



Waterloo Lodge School

Options Autism



Part of Outcomes First Group

26th March 2026

Dear Parents and Carers

We are writing to inform you of an important update regarding recent Department for Education (DfE) guidance on the use of restrictive interventions in schools, including a clarified national definition of *seclusion*.

As you'll be aware, we already uphold the highest standards of safeguarding across our schools with clear, robust and consistently applied policies regarding safeguarding and restrictive interventions. We welcome this updated guidance, which closely aligns with our existing practice. The strengthened guidance reinforces prevention, promotes de-escalation and trauma-informed approaches, and sets clearer expectations about recording and reporting significant incidents to parents.

Importantly, these changes relate mainly to clarified terminology and reporting requirements. They do not reflect a change in our values, ethos or everyday practice.

We remain committed to:

- Prevention and early intervention
- A trauma-informed, relational approach
- Using the least restrictive options possible
- Reducing restrictive interventions wherever we can

All staff are trained in CPI (Crisis Prevention Institute) Safety Intervention, alongside our neurodiversity-affirming, person-centred Behaviour Policy. Our focus is always on recognising early signs of dysregulation and supporting young people to regulate safely.

Clarification regarding seclusion

The updated DfE guidance provides a clearer national definition of *seclusion*, which refers to: "a non-disciplinary intervention involving keeping a pupil confined to a place away from others, and preventing them from leaving either by physical obstruction, blocking, or making them believe they will be punished if they try to leave."

We want to be absolutely clear that we do not have seclusion rooms in any of our schools, nor do we plan for or maintain any spaces intended for seclusion.

However, under the updated national definition, there may be rare occasions where a *short-term safeguarding response*—for example, supporting a highly distressed young person to remain in a separate safe space for a brief period because they are unable to leave safely—meets the formal definition of seclusion.



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An example might include:

- A pupil becoming highly dysregulated and unsafe in a classroom,
- Staff supporting them to move to a quieter, safer space,
- And for a short time, the young person is not able to leave independently due to immediate risk of harm.

Although this is not a “seclusion room”, this scenario must be recorded and reported as seclusion under the revised guidance.

We want to reassure you that:

- Seclusion is *only* used as a last resort
- It is *only* used to prevent immediate risk of harm
- It lasts for the shortest time necessary
- Senior oversight is always in place
- It is treated as a safeguarding response
- It is carefully recorded, reviewed and followed by reflection

It is never used as a punishment.

We remain clear that sensory spaces are for regulation and support and must never be used in a restrictive way, except where required briefly for safeguarding. We continue to invest in high-quality sensory environments because they help reduce escalation and promote learning.

What this means for you

If your child is ever involved in an incident requiring a restrictive intervention (including seclusion under the updated definition), you will receive:

1. A phone call from school

You will receive a call as soon as possible after the incident and always before your child returns home.

This call will include:

- A clear account of what happened
- Any identified triggers or early warning signs
- The de-escalation strategies used
- How your child’s support plan or behaviour plan was followed
- How your child was supported afterwards
- Next steps, learning or adaptations
- How we can keep working together to reduce risk

2. Written notification via email

As required by the updated DfE guidance, you will also receive a written summary of the incident. This may be briefer than the phone call, and you are always welcome to ask for further detail or a meeting in school.

Our commitment

We recognise that receiving a notification about restraint or seclusion can feel worrying. Please be



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assured that restrictive interventions are always a last resort and only used to keep someone safe. Whenever a restrictive intervention occurs, mandatory post-incident actions take place—including post-incident support, reflection and senior oversight—to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

We are committed to:

- Transparency
- Partnership with families
- Safeguarding first
- Reducing harm
- Working in a trauma-informed, respectful and least-restrictive way

If you would like to discuss anything in this letter, or have questions related to this guidance and our safeguarding policies, please contact the school leadership team who will be happy to assist.

Thank you for your continued trust and collaboration.

Yours sincerely

Helen Rigby

Mrs Helen Rigby
Executive Head Teacher