Safe Touch: Policy and Guidance for Appropriate Physical Contact with Children

Date Approval	: 1 October 2022	**Next Review**	: 10 January 2027
Review Cycle	: 24 months	**Scope**	: Whole School
Ownership	: Campus Principal	**Approved by**	: SLT

This policy is part of a suite of policies in place in Asia Pacific Schools. The purpose is to safeguard children and protect them from harm. It should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Overarching Safeguarding Statement
- Child Protection Policy
- Staff Handbook
- Health and Safety Policy
- Medical Emergency Response plan
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Intimate Care Policy
- Physical Restraint Policy

1. Introduction

Asia Pacific Schools take seriously our responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of our children, to minimise risk and to work together with other agencies to ensure adequate arrangements are in place within school to identify, assess and support those children who are suffering harm and to keep them safe and secure whilst in our care.

In line with both our vision of a World at Peace -Through Education, and our mission and core values we have in place an ISP Safeguarding Application Note which provides us with clear guidelines in relation to child protection and safety.

Safeguarding is a proactive duty for every member of the school community, children, and adults alike. It is more than just protecting children from deliberate harm. It relates to our core purpose of actively promoting the academic, physical, social, emotional, and mental health of the children in our care. It is inherent in everything we do and say and in how we behave towards each other.

Because of our close day to day contact with children school staff have a crucial role in helping to promote safety, reduce risks, and to identify at an early stage, welfare concerns and indicators of abuse and neglect.

Our policies and procedures relate to all members of our school community including pupils, staff, visitors/contractors, volunteers, and trainees working within the school. It is fully integrated into the ethos of the school, is underpinned throughout the curriculum and in the safety of the physical environment.

2. Definitions

i. Safeguarding

Safeguarding: is EVERYTHING we do in school to keep children safe, healthy, happy and therefore learning.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children refers to the processes of protecting students from harm, preventing the impairment of their health and development, ensuring that we seek to improve the general health and well-being of all students in our care and enabling every student to have the optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully.

ii. Child Protection

Child protection is **part of** the safeguarding process. It focuses on protecting individual children identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. This includes child protection procedures which detail how to respond to concerns about a child."

"Preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children – including commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labour and harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting and child marriage." UNICEF

iii. Intimate care

Intimate care can be defined as any care which involves washing, touching or carrying out a procedure to intimate personal areas which most people usually carry out themselves, but some pupils are unable to do because of their young age, physical difficulties or other needs. Examples include care associated with continence and menstrual management as well as more ordinary tasks such as help with washing, toileting or dressing.

It also includes supervision of children involved in intimate self-care.

APS has a separate Intimate Care policy, which should serve as a supporting document to this policy.

iv. Positive Handling and Physical Restraint

This is when a trained member of staff intentionally uses positive moving and handling physical force techniques to restrict a child's movement against his or her will for the express purpose of reducing any risk to the child or other children or adults in the immediate area. In most cases this will be through the use of the adult's body rather than mechanical or environmental methods.

APS has a separate physical restraint policy to read with this policy.

v. Reporting Concerns

All staff members are required to report any concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead without delay.
Any incident involving allegations of staff using inappropriate physical contact will be investigated and may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

3. Policy Aim

To provide clear advice, guidance, and expectations for staff so they understand and implement safe practices in relation to touch, intimate care and physical restraint, thereby protecting both children and staff.

4. The purpose of physical contact

It is not illegal to touch a child, and by the nature of working with children, particularly young children, there will be occasions when physical contact is both proper and necessary e.g. during the swimming lessons and Physical Education. Safe touch and physical contact are essential to provide sensitive, high quality, care and educational provision. It is important in fostering positive relationships, developing healthy and secure attachments. It contributes to cognitive development and the building of brain architecture.

Touch should always be a response to a child's needs. It should not be based on the adult's emotional needs.

Touch and physical contact may be used for:

Communication

- Greeting or congratulating someone (shaking hands).
- Supporting early communication (e.g. sensitively directing, guiding, supporting children in an educational task)

Learning

- To assist, prompt and enable interactions with peers and staff.
- To support engagement with resources and classroom activities. e.g dance, PE, climbing, using a trampoline

Transitions

- Offering a hand to guide e.g. when walking from one place to another, crossing a road
- To prompt a learner during changes between activities

Play

- Many aspects of play activities naturally involve touch e.g. assisting onto a swing/slide

Therapy

- massage, sensory stimulation, physiotherapy

Emotional reasons

- To communicate affection and warmth.
- To give reassurance.
- To comfort a child who is in distress

Physical Restraint

- To reduce the risk of harm e.g. for self-defence
- To protect children and young people from immediate or imminent risk of injury by physically intervening
- To prevent immediate risk of significant danger to property e.g. when a child is about to vandalise property

Intimate care:

- To give medical and nursing care
- Supervision of a child involved in intimate self-care e.g. to support a child administer an insulin injection
- Assisting a child requiring medical care, who is not able to carry this out unaided
- Support a child to access the toilet or shower
- To ensure that each child feels clean and fresh e.g. washing, nappy changing
- Assist learners after they have used the toilet to ensure that their bottom is clean
- Feeding, oral care

5. General guiding principles when deploying physical contact

Every child has the right to feel and be safe.
Every child has the right to personal privacy.
Every child has the right to be valued as an individual.
Every child has the right to be treated with dignity and respect

i. Factors to consider when using touch

- The power imbalance between adult and child - confusion of professional and personal boundaries
- The previous experiences of the child – particularly abusive ones
- Signs of discomfort in children such as stiffening or pulling away or walking away
- The length of time a child has been in a state of high distress

- Safety of the child and other children
- Developmental age or any communication issues e.g. not having English as a first language
- Cultural considerations- what is acceptable practice in some cultures may not be in others.
- Gender
- Age

ii. Inappropriate touch

- Inconsistency in approach- either in the same adult or in different adults in the setting,
- hugging
- kissing
- special treatment of one child over another
- insincere touch
- touch between the waist and the mid-thigh or near the chest

iii. Sensible questions for adults to ask themselves or others before touching a child: -

Is the touch:

- welcomed by the child- paying particular regard to cultural sensitivities or to children who have been physically/sexually abused?
- offering a sense of emotional well-being and security?
- reinforcing a sense of positive self- identity and esteem?
- supporting social interaction?
- encouraging confidence and empowerment?
- in response to a health or welfare concern?
- timely/purposeful?
- Am I dealing in a different manner with a particular child than with others under the same circumstances?
- Would I modify my behaviour with a child if a colleague were present?
- Would I judge my conduct negatively if I observed it in another adult?
- Is it possible that the consequences of my actions will have negative outcomes for the children?

iv. Transparency, clarity and consent in using touch

Discuss with your line manager, Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead any concern you have about whether a situation might compromise or breach a professional relationship

Unsafe Touch: -Unacceptable Physical Contact

Staff must not act in a way that might reasonably be expected to cause injury, fear, confusion or could be construed as grooming for example by:

- holding a child by the neck or collar, or in a way that may restrict their ability to breathe
- slapping, hitting, smacking, punching or kicking a child
- twisting or forcing limbs against a joint
- tripping up a child
- holding or pulling a child by the hair or ear
- holding a child face down on the ground
- over direction- pushing, pulling (except in an emergency to protect from harm)
- unwanted or unnecessary touching of a child personally or with objects (e.g. pencil, pen ruler).
- Initiating, permitting or requesting inappropriate or unnecessary physical contact with a child (e.g massage, kisses, tickling,)
- facilitating situations which unnecessarily result in close physical contact with a child
- inappropriate use of physical restraint/restrictive practices
- carrying children
- touch between the waist and the mid-thigh or near the chest
- allowing children to sit on a knee for an unspecific reason or for an overly long period of time

- sitting on an adult's shoulders

Children touching you in private areas, between the legs, breasts, invasions of personal space etc- must be reported straight away to The Designated Safeguarding Lead using MyConcern Online platform.

Other signs to look out for:

- Over seeking hugs or cuddles. Staff question why the pupil is like this and report their concerns. Pupils should be gently and sensitively discouraged – use replacement gestures i.e. high 5

---------- End of Policy ----------