



Touch Policy

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Approved By	Trust Board	Status	Non-Statutory
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Details of Policy Updates

Date	Details
02/02/2021	Name and logo updated by SJM
28/09/2025	Updated to reflect current guidance

Touch Policy

1. Introduction – Statement of Intent

Our policy on touch has been developed with due consideration of neurobiological research and studies highlighting the positive impact of safe, attuned touch in supporting emotional regulation and connection. This policy reflects current statutory and non-statutory guidance, including the Department for Education's revised *Use of Reasonable Force* guidance (2013), which emphasises trauma-informed practice, safeguarding, and the rights of children with SEND. It also incorporates principles from *Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention* (2019) and aligns with the latest version of *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (2025), which recognises the role of appropriate touch in nurturing relationships and promoting wellbeing.

The Trust aims to ensure that all staff and authorised volunteers feel confident and young people feel secure with all forms of appropriate safe touch.

It is not illegal to touch a pupil, but touch should not be invasive. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, with a young person in school is proper and necessary.

The importance of touch should not be underestimated as it can:

- demonstrate affection and care
- show acceptance and inclusion
- soothe and help adults attune to the child's emotional state
- reinforce verbal communication and emotional tone
- provide reassurance and emotional safety
- offer an alternative to spoken communication.
- Support emotional regulation and reduce stress
- Promote secure attachment and trust
- Encourage social bonding and connection
- Enhance learning and attention in emotionally safe environments

2. General

We define the appropriate use of touch as essential in situations where abstaining would be inhumane, unkind, and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging. For example, comforting a young person in acute distress through safe, attuned touch can prevent re-traumatisation and mitigate the release of toxic stress chemicals that contribute to long-term harm. In such states, when verbal communication and eye contact are no longer effective, touch may be the only means of maintaining connection and preventing dissociation.

In cases where a young person is at risk of harming themselves, others, or property, and all de-escalation efforts have failed, a physical intervention may be necessary. Please refer to the Physical Intervention Policy. All staff at North Star Academy Trust are trained in Team Teach, a recognised approach that promotes de-escalation and safe handling.

The staff at North Star Academy Trust initiate and respond warmly to appropriate touch from all young people. Each morning, students are greeted both as they enter the school and again as they arrive in their individual classrooms. Interactions in the corridor or during these welcoming moments may include physical contact, such as a handshake, high-five, or gentle pat on the shoulder. These gestures help foster a nurturing, warm, and caring environment that supports emotional safety and a strong sense of belonging. This sense of connection is vital for the wellbeing and development of the young people attending the schools within North Star Academy Trust.

We acknowledge the current climate of caution around touch in schools. However, our policy is grounded in the belief that understanding the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch is essential. Staff are trained to avoid touch that is impulsive, avoidant, or emotionally disconnected, and to recognise when psychological holding has been achieved without physical contact. Consent and communication are central: both staff and pupils are encouraged to seek permission before initiating touch, ensuring that all interactions are respectful, safe, and attuned to individual needs.

3. Appropriate Touch

By 'Appropriate Touch' we mean touch that is physical contact that is respectful, non-invasive, and emotionally attuned. It must never be humiliating, confusing experienced as flirtatious or erotic in any way. Examples of appropriate areas for touch include 'shoulders, arms, back, hands (e.g. hand-holding when comforting)'. Any other places are considered inappropriate.

Staff are fully trained to recognise and avoid any form of touch that could be perceived as invasive, traumatising, or misinterpreted. Any use of touch that breaches these boundaries would constitute a serious violation of the Trust's Code of Conduct and may result in the highest level of disciplinary action.

The Trust is committed to ensuring that all young people feel safe in both their bodies and their emotions. Staff work collaboratively to uphold this commitment in every interaction. Where staff are acting in the best interests of the young person, they will be supported by the school.

4. Guidance

North Star Academy Trust staff should always consider and adhere to the following principles when carrying out their duties involving physical contact:

- **Touch must never be sexualised or inappropriate.** It should not be used in ways that could arouse sexual expectations or feelings. Play-fighting is not a substitute for appropriate affection towards young people and can send confusing messages about personal and professional boundaries.
- **Intimate personal care** must be delivered with sensitivity and respect. Staff should ensure the student is comfortable with the staff member attending to their needs.

Another staff member should be nearby to monitor, and the young person's privacy and dignity must be preserved at all times.

- **Privacy and professionalism** are essential. Staff should promote a safe environment that respects personal boundaries. This includes being mindful of how they present themselves (e.g. dress and body language) and how they interact with both colleagues and young people.
- **Responding to physical comfort-seeking** should be handled with care. If a staff member feels it is inappropriate to respond with touch, they should avoid outright rejection and instead use gentle diversion or explanation, where appropriate, to maintain emotional safety.
- **Respect for boundaries** is paramount. If a young person indicates discomfort with touch, such as flinching or moving away, staff should acknowledge this and, where appropriate, offer an apology to reinforce respect for personal space.
- Physical intervention may be necessary when a child presents a danger to themselves or others. Such actions must follow the Trust's Physical Intervention Policy.
- **Individualised plans** may include touch as a calming strategy. In some cases, children may request a hug as an alternative to physical intervention. If agreed and documented in their Supporting Behaviour Plan and Risk Assessment, such contact must remain appropriate, occur in the presence of another adult, and follow the guidelines outlined in this policy.
- **Clarity of intention is essential.** Clarity should always be our aim. A young person should never be left uncertain about the purpose of physical contact, even if they may not fully understand it cognitively. Unconsidered or clumsy touch can be experienced as confusing, uncomfortable or distressing. Planned, attuned, and contextually appropriate touch within a safe relationship is far less likely to cause discomfort

All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at North Star Academy Trust is safe, appropriate, and in line with safeguarding and health and safety guidelines. Staff should expect to be observed and be open to professional dialogue about any concerns. Low-level concerns about staff conduct or practice must be recorded promptly on StaffSafe. Any member of staff who is concerned about another member of staff's practice should report their concerns with the CEO or Designated Safeguarding Leads.

5. Complimentary Policies

This Policy must be read in conjunction with the following Trust and School Policies:

- North Star Academy Trusts Safeguarding Policy
- School's Behaviour Policies
- School's Anti-Bullying Policies
- Equalities Information
- Physical Intervention Policy
- Staff code of conduct