



Featherstone Primary Academy

Safe Touch and Physical Contact Policy

GREENHEART
LEARNING PARTNERSHIP 

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Featherstone Primary Academy's policy on Safe Touch and Physical Contact aims to create a safe and happy school environment. An environment where children and staff enjoy coming to school and build positive relationships with everyone they interact with. These positive experiences are fundamental to our school's ethos, and this policy fully supports this goal.

Research has recognised that physical touch is incredibly important for a child's development. Touch is essential in order to provide sensitive, good quality care and support natural interactions and is part of the development, emotional wellbeing, care and education of 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.

Psychologically, touch can be calming and relaxing and is vital for emotional wellbeing. Physiologically, touch facilitates the growth of the body's cells and the development of the brain and nervous system. While touch can be associated with intimacy or physicality, it is crucial to protect children from inappropriate physical interactions. However, it is equally important to recognise that positive, appropriate touch is vital for a child's wellbeing, sensory regulation, and emotional security

Guidelines on the use of physical touch

The guideline below describes Featherstone Primary Academy's procedures on the use of appropriate physical touch.

Purposes of touch

Staff at Featherstone Primary Academy routinely engage in the physical touch with pupils for the following reasons:

- To aid and develop communication – touch cues, physical prompts, intensive interactions and to make social interactions.
- To offer physical support and guidance- help with mobility, moving and handling, guiding pupils into rooms (particularly those who are within our EYFS or have a physical disability).
- To offer reassurance and support- comforting distressed or upset pupils, communicating warmth, comfort and reassurance and to develop positive emotions.
- Physical prompting and support- gestural and physical prompts during learning activities such as hand over hand or hand under hand support.
- To support pupils with personal/intimate care routines.

- Protection- from other students or from themselves (for example self-harming or absconding), including positive handling and physical intervention.
- To carry out therapy programmes- physiotherapy, occupational therapy following programmes and advice.
- Responding to pupils' physical contact.
- Giving rewards such as high fives, fist pumps, hand on shoulder etc.

General Principles and Guidelines

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 save time. Discuss the use of touch with colleagues if you are unsure.

Where appropriate, have consent from the pupil who is involved in the use of touch. Always explain to the pupil what you are doing and why.

Be prepared to openly discuss and explain why you are using physical touch with pupils.

Staff should be sensitive to signals (non-verbal and verbal) that indicate that a child dislikes touch. For example, a child may pull away or make negative facial expressions.

Be aware that some pupils may provoke a physical intervention situation in order to gain physical contact.

Staff also need to consider the influences of race, gender, age, sexual identity and disability:

- Gender difference may make someone feel uncomfortable
- A child's personal history may distort the understanding of a 'safe' adult
- Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds may have beliefs that limit touch
- Pupils with multisensory 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

Positive Handling / Physical Intervention

Where physical touch has been used due to a child's behaviour (positive handling and physical intervention) or as a de-escalation tool, this needs to be recorded as soon as possible and communicated with the SLT and DSL/DDSL.

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 judgment when comforting pupils.

Instances of inappropriate physical contact initiated by pupils

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 DSL/DDSL. If possible, staff should not give negative feedback to the students as this may reinforce the behaviour. If this is a regular occurrence, the methods for managing this behaviour should be highlighted on a student's behaviour plan. If staff feel it is not appropriate to respond to physical contact from a child, staff should avoid open rejection and should try to divert and redirect the child instead.

Hand Holding

Staff should use their professional judgement when holding hands with students. Our students often need support with walking and balance or may need support to prevent them from running.

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

In using touch during personal care routines staff should ensure that pupils are comfortable and familiar with the staff member delivering intimate care.

Staff should be aware of the types of touch used. Pupils with ASD, multisensory impairment and/or sensory integration difficulties may become confused and distressed with certain types of touch. It is important to verbalise reassurance as well.

If you are in any doubt about any issues concerning appropriate touch, or you observe any practice that causes concern, you should discuss this with the designated safeguarding lead.

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