



PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP BOUNDARIES

Policy & Procedure No.

OP06

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Reference to

LE01 Data Protection
LE02 Confidentiality
OP03 Whistleblowing
HR04 Safer Recruitment
Employee Handbook

1. Introduction

This document is intended to provide a code of practice which will assist all staff in establishing and maintaining professional practice and boundaries with pupils, colleagues, other professionals and partner agencies.

2. Working with Pupils

Values and Principles

It is the purpose of this section to establish a professional context for working with the people who use our services by describing the basic values and principles, which govern professional practice.

It should be acknowledged that as the pupils are dependent on support staff in order to receive their required level of support and care, the staff can therefore be perceived as having “power” and influence over them.

There are many ways in which colleagues could deliberately or inadvertently influence the people who use our services and it is therefore important that we consciously always maintain professional relationships.

Many of our pupils are vulnerable; therefore it is not permissible for staff to enter into a non-therapeutic relationship with our pupils or their families, nor is it permissible for any employee to have social contact with off-roll pupils within three years of their leaving date where the ex-pupil is still a child or is a vulnerable adult or where contact could result in vulnerability unless their parent/carer organise a specific meeting. Staff should approach their manager if they feel concerned about any aspect of their relationship with a current or ex-pupil.

Professional Relationship with Pupils

It is a relationship formed between two people, one being the recipient of a defined service and the other a member of staff paid to provide part or all the defined service:

- a. The relationship is formed to meet the needs of the pupil.
- b. In remaining professional, the member of staff must depersonalise the issues and remain objective with the aim of achieving a positive and, hopefully, agreed outcome for the pupil. It is not, and never can be, an equal relationship, but inherent within it is that both parties are treated fairly, with dignity and respect and as valued individuals.
- c. A professional relationship should always be maintained. The pupils should not feel in any way indebted to staff, or that they are the recipients of charity or goodwill. It should be appreciated that staff are paid to carry out their duties and overt gratitude should be discouraged and the reasons for this explained.

- d. This should be achieved whilst recognising that good support delivery is based on the development of working relationships with the pupils, not a cold mechanical approach.

Favouritism

There should be no favouritism, or the appearance of favouritism, shown by staff towards particular people they are supporting/treating/teaching. Whilst colleagues may find some people easier to work with than others, this should not be reflected in the amount or quality of attention offered.

Support offered should be based on what the person wants and needs, as defined within their individual plans; positive behaviour support plans and risk assessments and within the levels indicated within the pupil's EHCP.

Approach

Consideration should be given as to how to approach pupils, to ensure interaction always takes place within a framework of respect. Staff should ensure that:

- a. They do not present themselves as superior
- b. They use tact, empathy and diplomacy in all contacts and interactions
- c. They are careful not to influence service users with their own beliefs and values
- d. They adopt a flexible, non-regimented approach
- e. They are prepared to admit error or lack of knowledge.

Rights and Choices

The rights of pupils must always be given a high priority.

3. Relationships with Colleagues/Team Working

For information regarding employment of colleagues working with relatives, friends or those in relationships refer to Staff Safer Recruitment local policy. For queries or advice refer to the HR Manager.

In order to enable the delivery of high quality and effective services, the establishment and maintenance of professional, co-operative and open relationships with colleagues is essential. It is important to remember that individual colleagues have a responsibility to contribute constructively to effective team practices and procedures and that failure to communicate with, and support colleagues is a major contributory factor in instances of risk at work.

In order to reduce risks, it is recommended that relatives, friends and those in relationships are not engaged within the same unit where there may be collusion on confidential information or security, or where the activities of one may compromise the other. Employees should not report into or manage a relative, friend or someone they are in a relationship with or be engaged where one may have the authority to influence the discipline or payments made or the career development of another.

If staff notice relationships developing which cause or could potentially cause concerns and could be to the detriment of pupils, this should be reported to the Safeguarding Lead immediately. Further advice on handling these situations can be sought from the Headteacher or the HR Manager.

The following values and principles should underpin all aspects of practice in relationships, boundaries and professional practice with individual staff and the team.

Systems and forums to assist in high quality communication such as handovers, diaries, regular staff meetings and training are important in the maintenance of a cohesive team. These activities provide the opportunity for discussion and the resolution of issues that arise during the working day and help to prevent the spread of gossip and hearsay. All staff should understand the reason for, and respect the use of, these activities and be committed to actively support and participate in them.

In services where staff are lone working in the community and do not see other colleagues on such a frequent basis, attention to the detail of written records is essential and thought must be given other ways of maintaining regular contact, such as telephone calls, briefing sheets and minutes.

Staff supervision and team meetings should be used to highlight, discuss, monitor and review the issues raised in this document.

4. Relationships/conduct with other agencies and professionals

The establishment and maintenance of professional relationships with partner agencies and individuals is essential to ensure that service users obtain the best possible range of services. Colleagues should:

- a. Always remember that they are representing Seadown School when working with partner agencies and professionals and therefore should conduct themselves in a professional manner
- b. Discuss only relevant information and ensure it is communicated in a concise and accurate way avoiding anecdotes and hearsay
- c. Dress appropriately for the working environment
- d. Ensure any issues that may impact on confidentiality are discussed with their line manager prior to meetings / events
- e. Never represent Seadown School or our pupils in a negative light. It is expected that staff will represent Seadown School and pupils accurately, fairly and professionally, bearing in mind issues of confidentiality and this policy
- f. It is recognised that staff may have personal views on specific issues that may differ from the corporate approach. Staff are expected to present and support the corporate viewpoint, and not present personal views under Seadown School's name. Staff are required to seek clarification from their line manager if they are unclear about the corporate approach on issues and to use staff meetings and supervisions to explore complicated issues they may be expected to respond to.

5. Filming, Photography or Video

Unless expressly authorised in advance by the Headteacher or the SLT for purposes strictly connected with work, staff are not permitted to take pictures, film or record footage (using phones or other recording equipment) of pupils or other colleagues whilst at work.

This also applies to covert filming. If a colleague has concerns about the care or treatment of a pupil, this must be reported to the Safeguarding Lead or in accordance with the school's OP03 Whistleblowing Policy.

Anyone found taking pictures or recording footage of pupils or colleagues either overtly or covertly, without the express permission of senior management for a legitimate work purpose (such as supervision or training) will be dismissed for gross misconduct. The matter is likely to be notified to the police, the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) and relevant regulatory, safeguarding and professional bodies.

6. If Boundaries Have Been or are Suspected to Have Been Broken

It is recognised that in practice it can be difficult to maintain professional boundaries and many situations/dilemmas will occur which are not specifically covered by this or any other policy. It is also appreciated that in the area of operations, colleagues are constantly being confronted with issues that require them to make quick decisions on complicated issues. Such situations require colleagues to exercise high standards of professional judgement in what is often a high-pressured environment.

Seadown School is committed to providing support to staff in these situations, but this can only be done if line management is made aware that difficulties exist. If colleagues find themselves in a situation where they feel there is the potential for a boundary to be broken, in order to manage a situation, the following steps can be taken:

Access Line Management

Staff should let their line manager know what they are doing or intend to do, preferably in advance, although it is accepted that this is not always possible. Similarly, if colleagues have concerns about the actions of a colleague then they should also advise their line manager of their concerns. If the direct line manager is not available, they should go to the next management tier for advice or access advice.

Confidential Reporting

Seadown School has a secure email available, which is private and confidential, for colleagues to make reports of issues that they are not comfortable with taking to management. Please refer to our Policy & Procedure on OP03 Whistleblowing.

Involve Colleagues

Other people in the team, particularly those likely to work with the pupil concerned, should also be aware of where a boundary may have been blurred or crossed. This will enable colleagues to maintain a consistent approach and will also enable other opinions to be considered prior to any actions being taken.

Keep a Record

A written record of a broken or blurred boundary should be kept in an appropriate file or book to ensure openness and consistency and assist in monitoring.

Disciplinary Action

It is worth noting that the breaking or blurring of boundaries and professional conduct is potentially a disciplinary offence and taking the steps outlined above not only constitutes good practice but will also potentially serve to protect colleagues in the event of disciplinary action being taken. Employees could also be referred to their registering professional body and the Disclosure and Barring Service.

END

POSITION	Headteacher	NAME		SIGNATURE		DATE	
POSITION	Governor	NAME		SIGNATURE		DATE	
POSITION		NAME		SIGNATURE		DATE	