

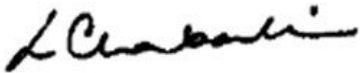


WALTHAMSTOW HALL
SEVENOAKS

Staff Code of Conduct and Prudence Guidance

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Signed: 
Ms L Chamberlain
Headmistress

Date: 01 October 2024

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Purpose

- 1.1 Relationships with colleagues, governors, contractors, visitors, pupils and their family members should be reasonable and mutually respectful at all times. The nature of a busy, relatively small school with its House structure and emphasis on good pastoral care, encourages staff and pupils to work together in a productive and warm atmosphere. However, this is not without its risks, and all staff must be aware of the possibility of their dealings with pupils being misconstrued as unprofessional conduct. Staff must be alert to situations where they or other staff are potentially vulnerable to false allegations of unprofessional conduct. In particular, occasions in which a member of staff and a pupil are alone in the same room can lead to situations that might be misinterpreted by the pupil.
- 1.2 On all occasions, but particularly when alone with pupils, staff must be wholly professional and not do or say anything that might make a pupil feel uncomfortable or that could be misconstrued in any way.
- 1.3 All Walthamstow Hall School staff and governors have a responsibility to safeguard children and must read Part One of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) and Annex B. Staff are given regularly updated child protection training, and are required to read the School's Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy, which is also regularly updated. Staff with concerns about a child must speak directly with the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Louise Chamberlain (Headmistress) or one of the DSL team (Nick Castell, Nicky Armitage, Katie Franzen, Gill Palmer) but should, in exceptional circumstances, consider contacting children's social care directly. It is a requirement of members of staff that they report safeguarding concerns, and failure to report a matter of which they have knowledge could lead to disciplinary action. This is the case whether or not the matter involves, or might involve, another member of staff.
- 1.4 The purpose of this guidance is to: confirm and reinforce the professional responsibilities of all staff (teaching and support); clarify the legal position in relation to sensitive aspects of staff/pupil relationships, in order to inform about, and protect staff from, otherwise unforeseen circumstances; set out the expectations of standards to be maintained within the School. It should be noted that the examples set out here are intended to be illustrative examples, not an exhaustive list.

2. Interacting with pupils on their own

- 2.1 A member of staff on their own must not be with a pupil in a room on their own unless there is a window to the corridor or to a public place, others enter the room often, it is a public room (e.g. classroom).
- 2.2 For the purposes of pastoral care, the following are designated public rooms:
Headmistress's study Deputy Heads' offices (Seniors and Juniors) Heads of Key Stages' offices School counsellor's room Medical centre Victorian waiting room Forecastle
- 2.3 It is prudent for staff on their own to avoid meeting with a pupil on their own outside of the school day; if this is necessary, they should tell another member of staff (usually their line manager) and hold the meeting in a designated public room e.g. Forecastle.
- 2.4 A member of staff on their own should avoid being in cars or on travelling with a pupil on their own unless another member of staff has been informed about it and the situation is urgent/it is an emergency (e.g. a visit to hospital). Casual and repeated lifts given by staff to pupils might be interpreted as possible grooming e.g. offering a lift to a pupil waiting at a bus stop. If it has been agreed with a member of the DSL team that a pupil can be transported on their own, they must sit on a rear seat and be able to get out of the car without the driver's assistance e.g. back door unlocking.

- 2.5 Staff must not engage in inappropriate electronic communication with pupils. It is inappropriate, for instance, for a member of staff to be a “friend” of a pupil on an online social network and electronic applications.
- 2.6 Staff must not give pupils their private phone number(s). Staff must make a neutral notification if their private phone number becomes known to a pupil or pupils inadvertently.
- 2.7 Pupils must never be employed directly for payment by staff outside or inside of School.
- 2.8 Physical contact
 - 2.8.1 Staff must avoid touching pupils unless they are helping them after physical injury, or when a pupil needs comfort in emotional distress, or in some similar supportive way. There are usually suitable alternatives to preventing pupils from coming to harm, and touching must never be used to exercise power.
 - 2.8.2 Physical contact with a student may very occasionally be beneficial in order to demonstrate a required action, or a correct technique in, for example, singing, drama, PE and sports. However, there are usually suitable alternatives to physical contact in such teaching scenarios and staff are strongly recommended to use such teaching methods.
 - 2.8.3 Any physical contact must be in response to the pupil’s needs, of limited duration and appropriate to the pupil’s age, stage of development and sex. Physical contact can be easily misinterpreted, especially if the pupil has experienced abuse or trauma (recently or in the past). Permission must be sought from the pupil before each occasion of physical contact, unless it is an emergency.
 - 2.8.4 Staff must use professional judgement, and seek advice from their line manager about the advisability or otherwise of physical contact with pupils in their particular work circumstances. Contact under these circumstances should be for the minimum time necessary, take into account the right of the pupil to refuse to allow physical contact, and take place in an open environment. Staff must remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the pupil.
- 2.9 Staff must not meet with pupils alone off the school premises.
- 2.10 If any situation occurs that might be misconstrued, the member of staff must report the incident to the Headmistress as soon as possible, as a neutral notification.
- 2.11 Staff must avoid making remarks of a sensitive or personal nature to pupils; terms of endearment must also be avoided as these could be misconstrued.
- 2.12 Staff must ensure that pupils do not develop “dependent relationships” with them.
- 2.13 Staff must consider carefully the time and context in which they are communicating with pupils via email or Teams on the School system.

3. Interacting with groups of pupils

- 3.1 Staff must not feel that they are unable to monitor behaviour in the toilets or changing rooms, but they must avoid being there with an individual pupil and they must exercise caution and sensitivity in these areas particularly.
- 3.2 Staff must avoid sharing with pupils in certain activities, such as swimming or use of the gym, where levels of undress or physical contact might occur, and which expose both staff and pupils to vulnerability. Where staff are required to be in the pool for safety reasons, staff must clearly be seen to be behaving in a supervisory or teaching role.
- 3.3 Pupils must never be in staff accommodation (on site or on residential trips) unless in an emergency.

4. Dependent relationships

- 4.1 All staff are in a position of trust, and great care must be taken to ensure that this position of trust is not abused or misconstrued.
- 4.2 Allowing any sort of dependent relationship to develop with a pupil is a breach of this trust. Please note that this includes form tutors/teachers who encourage pupils to share more of their personal life and private feelings than is appropriate or strictly necessary.
- 4.3 Great care must be taken to ensure that no sexual relationship or one which appears to be romantic, no matter how one-sided, is allowed to develop between a member of staff and a pupil.
- 4.4 Staff should take particular care when working with a pupil who:
 - appears to be emotionally distressed, or generally vulnerable and/or is seeking expressions of affection
 - appears to hold a grudge against them
 - acts in a sexualised way, or who is inclined to make apparently exaggerated claims about themselves or others, or one whose manner with adults seems over-familiar
 - may have reason to make up an allegation to cover up poor performance in examinations
- 4.5 Some of the behaviours in 5.4 may be indications that a child has been, or is being, abused and must therefore be reported to a member of the DSL team. Any incident involving children that could give cause for concern must be recorded, with justifications for any actions taken. In addition, any incident must be promptly reported to a member of the DSL team.
- 4.6 Staff must also be careful not to form dependent relationships with parents of children in the School.

5. Photographing pupils

- 5.1 Staff must not use their own phones or cameras, and must use School devices only for their own protection.

6. Use of toilets and showers

- 6.1 In school and on school trips, staff are expected to use different toilet and washing facilities from pupils. Where it is not possible to use separate facilities, staff should act prudently by, for example, not using the facilities at the same time as pupils.

7. Setting a good example

- 7.1 Staff must at all times provide a good example for pupils, with their appearance, general behaviour and dealings with others. Staff must be polite and professional in their behaviour towards other staff, as they must in all dealings with pupils and their parents.
- 7.2 Staff must exercise discretion in what they say to other pupils or to parents, and must avoid commenting to them about school policy, management or other staff. Under no circumstances must staff discuss pupils or their families in the hearing of other pupils. Confidential information must always be treated appropriately, and unprofessional conversations avoided. Similarly, staff must not speak to the press or other outside agencies about school matters without the express permission of the Headmistress.
- 7.3 Staff must also ensure that they do not bully, harass or intimidate other staff or pupils.

- 7.4 Alcohol may not be consumed during normal working hours except on celebratory occasions approved by your line manager. Anyone found under the influence of drink or illegal drugs whilst on duty will be liable to a disciplinary procedure. The School operates a zero-tolerance approach to the use/possession of illegal substances and the police will be involved if a criminal offence is committed.
- 7.5 To promote a healthy and pleasant working environment and to comply with statutory regulations, smoking is not allowed in any School buildings or anywhere outside on the School sites. In addition, smoking constitutes a fire hazard. Staff discovered smoking in an area where there is a particular fire risk will be liable to dismissal without notice.

8. Language

- 8.1 Staff should use appropriate language at all times when working for the School, and must:
- Avoid words or expressions that have any unnecessary sexual content or could be construed as innuendo
 - Avoid displays of affection either personally or in writing
 - Avoid any words or actions that are over-familiar
 - Not swear or use any sort of offensive language in front of pupils, parents, visitors or other staff
 - Avoid the use of sarcasm or derogatory words when reprimanding pupils
 - Avoid making unprofessional personal comments about anyone
 - Avoid any form of aggressive or threatening words, or aggressive contact
 - Avoid shouting at pupils or unnecessarily raising their voice
 - Avoid addressing pupils by their surnames only or by a name not usually used by other staff e.g. a nickname that a pupil is addressed as by their close friends

9. Political and personal viewpoints

- 9.1 Pupils should feel able to raise a range of viewpoints with teachers and to raise challenging current affairs with their tutor or PSHE teacher.
- 9.2 Staff have a legal duty to be politically impartial and should not promote partisan political views or encourage pupils to participate in specific political activity e.g. protests. Further guidance from the Department of Education can be found here: [Political Impartiality Guidance Pamphlet \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61222/political-impartiality-guidance-pamphlet.pdf)
- 9.3 Staff should raise concerns about pupils who express extreme views and/or appear to be at risk of becoming radicalised in line with the Safeguarding and Child Protection policy. Staff should also be aware that pupils may talk about sensitive or contentious topics in a way that causes offence or upset without intending to do so, without realising how their views appear to others and may have had their opinions formed partly or wholly by misinformation/disinformation on social media.

10. Sexuality

- 10.1 In the professional environment of a school, staff should not do or say anything that draws attention to either their own sexuality or that of the pupils. For example:
- Staff must always dress appropriately and professionally.
 - Staff must be careful that their body language is neither suggestive nor sexually threatening
 - Pupils must not feel that a member of staff is looking at them in a way that might be seen as inappropriate.

- Staff must avoid remarks of a personal or explicit nature, sexual innuendo or any comment that could be misconstrued or that could make a listener feel uncomfortable.
- 10.2 Normal adolescent development can include fixations and infatuations. These need sensitive management to avoid allegations of exploitation. If a member of staff thinks that a pupil has developed a fixation or infatuation focused on them or a colleague, they must bring it to the attention of a member of the DSL team at the earliest opportunity.
- 10.3 It is an offence in law for a person aged 18 or over, such as a teacher, to have a sexual relationship with a child under 18 where that person is in a position of trust in respect of that child, even if, in the case of those over 16, that relationship is consensual

11. Dress and appearance

- 11.1 Staff must wear their staff badge on a lanyard when in School. Temporary badges will be issued if necessary. Staff requiring a temporary badge must make the Deputy Head (Seniors) or the Junior School DSL aware each time they request one. Any member of staff may politely challenge someone not wearing their staff badge and should expect a polite response.
- 11.2 Staff are expected to present themselves in an appropriate professional manner for their role. On “home clothes” days and days when relatively informal clothes are more suitable for the occasion e.g. trips centred around outdoor activities, staff must dress in a manner which continues to recognise that they are in a professional capacity.

12. Staff children

- 12.1 Members of staff should not bring their children into school during the working day unless their children are pupils of the School. Outside working hours, where a member of staff is on a school site and is accompanied by their children, they are responsible for supervising their children at all times.
- 12.2 Members of staff whose children attend the School are expected to manage any potential conflicts of interest with care and discretion. They should take great care to maintain professional boundaries with colleagues working with their children, with their children’s peers and their parents and, when on School business, with their child.
- 12.3 Particular care must be taken with regard to:
- Information access
 - Information disclosure
 - Communication (in various forms) with colleagues
 - Communicating and interacting with pupils (in and out of school)
- 12.4 A member of staff with a child about to start attending the School is advised to meet with the Deputy Head (Seniors) in advance of their child joining the School.

13. Investigations (pupils)

- 13.1 In supporting a pupil experiencing mental health challenges or conducting a disciplinary investigation, staff may find that they are temporarily in possession of sharp or bladed items, drugs (prescribed, over-the-counter or illegal), another item with the potential to cause harm or an electronic device apparently containing illegal or disturbing images. Staff must take care to hand over to the Deputy Head (Seniors) or, in his absence, another member of the SLT, any such confiscated item(s) so that they can be secured in the designated place, which is the Deputy Head (Seniors) office. The

Deputy Head (Seniors) will either hand the items over to the police or to the pupil's parents or destroy them as agreed with the police or Headmistress (depending on legality of the items).

- 13.2 Staff must ensure that they do not in any circumstances make copies, in any form, of images which are or might be illegal images of children, since to make copies of such images, for any purpose, constitutes a criminal offence. Similarly, if a pupil discloses information about potentially illegal images of children, staff must not ask to view the images.

14. Declarations

- 13.1 Staff should ensure that they declare gifts by parents or others in line with the School's anti-bribery policy. They should speak to a member of the SLT if they have concerns about a particular gift e.g. that it has been given with the intention of influencing coursework grading.

15. Whistleblowing procedures

- 15.1 All staff should feel confident and secure about raising concerns. Raising concerns helps reflective practice, leading to the promotion of a culture which enables children to experience school as a safe place and all staff to feel that their workplace is one which everyone is working together in the best interests of children. Concerns should be raised within an atmosphere of transparency, accountability and trust, as well as confidentiality where appropriate.
- 15.2 All members of staff should feel able to raise concerns internally and confidentially about:
- dangers to health and safety of any individual
 - child protection issues
 - damage to the environment
 - a breach of a legal obligation
 - criminal offences
 - malpractice
 - fraud
 - miscarriages of justice
 - deliberate covering up of information which might show any of the above

16. Low Level Concerns

- 16.1 All staff have a responsibility to share low level concerns about staff that do not necessarily cross safeguarding thresholds. Low level concerns must be reported to the Headmistress directly, these are recorded including details of the concern, the context in which the concern arose and the action taken. The name of the person sharing the concern is also recorded, although wishes for anonymity shall be respected where reasonably possible. Responses to low level concerns could include the Headmistress meeting with the member of staff for a prudence guidance conversation, staff training or consultation with the LADO. Low level concerns are reviewed on a termly basis so that potential patterns can be identified and acted upon as necessary.
- 16.2 The purpose of encouraging reporting low level concerns is to build a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which all staff are able to share worries at an early stage if they feel that a colleague's behaviour is making them vulnerable. Staff should also feel able to share worries about situations which they consider may have made

them more vulnerable. Sharing and responding at an early stage helps the whole School community to be a safe place in which to learn and work.

16.3 For further information, staff should consult the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and the Low Level Concerns Policy.