



## **St. Vincent De Paul RC Primary School**

Positive Touch Policy  
September 2025

## **Purpose and Intent**

At St Vincent De Paul RC Primary School, we believe that appropriate, nurturing physical contact is an essential part of our role in supporting children's holistic development. Physical touch is not only inevitable in daily interactions but, when used appropriately, is highly beneficial to children's social, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

Touch can:

- Promote emotional security and bonding
- Serve as a powerful non-verbal form of communication
- Support stress relief and emotional regulation
- Reinforce verbal communication
- Offer comfort, calm, and reassurance
- Encourage sensory development
- Facilitate personal care routines
- Enhance inclusion and understanding in learning
- Ensure physical safety in certain situations

We recognise that when children are not guided in understanding appropriate touch, they may struggle to distinguish between helpful and harmful contact. By modelling safe, respectful, and compassionate physical interaction, we help children develop healthy boundaries and emotional resilience.

## **Evidence Base**

Extensive research supports the importance of positive touch:

- **Early bonding and stress reduction:** Harrison (2001)
- **Improved attentiveness and sleep in children with autism:** Escalona et al. (2001)
- **Improved caregiver-child interactions:** Pardew & Bunse (2005)
- **Touch for socioemotional and physical well-being:** Field (2010, 2016)

Positive touch has also been shown to reduce cortisol levels, heart rate, and blood pressure, while increasing oxytocin and promoting relaxation.

## **Guiding Principles**

Staff at St Vincent De Paul RC Primary School understand that appropriate physical contact is often necessary and helpful. All interactions involving touch are:

- Child-centred and for the benefit of the pupil
- Age-appropriate and developmentally informed
- Respectful of each child's individual needs, wishes, and cultural background
- Sensitive to the context and clearly purposeful

Where a child indicates discomfort or refusal of touch, their wishes are always respected.

## **Examples of Appropriate Touch**

- Holding a child's hand when crossing the road or guiding in a line
- Placing a hand on a shoulder to gain attention or provide reassurance
- Side-on hugs with children or lap-sitting for younger children (with clear consent)
- Hand-over-hand or hand-under-hand guidance during tasks (e.g. handwriting, art, therapy)
- Supporting children physically during PE or therapy, with clear purpose
- Offering comfort during moments of distress or dysregulation

## **Inappropriate Touch**

The following are never acceptable:

- Any contact that meets the adult's emotional or physical needs over the child's
- Coercive or manipulative touch
- Touch that is sexualised, harmful, or invasive
- Contact with private areas of the body
- Physical punishment of any kind (e.g., hitting, slapping, pinching, tickling for prolonged periods)
- Any action that causes a child to feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or violated

Touch must always be considered in the context of the child's age, cultural background, personal history, disability, and individual preferences.

## **Legal Framework and Safeguarding Context**

All staff are aware of and adhere to the school's **Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy**, as well as national guidance (e.g. **DFE 00295-2013**). Touch must never be used under the guise of therapeutic support if it is for the gratification of the adult.

Examples of acceptable physical contact include:

- Comforting a distressed child
- Congratulating or praising a pupil
- Assisting with medical needs (e.g., insulin administration, first aid)
- Demonstrating educational or therapeutic techniques
- Supporting communication in non-verbal or early-stage communicators

**Touch is always for the benefit of the child.**

## **Special Considerations and Therapeutic Touch**

Touch is especially important in trauma-informed and emotionally supportive environments. In line with **TISUK** (Trauma Informed Schools UK) and **CCMH** (Child Mental Health Centre), physical contact may be used to:

- Support emotional and physical regulation
- Provide sensory input or grounding during distress

- Assist children with profound or complex needs
- Build trust and attachment through therapeutic play and interventions

Touch should always be cautious and carefully considered with children who have sensory sensitivities or a history of trauma.

### **Definitions**

- **TISUK** – Trauma Informed Schools UK
- **CCMH** – Centre for Child Mental Health
- **Coercion** – Using force or manipulation to compel an action against a person's will

### **Procedures**

All staff receive training as part of their induction and ongoing professional development. This includes guidance on:

- When and how to use positive touch
- Recognising when touch is not appropriate
- Understanding cultural and individual differences
- What to do if uncertain about any physical interaction

Staff are encouraged to consult with senior leaders or the safeguarding team if ever in doubt.

### **Monitoring and Review**

- This policy is reviewed annually by the senior leadership team and designated safeguarding lead
- Positive touch training is revisited regularly and updated to reflect best practices and emerging evidence