrictive physical intervention is significantly reduced.

7. When Reasonable Force May Be Used

Reasonable force, including restrictive physical intervention, may be used only when Elms Approach strategies have been exhausted, are not viable, or are overridden by immediate risk.

Staff may use reasonable force to:

- Prevent a student from causing serious harm to themselves or others

- Prevent serious damage to property where there is a safety risk
- Prevent a criminal offence
- Restore safety where behaviour presents an immediate and significant risk

Any use of reasonable force represents a move beyond the Elms Approach preventative framework into an emergency safeguarding response, and must meet the tests of necessity, proportionality and least restriction.

8. Unacceptable Use of Force

Force must never be used:

- As a punishment or to cause pain, humiliation or distress
- In a way that restricts breathing, circulation or airway
- By applying pressure to the neck, chest or abdomen
- By deliberately placing or holding a student in a prone (face-down) position
- Outside of approved training and risk-assessed approaches

9. Team Teach Training Framework, Ground Recovery and the Elms Approach

The school uses Team Teach as its approved and accredited training framework for positive behaviour support, de-escalation and restrictive physical intervention, operating explicitly within the values and preventative structure of the Elms Approach.

The school:

- Provides Team Teach training to staff whose roles may require them to manage high-risk situations
- Has accredited Team Teach trainers responsible for delivering training, refreshers and quality assurance
- Does not require Team Teach training at the point of employment, but ensures that staff are trained appropriately before they are expected to use restrictive physical intervention
- Ensures training is current, evidence-informed and aligned with Department for Education guidance

Team Teach training provides staff with:

- Skills in primary prevention and de-escalation
- Clear decision-making models for risk and safety
- Approved techniques, including ground recovery, to be used only as a last resort
- Emphasis on dignity, welfare and risk reduction for students and staff

Team Teach is not a behaviour management system; it is a safety-focused framework used only when other strategies are no longer sufficient to manage immediate risk.

Ground Recovery within the Elms Approach

The school recognises that ground recovery techniques require a higher level of skill and risk management.

Accordingly:

- Only a smaller, identified group of staff receive additional Team Teach ground recovery training
- These staff are selected based on role, experience and assessed suitability
- Ground recovery is used only when staff with this additional training are available, wherever reasonably practicable

In this SEMH special school, Team Teach ground recovery techniques may be used only where:

- A student is significantly dysregulated and presents an immediate risk of serious harm
- Elms approach de-escalation strategies have been attempted, exhausted or are no longer viable
- The intervention is required to restore safety and enable recovery

Ground recovery techniques are:

- Time-limited and ended at the earliest safe opportunity
- Continuously monitored for breathing, distress and physical wellbeing
- Followed by restorative repair and reflection in line with the Elms Approach

Ground recovery may be required for as long as the immediate risk of serious harm persists, and must involve continuous reassessment, reduction, and attempts to transition to a safer position.

Ground recovery is never used as punishment, behaviour management, or a planned strategy.

10. Pupils with SEND and SEMH

As a specialist SEMH setting, the school recognises that students may present with high levels of distress, trauma-related behaviours, and emotional dysregulation which can increase the likelihood of restrictive interventions.

The school will:

- Operate within a trauma-informed and relational framework
- Make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010
- Develop and regularly review individual behaviour support plans
- Identify triggers, early warning signs and protective factors
- Clearly document any agreed physical support strategies, including any circumstances where increased physical support may be required

Behaviour support plans are co-produced with students (where appropriate), parents/carers and relevant professionals, and are reviewed following any significant incident. Behaviour plans clearly document any agreed physical support strategies.

11. Recording and Reporting

All incidents involving restrictive physical intervention must be recorded in writing as soon as practicable. Records will include:

- Names of students and staff involved
- Date, time, location and duration
- Description of the incident and intervention used
- Reason the force was necessary
- Any injuries or follow-up support
- Records will include the degree of force used

All our students have an EHCP detailing their special educational needs.

Parents will be informed as soon as practicable following any significant incident involving the use of force. This will normally be on the same day and will usually include a telephone conversation followed by written communication, ordinarily by email, unless this would place the student at risk of significant harm or conflict with safeguarding advice.

The written follow-up will normally summarise the incident, the reason force was considered necessary, the type of intervention used, the approximate duration, any injury or medical attention, and the immediate support or next steps arising from the incident.

12. Post-Incident Support, Repair and Elms Reflection

Following any significant incident involving reasonable force or restrictive intervention, the school will apply the Professional Reflection and Support strand of the Elms Approach.

The school recognises that, despite best efforts to minimise risk and impact, physical intervention may occasionally result in unintended physical marks such as bruising or minor injuries. The presence of a mark or injury does not in itself indicate inappropriate practice; however, all injuries are taken seriously and responded to in line with safeguarding duties.

This includes:

- Immediate first aid or medical attention where required
- Accurate recording of any injury sustained by a student or member of staff
- Consideration of whether the injury meets safeguarding or reporting thresholds
- Transparent communication with parents/carers in line with statutory guidance

Where an injury is observed:

- Staff must consider the context of the incident, the explanation provided, and the student's presentation
- Any concern that an injury may not be consistent with the account given, or that a student may be at risk of harm, will be reported immediately in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education and the school's safeguarding procedures
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will determine whether further action, including referral to children's social care or the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO)

Following the incident, the school will also ensure:

- A restorative conversation with the student, once regulated, to repair relationships and ensure the student's voice is heard
- Staff debriefs focused on reflection, learning and emotional wellbeing
- Identification of triggers, unmet needs or environmental factors
- Review and adjustment of behaviour support plans, routines or reasonable adjustments

Repeated incidents or injuries prompt deeper reflection, coaching and review, rather than normalisation of restrictive practice.

13. Monitoring, Governance and External Scrutiny

The governing body and senior leaders will ensure robust oversight of the use of reasonable force and restrictive interventions.

This includes:

- Regular review of incident data to identify patterns, frequency and proportionality
- Scrutiny of incidents involving ground recovery techniques
- Monitoring for any disproportionality relating to SEND, protected characteristics or individual students
- Ensuring staff training remains current and effective
- Using data to inform safeguarding, staff supervision and school improvement planning

This policy will be reviewed annually, and sooner if required by changes in legislation, guidance, or following serious incidents.

Appendix A: Rights-Based Decision-Making for Physical Intervention

When considering reasonable force or ground recovery, staff will rapidly assess:

- Risk – Is there an immediate risk of serious harm to the student or others?
- Rights – Which rights are engaged (e.g. safety, dignity, liberty)?

- Options – Have de-escalation and less restrictive options been attempted or ruled out?
 - Necessity – Is physical intervention necessary to protect from harm?
 - Proportionality – Is this the least restrictive option for the shortest time?
 - Review – How will this be ended safely and followed up restoratively?
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Appendix B: Rights Respecting Use of Ground Recovery (Team Teach)

Ground recovery techniques may temporarily restrict a student's movement to:

- Protect the student's right to life and safety
- Prevent serious harm to others

Safeguards include:

- Continuous monitoring of breathing, distress and physical wellbeing
 - Calm explanation to the student of what is happening and what will end the intervention
 - Ending the intervention at the earliest safe opportunity
 - Never using ground recovery as punishment, planned control, or behaviour management
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Appendix C: Assurance Statement

The school recognises that the use of restrictive physical intervention engages students' rights. Our approach ensures that:

- Interventions are used to protect rights, not override them
- Any restriction of liberty is lawful, necessary and proportionate
- Patterns of use are scrutinised for disproportionality and addressed through support, not normalisation
- Pupils' voices and experiences inform ongoing improvement

This reflects a strong safeguarding culture, trauma-informed practice, and compliance with statutory guidance and human rights duties.

Appendix D: Staff Practice Flow – Elms Approach to Intervention to Repair

Everyday Practice (Elms Approach)

Shared language of nurture and respect

Predictable routines and environments

Low-key responses: remind → redirect → repair

Positive relationships and co-regulation

⏴ If risk escalates

Heightened Support

Increased adult presence
Adjustments and regulation strategies
Calm, predictable adult responses

↓ ***If immediate risk of serious harm***

Safeguarding Response (Team Teach)
Use of reasonable force where necessary
Restrictive physical intervention as a last resort
Ground recovery only to regain safety



Repair and Review (Elms Reflection)
Pupil voice and restorative conversation
Staff debrief and reflection
Review of triggers, routines and adjustments
Update behaviour support plans

Appendix E: Parent and Carer Summary – How We Keep Children Safe

At our SEMH school, behaviour is understood as communication. We use the Elms Approach to help students feel safe, valued and supported through consistent routines, positive relationships and clear, calm responses.

Most situations are managed through:

- De-escalation and support
- Emotional regulation strategies
- Predictable adult responses

On rare occasions, when a student or others are at immediate risk of serious harm, trained staff may use reasonable force as part of a safeguarding response. This includes restrictive physical intervention, and in extreme cases, Team Teach ground recovery techniques.

We want parents and carers to be assured that:

- Physical intervention is used only as a last resort
- Staff are trained and accredited in Team Teach
- Interventions are time-limited and closely monitored
- Every incident is recorded, reported and reviewed
- Pupils are supported to repair relationships and return to learning
Elms School does not use seclusion. If a student needs space, regulation or reduced stimulation, this is provided through supervised support and safe spaces, not by preventing a student from leaving a room or area.

Our aim is always to reduce the need for physical intervention by strengthening support, consistency and understanding around each child's needs.

Appendix F: DfE Compliance Checklist (2026 Guidance)

This policy has been reviewed against the Department for Education guidance Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools (effective from 1 April 2026).

Legal basis

- References Education and Inspections Act 2006 (sections 93 and 93A)
- Acknowledges Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010
- Prevention and de-escalation
- Clear whole-school preventative framework (The Elms Approach)
- Emphasis on early intervention, de-escalation and reasonable adjustments
- Use of reasonable force
- Force used only when necessary to prevent harm or serious disruption
- Least restrictive option used for the shortest time
- Clear prohibition of punishment and unsafe practices
- Restrictive physical intervention and ground recovery
- Ground recovery identified as high-risk and last resort delivered only by a smaller, specially trained staff group
- Continuous monitoring of student welfare during intervention
- SEND and vulnerability
- Recognition of SEMH, trauma and communication needs
- Co-produced behaviour support plans
- Review triggered after repeated incidents
- Recording and reporting (statutory)
- All significant incidents recorded promptly
- Parents informed as soon as practicable and normally on the same day, with written follow-up
- Records include required statutory details
- Post-incident support
- Medical and emotional support provided
- Restorative repair and student voice included
- Learning informs future practice
- Governance and oversight
- Data reviewed regularly by leaders and governors
- Disproportionality monitored and addressed
- Training needs identified through review

Appendix G: Questions and Responses

Q: How does a Rights Respecting school justify physical intervention?

A: We recognise that physical intervention restricts liberty, so we use it only to protect students' rights to safety and dignity when risk is immediate. Our Elms Approach

minimises the need for intervention, and Team Teach provides a safeguarding response when prevention is no longer sufficient.

Q: Why do you use ground recovery?

A: In rare situations where there is an immediate risk of serious harm and other strategies are not viable, trained staff may use Team Teach ground recovery to regain safety. It is time-limited, closely monitored, and followed by restorative repair and review.

Q: Are all staff expected to restrain students?

A: No. All staff use Elms Approach strategies. Only staff trained in Team Teach may use restrictive physical intervention, and only a smaller, specially trained group may use ground recovery.

Q: How do you prevent overuse with SEMH students?

A: We analyse patterns, triggers and disproportionality. Repeated incidents lead to adjustments, coaching and system review, not normalisation of restraint.

Appendix H: Staff-Only Clarification – Ground Recovery and When It Must End

This guidance is for staff use only and must be read alongside Team Teach training, safeguarding procedures, and this policy.

Purpose

Ground recovery is a time-critical safeguarding response, not a holding strategy. It exists solely to prevent immediate serious harm and to enable a transition to a safer position.

What Ground Recovery Is

Ground recovery may involve briefly holding a student's arms and/or legs to stop dangerous movement only where risk is immediate and severe. This may include a short face-down moment as part of regaining safety.

Ground recovery may be required for as long as the immediate risk of serious harm persists, and must involve continuous reassessment, reduction, and attempts to transition to a safer position.

What Ground Recovery Is Not

Ground recovery is not:

- A method of behaviour management
- A way to gain compliance
- A position to be maintained once safety can be restored
- A response to refusal, defiance, or disruption alone
- The Non-Negotiable Safeguards

Staff must:

- Avoid pressure on the chest, abdomen, neck or airway
- Continuously monitor breathing, colour, responsiveness and distress
- Communicate calmly and clearly with the student where possible
- Reduce or release holds as soon as risk reduces

When Ground Recovery Must End

Ground recovery must end immediately when:

- The student's movement no longer presents an immediate risk
- The student shows signs of breath compromise, extreme distress or medical concern
- A safer seated or standing position can be achieved

If safety can be maintained by changing position, continued holding is no longer recovery – it becomes restraint.

After the Incident

Ground recovery always triggers:

- Enhanced recording and reporting
- DSL oversight
- Reflective staff debrief
- Review of the student's Positive Behaviour Plan and risk assessment
- Professional Expectation

Staff are trusted to use professional judgement, but ground recovery demands the highest level of scrutiny, reflection and accountability. When in doubt, prioritise breathing, dignity and transition to safety.

Appendix I: Governing Body Assurance and Approval Statement

The Governing Body confirms that this policy:

- Is aligned with the Department for Education guidance Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools (effective from 1 April 2026)
- Meets statutory duties under sections 93 and 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Reflects the school's SEMH context and safeguarding responsibilities
- Embeds The Elms Approach as the primary framework for behaviour support and prevention
- Ensures restrictive physical intervention, including ground recovery, is used lawfully, proportionately and as a last resort

Makes clear that Elms School does not use seclusion and that parent communication following significant incidents will normally take place on the same day with written follow-up

The Governing Body will receive regular reports on the use of reasonable force and restrictive interventions, including analysis of patterns, proportionality and training needs, and will use this information to support continuous improvement.

Date approved: March 2026

Review date: March 2027
