

Three Counties Academy Trust



Professional Boundaries with Pupils Policy

#SG12

Last amended 7th August 2026 (v1.0)

Policy lifespan: 3 years. Subject to annual compliance check. Next full review 31st August 2029.

Version history

Date	Version	Details	Actioned by	PDF to Websites	Word to Governor Hub
07.08.26	1.0	Formatted to house style and checked against model for updates	MF	✓	✓

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Trust Glossary

Policy Abbreviations and Acronyms

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DfE	Department for Education
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TCAT	Three Counties Academy Trust

NB. Where the term “parent” or “parents” is used this includes those who act as carers or have parental responsibility.

Statement of intent

Three Counties Academy Trust (TCAT) and all of our schools are committed to providing a safe learning environment for our pupils. This policy outlines TCAT's approach to maintaining professional boundaries and appropriate behaviour with pupils, which must be followed by all staff.

Teachers are expected to maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and always observing the proper boundaries appropriate to their profession. All staff will be expected to help create a warm, welcoming, and inclusive environment for pupils while maintaining professional boundaries.

Member, Trustee, Local Governor and Staff Summary

Purpose of the Policy

- Maintain clear professional boundaries between staff and pupils
- Protect pupils and staff through consistent expectations and safe working practices
- Promote a culture of respect, professionalism and safeguarding

Governance Responsibilities

- Seek assurance that professional boundaries are understood and applied consistently
- Ensure safeguarding, allegations and professional conduct procedures remain effective
- Monitor compliance with statutory safeguarding expectations

Professional Expectations

- Staff must maintain professional relationships with pupils at all times
- Staff must not develop personal, social or sexual relationships with pupils
- Communication with pupils must take place through approved school systems only
- Staff actions should always be transparent, proportionate and professionally justifiable

Duty of Care

- All staff hold positions of trust and authority
- The welfare and best interests of pupils must remain central to decision making
- Staff are expected to model respectful behaviour and challenge inappropriate conduct

Language and Physical Contact

- Pupils must not be treated as friends
- Inappropriate, sexualised, humiliating or discriminatory language is prohibited
- Physical contact must be necessary, proportionate and professionally appropriate

- Any contact capable of being misunderstood should be reported and reviewed

Professional Boundaries

- Staff must not share personal information unnecessarily with pupils
- Staff must not use personal devices or social media to build relationships with pupils
- Staff must not invite pupils to their homes or attend social events without appropriate authorisation
- Gifts, special treatment or favouritism must be avoided

Former Pupils and Allegations

- Staff are strongly discouraged from forming personal relationships with former pupils
- Concerns about professional boundaries may be referred for safeguarding advice
- Allegations are managed through established safeguarding and allegations procedures

Key Governance Assurance

- Clear professional boundaries support effective safeguarding
- Training, reporting and oversight arrangements should remain robust
- Any concerns are managed through established safeguarding processes

Parent Summary

Our Commitment to Your Child

- All staff are expected to maintain safe and professional relationships with pupils
- Professional boundaries help create a safe, respectful and supportive learning environment
- The wellbeing of children is at the heart of all safeguarding decisions

What Parents Can Expect

- Staff communicate with pupils through approved school systems and processes
- Clear standards exist for behaviour, communication and physical contact
- Concerns about professional boundaries are taken seriously and reviewed appropriately

Safe and Professional Relationships

- Staff must not develop personal, social or inappropriate relationships with pupils
- Staff must not use personal social media, personal phones or personal email accounts to communicate with pupils
- Staff are expected to act as professional role models at all times

Physical Contact and Communication

- Any physical contact must be appropriate, necessary and in a child's best interests
- Staff receive guidance on appropriate language and conduct with pupils
- Pupils should always be treated with dignity and respect

If Concerns Arise

- Any concerns about professional boundaries are managed through established safeguarding procedures
- The school will take appropriate action where concerns are identified
- Where necessary the school may seek advice from external safeguarding agencies

Confidentiality and Reassurance

- Parents are entitled to know that robust safeguarding procedures are in place
- Individual safeguarding concerns, investigations and outcomes are confidential
- The school will not normally share employment, disciplinary or safeguarding outcomes with parents
- Confidentiality helps protect children, families, staff and the integrity of safeguarding processes

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance and good practice including, but not limited to, the following:

- [Education Act 2002](#)
- [DfE 'Keeping children safe in education'](#)
- [DfE 'Data protection in schools'](#)

Where legislation has been passed or updated during the shelf life of this policy, we will always apply the latest version available irrespective of the version quoted here.

This policy operates in conjunction with the following policies:

- Staff Code of Conduct (HR26)
- First Aid Policy (HS2)
- Driving at Work Policy (HS9)
- Intimate Care Policy (SD4)
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures (SG1)
- Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy (SG5)
- Physical Intervention Policy (SG7)
- Reporting Low-Level Safeguarding Concerns Policy (SG11)

Central TCAT policies have the policy number identified, e.g. "SG1". Where no policy number is identified this indicates the policy is a school specific policy available from an individual TCAT school's website.

2. Professional expectations

The CEO, Executive Headteachers, Headteachers and Heads of School will ensure all staff, and pupils as age appropriate, are aware that it is an offence for a person aged 18 or over to have a sexual relationship with a child under the age of 18 where that person is in a position of trust in respect to that child, even if the relationship is consensual.

All staff will:

- Always maintain professional boundaries and relationships with pupils at and consider whether their actions are warranted, proportionate, safe, and necessary
- Act in an open and transparent way that would not lead to others questioning their actions
- Ensure that they do not establish social contact with pupils for the purpose of securing a friendship, or to pursue or strengthen a relationship
- Ensure that they do not develop personal or sexual relationships with pupils. This includes making sexual remarks and discussing their own sexual relationships with, or in the presence of, pupils
- Only contact pupils via the TCAT's established mechanisms; personal phone numbers, email addresses or social media platforms will not be used to contact pupils

In the case that any inappropriate contact is made with pupils, it will be raised with the school DSL and the Headteacher/Head of School who will consult the CEO and be handled in line with TCAT's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy and TCAT's Staff Code of Conduct.

In the case that a pupil is consistently attempting to befriend or contact a member of staff on social media, the member of staff will inform their Headteacher/Head of School as soon as possible.

3. Former pupils

Staff will be strongly discouraged from forming personal relationships with former pupils, including on social media, as well as with the parents of any pupils on social media.

In the event of TCAT becoming aware of a close relationship between a member of staff and a former pupil which may raise concerns about their suitability to work with children, the CEO will contact the LA designated officer (LADO) for advice and guidance or designate the school DSL to do so.

Any inappropriate contact made with former pupils will be handled in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures and Staff Code of Conduct.

4. Duty of care

The CEO with the assistance of Executive Headteachers, Headteachers and Heads of School, will ensure all staff recognise that:

- They are in a unique position of trust, care, responsibility, authority, and influence with their pupils, which means there is a power imbalance within a pupil-teacher dynamic
- They have the responsibility to have the best interest of pupils in mind
- They should be a model of good behaviour, challenging inappropriate actions and language, and promoting respect and tolerance
- Activities of a sexual nature can be deemed an abuse of responsibility of authority

The Education Act 2002 imposes clear duties to provide acceptable levels of care to protect pupils from all reasonably foreseeable risks and harm

5. Appropriate language and physical contact

Appropriate language

Staff will be informed that pupils should not be treated as friends. Staff will not:

- Use inappropriate names or terms of endearment
- Allow inappropriate conversations or enquiries of a sexual nature to occur
- Comment on a pupil's appearance, including personal flattery or criticism
- Treat pupils disrespectfully or discriminatorily, based upon their perceived or actual sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and any other pupil characteristic
- Subject pupils to humiliation, profanity, or vilification
- Allow or partake in suggestive humour, banter, jokes, or innuendos of a sexual nature
- Use obscene or inappropriate gestures and language
- Partake in any inappropriate personal conversations, including on the phone, where this may be overheard by pupils

Physical contact

All staff members will, as much as possible, respect the personal space and privacy of all pupils, and will avoid situations which unnecessarily result in close physical contact.

TCAT understands that there are, however, circumstances in which it is entirely necessary for staff to have physical contact with pupils, e.g., when applying first aid, assisting with intimate care, or using reasonable force, but staff will only do so in a professional and appropriate manner in line with the TCAT's First Aid Policy, Intimate Care Policy and Physical Intervention Policy.

When any necessary physical contact is made with pupils, it will be conducted in a way which is responsive to their needs, is of as limited duration as possible and is appropriate to their age, stage of development, gender, and background.

Staff will seek the pupil's permission, where possible, before initiating contact.

Staff will always use their professional judgement when determining what physical contact is appropriate, as this may differ between pupils. As such, the pupil's feelings and wishes will always be taken into account.

Staff will never touch a pupil in a way which is indecent and will be aware that even well-intentioned physical contact may be misconstrued by a pupil, an observer or by anyone to whom this action is described and, therefore, will be prepared to justify their actions.

Staff will not engage in rough play, tickling or play fights with pupils.

If a pupil is in distress and in need of comfort as reassurance, staff may use age-appropriate physical contact, such as placing their hand on the pupil's shoulder. Staff will remain self-aware of their actions at all times and ensure that their contact is not threatening, intrusive or subject to misinterpretation.

Physical contact will never be secretive; if a member of staff believes an action could be misinterpreted, this will be reported in line with the Low-Level Safeguarding Concerns Policy and appropriate procedures will be followed.

Extra caution will be taken with physical contact where it is known that a pupil has previously suffered from abuse or neglect.

6. Appropriate boundaries

The CEO, Executive Headteachers, Headteachers and Heads of School will ensure staff are aware that they must not:

- Discuss personal information with pupils, such as concerning their lifestyle or marital status, unless it is directly relevant to the topic being taught
- Correspond in a personal nature through any medium with pupils, e.g., phone calls or text messages, unless it is within the staff member's role and via an approved communication method, e.g., school emails
- Adopt an ongoing support role beyond the scope of their position
- Use personal equipment for approved activities, such as a personal camera, unless approved in writing by the SLT, and will not photograph, audio record or film pupils without authorisation from the SLT and consent from the pupil's parent
- Save images, videos, or audio recordings of pupils on personal devices, unless authorised by the SLT or parents
- Upload images, videos, or audio recordings of pupils to any location without consent from parents and the SLT
- Discuss or share information regarding other pupils or members of staff; staff should be aware of their surroundings when speaking to others, as their conversations may be overheard
- Ignore instances of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour amongst pupils

Staff will be informed that they must not:

- Invite or allow pupils to visit their home
- Allow pupils to access staff members' personal devices
- Attend pupils' homes or their social gatherings, unless approved by the SLT
- Be alone with a pupil outside of teaching responsibilities, unless approved by the SLT
- Enter changing rooms or toilets occupied by pupils, when supervision is not required or appropriate, use toilet facilities allocated to pupils, or undress in facilities intended for use by pupils or in close proximity to areas commonly used by pupils
- Not transport a pupil unless in line with the Driving at Work Policy
- Carry out one-to-one tutoring, mentoring, or coaching of pupils, unless approved by the Headteacher/Head of School or SLT
- Give personal gifts or special favours, or disproportionately single specific pupils out for special duties or responsibilities
- Offer overnight, weekend or holiday care as a respite to parents without the approval of the CEO

7. Allegations

The CEO or senior leader where delegated, will be the 'case manager' in the event that an allegation of a staff member overstepping professional boundaries with a pupil. They will be responsible for deciding with the DSL and LADO, where appropriate, the course of action of each allegation.

Should an allegation be made against the CEO, it will be brought to the attention of the Chair of the Trust Board immediately. In the case that an allegation is made, TCAT will follow the Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy.

Monitoring and review

Lifespan of Policy: 3 Years

At any point this policy is updated or fully reviewed, it will be updated on the main TCAT website and will automatically update on all TCAT school websites simultaneously.

Where an annual check or other check results in minor changes, the Version History will be reviewed and updated with a change in the number following the decimal point, for example, v1.1 ⇒ v1.2. Where the policy is reviewed in full, then the number before the decimal point will change and reset, for example v1.4 ⇒ v2.0.

Any changes made by the CEO in collaboration with the Board Appointed Trustee will be passed to the Trust Board for ratification and subsequently be notified to Clerks to Local Governing Bodies and Headteachers/Heads of School.

The next scheduled full review date for this policy is 31st August 2029.

Date approved by the Board Appointed Trustee: 7th August 2026.

To be ratified and recorded in the minutes at the first Trust Board Meeting after 7th August 2026.

Appendix A: Low-Level Concern Reporting Form



Thank you for reporting your concerns to the safeguarding team; we are grateful to you for taking the safety and welfare of our pupils seriously. Please fill in the below form, including as much detail as you can, and return it directly to your Headteacher/Head of School or in the case of the concern relating to the Headteacher/Head of School return to the Executive Headteacher or the CEO. Please refrain from discussing this concern with anyone other than the CEO, Executive Headteacher, Headteacher, Head of School, Trust Education Welfare and Safeguarding Support Officer or DSL until the matter has been dealt with. We ask that you keep all details, including the name of the staff member to whom the concern pertains, confidential.

Your details	
Name (optional)	
Role	
Date and time of completing this form	
Details of individual whom the concern is about	
Name	

Role		
Relationship to the individual reporting the concern, e.g., manager, colleague		
Details of concern		
Please include as much detail as possible. Think about the following: What behaviour and/or incident are you reporting? What exactly happened? Why does the behaviour and/or incident worry you? Why do you believe the behaviour and/or incident is not consistent with our Staff Code of Conduct?		
Details of any children or young people involved		
Name(s)		
Do you believe there is a risk of harm to the above children or young people, either now or in the future, as a result of the individual's behaviour? Explain your answer.		
Next steps		
What would you like to see happen in response to your concern?		
Are you willing to meet with the CEO, Executive Headteacher, Headteacher, Head of School, Trust Education Welfare and Safeguarding Support Officer or DSL	Yes	No

to discuss your concern? Please circle as appropriate.		
Please state any other information that you believe is relevant to the processing of this concern.		
Signature		
For use by safeguarding team upon receipt of concern		
Date and time concern received		
Signature of DSL, deputy DSL or Trust Education Welfare and Safeguarding Support Officer		
Actions to be taken, e.g., no action, investigation, reclassification as allegation meeting the harms threshold.		
Rationale for deciding on actions above.		

Trust Glossary

AA	Admissions Authority	H&S	Health and Safety
AAI	Adrenaline Auto-Injector (Epi Pen)	HoS	Head of School
ACM	Asbestos Containing Materials	HSE	Health and Safety Executive
AHT	Assistant Headteacher	ICO	Information Commissioners Office
AIR	Attendance Intervention Reviews	IDSR	Inspection Data Summary Report
APDR	Assess Plan Do Review Cycle	IHP	Individual Healthcare Plan
APIs	Application Programming Interfaces	IRMS	Information and Records Management Society
ASC	Autistic Spectrum Condition	IWF	Internet Watch Foundation
ASP	Analyse School Performance	KCSIE	Keeping Children Safe in Education
ATH	Academy Trust Handbook	KS1/2/3/4	Key Stage 1/2/3/4
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds	LAC	Looked After Child
BAT	Board Appointed Trustee	LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
BCP	Business Continuity Plan	LGB	Local Governing Body
BFR	Budget Forecast Return	LLC	Low-Level Concerns
CEO	Chief Executive Officer	LSA	Learning Support Assistants
CFO	Chief Financial Officer	MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
CIF	Condition Improvement Fund	MAT	Multi-Academy Trust

CIN	Child in Need	MFA	Multi-Factor Authentication
CLA	Children Looked After	MFL	Modern Foreign Language
CMIE	Child Missing in Education	NCSC	National Cyber Security Centre
COO	Chief Operating Officer	NoV	Note of Visit
COSHH	Control of Substances Hazardous to Health	NPQ	National Professional Qualifications
CP	Child Protection	PA	Persistent Absence
CPD	Continuing Professional Development	PAN	Published Admission Number
CPOMS	Child Protection Online Management System	PECR	Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations
CSCS	Children's Social Care Services	PEP	Personal Education Plan
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation	PEEP	Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan
CTIRU	Counter-Terrorism Internet Referral Unit	PEx	Permanent Exclusion
CWD	Children with Disabilities	PP	Pupil Premium
CYPMHS	Children and Young People's Mental Health Services	PPG	Pupil Premium Grant
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service	PSHE	Personal, Social and Health Education
DDSL	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead	PSED	Public Sector Equality Duty
DfE	Department for Education	PTFA	Parent, Teacher and Friends Association
DHT	Deputy Headteacher	QA	Quality Assurance

DSE	Display Screen Equipment	RIDDOR	Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead	RHE	Relationships and Health Education
DPO	Data Protection Officer	RPA	Risk Protection Arrangement
EAL	English as an Additional Language	RSHE	Relationships, Sex and Health Education
ECT	Early Career Teacher	SA	Severely Absent
EDIB	Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging	SALT	Speech and Language Therapist
EHA	Early Help Assessment	SARC	Sexual Assault Referral Centre
EHENA	Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment	SBM	School Business Manager
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan	SCC	Standard Contractual Clause
EHE	Elective Home Education	SCITT	School-Centred Initial Teacher Training
ELSA	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant	SCR	Single Central Record
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency	SDP	School Development Plan
EVC	Educational Visit Coordinator	SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
EWOSSE	Education Welfare and Safeguarding Support Officer	SEF	Self-Evaluation Form
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage	SEMH	Social, Emotional, and Mental Health
FBV	Fundamental British Values	SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
FFT	Fischer Family Trust	SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

FGM	Female Genital Mutilation	SIP	School Improvement Partner
FGMPO	FGM Protection Order	SLA	Service Level Agreement
FOI	Freedom of Information	SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Needs
FSM	Free School Meals	SLT	Senior Leadership Team
FTS	Find a Tender Service	SPOC	Single Point of Contact
GAG	General Annual Grant	STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation	TA	Teaching Assistant
GIAS	Get Information about Schools	TAC	Team Around the Child
HASH	Herefordshire Association of Secondary Heads	TCAT	Three Counties Academy Trust
HBA	Honour Based Abuse	TUPE	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)
HR	Human Resources	VSH	Virtual School Headteacher