



Article 3

The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

Staff and Volunteers' Code of Conduct

Introduction

It is essential that every member of staff reflects the values promoted by Rathmore Primary School. Staff must always be mindful of the fact that they hold a position of trust and that their behaviour towards the children of Rathmore must be above reproach.

Guiding Principles

- This code of conduct is not intended to detract from the enriching and positive experiences that our children gain from interaction with the teachers and other staff.
- It is intended to assist staff to be aware of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour towards the children in their care.
- Staff are expected to act professionally, always seeking to provide a safe and supportive environment.

The basic principles which underpin the following policy are:

- The welfare of the child is paramount [Children's Act 1989]. As a Rights Respecting School we encourage respect across the whole school community and seek to ensure that all children are protected from harm. (Article 19 UNCRC)
- Staff are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions.
- Staff should work in an open and transparent manner.
- Staff should discuss and/or take advice promptly from the Principal or designated teachers over an incident which may give rise to concern.

1 Professional Conduct

Confidentiality

Staff will have access to information about children in order to undertake their everyday responsibilities. This information about child/parent/family/relatives must never be used outside the work context.

Staff Behaviour

All staff have a responsibility to adopt high standards of personal conduct in order to maintain the respect and confidence of their peers, children, parents and public in general. Staff behaviour, either in or out of the workplace, should not compromise his/her position within the work setting.

Dress and Appearance

Staff dress and appearance are obviously matters of personal choice and self-expression. However, staff should consider their manner of dress and appearance to ensure it is appropriate to their professional role and avoids criticism or allegation. Staff should not dress in a way that is offensive or revealing, and is absent from political or other contentious slogans.

Social Contact

Staff should not establish or seek to establish social contact with children for the purpose of securing a friendship or strengthen a relationship.

Staff should not give personal details such as home/mobile phone number, address or e-mail address to children or parents.

Gifts from suppliers or associates of the school must be declared to the Principal with the exception of "one off" token gifts from students or parents. Personal gifts from individual members of staff or volunteers to students are inappropriate and could be misinterpreted and may lead to disciplinary action. A record will be kept of all gifts received.

Relationships with Students

All staff and volunteers must declare any relationships that they may have with pupils/students outside of school; this may include mutual membership of social groups, tutoring, or family connections. Staff and volunteers should not assume that the school are aware of any such connections.

Mobile Phones /Cameras

Staff mobile phones must be turned off/silent and out of sight during all professional duties. Camera devices should never be used for work purposes.

Photographs or video footage of students should only be taken using school equipment for purposes authorised by the school. Any such use should always be transparent and only occur where parental consent has been given. The resultant files from such recording or taking of photographs must be retained and destroyed in accordance with school policy.

Social Media

Staff and volunteers must not engage in appropriate use of social network sites which may bring themselves, the school or employer into disrepute. They should ensure that they adopt suitably high security settings on any personal profiles they may have.

Staff should exercise caution in their use of all social media or any other web based presence that they may have, including 'liking' certain pages or posts established by others. At no time should staff communicate with students via personal accounts on social media platforms.

Computers

Staff must use the C2K website for all school business. E-mail and internet use during the working day should be for educational/work use only.

2 Physical Contact with Children:

- As a general principle, staff and volunteers are advised not to make any unnecessary physical contact with any child.
- A distressed child, especially a younger child, may need reassurance involving physical comforting, such as a caring parent would provide. Staff should not feel inhibited from providing this, but should do so only in a public place and in view of other adults.
- Staff and volunteers should never touch a child who has indicated clearly that he or she is, or would be, uncomfortable with such contact, unless it is necessary to protect that child, another child or property from harm.
- It is important that any physical contact, which would be likely to be misinterpreted by the child or other casual observer, should be avoided.

(Refer also to DENI Circular 1999/9, on the use of reasonable force, gives guidance on Article 4 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (*Power of member of staff to restrain pupils* and Rathmore Primary School's Safe Handling Policy).

- When a child requires any intimate care arrangements such as changing wet or soiled clothes, staff can only offer a change of clothes for the child to change themselves and/or contact the child's parents to come to school to assist. On these occasions staff are advised to be sensitive to the child's need for, and right to, privacy. However, staff should not hesitate to provide help for a distressed child unable to change themselves in an emergency situation. The incident is always recorded and reported to parents.
- Physical punishment of any kind is illegal, as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour, unless it is by way of necessary restraint. Any necessary restraint is always recorded and reported to parents. (refer to Safe Handling Policy)
- During any PE or sporting activity, physical contact must be kept to a minimum. Any contact will be in order to demonstrate techniques and keep children safe.
- When accompanying children to changing facilities, either in school, swimming pool or at other venues, staff and volunteers will be sensitive to the children's right to privacy whilst ensuring safety is maintained. For example, it may be necessary for an adult to enter the changing room should an emergency situation arise. In this situation the member of staff or volunteer will give warning before entering a changing room.
Currently due to COVID restrictions, children are coming to school dressed for PE on their PE days. This removes the need for routine changing in school. (If the situation arises: In school P1- P4 children will change together while P5-P7 children will change in gender groups. As there are no changing rooms in Rathmore, P5-P7 class teachers will remain in the class with their gender group during changing while the other group change in the cloak area.)
- Staff who have to administer first aid to a child should ensure wherever possible that this is done in the presence of another adult or another child. However, staff should not hesitate to provide first aid in an emergency simply because another person is not present. Administering first aid is an area where physical contact cannot always be avoided and often it is essential, for example, when moving a child into the recovery position. Staff are trained to act with discretion and should never remove any child's clothing unless treatment necessitates this.
- Staff should be particularly careful when supervising children in a residential setting, or in approved out of school activities. In these situations, more informal relationships tend to be usual and staff will be in proximity to children in circumstances very different from the normal school/work environment. When carrying out supervisory duties on a residential

trip, good practice would encourage staff to work with a colleague to carry out such duties. This would be particularly relevant if a child requires assistance during the night. Staff will meet with the Designated Teacher and the trip leader to be given an opportunity to discuss any issues or concerns they may have concerning their role, before each trip commences. They will also be given a clear outline regarding emergencies, specific first aid requirements and individual roles.

When organising educational visits, transport should be arranged for all children. No child should be transported by car.

- Following any incident where a member of staff or volunteer feels that his or her actions have been, or maybe, misconstrued, a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to the designated teacher for child protection, Dr Rhonda Mitchell-Barrett, the deputy designated teacher Mrs Deborah Davies, or the school principal Mrs Julie Hardy. Nursery concerns should be addressed to Ms Nicola Cranston, designated teacher for the Nursery.

3 Choice and Use of Teaching Materials

All teaching materials must be viewed before their use with children. Teachers and others, including class visitors, should be very careful in their choice of teaching materials and resources and should avoid materials which have the potential to be misinterpreted or are of a sensitive nature. If there is any doubt about the appropriateness of a particular teaching material, the teacher should consult with the principal before using it. Films shown must have a U certificate.

4 Relationships and Attitudes

Guided by the Pastoral Care policies of the school and any current DENI or EA advice, staff and others should ensure that their relationships with children are at all times appropriate to the age, maturity and gender of the children, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation.

Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought, particularly when dealing with the older primary boys and girls. This is important in terms of protecting children and the adults who are in contact with them.

Disciplinary Action

Staff and volunteers should be aware that a failure to comply with this Code of Conduct could result in disciplinary action including but not limited to dismissal.

Conclusion

It would be impossible and inappropriate to lay down hard and fast rules to cover all the circumstances in which staff and volunteers interrelate with children and young people, or where opportunities for their conduct to be misconstrued might occur.

It is prudent, however, for all staff and volunteers to reappraise their teaching styles, relationships with and their manner and approach to children from time to time.

In all circumstances, professional judgement will be exercised and for the vast majority of employees and volunteers this code of conduct will serve only to confirm what has always been their good practice.

If an individual has any doubts about points raised in this Code of Conduct or how they should act in particular circumstances, they should consult with the principal or member of the Pastoral Care Team.

All staff and volunteers must sign a form to confirm that they have read, understood and agreed to comply with the code of conduct.

From “A Code of Conduct for Employees within the Education Sector whose work brings them into contact with children/young people” Appendix 9: Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection: DENI 1999 and Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools- Updated 2019 (DENI)