



Code of Conduct for All Staff

This policy applies to:

All Ardingly College Family of Schools Staff (Ardingly College including APL and Great Walstead School)

Person responsible for the policy:

HR Department

Policy reviewed by Board of Governors – July 2026

Review Dates:

Last Review July 2026

Next Review July 2027

Introduction and purpose

1. As a values-driven and people-centred employer we commit to developing and maintaining a culture of care and inclusion; ensuring that this culture is embedded in all our activities, policies, and decisions.
2. Our Vision is for Ardingly College Family of Schools to be a place where:
 - We have a shared purpose and strong values, to which we are all aligned, to which we are all held, and which show up in all that we do.
 - We are a strong, open, and inclusive community, where everyone can be their authentic selves, feel cared for and safe. We treat each other with kindness, act with integrity, live our values, speak up to hold one another to account and tackle poor behaviour if it arises.
3. Our Staff Code of Conduct is designed to give clear guidance on the standards of behaviour all school staff are expected to observe. The purpose of this Code is to:
 - place the welfare of children at the centre of Ardingly College Family of Schools and its culture
 - confirm and reinforce the professional responsibilities of all Staff
 - clarify the legal position in relation to sensitive aspects of Staff / pupil relationships
 - set out the expectations of standards and behaviour to be maintained within the School
 - help adults establish safe practices and reduce the risk of false accusations or improper conduct.
4. This policy should be read in conjunction with the following related policies and procedures:
 - Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
 - Low-level Concerns Policy
 - Positive Handling Policy
 - Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
 - Dignity at Work Policy
 - IT Communication and Systems Policy (For Great Walstead Staff this is covered in the Great Walstead Staff Handbook)
 - Taking, Storing and Using Images of Children Policy (Ardingly College) Online Safety Policy (Great Walstead)
 - Data Protection Policy
 - Social Media Policy (Ardingly College) Online Safety Policy (Great Walstead)
 - Health and Safety Policy
 - Whistleblowing Policy
 - Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs Policy
 - Anti-bribery and Corruption Policy
 - Staff Wellbeing Policy
 - Internal Communications Policy
 - Dealing with Allegations Against Staff Policy
 - Keeping Children Safe in Education (Part1 and Annex B)

Application

5. The code applies to all staff, whatever their position or responsibilities. It includes employees, Governors, contractors, agency workers, work experience students and volunteers.

6. **It is our expectation that all staff confirm that they have read and understood their duties under the Code of Conduct annually.**

Key duties

7. It is the contractual duty of every member of staff to observe the rules and obligations in this Code. Ardingly College Family of Schools also has a duty of care to its staff, parents, guardians or carers and pupils and the implementation of the practices in this Code will help to discharge that duty.
8. All staff are under a duty to report their own wrongdoing, or any wrongdoing or proposed wrongdoing of any other member of staff or any conduct which they may suspect to be inappropriate. This duty applies even if the concern is no more than one which causes a sense of unease or a nagging doubt. Staff are under a duty to report suspected, known, or proposed wrongdoing in conjunction with the Ardingly College Family of Schools' policies. This includes suspected, known, or proposed wrongdoing brought to the attention of a member of staff by a pupil, parent, or other adult.

Making professional judgements

9. This guidance cannot provide a complete checklist of what is, or is not, appropriate behaviour for staff. It does highlight however, behaviour which is illegal, inappropriate, or inadvisable. There will be rare occasions and circumstances in which staff have to make decisions or take action in the best interest of a pupil or colleague where no guidance exists. Individuals are expected to make judgements about their behaviour in order to secure the best interests and welfare of their colleagues and the pupils in their charge and, in so doing, will be seen to be acting reasonably. These judgements should always be recorded and shared with a manager. Staff should always consider whether their actions are warranted, proportionate, safe, and applied equitably.

Conduct at work

10. **Professionalism:** Staff must observe the terms and conditions of their contract of employment, comply with all reasonable instructions given by staff who are senior to them and act always in good faith and in the best interests of Ardingly College Family of Schools, its pupils, parents, and staff. All staff should carry out their duties and responsibilities to the best of their ability, taking pride in their work and demonstrating honesty and integrity at all times.
11. **Resources:** All staff should treat Ardingly College Family of Schools' resources responsibly, and exercise due financial care.
12. **Relationships with staff:** Relationships between staff should be characterised by fairness, openness, respect, and professionalism. This means valuing all contributions, acknowledging, and respecting difference, and working together to build a climate of inclusion, psychological safety, and continuous improvement. Staff must not bully, harass, or intimidate other staff or students. All staff must be conscious that what appears as innocent "banter" to some may not be perceived that way by others, as detailed in our ***Dignity at Work and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policies***.
13. **Romantic relationships with colleagues:** While we do not object to employee relationships, our workplace is a professional setting. We expect our employees to treat each other with respect and maintain professionalism at all times. Any workplace relationships which may create a conflict of interest should be declared to the HR Director or a member of College Executive. Ardingly College

Family of Schools reserves the right to change reporting lines / managerial structures to ensure that any conflicts of interest which may arise are mitigated appropriately.

14. **Sexual harassment:** Ardingly College Family of Schools takes a firm stance on Sexual Harassment. Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which has violated someone's dignity or created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone. It can be sexual harassment if the behaviour:

- has one of these effects even if it was not intended
- intended to have one of these effects even if it did not have that effect

For more details on what constitutes sexual harassment and how to report it, please refer to the ***Dignity at Work Policy***.

15. **Relationships with parents:** Staff should create a professional, polite, welcoming, and open relationship with parents. All parental concerns should be treated seriously and dealt with promptly.

16. **Role modelling behaviour:** School staff are in a unique position of influence and must adhere to behaviour that role models the highest possible standards for all the pupils within the school and other members of staff. Staff should always use appropriate language and should:

- avoid words or expressions that have any unnecessary sexual content or innuendo; avoid displays of affection either personally or in writing
- avoid any words or actions that are over-familiar
- not swear, blaspheme, or use any sort of vile language in a professional capacity in front of pupils, parents, visitors, or other staff
- avoid the use of sarcasm or derogatory words when disciplining pupils or staff
- avoid making unprofessional personal comments about anyone
- avoid any form of aggressive or threatening words or aggressive contact such as holding, pushing, pulling, or hitting, which could amount to a criminal assault.
- be careful that their body language is neither suggestive nor sexually threatening
- students nor staff should not feel that a member of staff is staring at them in a suggestive or lascivious way

17. **Safeguarding and child protection:** All staff need to be aware of the ***Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy***. It is essential that all staff have regular training in Safeguarding and Child Protection issues and know the procedures for dealing with and reporting concerns. All staff have a duty to look out for signs of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect of pupils in the light of a child's behaviour. Staff must pass any concerns on to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

18. **Political neutrality:** Staff are required to maintain a fair, dispassionate approach to sensitive topics, and the promotion of partisan political views is strictly prohibited.

- Educators are expected to keep their personal political opinions separate from their teaching and ensure biased viewpoints are not communicated to students.
- When dealing with political or sociological issues, contested theories must be framed as such, rather than presented as absolute, established fact.
- Visiting speakers and external organisations must be vetted to ensure they do not take extreme partisan positions or undermine fundamental British values.

These professional and conduct standards are anchored in law and statutory guidance, specifically **The Education Act 1996** and The Department for Education (DfE) [Political Impartiality in Schools](#) standards.

19. **Acceptable use of IT:** All staff must exercise caution when using information technology and be aware of the risk to themselves and others, as detailed in our ***IT Communications and Systems Policy, Great Walstead Staff Handbook and Data Protection Policy***.
20. **Taking and storing images of children:** Staff must not use their personal mobile phones, or any other personal device, to take images and videos of pupils. Staff must not publish anything that could identify pupils, parents or guardians on any personal social media account, personal website, or similar platform without prior consent of the Head. This includes photos, videos, or other materials such as pupil work. Further information can be found in the ***Taking, Storing and Using Images of Children Policy (Ardingly College) and Online Safety Policy (Great Walstead)***.
21. **Smoking:** is only permitted in designated outdoor areas.
22. **Alcohol and drugs:** All staff must comply with our ***Alcohol and Drugs Policy***. Alcohol may not be consumed during normal working hours except on celebratory occasions approved by a member of the Senior Management Team and in this situation Ardingly College Family of Schools expects a high standard of behaviour from all members of staff. Neither non-proprietary nor non-prescribed drugs may be brought into Ardingly College Family of Schools' premises. It is strictly forbidden to work or remain at work under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs. Anyone found under the influence of drink or illegal drugs whilst on duty will be sent home and liable to disciplinary action.
23. **Confidentiality:** Staff should exercise due confidentiality towards matters that are either discussed or overheard and must not disclose confidential or business-sensitive information. Staff should exercise discretion in what they say to students and to parents and should avoid commenting to them about Ardingly College Family of Schools' policy, management, or other staff. However, staff have an obligation to share with their line manager, the Designated Safeguarding Lead or the Headteacher, any information which gives rise to concern about the safety or welfare of a pupil/student.
24. **Dress:** Staff should always dress appropriately and professionally. Dress must not be offensive, revealing, or discriminatory. Political and other contentious slogans and badges are not allowed. All staff must wear their lanyards / staff badges at all times.
25. **Receiving Gifts:** As with most educational institutions it is accepted that parents or children make small gifts to show appreciation. However, staff must not receive gifts on a regular basis from any individual or receive anything of significant value where they feel that the gift may be an attempt to gain influence. Staff should decline gifts that could be seen as a bribe or that create an expectation of preferential treatment. Any gift received by a member of staff over the value of £50 should be declared to the Financial Controller.
26. **Giving Gifts and Rewards:** Where staff are thinking of giving a gift or reward, it should only be provided as part of an agreed reward system, with prior approval from the Head, COO or HR Director. Selection processes should be fair and where possible agreed by more than one member of staff. The gift or reward should be of little monetary value or else declared for tax purposes. Decisions regarding entitlement to benefits, rewards or privileges must avoid perceptions of favouritism or bias. The selection process must be based on transparent criteria.

27. **Staff with children at Ardingly College or Great Walstead:** Ardingly College and Great Walstead are made so much more special by the fact that we have so many staff children. The guidelines below should help both staff and staff parents, ensure that our day-to-day interactions are positive and that we have the best interests of both the children and the adults at heart.

28. **Both staff and staff parents** should ensure that appropriate and respectful professional boundaries are always maintained. With particular reference to:

- The maintaining of confidentiality at all times, on all Ardingly College Family of Schools matters e.g., conversations had at home within hearing of spouses and children, conversations with other parents or interaction on class WhatsApp groups. It is recommended that staff parents operate as 'admin only' on class WhatsApp groups.
- **Staff members** communicating with staff parents regarding matters relating to their child in the same way they would communicate with non-staff parents e.g.:
 - showing them the same level of professionalism, courtesy, and responsiveness
 - using appropriate channels e.g. not using Ardingly College or Great Walstead online platforms (MS Teams). Contact (email or call) as you would any other parent.
 - not making assumptions about what information they may have access to in their capacity as a member of staff.
 - not engaging staff parents in a school-related conversation about their child during working hours without first seeking their consent and appreciating that they may not wish to unexpectedly find themselves in 'parent mode.'
- **Staff parents** communicating with staff members regarding matters relating to their child in the same way they would communicate with their child's teachers if they attended another school e.g.:
 - Showing them the same level of professionalism and courtesy
 - using appropriate channels (emailing relevant staff member as a parent) e.g. not using Ardingly College or Great Walstead online platforms (MS Teams)
 - not approaching their child's teacher during the working day to discuss matters relating to their child, without expressly requesting the opportunity to do so, as they would were their child at another school.
- Staff parents complying fully with the relevant school policies and procedures as they apply to all parents.
- If you have any concerns regarding the maintenance of these professional boundaries either in your capacity as a member of staff or as a staff parent please raise this with either the member of staff themselves (if you feel comfortable doing so), with your manager or with a member of the HR team who can provide guidance and support.

29. Where possible, parents who are teaching staff will not be timetabled to teach their own children (unless no other appropriate member of staff is available). Ardingly College and Great Walstead reserve the right to change the timetable to mitigate this possibility.

Conduct Outside of Work

30. As a member of a school community, each employee has an individual responsibility to maintain their reputation and the reputation of Ardingly College Family of Schools whether inside or outside of working hours. Staff must not engage in conduct outside work which could damage the reputation and standing of the school or the employee's own reputation or the reputation of other members of the school community. Any such conduct could lead to dismissal.
31. **Criminal offences:** Criminal offences that involve violence or possession or use of illegal drugs or sexual misconduct are likely to be regarded as unacceptable and could lead to dismissal. Staff must immediately notify Ardingly College Family of Schools of any child protection investigation of any member of your household or of any charge or conviction of any criminal offence brought against you during your employment.
32. **Social media:** Staff must not engage in inappropriate use of social media sites which may bring themselves, Ardingly College Family of Schools, or our community into disrepute, as detailed in the ***Social Media Policy (Ardingly College) and Online Safety Policy (Great Walstead)***.
33. **Out of hours emails:** The health and wellbeing of our employees is of the utmost importance to us. Where possible, e-mails should be checked or sent only during normal working hours and within the hours of 7am – 7pm on weekdays. Due to differing/non-standard patterns of work, some employees may occasionally send communications at times which are inopportune for other employees, e.g. weekends. The sender should give due consideration to the timing of their communication and potential for disturbance, and the recipient should understand that they will not be expected to respond until their working time recommences. Please refer to our ***Internal Communications Policy*** for further guidance.
34. **Work outside of Ardingly College Family of Schools:** With prior written consent from a member of College Executive, staff may undertake work outside Ardingly College Family of Schools, either paid or voluntary, provided that it does not conflict with the interests of Ardingly College Family of Schools and is not to a level which may contravene the working time regulations or affect an individual's work performance.

For any other employment or private commercial activity, we expect that colleagues:

- Notify HR that they have another source of employment (including self-employment) in order that we can appropriately identify any conflicts of interest.
- Refrain from using Ardingly College Family of Schools forms of communication (such as iSams, work email addresses, work phone numbers, work social media channels etc)
- Ensure any marketing literature does not imply that it is an Ardingly College Family of Schools operated or endorsed activity
- Collect, manage, and use their own data in accordance with the relevant legislation, and specifically do not use Ardingly College Family of Schools' data, its systems, or its infrastructure for the management of non-Ardingly College Family of Schools activity

Additionally, where the activity takes place using Ardingly College Family of Schools facilities, we would expect that a formal contract is in place between APL and the employee/their organisation, and additional measures are in place (such as branding, or an overt statement) to make it particularly clear that it is not an Ardingly College Family of Schools provided or endorsed service.

Ardingly College Family of Schools communications channels (such as MS Teams posts, newsletters etc) should not be used to advertise services, unless there are very clear statements to clarify the nature of the relationship.

35. **Contact with pupils and parents outside of work:** Staff should avoid unnecessary contact with pupils outside of work. **Please note:** *It is understood that if you are a staff parent you will have contact with those pupils who are friends with your children and their parents outside of work, and if you are acting in your capacity as a parent normal parental consent will apply in relation to the boundaries listed below:*

36. Staff should:

- not give pupils their home address, home phone number, mobile phone number or personal email address;
- not send personal communication to pupils unless agreed with a senior colleague;
- not make arrangements to meet pupils outside of work, other than on recognised authorised work trips;
- not contact pupils at home unless strictly necessary, and a record kept of any such occasion;
- not give a pupil a lift in their own vehicle other than on Ardingly College Family of Schools business and with the permission of the Senior Deputy Head (Senior School) or Head of Prep School (Nursery-Prep).
- not invite pupils to their home unless a member of the Senior Management Team and the Designated Safeguarding Lead has been informed. This also applies to staff living in Ardingly College Family of Schools accommodation.

Guidelines on staff / pupil relationships

37. **One-to-one situations:** If a member of staff is alone in a room with a student, the guiding principle should be that the meeting can be seen by passers-by. If there is no glass panel in the door, then the door should be left open. Thought should also be given to where the student sits in relation to the member of staff (e.g., a male teacher and a female student should not be sitting together on a sofa).

Meetings with individual students should not be scheduled for times when no one else will be around and should not continue for any longer than is necessary to achieve its purpose.

Staff should not meet with students alone off work premises. They should also avoid being alone in their cars with individual students except in exceptional circumstances. Where the situation is unavoidable, staff must discuss the arrangements with a senior member of staff in advance and would also be advised to inform the student's parents.

Unauthorised student access to staff accommodation is strictly forbidden. It is acceptable for those attached to a boarding House to entertain boarders in a group of at least two students, not individuals, and in the HoMM's presence or with the HoMM's permission.

If a situation occurs that might be misconstrued, the member of staff should report the incident to the Deputy Head (Pastoral and Co-Curricular) as quickly as possible.

38. **Dependent relationships, infatuations, and crushes:** Staff should ensure that students do not develop "dependent relationships" with them.

Staff should not make remarks of a sensitive or personal nature to students. Terms of endearment should also be avoided as these could be misconstrued.

Crushes, fixations, and infatuations are part of normal adolescent development. However, they need sensitive handling to avoid allegations of exploitation. If staff suspect that a pupil has developed a “crush,” they should bring it to the attention of a senior colleague and the Designated Safeguarding Lead at the earliest opportunity.

Staff should take particular care when dealing with a pupil who:

- appears to be emotionally distressed, or vulnerable and/or is seeking expressions of affection
- appears to hold a grudge against them
- acts in a sexually provocative way, or who is inclined to make exaggerated claims about themselves and others, or one whose manner with adults is over-familiar
- may have reason to make up an allegation to cover up poor performance in examinations

Some of these behaviours may be indications that a child has been abused and should therefore be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead. Any incident involving children that could give cause for concern should be recorded with justifications for any actions taken and discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

39. **Physical Contact:** Staff must comply with the guidance set out in the ***Restrictive Intervention Policy***. As a general rule, staff are advised not to make any physical contact with any student whether to guide, restrain or console. For the purpose of this Policy “restraint” means restricting liberty of movement and “reasonable force” means using no more force than is needed. In some teaching contexts, it is recognised that physical contact is occasionally necessary (such as in PE, drama, or sports coaching for example, or in practical demonstrations or First Aid), however, the consent of the student should be sought before any physical contact is made.

Any form of physical punishment is unlawful, but misguided contact such as ruffling hair, putting an arm around a shoulder or patting a pupil must be avoided. The only exceptions to this are:

- the administration of first aid;
- in cases of distress when, for example, a student might benefit from an arm around the shoulder when being taken to the Health and Wellbeing Centre;
- or when preventing a student from injuring themselves or others.

Any necessary searches must be conducted in line with Ardingly College Family of School's ***Behaviour and Conduct Policies*** and DfE (Department for Education) guidelines (Searching, Screening and Confiscation Advice for schools July 2022). All searches must be authorised in advance by the Senior Deputy Head or the Deputy Head Pastoral.

40. **Abuse of a position of trust and inappropriate relationships with pupils:** All staff are in a position of trust, and great care should be taken to ensure that this position of trust is not abused or misconstrued. Allowing any sort of dependent relationship to develop with a student is a breach of this trust. Please note that this includes tutors who encourage students to share more of their personal life and private feelings than is appropriate or strictly necessary.

Great care should be taken to ensure that no romantic or sexual relationship, no matter how one-sided, is allowed to develop between a member of staff and a student. Staff should also note that in both employment law and case law, it is a breach of trust (and hence, gross misconduct) for a teacher to initiate a romantic or sexual relationship with a student after that student has left Ardingly College Family of Schools.

Staff must not:

- Have any type of sexual relationship with a pupil or pupils

- Have sexually suggestive or provocative communication with a pupil
- Make sexual remarks to or about a pupil
- Discuss their own sexual relationships in the presence of pupils

Sexual relationships or sexual contact with any pupils or encouraging a relationship to develop in a way which might lead to a sexual relationship, or any relationship just considered inappropriate with any pupil is a grave breach of trust that will lead to disciplinary action and may also lead to criminal prosecution.

It is the criminal offence of an abuse of a position of trust to have any sexual relationship with any pupil under the age of 18, and whilst not a criminal offence, it is a breach of this Code and considered to be gross misconduct to have a sexual relationship with any pupil, even if over the age of 18.

Forming relationships with children or young people who are pupils or students at another school will be a criminal offence if they are under 16 but may also be a criminal offence if under the age of 18 and will be regarded as gross misconduct.

Such behaviour tends to bring Ardingly College Family of Schools into disrepute and gives rise to concern that the Staff involved cannot be trusted to maintain professional boundaries with pupils and students. Whilst not necessarily a criminal offence, Ardingly College Family of Schools considers it inappropriate for Staff to form inappropriate relationships with a pupil of any school, irrespective of their age.

Dealing with allegations against staff

41. All employees must be aware of the ***Child Protection Policy, Keeping Children Safe in Education (Part 1 and Annex B), the Dealing with Allegations Against Staff policy and procedure and the Low-Level Concerns policy***. If at any time employees have concerns about appropriate conduct, dealings with students or the behaviour of a colleague, they should be discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), and with the Senior Deputy Head or Head. If the concern relates to either the DSL or Senior Deputy Head or Head, it should be discussed with the Head of College or the Chair of the Board of Governors.

Allegations of unprofessional conduct can arise at any time. Professionalism and vigilance are required of all staff to ensure the safety of children in our care and to reduce the risk of an allegation of impropriety against member of staff. This guidance applies to all adults working in Ardingly College Family of Schools, not just teachers.

42. **Low Level Concerns:** Ensuring low level concerns are dealt with effectively should protect staff from potential false allegations or misunderstandings. Staff should be clear on expected behaviours, feel empowered to share low level concerns and feel comfortable to address unprofessional conduct at an early stage. In line with the guidance from KCSIE, Ardingly College Family of Schools supports an open culture for sharing low level concerns in order that they can be responded to quickly and appropriately. ***For further details please see the Child Protection Policy and Low-Level Concerns policy.***
43. **Whistleblowing:** All staff are required to report their own wrongdoing or the proposed wrongdoing of any other member of staff or any conduct they may suspect to be inappropriate. Any issues specifically in relation to safeguarding concerns should be reported to the Designated

Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The **Whistleblowing Policy** sets out the procedure for reporting any concerns, including safeguarding issues.

Conclusion

44. The guidelines set out above are intended to help staff to develop friendly, productive relationships with colleagues and students. They are also there to protect staff and to ensure that no situation arises that will compromise a member of staff's integrity and professionalism or Ardingly College Family of Schools name. A breach of this policy may be treated as misconduct and could result in disciplinary action including in serious cases, dismissal.

Related Policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Low-level Concerns Policy
- Restrictive Interventions Policy
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- IT Communication and Systems Policy (For Great Walstead Staff this is covered in the Great Walstead Staff Handbook)
- Taking, Storing and Using Images of Children Policy (Ardingly College) Online Safety Policy (Great Walstead)
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