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# Personal and Professional Conduct

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## **PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

All staff are expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct. At all times and in all situations, staff should conduct themselves in a professional way and ensure that they are following and acting upon the statutory guidance found in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026'. Employees must not engage in conduct outside of work which could damage the reputation of the school or the employee's own reputation or the reputation of other members of the school community.

The following statements define the behaviour and attitudes which set the required standard for conduct:

All teachers must by law, follow the Teaching Standards 2021:

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by:
- treat pupils with dignity, build relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observe proper boundaries
- have regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
- show tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
- do not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs
- ensure that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law.
- staff must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality.
- staff must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

These standards are also good practice for all support staff, Governors and volunteers.

There can be no doubt that a pat on the shoulder, a held hand or even an arm around the shoulder can be a powerful and appropriate action. Touching can be a positive reinforcement to relationships and a comfort in times of stress. It is acknowledged that, close contact between a child and an adult is more part of normal practice in Early Years settings. In summary, it is generally deemed appropriate to (if necessary) touch others on the upper arm which would appear to be regarded as a neutral zone in most cultures.

1. Staff may have cause to have physical contact with pupils for a variety of reasons:

- To comfort a pupil in distress (as long as this is age appropriate)
- To gently direct a pupil (again, age-appropriateness has to be considered)
- For curricular reasons (e.g. in physical activities such as PE, Drama, Art, Science, Design Technology etc)
- In an emergency to avert danger to the pupil
- In rare situations when physical intervention is warranted (Only staff trained in Team Teach should use this).

Staff have a 'Duty of Care' towards the students in their care. Therefore if a student is likely to be at risk of harm, you must take action. The action you take will be dependant on the dynamic risk assessment that you make at that moment in time.

2. In all situations when physical contact between staff and pupils takes place, staff must consider the following:
  - The pupil's age and level of understanding as to why physical contact is made
  - The pupil's individual characteristics (e.g. whether the physical contact might be misinterpreted or cause an escalation in behaviour)
  - The location where the contact takes place (e.g. it should not take place in private without other witnesses present)
  - It should not become an habitual act between a particular staff member and an individual pupil
  - Physical contact should never be made as a punishment or in order to inflict pain
  - All forms of corporate punishment are prohibited
  - Physical contact should not be made with either participant's neck, breasts; abdomen, genital area, other sensitive body parts, or to put pressure on joints
3. This guidance on physical contact between staff and pupils should be read in conjunction with other school policies, in particular the Health and Safety Policy, Safeguarding Policy, Equal Opportunities Policy and the Behaviour Policy.

Appropriate touches include:

- Hand shakes
- Shoulder hugs
- Linked arms
- Holding hands during playtimes or outings
- Guiding children using "Caring Hands"
- Team Teach approaches for trained staff only

Lap-Sitting

At Bridgewater we discourage lap-sitting. Children should be taught to seek comfort/attention through other means, for example a hand hold or hug. If a child attempts to sit on your lap, explain to them that this is not what we do here and ask them to sit next to you if it is appropriate. At times, children may in crisis or distress spontaneously hold you in a way which is not described as above. If this should happen please ensure that you have informed a senior member of staff to protect yourself.

The following basic ground rules applied with professional judgement will promote confidence and trust in staff:

**Respect privacy without compromising safety** - when 1:1 meetings with children or young people are necessary, then if possible, have these in a room with visual access or the door open and/or with another adult in a nearby area.

**Think carefully about physical contact** - children and young people may need comfort when they are upset, but offering physical comfort must be carefully judged. Even with younger children, think about the context and circumstances before responding to a child's wishes for physical comfort. Show respect and ask the child or young person first.

**Use of social networking** - Social networking is a way of life for most young people and many adults. However adults working with children and young people should review their use of social networks as they

take on professional responsibilities. Strong passwords should be used and security settings should be applied so that you control all access to your profile'. (See Appendix 1 for guidance on ensuring Facebook and Social Media settings are private and advice on protecting yourself whilst using Social Media). It is unacceptable to make any form of communication with children via social media or any other form of technology outside of school hours (specific guidance is included in Annex A).

**Restraint or physical intervention is a last resort, only to be used when necessary to protect a child or others** - your school and education authority guidelines on restraint or physical intervention should be observed, and in all situations, every effort should be made to defuse a situation before taking any action physically. Any physical intervention should only be carried out by members of the Senior Leadership Team who have been Team Teach trained.

**Dignity and privacy** - Staff responsible for the personal care of disabled pupils should take care to provide privacy for the child or young person and respect his/her preferences for care, while ensuring other staff are aware of the care activities.

**Appropriate relationships with children and young people** - if a child or young person is becoming inappropriately attached to a member of staff, or a member of staff is developing feelings for the child or young person not appropriate to a professional relationship, then the advice of a senior colleague or the Head should be sought.

**Be aware of language** - Staff should be aware that remarks which some children and young people understand as fair and humorous can be viewed by others as hurtful and embarrassing. In particular, staff should avoid using humiliation or sarcasm as a form of sanction or to assert authority. Staff should model respect to their pupils.

**Share concerns.** A climate of openness in school is essential for everyone to work well together. The careless actions of one member of staff can affect the whole school, so all staff should report any concerns about their colleagues to a senior manager, for everyone's sake.

**Promote personal safety education** - There are many opportunities in school to enable children and young people to learn skills and knowledge to help keep them safe. This can take place within personal, social and health education, but many other activities help children and young people to build their resilience.

Throughout the school, it is possible to provide opportunities for children and young people to:

- Be aware of and able to weigh up risks and consequences
- Be skilled in asserting their needs and personal boundaries
- Be practiced in responding to others about behaviours they do not like
- Be confident and thoroughly understand their own importance

## **Annex A.**

### **Communication, social media and internet use.**

- Employees must not give their personal contact details (including their mobile telephone number, home address and e-mail address).
- Communication with pupils must at all times take place within appropriate professional boundaries and must be transparent and open to scrutiny. Contact should only be made for appropriate professional reasons.
- 'Communication' refers also to the wider use of technology, including mobile phones, text messaging, instant messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites, social networking sites, online gaming and blogs.
- Please refer to the school policy on the use of mobile phones when on school premises.
- Employees should not post any comments on social media or the internet that could potentially be defamatory to the school or damage the school's reputation. Comments must not disclose confidential information relating to the school, its pupils, governors or employees.
- Bullying, harassment and victimisation of employees, pupils or other persons affiliated with the school through online means will not be tolerated and will be subject to disciplinary action.
- Employees must not allow current or recent pupils access to their social media accounts.
- It is advised that employees do not identify themselves with the school on their personal social media accounts.
- It is advised that employees make all social media profiles 'private' so that pupils and parents do not have access to their personal details and images. Employees should be aware that they leave themselves open to a charge of professional misconduct if inappropriate images of them are made available on a public profile.
- It is advised that employees exercise caution and do not accept friend requests from parents.
- Accessing, marketing and storing child pornography or indecent images of children is illegal and will invariably lead to a criminal conviction and the individual being barred from working with children and young people.
- Under no circumstances should employees in schools use school equipment to access inappropriate images on the internet or access any other site which could call into question their suitability to work with children. The same rule applies to the use of the school's equipment by members of staff at home eg laptops and tablets. Equipment containing such images or links must not be brought in to the work place.

## **Appendix 1 – Social Media Guidelines**



### **Don't accept friend requests from pupils on social media**

#### **10 rules for teachers on Facebook**

1. Change your display name – use your first and middle name, use a maiden name, or put your surname backwards instead
2. Change your profile picture to something unidentifiable, or if not, ensure that the image is professional
3. Check your privacy settings regularly
4. Be careful tagging other staff members in images or posts
5. Don't share anything publicly that you wouldn't be just as happy showing your pupils
6. Don't use social media sites in school hours
7. Don't make comments about your job, your colleagues, your school or your pupils online – once it's out there, it's out there
8. Don't associate yourself with your school on your profile (e.g. by setting it as your workplace, or by 'checking in' at a school event)
9. Don't link your work email address to your social media accounts – anyone who has this address (or your personal email address/mobile phone number) is able to find you using this information
10. Consider uninstalling the Facebook app from your phone – the app recognises wi-fi connections and makes friend suggestions based on who else uses the same wi-fi connection (such as parents or pupils)

#### **Check your privacy settings**

- Change the visibility of your posts and photos to 'Friends only', rather than 'Friends of friends'. Otherwise pupils and their families may still be able to read your posts, see things you've shared and look at your pictures if they're friends with anybody on your contacts list
- Don't forget to check your old posts and photos
- The public may still be able to see posts you've 'liked', even if your profile settings are private, because this depends on the privacy settings of the original poster
- Google your name to see what information about you is visible to the public. Facebook also has a setting that allows you to see what your profile looks like to other people, including specific friends and people searching for your name
- Prevent search engines from indexing your profile so that people can't search for you by name
- Remember that some information is always public: your display name, profile picture, cover photo, user ID (in the URL for your profile), country, age range and gender

## **What to do if...**

### **A pupil adds you on social media**

- In the first instance, ignore and delete the request. Block the pupil from viewing your profile
- Check your privacy settings again, and consider changing your display name or profile picture
- If the pupil asks you about the friend request in person, tell them that you're not allowed to accept friend requests from pupils and that if they persist, you'll have to notify senior leadership and/or their parents
- If the pupil persists, take a screenshot of their request and any accompanying messages
- Notify your senior leadership team (SLT) or headteacher about what is happening

### **A parent adds you on social media**

- It is at your discretion, in accordance with your school's policy, whether to respond. Bear in mind that:
- Responding to one parent's friend request or message might set an unwelcome precedent for both you and other teachers at the school
- Pupils may then have indirect access through their parent's account to anything you post, share, comment on or are tagged in
- If you wish to decline the offer or ignore a message, consider drafting a stock response to let the parent know why you're doing so

### **You're being harassed on social media, or somebody is spreading something offensive about you**

- **Do not** retaliate or respond in any way
- Save evidence of any abuse by taking screenshots and recording the time and date it occurred
- Report the material to Facebook or the relevant social network and ask them to remove it
- If the perpetrator is a current school pupil or staff member, the school's own mediation and disciplinary procedures are usually sufficient to deal with online incidents
- If the perpetrator is a parent or other external adult, a senior member of staff should invite them to a meeting to address their concerns, address any reasonable complaints and/or request they remove the offending comments or material
- If the comments are racist, sexist, of a sexual nature or constitute a hate crime, you or someone from the school should consider contacting the police

Please visit [www.webwise.ie/teachers/facebook-for-teachers/](http://www.webwise.ie/teachers/facebook-for-teachers/) for further advice and tips on ensuring your Social Media account privacy settings are up to date.