

Staff Code of Conduct 24-25

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Reviewed by: Linda Matthews - Headteacher



Staff Code of Conduct

This Policy is to be read in conjunction with the School's:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy & Procedures
- Intimate Care Policy & Procedures
- Health & Safety Policy
- Whistle-blowing Policy
- Staff Disciplinary Policy
- Behaviour Support Policy
- Administration of Medication Policy & Procedures

and:

- Guidance for Safer Working Practices for those Working with Children and Young People in Education 2019
- Keeping children Safe in Education 2021 – Part 1 and Appendix A

Introduction

At Watergate School we believe that the safety and welfare of our children is paramount. We recognize that because of their severe and complex needs our pupils are particularly vulnerable and as such we have the highest possible expectations of professional behaviour from all members of our staff team.

The Governors of Watergate School have a legal duty under section 175 of the Education Act 2002 to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by creating and maintaining a safe learning environment.

All staff at Watergate School have a duty to keep children safe and protect them from harm. Staff should ensure that they avoid putting themselves in situations in which allegations of abuse or inappropriate behaviour could be made.

The Public are also entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from school staff, governors and volunteers and to have trust and confidence in their integrity.

All adults working in Watergate School must therefore act with the utmost integrity with regard to the business of the school and not do anything, which may adversely affect its reputation.

Purpose

The following Code has been drawn up to reduce the risk of staff being accused of improper or unprofessional conduct in all aspects of their work. It aims to help staff work safely and professionally and clarify what behaviour constitutes safe practice and what is unacceptable and/or illegal.

Scope

The Code is predominantly about safe working practices for the protection of children and in this connection should be read in conjunction with Watergate School Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. However, the Code also includes other general aspects of conduct expected within Watergate School.

The Code cannot cover every eventuality. Its purpose is to show the standard expected of employees, but it does not replace the general requirements of the law.

General obligations

Staff should understand the responsibilities that are an intrinsic part of their employment or role. They should make a professional judgement about their actions and behaviour and seek to avoid conduct, which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation or intentions.

If there is an incident in which staff feel there may be a concern raised about their behaviour, they should discuss the circumstances that informed their action, or their proposed action with the headteacher, to help ensure that only the safest practices are employed and the risk of actions being misinterpreted reduced.

Records should be made of any incidents and decisions made or further actions agreed, with their justifications, in accordance with school policy.

All staff should know who the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Officers (DDSOs) are, be familiar with the school's child protection procedures and understand their responsibilities to safeguard and protect children.

Staff should understand their responsibility to voice any general concerns that they might have about practice within the school, in accordance with Watergate School's Whistle-Blowing policy.

Staff should also be aware of and comply with Watergate School financial and administrative regulations and any other procedure as detailed in the staff handbook.

Staff must be aware that unlawful, unsafe or inappropriate behaviour may result in disciplinary action being taken and could result in dismissal.

Good practice guidelines

The following Code and guidelines set out specific areas of conduct and behaviour that constitute expected and safe practice.

If staff are in any doubt about any aspect of this guidance or need to seek further clarification about a particular situation in the absence of specific guidance, they are advised to speak to the headteacher.

Standards of Behaviour

All adults working with children are in a position of trust in relation to the individuals in their care. Staff are expected to adopt and maintain professional working relationships and have high standards of personal integrity and conduct and behave in such a way that does not compromise their position both within or outside Watergate School.

Staff should not:

- behave in a manner, which would lead any reasonable person to question their suitability to work with children
- use their power to intimidate, threaten, coerce or undermine others
- make (or encourage others to make) unprofessional personal comments/gossip which scapegoat, demean or humiliate other individuals or might be interpreted as such
- participate in inappropriate behaviors, interactions and activities
- engage with parents/carers of pupils at Watergate on social media platforms, i.e. Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Snap chat etc.
- share personal phone numbers (with the exception of external contract with parents/carer e.g. for respite care)
- chew gum during lesson times

Confidentiality and Information disclosure

Staff should not use any information obtained in the course of their duties to the detriment of Watergate School, or for personal gain or benefit, or pass this information on to others who might use it in such a way.

Staff must also take all reasonable steps to ensure that the loss, destruction, inaccuracy or disclosure of information does not occur as a result of their actions, including information relating to school business and pupil data.

There are some circumstances in which staff are expected to share information about a child, for example, when safeguarding or child protection issues arise. In such cases staff have a duty to pass information on without delay in line with the school Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. If staff are in any doubt about

whether to share information or keep it confidential they should seek guidance the Headteacher, who is the DSL or one of the DDSOs.

- staff should not use their position to gain access to information for their own advantage or to intimidate, humiliate or embarrass a child
 - staff are expected to treat any information they receive about children in a discreet and confidential manner
 - staff must be cautious when passing on information to others about a child and if in any doubt about sharing information, seek the advice of the DSL or one of the DDSOs
 - school matters must not be discussed on any social media platform
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Equality issues

All staff should adhere to Watergate School Equal Opportunities Policy, in addition to the requirements of the law.

- staff should not discriminate in recruitment and employment practices, nor in the delivery of services;
- staff should also ensure that in their dealings with parents and other members of the public, they ensure the provision of an efficient and impartial delivery to all individuals.

Employment matters

All staff involved in appointments and/or tendering processes should ensure that these are made on the basis of merit.

Staff should not be involved in an appointment, or decisions relating to discipline, promotion or pay adjustments for any individual who is a relative or with whom they are in a close personal relationship

All relationships of a business or private nature with external contractors, or potential contractors should be made known to the Headteacher, or in the case of the Headteacher to the Chair of Governors.

Employment reference requests need to be completed by a member of the senior leadership team. Staff may only provide personal references for colleagues using their personal emails/correspondence.

Public duty and private interest

It is important that staff do not put themselves in a position where their duty to Watergate School and their private interests conflict.

Staff should not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work and the provision of a balanced and professional service, ensuring that they work to the professional standard required.

Other Employment

Any external work that staff undertake must not bring Watergate School into disrepute or conflict with the school's interest.

Any copyright created by a member of staff during their employment Watergate School becomes the property of the school.

Staff should not set up a business, or accept employment with a business, that is engaged in work, which is in direct competition with Watergate School.

Private work should not be undertaken in the school's time, or using the school's premises or equipment.

Staff should inform the Headteacher if they have additional employment and should not undertake other work that may interfere with their ability to carry out their role at Watergate safely and competently, e.g. nightshifts.

Dress and Appearance

A person's dress and appearance are matters of personal choice and self-expression, some will wish to exercise their own cultural customs. However, staff should ensure that they are dressed decently, safely and appropriately for the tasks that they undertake and that through their appearance, they promote a positive and professional image.

This means that staff should choose clothing and jewellery that:

- Is appropriate to their role
- Does not pose any risk to children or themselves, e.g. sharp items, bulky rings, dangling earrings
- Is not likely to be viewed by others as offensive, revealing or sexually provocative
- Does not distract, cause embarrassment or give rise to misunderstanding.
- Does not have political or otherwise contentious slogans
- Allows interaction with pupils without physical restriction

Smoking, Alcohol, Legal Highs, Medication

The use of alcohol or legal highs whilst at work is strictly prohibited and will result in immediate disciplinary action – please refer to LA staff disciplinary code.

Staff should never come to work under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If a staff member is taking strong, prescribed medication, that may impact upon their performance in school, they must inform a member of the Senior Leadership Team and a risk assessment will be completed to ensure the person is able to carry out their duties and responsibilities safely.

Smoking is not permissible on school premises or within sight of children when off-site.

Financial inducements, gifts, hospitality and sponsorship

Staff should ensure that they use public funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner and that they do not give or receive any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage, which might be misinterpreted.

Although staff should not give or receive gifts from pupils or parents on a regular basis, or of any significant value, it is acceptable however for staff to receive small tokens of appreciation, such as at Christmas time.

- staff should not seek or receive preferential rates for themselves by virtue of their dealings on behalf of the school
- staff should ensure that gifts are declared if they are received
- staff should not give gifts to pupils.

Use of School Time and Facilities

The School's property and facilities (eg stationery, computers, photocopiers) may only be used for school business unless permission for their private use has been granted by the Headteacher.

Staff should not store alcohol or legal highs for personal use, on the school premises. Alcohol purchased by the PSFA for licensed fund-raising functions will be stored safely in locked cupboards.

Publication of Books/Articles

Staff should speak to the Headteacher if they wish to publish books, articles, letters, dissertations etc., which have been written in connection with their duties and their role within Watergate School.

Infatuations

In cases where a pupil develops an infatuation, there is a high risk of words or actions being misinterpreted and for allegations to be made against staff.

Staff should report to the headteacher any clear/apparent indications (whether they are verbal, written or physical), that suggest a pupil may be infatuated with them and respond sensitively to such situations in order to maintain the dignity of all parties.

Social contact

Staff should not establish or seek to establish social contact with pupils or their families to secure or strengthen a friendship. Staff should not give out personal details such as home/mobile numbers, home address or e-mail address to pupils or to parents.

Staff should always approve any planned social contact with a pupil or their family with the headteacher.

Staff should advise the headteacher of any regular social contact, including on social media, they have with a pupil or their family, where it is apparent that it may give rise to a concern.

Physical contact

It is unrealistic to suggest that teachers and support staff should never touch pupils – especially in the context of a special school where physical contact is a necessity. There are occasions when it is entirely appropriate and proper for staff to have physical contact with pupils, such as when a distressed pupil needs comfort and reassurance or as an integral part of some lessons such as PE and music or during Intensive Interaction/ similar activities. Our children also require help with personal and intimate care which requires varying levels of physical contact depending on the needs of the child. (Please see our Intimate Care Policy).

Staff must be aware that innocent actions and appropriate physical contact could be misconstrued. It is therefore crucial that staff only initiate physical contact for the minimum time necessary and in ways appropriate to their own role and the needs of the child.

Staff should use their professional judgement at all times. Where a member of staff thinks that an incident could have been misinterpreted they should self-report it to the Headteacher.

Extra caution may also be required where it is known that a child has suffered previous abuse or neglect. Such children may seek out inappropriate contact, thereby leading staff to be vulnerable to allegations of abuse.

Staff should:

- be aware that even well-intentioned physical contact may be misconstrued by the child, an observer or by anyone to whom this action is described
- never touch a child in a way which may be considered indecent – make sure that reference is made to care plans and personal/intimate care plans
- always explain to a pupil the reason why you are using touch and what form that touch will take
- if it is anticipated that a pupil might misinterpret forms of touch consider involving another member of staff, or a less vulnerable pupil in a demonstration
- always tell a colleague when and how they offered comfort to a distressed child and record any situations on CPOMS where they think they may give rise to concern;
- adhere to the school's policy and guidance on physical intervention and be acquainted with DfES Guidance in Respect of Physical Contact with Pupils and Meeting the Medical Needs of Children and Young People in School.

Intimate Care, Showers and Changing

All children have a right to respect, safety, privacy and dignity when contact of an intimate nature is required. The vast majority of children at Watergate School need support with intimate care. Staff should:

- always adhere to the highest standards of caring, kind, professional behaviour
- adhere to the school's intimate care guidelines
- make other staff aware of the task being undertaken
- explain to the child what is happening

Behaviour Support and Physical Intervention

Physical punishment is unlawful in all schools and physical force should never be used as a form of punishment; to do so is likely to constitute a criminal offence.

However, in order to prevent injury to the pupil, another person or to prevent significant property damage, staff have the right to use physical intervention/ reasonable force for the shortest period necessary to manage or restrain pupils (please refer to Physical Intervention Policy).

Staff will be alert to possible triggers and try to defuse situations before they escalate

Staff will inform parents of any situations arising

Staff will adhere to Watergate School policies on Behaviour Support and Physical Intervention and follow Relational Support Plans

Where it is identified that staff may have to use physical intervention they will have received appropriate training Studio 3

Sexual contact with children

It is a criminal offence for any adult in a position of trust to engage in any form of sexual activity with a young person under 18, even with their consent. This also includes non-contact activities such as causing children to engage in or watch sexual activity. Children at Watergate School are particularly vulnerable as they are unlikely to understand sexually motivated behaviours and unlikely to be able to communicate concerns to others.

In this regard, staff will not:

- use their status and standing to form or promote relationships with children, which are of a sexual nature
- pursue sexual relationships with children either in or out of school
- enter into or encourage inappropriate or offensive discussion about sexual activity
- make sexual remarks to, or within earshot of, a pupil (including email, text messages, phone or letter), or use any communication which could be interpreted as sexually suggestive or provocative
- discuss their own sexual relationships with, or in the presence of pupils

- confer special attention and favour upon a child which might be misconstrued as being part of a 'grooming' process

One to one situations

When staff work regularly on an individual basis with children, they are more vulnerable to allegations.

To avoid such situations arising, wherever possible, lessons and activities should be arranged so that staff are visible and/or audible and not in secluded areas of the school (as far as is reasonably possible). Volunteers will not work alone and unsupervised with individuals

Staff should:

- ensure there is visual access and/or an open door in one to one situations, as far as is reasonably possible
- avoid the use of 'engaged' or equivalent signs wherever possible, as they may create an opportunity for secrecy or the interpretation of secrecy
- report to the Headteacher any situation which gives rise to complaint, disagreement or misunderstanding or where a child becomes distressed or angry.

Transporting children

In cases where children need to be transported between different locations, a designated member of staff will be appointed to plan and provide oversight of all arrangements, following Lewisham's Educational Visits Procedures.

Except in exceptional circumstances staff will not use their own vehicles to transport children. They may only do this with the approval of a member of the SLT and if they have appropriate insurance (for business use). In such circumstances and when driving the school minibus, they will only do so if there is also an escort present to support the child/children.

In such circumstances staff:

- must be aware that the safety and welfare of the child is their responsibility safely handing over to a parent/carer;
- should report the nature of the journey, the route and expected time of arrival
- should make sure that their behaviour and all arrangements ensure vehicle, passenger and driver safety, taking into account any specific needs that the child may have.
- No staff member should use their mobile phone whilst driving pupils. If it is needed for navigational purposes it should be in a suitable hands-free mount and operated by the member of staff not driving the vehicle.

Educational visits, Holiday Club School Journey

Staff will always have another adult present during out of school activities, unless otherwise agreed with the headteacher. Health or the Educational Visits Coordinator and safety requirements should be strictly adhered to.

Staff should ensure that they display professional behaviour during activities that take place off the school site and ensure that their behaviour cannot be interpreted as seeking to establish an inappropriate relationship or friendship. Staff should therefore maintain a professional relationship with pupils at all times.

Where out of school activities include overnight stays, particular consideration should be given to sleeping arrangements. Pupils, staff and parents must be informed of the arrangements in advance.

Staff should:

- Follow Lewisham's Educational Visit procedures
- undertake risk assessments
- have parental consent to the activity
- ensure that their behaviour remains professional at all times

First aid and administration of medication

In cases where first aid or medication needs to be administered, all staff should adhere to Watergate School 'Health and Safety' and 'Administration of Medicines' Policies.

Medication should only be administered in accordance with signed (parent, Special Needs Nursing Team and headteacher) health care plan, by staff who have received the appropriate training.

Staff should:

- make other staff aware of the task being undertaken;
- explain to the child what is happening.

Photography, videos and other creative arts

Many learning activities at Watergate School involve recording images for the teaching purposes and to provide evidence for assessment, and to celebrate learning, but the use of such images needs careful consideration and handling. In particular, children who may have been abused in this way may feel threatened by the use of photography and filming.

The use of any images of children for publicity purposes will also require the appropriate consent of the individual concerned and their legal guardians.

Staff should therefore:

- only ever use school equipment for the purposes of taking visual images
- be clear about the purpose of the digital image and about what will happen to the photographs/videos when the lesson or activity is concluded;
- never take photos or other digital images to record marks or injuries
- ensure that all images are available for scrutiny in order to screen for acceptability;
- never use personal mobile phones or electronic equipment to take or send images
- always keep their phone in their locker and never use it in areas where children are present.

Communication and social media

Staff's should consider social media profiles and privacy settings so they are not directly accessible to parents/pupils/families. Staff should consider using a first and middle name instead their full name, and set public profiles to private.

Staff should not attempt to contact pupils or their parents via social media, or any other means outside school, in order to develop any sort of relationship. They will not make any efforts to find parents' or pupils' social media profiles.

Staff will ensure that they do not post any images online that identify children who are pupils at the school.

Staff should be aware of the school's e-safety policy

Internet use

Accessing child pornography or indecent images of children on the computer is illegal. Under no circumstances should adults in schools access inappropriate images on the internet. The same rule applies to the use of the school's equipment by members of staff at home, e.g. use of laptops.

All staff members should follow the school policy on the use of IT equipment and its Acceptable Use.

Disclosure

It is expected that all candidates for posts at Watergate School disclose any incidents of past criminal activity in their application form. Candidates must expect to be questioned about this if they are short-listed for interview.

Before taking up employment at Watergate School all staff, volunteers, students and governors will be subject to an enhanced check using the Disclosure and Barring service.

Enhanced DBS checks will be renewed every three years. If a member of staff has any dealings with the police that may result in prosecution that will show up on their next DBS they must disclose this to the Headteacher immediately. Failure to disclose an incident of criminal activity which later appears on a DBS check may result in disciplinary action.

The Childcare (Disqualification) Regulations 2018 set out ground for disqualification under the Childcare Act 2006 where the person meets certain criteria set out in the Regulations. For example, an individual will be disqualified where they have committed a relevant offence against a child; been subject to a specified order relating to the care of a child; committed certain serious sexual or physical offences against an adult ; been included on the DBS Children's Barred List, been made subject to a disqualification order by the courts ; previously been refused registration as a childcare provider or provider or manager of a children's home or had such registration cancelled. A disqualified person is prohibited from providing relevant early or later years childcare as defined in the Childcare Act 2006 or being directly concerned in the management of such childcare. Schools are prohibited from employing a disqualified person.

The Disqualification under the Childcare Act 2006 (Regulations 2018) state that schools should make clear their expectation that staff must disclose any relationship or association (in the real world or online) that may impact upon the school's ability to safeguard pupils. This applies to all staff at Watergate school.

Conduct outside of work

Staff will not act in a way that would bring the school, or the teaching profession into disrepute. This covers relevant criminal offences, such as violence or sexual misconduct, as well as negative comments about the school on social media.