



# BIRKENHEAD SCHOOL

## Staff Code of Conduct

Birkenhead School expects the highest standards from all members of its community, and particularly its staff and students. This policy applies to all staff and volunteers in the school regardless of their position, role or responsibility. References to 'staff' throughout the policy relate to all of the following groups:

- All members of staff including teaching and support staff
- Volunteers, including governors
- Casual workers
- Temporary and supply staff, either from agencies or engaged directly
- Student placements, including those undertaking initial teacher training and apprentices.

There are a number of relevant policy documents relating to professional expectations and this brief summary should therefore be read alongside the following published documents:

Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy; "Whistle-Blowing" Policy – Raising Concerns; Educational Visits Policies (Seniors and Prep); Anti-Bullying Policy; E-Safety Policy; and various Financial Policies / Guidelines.

It is the responsibility of all staff to ensure that they have read, understand and adhere to all School policies. These are available in the staff handbook on Firefly.

Teachers are also asked to familiarise themselves with the Department for Education's 'Teachers' Standards' and in particular Standard 8 which deals with personal and professional conduct. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards>)

At all times staff are expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct and should therefore be excellent role models. This includes being professionally attired at all times and an awareness of the standards of behaviour expected by professional members of the School at all times, including on School trips.

Staff uphold public trust in the teaching profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by:

- Conducting themselves in line with the School values of respect, responsibility, resilience, courage, compassion, inclusivity and integrity.

Treating students and colleagues with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to their professional position.

- Having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' wellbeing, in accordance with statutory provisions as appropriate.
- Showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
- Not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs
- Ensuring that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law.
- All staff must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of Birkenhead School and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality.

## **Safeguarding**

Staff are reminded that at the heart of all that we do is 'Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of students in our care.' All conduct must be based upon this premise and the fact that the needs of the child are always paramount. With this in mind, staff are asked to regularly remind themselves of the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. This policy also assists by protecting members of staff against false or malicious accusations or accusations which may result from misunderstandings. All staff must read and understand Part 1 and Annex A of the Government Guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' for September 2023. [KCSIE 2023](#)

- Staff have a duty to safeguard students from physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect
- The duty to safeguard students includes the duty to report concerns about a pupil/student or colleague to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for Child Protection. The school's DSL is Kirsten Pankhurst. The Deputy DSLs are Richard Halppin and Katie Tyrie
- The school's Child Protection Policy, including Prevent guidelines and Whistleblowing Procedure are available in the Staff handbook on Firefly: Staff must be familiar with these documents.
- Staff should treat children with respect and dignity and must not seriously demean or undermine pupils, their parents or carers, or colleagues.
- Staff should not demonstrate behaviours that may be perceived as sarcasm, making jokes at the expense of students, embarrassing or humiliating students, discriminating against or favouring students.

- Staff must take reasonable care of pupils/students under their supervision with the aim of ensuring their safety and welfare.
- Physical conduct with a child should always be appropriate and with the permission of the child.

While recognising that there are occasions when one-to-one advice, support or feedback needs to be given to students, staff should protect themselves from allegations of abuse by ensuring these meetings take place during the working day, in school premises where all parties can be clearly seen. In a similar vein, staff should not give lifts to students alone, unless in exceptional circumstances. All efforts should be made to make alternative arrangements, but where exceptional circumstances demand, another member of staff should be made aware of the journey. If staff are transporting students in their personal vehicles, and this is unavoidable, it is incumbent upon the staff member to ensure that they are fully covered by appropriate business insurance. Parent consent should be sought in advance, in writing, and kept on file. In an emergency, parents should be informed as soon as possible after the event.

In the various social interactions which occur at school, or on School trips, staff must ensure that they adhere to the law and to accepted guidelines where the provision of alcohol is concerned.

Staff should not seek to develop or enhance friendships or social contact with students out of School. Any relationships that staff have with students outside of School must be declared, including tutoring or family connections.

### **Whistle-Blowing**

Staff are encouraged to be professionally curious and confident. In any cases where staff have cause to doubt the actions of the safeguarding team, including decisions on actions and outcomes, they are encouraged to make use of the whistle-blowing policy without fear of recrimination.

### **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. A 'no touch' approach is impractical for some staff and may in some circumstances be inappropriate. When physical contact is made with students it should be in response to their needs at that time, of limited duration and appropriate to their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity and background. Consent should be sought wherever possible before essential physical contact, for example demonstrating a ball drill in games.

It is not possible to be specific about the appropriateness of each physical contact, since an action that is appropriate with one child in one set of circumstances may be inappropriate in another, or with a different child. Staff should therefore, use their professional judgement at all times. Staff should be aware that even well intentioned physical contact may be misconstrued by the child, an observer or by anyone to whom this action is described. Staff should never touch a child in a way which may be considered indecent or improper. Always be prepared to explain actions and accept that all physical contact be open to scrutiny. Extra caution should be exercised where a child is known to have suffered previous abuse or neglect, or have SEND. Such experiences may sometimes make a child exceptionally needy and demanding of physical contact and staff should respond sensitively.

Staff supervising PE and games or providing musical tuition should demonstrate the use of a particular piece of equipment/instrument on another member of staff if possible. However, they may be required to initiate physical contact with students/students to support a child to perform a task safely, to demonstrate the use of a particular piece of equipment/instrument or to assist them with an exercise. Contact under these circumstances should be done with the student/students' agreement, and in an open environment. Staff should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the student/students.

Physical contact must never be secretive, 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 reported to the DSL and recorded. This should be recorded as a 'low-level' concern unless investigated and found to breach the code of conduct or safeguarding policy.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Care should be taken by staff to avoid any conflict of interest between activities undertaken outside school and responsibilities within school. Similarly, they should not assign / accept benefits (e.g. paying own expenses from a School budget) or allocate undue benefits to any family member, friend or colleague (e.g. employment opportunity, training / bonus, hospitality).

### **Dealing with the School's Money**

You must:

- Ensure that public funds are used in a responsible and lawful manner.
- Strive to ensure value for money to the School and to avoid legal challenge to the School.
- Ensure compliance with the School's Finance Procedures and Responsibilities policy

### **Criminal Charges and Convictions**

In accordance with the Independent School Standards Regulations, the School requires all applicants to disclose criminal convictions, whether committed in the UK or elsewhere. You must:

- Notify the School in writing immediately if you are subject to a caution, ban, police enquiry, investigation, pending prosecution or are charged with any criminal offence or if convicted of any criminal offence, this includes cautions.
- If charged with an offence, advise the School as your employer immediately after you are charged (i.e. next working day). It should be noted that the term 'conviction' includes a finding of guilt, regardless of whether or not a conviction is recorded. Failure to notify the School in either case will constitute grounds for disciplinary action

All staff and volunteers and required to notify the Headmaster (or in the case of the Headmaster the Chair of Governors) immediately if they are found to by the Police/Court to have engaged in criminal activity, or are under investigation by the Police or Social Services, as this may impact on their ability to work with children.

## **Political Neutrality**

The School will not concern itself with the political beliefs of individuals however you must not allow your own political beliefs to interfere with the work of the School. You may not display party political posters, including election material, in any place of work.

## **Email and E-safety**

All staff should be familiar with, and follow, the School's Online Safety Policy. Staff should use email professionally, and email should always be factual. Care should be taken when writing about students and ensure that confidentiality is protected. Initials should be used in subject lines wherever possible. Contact should only be made with students using the school email account or Firefly messages.

Staff should follow the published protocols when contacting students using electronic media and must not have current students as 'friends' or 'followers' on social network sites. It is inadvisable to have recent (within the last two years) Old Birkonians as friends on Social Media platforms, unless for networking reasons, for example LinkedIn.

If inappropriate contact is made by students, staff should report this immediately to the DSL.

Staff must not engage in inappropriate use of social network sites which may bring themselves, the school or the school community into disrepute. Staff should adopt the highest security settings on any personal profiles they have. Staff should not distribute, download, upload or browse any content that could be considered offensive, illegal or discriminatory. Staff should not 'like' social media posts that could be considered offensive, illegal or discriminatory.

Staff should remain mindful of their digital footprint and exercise caution in all their use of social media or any other web based presence they have. This includes written content, videos or photographs and views expressed either directly or by 'liking' certain pages or posts or following certain individuals or groups.

Staff should not use their own mobile devices for taking or storing images of students. The School has devices for this purpose. If own devices are used, this must be with the permission of the DSL and parents of the students concerned. The images should be stored on school systems and deleted from the personal device as soon as possible.

Emails should be checked on each contracted day. Replies to parents should be made within 48 hours of receipt during the working week.

## **Smoking and Vaping**

The School is a non-smoking organisation. With this in mind you are not permitted to smoke or vape in any of the School's offices, or any other building or grounds, owned or occupied by the School, at any time. Smoking or vaping whilst on the School's premises may be subject to disciplinary action.

## **Personal Mobiles**

- Employees are not permitted to make/receive calls/texts during work time where children are present (excluding break times).
- Staff should ensure that mobiles are set to silent at all times whilst in classrooms with children. They should not be left on display.

- Staff are not permitted to use recording equipment on their personal mobile phones.

### **Dress and Lanyards**

Staff are required to arrive on time and correctly attired for all School commitments as well as in a position to undertake their role (e.g. not under the effect of alcohol/drugs). The wearing of official School lanyards is included in the required attire at all times when on School business, or at School.

### **Absence and Punctuality**

All staff whose contracted hours permit should attend morning briefings on Mondays at 08:15am. All staff must attend Assembly and Form Tutors and Heads of Year/Section must attend Chapel unless express permission has been granted by the Deputy Head in Seniors or Deputy Head of Prep. Staff need to be on time for changeover of lessons and all duties.

Lateness can result in health and safety risks. Staff must inform the Deputy Head Academic in Seniors or the Deputy Head in Prep, in advance if they are going to be absent or late for their duty and, where possible, they should arrange a swap with another colleague.

Staff are required to attend all relevant meetings including Parents' Evenings and Open Days/Evenings. There are 5 INSET days per year; September INSET days have required attendance from all staff regardless of contracted hours. Staff should attend all required twilight meetings and Staff Training. Teaching staff are also expected to play their part in the wider academic and co-curricular life of the School, this is reflected in the salary of all teaching staff.

Form Tutors must ensure that notices in the Day Book are read out to students in the morning and in afternoon registration. All staff should ensure that registers are taken after lunch in Seniors.

Any request for a period of absence should be made to the relevant SLT member (or manager in the case of some support staff). Any unavoidable absence should similarly be reported to the same people as soon as possible and work must be provided for students in the absence of a teacher. A return to work interview with the relevant manager must take place on the day of return. The absence policy is available on Firefly.

### **Confidentiality**

Members of staff may have access to confidential information about students, their parents/carers or their siblings. Staff must not reveal such information except to those colleagues who have a professional role in relation to the student/student on a need to know basis.

Staff should never use confidential or personal information about a student or her/his family for their own, or others' advantage (including that of partners, friends, relatives or other organisations). Information must never be used to intimidate, humiliate, or embarrass the student.

Staff should take care in protecting the data they hold by using School laptops for school business. Staff should take care of personal data, such as exercise books or exam papers by not leaving them in public places, or high risk areas (such as in the car overnight).

Memory Sticks, portable hard-drives and other transferable media should not be used.

All aspects of the GDPR policy should be followed, including following email protocols that retain the confidentiality of parents' addresses and student information.

### **Low level concerns**

The safety and wellbeing of children in our school is dependent on the vigilance of all our staff and their prompt communication to the DSL of any concerns, no matter how small, about any conduct by an adult which causes you to doubt that adult's suitability to work with or have access to children. All references in this section to "adult" should be interpreted as meaning any adult (defined above) and any visitor, unless otherwise stated. The school is conscious of its duty of care to pupils and will always act, including if alerted to the possibility of abuse arising from situations or persons outside the school setting.

The notification and prompt handling of all concerns about adults is fundamental to safeguarding children. It helps to identify and prevent abuse and to protect adults against misunderstandings or misinterpretations. It also encourages openness, trust and transparency and it clarifies expected behaviours. Those raising concerns or reporting allegations in good faith will always be supported, and adults in respect of whom concerns or allegations have been raised will not suffer any detriment unless the concern or allegation is found to be substantiated.

**If you are concerned about the behaviour or actions of any adult speak to the DSL or Head Master.**

Staff should always avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others. As a result of their knowledge, position and/or the authority invested in their role, all adults working with children and young people are in positions of trust in relation to the young people in their care. A relationship between a member of staff and a pupil cannot be a relationship between equals. There is potential for exploitation and harm of vulnerable young people and all members of staff have a responsibility to ensure that an unequal balance of power is not used for personal advantage or gratification. Staff should note that it is an offence for a person aged 18 or over and in a position of trust to touch a child in a sexual way or have a sexual relationship with a child, even if the relationship is consensual. A position of trust could arise even if the member of staff does not teach the child.

The school has a specific Early Years Policy for The Use of Mobile Phones and Devices that recognises and manages the risks by a means appropriate to the setting.

The school's overarching aim is to facilitate a culture in which the clear values and expected behaviours which are set out in our Code of Conduct are lived, constantly monitored, and reinforced by all staff. In particular, the intention of this policy is to:

- maintain a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which staff are confident and clear about expected behaviours of themselves and their colleagues, the delineation of boundaries and reporting lines;
- ensure staff feel empowered to raise any low-level concern, whether about their own or a colleague's behaviour, where that behaviour might be construed as falling short of the standards set out in our Code of Conduct.

### **What is a low-level concern?**

A low-level concern for this purpose is any concern, no matter how small and even if no more than a 'nagging doubt', that an adult may have acted in a manner inconsistent with the school's Code of Conduct or simply – even if not linked to a particular act or omission – a sense of unease as to the adult's behaviour particularly towards or around children.

### **What should I do if I have one?**

Where a low-level concern exists it should be reported to the DSL or to the Headmaster as soon as reasonably possible and, in any event, within 24 hours of becoming aware of it (where the concern relates to a particular incident).

### **How will my low-level concern be handled?**

The DSL will discuss all low level concerns she receives with the Headmaster as soon as possible and in any event within 24 hours of becoming aware of it. The Headmaster will, in the first instance, satisfy himself that it is a low-level concern and should not be reclassified as an *allegation* and dealt with under the appropriate procedure (outlined later in this document). The circumstances in which a low-level concern might be reclassified as an allegation are where:

- a) the threshold is met for an allegation
- b) there is a pattern of low-level concerns which collectively amount to an allegation or
- c) there is other information which, when taken into account, leads to an allegation.

Where the Headmaster is in any doubt whatsoever, advice will be sought from the Designated Officer, if necessary on a no-names basis.

Having established that the concern is low-level, the DSL or Headmaster as appropriate will discuss it with the individual who has raised it and will take any other steps to investigate it as necessary. Most low-level concerns by their very nature are likely to be minor and will be dealt with by means of management guidance, training etc.

### **What records will be kept?**

Where a low-level concern has been communicated, a confidential record will be kept in a central safeguarding file by the DSL. This is necessary to enable any patterns to be identified. However, no record will be made of the concern on the individual's personnel file (and no mention made in job references) unless either:

- a) the concern (or group of concerns) has been reclassified as an allegation as above; or
- b) the concern (or group of concerns) is sufficiently serious to result in formal action under the school's grievance, capability or disciplinary procedure.

### **Disciplinary Action**

Staff should be aware that a failure to comply with this code of conduct could result in disciplinary action including but not limited to dismissal.

### **General**

All staff are expected to uphold the good reputation of Birkenhead School in their communications both within School and as part of the wider community and should not bring the name of the School into disrepute. This naturally includes comments made or shared on social media.

**Kirsten Pankhurst 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023. To be reviewed September 2024**