



# Restrictive Practice 2023

A statistical bulletin

Published November 2024

# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction .....                         | 2  |
| Main Points .....                          | 4  |
| Data and Methodology .....                 | 5  |
| Incidents of Restraint.....                | 7  |
| Physical .....                             | 7  |
| Seclusion .....                            | 8  |
| Appendix .....                             | 11 |
| Glossary .....                             | 11 |
| Historic data.....                         | 11 |
| Useful resources and further reading ..... | 14 |
| Contact.....                               | 15 |
| Further Information.....                   | 15 |
| Let us know what you think .....           | 15 |

# Introduction

The Care Inspectorate is a scrutiny body that supports improvement. This means we look at the quality of care in Scotland to ensure it meets high standards. Where we find that improvement is needed, we support services to make positive changes.

Our vision is that everyone experiences safe, high-quality care that meets their needs, rights and choices. We believe that the first priority of care services must always be the wellbeing of people experiencing care. The use of restrictive practices, including physical restraint, must be considered within the context of practitioners having a duty of care, and taking protective action to keep young people safe. We are committed to upholding and promoting human rights and the rights of the child. These rights may only be restricted as a last resort, including in the use of restraint. The use of force is required by law to be justifiable, reasonable and proportionate. For a physical intervention to be legally defensible and justifiable, the practitioner *“must reasonably believe that:*

- *A child will cause physical harm to themselves or another person;*
- *A child will run away and will put themselves or others at serious risk of harm; or*
- *A child will cause significant damage which is likely to have a serious emotional effect or create a physical danger”<sup>1</sup>*

**The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011** includes a specific requirement that *“A provider must ensure that no service user is subject to restraint, unless it is the only practicable means of securing the welfare and safety of that or any other service user and there are exceptional circumstances”* (4(1)(c)).

**The Promise** highlights that *“Scotland must ensure that whilst working towards change:*

- *The rights of children must be at the forefront of every decision about the use of restraint.*
- *The practice must only be used to keep people safe and must always follow a model which focuses on co-regulation, so that the workforce reflects on their responses.”<sup>2</sup>*

One of the recommendations of The Promise relates to the recording and reporting of both restraint and seclusion. This recommendation was made with the intention of better understanding how often these restrictive practices were used and monitoring the progress towards stopping them. As the body that collects data from Scottish care services on the use of restraint and restrictive practices, we have undertaken a number of strands of work to progress towards meeting these recommendations.

---

<sup>1</sup> (SIRCC, 2005, p. 35)

<sup>2</sup> (The Promise, 2020, p. 86)

We have been a member of the **Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group (SPRAG)**, a group that has wide sector representation, since 2019. We have worked collaboratively with SPRAG to revise the definitions that we use in relation to restraint and restrictive practices, to inform more accurate reporting. We used these definitions in the revised version of **Records that all registered children and young people's care services must keep and guidance on notification reporting**, and to create a new notification on the use of restraint and restrictive practices. Both of these pieces of work were carried out in collaboration with SPRAG, with the aim of enhancing clarity on what was reportable and improving the quality of data we hold. These same definitions were used to revise the content of the annual returns for residential childcare services to ensure consistency and were included in the annual returns for December 2023.

In publishing these statistics, we aim to provide enhanced transparency for the direction of travel of the sector, young people experiencing care, and other interested stakeholders.

## Main Points

- At 31 December 2023, there were 408 services providing residential care and support for children and young people across Scotland. Of these, 346 were care home services for children and young people, 32 were school care accommodation services (special residential schools) and 4 were secure accommodation services. These services are the focus of this report.<sup>3</sup>
- There were 6,331 incidents of physical restraint in 2023, and the median number of incidents of physical restraint for all services was 2.
- There were 729 incidents of seclusion in 2023, and the median number of incidents of seclusion for all services was 0.
- We have changed the data we collect about restrictive practice over time; therefore we cannot present reliable time series data in this report. Rather, the December 2023 data is a baseline for future reports. However, we have also included the historical data we have collected.

---

<sup>3</sup> The remaining 26 services are mainstream residential school services and school hostels which are not the focus of this report.

## Data and Methodology

See appendix for glossary of terms used in this publication.

This report is based on data collected by us from service providers in their annual return over the last five years from 2019 to 2023. The most recent annual return data covers the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.

This report shows figures for residential childcare services, which includes the following:

- Care homes for children and young people - providing accommodation with personal care and support to looked after children and young people.
- School care accommodation services (special residential schools) - provided for the purpose of young people's attendance at the school, meaning that young people experiencing care in these services often have disabilities, neurodiversity, or complex trauma and mental health needs.
- Secure accommodation services - providing accommodation for the purpose of restricting the liberty of young people, meaning that young people may pose significant risk to themselves, or others.
- The data presented in this publication is exclusively relating to care home services for children and young people, school care accommodation services (special residential schools) and secure accommodation services.

Figure 1.1 provides information about the size and scale of the different types of service. It shows that at 31 December 2023:

- The majority (346) of the residential services are care home services for children and young people, and these tend to be small services with an average of 5.3 places per service.
- There are 32 school care accommodation services (special residential schools), and these tend to be larger with 13 places on average.
- There are only 4 secure accommodation services, and these tend to be the largest type of service with 20.2 places on average.

The information above is important context in which to interpret the information about restraint in the rest of this report.

98% of these services completed and submitted an annual return covering the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023. If a service did not complete and submit an annual return, or submitted a return but did not answer these questions, we imputed data from information provided by the service from their last submitted return. We also investigated outliers in the data and validated or modified them as appropriate.

**Figure 1.1 Number of services and total and average capacity (registered places) of each service type at 31 December 2023.**

| Service                           | Subtype                    | Number of services | Total capacity | Average capacity |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Care Home Service                 | Children & Young People    | 346                | 1,828          | 5.3              |
| School Care Accommodation Service | Special Residential School | 32                 | 416            | 13.0             |
| Secure Accommodation Service      |                            | 4                  | 81             | 20.2             |

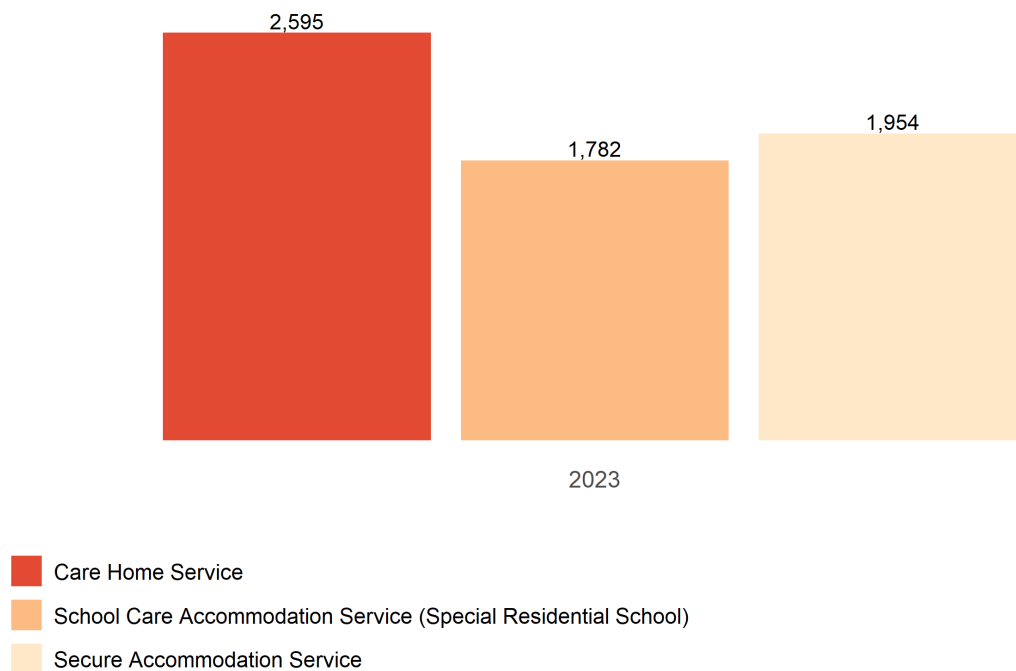
# Incidents of Restraint

For all incidents of restraint, figures are presented as absolute counts and therefore should be interpreted in the context of the number of services of each type and that services of the same type will have varying capacities. It is worth noting that for some services, only a few children and young people may have experienced the majority of incidents while most may have experienced few or no incidents. This should be taken into consideration when interpreting the data.

## Physical

Services were asked to report the number of incidents of physical restraint between 1 January and 31 December of each year. There were 6,331 incidents of physical restraint in 2023 across the three service types shown in Figure 1.2.

**Figure 1.2 Number of incidents of physical restraint between 1 January and 31 December**



The number of incidents of restraint may also relate to the size of the services. The number of restraints per place enables a more direct comparison between the different types of service. Figure 1.3 shows that, although the number of physical restraints was highest in care homes, the rate per place was the lowest of the three service types at 1.4 incidents of physical restraint per place. The rate was slightly higher in school care accommodation services (special residential schools) at 4.3 incidents per place and was highest in secure accommodation services at 24.1 incidents per place.



**Figure 1.3 Incidents of physical restraint between 1 January and 31 December 2023: rate per place and median.**

| Service                           | Subtype                    | Number of incidents | Total capacity | Rate per place | Median |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|
| Care Home Service                 | Children & Young People    | 2,595               | 1,828          | 1.4            | 1      |
| School Care Accommodation Service | Special Residential School | 1,782               | 416            | 4.3            | 10     |
| Secure Accommodation Service      |                            | 1,954               | 81             | 24.1           | 470    |

Not all individual services reported a physical restraint. Some reported none, while others have reported many. Using the median gives some insight into the distribution of incidents of physical restraint between services. The median is used as an average measure as some larger services that report more incidents can skew the mean average.

The median number of incidents of physical restraint for all services was 2 in 2023. This means that 50% of services had 2 or fewer incidents and 50% had 2 or more. By service type, the median number of incidents of physical restraint ranged from 1 for care home services to 470 for secure accommodation services as shown in Figure 1.3.

## Seclusion

Services were asked to report the number of incidents of seclusion between 1 January and 31 December of each year. There were 729 incidents of seclusion in 2023 across the three service types shown in Figure 1.4. Most of these were in secure accommodation services.

**Figure 1.4 Number of incidents of seclusion between 1 January and 31 December**

The number of incidents of seclusion may also relate to the size of the services. The number of incidents of seclusion per place enables a more direct comparison between the different types of service. Figure 1.5 shows that, as well as having the highest number of incidents of seclusion, secure accommodation also had the highest rate at 7.35 incidents per place compared with 0.07 for care homes and 0.03 for school care accommodation services (special residential schools).

**Figure 1.5 Incidents of seclusion between 1 January and 31 December 2023: rate per place and median.**

| Service                           | Subtype                    | Number of incidents | Total capacity | Rate per place | Median |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|
| Care Home Service                 | Children & Young People    | 120                 | 1,828          | 0.07           | 0      |
| School Care Accommodation Service | Special Residential School | 14                  | 416            | 0.03           | 0      |
| Secure Accommodation Service      |                            | 595                 | 81             | 7.35           | 194    |

Not all individual services reported seclusion incidents. Some reported none, while others have reported many. Using the median gives some insight into the distribution of incidents of seclusion between services. The median is used as an average measure as some larger services that report more incidents can skew the mean average.

The median number of incidents of seclusion for all services was 0 in 2023. This means that 50% of services had 0 incidents and 50% had 0 or more. By service type, the median number of incidents of seclusion ranged from 0 for care home services and

school care accommodation services (special residential schools) to 194 for secure accommodation services as shown in Figure 1.5.

# Appendix

## Glossary

The following definitions are those used in the most recent annual return and therefore may differ from updated definitions.

### **Physical Restraint**

An intervention in which staff hold a child to restrict their movement and should only be used to prevent harm.

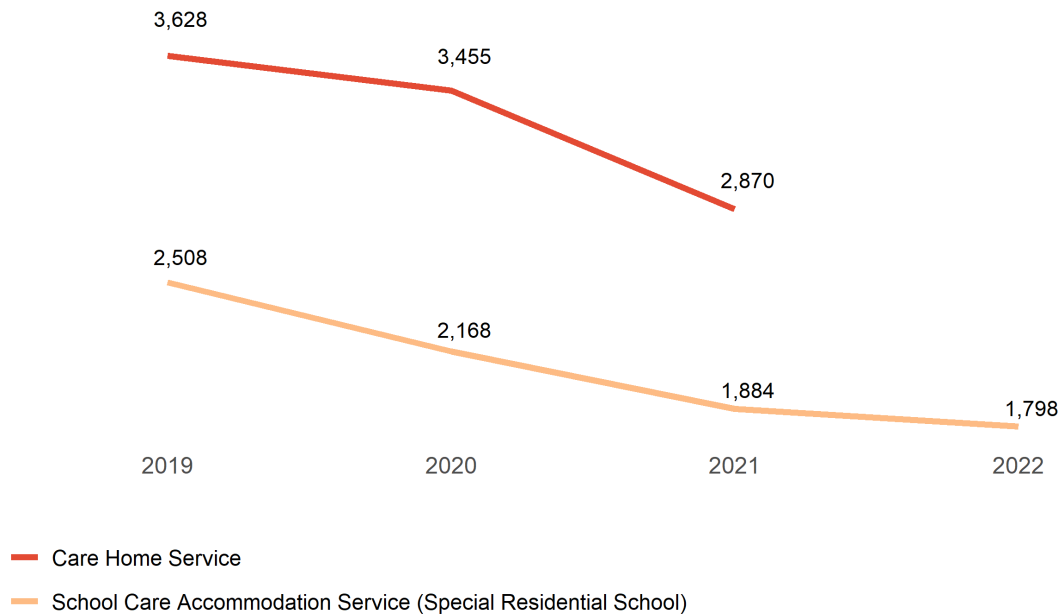
### **Seclusion**

An act carried out with the purpose of confining and isolating a child or young person, away from other children and young people and staff, in an area from which they are prevented from leaving.

## Historic data

Prior to 2022 for care home services and 2023 for school care accommodation services (special residential schools), services were asked to report the total number of incidents of restraint (Figure 1.6). Similarly, prior to 2022 secure accommodation services were asked to report the number of children and young people restrained (Figure 1.7). Although these changes to recording practice make it difficult to present a definitive trend, the data does indicate an overall reduction in the number of all incidents of restraint over this time period (Figure 1.6). However, the data also demonstrates an increase in the number of incidents of physical restraint from last year (Figure 1.8) to this year (Figure 1.2) and this is being monitored closely.

**Figure 1.6 Number of incidents of restraint between 1 January and 31 December**

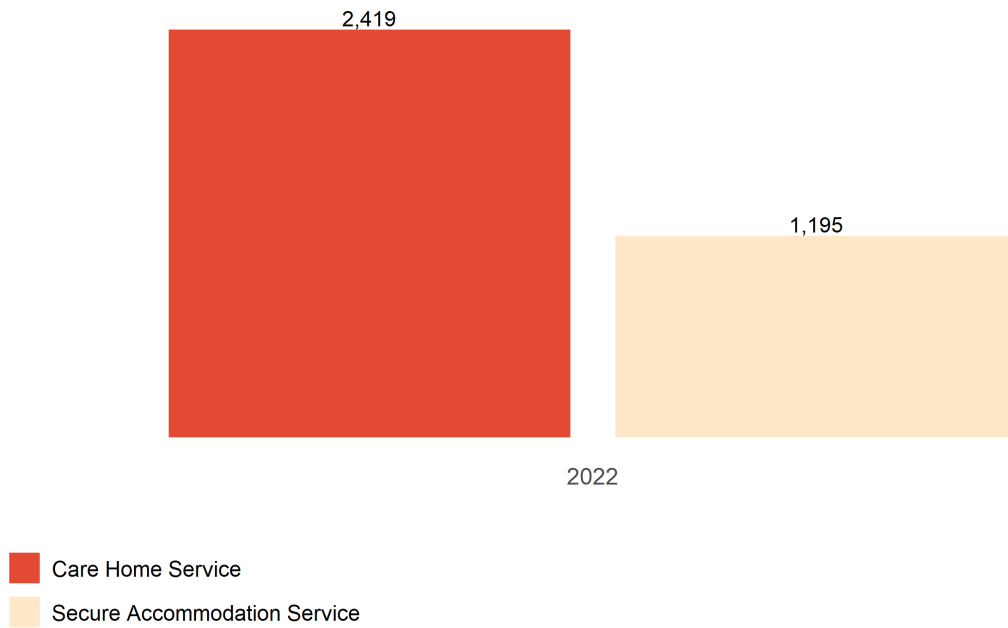


**Figure 1.7 Number of children and young people restrained in secure accommodation services between 1 January and 31 December.**

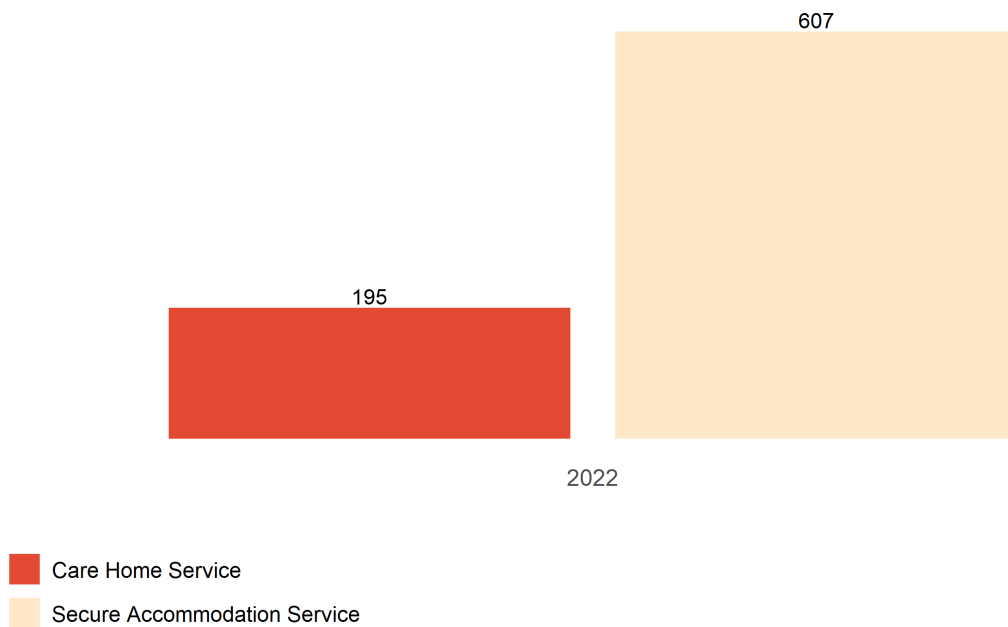
| Year | Number of children and young people restrained |
|------|--|
| 2019 | 159  |
| 2020 | 123  |
| 2021 | 119  |

From 2022 care home services and secure accommodation services were asked to report the number of incidents of different forms of restraint including physical restraint and seclusion (definitions are provided in the Glossary) (Figures 1.8 & 1.9). This was implemented from 2023 for school care accommodation services (special residential schools).

**Figure 1.8 Number of incidents of physical restraint between 1 January and 31 December**



**Figure 1.9 Number of incidents of seclusion between 1 January and 31 December**



## Useful resources and further reading

- **Health and Social Care Standards**
- **Holding Safely: A Guide for Residential Child Care Practitioners and Managers about Physically Restraining Children and Young People**
- **Position paper: Depriving and restricting liberty for children and young people in care home, school care and secure accommodation services**
- **The Promise**
- **Quality frameworks and Key questions**
- **Records that all registered children and young people's care services must keep and guidance on notification reporting**
- **Restraint Reduction Network Blanket Restrictions Toolkit**
- **Rights, risks, and limits to freedom**
- **Schedule 12 to the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010**
- **Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group**
- **Self-evaluation tool: The use of restrictive practices**
- **The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011**

## Contact

Intelligence Team  
[intelligenceteam@careinspectorate.gov.scot](mailto:intelligenceteam@careinspectorate.gov.scot)

For all media enquiries please email [media@careinspectorate.gov.scot](mailto:media@careinspectorate.gov.scot) or call 01382 207 171.

## Further Information

Further information and data for this publication are available from the [publication page](#) on our website.

## Let us know what you think

Let us know what you think about this publication [here](#).



## Headquarters

Care Inspectorate  
Compass House  
11 Riverside Drive  
Dundee  
DD1 4NY  
Tel: 01382 207100  
Fax: 01382 207289

Website: [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com)

This publication is available in alternative formats on request.



© Care Inspectorate 2024 | Published by: Communications | COMMS-1124-531

