



## Wellington Area Rural Federation



# CODE OF CONDUCT FOR STAFF, Volunteers, Governors and Work Experience Students WORKING WITH CHILDREN September 2024

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**The health, safety and well-being of all our children is of paramount importance to all the adults who work in our schools. Our children have the right to protection, regardless of age, gender, race, culture or disability. They have a right to be safe in our schools.**

All staff should clearly understand the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in their dealings with pupils.

This advice is relevant to all employees working with children.

Staff should adopt a professional, common sense approach in their day-to-day dealings with children. This code does not replace or take priority over the County Council's Child Protection Procedures. All staff must be aware of the action that must be taken by employees when child abuse is suspected whether inside the school, at home or elsewhere or following any disclosure of alleged abuse. A copy of the County Council's Child Protection Procedures is available from the Head Teacher.

However, heightened awareness of abuse on the part of parents and pupils and a high media profile given to child abuse cases make it advisable for all employees to re-examine their approaches to individual pupils and their teaching styles to ensure that these do not give any grounds for doubt or suspicion on the part of colleagues, parents or pupils. Many staff will be reassured by the advice contained in this code. It will in many cases simply confirm good professional practice.

## 2. THE CODE

### 2.1 General

Employees should take care that their relationships with pupils reflect the age, gender and maturity of the pupils. It will be particularly important to ensure that all aspects of demeanour, language and attitudes - however conveyed - do not give rise to misunderstandings. Ambiguous or ambivalent comment and conduct, in particular, should be avoided.

#### 2.1.2 Emotional Conduct

We believe that it is essential to use polite, respectful language when talking to anyone, and especially children. The persistent and hurtful use of sarcastic, demeaning or insensitive comments towards young people may be regarded as a form of abuse which is potentially very damaging and which we avoid.

#### 2.2 Physical Contact

Staff must not make gratuitous physical contact with pupils and should avoid attributing 'touching' to their teaching style as a way of relating to pupils. Touching pupils, including well-intentioned informal and formal gestures such as putting a hand on the shoulder or arm, can, **if repeated regularly**, lead to questions being raised. There will be occasions when physical contact will be acceptable. In general these will fall into one of four categories:

### **2.2.1 Action to prevent harm or injury to the pupil or to others**

If it is necessary to prevent a pupil causing injury to him/herself or to others the use of minimum force and contact necessary to prevent harm or injury is acceptable and defensible. Such incidents must always be recorded in our incident book. (see 2.10 below).

### **2.2.2 Comforting a pupil in distress**

There is no easy definition of what is acceptable since much will depend on the circumstances, the age of the pupil, the extent and cause of the distress and the alternative means of providing comfort. Employees will need to use their professional judgement and discretion in relation to these factors. Employees should consider how others might perceive the action, even if no one else is present, and ensure that it does not develop into unnecessary contact. Particular care must be taken in instances, which involve the same pupil over a period of time.

### **2.2.3 Unavoidable contact.**

This is a particularly sensitive issue in subjects such as Physical Education and Drama and in some forms of skills coaching. All Staff must be alert to the possibilities of misinterpreting any contact. To avoid such misunderstanding all planned contact must be demonstrably unavoidable. It may be, for example, that alternative methods involving demonstrations of particular techniques by the teacher or a particularly competent pupil may be more appropriate than modifying a pupil's technique by physical contact. In cases of doubt or uncertainty staff should seek advice from their Headteacher. There are other occasions when physical contact may be questioned even if innocent in intention. Employees should therefore ensure that their actions recognise the possibility of misinterpretation and are open to the scrutiny of colleagues. Individual professional judgments will be required about the level of physical contact with individual children, which will take account of their age, circumstances and background.

### **2.2.4 Contact initiated by a child**

Children will sometimes initiate contact. This may for example be taking hold of a teacher's hand when walking alongside them or a more obviously affectionate gesture such as giving a hug. This requires considerable sensitivity as it would be wrong to rebuff or reject the child but equally it would be inappropriate to allow the contact to be prolonged or over affectionate. Staff should be particularly careful where other members of staff are not present. If a child regularly initiates contact this should be discussed with the headteacher or senior staff.

### **2.2.4 Corporal Punishment**

Any form of physical punishment is prohibited under disciplinary procedures and potentially actionable in law. This also applies to any form of physical response to misbehaviour, with the exception noted in 2.2.1 above.

## **2.3 Private meetings**

Private meetings, by their very nature, provide opportunities for pupils to make malicious allegations. Staff and others must therefore recognise this possibility and plan such meetings accordingly. It is advisable to avoid remote areas of the school and to ensure that wherever possible the door is left open or visual contact with others is maintained. Under no circumstances should meetings with individual pupils be arranged off the school premises without the prior approval of the Headteacher or any senior colleague with delegated authority to approve such meetings. This includes the transporting of individual children in private cars. Such meetings should, in any event, be discouraged. Where it is not possible to meet in the circumstances referred to above another member of staff should be told of the meeting beforehand. Steps to prevent others entering a room by the use of 'Meeting in Progress' are especially

likely to be open to misinterpretation. In many cases it will be advisable for another pupil or adult to be present or in a position to minimise risk during the interview.

#### **2.4 Pupils with Special Needs**

If pupils require assistance with toileting staff should consider whether it would be possible to arrange for the presence of another adult in the vicinity. Where this is not possible employees should discuss with their Headteacher what arrangements will be reasonable in all the circumstances. The Headteacher may refer to the matter to the relevant agency for further advice.

#### **2.5 First Aid**

The existence of any life threatening or serious condition will determine the suitability and necessity of physical contact. In the absence of such justification employees who administer first aid should ensure that, wherever possible, other children or another adult can be present if there is any doubt over the possibility of any physical contact being misconstrued.

#### **2.6 Comments and Discussions with Pupils**

Employees must avoid comments to or about pupils which could be taken to have sexual overtones. It is equally unacceptable for employees to encourage debate and discussion between groups of students, which could be interpreted as having sexual overtones, which are not justified in the context of the teaching programme. It will be especially helpful if Schemes of Work highlight particular areas of risk and sensitivity. Specific guidance may be needed to assist newly qualified teachers or other teachers who are new to this area of work. This will call for the exercise of careful judgment in responding to questions raised by pupils.

Notwithstanding the advice given above it is recognised that, in order to discharge particular pastoral responsibilities, employees may from time to time need to engage in conversation with pupils and students which cover sensitive matters. Staff must use their professional judgement to ensure that they are not drawn into areas inappropriate to their duties or their relationship with the pupils concerned. Staff must also use their discretion to ensure that, for example, any probing for details cannot be construed as unjustified intrusion. In responding to individual students' distress employees will need to consider carefully whether they should offer advice, sympathy or counselling if a discussion enters a sensitive area or, alternatively, refer them to a colleague or agency who is better placed to offer appropriate advice.

#### **2.7 Infatuations and Crushes**

These unfortunately do develop and can involve pupils and Staff of both sexes on both a heterosexual and homosexual basis. They need to be handled sensitively. Careless and insensitive reactions have been known to provoke false accusations. It is therefore in the interest of all parties to avoid adding to the pupil's problems by encouraging the crush or making jokes about the situation. In such situations the advice of a senior colleague must be sought. Other members of staff have a part to play, too, in alerting a colleague to the possibility of an infatuation in order that appropriate steps can be taken to minimise hurt and distress and the risk to the teacher concerned. Whilst the risk of infatuation is not limited to younger members of staff, newly qualified Staff must recognise their particular vulnerability to adolescent infatuation.

#### **2.8 Out of School and After-School Activities**

Employees should take particular care when supervising pupils in the less formal atmosphere of a residential setting or after-school activity. The more relaxed relationships that may promote successful activities can be misinterpreted by young people. It is important to emphasise that the standards of professional conduct and behaviour expected of employees should be no different to that which applies within school

## **2.9 Teaching materials**

The use of books, videos and films of an explicit or sensitive nature, particularly in relation to language or sexual behaviour must be given careful consideration to ensure that its selection is not subsequently misinterpreted. There should always, therefore, be a clear link with the targets of the teacher's programme.

## **2.10 Reporting Incidents**

Staff should report any concerns they may have following any incident where s/he feels that his/her actions or any others actions may have been misinterpreted. This report should be made to the Headteacher as soon as possible after the incident and should include as an immediate follow-up the preparation of a written note of the incident, a copy of which should be given to the Headteacher. The teacher may also wish to seek advice from his/her professional association.

Whilst reporting of incidents is always advisable it is particularly important to ensure that a contemporary written record is made if any form of restraint has been used against a pupil or whenever a pupil, parent or third party has complained about an action or expressed an intention to complain.

## **2.11 Personal letters and on-line communication**

It will not be appropriate for Staff to write personal notes or letters, or to send e-mail, to individual students. Staff should keep passwords secure and ensure that no other person can gain access to their e-mail account and maliciously send messages which appear to have been written by them. Ideally, both Staff and pupils should use an e-mail address provided as part of an official school or LEA internet service, even if they are sending messages while working at home. Since these services can be monitored, they provide a measure of protection for both parties. Schools should implement a code of conduct in which pupils and adults understand what to do if they receive inappropriate e-mail messages from any source.

The increased availability of internet 'chat rooms' and similar on-line forums also poses risks for children and Staff. While they are popular among young people and offer many positive experiences, there is widespread concern about their potential abuse by paedophiles attempting to groom new victims. The LEA's advice is that Staff should not use unregulated chat rooms for children and should be aware that it is impossible to determine the age of any participant in these environments. Managed services are available in which on-line discussions for educational purposes can be organized in a secure environment for bona fide participants. The ICT Service can provide advice on these and other related facilities.

## **3. FOOTNOTE**

Many Staff express regret at the need for a code such as this. However, its purpose is to promote the highest standards of care for young people and to protect Staff and others from the potentially devastating consequences of false allegations. It is an unfortunate fact that society is less trusting and that, on occasions, cases have come to light, which have justified the increased level of mistrust. All Staff are urged to consider how they can safeguard their own position in the light of this advice without giving up important personal principles of care and trust. Whenever doubt exists any teacher should seek the advice of his/her Headteacher or experienced senior colleague.

## **ADDITIONAL FOOTNOTE RE: Safeguarding Audit 2023/24**

Staff should not engage with any pupil outside of school via Social Media as this contravenes the above. If Social Media is utilised within the school environment – such as a Sports Blog – this must be restricted to posts completed within the school and not open to public comment. All content must be verified by a Senior Member of staff before posting.

