



N E W C A S T L E
PRIMARY SCHOOL
& NURSERY UNIT

Code of Conduct

‘Be The Best You Can Be’

Updated: September 2024

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A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EMPLOYEES WITHIN THE EDUCATION SECTOR WHOSE WORK BRINGS THEM INTO CONTACT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction

All actions concerning children and young people must uphold the best interests of the young person as a primary consideration. 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 their charge must be beyond reproach. This Code of Conduct is not intended to detract from the enriching experiences children and young people gain from positive interaction with staff within the education sector. 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.

CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Private Meetings with Pupils.

- a. Staff should be aware of the dangers which may arise from private interviews with individual pupils. It is recognised 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.
- b. Where such conditions cannot apply, staff are advised to ensure that another adult knows 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.
- c. Where possible another pupil or (preferably) another adult should be present or nearby during the interview, and the school should take active measures to facilitate this.

2. Physical Contact with Pupils.

- As a general rule, 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 not feel inhibited from providing this.
- 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, or others or property from harm. (DENI Circular 1999/9, on the use of unreasonable force, gives guidance on Article 4 of the Education (NI) 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 and recorded appropriately on an Accident Report form. **However, no member of staff should hesitate to provide first aid in an emergency simply because another person is not present.**
- Any physical contact which would be likely to be misinterpreted by the pupil, or 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 his/her 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 usual and where staff may be in proximity in circumstances very different from the normal school environment.

3. 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 application, either by pupils or by the teacher, might after the event be criticised. Schools have already received advice on the value of consulting parents and Governors when proposing to use materials in connection with sex education programmes.
- If in doubt about the appropriateness of a particular teaching material the teacher should consult with the Principal before using it.

4. Relationships and Attitudes

Within the Pastoral Care Policies of the school and the employing authority, staff should ensure that their relationships with pupils are appropriate to the age, maturity and sex of the pupils, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought.

5. Social Networking Sites

People who work with children and young people should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries, avoid improper contact and respect their position of trust.

With regard to relationships, staff and volunteers should **NOT** attempt to establish an inappropriate relationship which might include

- Communication of a personal nature
- Inappropriate dialogue through the internet
- The sending of emails or text messages

Staff and volunteers should be extremely careful in corresponding with people on social networking sites. They should at all times remain professional and they should **NOT** correspond with children nor add them as “friends”. It should be noted that on such sites an inappropriate or even misconstrued communication may have the potential to impact upon careers or even result in criminal investigation.

In addition, staff should bear in mind who may access their own profiles and therefore take care as to the information they display about themselves and their personal lives.

Staff should not make, view or access illegal or inappropriate images of children.

In general, staff and volunteers within the school setting should exercise caution when using social networking sites and avoid inappropriate communication of any kind.

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 judgement will be exercised and for the vast majority of employees this Code of Conduct will serve only to confirm what has already been their practice. If employees have any doubt about points in this code, or how they should act in particular circumstances, they should consult their Principal or representative of their professional association.

From time to time, however, it is prudent for all staff to reappraise their teaching styles, relationships with children and their manner and approach to individual children, to ensure that they give no grounds for doubt about their intentions in the minds of colleagues, of children or of their parents/guardians.

Whilst we have a Code of Conduct for Staff, it would be expected that parents, when on school grounds, would adhere to the aforementioned guidelines as well as being courteous and respectful at all times to members of staff, pupils and other parents.