

Positive Touch Policy



Review Date

February 2025

Ratified

August 2025

Next Review

February 2027

Responsible Directorate

Safeguarding

Our Trust

*These four critical questions make it clear who we are and what we do.
We ask ourselves these questions to guide our work and our improvement.*

Why do we exist?

To **transform life chances** by achieving the highest possible standards and preparing all our students to lead successful lives.

How do we behave?

- **Hard work**
We are determined to see things through to the end and are resilient when faced with challenges.
- **Integrity**
We do the right thing because it is the right thing to do.
- **Teamwork**
We work together to help everyone succeed.

What do we do?

- We educate, safeguard and champion all our learners.
- We set high standards for ourselves and our learners.
- We build the powerful knowledge and cultural capital which stimulate social mobility and lifelong learning.

How will we succeed?

1. Aligned autonomy
2. Keeping it simple
3. Talent development

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Statement of Intent

At Phoenix Academy we believe that the use of appropriate positive touch is a vital aspect of our nurturing role. Touch and physical contact is essential in order to provide sensitive, high-quality care and educational provision. Used in context and with empathy, touch supports the development of natural interactions with the young people we teach and care for. The intent of this policy is to safeguard both staff and pupils with this approach.

1 | Purpose of Positive Touch

1.1 Touch not only promotes a child's social and emotional development but is also a highly effective and powerful method of non-verbal communication, is key to the development of healthy relationships and a method of stress relief. It can be used to:

- Show acceptance
- Provide reassurance
- Demonstrate affection
- Calm and provide comfort
- Emphasise the spoken word
- Provide sensory stimulation
- Engage in personal care routines
- Deliver various therapy programmes
- Offer an alternative to spoken communication
- Remove a child from danger or keep a child safe

1.2 *The role of appropriate touch*

When positive touch is not encouraged, it risks becoming misunderstood or even sexualised. Children may miss valuable nurturing, reassuring, and healing touch experiences. Staff play a critical role in instilling understanding of appropriate touch and its benefits.

2 | Research

2.1 Research has shown that positive touch is beneficial for early bonding, stress reduction, and state regulation (Harrison, 2001); it also can improve attentiveness and sleep problems in some children with autism (Escalona, Field, Singer-Strunck, Cullen, & Hartshorn, 2001 Cullen LA, Barlow JH, Cushway D. 2005). For children with delays and disabilities, positive touch has been used effectively to enhance caregiver-child interactions and increase the child's comfort (Pardew & Bunse, 2005). Field, T (2010) explored the importance of 'Touch for socioemotional and physical well-being'.

- 2.2 Members of staff in a caring school recognise physical contact as an important part of child development and guidance. They understand that physical contact may be communication and they recognise the importance and significance of non-verbal communication and respond appropriately. This should always be done in a developmentally appropriate way and should a child shun the comfort offered through touch, the child's wishes will be respected by the member of staff dealing with the situation. All touch, that does not involve the use of reasonable force (see Reasonable Force Policy) will be consent based. For non-verbal or SEND pupils, consent may be established through behaviour plans, parental discussion, and ongoing observation of pupil comfort.
- 2.3 Therapeutic touch is used in situations where children are distressed. In these situations, research has shown that it would be unkind or increase the child's distress if touch was not employed. When children are very distressed they often ignore information provided by their senses for example they may no longer see or no longer hear. When a child is distressed touch can be the only means of maintaining a connection with the child.
- 2.4 Where a child presents a danger to themselves or to others it will at times be necessary for trained staff to use a means of physical intervention or safe holding using Team-teach methods. This is appropriate if a child is hurting either him/herself or others or is damaging property and is so distressed and out of control that all verbal attempts to reduce/stop the behaviour have failed.
- 2.5 Such interventions are supported and documented in the government document 'Use of Reasonable Force in School: Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies' (Gov.uk). These techniques can be the safest means of holding a child to feel safe and soothed and to calm them down when they are very distressed, are used to prevent the child from exposing themselves or others to physical or psychological harm. At such times staff should always take care to explain what they are doing and that the actions taken are for safety reasons. As the situation de-escalates, touch can be appropriately used to move from one situation of control to one of care, such as the friendly hold.
- 2.6 Where significant physical contact takes place (e.g. repeated comforting, personal care beyond routine), staff should document the context and purpose of the touch in the pupil's records. Consent for routine touch should be discussed and agreed with parents/carers as part of pupils' individual plans.

3 | Responsibilities

- 3.1 The Principal has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2 The Principal and nominated SLT are responsible for ensuring all staff are made aware of and have understood this policy.

- 3.3 The Principal and nominated SLT are responsible for sourcing and ensuring all staff have appropriate training for positive handling or use of reasonable force. All staff will receive training on the appropriate use of touch, including trauma-informed approaches, cultural sensitivity, and safeguarding boundaries. This training will be updated every two years or sooner if guidance changes.
- 3.4 If staff are in any doubt about issues concerning appropriate touch or observe any practice that causes concern, they should discuss this with the Principal.
- 3.5 The Principal will ensure that all allegations against members of staff and volunteers are handled in line with our safeguarding procedures. More information regarding this, can be found in the Safeguarding Policy for Phoenix Academy.
- 3.6 All staff are responsible for:
- Referring any low-level concerns about another member of staff and any allegations of abuse directly to the Principal. If the concerns are about the Principal, these should be referred to the Director of Primary Education. The Director of Primary Education or Principal will work in conjunction with the Director of Safeguarding to support a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), in either situation.
 - Raising concerns about poor or unsafe practice and potential failures in the academy's safeguarding regime through the academy's Whistleblowing Policy.

4 | Appropriate Touch

- 4.1 Examples of appropriate touch may include the following:
- Respecting the personal privacy and personal space of children
 - Responses affecting the safety and well-being of the child (e.g., holding the hand of a child while crossing the street, using a Team Teach hold when a pupil becomes a danger to themselves or others)
 - Responses supporting social and emotional development such as hugs (usually side on with older pupils to avoid full-body contact), lap sitting (child facing outwards and sideways) for younger children, reassuring touches on the shoulder, head and back
 - Touch for health and hygiene and personal care

5 | Inappropriate Touch

- 5.1 Examples of inappropriate touch include the following:

- Satisfaction of adult needs rather than that of the pupil
- Coercion or other forms of exploitation of the pupil's lack of knowledge
- Violation of laws against sexual contact between adults and children
- Forced kisses, corporal punishment, slapping, striking or pinching, tickling for prolonged periods, fondling or molestation.

6 | Considerations

- 6.1 It is vital that staff should always consider the pupil's gender, race, disability, and age when using touch as individuals may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch. An individual's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. In addition, some individuals may be used to differing levels of touch as part of their cultural upbringing. All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at Phoenix Academy is safe, sensitive and appropriate.
- 6.2 Staff should be sensitive to a pupil's behaviour (e.g., over excitement or negative reactions to touch) and should withdraw touch when they feel it is having a negative impact. All touch that is not based around the use of reasonable force (see Reasonable Force Policy) should be consensual.
- 6.3 Each pupil at Phoenix will have a 'Positive Handling Plan' where examples of supportive touch will be individualised and recorded.