

NORTH LONDON GRAMMAR SCHOOL

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR TEACHERS, VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Education professionals recognise that they may sometimes be the victims of false or malicious allegations of child abuse by pupils and students or their parents. All allegations of child abuse must be taken seriously. This will require that each allegation will be investigated. Under child protection procedures this is likely to involve police and Social Service departments. It may be necessary to suspend the teacher or other employee concerned pending the outcome of any investigation, with all the inevitable consequences in terms of public perception and feelings of helplessness and isolation. The parent organisation Axis recognises that this will be a difficult and distressing experience even if the allegations are eventually shown to be without foundation.
- 1.2 Whilst this advice is intended primarily for teachers it is relevant to all employees working with young people. Headteacher is advised to make use of this code within any induction or INSET for non-teaching staff.
- 1.3 All teachers will understand and appreciate that a code of conduct cannot cover all eventualities and will not totally remove the risk of false or malicious allegations.

2. The Code

2.1 General

Employees should take care that their relationships with pupils reflect the age, gender and maturity of the pupils. It will be particularly important to ensure that all aspects of demeanour, language and attitudes – however conveyed – do not give rise to misunderstandings, especially when dealing with adolescent boys and girls. Ambiguous or ambivalent comment and conduct, in particular, should be avoided.

2.2 Physical Contact

There will be occasions when physical contact will be acceptable. In general these will fall into one of three categories.

(i) Action to prevent harm or injury to the pupil or to others

If it is necessary to prevent a pupil causing injury to him/her or to others the use of minimum force and contact necessary to prevent harm or injury is acceptable and defensible. Such incidents must always be reported.

Further advice is contained in the 'Guidance on Physical Intervention for Teachers and Other Employees Working with Young People'.

(ii) Comforting a pupil in distress

There is no easy definition of what is acceptable since much will depend on the circumstances, the age of the pupil, the extent and cause of the distress and the alternative means of providing comfort. Employees will need to use their professional

judgement and discretion in relation to these factors. Employees should consider how others might perceive the action, even if no-one else is present, and ensure that it does not develop into unnecessary contact. Particular care must be taken in instances which involve the same pupil over a period of time.

In many cases it will be advisable for another pupil or adult to be present or in a position to minimise risk during the interview.

2.3 Pupils with Special Needs

If pupils require assistance with toileting staff should consider whether it would be possible to arrange for the presence of another adult in the vicinity. Where this is not possible employees should discuss with their Headteacher what arrangements will be reasonable in all the circumstances.

2.4 First Aid

The existence of any life threatening or serious condition will determine the suitability and necessity of physical contact. In the absence of such justification employees who administer first aid should ensure that, wherever possible, other children or another adult can be present if there is any doubt over the possibility of any physical contact being misconstrued.

2.5 Comments and Discussions with Pupils

Employees must avoid comments to or about pupils which could be taken to have sexual overtones. It is equally unacceptable for employees to encourage debate and discussion between groups of students which could be interpreted as having sexual overtones which are not justified in the context of the teaching programme.

Notwithstanding the advice given above it is recognised that, in order to discharge particular pastoral responsibilities, employees may from time to time need to engage in conversation with pupils and students which cover sensitive matters. Teachers must use their professional judgement to ensure that they are not drawn into areas inappropriate to their duties or their relationship with the pupils concerned.

In responding to individual students' distress employees will need to consider carefully whether they should offer advice, sympathy or counselling if a discussion enters a sensitive area or, alternatively, refer them to a colleague or agency who is better placed to offer appropriate advice.

The persistent and hurtful use of sarcastic, demeaning or insensitive comments towards young people may also be regarded as a form of abuse which is potentially very damaging and should be avoided.

2.6 Infatuations and Crushes

These unfortunately do develop and can involve pupils and teachers of both sexes on both a heterosexual and homosexual basis. They need to be handled sensitively. Careless and insensitive reactions have been known to provoke false accusations. It is therefore in the interest of all parties to avoid adding to the pupil's problems by encouraging the crush or making jokes about the situation. In such situations the advice of a senior colleague must be sought. Other members of staff have a part to play, too, in alerting a colleague to the possibility of an infatuation in order that appropriate steps can be taken to minimise hurt and distress and the risk to the teacher concerned. Whilst the risk of infatuation is not limited to younger members of staff, newly qualified teachers must recognise their particular vulnerability to adolescent infatuation.

2.7 Out of School and After-School Activities:

Employees should take particular care when supervising pupils in the less formal atmosphere of a residential setting or after-school activity. The more relaxed relationships that may promote successful activities can be misinterpreted by young people. It is important to emphasise that the standards of professional conduct and behaviour expected of employees should be no different to that which applies within school. Employees should be aware of the particular care which should be taken with older, more mature students in

these circumstances.

2.8 Teaching materials

The use of books, videos and films of an explicit or sensitive nature, particularly in relation to language or sexual behaviour must be given careful consideration to ensure that its selection is not subsequently misinterpreted. There should always, therefore, be a clear link with the targets of the teacher's programme.

2.9 Reporting Incidents

Teachers should report any concerns they may have following any incident where s/he feels that his/her actions may have been misinterpreted. This report should be made to the Headteacher as soon as possible after the incident and should include as an immediate follow-up the preparation of a written note of the incident, a copy of which should be given to the Headteacher. The teacher may also wish to seek advice from his/her professional association. The Headteacher who faces a similar situation is advised to contact the Chair of governors.

Whilst reporting of incidents is always advisable it is particularly important not to be used against a pupil or whenever a pupil, parent or third party has complained about an action or expressed an intention to complain.

3 Footnote

Many teachers express regret at the need for a code such as this. However, its purpose is to promote the highest standards of care for young people and to protect teachers and others from the potentially devastating consequences of false allegations. It is an unfortunate fact that society is less trusting and that, on occasions, cases have come to light which have justified the increased level of mistrust. All teachers are urged to consider how they can safeguard their own position in the light of this advice without giving up important personal principles of care and trust. Whenever doubt exists any teacher should seek the advice of the Headteacher or experienced senior colleague.

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