

Positive Touch Policy



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Requires approval by Governing Body: Yes

Date approved: 03/12/2025

Southgate School: Positive Touch Policy

This policy is shared and signed by all the staff at Southgate School and shared on the school's website for all parents and carers to view. If you have any questions in relation to this policy, please email office@southgateschool.co.uk

We have carefully considered and analysed the impact of this policy on equality and the possible implications for pupils or staff with protected characteristics, as part of our commitment to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Rationale

The understanding of appropriate touch is key to the development of healthy relationships. At Southgate School, we believe that the use of touch is a vital aspect of our nurturing role: we recognise that adult physical contact is not only inevitable but desirable, and that touch is also an effective method of stress relief.

Touch 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 programs
- Offer an alternative to spoken communication
- Remove a child from danger or keep a child safe

Research shows 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'.

When appropriate touch is not fostered:

- Children, particularly those with complex needs, may struggle to develop their understanding of appropriate and inappropriate touch.
- All touch has the potential to become sexualised.
- Children miss out on a whole range of valuable touch experiences – friendly, nurturing, reassuring, comforting and healing.

Therefore, at Southgate, we instill with our pupils a sense of what appropriate touch is.

Southgate Practice

Staff Approach

Staff at Southgate are trained to be skilled in understanding that touch not only promotes a pupil's social and emotional development, but is also a highly effective and powerful method of non-verbal communication.

Staff understand the changes to appropriate physical contact at different stages of child development. As pupils move through school, we work to develop the use of positive touch to be as closely in line with age appropriacy as is developmentally possible for each pupil.

At Southgate, therapeutic touch is used in situations where pupils are distressed. In these situations, research has shown that it would be unkind or increase the pupil'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 be able to see or hear effectively. When a child is distressed, touch can be the only means of maintaining a connection with them.

Staff 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. In addition, some individuals may be used to differing levels of touch as part of their cultural upbringing.

Staff are aware that an individual's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them, and that this needs to inform their approach to touch. This is particularly relevant for pupils with attachment issues, where pupils may have limited understanding of the differences between 'school adult' and 'carer'. Misinterpretations of touch may lead to over-attachment.

Staff are aware that should a pupil shun the comfort offered through touch, the pupil's wishes are followed, unless this would cause them to be unsafe.

Physical intervention

Where a pupil presents a danger to themselves or to others, there may be times when it is necessary for trained staff to use a means of physical intervention ('safe holding') to keep them safe. At Southgate, this is undertaken using Team Teach methods. Team Teach physical intervention is used to enable the school to comply with its duty of care to ensure the safety of pupils. It is used only after all other de-escalation strategies have been unsuccessful, and when it is reasonable, proportionate and necessary to do so.

The use of physical intervention is supported and documented in the government document 'Use of Reasonable Force in School: Advice for headteachers, staff and

governing bodies' (July 2013). Team Teach techniques are employed at Southgate as they are considered to be the safest means of ensuring pupil safety; calming a pupil down when they are very distressed; preventing a pupil from exposing themselves or others to physical or psychological harm.

When physical intervention is used, staff explain to the pupil that the actions they are taking are for safety reasons. As the situation de-escalates, touch can be appropriately used to move from a situation of ensuring safety to one of support, such as a help hug

Examples of appropriate touch:

- Responses affecting the safety and well-being of the pupil.
This may include holding the hand of a pupil while crossing the street; using a Team Teach physical intervention when a pupil becomes a danger to themselves or others.
- Responses supporting social and emotional development.
This may include hugs (note: hugs are side on to avoid full-body contact); reassuring touches on the shoulder; back rubs; lap sitting (note: for younger pupils & only for reassurance / repair; not for routine, as this is a more appropriate touch for a 'carer' than a 'school adult').
- Touch for health and hygiene, personal care.
Where a pupil requires intimate personal care, staff ensure that the pupil is as comfortable as possible with the staff member attending to their needs. A pupil's privacy and dignity is always preserved. (See Intimate Care Policy.)

Examples of inappropriate touch:

- Satisfaction of the adult's needs rather than those of the pupil.
- Touch that is without the pupil's consent (unless keeping safe).
- 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, fondling or molestation.
- Corporal punishment, slapping, striking or pinching.
- Tickling for prolonged periods.

All staff take responsibility to ensure that all practice at Southgate School is safe, sensitive and appropriate.