



AMBITIONS
Academies Trust

**AMBITIONS ACADEMIES TRUST
CODE OF CONDUCT
PREVENTING THE ABUSE OF TRUST**

Outstanding Achievement for All

CODE OF CONDUCT IN SCHOOLS – PREVENTING ABUSE OF TRUST

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, ACADEMY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS, ETC. WHOSE WORK WITHIN AN ACADEMY BRINGS THEM INTO CONTACT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

1. PREAMBLE

This document is intended to assist staff and volunteers to minimise the risk of being accused of improper conduct towards the young people with whom they come into contact during their work. The purpose of the Code is two-fold:

- a) it aims to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people and protect them from potentially damaging behaviour, and
- b) it aims to protect the person in a position of trust by preventing him/her from behaving inappropriately or entering into such a relationship deliberately or accidentally by providing guidance on what behaviour is acceptable.

It would be impossible and inappropriate to lay down hard and fast rules to cover all the circumstances in which staff relate to pupils and where opportunities for their conduct to be misconstrued might occur. Staff must exercise professional judgement in their dealings with pupils. For the vast majority of staff this code of conduct will serve only to confirm what has always been their practice. If staff have any doubts about the advice contained in this document they should consult their Associate Principal or seek advice from their trade union.

From time to time, however, it is advisable for all staff to reappraise their teaching styles, relationships with pupils and their manner and approach to individual pupils, to ensure that they give no grounds for any doubts in the minds of colleagues, pupils or parents.

A relationship of trust, for the purposes of this document, is one where a member of staff, volunteer or Academy Advisory Committee Member is in a position of power or influence over a pupil by virtue of the work or nature of the activity being undertaken.

Failure by staff to comply with this Code of Conduct may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

2. SCOPE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Where this Code of Conduct is adopted by an Academy, it should apply to all staff within the Academy's complement, volunteers and Academy Advisory Committee Member.

3. INTRODUCTION

Any person whose work brings them into contact with young persons is in a position of trust and needs to be clear about what kind of behaviour is acceptable and that which is not.

Child abuse may be physical, emotional, sexual or as a result of neglect. Whilst child abusers may be relatives or friends of the family, some meet children in other contexts and a small minority of these may gain access to children in Academies as teachers or support staff or through their voluntary involvement in Academy activities. Pupils should not feel inhibited from reporting abuse against them by staff or volunteers, or any incident where a pupil has grounds to believe that a member of staff has crossed the boundary of acceptable behaviour. The Associate Principal and staff will continue to do all they can to ensure that the environment within Academies encourages pupils and staff to make truthful reports of any inappropriate behaviour.

The action to be taken by staff when they suspect a pupil is being abused by a person outside or inside the Academy, and the steps that should be taken if an allegation of abuse is made against a member of staff by a pupil, are set out in the Academy's child protection procedure and all staff should be familiar with that.

Staff should also be familiar with the Academy's policies about physical contact with pupils, the use of reasonable force to control or restrain pupils, and the procedures that should be followed if a pupil needs first aid or medical attention.

4. GUIDELINES ON CONDUCT

a) Private Meetings with Pupils:

Staff and volunteers should be aware that private meetings with individual pupils may give rise to concern. There will be occasions when a confidential interview or a one to one meeting is necessary, but, where possible, such interviews should be conducted within school hours 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, and another pupil or adult should be present or nearby. Where such conditions cannot apply, staff should ensure that another adult knows that the interview is taking place.

Meetings with pupils away from the Academy premises should only be arranged with the specific approval of the Associate Principal and, where applicable, the pupil's parent(s), a record of this approval should be kept on the pupil's file.

b) Physical Contact with Pupils:

Physical contact may be misconstrued by a pupil, parent or observer. 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 serious questions being raised. As a general principle staff must not make gratuitous physical contact with their pupils. It is particularly unwise to attribute touching to their teaching style or as a way of relating to pupils.

Any form of physical punishment of pupils is unlawful as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour unless it is by way of restraint. It is particularly important that staff understand this both to protect their own position and the overall reputation of the Trust.

c) Where Physical Contact May be Acceptable:

There may be occasions where a distressed pupil 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 to be by others present, normal and natural does not become unnecessary and unjustified contact, particularly with the same pupil 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/she should seek the advice of the Associate Principal.

Some staff are likely to come into physical contact with pupils from time to time in the course of their duties. Examples include showing a pupil how to use a piece of apparatus or equipment; demonstrating a move or exercise during games or PE, and contact activities at a youth club. Staff should be aware of the limits within which such contact should properly take place and of the possibility of such contact being misinterpreted.

There may be occasions where it is necessary for staff to restrain a pupil physically to prevent him/her from inflicting injury to others or self-injury, damaging property, or causing disruption. In such cases only the minimum force necessary may be used and any action taken must be to control/restrain the pupil in accordance with the Academy's policy. Where an employee has taken action to physically restrain a pupil he/she should make a written report of the incident in the form prescribed by the Academy's policy on restraint. Only employees who have received appropriate training in the use of force to control or restrain pupils should undertake such action unless it is essential to avoid serious injury.

d) Caring for Pupils with Particular Problems:

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

Wherever possible staff who have to help children with toileting difficulties should be accompanied by another adult, and pupils should, wherever possible, be encouraged to change themselves. However, whilst the presence of two people may be seen as providing protection against a possible allegation of abuse against a member of staff, it further erodes the privacy of the child. Ensuring that members of staff make their intention and purpose known to others before commencing intimate care with a child is a sensible precaution. It is also advisable to make arrangements to ensure there is always another staff member nearby when intimate care is being undertaken on a one-to-one basis. It is accepted that there will be some situations where pupils will present particular problems for staff and the emphasis will be on what is reasonable in all the circumstances.

e) Relationships and Attitudes:

All staff should clearly understand the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in their dealings with pupils. Intimate or sexual relationships between staff and pupils will be regarded as a grave breach of trust, and any sexual activity between a member of staff and a pupil under 18 years of age may be a criminal offence in accordance with the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000.

All staff should ensure that their relationships with pupils are appropriate to the age and gender of the pupils, and take care that their language or conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought, particularly when members of staff of either sex are dealing with adolescent boys and girls.

From time to time staff may encounter pupils who display attention seeking behaviour, or profess to be attracted to them. Staff should aim to deal with those situations sensitively and appropriately, but must ensure that their behaviour cannot be misinterpreted. In these circumstances, the member of staff should also ensure that the Associate Principal or a senior colleague is aware of the situation and the action to be taken is recorded on the pupil's file.

Contact between staff and pupils via text messaging, email or other written methods, which would not normally form part of their duties, may also give rise to comment or speculation and should not therefore be undertaken without the prior agreement of the Associate Principal or line manager.

- f) Where Conversation of a Sensitive Nature May be Appropriate:
Many staff have a pastoral responsibility for pupils and in order to fulfil that role effectively there will be occasions where conversations will cover particularly sensitive matters. Staff must, in these circumstances, use their discretion to ensure that, for example, any probing for details cannot be construed as unjustified intrusion.

Other staff in Academies may, from time to time, be approached by pupils for advice. Pupils 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 pupil to another member of staff with acknowledged pastoral responsibility for the particular pupil.

- g) Inappropriate Comments and Discussions with Pupils:
As with physical contact, comments by staff to pupils, either individually or in groups, can be misconstrued. As a general principle therefore staff must not make unnecessary comments to and/or about pupils which could be construed to have a sexual connotation. It is also unacceptable for staff to introduce or to encourage debate amongst pupils 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 pupil is best addressed rather than ignored.

Systematic use of insensitive, disparaging or sarcastic comments is also unacceptable.

h) Use of Personal Material:

Videos and/or photographic images of pupils must not be taken without prior agreement from the Associate Principal and written consent from the pupil's parent/guardian. Copies of such images or any personal data relating to a pupil may not be passed on to a third party without prior written consent from the pupil's parent/guardian.

i) Extra-Curricular Activities:

Staff should be particularly careful when supervising pupils in extra curricular activities, or a residential setting such as a ski trip, outdoor education camp or extended visit away from home. Typically a less formal approach than usual is appropriate in these settings, but that can be open to misinterpretation. Although a more informal approach is usual in such circumstances, the standard of behaviour expected of staff will be no different from the behaviour expected within Academy.

Staff should take care in receiving or giving gifts to pupils which could be misunderstood. Gifts to individual pupils from staff will be exceptional and should be assessed against the Academy's policy or by a senior member of staff. Inappropriate gifts from pupils should be reported.

j) Reporting Incidents:

Following any incident where a member of staff feels that his/her actions have been, or may be, misunderstood or misconstrued, or that circumstances arise such that an abuse of trust might be wrongly suspected by others, he/she should discuss the matter with the Associate Principal. Where it is agreed with the Associate Principal the member of staff or volunteer should provide a written report of the incident. A detailed written report should always be made if a member of staff had been obliged to restrain a pupil physically, or where a complaint has been made by a pupil, parent or other adult.

If a member of staff or volunteer is concerned that he/she might be developing a relationship with a pupil which could have the potential to represent an abuse of trust, the first advice must be to ensure that the relationship does not develop further. The Associate Principal should be immediately advised of these concerns. Staff and volunteers should take steps to minimise risk and to avoid situations which might be misconstrued. Contemporaneous recording and reporting the facts of the situation will assist in responding to any subsequent complaint.

A member of staff or volunteer who needs advice about what might be a developing relationship should contact his/her trade union or professional association, Associate Principal, Director of Education or Business Director.

If a member of staff or volunteer is concerned that a pupil is becoming attracted to his/her or that there is a developing attachment or dependency, the member of staff/volunteer must report the situation to the Associate Principal and seek professional advice.

If a member of staff or volunteer is concerned about the apparent development of relationship by another member of staff or volunteer, or receives a report from a

pupil about such a relationship, it is again important to immediately seek advice from the sources already described. In the case of an Associate Principal, the matter should be raised with the Director of Primary Education or Director of Special Education.

k) Text Messaging:

A written record should be made of all calls from/to a mobile phone in the same way as calls from a landline, according to agency/service procedure.

It is good practice to make a specific note of any mobile phone contact outside of normal working hours.

Work mobile numbers should only be given out to children/young people in accordance with agency/service protocols and policies. Line managers should be informed of all occasions when a number is given.

The use of texting is accepted as an essential tool of social contact for young people. Adult users must be aware of this. **It is recognised that texting is increasingly becoming a 'normal' professional tool of communication between adults and young people alongside meetings, telephone calls and letters.**

Texting should only contain information of a professional nature and written plain, unambiguous language, reflecting dialogue that would occur face to face. The language used should be professional and appropriate to the service/agency. It would not be appropriate to use 'text language' in a professional communication.

Texting should only be used if previously agreed by the child/young person e.g. for a specific agreed reason or purpose. The reason should be noted in the case record.

Texting should not normally be used as third party communication i.e. to ask one service user to pass on a message to another service user.

All texts sent/received must be recorded by being transcribed and put in the case file, timed and dated when recorded.

It is not recommended that personal home or mobile numbers are given to children or young people (or any service user). This should only happen where a service/agency policy specifically allows it and should be agreed with the line manager.

Any texts/calls of an abusive, threatening or nuisance calls should be recorded and reported to line manager.

Agencies/services should be clear about when a work mobile should be switched on or off. A nuisance call received out of work hours can be very distressing. If the phone is off no nuisance call can be received.

The law is very clear about the use of mobile phones when driving; all users have a responsibility to comply with the law. Some agencies/authorities instruct that all mobiles are switched off when driving.

It is possible for mobile phones with Bluetooth capability to receive unsolicited material, including images. Any such images received should be reported to line manager and then deleted. Please be aware that the Bluetooth issue is a complex one, all phones differ. Mobile phones can be configured to prevent unsolicited material. Please contact your provider to clarify this.

l) Police Advice regarding indecent video, film or still images transmitted by mobile phone:

No young person should be asked to forward any material by staff as this is inadvertently asking the young person to commit an offence of distributing indecent images.

If a young person is volunteering the images for a member of staff to view the staff member should get the young person's permission to hold on to the phone and contact the police to see if they want to view the images.

If a staff member has an image received on their phone they should contact their Associate Principal/ Line Manger immediately so that a manager is aware that the image has been received. The police can then be contacted and the image viewed by them if necessary and then deleted

If a young person refuses to give their phone to a member of staff the young person should be advised to delete the material and a record of such kept on the agency file. The same advice should be given to staff.

TRUST STAFF SHOULD NEVER DOWNLOAD ANY INDECENT IMAGES BUT IF IN DOUBT OF THE CONTENT, CONTACT THE POLICE SRU (Safeguarding Referral unit), OR DESIGNATED MEMBER OF STAFF FOR SAFEGUARDING WITHIN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY.

m) E Mail Communication:

Many young people and children have a personal e mail address.

Any adult working with children or young people should only use a work email address, as defined by service or agency.

Any communication by email must be compliant with any individual service/agency protocol and guidance.

All communication should be for clear professional reasons and the content must reflect this.

E mail communication should only be used as part of an agreed strategy or plan with the child/young person and parent/carer should be aware of this, according to age of young person and agency/service protocol and guidance. Any e mail communication without parent/carer knowledge should only happen with the agreement of a line manager and the decision recorded

A record of all emails sent/received should be kept as part of the agency add 'or service' record, printed off or copied into a computer system.

n) Social Networking Sites:

It is not recommended that adults working with children/young people should correspond with clients in this way.

If you become aware of a social networking site which contains any personal information about activities of concern about a young person known to you, this should be recorded and the line manager should be informed.

Staff should be aware of possible implications when entering any personal details on any gaming or social networking site e.g. you tube, my space, facebook etc.

o) Further Action:

Allegations of physical/sexual abuse, made against employees within schools, will be dealt with objectively and reasonably in accordance with the Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Physical/Sexual Abuse in Schools.

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