

ABERCORN PRIMARY SCHOOL



A Code of Conduct for all Staff

Ratified: August 2023

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Introduction

All actions concerning children and young people must uphold the welfare and best interests of the young person as the primary considerations.

Staff must always be mindful of the fact that they hold a position of trust and that their behaviour towards the children and young people in the charge must be above reproach.

This Code of Conduct is not intended to detract from the enriching experiences children and young people gain from positive interaction with staff. It is intended to assist staff in respect of the complex issue of child abuse, by drawing attention to the areas of risk for staff and by offering guidance on prudent conduct.

1. Private Meetings with Pupils

- Staff should be aware of the dangers which may arise from private interviews with individual pupils or where one to one contact is expected during the normal course of a child's education eg Learning Support or Music tuition. It is recognized that there will be occasions when confidential interviews must take place. As far as possible, staff should conduct such interviews in a room with visual access or with the door open.
- Where such conditions apply, staff are advised to ensure that another adult knows that the interview is taking place. It may be necessary to use a sign indicating that the room is in use but it is not advisable to use signs prohibiting entry to the room.
- Where possible, another pupil(s) or (preferably) another adult should be present nearby during the interview and the school should take active measure to facilitate this.

2. Physical Contact with Pupils

- As a general principle, members of staff are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with their pupils.

- It is unrealistic and unnecessary, however, to suggest that staff should touch pupils only in emergencies. In particular a distressed child, especially a younger child, may need reassurance involving physical comforting, as a caring parent would provide.
- Staff should never touch a child who has clearly indicated that he/she is or would be uncomfortable with such contact unless it is necessary to protect the child, others or property from harm. The DENI Circular 1999/9 on use of reasonable force give guidance on Article 4 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (*Power of member of staff to restrain pupils*).
- Physical punishment is illegal as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour, unless it is by way of necessary restraint.
- Staff who have to administer first aid to a pupil should ensure, wherever possible, that this is done in the presence of other children or another adult. *However, no member of staff should hesitate to provide first aid in an emergency situation simply because another person is not present.*
- Any physical contact which would be likely to be misinterpreted by the pupil, parent or other casual observer should be avoided.
- Following any incident where a member of staff feels that his/her actions have been, or may be misconstrued, a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to the Designated Teacher or Principal.
- Staff should be particularly careful when supervising pupils in a residential setting or in approved out of school activities, where more informal relationships tend to be the norm and where they may be in proximity to pupils in circumstances very different from the normal school/work environment.

3. Professionalism towards Colleagues, Parents and Carers

As a staff member

- You should work in a collegiate and co-operative manner with colleagues and members of other relevant professions;
- You must treat all colleagues and parents and carers fairly and with respect, without discrimination;

- You should not make malicious or unfounded criticisms of, or accusations about, colleagues that may undermine them professionally or in the professional judgements they make;
- You should promote good relationships between home and school and, as such, respect the role of parents and carers in the learning experience as appropriate;
- You should exercise great care when expressing opinions in public about your employer and be mindful of Data Protection Act requirements concerning handling information about parents, carers and pupils.
- **Commentary Colleagues** - Everyone in the workplace should be able to work in an environment which is free from discrimination and harassment. A teacher should work in a collegiate way, treating all colleagues professionally.
- You should avoid undermining a colleague by remarks which are or could be perceived as being malicious, unfounded or unprofessional. This is of particular importance when in contact with parents, carers and pupils.
- You should guard against inappropriate communication with, or behaviour towards, colleagues which is or could be perceived as being of an unprofessional, discriminatory or harassing nature.
- **Parents and Carers** – Success in the education of pupils is greatly enhanced by the active involvement of their parents or carers or key adults in their lives.
- As appropriate, parents and carers should be seen as vital partners in the learning experience and therefore as a teacher you should: be professional in dealings with parents and carers and avoid making comments, being drawn in to inappropriate discussions or divulging confidential information about other pupils, colleagues, or the school.
- You should encourage the involvement of parents and carers as appropriate in the learning experience, welcoming them as active participants in the life of the educational establishment, and working in partnership with it.

4. Relationships and Attitudes

All staff should ensure that their relationships with pupils and their attitudes towards pupils are appropriate to the age, maturity and sex of the pupils. They should also take care that their conduct and language do not give rise to any comment or speculation regarding impropriety.

Staff should therefore not:-

- Use any form of inappropriate language (foul, sexualised or discriminatory) on school premises or when accompanying children outside school or allow children to use such language unchallenged;
- make sexualised or suggestive comments to children, even in fun;
- reduce a child to tears as form of control;
- allow allegations made by a child to go unrecorded or not acted upon.

5. Use of Mobile Phones/Personal Devices

- Staff should be discreet when using mobile phones and calls/text messages should not be made or received when children are present (except in an emergency situation involving children/staff). If possible, usage should be restricted to break and lunchtimes. Staff should also not use mobile devices in sensitive areas outside school e.g. swimming pool or in pupils' accommodation on residential trips.
- Staff are advised not to give their mobile phone numbers to personal email addresses to pupils and, where possible, to parents.
- Staff should not correspond with pupils on social networking sites e.g. Facebook. Privacy settings should be in place so that pupils cannot access a member of staff's personal site;
- Staff should not take or have photographs of pupils on their personal devices.

6. Choice and use of Teaching Materials

- Teachers should avoid teaching materials the choice of which might be misinterpreted and reflect upon the motives for the choice.
- When using teaching materials of a sensitive nature a teacher should be aware of the danger that their usage, either by pupils or by the teacher, might be criticized after the event.
- If in doubt about the appropriateness of a particular teaching material, the teacher should consult with the Principal before using it.

7. Dress Code

Staff at Abercorn Primary School are role models for the children and it is our intention to foster a feeling of professionalism and pride within our school, while still allowing for individual style and choice.

We believe that appearances are one of the first characteristics that people are measured by and therefore, consider that smart clothing (i.e. no denim jeans) is paramount for the first impressions to be of trust, respect and professionalism. As part of safeguarding for staff and pupils, it is important that staff wear clothing which is:

- ***Reflective of their professionalism***
 - is not likely to be viewed as offensive or revealing, cause embarrassment or give rise to misunderstanding.
 - is absent from any political or otherwise contentious slogans and is not discriminatory.
- ***Appropriate for the task***
 - e.g. trainers and sportswear for sports tournaments or for a relevant after school activity.
 - e.g. wearing an art apron during messy art activities.

8. Confidentiality

Information obtained in school relating to the personal circumstances or the educational attainment of a pupil should not be discussed outside of school. Any documentation with personal details of children/staff should be shredded when no longer required.

CONCLUSION

It would be impossible and inappropriate to lay down hard and fast rules to cover all the circumstances in which staff interrelate with children and young people, or where opportunities for their conduct to be misconstrued might occur. In all circumstances, employees' professional judgment will be exercised.

From time to time, however, it is prudent for all staff to reappraise their teaching styles/relationships with pupils to ensure that they give no grounds for doubts about their intentions in the minds of colleagues, pupils or of parents/guardians. We promote shared responsibility and mutual accountability and recognise this as vital between all staff to ensure a safe environment for both children and adults.

Addendum

Guideline for Self-Protection

1. In the event of injury to a child, ensure that it is recorded and witnessed by another adult.
2. Keep records of any allegations a child makes against you or other staff eg "You're always picking on me", "You hit me" or comments such as "Don't touch me". Keep a record of dates and times and report to the Principal.
3. If a child touches you or talks to you in a sexually inappropriate way or place, record what happened and tell another adult. As it could be totally innocent, do not make the child feel like a criminal. However, remember that ignoring this or allowing it to go on may place you in an untenable situation.
4. Do give firm guidelines to any child who demonstrates sexually inappropriate behaviour. Explain that the behaviour is unacceptable and could get the child into difficulty, but do not make the child feel guilty. The behaviour may be an imitation of abuse the child has suffered and may not be the child's fault. Report any such concerns to the Designated Teacher.

5. If you take children on journeys, always have two children along and ensure parental permission has been obtained.
6. Do not spend an excessive amount of time alone with one child away from other people. If it is one to one meeting, ensure there is visual access or leave the door open. Tell another member of staff if you are going to see a child on your own.
7. If you are accompanying children on a residential trip never, under any circumstances, take a child or children into your room.
8. Do not go into a toilet alone with a child or do something of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves. This includes cleaning bottoms or any other activity that could be misconstrued. Please refer to the school's Intimate Care Policy for more detailed guidelines.
9. Be mindful of how and where you touch children. Never pat a child on the bottom.
10. If you must physically restrain a child for any reason, be aware that it could be misinterpreted as assault. Any such incident should be reported to the Principal.
11. Ensure that you have the opportunity to discuss your own feelings, if possible, with other members of staff.

