

# Professional conduct policy

## Professional conduct policy: document provenance

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<b>Date of next review</b>	July 2027
<b>Summary of changes in this review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Significant changes to process to recognise the introduction of our business services model</li><li>• Changes to naming conventions for senior leaders</li></ul>
<b>Related policies and documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DfE Teachers' Standards</li><li>• Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE)</li><li>• Online safety and acceptable use of IT policy</li><li>• Child protection and safeguarding policy</li><li>• Dealing with allegations of abuse against staff policy</li><li>• Disciplinary policy</li><li>• Data protection policy</li><li>• Academy behaviour policy</li><li>• Academy Care and control of students policy</li><li>• Academy intimate care policy</li><li>• Academy relationships and health / sex education policy</li><li>• Propriety and behaviour</li></ul>

Unless there are legislative or regulatory changes in the interim, the policy will be reviewed as per the review cycle. Should no substantive change be required at this point, the policy will move to the next review cycle.



## Contents

Section		Page
1.0	Policy statement	4
2.0	Scope and purpose	4
3.0	Professional conduct	4
4.0	Confidentiality	5
5.0	Staff dress code	5
6.0	General relationships with students	5
7.0	Choice and use of teaching materials	5
8.0	Peripatetic lessons	5
9.0	Working or meeting one-on-one with students	5
10.0	Educational visits and extra-curricular activities	6
11.0	Contact with students outside work	6
12.0	Personal views and beliefs	6
13.0	Social Media	6
14.0	Inappropriate comments and discussions with students	6
15.0	Where conversations of a sensitive nature may be appropriate	7
16.0	Where physical contacts with students may be acceptable	7
17.0	Caring for students with particular needs	7
18.0	Gratuitous physical contact with a student	7
19.0	Sexual contact with young people	7
20.0	Review	7

## 1. Policy statement

- 1.1. Our trust seeks to provide a safe and supportive environment which promotes wellbeing and the best outcomes for our students. To ensure that our staff are supported in achieving this aim, these guidelines on professional conduct are vital. They are produced as part of our efforts to minimise the risk of staff being accused of improper conduct towards the young people who attend our academies.
- 1.2. The Children Act makes clear that the welfare of the child is paramount when considering any competing rights / considerations and is the principal that sits at the base of our child protection and safeguarding policy; in cases of serious or gross misconduct we will always cooperate with the relevant statutory safeguarding partners, the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).
- 1.3. Where the test for harm is met and substantiated in any allegation, we will always consider a referral to the TRA and DBS. The relevant principal or school trust leader is responsible for making the referrals with support from our trust head of HR.

## 2. Scope and Purpose

- 2.1. This policy applies equally to all of our employees and volunteers regardless of the role they undertake for our trust and seeks to set out the high levels of professional conduct that should be displayed.
- 2.2. In this document we set out the minimum standards we expect of our staff, and we recognise that in places they are rightly higher than the minimum standards of conduct set out in legislation or required by social norm; this results from the fact that all of our staff are expected to act as role models for young people and because the reputation of our trust is carried, in large part, through the actions of our staff.
- 2.3. In addition to the principles in the document, the wide range of professionals we employ are also required to adhere to the standards their own professional bodies set out (e.g. teachers are expected to act in accordance with the Teacher's Standards set out by the Department for Education (DfE)). This policy must be read in conjunction with:
  - DfE Teachers' Standards
  - Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE)
  - Online safety and acceptable use of IT policy
  - Child protection and safeguarding policy
  - Dealing with allegations of abuse against staff policy
  - Disciplinary policy
  - Data protection policy
  - Academy behaviour policy
  - Academy Care and control of students policy
  - Academy intimate care policy
  - Academy relationships and health / sex education policy
  - Propriety and behaviour

## 3. Professional conduct

- 3.1. All employees and volunteers in our trust have a responsibility to maintain the confidence of our students, their families and the wider public in our ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of the students who attend our academies. In doing this, members of staff are required to take action, where appropriate, to protect children from maltreatment, prevent impairment in health and development and ensure children grow up in safe and effective care. Staff should be aware of the signs of abuse and neglect and speak to the relevant designated safeguarding lead without delay should they have any concerns about a child. Further information is available in our trust child protection and safeguarding policy, which is required reading for all members of staff.
- 3.2. Staff are expected to adopt high standards of professional conduct in order to maintain the confidence of our students, families and the wider public; this includes attention to dress, appearance, how they express themselves and how they conduct professional relationships with other members of our staff. Additionally, members of staff should think about how they present themselves outside of work, especially on social media, and the image of themselves, their academy and our trust that they may be portraying. KCSIE sets out the requirement that those involved in educating children should never act or behave in a way which could call into question their suitability to work with children.
- 3.3. Staff are required to report any concerns, no matter how low-level or small, and even if they cause no more than a sense of unease or nagging doubt that an adult working in, or on behalf of, our trust may have behaved in a way inconsistent with this



professional conduct policy or may in some other way have given cause for concern, even if this behaviour occurs outside of work. The appropriate action is detailed in our policy on dealing with allegations of abuse against staff members.

- 3.4. It is not uncommon for students to develop a strong attachment / infatuation with a member of staff. Any situation should be responded to sensitively to maintain the dignity of all concerns. If you are aware of an infatuation involving yourself or another, you should report it to the relevant Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as you become aware.

## **4. Confidentiality**

- 4.1. Members of staff will, in order to undertake their role, likely have access to sensitive / confidential information about students, colleagues and our trust. This information should never be referred to casually or used in order to embarrass, intimidate or humiliate a student, family or colleague. Highly sensitive information will only be shared on a 'need to know' basis at the discretion of the relevant designated safeguarding lead, principal, functional lead or school trust leader.
- 4.2. All information should, at all times, be handled in accordance with our trust data protection policy.

## **5. Staff dress code**

- 5.1. General Guidelines. Members of staff are expected to dress professionally and appropriately at work; where particular clothing is required for health, safety and hygiene purposes, it must be work. Staff should wear their ID card with a trust-issued lanyard at all times whilst at work.
- 5.2. Training / Data and planning days. On days when students are not present, staff may dress more casually; this should still represent an appropriate standard of dress for the workplace.
- 5.3. Holidays / trips. During school holidays and on school trips, dress can be casual if the students are 'dressing down'; however, it should still be sensible, appropriate to the activity and remain professional.
- 5.4. Sports clothing. It is recognised that some activities require the wearing of sports clothing. It is expected that staff will change back into normal clothing once the activity is completed; however, there are some areas of work (e.g. PE) where, due to the continuous nature of the activity, it is acceptable to remain in sports clothing all day.

## **6. General relationships with students**

- 6.1. Staff must always consider their attitude, demeanour and language when engaging with students and ensure that relationships with students are appropriate to the age and gender of the student, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to speculation or comment.
- 6.2. Members of staff are expected to be aware that the professional relationship between them and any student is not a relationship of equals and are required to ensure that they do not act in such a way as to gain personal advantage or gratification from the relationship, no matter how inadvertently.

## **7. Choice and use of teaching materials**

- 7.1. Teachers should always ensure that the selection of teaching methods and materials can not be misinterpreted and criticised; particular care in this regard should be taken when teaching particularly sensitive topics. Teachers should always be able to clearly relate any materials / methods used with the relevant learning outcome.

## **8. Peripatetic lessons**

- 8.1. Peripatetic lessons are a key part of the experience at many of our academies and, in order to maximise learning and progress, are often carried out in a one-to-one situation. Peripatetic members of staff must have had appropriate training and be aware of the increased risks associated with working one-to-one with students. Wherever possible, rooms used for peripatetic lessons should have a glass door or other means of good visual access, with lessons taking place in a designated area of the academy at pre-determined times.

## **9. Working or meeting one-on-one with students**

- 9.1. Staff should be aware of the potential dangers that arise when meeting privately with individual students. Whilst it is recognised that there are times when this is necessary, where possible, such one-to-one meetings should be held in rooms with good visual access, with the door open where possible / practicable, and in an area likely to be frequented by other people. Staff meeting on their own with an individual student must make another adult aware of where / when the conversation is taking place beforehand, wherever possible, and the use of 'Do Not Disturb' signs is heavily discouraged.
- 9.2. Meetings or other contact with students away from the academy premises (or at the academy 'out of hours') is not permitted without the express permission of the relevant principal.



## 10. Educational visits and extra-curricular activities

- 10.1. Members of staff supervising students on activities away from the academy, including residential activities, should exercise additional caution. They should ensure that appropriate risk assessments and staffing ratios are in place, plus the relevant approvals from our trust and local authority must be in place prior to leaving the academy.
- 10.2. The less formal approach adopted in activities away from an academy can lead to a greater risk of misinterpretation, and whilst the relationship between staff and students may feel more informal, the same high standards of behaviour and propriety are expected of staff as when at the academy.
- 10.3. Members of staff acting in any supervisory capacity must not drink alcohol in the presence of students or when on duty; members of staff must ensure that any consumption of alcohol 'off duty' does not impair their ability to supervise students when next on duty.

## 11. Contact with students outside work

- 11.1. Conversations with students by telephone, text or on social media sites should, in general, not occur. Where it is necessary then it should only be with the express permission of the relevant principal, or another senior leader deputising for the principal, and should always be reported to the relevant designated safeguarding lead. Members of staff should remember that private communication is always open to misinterpretation and may lead to an accusation of inappropriate conduct or damage the reputation of a member of staff. Unsolicited contact from students by phone, text or on social media must always be reported to the relevant designated safeguarding lead.

## 12. Personal views and beliefs

- 12.1. All members of staff have a responsibility to ensure that students receive a broad and balanced education in our academies, and teachers have a particular responsibility to ensure that this is reflected in both the overall design of the curriculum and the individual lessons they deliver. It is important that when teaching, particularly when dealing with political, religious or otherwise sensitive topics, teachers do not impose personal beliefs on students. Students should be enabled to make informed decisions and draw appropriate conclusions by being given balanced and reliable information. It must be clear that some views are unacceptable, and the expression of them is in contravention of the Equality Act 2010.
- 12.2. Where outside speakers are being brought into an academy, they must be approved by the relevant principal and must be made aware of the need to present balanced and reliable information; it is the responsibility of the staff member arranging the visit to check any presentation before it is delivered.

## 13. Social Media

- 13.1. We recognise the right to self expression and that staff are entitled to use, and express their personal views on, social media; however, staff must also think about how they present themselves on social media so as not to undermine their professional reputation and to avoid comments they make being misinterpreted and causing damage to their own / our trust's reputation. Staff are encouraged to use the privacy settings available on most social media sites to restrict the audience of their activity. More information on our expectations can be found in our social media policy.
- 13.2. There is no acceptable reason for any member of staff to be connected to any of our students on social media; should a child attempt to contact a member of staff on social media, they must report this immediately to the relevant designated safeguarding lead.

## 14. Inappropriate comments and discussions with students

- 14.1. Staff should be aware that comments they make to students, whilst teaching or in general conversation, can be misconstrued and cause concern or offence even when not intended. As a general principle, members of staff must not make comments to and about students or other members of staff which could be construed to have a sexual or otherwise inappropriate 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 sexualised or otherwise inappropriate connotation that is unnecessary given the context of the lesson being delivered or the circumstances; at the time it is recognised that a topic raised by a student is best addressed than ignored and staff are expected to provide appropriate challenge. Jokes of an 'adult nature' must be avoided.
- 14.2. The use of insensitive, disparaging or sarcastic comments is also unacceptable. Staff must not draw attention to students' physical attributes, even if the comment is intended in a positive manner. Teachers should communicate in standard English to ensure they avoid overly familiar or colloquial terminology that may undermine their position of authority.





## **15. Where conversations of a sensitive nature may be appropriate**

- 15.1. 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.
- 15.2. 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 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).

## **16. Where physical contact with students may be acceptable**

- 16.1. There may be occasions when a distressed student needs comfort and reassurance, which may include age-appropriate physical comforting, such as a parent/carer 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, advice should be sought from the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- 16.2. 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.
- 16.3. There may be rare occasions where it is necessary for staff to restrain a student to prevent the student from inflicting damage on themselves or others. Our trust's Care and Control of Students policy gives further details to support staff action in such cases and sets out the reporting requirements following any physical intervention with students.

## **17. Caring for students with particular needs**

- 17.1. Staff who have to administer first aid should ensure, whenever possible, that other students or another adult is present if they are in any doubt as to whether necessary physical contact could be misconstrued.
- 17.2. Wherever possible, staff that help students with physical disabilities should be accompanied by another adult.

## **18. Gratuitous physical contact with a student**

- 18.1. Physical contact may be misconstrued by a student, parent/carer 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.

## **19. Sexual contact with young people**

- 19.1. Any sexual behaviour or contact, including grooming patterns of behaviour by a member of staff with, or towards, a child or young person, is both unacceptable 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). In line with KCSIE, we will report all allegations or suggestions of sexual impropriety to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and, if we believe an offence may have occurred, to the local police.
- 19.2. In all situations where we believe inappropriate sexual activity with or towards a child or young person has occurred and involves one of our staff, we will, after completing any necessary investigation, make a referral to DBS and, for teaching staff, the TRA. It is the responsibility of the relevant principal (school trust leader if the concern is related to a principal) to make the required referrals with the support of our trust head of HR.

## **20. Review**

- 20.1. This policy has at its formation, been subject to consultation with recognised trade unions. Unless there are legislative or regulatory changes in the interim, this policy will be reviewed every year; this will include consultation on any changes with recognised trade unions. Should no substantive change be required at this point, the policy will move to the next review cycle.

