

## Guidance for Heart of Mercia Multi-Academy Trust Employees on Safer Working Practices

It is recognised that most adults who work with pupils/students act professionally and aim to provide a safe and supportive environment which secures the well-being and very best outcomes for pupils/students in their care. Achieving these aims is not always straightforward, as much relies on pupil/student and staff interactions where tensions and misunderstandings can occur.

This document aims to reduce the risk of these misunderstandings and is a supplement to the **Trust Staff Code of Conduct** (available at [Policies and Procedures | Heart of Mercia Multi-Academy Trust](#)). It also compliments any local guidance in academies of the Trust on safer working practices.

There will be occasions and circumstances in which Heart of Mercia Multi-Academy Trust (the Trust) employees must make decisions or take action in the best interest of a pupil/student 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 pupil/student in their charge and, in so doing, will be seen to be acting reasonably. These judgements should always be recorded and shared with a line manager. Adults should always consider whether their actions are warranted, proportionate, safe, and applied equitably.

**Working with Pupils/Students Alone:** You should avoid this if you feel the pupil/student is likely to put you at risk. You may wish to ask another member of staff to be present and you should ensure that there is visual access and/or an open door in one-to-one situations. Always report any situation where a pupil/student becomes distressed or angry. All work with pupils/students and parents should usually be undertaken in the school or college or at another recognised workplace, and any home visit in response to an urgent or specific situation should be agreed with the member of staff's line manager. Consideration should be given to any circumstances which might render the staff member becoming more vulnerable to an allegation being made e.g., hostility, child protection concerns, complaints, or grievances. Specific thought should be given to visits outside of 'office hours' or in remote locations. Visits should not be made alone, and staff should have access to a mobile telephone and emergency contact.

It is fully recognised that occasions will arise where confidential meetings or interviews must take place between a member of staff and a pupil/student:

- If possible, leave the door ajar or use a room with a window in the door.
- Where such conditions cannot apply, staff are advised to ensure that another member of staff knows that the meeting is taking place.
- Never meet a pupil/student away from the College unless express permission is given, and reasons are discussed with your line manager.
- Avoid travelling in a car with one pupil/student (see below).

**Transporting Pupils/Students:** You do not have an obligation to transport pupils/students in your own vehicle. If you do, you should ensure that you have the appropriate insurance that permits business use. If the arrangement is planned, it will form part of the academies outdoor or off-site

activities policy and appropriate risk assessments are required. In the case of an emergency or when failure to do so would put the pupil/student at risk, you should report the nature of the journey, the route and expected time of arrival to your line manager or other member of staff as soon as possible. You may decide you would prefer another member of staff to accompany you or to ask the pupil/student to sit in the rear seat of the car.

**Trips and Visits:** Staff should take particular care when supervising pupils/students in the less formal atmosphere of an educational visit where 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. Please consult the academies policy for off-site and/or outdoor activities for specific guidance. In all circumstances, those organising trips and outings should pay careful attention to ensuring there is a safe staff/student ratio and suitable gender mix of staff.

**Social Networking:** All Trust staff are bound by the **acceptable use policy of their academies**, and you must ensure that you follow its requirements regarding the use of social media and in particular you must not invite pupils/students or accept invitations from them to become 'friends' on Facebook or other social networking sites. You must ensure that your communications are open and transparent, and you should avoid any communications that could be interpreted as 'grooming behaviour.'

**Other Social Interaction:** Staff must avoid arranging to meet pupils/students socially where their motives are unclear. You should also inform your line manager if you have any regular social contact with a pupil/student outside of school or college.

Staff should refrain from lending money to a pupil/student. Pupils/students who are in need of money for food or travel should be directed to the appropriate staff member in the academy who has discretion to allocation money from bursary funding as appropriate.

#### **Interactions with pupils/students once they have left the academy**

The Trust recognises that working with young people involves forming a professional relationship with them and that this professional relationship is one in which power dynamics exist. Ongoing relationships can be invaluable, providing a sense of continuity and encouragement as students transition into new phases of their lives.

After pupils/students leave an academy of the Trust it is crucial that the teacher-pupil/student relationship remains professional, with clear boundaries in place. Staff must be mindful of the inherent power dynamics that persist even after a pupil/student has left, which can make any informal or social relationship inappropriate.

Trust staff are advised to avoid maintaining relationships with past students unless the reasons for doing so arise from, or contribute to, the work of their academy, or the Trust. Wherever possible, communication with former pupils/students should be conducted through professional channels such as the academy email or LinkedIn, avoiding the use of social media messaging platforms. Where such

relationships exist, staff are reminded of the need for full transparency where there may be a concern that their professionalism, integrity, or the well-being of other parties may be open to question.

While staff may continue to offer support in the form of references, career advice, or mentorship for example, personal or social interactions should be carefully limited. Engaging in personal relationships through social media or social settings, can blur appropriate boundaries and could be misused, misinterpreted, or misrepresented. Trust staff should be mindful of not bringing themselves, and/or the Trust and its academies into disrepute.

The Trust expects its staff to operate in a manner that is fully transparent, and with due regard to the highest standards of professional behaviour to protect themselves from any allegations of inappropriate behaviour or relationships. By recognizing the continued influence they hold, staff can ensure that any ongoing relationship is constructive, appropriate, and ethical.

**Photography:** Staff must not have images of pupils/students on their personal devices, and you should not ordinarily use your own personal equipment to take images of pupils/students at or on behalf of the school or college. There are limited exceptions for purposes such as trips and visits. In these instances, this should be included as part of the risk assessment for the activity and the intention to take photographs and its purpose shared with pupils/students (and parents in the case of a trip/visit). The images should only be retained for as long as necessary for the intended purpose at which point, they should be deleted. Arrangements for the retention and deletion of the images should be agreed with your line manager or a member of the academy Senior Leadership Team.

**Language:** All staff must avoid using personal or suggestive language that might give rise to offence or be misinterpreted. Care should be taken not to invade a pupils/student's personal space.

**Dress code:** As teachers and educational workers we act as role models for pupils/students, and we represent the academy and the Trust to the public on whose support we rely. Staff should ensure that they dress in a manner which is functional and suitable for a working environment. Where local arrangements for staff dress code exist, these should be followed. Clothing or accessories that are distracting, offensive or that prevent effective communication are not acceptable.

**Infatuations:** it is not uncommon for pupils/students to develop a 'crush' or infatuation concerning a member of staff. The member of staff should make every effort to ensure that their own behaviour cannot be brought into question and does not appear to encourage this. Any member of staff who becomes aware that a pupil/student has become or may be becoming infatuated with either themselves or a colleague, should immediately report this to their line manager.

**Physical Contact and Restraint:** Staff should only touch pupils/students if it is clearly necessary to demonstrate or guide. Always explain to a pupil/student the reason contact is necessary and what form that contact will take. Even innocent actions can be misconstrued. Staff should be aware of gender, cultural or religious issues that may need to be considered prior to initiating physical contact and also that different pupils/students react in different ways to physical contact.

Reasonable force can legally be used to control or restrain a pupil/student, but it should be the last resort. If restraint of a pupil/student is required, only the minimum necessary force should be used to prevent harm to the pupil/student, others, or property. If dealing with pupils/students with behavioural difficulties, it is wise to obtain advice beforehand. Where restraint has been used, you should report it to a member of the academy Senior Leadership Team.

If you must deal with a challenging pupil/student:

- Try to defuse the situation before it escalates.
- Never compromise your own safety.
- If you must use reasonable physical restraint to prevent a pupil/student harming themselves or another, report this immediately to your line manager.

Contact the reception in your academy or a member of the academy Senior Leadership Team in the case of a fight breaking out.

**Personal / Intimate Care:** This must be provided only by named individuals who have undergone training and who have agreed specific care arrangements with a pupil/student and their parent / guardian. In the event that an adult student requires personal care, Personnel must be notified, and a suitable Barred List check carried out in addition to the DBS check.

**Whistleblowing:** This is the mechanism by which staff can voice their concerns, made in good faith, without fear of repercussion. For further details please consult the Trust Whistleblowing policy available at [Policies and Procedures | Heart of Mercia Multi-Academy Trust](#).

Staff must acknowledge their individual responsibilities to bring matters of concern, regarding the behaviour of a colleague, to the attention of the academy Head or Principal. Where the concern is about the academy Head or Principal, they should bring their concern to the attention of the Chief Executive of the Trust. This is particularly important where the welfare of pupil/student may be at risk.

Staff must report any behaviour by colleagues that raises concern regardless of source through following the guidance set out in the Trust's Safeguarding, Whistleblowing and Managing Allegations policies and any relevant policies in their academy.

A member of staff must self-refer, where, for example, they have found themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted, might appear compromising to others and/or on reflection they believe they have behaved in such a way that they consider falls below the expected professional standards.

**If you are in doubt, you should seek advice about safer working practices from your line manager, or a member of your academy SLT.**

Further information and guidance can be found at [Professional and Personnel Relationships \(safeguardingchildren.co.uk\)](#)