Staff Contact Policy

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Contact between staff and pupils outside the usual work context

Introduction

This policy applies to:

- All employees where the governing body has a delegated budget and powers of local management.
- Any form of contact outside the usual work context between staff and pupils or their families.
- This includes non-direct contact such as telephone, via text message, email or on social networking sites.
- Contact outside the usual work context between staff and former- pupils, including those who have grown to adults.

This policy cannot cover all situations. Staff at times will be required to exercise their professional judgment and should seek guidance and support from their Head Teacher, or from the Chair of Governors in the case of the Head Teacher, if they are unsure about how to handle a situation. Depending on the circumstances, inappropriate contact and/or a failure to follow advice will be treated seriously and could lead to the initiation of Safeguarding procedures of the academy trust, SNMAT, and disciplinary action. If the Head Teacher is unsure about how to handle a situation within the context of this policy, they should discuss their concerns with the Chair of Governor in the first instance or contact the SNMAT HR team.

It is the policy of the school that there will be no personal contact other than in certain exempted circumstances between staff and current/former pupils of school age outside the normal working environment. Examples could include sporting activities; organised social circumstances (such as organised sports events; or shared interests such as volunteering or scouts).

Guidance on Safer Working Practice is explicit that staff should **not** establish or seek to establish social contact with pupils for the purpose of securing friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship. The reasons for this are as follows:

- Such contact can blur the professional boundaries between the staff member and pupil.
- Such contact can compromise confidentiality.
- Such contact can place both pupil and the staff member in a position of vulnerability.
- Pupils at the school may struggle to differentiate between the role of staff member and friend and therefore have expectations which the staff member cannot fulfil.

Intended Contact

In many cases contact outside the working environment is normal. For example, where staff have their own children at school; their friends are visiting or where private tuition is provided. Any proposed work-related contact, outside of the normal working environment, must be agreed in advance by the head teacher (for example private tuition). If agreed, a record of this must be kept on the staff members' personal file and the pupil's file. The record must set out reasons for the proposed contact.

All such contact must also be monitored by the member of staff's line manager or head teacher. For situations involving former pupils - see '**Contact with Former Pupils**' below.

Unplanned Contact

Unplanned or unexpected contact with pupils with whom a member of staff will have no on-going professional contact is inevitable at some point and this should be of a minimal nature (e.g. a brief greeting in the street).

Correspondence

Copies of any correspondence received by a member of staff should be drawn to the attention of their line manager or head teacher and filed with any response in the appropriate schools' records system. Internal email systems and school computer equipment should only be used in accordance with school policy.

Staff should be cautious when using social networking sites outside of work and avoid publishing, or allowing to be published, any material, including comments or images, that could damage their professional reputation and/or bring the school into disrepute. Staff should be strongly advised to set their profile as 'private' and not allow access to pupils, their families and or carers. Locally there have been incidents of pupils misinterpreting the nature of their relationship with members of staff as a direct result of them having contact on social networking sites.

Staff should also be mindful that requirements in relation to maintaining the confidentiality of pupils, their families, colleagues and the school itself apply to all forms of communication, including that which takes place on social networking sites.

Staff should **not** give their personal details such as home/mobile phone number; home or email address to pupils unless the need to do so is agreed with their head teacher. Any ongoing contact from the pupil outside of the agreed contact should be reported immediately to the head teacher.

Every effort should be made by the school to provide staff with school mobile telephones when they are embarking upon school trips, residentials or other activities which involve being offsite.

Contact with former pupils

In some circumstances former pupils may make contact with a previous member of staff. This may occur even when they have grown to adults. For example, situations where staff remain in contact with former pupils who have moved on to secondary school, who attend university or who have been placed in care or adopted.

In these situations, members of staff must take account of the fact that they are school employees and therefore have a responsibility as a member of staff and that young people may struggle to differentiate between the roles of staff member and friend.

Staff members must always discuss any such significant contact with their current line manager/head teacher and seek advice on how to manage any future contact.

If a former pupil requires assistance or some form of help that lies outside of school, they should be signposted to relevant services. However, if the head teacher agrees that further contact with the staff member is relevant and appropriate, a clear plan of involvement, including outcomes expected and timescales must be drawn up and agreed by the head teacher.

In these circumstances, the head teacher must ensure that adequate support/supervision is available to the staff member and ensure that all such contacts and plans are recorded and that other appropriate agencies are involved.

Where a close relationship develops between a member of school staff and an ex-pupil, which may raise concerns about the member of staff's suitability to work with children, the Head teacher should contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for advice and guidance.

Further Guidance

Further guidance can be found in the documents and locations as outlined in the area below:

- "Guidance for Safe Working Practice for the Protection of Children and Staff in Education Settings" - Available in the practice guidance section of the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children board
- WebPages www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/nscb
- NEOST Guidance on Conduct for Teachers, Education Staff and Volunteers – September 2002.
- TeacherNet: www.teachernet.gov.uk
- Becta: schools.becta.org.uk