

Argyle House School

Code of Conduct for Teaching and Support Staff

Overview

Argyle House School seeks to provide a safe and supportive environment, which secures the well-being and very best outcomes for students in their care.

This document should clarify what is expected in terms of professional behaviour and what might be considered as misconduct. It also describes safe practice and which behaviours should be avoided.

If a member of staff does not follow this code of conduct this may lead to disciplinary procedures.

There may be times when professional judgements are made in situations not covered by this document, or which directly contravene the guidance given by their employer. It is expected that in these circumstances staff will always advise senior colleagues of their justification for any such action already taken or proposed.

Core Principles

- The welfare of students is paramount.
- Staff are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions.
- Staff should work, and be seen to work in an open and transparent way.
- Staff should discuss and/or take advice promptly from a senior manager over any incident, which may give rise to concern.
- Records should be made of any such incident and of decisions made/further action agreed.
- Staff should apply the same professional standards in keeping with the School's Equality Policy.
- All staff should know the name of their designated person for child protection, be familiar with child protection arrangements and understand their responsibilities to safeguard and protect students.
- Staff should be aware that breaches of the law and other professional guidelines could result in criminal or disciplinary action being taken against them.

Safe Working Practices for the Protection of Students and Staff at Argyle House School

This guidance has been produced to help all staff establish the safest possible learning and working environments. The aims are to safeguard young people and reduce the risk of staff being falsely accused of improper or unprofessional conduct.

Duty of Care

Teachers and other staff are accountable for the way in which they exercise authority; manage risk; use resources; and protect students from discrimination and avoidable harm.

All staff, whether paid or voluntary, have a duty to keep young people safe and to protect them from physical and emotional harm. This duty is in part exercised through the development of respectful, caring and professional relationships between staff and students and behaviour by staff that demonstrates integrity and good judgement.

There are legitimate high expectations about the nature of the professional involvement of staff in the lives of students. When individuals accept a role that involves working with children and young people, they need to understand and acknowledge the responsibilities and trust inherent in that role.

Employers have a duty of care towards their employees which requires them to provide a safe working environment for staff and guidance about safe working practices.

Exercise of Professional Judgement

This guidance cannot provide a complete checklist of what is, or is not, appropriate behaviour for staff. It does highlight however, behaviour that is illegal, inappropriate or inadvisable. There will be occasions and circumstances in which staff have to make decisions or take action in the best interests of the students which could contravene this guidance or where no guidance exists. Individuals are expected to make judgements about their behaviour in order to secure the best interests and welfare of the children in their charge and in so doing, will be seen to be acting reasonably.

Power and Positions of Trust

All adults working with students in education settings are in positions of trust in relation to the young people in their care. A relationship between a member of staff and a student cannot be a relationship between equals. There is potential for exploitation and harm of vulnerable young people; staff have a responsibility to ensure that an unequal balance of power is not used for personal advantage or gratification.

Staff should always maintain appropriate professionalism and wherever possible, they should avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others, and report and record any incident with this potential.

Where a person aged 18 or over is in a position of trust with a child under 18, it is an offence for that person to engage in sexual activity with or in the presence of that child, or to cause or incite that child to engage in or watch sexual activity. Where a person aged 18 or over is in a position of trust established with a person who has only recently left the school, any attempt to engage in sexual activity with that person will be a cause for concern and will be treated as a breach of trust established in that prior relationship.

Confidentiality

Members of staff may have access to confidential information about students in order to undertake their every day responsibilities. In some circumstances staff may be given additional highly sensitive or private information. They should never use confidential or personal information about a student or her/his family for their own, or others' advantage. Information must never be used to intimidate, humiliate, or embarrass the student.

Confidential information about students should never be used casually in conversation or shared with any person other than on a need to know basis. In circumstances where the student's identity does not need to be disclosed the information should be used anonymously.

There are some circumstances in which a member of staff may be expected to share information about a student, for example when abuse is alleged or suspected. In such cases, individuals have a duty to pass information on without delay, but only to those with designated child protection responsibilities.

If a member of staff is in any doubt about whether to share information or keep it confidential he or she should seek guidance from a senior member of staff. Any media or legal enquiries should be passed to the Head Teacher.

Adults need to be aware that although it is important to listen to and support students, they must not promise confidentiality or request students to do the same under any circumstances.

Additionally concerns and allegations about adults should be treated as confidential and passed to a senior manager without delay.

Propriety and Behaviour

All staff have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of students. They should adopt high standards of personal conduct in order to maintain the confidence and respect of their peers, students and public in general.

An individual's behaviour, either in or out of the workplace, should not compromise her/his position within the work setting so it is important to exercise due care and attention when outside of the school environment.

Membership of organisations whose goals are in conflict with the values and equality policies of the school is not acceptable.

Dress and Appearance

Staff should consider the manner of dress and appearance appropriate to their professional role. We require students to be smart in their uniform. Smart and professional appearance is expected at all times for staff. Staff should ensure they are dressed decently, safely and appropriately for the tasks they undertake.

Those who dress or appear in a manner which could be considered as inappropriate could render themselves vulnerable to criticism or allegation. Appropriate personal presentation is expected of staff.

Jewellery should not be ostentatious.

Gifts

Staff need to take care that they do not accept any gift that might be construed as a bribe by others, or lead the giver to expect preferential treatment.

There are occasions when students or parents wish to pass small tokens of appreciation to staff, for example at Christmas or as a thank you, and this is acceptable. Members of staff may not give personal gifts to individual students. It is acceptable for staff to offer gifts at Christmas or when the student is leaving the class of a small value.

Infatuations

Staff need to be aware that it is not uncommon for students to be strongly attracted to a member of staff and/or develop an infatuation. Staff should be aware that such circumstances always carry a high risk of words or actions being misinterpreted and for allegations to be made against staff.

A member who becomes aware that a student may be infatuated with themselves or a colleague should discuss this at the earliest opportunity with a senior colleague so that appropriate action can be taken. In this way, steps can be taken to avoid hurt and distress for all concerned.

Personal Living Space

No student should be in or invited into, the home of an adult who works with them, unless the reason for this has been firmly established and agreed with parents and senior managers.

Communication with Students

Communication between students and adults, by whatever method should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology. Adults should not share any personal information with a student. They should not request, or respond to, any personal information from the student, other than that which might be appropriate as part of their professional role. Adults should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny.

Adults should also be circumspect in their communications with students so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour which could be construed as grooming. They should not give their personal contact details to students. This also includes communications through internet based websites, such as social networking, instant messaging or gaming.

Social Contact

Staff should not establish or seek to establish social contact with students, or their families, for the purpose of securing a friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship. Even if a young person seeks to establish social contact, or if this occurs coincidentally, the member of staff should exercise his/her professional judgement in making a response but should always discuss this with a senior manager. Staff must be aware that social contact, in certain situations, could be misconstrued as grooming.

Staff should not give any personal details to students, unless it has been agreed by the Head Teacher.

Social Networking Sites and Online Gaming

Staff must deny current or recent students access to your profile so you do not put yourself in a vulnerable position.

Staff should be aware that they leave themselves open to a charge of professional misconduct if images of a member of staff in a compromising situation are made available on a public profile by anyone.

If a student does gain access to the profile of a member of staff by fraudulent means senior management should be informed immediately.

Where relationships exist between staff and those who are also parents at the school, or personal friends who are parents at the school, social networking is acceptable but caution must be exercised so that professional standards are maintained and staff do not compromise themselves or the school.

As soon as a member of staff becomes aware that they are in an online game with a student they should cease to play against that student.

Physical Contact

There are occasions when it is entirely appropriate and proper for staff to have physical contact with students, but it is crucial that they only do so in ways appropriate to their professional role.

A no touch approach is impractical for most staff and may in some circumstances be inappropriate. When physical contact is made with students this should be in response to their needs at the time, of limited duration and appropriate.

Staff should use their professional judgement at all times about the appropriateness of any physical contact.

Physical contact should never be secretive, or for the gratification of the adult, or represent a misuse of authority. If a member of staff believes that an action could be misinterpreted, the incident and circumstances should be made clear to senior management.

Some staff, for example, those who teach PE and games, or who offer music tuition, will on occasions have to initiate physical contact with students in order to support a student so they can perform a task safely, to demonstrate the use of a particular piece of equipment/instrument or assist them with an exercise. This should be done with the student's agreement.

Changing

This supervision should be appropriate to the needs and age of the students concerned and sensitive to the potential for embarrassment. Staff therefore should be vigilant about their own behaviour.

Students in Distress

There may be occasions when a distressed student needs comfort and reassurance. This may include age-appropriate physical contact. Staff should remain self-aware at all times in order that their contact is not threatening intrusive or subject to misinterpretation.

Behaviour Management

All students have a right to be treated with respect and dignity. Staff should not use any form of degrading treatment to punish a student. The use of humour can help to defuse a situation.

Sexual Contact with Students

Any sexual behaviour by a member of staff with or towards a student is both inappropriate and illegal. The sexual activity referred to doesn't just involve physical contact, it may also include non-contact activities.

One to One Situations

Staff working in one to one situations with children and young people are more vulnerable to allegations. Teachers and others should recognise this possibility and plan and conduct such meetings accordingly. Every attempt should be made to ensure the safety and security needs of both staff and students are met.

Pre-arranged meetings with students away from the school premises should not be permitted unless approval is obtained from their parent and the Head Teacher or other senior management.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Please see Educational Visits Policy.

Staff should take particular care when supervising students in the less formal atmosphere of a residential setting or after-school activity.

First Aid and Administration of Medication

The school has an administration of medication policy, which must be adhered to at all times.

Intimate Care

Please refer to this specific policy.

Curriculum

Many areas of the curriculum can include or raise subject matter which is sexually explicit, or of an otherwise sensitive nature. Care should be taken to ensure that resource materials cannot be misinterpreted and clearly relate to the learning outcomes identified by the lesson plan. This plan should highlight particular areas of risk and sensitivity.

Photography, Videos and Other Creative Arts

Staff need to be aware of the potential for these aspects of teaching to be misused for pornographic or 'grooming' purposes. Careful consideration should be given as to how these activities are organised and undertaken.

Using images of children for the school's publicity purposes has already had the consent of parents.

Internet Use

Under no circumstances should adults in the school access inappropriate images or indecent material. This would normally lead to disciplinary action, particularly if as a result students might be exposed to inappropriate or indecent material.

Whistleblowing

Staff should acknowledge their individual responsibilities to bring matters of concern to the attention of senior management and/or relevant external agencies. This is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

At Argyle House School we recognise that children cannot be expected to raise concerns in an environment where staff fail to do so. All staff should be aware of their duty to raise concerns, where they exist, about the management of child protection, which may include the attitude or actions of colleagues. Firstly this should be reported to the Head Teacher or a Senior Manager. If it becomes necessary to consult outside the school, they should speak in the first instance to the Area Education Designated Officer-LADO: LADO@sunderland.gcsx.gov.uk ; Sunderland Education Lead: Dianne.Stockdale@togetherforchildren.org.uk

❖ **Sunderland Local Safeguarding Children's Board Contact Information:**

Secure e-mail: safeguarding.children@sunderland.gcsx.gov.uk

Telephone Numbers: (0191) 5205560- during business hours

(0191) 5205552- Out of hours service

Sharing Concerns and Recording Incidents

All staff are to make themselves familiar with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policies.

Members of staff should feel able to discuss with their senior manager any difficulties or problems that may affect their relationship with students so that appropriate support can be provided or action can be taken.