# Policy on the Use of Physical Restraint

# Scoil Pól

## 1. Introduction and Purpose

At Scoil Pól, physical restraint is used only as a last resort, to keep a student or others safe from imminent physical harm. It is never used as a punishment, a sanction or a way of making a student comply.

Scoil Pól, Kilfinane, is a Le Chéile Schools Trust school. It was founded in 1903 by the Sisters of Charity of St Paul the Apostle, and its motto is *Omnibus Omnia*: all things to all people. Our ethos commits us to the dignity, safety and wellbeing of every student, including students with special educational needs (SEN) and students in our special classes.

This policy sets out how the school prevents crisis situations, when and how physical restraint may be used, and what happens afterwards. It follows the Department of Education and Youth (DEY) *Guidelines for Schools: Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations* (December 2024). It also follows Circulars 0081/2024 and 0042/2026. Circular 0042/2026 strongly encourages Boards of Management to adopt a policy on the use of physical restraint.

## 2. Legal and Policy Framework

This policy was written with reference to:

- The Education Act 1998, in particular Section 15 (duties of the Board of Management)
- The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004
- The Equal Status Acts 2000–2018 and the Disability Act 2005
- The Children First Act 2015 and the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*
- The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005
- The Data Protection Acts 1988–2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- DEY *Guidelines for Schools: Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations* (December 2024)
- Circular 0081/2024 (recording and reporting of physical restraint) and Circular 0042/2026 (training, monitoring and oversight)
- NEPS, *A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools* (2007), and the NCSE Relate *Phases of Support* tool
- Circular 0047/2021, *Guidelines on the Use of Reduced School Days*
- *Guidelines for Developing a Code of Behaviour* (NEWB, now Tusla Education Support Service, 2008)

**Related Scoil Pól policies:** Special Educational Needs Policy (2026/27), First Aid Policy (ratified 23 June 2026), Code of Behaviour, Child Safeguarding Statement, Bí Cineálta Policy, Administration of Medication Policy, Health and Safety Statement, Critical Incident Policy, Data Protection Policy and Complaints Procedure.

## 3. Scope and Definitions

This policy applies to all students, staff (teachers, SNAs, escorts, ancillary staff), substitutes, PME students and volunteers. It covers the school day, school transport, school trips and all school-organised activities.

- **Behaviour of concern:** behaviour that puts the safety or wellbeing of the student or others at risk, or seriously limits the student's access to learning. It is usually a form of communication, often of distress or unmet need.
- **Crisis situation:** a situation in which a student's behaviour poses an imminent danger of serious physical harm to themselves or others.
- **Physical restraint:** "any direct physical contact where the intention of the person intervening is to prevent, restrict or subdue movement" (Department of Health, 2014).
- **Seclusion:** placing a student alone in a room or area that they cannot leave, or believe they cannot leave. **Seclusion is not permitted at Scoil Pól.**

**What is not physical restraint:** comforting or reassuring contact, guiding a student by the hand or elbow without force, physical support during care routines in line with the Intimate Care Policy, and first aid. A student choosing a planned break or using a calm space such as the HUB or sensory room, which they are free to leave, is not seclusion.

**Practices that are never used:**

- Seclusion, or locking a student in any room or space
- Prone restraint (face down) or any hold that puts pressure on the neck, chest, back or abdomen, or restricts breathing
- Mechanical restraint (straps, belts or equipment used to restrict movement), except prescribed equipment used for its intended purpose, such as a transport harness
- Restraint used as punishment, to force compliance, or for staff convenience
- Holds that deliberately cause pain, or that staff have not been trained in
- Threats of restraint

## 4. Prevention and De-escalation

Most crisis situations can be prevented by understanding what a student's behaviour is communicating and planning ahead. Prevention takes as much planning as a safe response.

**Whole-school (Support for All):** a positive Code of Behaviour, predictable routines, visual supports, the Tuesday and Thursday pastoral check-ins, staff awareness of students' needs through the SEN Register, and calm spaces such as the HUB.

**School Support (Support for Some):** a referral to the SEN department, Check In- Check Out, movement and sensory breaks, pass cards, and the student's Student Support File (SSF), as set out in the SEN Policy.

**School Support Plus (Support for Few):** students who have shown, or are at risk of showing, behaviours of concern have an individual **Behaviour Support Plan** within their SSF. The plan is drawn up by the SENCO with the student, parents/guardians, key teachers, SNAs and, where involved, the NEPS psychologist, CAMHS or other professionals. It uses the NCSE Relate *Phases of Support* and records:

- known triggers and early warning signs
- what helps the student to stay calm and regulated, and what makes things worse
- de-escalation steps for each phase (calm, rising anxiety, crisis, recovery)
- the safe space the student can go to, and who supports them there
- whether any physical intervention is foreseeable, and if so the agreed approach, discussed with parents/guardians in advance
- any medical needs relevant to a crisis (e.g. asthma, epilepsy, cardiac or respiratory conditions), drawn from the student's Individual Healthcare Plan under the First Aid Policy

**De-escalation:** staff stay calm, use few words and a quiet voice, give space and time, offer choices, remove the audience where possible, and move other students away rather than moving the student by force. Staff never go alone into a crisis situation if help can be called.

## 5. When and How Physical Restraint May Be Used

Physical restraint may be used **only** when all of the following apply:

1. There is an imminent risk of serious physical harm to the student, other students, staff or others.
2. De-escalation and the student's Behaviour Support Plan have been tried, or there is no time to try them.
3. No safer alternative is available, such as moving other students away or giving the student space.
4. The restraint is reasonable and proportionate to the risk.

When restraint is used, staff must:

- call for help immediately from other staff, you may send a student messenger to the main office
- use the least restrictive hold, for the shortest time, with the minimum force needed
- use only techniques they have been trained in, wherever a trained staff member is available
- keep talking calmly to the student and tell them what is happening and why
- watch the student's breathing, colour and distress throughout, and release the hold at once if there is any sign of medical difficulty
- end the restraint as soon as the immediate danger has passed
- make sure a second adult is present, where possible, as a witness and for support

Where no trained staff member is present, any staff member acting in loco parentis may take reasonable action to prevent serious harm. They must then follow the procedures in Section 7.

## 6. Roles and Responsibilities

| Role | Responsibilities |
|---|---|
| **Board of Management** | Adopts and reviews this policy. Receives and reviews reports of every incident of physical restraint (Circular 0042/2026). Approves the release of staff for training. Monitors patterns and resources. |
| **Chairperson of the Board** | Is informed of every incident by the Principal, and brings the reports to the Board. |
| **Principal (or Deputy Principal in the Principal's absence)** | Leads implementation. Is informed immediately of any restraint. Makes sure parents/guardians are told the same day and that the incident is recorded and reported to the NCSE. Makes sure the student's support plan is reviewed. Keeps the list of trained staff up to date. Acts as or liaises with the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) on any child protection concern. |
| **SENCO** | Coordinates Behaviour Support Plans within SSFs. Leads post-incident review meetings. Liaises with NEPS, the NCSE and outside agencies. Collates the incident log for the Principal. |
| **Trained staff (see Appendix C)** | Respond to crisis situations when called. Model de-escalation. Support colleagues. |
| **All teachers, SNAs and escorts** | Know the Behaviour Support Plans of the students they work with. Use de-escalation. Call for help early. Record and report any incident the same day. |
| **First aiders** | Check the student and staff for injury after any restraint, in line with the First Aid Policy. |
| **Parents/guardians** | Share relevant information. Help develop and review their child's Behaviour Support Plan. Are informed of any incident on the same day. |
| **Student** | Is involved, at an appropriate level, in developing their own plan and in reflecting after an incident. |

## 7. After an Incident

Every use of physical restraint is followed by the steps below, in this order.

1. **Safety and first aid (immediately).** A first aider checks the student and any staff involved for injury, in line with the First Aid Policy. Any injury is recorded on the school's Accident/Incident Reporting Document and given to the Principal. Serious injuries (head injuries, suspected fractures, loss of consciousness, breathing difficulty) mean calling 999/112 at once. A staff injury is recorded separately and reported to the Health and Safety Authority if required.

2. **Recovery.** The student is supported to calm down in a safe, supervised space with a familiar adult. They are never left alone. Return to class happens only when the student is ready.
3. **Inform the Principal (immediately).** The staff member informs the Principal, or the Deputy Principal in the Principal's absence, as soon as the student is safe.
4. **Inform parents/guardians (same day).** The Principal or SENCO phones the parents/guardians at the earliest possible juncture, and always on the same school day. They explain what happened, why restraint was used, for how long, and whether there was any injury. Parents are invited to a review meeting.
5. **Record (same day).** The staff involved complete the Scoil Pól Physical Restraint Incident Record (Appendix A) before leaving school that day. Records are factual, dated and signed, and witnesses add their own accounts.
6. **Report to the NCSE.** The Principal reports the incident to the NCSE using the current Resource 4: NCSE Record of Incident involving Physical Restraint. This is the only format the NCSE accepts, and has been mandatory since September 2025.
7. **Report to the Board of Management.** The Principal informs the Chairperson promptly. An anonymised report of all incidents goes to every Board meeting. The Board reviews patterns, training and resources.
8. **Child protection.** If an incident raises a child protection concern, the DLP follows the Child Safeguarding Statement and Children First procedures, including reporting to Tusla or An Garda Síochána where required.
9. **Debrief and review (within five school days).** The SENCO leads a post-incident review with the staff involved, parents/guardians and, where appropriate, the student (Appendix B). The student's Behaviour Support Plan and SSF are updated where appropriate, and NEPS or the NCSE is consulted if needed. Staff wellbeing is also considered, including access to the Employee Assistance Service.

A reduced school day is never used as a sanction following an incident. It may be considered only in exceptional circumstances, in line with Circular 0047/2021 and the SEN Policy.

## 8. Training

Staff who may be called on to respond to crisis situations, especially staff working in the special classes, complete approved training. This includes the DEY webinars and information sessions, NCSE behaviour training and, where the school has a clear need, NCSE-funded Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training. The Board of Management may release teachers for training (Circular 0042/2026). Refresher training is completed as the provider requires. The Principal keeps a list of trained staff (Appendix C). The list is shared on the staff Teams platform and in the staff room, alongside the list of first aiders.

All staff, including new staff, substitutes and PME students, are briefed on this policy at induction and at the start of each school year.

## 9. Complaints

A parent/guardian who is unhappy with how an incident was handled should first use the school's Complaints Procedure. If they remain dissatisfied, they may use the Department of Education and Youth complaints portal, available since September 2026. The school will then be asked to explain how it handled the incident and followed its complaints process.

## 10. Data Protection

Incident records, NCSE reports and review notes are personal data. They are stored securely by the Principal, shared only with those who need them, and kept in line with GDPR and the school's Data Protection Policy and records retention schedule. Reports to the Board of Management are anonymised. Where a student is 18 or over, their own consent is sought before information is shared, as set out in the SEN Policy.

## 11. Links to Other Policies

- **SEN Policy:** the Continuum of Support, Student Support Files, the SENCO's role, special classes, and the policy sections on Behaviours of Concern and Reduced School Days.
- **First Aid Policy:** checks for injury, emergency procedures, the Accident/Incident Reporting Document, Individual Healthcare Plans, and informing parents.
- **Code of Behaviour:** positive behaviour supports. Restraint is never a sanction under the Code.
- **Child Safeguarding Statement:** responding to any child protection concern.

## 12. Review and Ratification

This policy will be reviewed every two years, in line with the First Aid Policy. It will also be reviewed sooner after any serious incident, a pattern of incidents, or new Department guidance.

Policy adopted by the Board of Management on: **15th October 2026**

Next review date: **October 2028**

Signed: _____ Date: **15th October 2026**
Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed: _____ Date: **15th October 2026**
Principal

## Appendix A: Physical Restraint Incident Record (internal)

Complete on the day of the incident and give to the Principal. This internal record is separate from the NCSE Resource 4 form, which the Principal submits.

| Field | Details |
|---|---|
| **Student name, year and class / special class** | |
| **Date, time started and time ended** | |
| **Location** | |
| **Staff involved (names, roles, trained Y/N)** | |
| **Witnesses** | |
| **What happened before (triggers, early warning signs)** | |
| **De-escalation strategies tried** | |
| **Why restraint was necessary (the imminent risk)** | |
| **Hold used and how long it lasted** | |
| **Student's response during and after** | |
| **Injuries to student or staff (Accident/Incident Reporting Document completed Y/N; first aider's name)** | |
| **Parents/guardians informed (by whom, time, method)** | |
| **Principal informed (time)** | |
| **NCSE Resource 4 submitted (date)** | |
| **Chairperson of the Board informed (date)** | |
| **Child protection concern? (Y/N; DLP informed)** | |

| Field | Details |
|---|---|
| **Signed (staff) and date** | |
| **Signed (Principal) and date** | |

## Appendix B: Post-Incident Review Checklist

The SENCO leads this review within five school days of the incident.

- ☐ The student has been supported, and their account heard in a way suited to their age and needs
- ☐ Parents/guardians have been met and their views recorded
- ☐ Staff involved have been debriefed and their wellbeing checked
- ☐ Triggers and early warning signs have been identified
- ☐ The team has agreed what could prevent a recurrence (environment, timetable, sensory, communication, health)
- ☐ The Behaviour Support Plan and SSF have been updated where appropraite, using the Relate Phases of Support
- ☐ A NEPS, NCSE or outside agency referral has been considered
- ☐ Training needs have been identified for staff
- ☐ The incident log has been checked for patterns (time, place, staff, student)
- ☐ The Appendix A record, Resource 4 and the Board report are complete and filed securely

## Appendix C: Staff Trained in De-escalation and Safe Intervention

| Name | Role | Training (provider) | Date completed | Refresher due |
|---|---|---|---|---|
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