

# Positive Touch Policy



**Review Date**

February 2023

**Ratified**

September 2023

**Next Review**

February 2025

**Responsible Directorate**

Safeguarding

# Our Vision



## Transforming Lives of our learners

We seek to ensure that all our learners receive a high-quality education from expert staff and aspire to achieve the best they possibly can, no matter their background or ability. Our learners have safe, supportive learning environments in which they develop, grow, and challenge themselves. We are determined that our learners will receive the very best enrichment and opportunities to help them reach their full potential and ensure they are prepared for the future, wherever it might take them.



## Transforming Lives of our colleagues

Our colleagues are supported with the very best professional development through our innovative ATT institute, allowing them to stay focused on learning and developing as practitioners whilst they progress in their careers. We share the very best practice across our community of academies to help build systems and processes that really work.



## Transforming Lives in the communities we serve

We are committed to actively engaging with and addressing inequality in our local areas. We understand that every one of our academies and their diverse communities are different, so we aim to build a supportive, collaborative, and nurturing relationship with each whilst sharing our key values across our Trust.

**Commitment  
to Education**

**Transparency  
and Integrity**

**Innovation and  
Improvement**

**Dedication to  
Inclusivity**

# Our Values

## Commitment to Education

Our core purpose is to positively impact the lives of all our learners. Education will always be at the heart of everything we do.

## Transparency and Integrity

We are proud of our success whilst being open and honest about our areas for improvement. Our actions are always ethical and in the best interests of all our stakeholders.

## Innovation and Improvement

We are committed to innovative education- always moving forward and never standing still. Our learners are ambitious and prepared for a future that is constantly changing and developing.

## Dedication to Inclusivity

Our learners are all different and all important to us. We aspire to support, challenge, and help each one of them reach their full potential, regardless of their background or level of ability.

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# Statement of Intent

At Phoenix Academy we believe that the use of appropriate positive touch is a vital aspect of our nurturing role. Touch and physical contact is essential in order to provide sensitive, high-quality care and educational provision. Used in context and with empathy, touch supports the development of natural interactions with the young people we teach and care for. The intent of this policy is to safeguard both staff and pupils with this approach.

## 1 | Purpose of Positive Touch

1.1 Touch not only promotes a child's social and emotional development but is also a highly effective and powerful method of non-verbal communication, is key to the development of healthy relationships and a method of stress relief. It can be used to:

- Show acceptance
- Provide reassurance
- Demonstrate affection
- Calm and provide comfort
- Emphasise the spoken word
- Provide sensory stimulation
- Engage in personal care routines
- Deliver various therapy programmes
- Offer an alternative to spoken communication
- Remove a child from danger or keep a child safe

1.2 When appropriate touch is not encouraged, as often happens, then all touch has the potential to become sexualised. Children don't learn to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touch. They miss out on a whole range of valuable touch experiences – friendly, nurturing, reassuring, comforting and healing. We should be instilling a sense of what appropriate touch is.

## 2 | Research

2.1 Research has shown that positive touch is beneficial for early bonding, stress reduction, and state regulation (Harrison, 2001); it also can improve attentiveness and sleep problems in some children with autism (Escalona, Field, Singer-Strunck, Cullen, & Hartshorn, 2001 Cullen LA, Barlow JH, Cushway D. 2005). For children with delays and disabilities, positive touch has been used effectively

to enhance caregiver-child interactions and increase the child's comfort (Pardew & Bunse, 2005). Field, T (2010) explored the importance of 'Touch for socioemotional and physical well-being'.

- 2.2 Members of staff in a caring school recognise physical contact as an important part of child development and guidance. They understand that physical contact may be communication and they recognise the importance and significance of non-verbal communication and respond appropriately. This should always be done in a developmentally appropriate way and should a child shun the comfort offered through touch, the child's wishes will be respected by the member of staff dealing with the situation. All touch, that does not involve the use of reasonable force (see Reasonable Force Policy) will be consent based.
- 2.3 Therapeutic touch is used in situations where children are distressed. In these situations, research has shown that it would be unkind or increase the child's distress if touch was not employed. When children are very distressed they often ignore information provided by their senses for example they may no longer see or no longer hear. When a child is distressed touch can be the only means of maintaining a connection with the child.
- 2.4 Where a child presents a danger to themselves or to others it will at times be necessary for trained staff to use a means of physical intervention or safe holding using Team-teach methods. This is appropriate if a child is hurting either him/herself or others or is damaging property and is so distressed and out of control that all verbal attempts to reduce/stop the behaviour have failed.
- 2.5 Such interventions are supported and documented in the government document 'Use of Reasonable Force in School: Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies' (Gov.uk). These techniques can be the safest means of holding a child to feel safe and soothed and to calm them down when they are very distressed, are used to prevent the child from exposing themselves or others to physical or psychological harm. At such times staff should always take care to explain what they are doing and that the actions taken are for safety reasons. As the situation de-escalates, touch can be appropriately used to move from one situation of control to one of care, such as the friendly hold.

## 3 | Responsibilities

- 3.1 The Principal has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2 If staff are in any doubt about issues concerning appropriate touch or observe any practice that causes concern, they should discuss this with the Principal.
- 3.3 The Principal will ensure that all allegations against members of staff and volunteers are handled in line with our safeguarding procedures. More information regarding this, can be found in the Safeguarding Policy for Phoenix Academy.
- 3.4 All staff are responsible for:
  - Referring any low-level concerns about another member of staff and any allegations of abuse directly to the Principal. If the concerns are about the Principal, these should be referred to

the Director of Primary Education. The Director of Primary Education or Principal will work in conjunction with the Director of Safeguarding to support a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), in either situation.

- Raising concerns about poor or unsafe practice and potential failures in the academy's safeguarding regime through the academy's Whistleblowing Policy.

## 4 | Appropriate Touch

4.1 Examples of appropriate touch may include the following:

- Respecting the personal privacy and personal space of children
- Responses affecting the safety and well-being of the child (e.g., holding the hand of a child while crossing the street, using a Team Teach hold when a pupil becomes a danger to themselves or others)
- Responses supporting social and emotional development such as hugs (usually side on with older pupils to avoid full-body contact), lap sitting (child facing outwards and sideways) for younger children, reassuring touches on the shoulder, head and back
- Touch for health and hygiene, personal care

## 5 | Inappropriate Touch

5.1 Examples of inappropriate touch include the following:

- Satisfaction of adult needs rather than that of the pupil
- Coercion or other forms of exploitation of the pupil's lack of knowledge
- Violation of laws against sexual contact between adults and children
- Forced kisses, corporal punishment, slapping, striking or pinching, tickling for prolonged periods, fondling or molestation.

## 6 | Considerations

6.1 It is vital that staff should always consider the pupil's gender, race, disability, and age when using touch as individuals may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch. An individual's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. In addition, some individuals may be used to differing levels of touch as part of their cultural upbringing. All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at Phoenix Academy is safe, sensitive and appropriate.

- 6.2 Staff should be sensitive to a pupil's behaviour (e.g., over excitement or negative reactions to touch) and should withdraw touch when they feel it is having a negative impact. All touch that is not based around the use of reasonable force (see Reasonable Force Policy) should be consensual.
- 6.3 Each pupil at Phoenix will have a 'Positive Handling Plan' where examples of supportive touch will be individualised and recorded.

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