Support Services for Education

Code of Conduct for Schools and Academies

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Effective Date	Formal Adoption by school
Consultation	This code of conduct has been subject to consultation with recognised schools trade unions and formally agreed with a recommendation that this framework code of conduct be adopted by Somerset Schools and Academies. Whilst not itself amounting to a disciplinary code, any failure to follow the code of conduct set in this document may, depending upon circumstances, give rise to disciplinary action.
Updates	Further information added to Sexual Harassment and Whistleblowing to comply with the Employment Rights Act 2025.

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Pre-amble (This does not form part of the Code of Conduct)

Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE 2026) makes specific reference to Staff Codes of Conduct where it states all "*staff members should be aware of systems within their school or college which support safeguarding, and these should be explained to them as part of staff induction. This should include:*

- *the child protection policy;*
- *the staff behaviour policy (sometimes called a **code of conduct**); and*
- *the role of the designated safeguarding lead."*

Copies of policies and a copy of part one of Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE 2026) should be provided to staff at induction.

The document goes on to say:

120. Governing Bodies and proprietors should ensure there are appropriate policies and procedures in place in order for appropriate action to be taken in a timely manner to safeguard and promote children's welfare.

121. This should include:

- *an effective child protection policy; and*
- *a staff behaviour policy (sometimes called the code of conduct) which should amongst other things include low-level concerns, allegations against staff and whistleblowing, acceptable use of technologies, staff/pupil relationships and communications including the use of social media.*

Although many schools do have "Code of Conduct Policies", others have a number of policies which when taken together could be viewed as governing staff behaviour.

OFSTED view is there is "no expectation that schools need to have policies relating to staff behaviour in any particular format. What is important is that schools have this covered somewhere in their policies and procedures and that all staff are aware of this. Inspectors will want to know how schools have ensured that staff know what is expected of them and may ask to see how this is covered but should not be giving the impression that this needs to be a single policy document or in the form of a code of conduct."

As a result, the "Code of Conduct" document below provides a template for individual schools to use and develop to support staff in understanding the expectations the school has of them and understanding their responsibilities. It should not be viewed as a stand-alone document, but one of a number of mechanisms to enhance understanding of expectations of staff, volunteers, management and governance and signpost members of the school community to specific responsibilities placed on them.

Schools should ensure that any policies referred to (especially under Additional Requirement) have been adopted by the Governing Body and are actively promoted to employees and are easily accessible.

CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Introduction

The school's reputation and the trust and confidence of the community in its integrity is of vital importance. It must discharge its day-to-day responsibilities with openness and honesty. This code of conduct is presented to assist employees and volunteers (including Governors) in carrying out their day-to-day responsibilities in accordance with legal requirements placed upon them and any policies adopted by the school.

This code of conduct sets out the key principles for the creation and maintenance of a safe school culture. Employees who are contracted under Teachers' Terms and Conditions of Employment also have a statutory obligation to adhere to the 'Teachers' Standards' and in relation to this policy, Part 2 of the Teachers' Standards - Personal and Professional Conduct.

If an employee fails to adhere to this policy, then this may result in disciplinary action, including their dismissal.

Objectives of a safe school culture are:

- to safeguard pupils and protect employees.
- to make explicit expectations of performance and conduct.
- to minimise opportunities for abuse.
- for all employees to have confidence to report concerns with full confidentiality.
- to enable the school to respond promptly to any concerns raised: the school will always investigate and address issues.
- to create and maintain an ethos of mutual respect, openness and fairness.

2. Status of the Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct applies to all employees of the school and to volunteers. Throughout the document, reference is made to employees referring or reporting issues to the Headteacher/Chair of Governors. Where the employee is the Headteacher they should refer or report issues to the Chair of Governors.

3. Behaviour & Conduct at Work and Outside of Work

Employees and volunteers of the school are expected to set examples of behaviour and conduct as role models which can be copied by pupils/students. Employees must:

a) avoid using inappropriate or offensive language at all times;
b) demonstrate the highest standards of conduct in order to encourage the school's pupils/students to do the same;
c) show tolerance and respect for the rights of others;
d) not undermine fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of Law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
e) express personal beliefs in a way that will not overly influence pupils and will not exploit pupils' vulnerability or could lead them to break the Law;
f) avoid putting themselves at risk of allegations of abusive or unprofessional conduct.

An update to the Employment Rights Act 2025 from the 1 October 2026 will make

- employers liable for harassment from third parties, for example customers or clients, unless they have taken all reasonable steps to prevent it happening – this will apply to all types of harassment.
- employers will need to take 'all reasonable steps' to prevent sexual harassment – current law says 'reasonable steps' to prevent harassment.
- Direct liability for third-party misconduct has also been introduced, and sexual harassment disclosures are explicitly integrated into whistleblowing protections

The DFE has provided guidance on the Definitions of Bullying and Harassment 2026 and examples that could be deemed as harassment, bullying and discrimination behaviours and conduct. Definitions of bullying and harassment - GOV.UK

Please also see Guidance for Schools, Section 3a – Dignity at Work Policy

Some Examples of harassment, bullying and discrimination

Category	**Examples**
Verbal abuse and Intimidation	repeatedly shouting or swearing at staff in public or private; spreading malicious rumours or prejudiced myths; insulting or using derogatory language, nicknames or banter; asking intrusive questions or making unwanted insinuations
Offensive behaviour	use of unwelcome or offensive imagery, graffiti, gestures, facial expressions, staring, mimicry, jokes, pranks; ridiculing or demeaning someone
Discriminatory language	racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist or disablist jokes, banter, insinuations or insults
Targeted harassment	taunting, picking on someone, setting them up to fail; making assumptions about competence and treating them as inferior
Exclusion and isolation	refusing to work with someone; exclusion, isolation, ignoring or shunning; unfairly excluding someone associated with the employee
Obstruction and undermining	making tasks unnecessarily difficult; undermining a competent worker through overload or persistent criticism; unfair work allocation; blocking promotion or training; overbearing supervision
Coercion and threats	Unwanted pressure or intimidation; threats or comments about job security without foundation
LGBTQ+ discrimination	Outing someone without consent; refusing to acknowledge gender transition; making assumptions about what is 'normal'

Category	Examples
Invasive behaviour	Intrusive questioning about personal or sex life; victimisation for refusing to accept or collude with bullying or harassment
Physical misconduct	Invasion of personal space; unnecessary touching; physical abuse, attacks or violence

Employees and volunteers of the school should remember their responsibilities to the local community and adopt a courteous, high quality, efficient and impartial approach to all groups and individuals with whom they come into contact in the course of their work. Such courtesy and efficiency should be shown to all people with whom employees and volunteers deal with, remembering that all opportunities need to be taken to enhance the reputation of the school whether locally, nationally, or internationally.

Employees and volunteers of the school must carry out their duties objectively, professionally, to the best of their ability and in an impartial manner. Employees and volunteers of the school are entitled to expect that no other colleague or Governor will seek to pressure or persuade them to carry out their duties in any other way. Where it is alleged that such action has taken place, the Headteacher and Chair of Governors will investigate the allegation if requested to do so.

There may be occasions when employees, carrying out their duties for the school, find themselves at odds with national Government advice or guidance. In such circumstances, it is particularly important that they are seen to behave with complete objectivity and impartiality obtaining managerial and professional advice and guidance where appropriate. They are entitled to expect to receive the unequivocal support of senior managers in so doing.

As a rule of thumb, employees and volunteers at the school should act in accordance with three key guiding principles:

1. Ensure that their conduct complies with these standards, the spirit of these standards, the school's policies, and the law.
2. Ensure that their conduct is never influenced by personal gain.
3. Ensure that their conduct could not give any reasonable person cause to question their motives.

Employees must not engage in activities outside work, including criminal activity, that could damage the reputation of the school or the employee's own reputation or the reputation of anyone connected with the school as this is likely to be regarded as serious misconduct which could result in their dismissal.

Employees must not make negative comments about the school on social media.

4. Dress code

Employees are expected to dress professionally and, appropriately for the role in which they are employed. [*School can set out here any individual requirements which are specific to the school.]*

5. Confidentiality & Openness

Employees and volunteers of the school may be privy to information which is confidential. Any express or implied responsibility to keep information confidential should be respected by employees and volunteers and there should be awareness that such responsibility might arise from the nature of the information itself, e.g. child protection disclosure. It will, however, be extremely rare that employees and volunteers will be unable to share confidences with either the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors.

Employees and volunteers should not use information obtained in the course of their time at the school for personal gain or benefit, nor should they pass it on to others who might use it in such a way. When employees and volunteers are acquainted with confidential information belonging to the school, they must not disclose that information to any person not authorised to receive it unless such material must by law be made available to specific parties e.g., in child protection cases to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Police or Social Services and disclosure of financial information to Internal or External Auditors.

Sharing of confidential information

Where employees or volunteers have access to confidential information about pupils/students or their parents/carers, they must not reveal such information except to those colleagues who have a professional role in relation to the pupil/student if appropriate to do so. Should employees or volunteers witness behaviours or actions that are concerning, these should be reported and dealt with in accordance with the appropriate school policy and procedure whilst maintaining confidentiality. Incidents must not be discussed outside the school, including with the pupil's/student's parent or carer, nor with colleagues in the school except with a senior member of staff with the appropriate role and authority to deal with the matter. Employees and volunteers have an obligation to share with their line manager or the Headteacher, any information which gives rise to concern about the safety or welfare of a pupil/student.

6. Relationships

Employee-Governor Relationships:

Mutual respect between Governors and employees is essential to good school management. Close personal familiarity between individual Governors and employees should be avoided wherever possible, as it can be detrimental to the relationship and may result in other Governors and employees feeling uncomfortable.

Employees and Governors involved in recruitment will ensure that appointments are made based on merit and in accordance with the school's policies and procedures. Merit is determined based on matching the chosen candidate with a job specification and ignoring all other extraneous considerations, e.g., close personal relationships with Governors or other employees. Employees in the course of their duties should not be involved in the appointment, pay adjustment, approval of expenses, promotion or discipline of partners, relatives, or close friends.

Close personal relationships between employees and/or Governors should not be permitted to influence decisions made and must be declared at the earliest opportunity.

Employee-Parent Relationships:
Employees should seek to establish positive and open relationships with parents/ carers and should aim to create a welcoming and open relationship whilst maintaining professional boundaries.

Employee-Pupil Relationships:
Section 16 of The Sexual Offences Act 2003 provides that it is an offence for a person aged 18 or over to have a sexual relationship with a child under 18 where that person is in a position of trust in respect of that child, even if the relationship is consensual. Employees and volunteers working within a school would be deemed to be in a position of trust and must conduct themselves in accordance with the statutory requirements of the guidance "Keeping Children Safe in Education" (DfE 2026) and must not engage in a employees/pupil relationship that extends beyond the professional requirements of their role in any circumstance. Employees and volunteers at the school are required to adhere to the school's safeguarding and child protection policies.

Employees will observe proper boundaries with pupils that are appropriate to their professional position. They will act in a fair and transparent way that would not lead anyone to reasonably assume they are not doing so.

If employees and pupils must spend time on a 1-to-1 basis, employees will make sure that:

- this takes place in a public place that others can access.
- others can see into the room.
- a colleague or line manager knows this is taking place.

Employees should avoid contact with pupils outside of school hours if possible. Personal contact details should not be exchanged between employees and pupils. This includes social media profiles. Gifts from employees to pupils are not acceptable.

If an employee is concerned at any point that an interaction between themselves and a pupil may be misinterpreted or is concerned at any point about a fellow employee and a pupil, this should be reported in line with the procedures set out in the school/ academy's Safeguarding Policy.

Communicating with pupils who attend the school over social media could be viewed as developing/attempting to develop an inappropriate relationship. As such specific regard should be given to the school's ICT Acceptable User & Social Media Policy. As a rule, employees and volunteers should not engage in communication with pupils of the school over social media unless explicitly agreed by the school and for the purpose of fulfilling their professional duties. Any communication should remain professional in nature. If employees are unsure of the appropriateness of any communication, they should discuss this with the Headteacher.

Employee-Contractor Relationships:

Relationships with contractors or potential contractors who are engaged or may be engaged to carry out work at the school should be made known and in the case of Governors, an interest declared to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors in accordance with the legal requirements in respect of declaring financial interest.

7. Sexual Harassment

Employees will help create a positive environment that works to prevent sexual harassment. This includes calling out sexual harassment that they witness. All witnesses will be provided with appropriate support and will be protected from victimisation.

If an employee is concerned at any point about incidents of sexual harassment (either directed at them or someone else), they should report their concern to the Headteacher. If the concern is about the Headteacher/other employee, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the employee should report their concern to the Chair of the Governing Body/Board of Trustees/other names Governor or Trustee. Further information regarding Prevention of Sexual Harassment in The Workplace can be found in the school's Dignity at Work Policy.

The DFE has provided guidance on the definitions of Bullying and Harassment with examples of what is defined as sexual harassment. Definitions of bullying and harassment 2026 - GOV.UK

8. Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing reports wrongdoing that it is "in the public interest". Examples of this are:

- Criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption.
- Pupils' or employee health and safety being put in danger.
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement.
- Breaches of financial management procedures.
- Attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest.
- Damage to the environment.
- Sexual harassment is a 'qualifying disclosure' under whistleblowing law. This means that by law, whistleblowers who make a disclosure about sexual harassment receive automatic statutory protection against workplace detriment and unfair dismissal.

Employees are encouraged to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible. Their concerns will be taken seriously and managed in accordance with the school's Whistleblowing Policy.

Employees should report their concern to the Headteacher. If the concern is about the Headteacher, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the employee should report their concern to the Chair of the Governing Body/ Board of Trustees/other named Governor or Trustee.

9. Political Neutrality

All employees and volunteers of the school are required to be politically neutral and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with the way in which they carry out their work or duty to implement the policies.

Under the Education (No 2) Act 1986 the Governing Body and the Headteacher are required to ensure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils, they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.

10. Personal Interests

Employees and volunteers must declare to the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors financial and any other interests that they consider could bring about direct conflicts with the school's interests, including membership of any organisation which does not open to the public that requires of members any form of commitment or allegiance and which has secrecy about rules and membership or conduct.

11. Business or Financial Interests

Schools and Academies must keep a register of business and financial interests for staff and Governors/Trustees. This register should be kept up to date and be freely available for inspection by Governors, staff and parents and reviewed regularly.

The register must state:

- business interests that they, or a member of their immediate family, have (for example, that they work for a supply company that your school uses);
- governance roles in other educational institutions;
- relationships they have with other Governors or school staff (e.g. spouses, partners and close relatives).

12. Other Employment

The Governing Body will not unreasonably stop employees from undertaking secondary employment, but such employment must not, in the view of the Governing Body, conflict with or act in a way which is detrimental to the school's interest or have the effect of weakening public confidence in the proper conduct of the school.

The Headteacher and Governing Body expect that all staff employed in the school will give full commitment to the school whilst employed there and will not take up other employment which may directly impact on their ability to fulfil their contractual requirements.

13. Honesty & Integrity

Employees must maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity in their work. This includes the handling and claiming of money and the use of school property and facilities.

All employees must comply with the Bribery Act 2010. A person may be guilty of an offence of bribery under this act if they offer, promise or give financial advantage or other advantage to someone; or if they request, agree or accept, or receive a bribe

from another person. If an employee believes that a person has failed to comply with the Bribery Act, they should refer to the Whistleblowing procedure.

14. Gifts & Hospitality

Gifts given to employees at Christmas time or the end of an academic/term year or after a particular event such as diaries, confectionery, calendars, pens etc are allowed.

Gifts given to employees from suppliers or associates of the school must be declared to the Headteacher or to the Chair of Governors if the Headteacher is the recipient, with the exception of "one off" token gifts (with a value of less than £20/£30) from students or parents. Employees of the school should not accept significant personal gifts, services or other benefits from contractors and service providers such as drink, cars, holidays, tickets etc. Where unsolicited gifts are received, they should be drawn to the attention of the Headteacher or Chair of Governors who will keep a record of circumstances. Employees should only accept offers of hospitality including invitations to functions, meals and site visits if there is a genuine need to impart or receive information or represent the school and/or the community, e.g., careers events. Offers to attend social or sporting functions at another's expense should be accepted only when these are part of the life of the community or where the school should be seen to be represented perhaps including occasions when a genuine business benefit may be obtained by the school as a result. Such visits should be properly authorised by the full Governing Body and recorded on a maintained register e.g., Logbook, Governing Body minutes and must not be excessive in the context of the occasion or the justification for attendance. If an employee is in any doubt about the propriety of accepting a gift, advice should be sought from the Headteacher or Chair of Governors.

Personal gifts from individual employees to pupils/students are inappropriate and could be misinterpreted. Therefore, in normal circumstances gifts should not be given to pupils/students as this could, unintentionally, be viewed as extending or attempting to extend a relationship beyond the professional requirements of the role. As such, if an employee does feel a gift is appropriate, then explicit agreement should be gained from the Headteacher with regards to the reason and nature of any gift.

15. Use of Electronic Technologies and Personal Communication Devices

a) Employees must exercise caution when using communication technologies and be aware of the risks to themselves and others. They must not engage in inappropriate use of social network sites which may bring themselves, the school, school community or employer into disrepute.
b) Employees must not use social media e.g. Facebook with pupils or former pupils who are still of statutory school age.
c) Employees must only use their school e-mail account or school learning platform account when communicating electronically with pupils/students and parents.
d) Employees must not use personal electronic communication devices such as mobile phones or iPads as cameras in school. Any photographs/video footage must be taken using school equipment. Employees must only save images on school IT hardware/computers.

e) Employees who are in contact with pupils should not use personal mobile phones in school during their directed/paid hours of employment unless there are exceptional circumstances and they have requested and been given explicit permission to do so by the principal/ headteacher. Outside of these times, mobile phones should only be used in areas of the school where pupils are not present.

f) Further information can also be found in the appropriate school policies and procedures (as listed below).

16. Use of ICT including e-mails and Social Media sites

The school acknowledges that the personal use of ICT including e-mails and social media sites can provide a positive way for employees to keep in touch with colleagues, friends and parents and can be used to exchange ideas and thoughts on common interests, both personal and work related.

However, employees also need to be aware that even if the privacy settings on their social media sites are set to private, information can still end up in the public domain and, therefore, should not be considered as private. This applies to the information accessed or shared both outside and inside of work. Information that employees may consider to be private could be deemed to be unacceptable conduct where for example:

- their work performance is affected;
- they have potentially broken the Law;
- they have breached confidentiality;
- they have published comments, videos, or photographs which reveal some form of work-related misbehaviour, for example feigning illness or avoiding work;
- they have blurred professional boundaries;
- they have expressed a personal view that the school would not want to be associated with, and which may well bring the school into disrepute;
- they have disclosed data or information about the school, colleagues and partner organisations, clients or service users that could breach the Data Protection Act 1998;
- they have not complied with school's Standards of Conduct resulting in an inappropriate reference to people working at or for the school, or people receiving services from the school;
- they have abused people working at or for the school or people receiving services from the school.

Employees whose conduct is deemed to be unacceptable may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the school's Disciplinary Procedure, not excluding dismissal.

17. Equal Opportunities

The school is committed to ensuring equal opportunities in employment and provision of education and believes that an effective equal opportunities policy is an essential means of increasing the value of its personnel by developing the potential of all its individual employees. The school's equal opportunities policy is designed to ensure that no employee or job applicant should receive less favourable treatment than another because of a protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010 i.e.,

age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. All employees and volunteers must comply with both the spirit and letter of the Equality Act and the school's equal opportunities policy and treat all members of the public and work colleagues with respect and fairness.

Employees and volunteers should be fully aware of the school's commitment to equal opportunities and the employment of disabled persons.

Employees should note that the following acts may be unlawful as well as constituting misconduct liable to disciplinary action (which could in some cases include summary dismissal):

1. Discriminating improperly in the course of their employment against members of the public, clients, stakeholders, fellow employees, job applicants or in respect of job transfer or promotion applications, because of a protected characteristic as listed above.
2. Instructing, causing or inducing, or attempting to induce, staff, volunteers and Governors to practice unlawful discrimination.
3. Verbal or physical harassment of a nature that is offensive to the victim.
4. Victimising individuals who have made allegations or complaints of discrimination or harassment or who have provided information about such discrimination or harassment.

For its part, the school will investigate any allegation of discrimination or harassment and will act as appropriate.

18. **Health & Safety**

The school (and the Local Authority where the LA is the employer) share a legal obligation to protect the health, safety, and welfare at work of all its employees and others in the workplace. Equally, employees should always be aware of and fulfil their legal responsibility to protect their own and others health, safety and welfare at work. This legal obligation is supported by the school's health and safety policy.

19. **Post-Employment**

The duty of fidelity which each employee owes to the school, and which requires an employee to act in an honest fashion and not in a manner which will harm the school may, in certain respects, continue following the end of the employee's employment. For example, even though they are no longer employed by the school, a former employee must not disclose confidential information which belongs to the school.

Certain employees may have access to intellectual property (such as copyright and materials which belong to the school). An employee might even have contributed to the creation of that intellectual property during a period of employment. However, where part or whole of that property belongs to the school it cannot be used by a former employee for any purpose without the agreement of the school as appropriate.

20. **Additional Requirement**

Although this code of conduct highlights overall expectations, employees are also expected to be aware of, and adhere to, other key legislation, professional standards, policies, procedures, and guidance in order to effectively carryout their duties during the course of their employment. Of particular importance we would highlight the following documents and advise staff and volunteers to familiarise themselves with them where appropriate to their role:

Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE 2026) – All staff and volunteers must have at least read Section 1 of this document:

- Child Protection Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers
- Teachers' Standards
- Professional Standards for Teaching Assistants (Non-Mandatory, Non-Statutory)
- Governance Handbook
- ICT Acceptable User & Social Media Policy
- Dignity at Work Code of Practice
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Grievance procedure

Individual schools should ensure any polices listed above have been adopted by the Governing Body and all employees and volunteers are made aware of them and have easy access to them.