

Staff Code of Conduct

Overview

Silcoates School seeks to provide a safe and supportive environment, which secures the wellbeing and best outcomes for the students in its care.

This guidance has been produced to help all staff establish the safest possible learning and working environments. The aims are to safeguard young people and reduce the risk of staff being falsely accused of improper or unprofessional conduct. This means that these guidelines apply to all adults working in the School, whatever their position, role or responsibilities.

Staff at Silcoates School are expected to:

- Put the wellbeing, development and progress of students first;
- Actively promote the wellbeing of children;
- Take responsibility for maintaining the quality and effectiveness of their teaching;
- Help students become confident and successful learners;
- Demonstrate respect for diversity and promote equality;
- Establish productive partnerships with parents;
- Work as part of a whole-school team;
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity and uphold parents' and students' trust and confidence in the teaching profession and the School.

Further to the eight principles above, staff are required to:

- Establish and maintain clear professional boundaries in their relationships with students;
- Take responsibility for upholding the School's reputation and for building trust and confidence in it;
- Maintain high standards in their own behaviour that enable them to uphold their reputation and effectiveness as a teacher or member of the support staff.

This document clarifies what is expected in terms of professional behaviour. It gives clear advice about what constitutes illegal behaviour and what might be considered as misconduct. It also describes safe practice and highlights behaviours that should be avoided.

Further details about some of the sections in the Code of Conduct are contained in other school policies, for example the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and the guidelines about the use of ICT, and staff are expected to be familiar with all such policies and procedures.

All staff must be aware that a failure to follow this Code of Conduct could lead to disciplinary procedures being taken by the School.



Core Principles

At Silcoates School, we believe that:

- The welfare of students is paramount;
- Staff are responsible for their own actions and behaviour, and must avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions;
- Staff should work, and be seen to work, in an open and transparent way;
- Staff should discuss and/or seek advice promptly from the Headmaster (re staff) or DSL (re pupils) about any incident which may give rise to concern;
- Records should be kept of any such incident and of decisions made/further actions agreed;
- All staff must know the name of the School's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Chris Evans, and be familiar with our safeguarding policies and arrangements, understanding their responsibilities to protect children;
- Staff should be aware that breaches of the law and other professional guidelines could result in criminal or disciplinary action being taken against them.

Duty of Care

Teachers and other staff are accountable for the way in which they exercise authority, manage risk, use resources and protect students from discrimination and avoidable harm.

All staff, whether paid or voluntary, have a duty to keep children 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 staff and students, and behaviour by staff that demonstrates integrity, maturity and good judgement.

There are legitimately high expectations about the nature of the professional involvement of staff in the lives of children. When individuals accept a role that involves working with children and young people, they need to understand and acknowledge the responsibilities and trust inherent in that role.

Employers have a duty of care towards their employees, which requires them to provide a safe working environment for staff and guidance about safe working practices, ensuring that safeguarding procedures are in place and reviewed, that there are systems for concerns to be raised and that adults are not placed in situations which render them particularly vulnerable.

Safeguarding

The School works in close conjunction with the Wakefield Safeguarding Children Partnership to ensure that the requirements of the Children Act are complied with. Regular training for all staff takes place, and key senior staff and governors are trained in Safer Recruitment procedures and in responding to allegations against staff.

Staff are expected to wear their ID badge at all time on the site. For more formal occasions, a badge will be provided as an alternative.



The School has a detailed policy with regard to Safeguarding. A copy of the policy is posted on the school website and the policy is updated at least annually. Further details are available on request from Chris Evans.

Although incidents requiring the implementation of the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy are rare at Silcoates, it is vital that all staff, both teaching and support staff, are fully aware of the School's policy and of the action they should take if a child protection situation arises.

Exercise of Professional Judgement

This guidance cannot provide a complete checklist of what is, or is not, appropriate behaviour for staff. It does, however, highlight behaviour that is illegal, inappropriate or inadvisable.

There will be occasions and circumstances in which staff have to make decisions or take action in the best interests of the students which could contravene this guidance, or where no guidance exists. Individuals are expected to make judgements about their behaviour in order to secure the best interests and welfare of the children in their charge and, in so doing, be seen to be acting reasonably.

In practice, where no specific guidance exists, staff should discuss the circumstances that informed their action, or their proposed action, with a senior colleague. This will help to ensure that the safest practices are employed and reduce the risk of actions being misinterpreted. Staff should always discuss any misunderstanding, accidents or threats with a senior member of staff, and always record discussions and actions taken with their justifications.

Positions of Trust

All adults working with children in the School are in positions of trust in relation to the young people in their care. A relationship between a member of staff and a student cannot be a relationship between equals. There is potential for the exploitation and harm of vulnerable young people. Therefore, staff have a responsibility to ensure that an unequal balance of power is not used for personal advantage or gratification.

Staff must always maintain appropriate professionalism and, wherever possible, they should avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others, and report and record any incident with this potential.

Where a person aged 18 or over is in a position of trust with a child under 18, it is an offence for that person to engage in sexual activity with or in the presence of that child, or to cause or incite that child to engage in or watch sexual activity. Where a person aged 18 or over is in a position of trust established with a person who has only recently left the school, any attempt to engage in sexual activity with that person will be a cause for concern and will be treated as a breach of the trust established in that prior relationship.



Confidentiality

Members of staff may have access to confidential information about students in order to undertake their everyday responsibilities. In some circumstances, staff may be given additional highly sensitive or private information. They must never use confidential or personal information about a student or a student's family for their own or others' advantage. Information must never be used to intimidate, humiliate or embarrass a student.

Confidential information about students should never be used casually in conversation or shared with any person 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.

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, but only to those with designated safeguarding responsibilities.

If a member of staff is in any doubt about whether to share information or keep it confidential, he or she should seek guidance from a senior member of staff. Any media or legal enquiries should be passed on immediately to a member of the senior team.

Adults need to be aware that, although it is important to listen to and support students, they must not promise confidentiality, or request students to do the same, under any circumstances. More detailed guidelines on confidentiality can be found in the Staff Handbook.

Propriety and Behaviour

All 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. This means that staff should not:

- Behave in a manner which would lead any reasonable person to question their suitability to work with students or act as a role model;
- Drink alcohol with current students in public or private places, nor purchase alcohol for students. There may be exceptional circumstances, for example where a member of staff is personal friends with a parent, which mean that normal social life will bring the student into social contact with a member of staff. However, generally, if a member of staff finds themselves in a pub or other meeting place in which current students are drinking, the member of staff should not join the students and may need to draw the attention of bar staff to the age of the students. If a member of staff feels that there are exceptional reasons why the general restriction on drinking alcohol with students should not apply, they should discuss the matter with a senior member of staff;
- Drink alcohol when they are the sole person supervising students on school trips. This applies even when there are no students present, as the member of staff may



- be called upon to act if an emergency occurs;
- Make inappropriate remarks to a student (including email, text messages, phone and/or letter, etc.);
- Discuss their own sexual relationships with or in the presence of students;
- Discuss a student's sexual relationships in inappropriate settings or contexts;
- Make (or encourage others to make) unprofessional personal comments in any form of communication, including e-mail, conversations or social networking comments.

An individual's behaviour, both in and out of the workplace, should not compromise his/her position within the work setting, so it is important to exercise due care and attention when outside the school environment.

Membership of organisations whose goals are in conflict with the values and equality policies of the School is not acceptable.

Sexual Contact with Students

Any sexual behaviour by a member of staff with or towards a student is both inappropriate and illegal. Students 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 the child or young person consents or not. This includes the prohibition on adults in a position of trust.

The sexual activity referred to does not just involve physical contact, including penetrative and non-penetrative acts. It may also include non-contact activities, such as causing children to engage in or watch sexual activity or the production of pornographic material.

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, and manipulate that relationship so that sexual abuse can take place. Staff should be aware that conferring special attention and favour upon a child might be construed as being part of a 'grooming' process, which is an offence.

Infatuations

It is not uncommon for students to be strongly attracted to a member of staff and/or develop an infatuation. Staff should be aware that such circumstances always carry a high risk of words or actions being misinterpreted and allegations being made against staff.

A member of staff who becomes aware that a student may be infatuated with them or a colleague should discuss this at the earliest opportunity with a senior colleague so that appropriate action can be taken.

Personal Living Space

No student should be in, or invited into, the home of an adult who works with them, unless the reason for this has been firmly established and agreed with parents and senior staff, or the home has been designated as a work place, for example a child-minder's or foster carer's.



Social Contact

Staff should not establish, or seek to establish, social contact with students or their families for the purpose of securing a friendship, or to pursue or strengthen a relationship. If a young person seeks to establish social contact, or if this occurs coincidentally, the member of staff should exercise their professional judgement in making a response and should always discuss this with a senior colleague.

Internet Use

Silcoates School has clear policies about access to and the use of the internet. Please refer to the ICT Code of Conduct - Staff and E-Safety Social and Digital Policy for further guidance.

Under no circumstances should adults in the School access inappropriate images. Accessing child pornography or indecent images of children on the internet, and making, storing or disseminating such material, is illegal and, if proven, will lead to the individual being barred from work with children and young people.

Using school equipment or the school network to access inappropriate or indecent material, including adult pornography, would normally lead to disciplinary action, particularly if, as a result, students might be exposed to inappropriate or indecent material.

Communication with Students (Including the Use of Technology)

Communication between students and adults, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites, social networking sites, online gaming and blogs. Adults should not share any personal information with a student. They should not request, or respond to, any personal information from the student, other than that which might be appropriate as part of their professional role. Adults should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny.

Adults should also be circumspect in their communications with students so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour which could be construed as grooming. They should not give their personal contact details to students, including e-mail, home or mobile telephone numbers, unless the need to do so is agreed with senior staff and parents. E-mail or text communications between an adult and a student outside agreed protocols could lead to disciplinary and/or criminal investigations. This also includes communications through internet-based web sites, such as social networking, instant messaging or gaming.

Communication with former students who are over 18 is left to staff discretion. However, staff should be aware that former students may themselves be in contact with current students.



Physical Contact

There are occasions when it is entirely appropriate and proper for staff to have physical contact with students, but it is crucial that they only do so in ways appropriate to their professional role, e.g., P.E. staff may demonstrate the hold of a racket. Staff should use their professional judgement at all times about the appropriateness of any physical contact.

A 'no touch' approach is impractical for most staff and may in some circumstances be inappropriate. When physical contact is made with students, this should be in response to their needs at the time, of limited duration and appropriate.

Physical contact should never be secretive, or for the gratification of the adult, or represent a misuse of authority. If a member of staff believes that an action could be misinterpreted, the incident and circumstances should be made clear to senior staff.

Physical contact which occurs regularly with an individual student is likely to raise questions, unless the justification for this is part of a formally agreed plan, for example in relation to students with SEND. Any such contact should be the subject of an agreed and open school policy and subject to review.

Some staff, for example those who work with younger children or who teach PE and Games or individual instrumental lessons, will on occasions have to initiate physical contact in order to support a student 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 and contact under these circumstances should be for the minimum time necessary to complete the activity. It should take place in an open environment and staff should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the student.

Further guidance is contained in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Showers and Changing

Young people 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.

Students in Distress

There may be occasions when a distressed student needs comfort and reassurance. This may include age-appropriate physical contact. Staff should remain cautious at all times so 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, he or she should seek further advice from a senior colleague.



Behaviour Management

All students have a right to be treated with respect and dignity. Staff should not use any form of degrading treatment to punish a student. While the use of humour can help to defuse a situation, the use of sarcastic, demeaning or insensitive comments towards students is not acceptable in any situation.

Care, Control and Physical Intervention

Staff may legitimately intervene to prevent a student from committing a criminal offence, injuring themselves or others, causing damage to property, engaging in behaviour prejudicial to good order, and to maintain good order and discipline. In doing so, staff should have regard to the health and safety of themselves and others.

Under no circumstances should physical force be used as a form of punishment. The use of unwarranted physical force is likely to constitute a criminal offence. In all cases where physical intervention is deemed necessary, the incident and subsequent actions must be documented and reported to senior staff.

One-to-One Situations

Staff working in one to one situations with children and young people are potentially more vulnerable to allegations. Teachers and others should recognise this possibility, and plan and conduct such meetings accordingly. Every attempt should be made to ensure that the safety and security needs of both staff and students are met.

Pre-arranged meetings with students away from the school premises should not be permitted unless approval is obtained from their parent and a senior colleague.

Transporting Children

In certain situations, for example out of school activities, staff or volunteers may agree to transport children. The Deputy Head (Pastoral) is the Educational Visits Coordinator and he can advise accordingly about all aspects of planning transport arrangements, as well as responding to any difficulties that may arise.

Wherever possible and practicable, it is advisable that transport is undertaken other than in private vehicles, with at least one adult additional to the driver acting as an escort. The driver must also have appropriate insurance.

Staff must ensure that their behaviour is safe, and that the transport arrangements and the vehicle meet all legal requirements. They must ensure that the vehicle is roadworthy and that the maximum capacity is not exceeded.

Further guidance is contained in the Trips and Visits Policy.



Co-curricular Activities

Staff should take particular care when supervising students in the less formal atmosphere of a residential setting or after-school activity.

During school activities that take place away from the school site or out of school hours, a more relaxed discipline or informal dress and language code may be acceptable. However, staff remain in a position of trust and need to ensure that their behaviour cannot be interpreted as seeking to establish an inappropriate relationship or friendship.

Where out of school activities include overnight stays, careful consideration needs to be given to sleeping arrangements. Students, staff and parents should be informed of these prior to the start of the trip. Health and safety arrangements require members of staff to keep colleagues/employers aware of their whereabouts, especially when involved in an out of school activity.

Again, further guidance is contained in the Trips and Visits Policy.

Intimate Care

All children have a right to safety, privacy and dignity when contact of an intimate nature is required (for example, assisting with toileting or removing wet/soiled clothing). A care plan should be drawn up and agreed with parents for all children who require intimate care on a regular basis.

Children should be encouraged to act as independently as possible and to undertake as much of their own personal care as is practicable. When assistance is required, staff should ensure that another appropriate adult is in the vicinity and is aware of the task to be undertaken.

Additional vulnerabilities that may arise from a physical disability should be considered with regard to individual teaching and care plans for each child. As with all arrangements for intimate care needs, agreements between the child, their parents and the School must be negotiated, agreed and recorded.

Further guidance is contained in the First Aid Policy.

Curriculum

Many areas of the curriculum can include or raise subject matter which is sexually explicit or of an otherwise sensitive nature. Care should be taken to ensure that resource materials cannot be misinterpreted and clearly relate to the learning outcomes identified by the lesson plan. This plan should highlight particular areas of risk and sensitivity.

The curriculum can sometimes include or lead to unplanned discussion about subject matter of a sexually explicit or otherwise sensitive nature. Responding to students' questions can require careful judgement, and staff may wish to take guidance in these circumstances from a senior member of staff.



Parents have the right to withdraw their children from all or part of any sex education provided, but not from the biological aspects of human growth and reproduction necessary under the science curriculum.

Photography and Videos

Many school activities involve recording images. These may be undertaken as part of the curriculum, out of school activities, for publicity or to celebrate achievement.

Staff need to be aware of the potential for these aspects of teaching to be misused, for example in the worst case scenario for pornographic or 'grooming' purposes.

Careful consideration should therefore be given as to how these activities are organized and undertaken. Staff should refer to the E-Safety Social and Digital Policy and the Taking, Storing and Using Images of Children Policy for further guidance. If staff are unsure about using image recording devices, they should consult a senior colleague.

Using images of children for the School's publicity purposes has already had the consent of parents. However, images should not be displayed on other websites, in publications or in a public place without additional consent. Separate, more directed guidelines for those who work with younger children are contained in the Mobile Phone Policy (EYFS).

Whistleblowing

Staff who are concerned about the conduct of a colleague or safeguarding practice within the school are undoubtedly placed in a very difficult situation.

All staff must remember that the welfare of the child is paramount and staff should feel able to report all concerns, no matter how small, about a colleague or the safeguarding practice within the school. The school's whistleblowing code (see Whistleblowing Policy) enables staff to raise concerns or allegations in confidence and for a sensitive enquiry to take place.

Safeguarding Concerns

In accordance with the School's Safeguarding Policy and the statutory guidance in *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023)*, if a member of staff has any concern however low-level about a colleague other than the headmaster regarding the safeguarding of children, this must be referred to the Head immediately; if the concern relates to the Head this must be referred to the Chair of Governors. Such safeguarding concerns may be about:

- the conduct of a member of staff (or any other adult working or volunteering within the School) relating to a pupil
- the approach taken to safeguarding in general by the leadership and management and/or the DSL team
- the approach taken to safeguarding on a specific case by the DSL team

Members of staff may also contact the local children's services or other external agencies directly.



The NSPCC whistleblowing line also provides guidance on how to deal with safeguarding concerns about colleagues or about safeguarding practice in the school: 0800 028 0285.

The term 'low-level concern' does not mean that it is insignificant, it means that it does not meet the harms threshold. It is an allegation and meets the harms threshold if the person has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child and/or;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child and/or;
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicated he or she may pose a risk of harm to children; and/or
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt' – that an adult working in or on behalf of the school may have acted in a way that:

- is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including appropriate conduct outside of work, and
- does not meet the allegations threshold or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider referral to the LADO

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being overfriendly with children;
- having favourites;
- taking photographs of children on their personal mobile phone or other device;
- engaging with a child in a one-on-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door; or,
- using inappropriate sexualised, intimidating or offensive language.

Whether the member of staff considers the conduct of a colleague or other adult in the school low-level or more serious, the action to be taken is exactly the same: refer immediately to the Head without informing the colleague or other adult, unless the concern relates to the Head in which case the matter should be referred immediately to the Chair of Governors.

All staff should be aware of the School's safeguarding procedures, including those for dealing with allegations against staff. Details of these procedures can be found in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. Staff who are the subject of allegations are advised to contact their professional association.



Disqualification Declaration

The School has a legal responsibility to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children and are not disqualified from working in childcare.

As part of the School's vetting procedures, staff are asked to sign an annual declaration to say that they are not disqualified. If this situation should change at any point during the school year, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform the School immediately. Likewise, any other criminal convictions, or anything that might bring the School's reputation into disrepute, must be reported to a senior colleague without delay.

Dress and Appearance

The way in which members of staff dress should be appropriate for professionals working in an independent school. Parents have high expectations about standards of dress and staff act as role-models for young people who have clear guidelines about how to present themselves appropriately. In keeping with these guiding principles, it is generally expected that:

- Men wear either a business suit or a jacket with suitable trousers, and shirt and tie; the jacket should be worn for moving around school and in the Dining Hall, the shirt should be fully buttoned and the tie done up properly.
- Women should exercise the same degree of formality and smartness in their choice of attire.
- Hair should not be extreme in colour or style.
- Teachers who have afternoon Games sessions should wear formal attire in the morning.
- PE Teachers' shorts should be Silcoates branded with an inseam of no less than 7".
- Teachers should not wear sports shorts or sports skirts in the Dining Hall or classrooms.
- Jewellery should not be ostentatious.
- Tattoos and body piercings, other than earrings, should be concealed.
- Staff should ensure that their appearance and clothing are not likely to be viewed as offensive, revealing or sexually provocative and that they do not cause embarrassment or give rise to misunderstanding.

INSET

Staff are expected to attend INSET days as directed by their line manager.

Gifts

Staff need to take care that they do not accept any gift that might be construed as a bribe by others, or lead the giver to expect preferential treatment. Members of staff must not give personal gifts to students, but it is acceptable for staff to offer prizes of small value in certain tasks or competitions.



There are occasions when students or parents may wish to pass small tokens of appreciation to staff, for example at Christmas or as a thank you, and this is acceptable. However, it is unacceptable to receive gifts on a regular basis or of any significant value. Any member of staff concerned about whether they or their colleagues may be at risk of giving or receiving a bribe (financial or otherwise) should contact the Bursar. Any member of staff receiving gifts or entertainment valued at more than £50 must disclose this to the Bursar.

Signatures of Confirmation

In order to ensure a consistent approach to important issues such as safeguarding and health and safety, there is an annual requirement for staff to sign their name on a central record sheet to say that they have read the respective policies and guidelines, understand them and will action them in their day to day working at school. The list of 'required reading' for signature will be amended and clearly explained each year. Any concerns about this process should be discussed with a senior colleague.

The School is fully committed to ensuring that the application of this policy is non-discriminatory in line with the UK Equality Act (2010). Further details are available in the School's Equal Opportunity Policy document.

Reviewed by:	Mr Wainman – Head		
Date of last review:	April 2023	Date of next review:	April 2024

