

# Leechpool Primary School

## Safe Touch Policy



### Aims

To ensure that all staff carry out safe, confident and dignified practice when using appropriate, necessary and/or planned touch.

This policy should be read and implemented in line with the following school policies:

- Safeguarding Policy/Child Protection Policy
- Whole School Behaviour Policy
- First aid
- Intimate Care
- Vulnerability and Lone Working

### Why use touch?

Used in context and with empathy, touch supports the development of our natural interactions with the children and young people we care for. It can also be key to developing fundamental social, behavioural and attention skills. Whilst offering physical support to those pupils who need it.

The guidelines that follow describe the school's procedures on the use of appropriate physical touch. Touch is important and may be used routinely for any of the following reasons: -

**Communication** – touch is beneficial as part of the process of establishing the fundamentals of communication (Nind and Hewett, 1994) for people at early communication levels. Touch is necessary to reinforce other communication (e.g. hand on shoulder when speaking) or to function as the main form of communication in itself. Touch enables staff and pupils to respond non-verbally or to respond to another person's own use of physical contact for communication and to make social connections. This is particularly likely to occur during intensive interaction or day-to-day greetings (handshakes, high fives etc.) Touch cues, hand over hand signing and physical prompts are aided and developed by the use of supportive touch.

**Educational Tasks**- Touch can also be used to direct children in educational tasks and developing skills. Physical prompting and support, gestural and physical prompts during learning activities such as hand-over-hand support and hand-under-hand support.

Play activities naturally include touch. People of any age who are at early levels of development are likely to be quite tactile and physical.

Physical support may also be necessary to include a pupil in activities such as; sensory circuits, swimming and Physical Education or to carry out therapy programmes such as; massage, sensory stimulation, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and Sensory Integration either by the therapist or by another member of staff carrying out a programme or following therapy advice.

**Mobility**- Physical support may be used as guidance and/or to help with mobility or as part of an activity where a pupil needs support when moving. Some pupils may need moving and handling to protect students from harming themselves or others, including restrictive physical intervention. This must be carried out in line with the relevant policy guidelines.

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**Emotional reasons** – touch is an effective way to communicate affection and warmth. It gives reassurance and can communicate security and comfort. Touch enables the person to develop understanding of these positive emotions and the ability to communicate them. Touch can offer reassurance and support, comforting distressed or upset pupils, communicating warmth, comfort and reassurance and to develop positive emotions. Cautionary touch should be used with pupils who are sensitive to touch, touch defensive or may have a history of receiving negative touch.

**Intimate Care** - touch is necessary in order to carry out and support pupils' personal care and intimate care routines (see Intimate Care Policy). In using touch during personal care routines staff should ensure pupils are comfortable and familiar with the staff members delivering the personal care.

**Medical care** – to provide medical care such as First Aid (See First Aid policy).

### Keeping Staff and Pupils Safe

#### Hand holding

Staff should use their professional judgement when holding hands with students. Offering a link of arms is preferential to hand holding. 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.

#### Types of touch

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.

#### What does it look like to others?

Other people may be watching who may misinterpret physical intervention procedures or the use of touch. To protect themselves staff should not lone work when providing touch as part of a therapy program or when supporting a pupil's sensory needs such as with massage. Staff must also not lone work when providing intimate care or personal care programmes where the pupil will be undressing and/or requiring physical support behind a closed door.

Staff should ensure that they understand the reasons that they are using touch and how to use it effectively. Staff members must feel that they can question the reasons they have been asked to provide physical care and ask for clarification when unsure.

Where physical intervention is necessary, staff must ensure they know how to carry out the procedures correctly and adhere to the relevant policies.

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### **Inappropriate Touch**

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

- Genitals
- Chest / breast
- Bottom

Except for:

- First aid
- Intimate/ Personal care
- Medical needs

In these circumstances, staff should ensure that there is another member of staff present who the pupil is comfortable and familiar with. For pupils receiving touch of an intimate nature, consent should have been gained from the pupil 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.**