
Strathearn School

Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers

Version History:

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Introduction

All adults who come in contact with pupils in Strathearn School have a duty of care¹ to safeguard and promote their welfare, and are in a position of trust² with them and their parents. All actions concerning such children and young people must uphold their best interests as a primary consideration. Behaviour of staff and volunteers towards pupils in their charge must be above reproach.

The aim of this Code is to clarify what constitutes appropriate behaviour and professional boundaries for adults in their relationship with pupils, to provide confidence and understanding to staff and volunteers about the standards of professional behaviour to which they should conform, and to protect them by reducing the risk of being unjustly accused of improper or unprofessional conduct. It is not intended to detract from the enriching experiences pupils at Strathearn gain from positive interaction with staff and volunteers.

This Code is informed by the guidance and procedures set out in legislation and guidance 2017 (see Appendix 1) and should be read in conjunction with the School's Safeguarding & Child Protection, E-Safety, Educational Visits, Safe Handling and Use of Reasonable Force and Medication Administration Policies.

Code of Conduct

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

In all circumstances, employees' professional judgement³ will be exercised and for the vast majority of employees this Code of Conduct will serve only to confirm what has always been their practice.

1. Confidentiality

Staff and volunteers may have access to confidential information about pupils in order to undertake their responsibilities. These details must be kept confidential at all times and only shared when it is in the interests of the pupil to do so. Such confidential information must not be used to intimidate, humiliate, or embarrass the pupil concerned, or their family.

Confidential information about students should never be used casually in conversation or shared with any person other than on a need to know basis. In circumstances where the student's identity does not need to be disclosed the information should be used anonymously.

There are some circumstances in which a member of staff may be expected to share information about a student, for example, when abuse is alleged or suspected. In such cases, individuals have a duty to pass information on without delay, but only to those with designated child protection responsibilities.

If a member of staff is in any doubt about whether to share information or keep it confidential, he or she should seek guidance from a senior member of staff. Any media or legal enquiries should be passed to senior leaders.

2. Propriety and Behaviour

All adults working with pupils have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of children and young people. It is therefore expected that they will adopt standards of personal conduct that will not compromise their position in their workplace or indicate an unsuitability to work with children or young people.

Members of staff will be punctual on all occasions. Teaching staff must arrive in time for registration in the mornings and be ready to teach each class on time. Non-teaching staff must adhere to their specified hours of work in accordance with the terms and conditions agreed and in consultation with their line manager.

3. Dress and Appearance

A person's dress and appearance are matters of personal choice and self-expression. However, adults should dress in ways which are appropriate to their professional role and not in any way that might cause embarrassment *or offence* to others.

The school is a health-promoting organisation and therefore operates a no smoking policy.

4. Gifts, Rewards and Favouritism

The giving of gifts or rewards to pupils should be part of supporting positive behaviour or recognising particular achievements. It is acknowledged that there are specific occasions when staff or volunteers may wish to give a pupil a personal gift. Any such gifts should be given openly and be of insignificant value so that this is not misinterpreted by others as favouritism or 'grooming'.

Staff should be wary of accepting gifts from current or potential parents or pupils, unless they are of insignificant value.

Staff should not normally accept any benefits, corporate hospitality or discounts from commercial organisations. If in doubt, the member of staff should discuss with the Principal.

5. Social Contact

Staff and volunteers who work with pupils should not have secret social contact with them or their families. No pupil should be in, or invited into, the home of an adult who works with them, unless the reason for this has been clearly established, e.g., babysitting, tutoring or friends of their children. Adults should use their professional judgement when taking part in any planned or unplanned social contact with pupils or their parents.

They should always report any situation to a senior member of staff which may place a pupil at risk or which may compromise the School or their own professional standing, and keep a record of any such occurrence.

6. Infatuations

Occasionally a pupil may develop an infatuation with an adult who works with them. Any adult, who has a concern that a pupil is developing an infatuation, should discuss this at the earliest opportunity with a senior member of staff⁴ so that action can be taken to avoid any hurt, distress or embarrassment. A written record should be kept of any such occurrences.

7. Sexual Contact

All adults should clearly understand the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in their contacts with pupils. Intimate or sexual relationships between pupils and the adults who work with them will be regarded as a grave breach of trust.

This means that adults should not:

- have sexual relationships with pupils
- have any form of communication with a pupil (for example, verbal comments, letters, notes, electronic mail, instant messaging, phone calls, texts or physical contact) that could be interpreted as sexually suggestive or provocative
- make sexual remarks to, or about, a pupil
- discuss their own sexual relationships with or in the presence of pupils

Adults should be aware that consistently conferring inappropriate special attention and favour upon a pupil might be construed as being part of a 'grooming' process and as such will give rise to concerns about their behaviour.

8. Physical Contact

As a general principle, adults should avoid unnecessary physical contact with pupils. There are occasions, however, when it is entirely appropriate for adults to have some physical contact with a pupil with whom they are working.

Adults who work in, for example, sports, drama, music or outdoor activities may have to initiate some physical contact with pupils, for example, to demonstrate technique in the use of a particular piece of equipment, adjust posture, or perhaps to support a pupil so she can perform an activity safely or prevent injury. Staff wishing to demonstrate a technique should explain to the pupil the reason why the contact is necessary and what form the contact will take. Such activities should take place in a safe and open environment i.e. one easily observed by others and last for the minimum time necessary. Contact should be relevant to age or understanding and adults should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the pupil. (See also policies on Safe Handling and Use of Reasonable Force, Medication Administration and Intimate Care Guidance).

There will be occasions when a distressed pupil needs comfort and reassurance and this may involve physical contact. Young children, in particular, may need immediate physical comfort, for example, after a fall, separation from parent, etc. Adults should use their professional judgement to comfort or reassure a child in an age-appropriate way whilst maintaining clear professional boundaries. However, adults should not assume that all children seek physical comfort if they are distressed.

If an adult believes that his / her action could be misinterpreted, or if an action is observed by another as being inappropriate or possibly abusive, the incident and circumstances should be reported to a senior member of staff⁴.

Where a pupil initiates inappropriate physical contact, it is the responsibility of the adult to sensitively deter the pupil and help her understand the importance of personal boundaries. Such circumstances must always be reported and discussed with a senior member of staff.

9. Communication using technology

All communication between pupils currently attending Strathearn School and staff or volunteers should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries, and should be transparent and open to scrutiny. This includes the use of mobile phones, text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams and websites, including instant messaging, social networking sites and blogs.

This means that adults should:

- not give their personal contact details to pupils, unless the need to do so is agreed with senior staff and parents/carers. Staff should always try to use school email addresses or school provided phones when communicating with pupils for educational purposes, such as sending homework assignments, confirming travel arrangements for a school trip or arranging play rehearsals or sporting fixtures. On occasions, and with prior agreement from senior staff, it may be necessary for staff or volunteers to use their own personal emails or personal communication equipment to communicate with pupils. This may include using and storing pupils' personal numbers or emails. Staff and volunteers should delete these when no longer needed.
- not use internet or web-based communication channels to send personal messages to a pupil
- ensure that if they make use of any **social networking site** such as Facebook or Twitter, details are not shared with pupils and privacy settings are set at maximum. They should be careful about what they write on these websites, including nothing that brings them, their place of work or other adults who work there into disrepute. They should not request, or respond to, any personal information from a pupil on a social networking site, including being added as a friend.

School employees must not access social websites for personal use (ie non-job related use) during work time. Access to some journals, blogs and social networking sites is permitted during work time for the purposes of undertaking job related duties only. School employees must act in the best interests of the school and not disclose personal data or information about any individual including staff, young people or children. This includes images.

The school respects an employee's private life. However, it must also ensure that confidentiality and its reputation are protected. Employees using social networking websites in their private life:

- must refrain from identifying themselves as working for the school, in a way which has, or may have, the effect of bringing the school into disrepute;
- must not identify other school employees, children or young people without their consent;
- must not make any defamatory remarks about the school, its employees, children or young people or conduct themselves in a way that is detrimental to the school;
- disclose personal data or information about the school, employees, children or young people that could breach the Data Protection Act 1998, for example, posting photographs or images of children or young people;
- must not allow pupils to access their personal social networking accounts and where they are contacted by a pupil they should bring it to the Principal's attention.

10. Behaviour Management

All pupils have a right to be treated with respect and dignity, even in those circumstances where they display difficult or challenging behaviour. The use of physical intervention can only be justified in exceptional circumstances and must be used as a last resort when other behaviour management strategies have failed. (See Safe Handling & Use of Reasonable Force Policy and Intimate Care Guidance). The use of demeaning or insensitive comments to humiliate pupils and corporal punishment are not acceptable.

11. Personal Care

Some job responsibilities necessitate intimate physical contact with pupils on a regular basis, for example, assisting with toileting, providing intimate care for pupils with disabilities or medical care.

The nature, circumstances and context of such contact should comply with any medical and/or individual education plan that has been drawn up for the pupil.

(Reference – Appendix J, Intimate Care Guidance, in the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy)

All pupils have a right to safety, privacy and dignity when contact of a physical or intimate nature is required and, depending on their abilities, age and maturity, should be encouraged to act as independently as possible.

Pupils are entitled to respect at all times, especially when in a state of undress, changing clothes, bathing or undertaking any form of personal care. There are occasions where there will be a need for an appropriate level of supervision in order to safeguard pupils and/or satisfy health and safety considerations. This supervision should be appropriate to the needs and age of the pupils concerned and sensitive to the potential for embarrassment.

This means that staff and volunteers should:

- avoid any physical contact when pupils are in a state of undress
- avoid any visually intrusive behaviour
- where there are changing rooms announce their intention of entering

This means that staff and volunteers should not:

- change in the same room as pupils
- shower or take a bath with pupils
- assist with any personal care task which a pupil can undertake by themselves.

12. First Aid and Administration of Medication

It is expected that many adults working with pupils will be aware of basic first aid techniques. It is not, however, a contractual requirement and whilst adults may volunteer to undertake such tasks, they should

be suitably trained before administering first aid and/or any agreed medication, and abide by the School's Medication Administration Policy.

13. One to One Situations

Where there is a need for a member of staff or volunteer to be alone with a pupil, certain procedures and explicit safeguards must be in place. One to one situations have the potential to make a pupil more vulnerable to harm by those who seek to exploit their position of trust. Adults working in one to one settings with pupils may also be more vulnerable to unjust or unfounded allegations being made against them. When one to one situations, including confidential interviews, are necessary adults should:

- avoid meetings with a pupil in remote, secluded areas or behind closed doors with 'engaged' or equivalent signs
- as far as possible conduct interviews in a room with visual access or with a door open. Where such conditions cannot apply, staff and volunteers are advised to ensure another adult knows the interview is taking place
- always keep a record of any situation where a pupil becomes distressed or angry and, if necessary, report it to a senior colleague.

14. Home Visits

There are staff for whom home visits may be necessary. In these circumstances it is essential that there is clear justification for such an arrangement and that this is reported to the Principal/Vice Principals.

15. Transporting Pupils

There will be occasions when staff or volunteers transport pupils as part of their duties, e.g., in the School minibus. Adults who use their own vehicles for transporting pupils should ensure that the vehicle is roadworthy, appropriately insured and that the maximum capacity is not exceeded. Insurance and Driving Licence should be verified annually with the Principal if own transport is being used for this purpose. Seatbelts should always be worn by pupils and staff.

In addition, staff and volunteers are advised when transporting pupils in a vehicle to avoid being alone with them, unless a senior member of staff or parents / carers are aware of and agree to this arrangement. It is generally advisable to ask a pupil to sit in the back of the vehicle if the driver is on his / her own. The presence of another adult or pupil should help to safeguard the driver.

It is generally inappropriate for staff and volunteers to offer lifts to a pupil outside their normal working duties, unless the reason for this has been clearly established, e.g., giving lifts to friends of their children. There may be occasions where a pupil requires transport in an emergency situation or where not to give a lift may place a pupil at risk. Such circumstances should be reported to a senior member of staff.

16. Trips and Outings (including residential)

Staff and volunteers should take particular care when supervising pupils on trips and outings, where the setting is less formal than the usual workplace. Such adults remain in a position of trust and need to ensure that their behaviour remains professional at all times (*see 2. above*).

Where activities include overnight stays, careful consideration needs to be given to sleeping arrangements. Pupils, staff, volunteers and parents should be informed of these prior to the start of the trip. In all circumstances, those organising trips and outings must pay careful attention to ensuring safe staff/ pupil ratios and to the gender mix of staff especially on overnight stays. Members of staff should also keep senior staff aware of their itinerary. (Reference Educational Visits Policy)

17. Photography and Videos

Working with pupils may involve the taking or recording of images. Any such work should take place with due regard to the law and the need to safeguard the privacy, dignity, safety and wellbeing of children and

young people. Informed written consent from parents or carers and agreement, where possible, from the pupil, should always be sought before an image is taken for any purpose. Staff and volunteers should check which, if any, pupils have not given consent for their images to be taken before, any of the latter are taken or recorded.

Staff and volunteers should not:

- display or distribute images of pupils, including uploading images to social networking sites, unless they have consent to do so from parents/carers
- use images which may cause distress
- take images of pupils for their personal use.
- take images of pupils unless it is in accordance with child protection procedures (*see Appendix G, Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy*).

18. Access to Inappropriate Images and Internet Usage

There are no circumstances that will justify staff or volunteers possessing indecent images, e.g., nakedness of children. Staff and volunteers who access and possess links to such websites will be viewed as a significant and potential threat to children. Accessing, making and storing indecent images of children are illegal. This will lead to criminal investigation, and, if proven, the individual being barred from ever working with children and young people.

Where indecent images of children are found, the police and Education Authority Designated Officer for Child Protection should be immediately informed. Staff and volunteers should not attempt to investigate the matter or evaluate the material themselves, as this may lead to evidence being contaminated which in itself can lead to a criminal prosecution.

Staff and volunteers should not use equipment belonging to their organisation to access adult pornography; neither should personal equipment containing these images or links to them be brought into the workplace. This will raise serious concerns about the suitability of the adult to continue to work with children. Staff and volunteers should ensure that pupils are not exposed to images or web links of an indecent nature. Any films or material used for educational purposes with pupils must be age appropriate. If any of the above circumstances arises, the Principal should immediately be informed.

19. Voicing and sharing concerns

Each employer should have a clear and accessible procedure by which adults can voice their concerns, made in good faith, without fear of repercussion and that meets the terms of the Public Interest Disclosure Act (NI Order) 1998. Adults who use this procedure should be made aware that their employment rights are protected. Staff and volunteers should report any behaviour by colleagues that raises concern, regardless of source. This is particularly important where the welfare of pupils may be at risk. (Reference – Whistleblowing Policy)

Individual members of staff and volunteers should be aware of the School's child protection and safeguarding procedures, including procedures for dealing with allegations against adults. All allegations must be taken seriously and properly investigated in accordance with statutory guidance. Staff and volunteers who are the subject of allegations are advised to contact their professional association or a relevant external agency (for those who are not a member of any professional association) who can advise them.

It is essential that accurate and comprehensive records are maintained wherever concerns are raised about the conduct or actions of staff and volunteers working with or on behalf of pupils.

Clarification of Terms

TERM	DEFINITION	MEANING
<p>1. Duty of care</p>	<p>To keep children and young people safe and to protect them from sexual, physical and emotional harm. The behaviour of the adult should demonstrate integrity, maturity and good judgement at all times.</p> <p>Employers also have a duty of care towards their employees. This requires them to provide a safe working environment for adults and provide guidance about safe working practices.</p>	<p><i>This means that adults should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>always act, and be seen to act, in the child's best interests</i> ▪ <i>avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions</i> ▪ <i>take responsibility for their own actions and behaviour</i> <p><i>This means that employers should: ensure that appropriate safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures are adopted</i></p>
<p>2. Position of Trust</p>	<p>One in which one party is in a position of power or influence over the other by virtue of their work or the nature of their activity. Adults should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others. They should report and record any incident with this potential.</p>	<p><i>This means that adults should not:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>use their position to intimidate, bully, humiliate, threaten, coerce or undermine children or young people</i>
<p>3. Making a professional judgement</p>	<p>There may be occasions and circumstances in which adults have to make decisions or take action in the best interests of the child or young person which could contravene guidance or where no guidance exists. In doing so they should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider whether their actions are warranted, proportionate, safe and applied equitably. • secure the best interests and welfare of the children in their charge. • record and share them with a senior colleague. <p>In undertaking these actions individuals will be seen to be acting reasonably.</p>	<p><i>This means that where no specific guidance exists adults should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>discuss the circumstances that informed their action, or their proposed action,</i> ▪ <i>report any actions which could be misinterpreted</i> ▪ <i>always discuss any misunderstanding, accidents or threats</i> ▪ <i>always record discussions and reasons why actions were taken</i> ▪ <i>record any areas of disagreement about course of action taken and if necessary referred to a higher authority.</i>
<p>4. Senior member of staff</p>	<p>Senior member of staff refers to any member of the Senior Leadership Team, Head of Year/ Key Stage/ Department, as appropriate.</p>	

APPENDIX 1

Legislation & Guidance informing the Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers in Strathearn School

The Children (NI) Order 1995

Welfare & Protection of Pupils Education & Libraries (NI) Order 2003

Department of Education NI documents	<i>Pastoral Care: Guidance on the Use of reasonable Force to Restrain and Control Pupils (1999)</i> <i>Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools - (Cir.17/04),</i> <i>Welfare & Protection of Pupils (Cir. 03/13)</i> <i>Supporting pupils with Medication Needs (2008)</i> <i>SBNI Core Child Protection Policy and Procedures (2017)</i>
Joint Education & Library Boards (NI)	<i>Regional Policy Framework on the Use of Reasonable Force / Safe Handling (2004)</i>
Education Authority	<i>Educational Visits: Policy, Practice & Procedures (2007)</i>
Department for Education & Skills	<i>Guidance for Safe Working Practice for the Protection of Children and Adults in Educational Settings (2006)</i>
DHSSPS	<i>Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in NI (2016)</i>
Department for Children, Schools & Families	<i>Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults working with Children and Young People (2009)</i>
ATL Advice	<i>Social Networking sites: How to Protect Yourself (2010)</i>