

Appropriate Physical Contact & Language Policy

This policy has been written for...	All staff at West Heath School who have contact with students, their parents and carers and for those who sponsor student's places. All staff should have a detailed knowledge of this policy. Whilst students will not be familiar with the details of this written policy document they will be made aware of its contents through their day to day interactions with staff.
Copies of this policy may be obtained from...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School web site - http://www.westheathschool.com • It is available as a hard copy on request from the school office • Hard copies for reference are filed in the staff room
This policy links with the following policies and documents...	<p>Positive handling Exclusion, Staff Disciplinary Policy, Health & Safety, Child Protection Rights and Responsibilities, Code of Conduct (both student documents) Staff Handbook Whistle Blowing policy</p>
Participants and consultees in the formulation of this policy were...	The Principal, senior leadership team, student services committee and the trustees of the School. A representative group of parents were invited to make comments and suggestions.
Edition, Review frequency and dates	<p>This is edition 8, released November 2016 This policy will be reviewed every two years It is due for review in November 2018</p>
Relevant statutory guidance, circulars, legislation & other sources of information are...	<p>The Education Act 1996 National Guidance (DfES/DoH 2002) (DfE) Use of Reasonable Force Guidance 2013</p>
The Lead Member of staff is	Vice Principal Teaching and Learning
Definitions and key terms used in this policy...	
The Rationale and Purpose of this policy	This policy concerns a very sensitive aspect of School life where, if things were to go wrong, the results could be very serious and damaging to either staff, students or both. For this reason there is a great deal of applied policy in the form of guidance.
Appendices	There are no appendices to this policy

Introduction

This policy and guidance is written from the perspective that all members of staff have a well-intentioned and honourably motivated attitude to our students. Nothing that is written below is intended to indicate otherwise. The school has a rigorous screening procedure as part of the recruitment process including checks by the disclosure and barring service. Those who are appointed have the full confidence of the principal and senior managers.

The Aims and Objectives of this policy are

- To ensure that the rights of both students and staff in this area are fully recognised.
- To ensure that every member of staff working with students is fully aware of his or her responsibilities before starting to work at the School.
- To set out a clear description of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in relation to physical contact and language.
- To provide illustrative guidance and examples to enable staff to use their own judgement within the context of their own work and relationships in School.

Part One: Physical Contact – Policy and Guidance

Rights – students and staff

It is imperative that we recognise that all students have the right *both* to be touched and the right not to be touched. In all cases except where a student is a danger to either themselves or others the decision regarding touch must lie with the student. Staff must be aware of the student's reaction to touch and respect absolutely their right to not be touched. Clearly such rights also extend to all staff.

Possible consequences:

Some students will have memories of previous life experiences where touch has been unwelcome and painful. Such memories may emanate from physical and or sexual abuse. It is essential therefore that all staff know what the possible consequence of touching a student may be. A well intentioned but unwanted embrace could lead to great distress in some students. It could result in an immediate and violent reaction or a delayed response, which may also be violent. In addition the reawakening of painful experiences may also prevent some students from coming to terms with their difficulties and consequently disrupt any progress they may be making.

Dangers for Students

Students, who are emotionally vulnerable or immature, are very often starved of affection and comfort. It is not surprising therefore that they sometimes bond strongly with a particular member of staff and wish to draw emotional comfort from that relationship. This is all the more true if they have not experienced consistent and solid parenting. In some instances some of our students will have an extreme attachment disorder which will cause them great difficulty in trusting any adult relationship. Such distrust is likely to manifest itself at either end of a continuum from excessive and extreme over familiarity including touch to absolute rejection of any comfort either verbal or physical. In their great need, they will not know where to draw the line and if they are not handled wisely there is a danger of them becoming inappropriately dependent. Sometimes children and young people who have experienced extreme trauma in their lives are unable or unwilling to move on preferring instead to stay in their own narrowly constructed but safe personal state. Our aim is to help our students change their behaviour

and attitudes, and beyond this, to help them move on to independence, we do them a disservice if we do not challenge as well as support them to do so.

The likelihood of an unhelpful attachment becoming particularly acute increases when the student and member of staff are of opposite genders. Both girls and boys, for whom the teenage years may be very bewildering and confusing, frequently develop crushes on their teacher, support assistant or care worker of the opposite gender.

It is very important to be aware of this and to take steps not to make their teenage years even more stressful than they already are. Our students are bombarded with messages and images from entertainment, advertising and the media promoting the themes of sex and sexuality; same sex genders addressed.

Dangers for Staff

In recent years there have been a number of proven cases of abuse by staff in schools and residential homes. This has reinforced the view that “it can and does happen”. The most serious danger to staff of over-familiarity or inappropriate physical contact with students is that it might make them vulnerable to an accusation of impropriety.

Legislation and guidance has been strengthened to ensure that children and young people are protected from harm or the causes of harm. It is imperative that all staff are vigilant and act quickly if they believe a colleague is putting himself or herself at risk. Should an accusation be made against a member of staff, it would be necessary to conduct a thorough and rigorous investigation.

Whilst it is unusual for children and young people to make malicious allegations it is not totally inconceivable that a student who has been spoken to about inappropriate behaviour might wish to retaliate against a member of staff by making an accusation.

Professional Relationships

The core principle is that we have professional relationships with our students. There is a great deal of difference between being **friendly** and being their **friend**. As professionals we fulfil a variety of roles, - from educator and guide to role model and mentor. In these roles our concern is to facilitate the changes for which the student has been entrusted to our school. Our primary aim is not to make them feel comfortable as a friend might, but to facilitate their personal, academic and social development as a friendly professional. Appropriate boundaries of professional contact and conduct must not be breached.

Yet there are times when physical contact is appropriate and very helpful and good. After all we are human beings and not robots. The remainder of this document provides some guidance about when, and what this might be. What is discussed below is not exhaustive but it is hoped give enough of a flavour for staff to make judgements about what is appropriate.

The Right Occasion An arm on the shoulder, linking arms, (but not holding hands across the genders), a hug from the side. All these can be helpful and appropriate for example when:

- a student is upset and in need of comfort;
- a student has heard some bad news;
- a student has resolved a conflict as part of repairing and rebuilding a relationship;
- a student has heard some really good news;

On rare occasions, more likely with a younger or immature student, he or she may be so upset that they may rush to sit on the knee/lap of the member of staff. In this instance the member of staff should ensure that the student sits across the lap and not astride, and so far as possible there should be a coat or covering of some description between the student and the member of staff. Additionally the student should be encouraged to move to a chair of his or her own where comfort can be given using a sideways hug. The transition from lap to chair should be managed with sensitivity and without conveying rejection. The student should be made aware at a later stage i.e. when calm why sitting on laps is not considered to be appropriate or in their best interests.

The common feature is that these contacts should be brief, but meaningful, and the situation would move on.

The Wrong Occasion It is not appropriate to hug, link arms or hold hands and the like:

- **In a lesson.** Lessons are for learning and students should be encouraged to listen and focus on the task in hand. Some students, especially those starved of affection at home may wish to snuggle up to a sympathetic teaching assistant as they listen to the teacher. This might not interfere with their learning but it may well provoke an envy response from other students in the group and interfere with their learning. It should therefore be discouraged. Such discouragement will need to be managed sensitively and in a way that does not convey rejection;
- **As a matter of habit** because this will promote the dangers outlined above. Comfort after a temporary crisis is different but we need to help our students move on;
- **If it is known or likely that a student has developed a crush** on the member of staff concerned.

Other Issues It is acknowledged that because of their life histories, our students need times when they can speak confidentially to staff.

Where individual meetings with students are planned the member of staff will need to take into account the student's unique characteristics and previous life experiences. The meeting can then be planned to ensure it is conducted in a way that is safe for both the student and themselves. Additionally staff should make a colleague aware of the meeting and how long it will last.

As a general rule it is unwise for members of staff to be alone with any student in a room with the door closed. Some students, for example when there has been a family background of sexual abuse or rape, would feel particularly uncomfortable in such a situation. Others from a similar

background may become sexually precocious.

There may, of course be exceptional brief occasions when this happens and is unavoidable. For the benefit of both the student and member of staff, either or both of whom may be uncomfortable in such a situation, as a general rule, the door should be left wide open. If it is necessary to have a conversation – say in relation to an incident or in connection with the lesson it is advisable to have another adult in the room –either discreetly occupied with something else or as a participant. If this were not possible it would be best to postpone the conversation.

There is a great deal of difference between the relaxed, colloquial language used between friends on a social occasion and the more measured and considered speech between students and staff in a professional context. In school we are at work and have a job to do. This is not to say that we cannot have fun but we do need to be mindful of acceptable boundaries. At all times, even when having fun, we are role models to our students.

Part Two: Appropriate Language – policy and guidance

Our Language Should: Reflect kindness and respect for the student and his/her dignity – (even if we are confronting them over some misdemeanour!). Shouting is not appropriate. A controlled raised voice may be effective sometimes but there is a great deal of difference between the two;

- be clear and direct;
- model good expression and appropriate choice of vocabulary (avoiding inappropriate slang).

Our Language Should Not

- be overly familiar or intimate;
- contain swear words or inappropriate sexual words or metaphors;
- contain sarcasm, double entendres or innuendo;
- be demeaning to the person spoken or referred to;
- give the impression that we are talking down to our students.

Bad and inappropriate language should always be challenged

Students who use bad or inappropriate language should always be challenged however the challenge may be delayed if the response to the unwanted behaviour is part of a plan which includes ignoring unwanted behaviours in order to focus on positive behaviours. To allow bad language to go unchecked is to convey the message that it is acceptable. It can also say to that student that we expect no more from you and in so doing put a ceiling on their development. As part of the checking it is beneficial to the student to ask them to rephrase the comment in more acceptable terms and, if they find this difficult model it for them and ask them to repeat it. The fact that some students come from environments where swearing and obscene references are commonplace does not excuse them using them in school. They can and must learn to moderate their language in school and we must help them. What may be appropriate in one place is not in another both for staff and students. We are a school.

Persons with particular responsibilities	The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of all staff. The policy should be reviewed in the light of any staff disciplinary actions relating to this area of school life or should there be a particularly noteworthy incident with a student. It may be necessary to incorporate additional guidance.
Other Participants & Stakeholders	Parents
Monitoring & Evaluation	Vice Principal Teaching and Learning Student Services Committee
Staff Development	All staff receive guidance on appropriate touch via the Team Teach protocols and induction
