



# **THE PILGRIM SCHOOL**

## **Confidentiality**

### **POLICY**

**School Lead: Head teacher**

**Governor Lead: Chair of Governors**

**Last reviewed: 15 July 2015**

**Date of next review: December 2019**

**Signed by Chair of Governors: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

# Confidentiality Policy

## Rationale and statement on the importance of confidentiality

The sharing of information is an essential requirement of our school in the context of its status as a 4 – 16 years special school established in a hospital which also provides an outreach service for pupils unable to attend their own schools because of illness, mental health needs or severe psychological difficulties or pregnancy. In order to provide the most appropriate support and help for each pupil referred to us, we work in a multi-agency system. Certain information regarding a pupil's health and well-being, the diagnosis or condition(s) which are preventing attendance at their own school, is essential. Parental consent is sought for members of staff to communicate directly with doctors/health professionals directly involved in the care or treatment of the child. Such communications are confined to questions which assist staff to decide on the most appropriate level and pace of educational support to balance the children's and their entitlement to education and protection

The focus of this policy relates to occasions when pupils may decide to share personal information with staff.

At The Pilgrim School, we believe that:

- The safety, well being and protection of our pupils are the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this school make about confidentiality. The appropriate sharing of information between school staff and professional colleagues from other agencies is an essential element in ensuring our pupils' well being and safety.
- It is an essential part of the ethos of our school that trust is established to enable pupils, staff, and parents/carers to seek help both within and outside the school and minimise the number of situations when personal information is shared to ensure pupils and staff are supported and safe.
- Pupils, parents/carers and staff need to know the boundaries of confidentiality in order to feel safe and comfortable in discussing personal issues and concerns, including health matters and sex and relationships.
- The school's attitude to confidentiality is open and easily understood and everyone should be able to trust the boundaries of confidentiality operating within the school.
- Issues concerning personal information including sex and relationships and other personal matters can arise at any time.
- Everyone in the school community needs to know that no one can offer absolute confidentiality.
- Everyone in the school community needs to know the limits of confidentiality that can be offered by individuals within the school community so they can make informed decisions about the most appropriate person to talk to about any health, sex and relationship or other personal issue they want to discuss.

## Definition of Confidentiality

The dictionary definition of confidential is "something which is spoken or given in confidence; private, entrusted with another's secret affairs"

When speaking confidentially to someone the confider has the belief that the confidant will not discuss the content of the conversation with another. The confider is asking for the content of the conversation to be kept secret. Anyone offering absolute confidentiality to someone else would be offering to keep the content of his or her conversation completely secret and discuss it with no one.

In practice there are few situations where absolute confidentiality is offered in The Pilgrim School. We have tried to strike a balance between ensuring the safety, well being and protection of our pupils and staff, ensuring there is an ethos of trust where pupils and staff can ask for help when they need it and ensuring that when it is essential to share personal information child protection issues and good practice is followed.

This means that in most cases what is on offer is limited confidentiality. Disclosure of the content of a conversation could be discussed with professional colleagues but the confider would not be identified except in certain circumstances.

**The general rule is that staff should make clear that there are limits to confidentiality, at the beginning of the conversation. These limits relate to ensuring childrens' safety and well being. The pupil will be informed when a confidence has to be broken for this reason and will be encouraged to do this for themselves whenever this is possible.**

Different levels of confidentiality are appropriate for different circumstances.

1. **In the course of a group lesson** (given by a member of teaching staff or an outside visitor, including health or youth service professionals).

Careful thought needs to be given to the content of the lesson, setting the climate and establishing ground rules to ensure confidential disclosures are not made. It should be made clear to pupils that this is not the time or place to disclose confidential, personal information. When a health or youth service professional is contributing to a school personal, social and health education programme in a classroom setting, s/he is working with the same boundaries of confidentiality as a teacher.

2. **One to one** disclosures to members of **school staff (including voluntary staff)**.

It is essential all members of staff know the limits of the confidentiality they can offer to both pupils and parents/carers (see note below) and any required actions and sources of further support or help available both for the pupil or parent/carer and for the staff member within the school and from other agencies, where appropriate. All staff at this school encourage pupils to discuss difficult issues with their parents or carers, and vice versa. However, the needs of the pupil are paramount and school staff will not automatically share information about the pupil with his/her parents/carers unless it is considered to be in the child's best interests.

(Note: That is, that when concerns for a child or young person come to the attention of staff, for example through observation of behaviour or injuries or disclosure, however insignificant this might appear to be, the member of staff should follow the school safeguarding policy.

3. **Disclosures to a counsellor, school nurse or health professional operating a confidential service in partnership with the school.**

Health professionals such as school nurses, CAMHS nurses, can give confidential medical advice to pupils provided they are competent to do so and follow the Fraser Guidelines (guidelines for doctors and other health professionals on giving medical advice to under 16s). School nurses are skilled in discussing issues and possible actions with young people and always have in mind the need to encourage pupils to discuss issues with their parents or carers. However, the needs of the pupil are paramount and the school nurse will not insist that a pupil's parents or carers are informed about any advice or treatment they give.

#### **Contraceptive advice and pregnancy:**

The DoH has issued guidance (July 2004) which clarifies and confirms that health professionals owe young people under 16 the same duty of care and confidentiality as older

patients. It sets out principles of good practice in providing contraception and sexual health advice to under-16s. The duty of care and confidentiality applies to all under-16s. Whether a young person is competent to consent to treatment or is in serious danger is judged by the health professional on the circumstances of each individual case, not solely on the age of the patient. However, the younger the patient the greater the concern that they may be being abused or exploited. The Guidance makes it clear that health professionals must make time to explore whether there may be coercion or abuse. Cases of grave concern would be referred through child protection procedures. The Government Guidance, "Working Together to Safeguard Children", following the Bichard report, was revised in April 2006.

**The legal position for school staff:**

School staff (including non-teaching and voluntary staff) should not promise confidentiality. Pupils do not have the right to expect that incidents will not be reported to his/her parents/carers and may not, in the absence of an explicit promise, assume that information conveyed outside that context is private. No member of this school's staff can or should give such a promise. The safety, well being and protection of the child is the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this school make about confidentiality.

School staff are NOT obliged to break confidentiality except where child protection is or may be an issue. However, at The Pilgrim School we believe it is important staff are able to share their concerns about pupils with colleagues in a professional and supportive way, on a need to know basis, to ensure staff receive the guidance and support they need and the pupils' safety and well being is maintained. School staff should discuss such concerns with their line manager or the Headteacher.

**Teachers, counsellor and health professionals:**

Professional judgement is required by a teacher, counsellor or health professional in considering whether he or she should indicate to a child that the child could make a disclosure in confidence and whether such a confidence could then be maintained having heard the information. In exercising their professional judgement the teacher, counsellor or health professional must consider the best interests of the child including the need to both ensure trust to provide safeguards for our children and possible child protection issues.

All teachers at this school receive basic training in child protection as part of their induction to this school and are expected to follow the schools' child protection policy and procedures.

**Visitors and non-teaching staff:**

We expect all non teaching staff, including voluntary staff, to report any disclosures by pupils or parents/carers, of a concerning personal nature to the designated child protection co-ordinator as soon as possible after the disclosure and in an appropriate setting, so others cannot overhear. This is to ensure the safety, protection and well being of all our pupils and staff. The designated child protection co-ordinator will decide what, if any, further action needs to be taken, both to ensure the pupil gets the help and support they need and that the member of staff also gets the support and supervision they need.

**Parents/carers:**

We believe that it is essential to work in partnership with parents and carers and we endeavour to keep parents/carers abreast of their child's progress, including any concerns about their progress or behaviour. However, we also need to maintain a balance so that our pupils can share any concerns and ask for help when they need it. Where a pupil does discuss a difficult personal matter with staff at our school, they will be encouraged to also discuss the matter with their parent or carer themselves.

The safety, well being and protection of our pupils is the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this school make about confidentiality.

### **Complex cases:**

Where there are areas of doubt about the sharing of information, seek a consultation with your local Children's Service Child Protection Co-ordinator.

### **Links to other school policies and procedures:**

**This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the school's policies on:**

PSHE

Child Protection

Anti-Bullying

Code of Conduct for staff

### **Statement of ground rules to be used in lessons**

We adopt ground rules to ensure a safe environment for teaching in particular in PSHE. This reduces anxiety to pupils and staff and minimises unconsidered, unintended personal disclosures.

At the beginning of each PSHE lesson, pupils are reminded of the ground rules by the teacher or outside visitor. The teacher establishes the ground rules together with the pupils at the beginning of their work with them and reminds them on a termly basis.

This is an example of the ground rules for our lessons:

***We do not ask each other personal questions or talk about personal experiences or those of named others.***

- ***We can pass or opt out of something if it makes us feel uncomfortable.***
- ***When we talk about sensitive and controversial issues related to drugs, alcohol, sex and relationships we should make statements about the population generally, for example some people..... some children..... some teenagers..... or use obvious fictitious names like Joe Bloggs, or a name agreed by the group***
- ***If we are worried about someone's safety or want to talk about personal problems or issues we can ask to speak to any member of staff privately.***
- ***Members of staff will always listen or advise where to seek help from but may not be able to keep any information disclosed confidential as they may need to inform other professionals in order to fully help you.***
- ***If we do find out things about other pupils, which are personal and private, we won't talk about it outside the lesson but if we are worried about someone else's safety we can tell a member of staff.***
- ***We will respect each other and not laugh, tease or hurt others***
- ***We won't say things we want to keep confidential***

**When confidentiality should be broken and procedures for doing this:**

See the Child Protection Policy

Where this does not apply and you are still concerned and unsure of whether the information should be passed on or other action taken you should speak to a **senior colleague** (e.g. a Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator)

**If the Headteacher issues instructions that s/he should be kept informed, all staff must comply. There is always a good reason for this, which you may not know about.**

**The principles we follow at our school are that in all cases we:**

- Ensure the time and place are appropriate. When they are not, we reassure the child that we understand they need to discuss something very important and that it warrants time, space and privacy.  
See the child normally (and always in cases of neglect, or abuse) before the end of the school day. More serious concerns must be reported immediately to ensure that any intervention necessary to protect the child is accessed as early as possible.
- Tell the child we cannot guarantee confidentiality if we think they will:
  - hurt themselves
  - hurt someone else
  - or they tell us that someone is hurting them or others
- Not interrogate the child or ask leading questions
- We won't put children in the position of having to repeat distressing matters to several people
- Inform the pupil first before any confidential information is shared, with the reasons for this
- Encourage the pupil, whenever possible to confide in his/her own parents/carers

### **Support for staff**

Staff may have support needs themselves in dealing with some of the personal issues of our pupils. At our school we prefer you to ask for help rather than possibly making a poor decision because you don't have all the facts or the necessary training, or taking worries about pupils home with you. There are many agencies we can refer pupils to who need additional support, if they are not already involved, and we have procedures to ensure this happens. We all work together as part of a team to support our pupils and asking for help is a way we ensure our school is a happy and safe learning environment.

Teaching staff should discuss any concerns about pupils with their Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator or a member of the Senior Management Team, support staff with the teacher they are supporting. Any unresolved issues should be discussed with the Headteacher.

### **Dissemination and implementation:**

This policy has been distributed to all teaching and non-teaching staff, All new staff receive a copy of the policy, together with basic training on the school's Child Protection Policy as part of their induction programme from their line manager.

### **Review:**

This policy is reviewed every 2 years or whenever deemed necessary by the Headteacher and Governors in the light of events and changes in the law.