



**Victoria Academies Trust**

**STAFF CODE OF CONDUCT v1.0**

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## **1. Introduction**

This Code of Conduct sets out the standards expected and the duty upon all staff, volunteers and Academy Councillors to abide by it.

All staff, Trustees and Academy Councillors, visitors have a duty to keep students 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 adults and pupils and behaviour by adults that demonstrate integrity, maturity and good judgment. This code is designed to be supportive and aims to help employees to maintain professional standards of behaviour and protect themselves from misunderstanding or criticism.

## **2. Purpose**

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to protect and promote the interests of staff and the pupils with whom they work and in so doing, to provide a framework for safe professional practice and effective partnerships between staff, leaders and parents/carers.

The Code does not supersede local operating guidelines nor the need for employees to fulfil their obligations laid down in their job description, work plan and contract of employment. It does not attempt to identify every Trust/academy rule that exists but highlights some key rules, which broadly apply to all employees.

All staff within the Trust, have a legal and moral duty to keep students and young people safe and to protect them from sexual, physical and/or emotional harm. The duty that rests on an individual is to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the welfare of a student or young person is paramount. (Children Act 1989, Education Act 2002, Education and Inspections Act 2006).

## **3. Behaviour and Standards**

Everyone within the Trust shares a responsibility for recognising the sensitivities and feelings of others, which may be different from their own but no less valid. All staff, Trustees and Academy Councillors should be committed to high standards in delivering work and dealing with colleagues, this will not only be about the tasks people do but the effect of their words, how they interact/engage with others and tackling discriminatory or inappropriate behaviour. They also have a responsibility to not behave in such a way that may 'bring the reputation of the Trust into disrepute' outside of working hours particularly if they live and work in the local community. Employees have a responsibility to work with colleagues and treat them with respect.

Trustees, Academy Councillors and all employees are expected to give the highest possible standard of service to the public and, where it is part of their duties, to provide appropriate and impartial advice. All, are expected to bring to the attention of the appropriate line manager any deficiency in the provision of services to the public.

Teachers are also subject to the standards of personal and professional conduct in the Teachers' Standards.

All employees are expected, without fear of recrimination, to report to the appropriate manager any impropriety or breach of procedure. The Trust has a procedure for "whistleblowing" (raising a concern) to facilitate this.

## **4. Confidentiality**

Employees, Trustees and Academy Councillors may have access to confidential information about students in order to undertake their responsibilities. In some circumstances the information may be highly sensitive. Confidential or personal information about a student or their family must never be disclosed to anyone 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. Information must never be used to intimidate, humiliate, or embarrass the student.

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 to those with designated student protection responsibilities.

Confidential information about students must be held securely. Confidential information about students must not be held off the Trust site other than on security protected Trust equipment. Information must only be stored for the length of time necessary to discharge the task for which it is required.

If a member of staff is in any doubt about the storage of sharing of information they should seek guidance from a senior member of staff. Any media or legal enquiries should be passed to senior management.

The Trust practices regarding dealing with confidential information is in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) full details can be found in the Trust's GDPR policies.

## **5. Propriety and Behaviour**

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 the public in general.

An individual's behaviour, either in or out of the workplace, should not compromise their position within the work setting or bring the Trust into disrepute. Personal property of a sexually explicit nature such as books, magazines, videos or digital media must not be brought onto or stored on the Trust premises.

Social networking sites and blogging are extremely popular. Staff must not post material which damages the reputation of the Trust or which causes concern about their suitability to work with children and young people. Those who post material which could be considered as inappropriate or who click the button to signify their agreement with such material posted by others, could render themselves vulnerable to criticism or allegations of misconduct.

## **6. Appropriate dress / Appearance**

A person's dress and appearance are matters of personal choice and self-expression. However, staff and volunteers must ensure cleanliness and neatness and that 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 allegations of misconduct.

## **7. Social Contact**

Adults in the academy should not establish or seek to establish social contact with any pupil in the Trust for the purpose of securing a friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship. This includes social networking sites mentioned above or blogging. Even if a pupil seeks to establish social contact, the adult should exercise their professional judgment in not making a response, as this could be misconstrued and may place the member of staff in a vulnerable position.

## **8. Use of Social Media**

The Trust has a separate policy on social media which forms part of this Code of Conduct.

In summary, social media is the term commonly given to websites and online tools allowing users to interact with each other; by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. Social media can include any website where comments and or information can be shared and are considered to be in the public domain for example photo sharing, blogs as well as the more well-known social networking sites such as twitter and Facebook.

You should only use social media in your capacity as an employee of the Trust where this is an appropriate communication tool which must be specifically endorsed by your Headteacher / Head of School.

If you are not using social media to support you directly in your employed position, you should always access this in your personal time.

In any circumstance:

- Be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent
- Be mindful that what you publish may be public for a long time
- Respect copyright and data protection laws as well as maintaining confidential information.
- Do not publish or report information or conversations that are accessed through your employment at the trust without explicit permission. "Conversations" may be oral or e-mail exchanges □ Do not use swear words or use derogatory language.
- It is unacceptable to use social media in a manner that would generally be accepted as a hostile attempt to hurt, upset or embarrass another person, or groups of people, associated with the Trust.
- Never refer to stakeholders, suppliers or staff in a way that they can identify individuals
- Never represent or reproduce the Trust logo or your academy's logo without authorisation
- Do not publish images relating to users of the Trust's services unless consent has been given in writing
- Be aware of safeguarding issues and materials which may adversely impact on children and vulnerable adults. Challenge and report inappropriate use of media.

In addition, in your personal use of social media:

- Ensure that your online activities or expressed opinions do not interfere with or conflict with your job or your colleagues (for example many roles within Trusts are viewed as role models, views expressed should not conflict with this).
- If you are identifiable as a Trust employee on social networks, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you should present yourself with colleagues and users of Trust services
- Do not download or copy Trust materials without permission customising your privacy settings and avoiding inappropriate personal

## 9. Physical Contact and Personal Privacy

There are occasions when it is entirely appropriate and proper for staff to have physical contact with pupils, but it is crucial that they only do so in ways appropriate to their professional role. When physical contact is made with students this should be in response to their needs at the time, of limited duration and appropriate given their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity and background. It is not possible to be specific about the appropriateness of each physical contact, since an action that is appropriate with one student in one set of circumstances may be inappropriate in another, or with a different student.

Physical contact should never be secretive or casual, or for the gratification of the adult, or represent a misuse of authority. If a member of staff or volunteer believes that an action could be misinterpreted, the incident and circumstances must be reported.

Physical contact, which occurs regularly with a student or students, is likely to raise questions unless the justification for this is part of a formally agreed plan (for example in relation to students with SEN or physical disabilities). Where feasible, staff should seek the student's permission before initiating contact. Staff should listen, observe and take note of the student's reaction or feelings and – so far as is possible - use a level of contact which is acceptable to the student for the minimum time necessary.

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

Where a member of staff has a particular concern about the need to provide this type of care and reassurance they should seek further advice from a senior manager. Some staff, for example, those who teach PE and

games, or who provide music tuition will on occasions have to initiate physical contact with students in order to support a pupil 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. Contact under these circumstances should be for the minimum time necessary to complete the activity and take place in an open environment. Staff should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the student. Students are entitled to respect and privacy when changing clothes or taking a shower. However, there needs to be an appropriate level of supervision in order to safeguard students, satisfy health and safety considerations and ensure that bullying or teasing does not occur. This supervision should be appropriate to the needs and age of the students concerned and sensitive to the potential for embarrassment.

Staff with a job description which includes intimate care duties will have appropriate training and written guidance. No other member of staff or volunteer should be involved in intimate care duties except in an emergency.

## **10. Sexual Contact with Children and Young People and Abuse of Trust**

Any sexual behaviour, whether homosexual or heterosexual, by a member of staff, volunteer, Trustee or Academy Councillors with or towards a child or young person is illegal. Children and young people are protected by the same laws as adults in relation to non-consensual sexual behaviour. They are additionally protected by specific legal provisions regardless of whether there is consent or not. All adults working in the Trust who have contact with students are in positions of trust. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 specifically established a criminal offence of the abuse of trust in relation to teachers and others who are in relationship of trust with 16 -18 year olds.

Sexual behaviour includes non-contact activities, such as causing a child or young person to engage in or watch sexual activity or the production of indecent images of children. 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015' defines sexual abuse as "forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening'.

There are occasions when adults embark on a course of behaviour known as 'grooming' where the sole purpose is to gain the trust of a child or young person, and manipulate that relationship so that sexual abuse can take place. Staff and volunteers should be aware that conferring special attention and favour upon a student might be construed as being part of a 'grooming' process, which is a criminal offence.

A relationship between a member of staff, a volunteer or an Academy Councillor and any student cannot be a relationship between equals. There is potential for exploitation and harm of students and all adults have a responsibility to ensure that the unequal balance of power is not used for personal advantage or gratification. It is important to recognise that women as well as men may abuse a position of trust.

## **11. Transporting Students**

In certain situations, e.g. out of Trust activities, staff, volunteers, Trustees or Academy Councillors may agree to transport students. Wherever possible transport arrangements should be made in advance by a designated member of staff. Wherever possible and practicable transport should be provided other than in private vehicles, with at least one adult additional to the driver acting as an escort. Adults should ensure that their behaviour is safe and that the transport arrangements and the vehicle meets all legal requirements. They must ensure that the vehicle is roadworthy and appropriately insured and that the maximum capacity is not exceeded.

## **12. Educational Visits and School Clubs**

Staff and volunteers should take particular care when supervising students in the less formal atmosphere of an educational visit, particularly in a residential setting, or afterschool activity. Staff and volunteers remain in a position of trust and the same standards of conduct apply. The Trust has a policy on educational trips and visits

which forms part of this Code of Conduct. As is reflected in the Trips and Visits Policy, Staff should not consume alcohol whilst they are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of students.