NMPAT

Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Trust

Physical Contact Policy

Early Years, Drama, SEND and Music Therapy Sessions

Purpose

The aim of the following policy statements is to create an open, trusting environment that will enable children to enjoy their music / dance / drama development.

It is NMPAT's policy that staff avoid physical contact with students where possible.

- **Limited permitted physical contact**
  Although staff should normally avoid physical contact with students. there are occasions when it is entirely appropriate and proper. It is crucial that they only do so in ways appropriate to their professional role. When physical contact is made with students, this should be in response to their needs at the time, of limited duration, and appropriate to their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity and background. It is not possible to be specific about the appropriateness of each physical contact, since an action that is appropriate with one student in one set of circumstances may be inappropriate in another, or with a different student.

- **There are circumstances in which staff may legitimately intervene physically**
  Staff may legitimately intervene to prevent a student from committing a criminal offence, injuring themselves or others, causing damage to property, engaging in behaviour prejudicial to good order and to maintain good order and discipline. Staff should have regard to the health and safety of themselves and others. Under no circumstances should physical force be used as a form of punishment. The use of unwarranted physical force is likely to constitute a criminal offence.

- **Comfort and reassurance**
  There may be occasions when a distressed student needs comfort and reassurance. This may include age-appropriate physical contact. Staff should remain self-aware at all times in order that their contact is not threatening, intrusive or subject to misinterpretation, and is in line with individual school expectations and policies.

- **Demonstration without physical contact should be the preferred method of teaching**
  Music teachers may on occasions initiate physical contact with students in order to support a student so they can perform a task safely, to demonstrate the use of a particular piece of equipment / instrument or assist them with an exercise. This must be done with the student's prior agreement, for the minimum time necessary to complete the activity and in an open environment. Staff should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the student.

- **Physical contact should never be secretive or casual**, or for the gratification of the adult, or represent a misuse of authority. If a member of staff or volunteer believes that an action could be misinterpreted, the incident and circumstances should be reported to their line manager.

There are certain circumstances where physical contact with students may be necessary. The following statements are provided as examples of what the staff of the NMPAT consider a "reasonable level" of contact.

Early Years Classes: Children in the 0-5 age group

Note: It is assumed parents and carers will remain in close contact with teachers at all times especially with the under threes. For our "over three" activities, parents should feel free to stay (or not) for any of the sessions or view the tuition as it takes place, through the observation window.

- Holding hands both with the teacher and other students – for example to lead a child or group of children in a circle or line activity.
- The gentle patting of a child on their shoulder, arm or feet; the movement / careful manipulation of hands and legs; gentle movement whilst resting on a tutor's knees - all to be performed purely with the intention of reinforcing pulse and with the permission of the child.
- The reasonable restraint of children, usually by their arm or leg, to either prevent them harming another child or from hurting themselves – and on occasions both. Parents / carers will always be informed where physical restraint has been deemed necessary. Where a situation cannot easily be resolved, parents / carers will always be summoned immediately.
- Supporting a child who is upset or needs reassurance by a short gentle cuddle until they regain their composure. N.B. Where a child is very upset; parents will of course be summoned.
- Allowing a child to voluntarily sit on a teacher's knee during a "quiet music / listening session" or other similar occasion – N.B. this can be a comfort to many students who are used to sitting on their parent / carer's knees.
- Assistance in putting on finger puppets, wearing masks and similar classroom props / decorations.
- To help children stand should they fall over.
- When assisting a carer who has another child to deal with. This could involve sitting with a child, assisting with dressing or undressing of outer garments – in other words generally working with a child in the manner of a carer in the carer's absence and with the carer's agreement. Toilet arrangements remain the sole responsibility of parents / carers.
- Periods of welcome and farewell where children approach the teacher seeking physical contact such as a gentle cuddle.

Drama Classes

- To guide students to the right position, for example when staging a drama scenario

Children and Young People with additional needs: Y-Not Arts Centre, Reach the Stars, Musical Stars and Music Therapy sessions

Note: Much work with children and young people with additional needs is focused on helping them to understand appropriate physical boundaries; reinforcing appropriate displays of affection ("hugs for home / high fives for adults"; hands to ourselves; "let's all sit on the floor together"). Physical contact should mainly be used in the context of managing and reformulating distress, anxiety, and restraint (if the child poses a danger to themselves or somebody else). It can, however, also be used to enable a child to experience activities, which their additional needs or disability would otherwise prevent.

Examples of instances where physical contact may be necessary:

- Holding hands to promote safety and orientation during periods of transition around the school or Centre.
- The gentle patting of a child on their shoulder, arm, or feet; the movement / careful manipulation of hands and legs - all to be performed purely with the intention of reinforcing musical elements and the activity itself, and with the permission of the child whenever possible.
- The reasonable restraint of a child, usually by their arm or leg, to either prevent them harming another child or from hurting themselves.
- Intervention to prevent physical harm from an epileptic seizure.
- Assistance in using equipment, or wearable accessories. This can include multisensory equipment particularly relating to feel and touch, which may need to be facilitated by an adult to enhance the child's experience or engagement.
- To help children stand should they fall over.
- When assisting a carer / key worker who has another child to deal with. This could involve sitting with a child, assisting with dressing or undressing of outer garments – in other words generally working with a child in the manner of a carer in the carer's absence and with the carer's agreement. Toilet arrangements remain the sole responsibility of school staff, parents and carers.
- Assisting profoundly disabled children to be out of their chairs for part of an activity. This decision will usually be made collaboratively with key adults at the setting who agree it would contribute to general wellbeing and enhanced experience in a session.

Notable instances of physical contact should be reported to the class teacher or key worker for documentation. They should all be recorded by the teacher / facilitator / therapist in session notes.