Partnership Learning

Close Relationships at Work Policy - Schools

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

The Board of Trustees and Local Governing Boards will assess the implementation and effectiveness of this policy. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the Trust and its schools.

This Policy will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees every 3 years and must be signed by the Chair of the Board of Trustees and Chief Executive.

Policy Adopted/Approved by Board of Trustees:	13th July 2026
Next Review:	Every 3 years
Signature of Chair of the Board of Trustees: 	Signature of Chief Executive: 

Partnership Learning

Close Relationships at Work Policy - Schools

1 Introduction

The nature and kinds of relationships between individuals working within an educational environment may be many and varied. Good working and social relationships can be beneficial in promoting team working and underpin a productive organisational culture. However, closer personal relationships may from time to time exist, develop, deteriorate or end between prospective employees, employees, workers and others within Partnership Learning whether in Trust schools or centrally employed.

Therefore, it is important to recognise that there will be situations arising in which there is the potential for either real or perceived conflicts of interest. A conflict of interest in this context is where a competing motivation impairs an employee's ability to make an unbiased decision or act with impartiality, independence and integrity. Such situations can relate either to the process for making appointments or to ongoing relations between employees and may have implications for the safeguarding of children. These conflicts of interest could include, but are not limited to preferential or prejudicial treatment, embarrassment or awkwardness for co-workers, lack of objectivity in decision making, bias, breaches of confidentiality, and/or divided loyalties.

This policy is not intended to preclude the appointment of near relatives, partners, close friends or associates (although there may be circumstances in which such an appointment may be deemed to be inappropriate or unwise) but sets out clear guidelines for doing so. It is intended to promote fairness and transparency where close personal relationships exist, develop, deteriorate or end in the workplace or at the time of appointment. It applies to all employees, workers, volunteers, governors, Trustees and others connected with the Trust or its schools.

2 Definition

A 'close relationship' includes those with family members, partners, close friends, or associates, including adoptive, step, and in-law relationships, or anyone whose relationship could create a conflict of interest and also encompasses situations where such relationships have deteriorated or come to an end.

3 General Principles

- Discussions and decisions regarding close relationships will be documented and handled sensitively.
- Professional conduct must be maintained at all times.
- There may be occasion to make relevant staff aware of a close relationship where it requires a change of procedures for safeguarding children
- Breaches of this policy may result in disciplinary action being invoked, which may lead to dismissal.
- If a member of staff has a concern about others' close relationships these may be raised confidentially with the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors where it concerns the Headteacher).

4 Recruitment

- All applicants, whether for employment, casual work or as a volunteer, must declare any close relationship with individuals connected to the Trust or its schools. The person in charge of any recruitment process (the recruiter) should make the Headteacher aware of any such declarations as early as possible and certainly prior to shortlisting.
- Existing members of staff, or those otherwise connected with the school, who become aware of an applicant/candidate with whom they have a close relationship should inform the Headteacher as soon as possible.
- Although this policy does not preclude the appointment of near relatives, partners, close friends or associates, the Headteacher must assess whether the potential appointment of a closely related applicant may be deemed to be inappropriate or unwise. If they are unsure, they should seek advice from the Trust Director of Operations and HR. Where it is decided that the recruitment process should continue, including the closely-related applicant, the individual staff member closely related should not be part of the decision-making processes. The headteacher must take measures as appropriate to ensure that recruitment processes are fair and transparent, including if necessary setting up recruitment processes independent of school staff. Headteachers should take advice from the Trust Director of Operations and HR if they are unsure about whether proposed processes are suitable.
- If the Headteacher becomes aware of a candidate with whom they have a close relationship applying for a school post this must be declared by the Headteacher to the Trust CEO and Director of Operations and HR as early as possible and certainly prior to shortlisting. They will assess whether the

potential appointment of the closely related applicant may be deemed to be inappropriate or unwise and discuss this with the headteacher. Where it is decided that the recruitment process should continue, including the closely-related applicant, the headteacher will not be part of the decision-making processes. The Trust will take measures as appropriate to ensure that recruitment processes are fair and transparent, including if necessary setting up recruitment processes independent of school staff.

- If a candidate has a close relationship with the CEO this must be declared by the recruiter to the Headteacher, the Chair of Trustees, CEO and Director of Operations and HR as early as possible and certainly prior to shortlisting. The Chair of Trustees and Director of Operations and HR will assess whether the potential appointment of the closely related applicant may be deemed to be inappropriate or unwise and discuss this with the headteacher. Where it is decided that the recruitment process should continue, including the closely-related applicant, the Trust will take measures as appropriate to ensure that recruitment processes are fair and transparent.

5 During Employment

Where an appointment is made, the employees, workers and/or volunteers who are in the close relationship must understand the need for professionalism at all times and are responsible for ensuring that this relationship does not give cause for concern – real or perceived – about possible conflicts of interest, including priorities, breaches of confidentiality, use of resources, preferential treatment, divided loyalties, bias or ethics.

- Any such relationship must be disclosed to the Headteacher.
- Where a personal relationship exists between employees who are in a line management or supervisory relationship at work, they should at all times ensure that this does not affect their professional judgement or responsibilities at work in any way. They should understand that activities such as appraisal or any other management activity or process involving the other party require them to avoid any perception of bias or preferential treatment.
- Where a personal relationship exists between employees who are in a line management or supervisory relationship at work, the school reserves the right to transfer one or both members of staff to another role following appropriate consultation with both members of staff in order to seek agreement to the transfer. The purpose of this transfer is to ensure appropriate line management structures are in place, particularly in relation to appraisal, pay decisions and matters relating to disciplinaries,

competency and grievances, and to avoid bias or perceived unfairness. If agreement can't be reached then the school reserves the right to make the change in order to safeguard the smooth running of the school and in the interests of protecting all parties.

- Where reassignment is not possible, safeguards will be implemented to ensure impartiality, and to ensure appropriate safeguarding for children.
- Whilst at work, those in a close personal or intimate relationship should ensure that they maintain appropriate physical and emotional distance, use professional communication and not pay undue attention to the other person, in comparison to other colleagues. Intimate behaviour during work time, for example kissing, touching or holding hands, is expressly prohibited. This rule applies during all working time, whether at school, Trust premises, on a school trip, or elsewhere. Any breach of this rule will be regarded as a disciplinary offence leading to disciplinary action
- If such a relationship comes to an end, both parties are expected to continue to conduct themselves in a professional way at work and ensure there is no disruption to the school
- For any internal appointments or promotions, the same requirements as per section 4 (above) apply.

6 Safeguarding and Child Protection

Partnership Learning is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. It is essential that close personal relationships do not compromise or undermine this commitment. All staff must ensure that their conduct upholds the highest standards of professionalism and does not discourage others from raising safeguarding concerns.

Systems must be in place to ensure that any personal relationships do not interfere with the school's safeguarding responsibilities. Any concerns that a relationship may be impacting the safety or wellbeing of children must be reported immediately in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures.