



Positive Touch Guidance

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These guidelines outline the principles and procedures for physical touch between staff members and pupils at Oakley Vale Primary School. This should be read alongside the following policies:

- Behaviour and Discipline
- Special Educational Needs and Inclusion
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs in School
- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Intimate Care Policy

All staff, visitors and volunteers at School are expected to follow these guidelines.

Rational

SLT at Oakley Vale met to discuss the issues around our use of and approaches to touch at the school. We all agreed the use of touch with the majority of pupils was unavoidable and, in many cases, a necessary and desirable element of building secure relationships between adults and pupils and in delivering the full curriculum and personal care for our pupils. It was agreed we need to establish clear guidelines and a consistent approach across the whole Trust.

Research has recognised that physical touch is important for a child's development. Touch is essential to provide sensitive, good quality care and to support natural interactions. It is part of the development, emotional wellbeing, care and education for our pupils. Touch is the earliest sensory system to become functional and is the foundation for all other sensory systems. Positive touch is beneficial for both psychological and physiological development.

- Physical touch can be calming and relaxing and is vital for emotional wellbeing.
- Physiologically touch facilitates growth of the body's cells and the development of the brain and the nervous system.

However, in the current social climate there is a tendency to associate touch with intimacy and sexuality. Safeguarding children and young adults from inappropriate physical interactions is crucial and for many of our pupils they are unable to discriminate between who they can trust and who they cannot – it becomes an all or nothing lesson. It is important to recognise the number of adults a child will come into contact with in the School and the risk of children become desensitised to social contact assuming it is always safe. There has to be a balance between protecting the child and young person, preparing them to be safe in the community and recognising the positive and appropriate use of touch for wellbeing, sensory regulation and emotional security.

Guidelines on the use of Physical Touch

The guidelines that follow describe the School's procedures on the use of appropriate physical touch.

Purposes

The staff at Oakley Vale Primary School routinely engage in physical touch with pupils including for the following reasons:

- To aid and develop communication – touch cues, hand over hand signing, physical prompts, intensive interaction and to make appropriate social interactions (high-five, shaking hands)
- To offer physical support and guidance, help with mobility, moving and handling, guiding pupils into rooms.
- To offer reassurance and support, comforting distressed or upset pupils, communicating warmth, comfort and reassurance and to develop positive emotions.
- Physical interventions and managing challenging behaviours. To protect students from harming themselves or others, including restraint.
- Play and intensive interaction
- Physical prompting and support, gestural and physical prompts during learning activities such as hand-over-hand support and hand-under-handsupport.
- To support with personal care routines
- To carry out therapy programmes, physiotherapy, occupational therapy.
- Rewards such as high-fives and a pat on the back.

General principles and Guidelines

Individual guidance will be agreed with the class team and added to the Pupil Profile s/behaviour plan. This will be discussed alongside the curriculum for each pupil, the individual therapies and interventions used, the age and the safeguarding of the pupil (taking into account the need to develop consistency across the whole School).

- Staff need to have a clear idea of why they are using physical touch with pupils. Staff should not be touching pupils for the sake of it or because it is easier or saves time.
- Where possible staff need to be sensitive to the child's ability to consent to touch, when, where and with whom. Always explain to the pupil what you are doing and why. The exception to seeking consent is where physical touch is being used to manage challenging behaviour and physical intervention is required as a last resort.
- Staff should be sensitive to signals, verbal or non-verbal, that indicate that a child dislikes touch.
- Some pupils may provoke or initiate a physical intervention situation in order to gain inappropriate physical contact.
- Where used pupils will have: A Behaviour Plan indicating how challenging behaviour is managed, a moving and handling protocol, A physiotherapy programme written by the physiotherapist, an intimate care plan, any other therapy programme.

All programmes must be readily available in the SEND files in the classroom and followed by

all staff.

The use of physical touch should be discussed openly and regularly. Staff should not feel embarrassed or ashamed of the use of touch and regular discussions should take place between staff teams.

Students with physical difficulties need support to touch and interact with their peers.

Staff need to consider influence of race, gender, age and sexual identity and disability.

- Gender differences may make someone feel uncomfortable or cause arousal.
- A child's person history may distort the understanding of a 'safe' adult
- Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds may be used to different types of touch
- Pupils with multi-sensory impairments may be startled by touch
- Pupils with sensory integration difficulties may interpret touch differently to others.

It is important for staff to familiarise themselves with the needs of different pupils and to ask advice if they are unsure.

Specific Guidelines and Principles

The use of touch to comfort pupils

It would not be appropriate or beneficial to suggest that staff do not comfort pupils who are upset or distressed. Staff need to be aware of a pupil's individual needs and circumstances and should use their professional judgement. A side to side hug often provides comfort and support and can be less intrusive than a front to front hug or sitting on an adult knee.

Pupils who have reached puberty

Staff need to be vigilant and aware that pupils who have reached puberty may become sexually aroused by physical contact. Staff need to be mindful of this and alternative methods of contact identified.

If the pupil seems to be sexually aroused by the member of staff's actions during personal care routines it is important that this is recorded and that a multi-disciplinary team undertakes a review of approaches.

Pupils who touch staff inappropriately

Occasionally students may engage in physical contact that staff find inappropriate. Staff should withdraw from these situations as soon as possible and these should be discussed with a more senior member of staff/DSL.

If possible, staff should not give negative feedback to the student as this may reinforce the behaviour. Staff should aim to divert or redirect a pupil's attention. If this is a regular occurrence the methods for managing this behaviour should be highlighted on the student's behaviour plan.

Hand holding

Staff should use their professional judgement when holding hands with students. Students often need support with walking and balance, or may need support for safety and to avoid running off.

- Staff need to be aware of the developmental age of the students they are supporting, and be clear the physical contact used is appropriate for the individual student. Developmental levels can often be more relevant to our students than their chronological age.

Final Reminders

- In using touch during personal care routines staff should ensure pupils are comfortable and familiar with the staff members delivering the personal care.
- Staff need to be aware of the types of touch used. Pupils on the Autistic Spectrum or with multi-sensory impairment and / or sensory integration difficulties may become confused and distressed by certain touch.
- Other people may be watching who may misinterpret physical intervention procedures. Staff must be fully informed of the strategies on the behaviour plan and must follow these at all times to protect themselves and the pupils

Inappropriate Touch

It is not appropriate to touch students in the following areas:

- Genitals
- Chest / breast
- Bottom

Except for:

- First aid
- Personal care
- Medical needs

In these circumstances staff should try and ensure that there is more than one person present and that consent has been gained from the student involved.

It is not acceptable to kiss students. If a student initiates a kiss between themselves and a member of staff, staff need to withdraw from the situation. Our responsibility is to ensure our pupils are fully prepared so they are safe within the School and wider community.

If you are in doubt about any issues concerning appropriate touch, or you observe any practice that causes concern, you should discuss this with a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate practice at all times.