

**ATHELSTAN PRIMARY SCHOOL
POLICY AND GUIDANCE
ON
SAFE TOUCH AND
INTIMATE PERSONAL CARE**

Background

In recent years a wide variety of issues have influenced the approach to touch and intimate personal care, not least child protection concerns and the experience/fear of allegations. As a result, establishments have adopted a variety of approaches from openly hands on to completely hands off. Clearly, the avoidance of idiosyncratic or individual approaches to this subject by members of staff, offers the safest outcomes for both staff and pupils. Therefore, it is essential that our staff are given, and follow, guidance on appropriate touch and intimate personal care.

Why is touch an important part of our work?

At Athelstan Primary School, we believe that touch is a very important part of our work with children who have Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties. The importance of touch should not be underestimated as it can:

- Demonstrate affection
- Show acceptance
- Emphasise the spoken word
- Provide reassurance
- Offer an alternative to spoken communication

However, staff should feel confident and pupils should feel secure with all forms of appropriate safe touch. Staff must always be particularly sensitive to pupils who are demonstrating that they are not comfortable with touch, even if it appears to be appropriate to the member of staff. This will be a major factor in avoiding any misunderstandings about experiences of touch e.g. a child who moves away, when comforted after a fall must be allowed his space.

What we need to consider

Given that touch is not the same for everyone and that we all have different experiences of positive and negative touch, we need to consider three main issues, to ensure that any use of touch or experience of intimate personal care is appropriate and safe;

- **WHO** – It is vital for a member of staff to think about what they represent to a particular child. Personal likes and dislikes will play part in any relationship but we must ensure that all such contacts are based on what is appropriate. Staff should also consider the power influences involved in relationships such as gender, race, disability, age, sexual identity and role status e.g. older pupils are less likely to need close supervision for personal care, or gender differences may make individuals feel uncomfortable. A child's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. Additionally, some children may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch as part of their cultural upbringing.

- **WHERE** – The intended message behind touch can be hindered by where it takes place. The same action in a lounge full of people could have a different message in a car or child's bedroom. Staff should always ensure that any form of touch is an open act and that other staff are aware of the circumstances, such as where you are and who you are with. Staff must always consider very carefully what constitutes intimate parts of the body for children. A child may still be developing a sense of what is intimate and less intimate, particularly if they have experienced damaging or inappropriate behaviour from other people. Generally touching an arm, shoulder or hand is more appropriate and feels less intimate than a child's leg or torso. Staff should always encourage children to say when they feel uncomfortable in any area of life, this is especially important in the area of touch and personal care.
- **WHEN** – The context or environment in which touch takes place between members of staff and children, is the decisive factor determining the emotional and physical safety of both parties.
Staff should always be aware of where they are and who they are with. Where possible, touch should be avoided in an isolated or one to one situation with a child. The best way to protect both yourself and the child is to ensure that all forms of touch are open to the scrutiny and observation of others.

It is also important for staff to recognise the different messages which can be given in physical intervention situations. Always ensure that other staff are present to observe/assist. Staff need to be aware that in extreme circumstances, some children may even provoke a restraint situation as a way of gaining physical contact from adults.

Points to remember:

Athelstan Primary School staff should always consider and abide by the following points when carrying out their duties:

- All positive physical interventions are in accordance with 'Guidance on the use of Reasonable Force in School' (DFES Reviewed 2015). Positive handling techniques are adopted in response to Team Teach training.
- Play-fighting is not a substitute for appropriate affections towards children, it gives confusing messages to children about personal and professional boundaries.
- Where a pupil requires intimate personal care, staff should ensure that the pupil is comfortable with the staff member attending to their needs, where possible a member of staff of the same sex should be used. Other staff should always be around to monitor events and the child's privacy and dignity should always be preserved.

- Privacy issues are always to be considered. A safe environment which respects privacy and shows regard for personal boundaries should be encouraged. Thought also needs to be given to how staff present themselves, (e.g. how they dress), and how they show professional respect relating to each other and to children (e.g. knocking on bedroom doors before entering).
- Where a member of staff feels that it would be inappropriate to respond to a child seeking physical comfort, outward rejection should always be avoided in favour of a diversion or some other such tactic and the reason, where appropriate, for avoiding physical contact should be given to the child.
- Unwelcome touch, where a child indicates that touch from an adult is not welcome, perhaps by moving away or flinching to avoid, the staff member should consider apologising to demonstrate a respect for personal boundaries.
- Where a child presents a danger to themselves or to others it will at times be necessary for staff to use means of physical intervention as described in school policy. At such times staff should always take care to explain what they are doing and that the actions taken are for safety reasons. As the situation de-escalates, touch can be appropriately used to move from a situation of control to one of care, for example using the Team Teach method, such as the friendly hold.
- Clarity should always be our aim. A child should never be left in any doubt about the member of staff's intention behind any physical contact. Clumsy or un-considered use of touch may be experienced by a child as being confusing, uncomfortable or distressing. A decisive, firm and planned form of open touch within an appropriate context and a safe relationship is less likely to lead to unease and confusion.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at Athelstan Primary School is safe and appropriate. We should all expect to be observed by others and be prepared to discuss any concerns we have in a professional manner. Any member of staff who is concerned about another member of staff's practice should discuss their concerns with the Headteacher, as appropriate.

Fiona Barry
September 2025