



Physical Contact Policy and Guidelines

Date	Review Date	Coordinator	Nominated Governors
Feb 2020	Feb 2021	Roger Williams	Full Governing Body

Introduction

The school adheres to statutory guidance regarding safeguarding children and health and safety. Alongside this guidance we recognise that there are many positive reasons for giving and making available physical contact to our students:

- We have some pupils who operate emotionally, physiologically, cognitively, communicatively at a very early level of development
- For people who are at an early level of development touch is likely to be the most fundamental, tangible, foundational form of communication - to some extent, underpinning further communication development
- Physical contact is a deep, fundamental form of communication for all human beings and can be particularly effective for ensuring the transmission of profound messages about self-worth and respect particularly (but not only) when speech communication is not available
- Inappropriate touch or the effects of the experience of inappropriate touch is partly combated by experience of appropriate touch
- Inappropriate response to touch cannot be combated by not touching
- Needs should be assessed on an individual basis
- Touch is normal interaction for the affirmation of relationships and giving of emotional, physiological support (even if cultural attitudes to touch vary enormously)
- Good experiences of positive, appropriate touching may make the recognition of negative inappropriate touch more likely
- Our practice can involve frequent, routine use of physical prompting. Again, we should ensure that these are also warm, communicative touches.
- Team Teach is used to protect pupils. Only members of staff trained in the techniques will carry them out in accordance with the pupil's behaviour management plan.
- Therapy, e.g. Sensory Integration, Deep Pressure etc. will be used with individual pupils as appropriate and in consultation with parents/carers.
- Medication/treatment – to offer support after seizures/ injury
- Touch will only be used in an educationally supportive and cognitively, socially and emotionally appropriate way.
- The cultural views and beliefs of individual pupil's families will be taken into account.

What does this mean in practice?

Members of staff may routinely touch pupils in order:

- To reinforce other communication, e.g. hand on shoulder whilst speaking, signing hand over hand, PECS, Signalong
- To give physical support and guidance
- To give reassurance – communicate security and comfort
- To physically intervene and manage negative behaviours
- To role model positive use of touch

- To respond non-verbally
- To direct or physically prompt
- To give personal care (e.g. toileting, supervision while changing etc.)
- To give physical cues for participation or understanding
- To aid protection in hazardous situations
- To give therapy, e.g. massage, physiotherapy
- To respond to a student's use of physical contact for communication and making social connections
- To reward and affirm
- To provide the opportunity of choice to lead the communication
- To communicate affection, warmth, a sense of mutuality etc. and enable the student to learn understanding of these things and the ability to communicate them
- To purposefully encourage some pupils who do not want or like touch, the enjoyment and benefit of physical contact
- To allow full participation in lessons where physical contact is part of teaching and learning e.g. guidance in gymnastics or in hairdressing
- As far as is possible, giving maximum regard to the student's right to give consent to physical contact (there are exceptions to this in our practice)

Potential hazards

What this means in practice is that physical contact may be a feature of routine staff techniques, however, all staff must observe these potential hazards:

- With all pupils, members of staff must operate maximum sensitivity to physical contact being misunderstood or misconstrued and triggering sexual arousal
- Pupils may sometimes touch intimate areas of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding. It is legitimate and advisable for the member of staff to withdraw from, or cease to touch, but not advisable to display a reaction at that moment which may be reinforcing and therefore counterproductive
- Pupils can sometimes become physically aroused during personal care. In this situation staff should finish personal care procedure and should give the pupil a few minutes of privacy

Some possible reasons for occasionally withholding non-routine physical contact

- If contact may, in the short term, contribute to sexual arousal
- If there is a history of sexual or physical abuse
- If distress is caused as a result
- If the member of staff is not able to cope at that time or is not able to cope personally with such tactile contact, in which case, they should discuss with class team
- If the member of staff at that moment feels that the circumstances may leave them vulnerable to allegations of improper conduct
- The pupil's use of touch is presently too extreme for the comfort of the member of staff

Notes:

- Intensive Interaction and Sensory Integration training will be provided for appropriate staff
- The majority of staff undergo Team Teach training and are aware of our Positive Handling Policy
- The team working ethos should also include good discussions among staff concerning the emotional aspects of the work
- Activities including physical contact such as intensive interaction, deep pressure input (sensory integration) or massage should be acknowledged in any individual programme for the pupil.

- If any distress is shown by the pupil taking part in Intensive Interaction/Sensory Integration, it will be stopped immediately.

Monitoring the Effectiveness of the Policy

- The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed every three years or when the need arises, and the necessary recommendations for improvement will be made to the governors.

Related documentation

Positive Handling Policy

Behaviour Statement

Behaviour Policy

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019