

METHODIST COLLEGE BELFAST

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Staff, both teaching staff and non-teaching staff, and volunteers who work in the College have a duty of care for pupils and are in a position of special trust with them and their parents. All actions concerning pupils must uphold the best interests of the pupil as a primary consideration. The aim of this Code is to clarify what constitutes appropriate behaviour and professional boundaries for staff and volunteers in their relationships with pupils, and to assist staff and volunteers by offering guidance on sensible conduct.

This Code is not intended to detract from the enriching experiences pupils at the College gain from positive interaction with staff. The guidelines help to provide an environment where the safety and welfare of pupils are assured and where there is confidence and understanding among staff and volunteers about the standards of professional behaviour to which they should conform.

This Code should be read in conjunction with the College's Child Protection Policy, The Use of Safe Handling Policy and the Disciplinary Policy, Article 4 Education (NI) Order 1998, DENI Circular 1999 Pastoral Care in School: Child Protection, The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 (Duty to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Pupils), The Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008, DCSF Guidance on Safer Working Practices for Adults who Work with Children and Young People in Educational, 2009 and DENI circular 2011/22.

1. Physical contact with pupils

- 1.1 As a general principle, staff and volunteers should not make unnecessary physical contact with pupils. The Board of Governors, in the belief that the best interests of the child must be paramount, recognises that there may be occasions when physical contact with a pupil may not be avoided and will support any member of staff or volunteer who has behaved in a reasonable and appropriate manner in pursuit of what could be deemed at the time to be in the best interests of the pupil. In particular, a distressed younger child may need reassurance involving appropriate physical comforting, as a caring parent would provide.
- 1.2 Medical and first-aid treatment which involves contact with a pupil, including any which is of a minor nature or which is not urgent, should normally be carried out by School Nurse or first aider in the Sanatorium if the problem occurs on the College campus. Off campus, staff and volunteer should encourage the pupil to administer treatment for him/herself if feasible (e.g. apply a sticking plaster), but if the member of staff or volunteer needs to be involved, there should be another person, preferably a responsible adult, present if possible. However, no member of staff or volunteer should hesitate to provide first-aid in an emergency simply because another person is not present.

- 1.3 The Departments of Physical Education, Science and Technology have their own first-aid procedure. These procedures are, however, fully informed by the Child Protection considerations in this Code.
- 1.4 Where a pupil may be at risk of serious damage, injury or even loss of life a member of staff or volunteer who possesses the competence to give emergency first-aid (including resuscitation) which would involve contact with the pupil should do so. The safety and well-being of the child are the paramount factors in determining the appropriateness of the action taken and the Board of Governors will support any member of staff or volunteer who in these circumstances has behaved in a reasonable and appropriate manner in the best interests of the pupil.
- 1.5 Staff and volunteers should never touch a child who has clearly indicated that he/she is or would be uncomfortable with such contact, unless it is necessary to protect the child or others from harm.
- 1.6 A member of staff or volunteer might need to remove a child from a source of imminent danger. Physical contact may be used by a member of staff or volunteer as a means of restraint where a pupil has become a danger to him/herself, to a member of staff or volunteer, to another pupil, to a member of the public or to property, or in order to prevent him/her from committing an offence, provided that:
 - * physical intervention is used as a last resort, after other behaviour management strategies have failed;
 - * the level of force used is reasonable and proportionate to what is required to restrain the pupil;
 - * every reasonable effort is made to avoid injury to the pupil;
 - * the pupil is on school premises or is off school premises but under the lawful control of the member of staff.See MCB policy on the *Use of Safe Handling* and *DENI Circular 1999 Article 4 Education (NI) Order 1998*
- 1.7 Any other form of physical contact with a pupil is to be avoided. The deliberate and conscious use of physical violence as a form of punishment or discipline is specifically prohibited by law and cannot be used under any circumstances. It is a serious offence for a member of staff or volunteer to touch a pupil on any part of his or her body in a manner or for a purpose which might reasonably be construed as punishment or as indecent.
- 1.8 The Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 makes it clear that it is an “*abuse of position of trust*” for a member of staff or volunteer to have an inappropriate relationship with anyone 18 years and under. Care should be taken to ensure no action could be construed as grooming. Staff and volunteers whose responsibilities necessitate intimate physical contact with pupils should comply with the plan of action agreed with the School Nurse and SENCO and The Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) Regional Policy and Procedures (2005, amended 2008) for working with vulnerable young people. The views of the pupil should be sought in the setting up and reviewing of arrangements.
- 1.9 As a general principle, in all circumstances where physical contact has to be made with a pupil, staff and volunteers should be aware of the potential for a

mistaken interpretation of their behaviour and, if possible, manage the circumstances so that they have at least one other person present, preferably a responsible adult. In subjects like Physical Education, Drama and Music staff wishing to demonstrate a technique should explain to the pupil the reason why the contact is necessary and what form the contact will take. Such contact should take place in a safe, open environment i.e. easily observed by others. Where pupils are changing, staff and volunteers should announce their intention to enter and allow time for pupils to be appropriately attired.

2. Conducting interviews

- 2.1 In circumstances where a member of staff is in a 'one-to-one' class or interview with a pupil, staff must ensure that they maintain professional boundaries at all times. It would not be possible for the activities of the College to proceed normally (e.g. an instrumental music lesson) or for the best interests of the pupils to be served (e.g. a pastoral interview) if a member of staff could never be alone with a pupil. However, staff should be aware of the possible risk which may arise and follow the College guidelines. Members of staff should ensure another member of staff knows the meeting is taking place. Another member of staff should either be present or reasonably near during the meeting. Volunteers should normally be accompanied by the member of staff in charge of the activity during an interview with a pupil, unless permission has been given by the Principal for a one-to-one interview.
- 2.2 Members of staff and volunteer should never be alone with any pupil if the latter may have cause for a sense of grievance; they should always ask a colleague to be present or, if this is not practicable, ensure that they have informed a colleague of the circumstances, i.e. where, when and with whom the interview is taking place, with whom and the concerns which the interviewer may have.
- 2.3 Members of staff and volunteer should always ensure that the location is as open to public overview and interruption as possible. For example, they should never have blinds/curtains closed or a door unable to be opened from outside or the window in the door covered. There should never be a sign prohibiting entry to the room, although a sign indicating the room is in use may be used. Staff and volunteers should consider, if the circumstances seem to merit it, whether the door of the room should be left open or, in the case of an interview which is not confidential, whether it could equally well be held in a more public area.
- 2.4 The seating for an interview or class should always be arranged so that there is no possibility of accidental physical contact which may be misinterpreted.
- 2.5 Members of staff and volunteers should not normally be alone with a pupil where the subject of the interview is known in advance to be about intimate/sexual matters.
- 2.6 All interviews and one-to-one classes should take place during normal school hours and in appropriate rooms on the College's premises.

- 2.7 No member of staff or volunteer should make an arrangement to meet a pupil or pupils off College premises, except if sanctioned by the Principal and it is directly related to an approved College activity previously notified to the Principal.
- 2.8 In the event that members of staff and volunteers become concerned at any stage for their own position, they should bring the interview to a halt so that they may leave the room in order to set up alternative, 'safe' arrangements.
- 2.9 Following any incident where a member of staff or volunteer feels that his/her actions have been, or may be, misconstrued a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to the Principal.
- 2.10 If a complaint is made about inappropriate behaviour regarding a member of staff or volunteer, this could result in the PSNI and/or Social Services being contacted.

3. General treatment of pupils

All members of staff and volunteers should be aware that under certain circumstances they could risk an allegation of emotional abuse. This is an area where there is the potential for differences between what an adult regards as normal and justifiable disciplinary action and language from what a pupil or a parent may see as a form of emotional abuse. It would be impossible to define every set of circumstances which might arise under this heading, but in general terms members of staff and volunteers need to ensure that they do nothing which might give the appearance of

- * verbal bullying of a particular pupil
- * personal denigration or humiliation of a particular pupil
- * unfair or inequitable treatment of a particular pupil.

Staff and volunteers should ensure that their relationship with pupils is appropriate to the age, maturity and gender of the pupils and conforms to our duty of care. Attitude, demeanour, tone and language all require care and thought by staff. *If a member of staff or volunteers is concerned about the behaviour of another member of staff or volunteer may be abusive, they must report it to the Principal.*

Staff and volunteers must take care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Staff and volunteers must refrain from asking pupils to undertake personal jobs and giving gifts should only be part of an agreed reward system to avoid gestures being misinterpreted as favouritism or grooming.

4. Residential Trips and Extra-Curricular Activities

- 4.1 It is clear that however meticulous members of staff and volunteers need to be in the normal circumstances of the day school, even more care needs to be taken in

the above areas. While these situations may be more informal, the normal high standard of professional conduct is to be maintained.

- 4.2 Members of staff and volunteers, in order to ensure that there is always someone who can verify their conduct, should avoid, if they can,
- * being alone in a room with a pupil other than for a confidential interview (see Section 2 above);
 - * being alone with a pupil in a car or minibus.

The presence of another pupil or pupils or a reasonable adult should be an adequate safe-guard. The situation where pupils are dropped off individually from a minibus or car until there is only one pupil left with a member of staff or volunteer should be avoided if possible, unless the parents of the pupil are aware of and agree to the arrangement or where the health and/or safety of the pupil would be compromised if such transportation was not provided. In such circumstances the pupil should, if possible, travel in the back of the vehicle.

Staff (or volunteers permitted by the Principal in exceptional circumstances) transporting pupils in their own cars must adhere to legislation about seatbelts and have specialist insurance to cover the use of their car for work purposes. Staff and volunteers must ensure emergency lifts are recorded with the Vice Principal (Quality Assurance) and can be justified.

- 4.3 Members of staff and volunteers on residential trips should only enter sleeping, toilet, showering or changing facilities when they are satisfied that there is another responsible adult in a position to verify their conduct. They should knock first, announce who they are and seek clearance to enter, except in emergencies.
- 4.4 Members of staff (or volunteers permitted by the Principal in exceptional circumstances) who are the only adult accompanying a school team or travelling with a small group on a residential trip need to be especially careful and sensitive to their own vulnerability. They should ensure that they abide by the general principle set out above of never being alone with a pupil in circumstances which might be difficult to account for later.
- 4.5 Members of staff organising school trips or extra-curricular activities should inform the Principal if they intend to engage an adult who is not a member of staff to accompany the trip or assist with the activity. The Principal must be consulted before he/she is engaged and it will be his decision whether the person can be used. Any person who has access to a pupil or pupils must have an enhanced disclosure check through Access NI/ISA. The member of staff in charge of the trip or activity must liaise with the Designated Teacher for Child Protection to ensure the volunteer is given appropriate instruction in Child Protection matters, the Use of Safe Handling and the requirements of this Code prior to taking part in the trip or activity. Guidance in the policy '*Educational Trips. Best Practice, 2009*' and *Off the Premises Handbook* should be followed.
- 4.6 Special oversight and care need to be shown to pupils on school trips who will be staying with host families. The Vice Principal in charge of trips should be consulted about the vetting issues. All reasonable steps should be taken to ensure

that the pupils are not going into a situation of known danger and, because it is very difficult to guarantee a pupil's safety in these circumstances which are largely outside our control, it is particularly important that pupils in this situation should have an emergency phone number to contact in the event of problems.

- 4.7 Where it is deemed desirable, staff and volunteers accompanying residential trips should establish 'out-of-bounds' areas and 'curfew' times for the protection of some or all pupils. The staff and volunteers should also ensure that they have an effective procedure for 'signing out/in' and an efficient method of raising concerns if pupils fail to report back by the required times.
- 4.8 Members of staff and volunteers accompanying residential trips should ensure that access to pupils while under their supervision (especially in their sleeping quarters) is secure.
- 4.9 Staff and volunteers should consult "Educational Trips: Best practice, 2009 (SEELB), including the requirements on risk assessments.

5 Choice and Use of Teaching Materials

- 5.1 Staff have a responsibility to ensure that all teaching material is appropriate to the age of the pupils with whom it is used. Staff should be sensitive to the fact that the experience and maturity of pupils within the same year group can vary greatly and select material carefully in order to avoid causing offence or distress. Material must also be compatible with the ethos of the College and comply with legal requirements. Special attention must be taken to ensure the ideas, language and images in teaching material are appropriate to the context and to the pupils with whom it is used. Volunteers must have material vetted by the member of staff in charge of the activity.
- 5.2 No material rated above "15" should be used with any pupils in the College, unless it is vetted by the teacher and deemed appropriate.
- 5.3 Staff and volunteers should avoid teaching material if the motives for its choice could be misinterpreted or criticised.
- 5.4 If in doubt about the appropriateness of a particular teaching material, staff and volunteers should consult with the Principal before using it.

6 Acceptable use of Technology

Staff and volunteers should be familiar with the College's *Acceptable Use of ICT Policy* and adhere to it. The use of devices owned personally by staff, volunteers and pupils is subject to the same requirements as technology provided by the school.

Conclusion

The above offers some guidance on prudent conduct by staff and volunteers, but it is not possible in this Code to cover all circumstances in which staff and volunteers interrelate with pupils. In general, staff and volunteers must ensure that their actions do not give rise to adverse comment or speculation, and their relationship with pupils is purely professional in nature. Any other relationship is inappropriate. Always act, and be seen to act, in the pupil's best interests, and in an open and transparent way. From time to time it is useful for staff and volunteers to reappraise their teaching styles, manner and approach to pupils to ensure they are appropriate. If staff or volunteers have any queries about this policy or how they should act in a particular circumstance, they should consult with the Principal or the Designated Teacher for Child Protection.

Chairman of Board of Governors: _____ Date: _____