St Nicholas' School

STAFF CODE OF CONDUCT POLICY

Introduction

This code has been drawn up to assist staff in maintaining entirely proper and professional relationships with pupils. It attempts to provide a clear and unambiguous picture of the boundaries associated with staff roles and the use of power and authority.

It is stressed that this code is not a legal document but is intended to provide a procedure for employees in carrying out their responsibilities. All staff (including volunteers) have a duty to be aware of this guidance, in addition to our safeguarding and child protection policy, to ensure their actions and behaviour do not place pupils or themselves at risk of harm or (in the case of staff) of allegations of harm to a pupil.

As an employee working with pupils, staff are required to demonstrate high standards in their exercise of authority, their management of risk, in the proper use of resources and in the active protection of pupils from discrimination and avoidable harm. The document is designed to be both useful for staff in avoiding situations that might lead to allegations against them, and to reassure other parties e.g. parents, schools, the LEA and the ISC, that a strategy exists to safeguard pupils.

Staff need to be prudent about their own conduct and vigilant about the conduct of others, so that their relationship with pupils remain, and are seen to remain, entirely proper and professional. It is recognised that staff are vulnerable to the possible consequences of their close professional relationships with pupils and to the potential for malicious and misplaced allegations being made by pupils, either deliberately or innocently, arising from the normal and proper associations that staff may have with them.

Principles

The duty of staff is to:

- Train and educate the pupils assigned to them according to the learning needs of those pupils.
- Promote the general progress and wellbeing of individual pupils and of any class or group of pupils assigned to them.
- Ensure the health and safety of pupils while they are within their responsibility.
- Provide advice and guidance to pupils on educational, personal and social matters including the provision of information about sources of more expert advice on specific questions.
- Maintain good order and discipline among pupils and promote their development.
- Report any malpractice under the School's whistleblowing policy.

These principles are intended to guide staff members and ensure that they give paramount consideration to the pupil's wellbeing by respecting and attempting to understand the following:

- The ascertainable wishes and feelings of the young person concerned (considered in the light of his/her age and understanding).
- The pupil's physical, emotional and learning needs.
- The likely effect on the pupil of any change in his/her circumstances.
- The pupil's age, gender, background and any other relevant characteristics.
- Any harm that the pupil has suffered or is at risk of suffering.
- Staff members are in a position of trust and they owe a duty of care to the pupil for whom they are responsible.
- Staff should never seek gratification of their own emotional or physical needs in their relationships with pupils and all affiliations must always be professional, appropriate and justifiable.
- The School's child protection procedures have primacy over other requirements and this document attempts to be supportive and complimentary to those procedures. These principles and subsequent guidelines provide the basis for the school to identify inappropriate behaviour by staff and therefore are accessible to all members of staff.

Guidelines for all members of staff

Physical contact

- As a general principle, staff should not have unnecessary physical contact with their pupils or vulnerable adults. There may be very limited occasions when a pupil needs comfort or reassurance, which may include physical comforting. Any such comforting gestures must always be appropriate to the pupil's age and any disability or learning needs they may have, and acceptable to the pupil concerned i.e. there should be no unwanted physical contact, however well intentioned. However, be aware that any physical contact may be misconstrued by a pupil, parent/carer or observer. Such contact can include well intentioned informal and formal gestures such as putting a hand on the shoulder or arm, which, if repeated with an individual pupil, could lead to serious questions being raised.
- Some staff are likely to come into physical contact with their pupils from time to time in the course of their training activities, for example when showing a pupil how to use a piece of apparatus or equipment. Staff should be aware of the limits within which such contact should properly take place and should consider the possibility of such contact being misinterpreted by the pupil. Those who teach PE and games, or who offer music tuition, will, on occasions, have to initiate physical contact with pupils in order to support a pupil so they can perform a task safely. **This should be done with the pupil's prior agreement.**
- Any form of physical punishment of pupils is strictly prohibited at St Nicholas' School, as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour unless it is by way of reasonable restraint. It is particularly important that employees understand this both to protect their own position and that of the organisation and the School.

- There may be occasions where it is necessary for a member of staff to physically restrain a pupil to prevent him/her from inflicting injury to himself/herself or others. In such cases only the minimum force necessary must be used and any action taken must be to restrain a pupil. Another member of staff should, if possible, be present to act as a witness. Where the member of staff has taken action to restrain a pupil he/she should report the matter to the Head immediately.

The practice of physical restraint – (this should be read in conjunction with the "Policy on the Use of Reasonable Force to Control or Restrain Pupils" contained in the Academic Management and Curriculum Handbook)

- Restraint can be defined as "the reasonable application of the minimum necessary force to overpower a child with the intention of preventing them from harming themselves or others, or from causing serious damage to property".

- Restraint should only be used exceptionally, when unavoidable and in keeping with the incident leading to it. The degree of force must be proportionate to the circumstances and seriousness of the behaviour; it should always be the minimum needed to achieve the desired result. It should be primarily for the benefit of the young person/s and, though immediate, should as far as possible be a considered response.

- Restraint should not be used as a form of punishment or, in normal circumstances, to enforce compliance with instructions. It should not be attempted where the member of staff is put at undue risk.

- Incidents of restraint should, in appropriate circumstances, be subject to debriefing for staff involved and lead to a review of strategies for managing the behaviour of pupils between relevant parties, e.g. manager, teacher, trainer etc. All incidents should be recorded using the form.

- Where staff are the subject of physical attack by pupils or their parents/carers, they should immediately report the incident to their managers.

Sexual contact

- There is NO acceptable behaviour that has either explicit sexual connotations or innuendo. Any such behaviour will always be treated as extremely serious and must be reported immediately, and may be dealt with in accordance with the School's disciplinary procedures.

Meetings with pupils

- Staff should be aware of the potential risks which may arise from interviewing individual pupils in private. It is recognised that there will be occasions when confidential interviews must take place but, 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. Meetings with pupils away from the School should not take place unless specific prior approval has been obtained from those responsible for the pupil (e.g. the Head).

- Where such conditions cannot apply, staff are advised to ensure that another adult knows that the interview is taking place. The use of "engaged" signs or lights are not advisable and where possible another adult should be present or nearby during the interview.

- If it is necessary to detain a pupil for any length of time after the end of normal School hours, prior warning must be given to the pupils parents/carers or Head.

Caring/first aid

- If a young person complains of injury or sickness, a judgment should be made as to whether he/she should be referred to a person qualified in first aid or advised to see his/her own doctor. The pupil's parents/carers should also be informed, if appropriate. Staff are referred to the School's First Aid Policy.

- Staff who have to administer first aid (normally a trained first aider) should ensure wherever possible that another adult is present, if they are in any doubt as to whether necessary physical contact could be misconstrued.

- Another adult should accompany employees who have to help pupils with personal care and pupils should, wherever possible, be encouraged to deal with such matters themselves.

- Where it is necessary to assist with/supervise dressing or undressing, staff must be of the appropriate gender and be careful to protect the dignity of the young person. Where possible, another member of staff of the appropriate gender should also be present.

- Male staff should not, as a general rule, enter female toilets nor should female staff enter male toilets, except in extreme situations such as fire, or where there may be a threat to life or limb.

Provision of advice and guidance

- Staff 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 a member of staff of another gender or to one with acknowledged expertise, experience or responsibility for that pupil. Staff must in these circumstances use their discretion to ensure that any probing for details cannot be construed as unjustified intrusion.

- Staff are advised never to stop a free-flowing account/disclosure of abuse but to make sure that at an appropriate point they inform the young person that they cannot keep such information confidential and need to tell someone else to get help. Example "Thank you for telling me, I now need to tell (where possible give the name and position of who will be told) so that we can get some help for you".

- A pupil may ask a member of staff to "keep a secret", or to promise not to tell other people what they are about to tell them. Where this happens the member of staff must explain that they are not able to promise confidentiality as they may need to tell someone else if they are to help the young person.

- Where a young person is told by a member of staff that they cannot promise confidentiality the young person may decide not to continue telling. If a young person starts to say something and then stops, the member of staff needs to try to leave it open for the young person to come back to the discussion; the member of staff must act, following the child protection procedures. It may be appropriate to refer the young person to available counselling/medical services, for instance their GP.

- Remember: if in doubt – act.

Social Contact

- Social contact with pupils, other than that which is School based or organised by the School, should be positively resisted.

- It is recognised that there may be occasions when accidental or reasonable social contact may be unavoidable, e.g. meeting pupils at social venues open to the general public or in shops or at private parties. In such circumstances, staff should be mindful at all times of their professional relationship with pupils.

- Staff are referred to the School's social media policy in relation to their use of social media with respect to pupils. Staff should not give their personal mobile numbers, email addresses or social media site details to students, nor should they communicate with them by text message, personal email or any form of social media. If staff need to speak to a pupil by telephone, they should use one of the school's landlines or mobiles. Any email communication should be work based in nature and sent using the school system.

General relationships with pupils

- Staff should ensure that their relationships with pupils are appropriate to the age, understanding and gender of the pupil, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought, particularly when dealing with adolescent girls.

- Comments by staff to pupils, either individually or collectively, can be misconstrued. As a general principle, 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 a class, training situation or elsewhere, which could be construed as having sexual connotation that is unnecessary given the context of the training session or the circumstances. However it is recognised that a topic raised by a pupil is best addressed rather than ignored.

- Staff should be careful of their use of language/terminology that may be misconstrued.

- The systematic use of insensitive, disparaging or sarcastic comments is unacceptable.

- If staff feel at any time that their relationship with a pupil is developing into one that would be inappropriate between a member of staff and a pupil, it is their responsibility to discuss the situation with the Head without delay.

Report of incidents

- Following any incident where a member of staff feels that his/her actions have been, or may be, misconstrued, the member of staff should report the matter to the Head without delay.

- Such reporting is especially important in any case where a member of staff has been obliged to restrain a young person physically to prevent him/her from inflicting injury to others or themselves, or where he/she has been personally attacked by another pupil, parent or carer. The Head will inform parents of an incident involving the use of force, usually on the same day and in any case, as soon as reasonably practicable. Parents will be given the opportunity to discuss it with the Head and, if they wish, with the member of staff involved.

- All staff have a responsibility to speak up about safeguarding and welfare matters. This can be done internally within the School or, where appropriate, to external agencies. Where necessary, concerns can be raised under the whistleblowing policy.

Professional Code of Conduct

St Nicholas' School Staff are expected to uphold and enhance the School's reputation as a community concerned with the education, pastoral care and wellbeing of others. Teachers will recognise the influence they have in their professional life and in their relationships with pupils, parents and colleagues. In addition, all staff have a very important part to play in the marketing of the School.

Teachers should always:

- Justify and maintain public trust and confidence in the School.

- Inform the Head of any problems concerning pupils which may have the potential for escalation. Experience shows that it is more effective to handle these proactively. The aim is to foster good parent teacher relationships.

- Behave in a strictly professional manner towards everyone connected with the School.

- Aim to work in a positive and co-operative manner with colleagues and act positively in ensuring that new staff recognise and maintain the standards expected.

- Consider the best interests of the children and at all times, set an example in standards of dress, behaviour, punctuality, and courtesy in accordance with the School Rules and Pupil Charter.

- Act compassionately and with dignity towards pupils and colleagues, but keep a proper emotional and psychological distance.

- Make sure that any duties are not undertaken under the influence of inappropriate drugs or alcohol.

- Seek help or support in times of anxiety or personal difficulty either from the Head or the Deputy.

- Alert the Pastoral Deputy if you have any concerns regarding the welfare or health of colleagues.

- Use suitable posture, tone and language in and out of class appropriate to the age of the pupils.

- Maintain a clear and appropriate level of record-keeping in order to monitor pupils' progress.

- Refuse paid work or private tuition without prior discussion with the Head.

- Maintain appropriate levels of confidentiality.

- Ensure that all financial dealings are conducted transparently and that clear records are kept.

- Make file notes on interviews with parents or incidents involving pupils. The information should be passed to the Head quickly through the school office.

- Follow Health and Safety Procedures paying particular attention to risk assessments and any new information distributed by the Health and Safety Co-ordinator.

- Send for immediate assistance if there is an accident or an individual is taken ill.

- Ensure that a personal opinion is not represented as the stance of the School.

- Use the internet safely. Private information must not be posted on websites where it can be copied, altered or used by other parties. Reputations and future prospects could be damaged.

- Follow the code for media response – ask reporters to "please address your enquiry to the Head". The term "no comment" must never be used. This is open to interpretation and can be very damaging to the School.

Reviewed and updated October 2019

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