

Professional Conduct Policy

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1.0 Policy statement

All our academies seek to provide a safe and supportive environment, secure the well-being and very best outcomes for children in our care. Staff can at times feel vulnerable in trying to achieve these aims; as such, guidelines on professional conduct are vital. The Trust is committed to supporting all staff to minimise the risk of being accused of improper conduct towards the young people with whom they come into contact during their working hours. Additionally, the expected standard of conduct amongst staff is high and staff need to understand that they are expected to act as role models for young people and be mindful of the reputation of the academy they work in and also the Trust as a whole. This policy has been formally adopted by the Trust Board.

2.0 Scope and purpose

- The expectations of professional conduct are the same regardless of which academy a member of staff works in (or in which role).
- All teachers are expected to be familiar with, and to uphold, all aspects of the Teachers' Standards and to recognise that conduct outside of work can impact on their employment, as they have a duty to uphold the reputation of the profession and the Trust.
- The senior leadership in each academy has responsibility for ensuring the professional conduct of members of staff.
- The governors expect the Principal and senior staff to model professionalism at all times.

The purpose of the policy is to:

- ensure a high standard of professional conduct amongst staff to safeguard children and protect staff from allegations
- ensure that the duty of care towards students and staff is promoted by raising awareness of illegal, unsafe and unwise behaviour
- ensure that staff exercise professional judgement appropriate to a professional in a 'position of trust'
- assist staff in monitoring their own standards and practice
- assist staff to work in a transparent and professional way

3.0 Private meetings with students

3.1 All staff should be aware of the dangers which may arise from private interviews with individual students. It is recognised that there are many occasions when confidential interviews take place. Where possible, such interviews should be conducted in a room with visual access, or with the door open, or in a room or area which is likely to be frequented by other people. Where such conditions cannot apply, staff are advised to ensure that another adult knows the interview is taking place. The use of 'Do Not Disturb' signs is not advisable. Where possible, another student, or another adult, should be present or nearby during the interview. Meetings or contact (e.g. via phone calls, texts, emails, social media) with students away from the academy premises (or indeed on the academy premises out of hours) are not permitted unless the specific approval of the Principal or Vice Principal has been obtained in advance. Staff must recognise that a relationship between a member of staff and a student cannot be a relationship of equals. There is a potential for exploitation and harm of vulnerable young people and staff have a responsibility to ensure that an unequal power balance is not used for personal advantage or gratification.

4.0 Peripatetic lessons

4.1 In order to maximise learning and progress, many peripatetic lessons are carried out in a one to one situation. In order to protect children and staff, these are always carried out within the school day at a pre-arranged time in a designated area. All peripatetic rooms have a glass door. Staff are trained in child protection procedures and are aware of their duty of care and expected code of conduct.

5.0 Confidentiality

5.1 Members of staff may have access to confidential information about students. This information should never be referred to casually or in order to humiliate or embarrass a student. Highly sensitive information should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis at the direction of the Designated Safeguarding Lead. Gossip about students, their families or colleagues, is unnecessary and unprofessional.

6.0 Propriety and behaviour

6.1 All staff have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of young people. They should adopt high standards of professional conduct in order to maintain this confidence. This includes attention to dress, appearance (see page 5) and self-expression and thinking about how they conduct their professional relationships with other members of staff. Standards may well vary from those adopted in their private life. Additionally, staff need to think carefully about the way that they present themselves on social network sites and the image of themselves, the academy and the Trust that they may be portraying.

6.2 Staff need to be aware that it is not uncommon for students to be strongly attracted to members of staff. Any situation should be responded to sensitively to maintain the dignity of all concerned. If you are aware of an infatuation involving yourself, or another, you should report it to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as you become concerned.

7.0 Sexual contact with young people

7.1 Any sexual behaviour by a member of staff with, or towards, a child or young person (up to the age of 19 in their care) is both inappropriate and illegal. Young people are protected by specific legal provisions regardless of whether they consent or not. Sexual activity does not just involve physical contact, it may also include causing children or young people to engage in or watch pornographic material. Staff should be aware that conferring special attention and favour upon a child or young person might be construed as being part of a 'grooming' process which is an offence (Sexual Offences Act 2003).

8.0 Caring for students with particular problems

8.1 Staff who have to administer first aid should ensure, whenever possible, that other students or another adult are present if they are in any doubt as to whether necessary physical contact could be misconstrued.

8.2 Wherever possible, staff that have to help students with physical disabilities should be accompanied by another adult.

9.0 Where physical contact may be acceptable

9.1 There may be occasions when a distressed student needs comfort and reassurance which may include physical comforting, such as a caring parent would give. Staff should use their discretion in such cases to ensure that what is, and what is seen by others present to be normal, and natural, does not become unnecessary and unjustified contact, particularly with the same student over a period of time. Where a member of staff has a particular concern about the need to provide this type of care and reassurance, he or she should seek the advice of the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

9.2 Some staff are likely to come into physical contact with students from time to time in the course of their duties. Examples include showing a student how to use a piece of apparatus or equipment and demonstrating a move or exercise during games or PE. Staff should be aware of the context within which such contact should properly take place and of the possibility of such contact being misinterpreted.

9.3 There may be rare occasions where it is necessary for staff to restrain a student to prevent him or her from inflicting damage on themselves or others. In such cases, only the minimum force should be used in order to restrain. In most cases of a student refusing to leave a room, or absconding, the student should not be physically handled. The incident should be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead. The only grounds to physically intervene would be if it was genuinely believed that the student was at risk to themselves or others. Physical force must never be used as a punishment, or to modify behaviour, or make a student comply with an instruction. Staff are advised that physical force may in law be regarded as an assault (see Care and Control of Pupils Policy). An accepted guideline that any complaint of inappropriate handling by a student (proven or otherwise) should be reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer for Child Protection (LADO). Following an investigation, it may be that information is passed to the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA).

10.0 Gratuitous physical contact with a student

10.1 Physical contact may be misconstrued by a student, parent or observer. Such contact can include well-intentioned formal or informal gestures such as putting a hand on the arm or shoulder which, if repeated with an individual, could lead to serious questions being raised. Therefore, as a general principle, staff should not make gratuitous physical contact with students and it is unwise to attribute touching to their teaching style as a way of relating to students.

11.0 Where conversations of a sensitive nature may be appropriate

11.1 Many staff have a pastoral responsibility for students and, in order to fulfil that role effectively, there will be occasions when conversations will cover particularly sensitive matters. Staff must, in these circumstances, use their discretion to ensure that, for example, any probing details cannot be construed as unjustifiable intrusion.

11.2 All staff may, from time to time, be approached by students for advice. Students may also appear distressed and staff may feel the need to ask if all is well. In such cases, staff must judge whether it is appropriate for them to offer counselling and advice or whether to refer the student to another member of staff with acknowledged pastoral responsibility for the particular student, i.e. Form Tutor, Head of Year, the Academy Nurse or Individual Needs / Special Needs Department. Staff must remember that discretion can never be guaranteed and anything of concern must be referred to the safeguarding team (see Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy).

12.0 Inappropriate comments and discussions with students

12.1 As well as physical contact, comments by staff to students, either individually or in groups, can be misconstrued. As a general principle, therefore, staff must not make unnecessary comments to, and about, students or other members of staff which could be construed to have a sexual connotation. It is also unacceptable for staff to introduce or encourage debates amongst students in class, or elsewhere, which could be construed as having a sexual connotation that is unnecessary given the context of the lesson or the circumstances. At the same time, it is recognised that a topic raised by a student is best addressed rather than ignored. Additionally, jokes of an 'adult nature' with sexual connotations should be avoided.

12.2 Systematic use of insensitive, disparaging or sarcastic comments is also unacceptable. As is drawing attention to any of the students' physical attributes, even in a positive manner. Additionally, teachers should communicate in standard English to avoiding over-familiar or colloquial terminology that may undermine their position of authority.

13.0 Choice and use of teaching materials

- 13.1 When using teaching materials of a particular sensitive nature, staff should be aware of the danger and that their selection could be misinterpreted and may be criticised after the event.

14.0 General relationships and attitudes

- 14.1 Staff should ensure that their relationships with students are appropriate to the age and gender of the student, taking care of their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought, particularly when staff of either sex is dealing with adolescent boys and girls.
- 14.2 Staff should be aware that some actions might be construed as sexual harassment.

15.0 Educational visits and extra-curricular activities

- 15.1 Staff should be particularly careful when supervising students on residential activities. They should always ensure that the male to female staff ratio is adequate for the effective supervision of both sexes. Similarly, the less formal approach adopted in extra-curricular activities generally can be open to misinterpretation. Although more informal relationships in such circumstances tend to be usual, the standard of behaviour expected of staff will be no different from the behaviour expected within the academy. Staff acting in any supervisory capacity should not drink alcohol in the presence of students or when on duty.
- 15.2 Staff should ensure that they:
- take responsibility for their own actions and behaviour; always question whether their conduct is professional (would you say / do that in front of a parent / governor?)
 - work and are seen to work in an open and transparent way
 - act and are seen to act in the child's best interests
 - avoid conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions
 - take advice from appropriate persons if in any doubt about actions taken or to be taken
 - discuss any misunderstandings with their senior leadership
 - identify and report any areas of risk or vulnerability
 - remove themselves from situations where they may be at risk from allegations
 - report concerns regarding self (e.g. suspected student infatuations)
 - report concerns regarding colleagues (see Whistleblowing Policy) and make records of any incident that occurs
 - work to the same professional standards regardless of gender or sexuality
 - consider the reputation of the profession and academy when using social network sites, including their interaction with other members of staff

16.0 Personal views and beliefs

- 16.1 All teachers have a duty to ensure that students have a broad and balanced education. It is important this is remembered when planning individual lessons as well as in the overall curriculum design. When dealing with, or teaching about political, religious or other sensitive issues, no personal beliefs should be imposed upon a student. Students should be enabled to make informed decisions and draw appropriate conclusions from being given balanced and reliable information. Any visitor or speaker allowed to deliver sessions to students should be made aware that they have to present balanced and accurate information and the content of any external presentation must be checked before it is delivered. A member of the SLT must be consulted before agreeing to allow a speaker / visitor into the academy.

17.0 Contact with students outside academy

- 17.1 As a general rule, conversations either by telephone, text or social networking sites with students at the academy are inadmissible. If a member of staff has any reason to give any private contact details (for example, their private mobile number in the case of an emergency on a field trip) to a student, they should inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead. Private communication is open to misinterpretation and may lead the member of staff to gain a bad reputation or lead to an accusation of unprofessional conduct. Staff should also think carefully about how they present themselves on any social networking website profile so as not to undermine their professional reputation. Informal meetings with students outside of academy should be avoided, unless there is family involvement (e.g. an 18th birthday party where parents are present), or it is an organised occasion (e.g. the Formal, a reunion party with other members of staff present, a leaving meal for Post-16 students with other members of the department present). If a member of staff is in any doubt about the appropriateness of contact, they should seek advice from the Vice Principal.



18.0 Social media

- 18.1 All staff need to be mindful of the need to make any social media sites as secure as possible. It is advisable to consider using an alternative name and avoiding references to the place of work. Comments about colleagues, students or their families on social media are never appropriate. Staff need to be careful about comments made in any electronic communication and how they portray their lifestyle, as privacy on any social media cannot be guaranteed. There is no acceptable reason for any member of staff to be connected with any child in the academy through social media. If a child attempts to contact you in any way, outside of work, by any means, you must contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Vice Principal immediately.

19.0 Staff dress code

19.1 General guidelines

- 19.1.2 All members of staff are expected to take a sensible and safe approach to dress and appearance, cleanliness and personal hygiene in order to promote a professional image of the academy at all times.
- 19.1.3 Staff other than those who undertake manual activity as part of their daily role must attend work each day in smart business dress suitable for a professional working environment. It should be non-offensive and contain no provocative logos or remarks which are inappropriate or likely to give offence to others.
- 19.1.3 Male staff must wear a shirt, tie, trousers and smart shoes (except PE staff or where uniform is provided). Male members of staff are permitted to work without a tie where this item of clothing could pose a risk to safety, for example, when operating or supervising machinery. Jeans are not permitted in term time.
- 19.1.4 Female staff must wear smart dresses or separates. Trousers may be full or ¾ length, but no shorter. Any cropped trousers must be formal and tailored (no leggings). Skirts and dresses should not be too short (just above knee length at the shortest). Shirts, blouses, knitwear and other smart tops may be worn, plus smart sensible shoes or boots (no flip-flops or backless sandals). Jeans are not permitted in term time.
- 19.1.5 The requirements of particular faiths to wear specific types of clothing will be respected so long as the item of clothing does not pose a hazard to the health and safety of employees.
- 19.1.6 It is not acceptable to wear clothing that over-exposes parts of the body, e.g. stomach, chest, etc. or that is transparent or see-through.
- 19.1.7 You are permitted to wear discrete earrings, finger rings or other jewellery. A small nose-stud is permissible, although no other form of facial piercing is. Tattoos should be appropriate to a place of work and given that staff work in schools, a consideration must be given to the appropriateness or otherwise of certain images. Leaders in schools must be particularly mindful of the appropriateness of their professional appearance. What may be acceptable for a member of staff, may not be for a leader. Perfume and aftershave should be discreet and not overpowering.

19.2 Holidays / trips

- 19.2.1 During school holidays and on school trips, dress can be casual if the students are 'dressing down' however it should still be sensible and safe.

19.3 Sports clothing

- 19.3.1 It is recognised that some activities require the wearing of tracksuits or shorts. However, it is expected that staff will revert to normal clothing once the activity is completed. It is acknowledged that there are some areas of work where, due to the continuous nature of the activity, appropriate tracksuit attire is acceptable during the school day, e.g. PE staff.

19.4 Uniform

- 19.4.1 Uniform is provided for staff in roles where physical work is undertaken. Uniform must be worn at all times.

19.5 Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- 19.5.1 Where safety clothing and personal protective equipment is issued, it must be worn where the risk assessment dictates or as directed in accordance with health and safety requirements.

20.0 The Welfare of the Child is Paramount Children Act 1989

20.1 Further reference:

Child Abuse and the Children Act – A Critical Analysis of the Teacher's Role by Gill Sage, ATL Solicitor. (One copy in the Library).