



Ravenshall

all different | all equal | all important

Use of Touch Policy

TITLE	Use of Touch Policy
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Ravenshall Use of Touch Policy 2023

AIMS

- To be clear about the benefits and risks of touch.
- To ensure staff understand their roles and responsibilities involving touch and follow all guidelines.
- To ensure that parents and carers are confident that their child's care needs are met safely.
- Staff carry out intimate care procedures following guidelines to protect themselves and pupils.

All pupils at Ravenshall have cognitive and communication needs, many pupils also have social, emotional and mental health needs, and physical and sensory needs. We believe that use of positive touch is a crucial part of the way we support our pupils.

Positive touch is an important way to support child development in all of these areas.

Using touch can:

- reassure and comfort
- show acceptance
- support communication and understanding

Touch forms apart of daily personal care routines, and for therapy programmes such as physiotherapy and sensory occupational therapy. Some pupils need a greater level of support to take part in their individual physiotherapy programmes, for example to move from wheelchair to standing frame. Staff will follow their individual plans as directed by the Locala physiotherapist or the moving and handling advisor, and request further support and advice if needed.

Some pupils require medical support which includes touch, such as having gastrostomy feeds, applying skin cream or needing emergency medication during a seizure. All medical procedures are detailed in the pupil's health care plan/ feeding plan, and staff are trained to administer medication.

In order to provide an effective multi-sensory curriculum, our learning activities often involve touch, for example TacPac and story massage.

Touch is essential to support some pupils who are very distressed (dependent on individual needs). When some children are distressed they are unable to use other senses properly and touch can be the most effective or only way to support them to regulate and feel safe. Staff approach this in a caring way and respect the child's wishes when offering support. Strategies to support individual pupils to regulate their emotions and calm down are detailed in their individual Regulation Support Plans and will be followed consistently by staff.

Sometimes, positive touch is needed to keep children safe, for example if they need to be removed from danger. Staff at Ravenshall are trained to use Positive Handling and Physical Intervention (PHPI) in circumstances when a child or children are unsafe and all other non-

physical support is not working. Please see our school policy called “Positive Relationships and Engagement policy” for more information about this.

Touch is an essential element of non-verbal communication. Use of touch helps pupils to understand instructions (for example using touch cues) and promotes social and emotional engagement- this is why shaking hands and other physical greetings are fundamental across all cultures. It is a way of establishing and developing warm and sincere relationships.

In order for pupils to understand what appropriate touch is, it must be modelled and used acceptably. All touch has the potential to become sexualised, and it is important for our pupils to learn to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Learning about safe and appropriate touch is a key part of our PSHE curriculum, and is also learned through assemblies, daily routines and specific interventions when needed.

Staff Guidelines

In order for the use of touch in school to be positive, safe and to promote learning, Ravenshall has guidelines which enable everyone to understand how touch can be effectively used in school. Staff must be clear about what the purpose of the physical contact is.

Pupils who are of a primary age, or who have a high level of sensory need will naturally require more positive physical support, for example holding hands/ linking arms to guide; support using apparatus such as the swing in the Sullivan Sensory Regulation Room; taking part in story massage sessions.

When pupils request physical contact, for example through a hug, staff are asked to use a “side hug” so that there is minimal bodily contact, and no frontal body contact. For younger pupils, a full hug may be needed, but staff should encourage side hugs. For pupils above primary school age, staff will always encourage side hugs, as this promotes life skills development and understanding of appropriate touch beyond school life.

We recognise that some pupils are tactile resistant, and that any/some forms of touch can cause or increase distress. Staff will always respect this. This individual information will be included in pupil profiles for staff to be aware of. Enabling these pupils to witness the benefits and positivity of appropriate touch can be a way for them to reduce anxiety about physical contact.

Pupils touching other pupils

Touch can be a key part of childhood play and learning, for example through games like “tig”. Pupils are taught about safe touch including being gentle and parts of the body which are acceptable to touch.

Pupils are encouraged to greet each other and may shake hands and congratulate each other with a “high 5”. This encourages positive relationships and friendships.

If pupils wish to hold hands, this is acceptable for primary age pupils.

Pupils older than primary age who want to hold hands because they are emotionally attached may do so outside at break time, and not touch more than this. Staff will ask pupils

not to hug, kiss or increase touch as we aim to promote a mature and appropriate environment in preparation for life beyond school.
 Pupils will learn about this through PSHE, form tutor time and through assemblies.
 If any pupils display sexualised touch, this will be addressed by staff straight away and reported to safeguarding so that supportive interventions and referrals can be put into place.

INTIMATE CARE

Many pupils need assistance when using the toilet. This may involve changing incontinence pads, or supporting with clothing or giving verbal prompts.

All pupils requiring intimate care support will have an individual plan, which is shared with families and which staff will follow. This will be reviewed as part of the annual review process and more regularly if needed.

Staff will explain the touch as it is used to help the pupil to understand the support given and what is happening, for example that they are going to remove trousers/ wipe.

Staff will ensure that dignity and respect are observed throughout intimate care support procedures. Staff will speak to the pupil directly and encourage independence and support throughout. Staff will check that pupil is comfortable and support them emotionally as well as physically.

Please see our Intimate Care Policy for more information.

An individual’s history may also influence who represents a “safe” adult to them, for example if they have experienced abuse by a male/ female.

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

All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at Ravenshall School is safe, sensitive and appropriate.

Change management log		
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1.1	Updated format	17.1.24

