

TRINITY SCHOOL



Touch Policy

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Third Revision:

Signed Chair/Vice Chair of Governors

Trinity School Appropriate Touch Policy 2023

This policy is intended to ensure that the Governor's Vision and Aims are delivered, as set out below:

Trinity School Vision

- **Leading Excellence in SEND Provision**
- **Ensuring Outstanding Person-Centred Achievement**
- **Including Everyone in Meaningful and Safeguarded Life**

Purpose:

1. All young people at Trinity School are supported through their development by empathetic staff who use touch in a well-informed and respectful way.
2. Staff are clear and open about why they are using touch and are able to explain their practice.
3. There is clarity and transparency in issues of touch.
4. Staff have the security of knowing that appropriate touch is sanctioned and promoted by the Headteacher and senior leaders to prevent feelings of isolation and lack of care with our students

Guiding Principles / Ethos:

Empathetic staff:

- understand that appropriate touch is necessary and desirable as part of our pupils' development, emotional wellbeing, care, education and quality of life.
- are sensitive to the danger of touch being misunderstood and triggering sexual arousal and, should this occur, that it should be reported.
- understand that a young person may inadvertently touch intimate parts of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding.
- understand the importance of reporting through safeguarding procedures any concerns they have about any aspect of touch

Staff and Governors at Trinity School have an awareness of the importance of appropriate touch and the implications for our pupils if they are not equipped for the wider world in terms of –

- their vulnerability to exploitation;
- self advocacy;
- appropriate touch on themselves and towards others;
- concepts of public and private places;
- understanding social signals from other people

The aims of our approach to touch are:

- to enable staff to support children and young people with respectful, empathetic touch with confidence
- to safeguard and oversee personalised approaches for touch for those young people whose need for touch may leave them vulnerable to exploitation or misinterpretation in school or in the wider world
- to enable families of our young people to know what is appropriate touch and how we safeguard their children
- to develop pupil self-esteem and self-awareness, communication and self-advocacy skills and their ability to keep themselves safe and understand what is appropriate on themselves or others
- to equip staff with an understanding of what is inappropriate touch and what to do if they witness its use

Agreed Procedures / Guidelines:

- Policy on Appropriate Touch shared and understood by staff across whole school in the context of safeguarding policies and the Emotional and Sexual Development policy.
- There is clear message that it is **never** appropriate for staff to touch a pupil's intimate body areas except as part of personal or medical care in an efficient and functional way
- A list of guidelines for what we consider to be appropriate touch is shared with all staff
- A system of "Touch Protocols" recognises the need for developmentally appropriate communication, bonding and intensive interactions and balances this with appropriate and professional distance
- Touch Protocols drawn up and shared with staff involved and families for the most vulnerable students by the Heads of School / Assistant Head FEC with support from the Emotional and Sexual Development team as appropriate

How do we know this approach is working? Our pupils are safeguarded by an empathetic staff without losing access to appropriate touch that supports their care, emotional wellbeing and communication.

Guidelines for appropriate touch when working with pupils

Touch is important and may be used routinely and transparently for any of the following reasons:

For communication (particularly considering the early developmental levels of our pupils):

- to reinforce other forms of communication (e.g. hand on shoulder when speaking) or to function as the main form of communication in itself
- to respond non-verbally or to respond to another person's own use of physical contact for communication and to make social connections. This is particularly likely to occur during Intensive Interaction or day to day greetings (hand-shakes, hugs etc.)

For educational reasons:

- as part of the process of establishing the fundamentals of communication for people at early communication
- to direct children in educational tasks and essential skills
- as support or guidance, for example during transitions between activities and during swimming, PE sessions, TacPac
- for support, modelling or guidance in next steps in learning and transitions

During play:

- remember play is important in development
- play activities naturally include touch
- many people of any age who are at early levels of development are likely to be quite tactile and physical

For therapy:

- for example, physiotherapy, sensory integration, massage either by the therapist or by another member of staff carrying out a therapy programme or following therapy advice

To support physical development / exercise:

- where pupil's learning will be enriched within a controlled, safe environment
- where pupils cannot experience movement independently or need support initially to do so
- to stimulate muscles / nerves outside of pupil's own control
- within a recognised programme

For emotional reasons:

- offering reassurance and encouraging bonding / relationship building
- to communicate security and comfort / affection and warmth
- to enable a pupil to develop understanding of these positive emotions and the ability to communicate them

For purposes of care:

- touch is necessary in order to carry out personal care

- touch is also necessary to support / teach independence with changing / dressing / undressing

For medical and nursing care

To give physical support:

- for pupils who have physical difficulties, for example transferring in and out of wheelchairs
- to guide pupils between places, rooms and activities

To protect from danger by using physical intervening and supporting challenging behaviour:

- following recognised school guidelines and policies
- using information included in individual Behaviour Support Plans and Individual Risk Assessments / Physical Intervention Policy / Team Teach guidance

It is important to balance developmental age with age-appropriateness and professional distance; bearing in mind how vulnerable our pupils are and using thoughtful planning for those at the very earliest levels of development. Whilst gender and cultural factors have relevance in issues of touch, the emotional and communication needs of the individual are due equal consideration.

For example, at Year 9, would we as professionals still offer comfort with a hug? However, we would recognise that a young person in Year 9 with PMLD would benefit from closeness in intensive interactions.

It is important to consider how many of our pupils build routines very quickly that they will not wish to unlearn. For these pupils it is imperative that from an early age we are teaching them what is and is not appropriate-e.g. lap-sitting; frontal hugs; carrying. From an early age, we should be deflecting pupils to sitting alongside; sideways hugs / patting for comfort; insisting that children are not carried unless absolutely necessary. Children for whom a degree of closeness is important during a crisis should have a Touch Protocol drawn up by the Head of School.

As far as possible, the young person involved should consent to any touch given and staff should be sensitive to any verbal and non-verbal communication they give that might indicate that they do not want to be touched. It should always be considered by staff that for touch to provide positive experiences it should be consensual.

Staff should also be sensitive to any changes in the young person's behaviour (e.g. over-excitement or negative reactions) that might indicate the need to reduce or withdraw touch, particularly during play or intensive interaction. Significant changes in behaviour should be clearly recorded.

If staff are in any doubt about issues concerning appropriate touch, or observe any practice that causes concern, they should discuss it with their phase managers.

Inappropriate touch includes touch of intimate areas; behaviour that is overfriendly/too close and does not recognise professional distance or age-appropriateness; sexual grooming; touch causing arousal or pain; touch that is not gentle or respectful; touch used for bullying; touch that is gratuitous; touch that is hidden.

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