

# HELD DOWN, HELD BACK

## Restraint and Seclusion in England's Schools

LIVES IN THE BALANCE

Lives in the Balance  
Children's Mental Health Advocacy Conference 2025

## England - 24,100+ schools

### 9.1 Million Students

Approx 1.7 Million on SEN Register or Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)

Northern Ireland - 1,024 schools  
Scotland - 2536 schools  
Wales - 1,542 schools

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## LEGAL LANDSCAPE

Section 93 grants broad discretionary powers with no safeguards

legislation.gov.uk

### Education and Inspection Act 2006

Section 93

**Section 93A**  
To be enacted

Department for Education

**Use of Reasonable Force: Advice for Headteachers and School Governors 2013 - 2025**  
Non-Statutory Guidance

**The Use of Reasonable Force and Other Restrictive Interventions 2025-**  
In draft

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## LEGAL LANDSCAPE

GOV.UK

### Reducing the need for restraint and restrictive intervention (2019)

*'Schools can use seclusion or isolation rooms appropriately as a disciplinary penalty without this constituting a restrictive intervention.'*

Equality and Human Rights Commission

### Human rights framework for restraint: principles for the lawful use of physical, chemical, mechanical and coercive restrictive interventions (2019)

*Example: Isolation may be enforced by locking a door or using a door the person cannot open themselves, or otherwise preventing them from leaving an area, for example, by the use or threat of force. **Enforced isolation is therefore restraint, but it may be described as seclusion, segregation, separation, time out or solitary confinement.***

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## EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION INQUIRY

2020-2021

275 LIVED EXPERIENCE TESTIMONIES WERE SUBMITTED TO THE INQUIRY.

74% of respondents did not know restraint and/or seclusion could be used in schools

**01**

94.4% OF CHILDREN SUSTAINED PHYSICAL INJURIES, PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM OR BOTH

**02**

ONLY 8.2% REPORTED THAT THEY WERE SURE THAT THEIR CHILD'S INJURIES WERE RECORDED IN SCHOOL RECORDS.

**03**

97.6% OF THE CHILDREN HAD A MEDICAL OR SEND DIAGNOSIS.  
75% WERE AUTISTIC

Neurodivergent and disabled children without intellectual disabilities were the most frequently restrained.

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## Key Legal Interventions Since 2019

**Steve Broach KC**  
38 Essex Chambers

**Polly Sweeney**  
Buck Funn Sweeney, formerly Ivan Mitchell

**Coilfhionn Gallagher KC**  
Douglas Street Chambers

**Dr. Oliver Lewis**  
Douglas Street Chambers

**James Betts**  
Solicitor & Lecturer, University of Liverpool, formerly Ivan Mitchell

**Angela Jackman KC**  
Ivan Mitchell

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## THE ICARS REPORT

April 2023

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## THE ICARS REPORT

April 2023

Restraint and Seclusion in England's Schools

- 71% of incidents occurred in mainstream schools
- 93% of children had a SEND diagnosis
- 81% of children had an autism diagnosis
- 34% of children had an ADHD diagnosis
- 87% of children had been restrained or secluded before the age of 10
- 73% of respondents were unaware that restraint or seclusion could be used in schools
- 29% of children had been restrained and/or secluded hundreds of times or too many to count

- 1 No Data Collection
- 2 No Legislative Protections
- 3 Life-Threatening Restraints
- 4 No Effective Safeguards

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## THE ICARS REPORT

April 2023

- 43% reported their child had been both physically and psychologically harmed
- 47% reported their child had been psychologically harmed without physical injury
- 5% reported physical injury without psychological harm.
- 3% reported no signs of harm at all

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## UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

June 2023

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ON THE FIFTH, AND COMBINED SIXTH AND SEVENTH PERIODIC REPORTS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND (2016 & 2022)

- 1 EXPLICITLY PROHIBIT THE USE OF RESTRAINT AND SECLUSION IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS
- 2 PROHIBIT THE USE OF RESTRAINT, SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, ISOLATION AND SECLUSION ON CHILDREN FOR DISCIPLINARY PURPOSES.
- 3 ADOPT A CHILD RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO ADDRESSING VIOLENCE OR OTHER DISTURBANCES IN SCHOOLS
- 4 REGULARLY COLLECT, ANALYSE AND PUBLISH DISAGGREGATED DATA ON THE USE OF ...SECLUSION, RESTRAINT, SOLITARY CONFINEMENT AND ISOLATION ON CHILDREN
- 5 DEVELOP STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF RESTRAINT ON CHILDREN TO ENSURE THAT IT IS USED ONLY AS A MEASURE OF LAST RESORT AND EXCLUSIVELY TO PREVENT HARM TO THE CHILD OR OTHERS AND MONITOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION
- 6 PROHIBIT THE PRESENCE OF POLICE IN SCHOOLS
- 7 PROVIDE REGULAR TRAINING FOR TEACHERS ON RELEVANT GUIDANCE FOR ADDRESSING DISTURBANCES IN A CHILD-SENSITIVE MANNER

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## THE i PAPER

- 1 How restraint in schools is traumatizing children with SEND and injuring teachers
- 2 Pupils traumatised by restraint in schools failed by 'wily wacky' guidance
- 3 Children 'at risk of harm' to SEND as police charging teenager from as up to £100k
- 4 SEND pupils 'injured by staff' at the school owned by Abu Dhabi royal family
- 5 SEND pupils pulled out of UK 'Lord of the Flies' school owned by Abu Dhabi royal

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Investigating the use of physical restraint on children in England's schools is extremely challenging. It involves proving that restraint is used in a way that is "excessive" in a country with no national standards for its use and no legal requirement to report them. It's required asking parents and vulnerable children to re-live traumatic and upsetting experiences. I've heard of children being taunted as they're pinned down on school benches in front of their peers and had skin scrapped all their feet after being dragged across concrete floors. One teenage girl was held down on the floor by men for 45 minutes.

What is at once striking but perhaps unsurprising is how this all appears to have become accepted practice in schools, one which does not require official outside scrutiny, a situation which is unlikely to change anytime soon in England.

While the political rhetoric maintains that physical restraint should be a "last resort" measure and "excessive" restraints is wrong it is hard to prove what this means in practice.

The yardstick I've come to rely on to assess "excessive" restraint appeals me personally. It's 10 minutes: the recommended maximum period an adult patient should be restrained on a mental health ward. There is no such limit for children in England. By piecing together poll data, interviews, and analysis of school reports of restraints which have been released to parents, we have begun to expose how restraint is used in excessive and harmful ways, leaving children traumatised and parents feeling like they have failed them.

What I originally thought would be quite a niche and difficult area to report has proven a subject of much interest to the readers of the publications I work for. I now have more to report on the use of restraint of children in England than I can handle. It's an unsettling testament to how hidden these issues have become and how much more they need to be exposed to the public through the media.

Keith Cooper - Award-winning investigative journalist, writer and researcher.

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# THE RESTRAINT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

## BEHIND EVERY CHILD RESTRAINED LIES A NETWORK OF PROFIT AND INFLUENCE.

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### HOUSE OF COMMONS EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE SOLVING THE SEND CRISIS INQUIRY 2024-2025

THE INQUIRY SET OUT TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS NEEDED TO STABILISE THE SEND SYSTEM NOW AND MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE IN THE LONG TERM, WHILE IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

- **Support for children and young people with SEND in mainstream and specialist settings**  
How support is provided in mainstream and specialist settings, including the workforce and early intervention.
- **Current and future SEND need**  
Understanding changing patterns of need and planning for future demand.
- **Current and future model of SEND provision**  
Considering how provision is organised locally and nationally, ensuring consistency, inclusion, and effective cross-agency working.
- **Finance, funding and capacity of SEND provision**  
Examining budget pressures, how resources are allocated, and what is needed for long-term stability.
- **Accountability and inspection of SEND provision**  
Strengthening oversight of schools, local authorities, and services to ensure duties are met and provision is inclusive.

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UK Parliament Committees

### HOUSE OF COMMONS EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE SOLVING THE SEND CRISIS INQUIRY 2024-2025

#### SCHOOL TRAINING COSTS DISCLOSED THROUGH FOI REQUESTS

**£9.3\* Million**  
Across 1110+ English Schools

**£2,564,750.97**  
896 Schools 2022 - 2023

<b>£70* k</b> 1 year cost	<b>£ 450</b> Paid to accreditation company
<b>£ 36k</b> 4 year cost	<b>£222,082.00</b> 161 trainee removal applications (1 month) 273 children enrolled on this school
<b>£85* k</b> 5 year cost	<b>£ 441</b> 11 trainee removal cases for one day training 33% above HMRC rate
<b>£ 28* k</b> 1 year cost	<b>£ 96* k</b> per year on behaviour team salaries

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mySociety  
WIKIDATATV.COM

**"These failings are horrendous and must never happen again."**

— No.10 Downing Street spokesperson  
(BBC News, 9 April 2025).

BBC News, Australia: 19-year-old 'brutally' restrained in school edming room, 9 April 2025.

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### ON GOING EFFORTS ACROSS ENGLAND

**DATA COLLECTION**

In follow up to The ICARS Report England, we are gathering lived experiences from parents, carers, and young people about isolation, removal, and seclusion rooms in England's schools to inform advocacy, policy reform, disability and human rights submissions.

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### THANK YOU

Legislate Educate Set Free

**#AgainstRestraint**  
**#ShineOnMax**

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