



## ***Safe Touch Policy 2023-24***

*This policy outlines the approach to use of appropriate touch at Arnbrook Primary School.*

COVID-19 Appendum:

These measures will be re-introduced if risk assessment deems fit:

Physical contact (a high five for example) must not be used to provide praise or congratulations.

Appropriate, safe touch is also sometimes used to calm a distressed child or encourage/affirm an anxious child, especially with younger pupils. In line with social distancing, other means of calming and soothing a child's strong emotions should be used, as referred to in our safe touch policy;

- Slowing one's pace
- Lowering the voice
- Encouraging them to breathe more deeply
- Talking slowly firmly and quietly in an unhurried unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries.

This may be more difficult with younger pupils. If a child is so distressed that a staff member feels they need some form of safe touch to reassure them, this should be done in line with our safe touch policy and PPE guidance that it's only needed for routine use and/or when dealing with a child displaying symptoms of COVID-19. Contact should be brief, gentle and on open clothed parts of the body (arms or shoulder) and staff should wash hands immediately afterwards and maintain as much distance as possible.

## **1. Purpose & Rationale**

At our school, we have a touch policy. This means that members of staff are able to physically guide, touch or prompt children in appropriate ways at the appropriate times. It outlines the reasons why we may choose to use appropriate touch and the appropriate ways in which we do so.

## **2. Background**

Children learn who they are and how the world is in relationship. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing. Touch is recognised as being a physical way of soothing, calming and containing distress. Many research studies have indicated the necessity of human contact and touch in the healthy development of children. It is a factor in children who experience neglect and 'fail to thrive'.

## **3. Aims of the Policy**

Our policy rests on the belief that every member of staff need to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Hence, staff need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. Equally, when a child is in deep distress, staff are trained to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding can be provided without touching.

## **4. Why Do We Use Touch?**

We may choose to use touch for a variety of reasons, but in general terms we would normally do so for either comfort or reward. We may also need to physically touch, guide or prompt students if they require personal care, assistance with writing, eating, dressing etc. Staff should take care and use their professional judgement when deciding whether to provide intervention/ assistance to a child who does not require such care, even if the child requests help. Staff should ask themselves how others may view their actions. Staff should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their reasons or intentions if appropriate touch is to be used.

### Appropriate touch may be used to

- Calm a distressed child
- Contain an angry child
- Encourage/affirm an anxious child
- To support a child with low self-esteem.

Other means of calm, soothing and containing children's strong emotions include:

- Slowing one's pace
- Lowering the voice

Ways of regulating children's emotions

- Breathing more deeply
- Talking slowly firmly and quietly in an unhurried unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries.

Such necessary interventions are fully in line with guidelines set out in the Government Document 'New Guidance on the use of Reasonable Force in School' (DfEE 1998) and 'Use of Reasonable Force' (2013).

## **5. What about other physical contact with pupils?**

It is not illegal to touch a pupil. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, with a pupil is proper and necessary. Examples of where touching a pupil might be proper or necessary:

- Holding the hand of the child at the front/back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school;
- When comforting a distressed pupil;
- When a pupil is being congratulated or praised;
- To demonstrate how to use a musical instrument;
- To demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching; and
- To give first aid.

In some cases, physical intervention is needed to ensure the safety of children and/or staff and prevent serious damage to property or maintain an orderly school environment. The Physical Intervention policy outlines the way this is used.

## **6. Our guidelines**

To ensure appropriate touch the following guidelines are adhered to at all times:

- Parents/carers should be informed of the school policy on touch through the website, safeguarding leaflet and annual updates.
- Teachers/support staff should read and follow the policy at all times and be provided with training on safer working practices, including appropriate touch.
- Where touch is used, it should be brief, gentle contact on open clothed parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders). Any sort of hug should be offered only in sideways manner & sitting alongside a child to offer emotional support is more appropriate than allowing a child to sit on the lap of a member of staff.
- Staff should touch with confidence and should verbalise their affection, reassurance and acceptance by touching and making positive comments, for example touching a child's arm and saying "well done". A fleeting or clumsy touch may confuse a child/young person or may feel uncomfortable or even cause distress.
- Where children/young people indicate that touch is unwelcome staff should stop immediately and apologise if necessary. Staff should talk to colleagues and record their interactions with children. If particular strategies work, or not, colleagues should be informed so they can build on or avoid making the same mistake.
- Touch of an equally positive and safe nature is acceptable between staff as it demonstrates positive role models for children and young people and shows that adults can get along and use touch in non-abusive or threatening ways. It is also acceptable to talk about how touch feels, about acceptable boundaries and expectations.

It is important to remember that some children may have suffered from inappropriate/unwanted and detrimental abuse and/or neglect which may lead them to attempt to relate to others in inappropriate ways. Any unwanted physical contact by an adult, however well intended, may trigger unexpected reactions which can be misconstrued in certain children. All staff should be aware that physical contact may lead to a response which is difficult to understand and manage.

Unsafe touch

- At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.
- No inappropriate touch: All staff are aware of inappropriate touch that is invasive or which could be confusing, traumatising or experienced as eroticising in any way whatsoever. Also no part of the body should be touched in a way that appears patronising or intrusive;
- Therefore the context in which touch takes place is usually the decisive factor in determining the emotional and physical safety for both parties;
- Serious Breach: Should any such touch be used it would be deemed as the most serious breach of the Code of Conduct warranting the highest level of disciplinary action (see safeguarding policy for further action to be taken).
- If a child approaches any member of staff and touches them in an unsafe way, then school safeguarding procedures should be followed, if necessary, and pupils encouraged to teach the child/young person an acceptable alternative.

To be read in conjunction with:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
- Intimate Care Policy
- Physical Intervention Policy

Review date: September 2024