

Staff Professional Boundaries

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy and the associated guidelines are to raise awareness of situations where professional boundary violations may occur and to suggest strategies to minimise risk.

This Policy and associated guidelines apply to all staff, including teaching and non-teaching staff, all casual staff, fixed term contractors, relief teachers, volunteers, and third-party contractors, in the school environment, whether they work in direct contact with children or young people. These guidelines also apply to School Board members.

NOTE: All references to 'School' or 'Firbank Grammar School' within this policy include all campuses and the School's Boarding Premises

Policy

Firbank Grammar School (the School) is committed to providing a safe physical, online and emotional environment where all students are respected and treated with dignity in an appropriate professional and caring manner where there is a zero tolerance of child abuse, and a safe and supportive child safe environment is maintained.

It is our policy that:

- Staff exercise their responsibilities in a way that always recognises professional boundaries regarding the relationship with students.
- Staff identify, discourage and reject any advances of a promiscuous or overly familiar nature initiated by a student.
- Staff interaction with students is always professional, including during and outside of school hours.
- Conflict of interest issues must be reported to the Principal as soon as practicable.
- Equal learning opportunities are given to all students without discrimination.

Appropriate consequences will be applied to Staff who breach professional boundaries. The School may take disciplinary action including, in the case of serious breaches, summary dismissal.



Professional Boundaries

Professional boundaries are parameters that describe the limits of a relationship in circumstances where one person (a student) entrusts their welfare and safety to another person (a Staff Member), in circumstances where a power imbalance exists.

The fact that Staff are in a unique position of trust, care, authority and influence with students means that there is always an inherent power imbalance that exists between them. It also means that professional boundaries must be established, maintained and always respected.

In most cases this power imbalance is clear, however sometimes it may be more difficult to recognise especially for younger Staff who may only be a few years older than their students.

The following guidelines are not exhaustive, and it is expected that all Staff (no matter their age or experience) use their own good judgment, think very carefully about the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students, and always err on the side of caution.

When unsure about whether professional boundaries are being, or have been, breached, ask yourself:

- Would I modify my behaviour if a colleague was present?
- How would I feel about explaining my actions at a staff meeting?
- Am I sharing information for the student's benefit, or for my benefit?
- Am I dealing with this student differently from others in similar circumstances?
- Is my language or demeanour different from normal when dealing with this student?

Staff Responsibilities

All Staff must:

- Follow the guidelines as set out in this policy.
- Immediately disclose any conflicts of interest to the School.
- Remove themselves from decision making where a conflict has been identified.



Personal Relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is or can be perceived or misinterpreted as having a personal rather than professional element. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual or condoned by parents or carers.

It is the student's perception of Staff behaviour and not the intention of the Staff Member that is important.

An established and expected professional relationship between Staff and students may be compromised by Staff:

- attending events or socialising with students outside of organised School events (without parental/carer permission)
- sharing personal details about their private lives with students
- meeting with students outside of school hours without permission from the School.
- acting in a flirtatious nature
- developing an intimate personal relationship
- using sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or material with students
- unwarranted and inappropriate touching
- unwarranted and inappropriate filming or photography
- deliberately exposing sexual behaviour of others (e.g., pornography)
- having contact without a valid context via written or electronic means (e.g., email, letters, telephone, text messages, social media sites or chatrooms)
- exchanging gifts of a personal nature

The imbalance of power and authority that exists in the staff/student relationship does not suddenly disappear after the student finishes their schooling. Staff should not assume that they will be protected from disciplinary action by claiming that a relationship began only after the student left the School as there may be a reasonable belief that the emotional intimacy of the relationship developed while the Staff/student relationship existed. Staff should also be aware that developing or encouraging romantic or sexual relationships with recent former students (over 18 years of age) may violate professional boundaries and are strongly discouraged from doing so, for a minimum of 2 years after the student has graduated from Firbank Grammar School.

Staff must always recognise that their role is not to be a "friend" or "parent" to a student.

Disclosure of interactions and relationships (Conflict of Interest)

Where personal relationships with students such as family relationships and close friendship networks exist, questions of conflicts of interest may arise.

It is encouraged that all Staff declare any interactions with students outside school hours to the Director of People and Culture and Principal. These interactions may include instances where the Staff Member is:

- related to the student
- friends with the student's parents or family
- a parent or carer of children who are friends with students at the school
- given parental consent to interact with the student for academic purposes outside of school hours and has notified the School
- Belong to the same club/association as a student

Any significant decisions relating to these students in the School (such as the appointment of classes or selection in sports teams) should be referred to another Staff Member and endorsed by a supervisor.

Fair Learning Opportunities

The focus of teaching is effective student learning and as such, teachers are expected to support their students with their professional expertise to offer them the best education in their individual circumstances. The quality of teaching and learning between teachers and students characterises their relationship.

Teachers should demonstrate their commitment to student learning by:

- maintaining a safe and challenging learning environment that promotes mutual respect.
- recognising and developing each student's abilities, skills and talents by catering to their individual abilities and respecting their individual differences
- encouraging students to develop and reflect on their own values
- interacting with students without bias
- not engaging in preferential treatment
- not discriminating against any student based on race, sex, sexuality, disability or religious or political conviction
- always making decisions in students' best interests

Electronic and online communications between staff and students

It is expected that all Staff at the School will adhere to the following guidelines:



- all use of technology should be for educational purposes or for the organisation of co-curricular activities
- all email communication between Staff and students should be via the School email system and reflect a professional Staff/student relationship
- staff should not communicate with students via text message where it is not in a professional context.
- staff should not give out their personal telephone numbers contact details, unless under special approved circumstances. All instances of this must be approved by the Head of Campus, and records of this approval are retained.
- teachers are not expected or encouraged to respond to concerns of parents/carers or students on holidays, weekends or in the evening.
- any student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to the School should only be used for School communications.

Social Media

Staff and students should always act in a respectful and responsible manner when using social media and always adhere to the School's IT responsible use and Social media policies.

Staff are not, under any circumstances, to accept or request students as 'friends' on any social media platforms or otherwise use social media to communicate in any way that is not condoned or approved by the School.

Photography and Video

The preference is for School staff to use Firbank Grammar owned devices to capture images of students however there may be times when use of personal devices for reasonable and legitimate educational purposes is required. If this occurs, staff are expected to forward images directly to the School and delete the images from their device within a week of the images being captured.

Staff should not exchange personal pictures with a student at any time.

Physical contact with students

All Staff should be aware that situations may arise that can be perceived in a manner that was not intended.

For this reason, all Staff at the School should adhere to the following guidelines for contact with students both in and outside of School grounds:

- Staff should avoid unnecessary physical contact with students.
- Minimal, non-lingering, non-gratuitous physical contact in the context of the situation is acceptable (e.g., congratulatory pat on the back or handshake)



Contact for sport, drama and dance instruction is acceptable in a class situation but not in a 1:1 situation. If physical contact is required for specific technical instructions, it must be brief and only with the consent of the student.

Note that a student may withdraw consent for this contact either verbally or gesturally and staff must remain vigilant whilst engaging in necessary contact situations. Once consent has been withdrawn no further contact can be or should be made.

Off Campus activities

During off-campus excursions or camps, the same physical contact guidelines apply as well as the following:

- Checking of sleeping arrangements, or supervising of students changing should be done, where possible, with another Staff Member present and always in a manner that respects students' privacy and personal space.
- Always knock and advise of presence prior to entering a bedroom or dormitory.

Ensure that while in a bedroom or dormitory a strict Staff/student relationship is upheld and that inappropriate behaviour, such as sitting on a student's bed, is not undertaken.

Related Policies and documents

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct
- Behaviour Management Policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- General Supervision Policy

Approval

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