

# East Midlands Academy Trust

## Safe Touch Policy

**'Every child deserves to be the best they can be'**

Scope: East Midlands Academy Trust & Academies within the Trust	
<b>Version: v1</b>	<b>Filename:</b> EMAT Safe Touch Policy
<b>Approval: October 2024</b>	<b>Next Review: October 2027</b> This policy will be approved by the Trust CEO and reviewed every three years.
<b>Owner:</b> Head of Inclusion	<b>Union Status:</b> Not Applicable
Policy type:	
Non - Statutory	New policy

### Revision History

Revision Date	Revisor	Description of Revision
October 2024 v1	JN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Policy</li> </ul>



The Everyone's Invited campaign has rightly served to focus our minds on the need to continue to work together to protect pupils.

We, at EMAT, believe that schools play a crucial role in teaching pupils about sex and relationships, equality and diversity and modern citizenship as well as preparing them for the modern world. This is enacted through each school's culture, its curriculum, and all policies. We aim to give all pupils and staff a voice to enable them to act in a protective manner towards themselves and others. This includes developing a robust whistleblowing culture as well as fostering a culture of integrity and mutual respect.

We recognise that we have the responsibility of tackling sexual violence and harassment, instilling values in our stakeholders and encourage all to be driven by their strong moral compass. Like so much of education, our work must complement that undertaken by parents and carers so that young people receive a consistent message, and they can go about their lives free from harassment and abuse.

All of our schools will continue to engage with their stakeholders, listen to their concerns and signpost necessary support and provision within and beyond its schools. We ask that anyone who has experienced such behaviour, or who is suffering because of it, to report it to an appropriate adult either in the school or within the EMAT team so they can be supported, and steps can be taken to address the issue.

A dedicated NSPCC helpline is now available to support anyone who has experienced sexual abuse in educational settings or has concerns about someone or the issues raised. The dedicated **NSPCC helpline number is 0800 136 663 or by emailing [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)**

Staff members can also seek support from **Vivup on 0330 380 0658** or by visiting their website [www.vivup.co.uk](http://www.vivup.co.uk)

If you are troubled about possible wrongdoing at work, please don't keep it to yourself. Our [Whistleblowing Policy](#) is there to reassure you that it is safe and acceptable to speak up and to enable you to raise any concern you may have at an early stage and in the right way. If you feel unable to raise the matter with your manager, for whatever reason, please raise the matter with:

- **EMAT Head of Governance & Compliance** – Alexandra Rigler – [alexandra.rigler@central.emat.uk](mailto:alexandra.rigler@central.emat.uk)
- **EMAT Senior Workforce Planning & HRBP** – Ruhena Mahmood – [Vicky.donnely@central.emat.uk](mailto:Vicky.donnely@central.emat.uk)

If you are unsure about raising a concern you can get free and independent advice from **Protect helpline on 020 3117 2520 or by emailing [whistle@protect-advice.org.uk](mailto:whistle@protect-advice.org.uk)**.

# EMAT SAFE TOUCH POLICY

## 1 Introduction

East Midlands Academy Trust (EMAT) practice is based on informed, evidence-based decision making to allow safe touch in specific cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy emotional growth and learning of our pupils.

Research cited by the Department for Education (DfE) in Working together to Safeguard Children (2023), reflects clearly that healthy pro-social brain development requires access to safe touch as one of the means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, sad or angry child. It is essential for all children to learn the difference between safe and unsafe touch and to experience having their strongest emotions contained, validated, accepted and soothed by a significant adult.

This policy on touch and physical contact has been developed with due consideration of neuro-biological research and studies based on and around the positive impact of touch. Our key aim is to facilitate a safe and happy school where children and staff alike enjoy coming to school and experience positive relationships with all who they encounter. These positive relational experiences are fundamental to EMAT's belief that every child deserves to be the best they can be and this policy fully supports this commitment.

## 2. Legislative Compliance

We believe this policy should be a working document that is fit for purpose, represents our ethos and enables consistency and quality across all academies. This policy complies with all statutory requirements and is based on the following legislation:

- [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2023\)](#), which sets out statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children.
- [The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014](#), which set out local authorities' and schools' responsibilities for education, health and care (EHC) plans, SEN coordinators (SENCOs) and the special educational needs (SEN) information report
- The [Equality Act 2010](#) (section 20), which sets out the school's duties to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with disabilities
- **EMAT Behaviour-Policy** which sets out how we provide calm, safe, supportive environments in which young people can learn and thrive.
- **EMAT Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy** which recognises each individual academy's statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of all pupils.

### 3. Aims

We believe that all our children have the right to independence, choice and inclusion and we proactively seek to provide opportunities for personal growth and emotional health and wellbeing. However, rights also involve responsibilities, such as not harming other people's rights. Children unable to self-advocate, control their individual actions, do not have Gillick competence or are unable to appreciate danger have a right to be protected; as do other pupils in each of our academies. Each school in the Trust and all staff have a duty of care to exercise towards our children and young people.

### 4. Rationale

Children learn who they are and how the world is, by forming relationships with people and the physical world around them. The quality of a child's relationship with significant adults is vital to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing. EMAT's policy considers the extensive neurobiological research and studies relating to attachment theory, child development and special educational needs. For example, an autistic child whose EHCP and professionals working around the child identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, mental health and the development of social skills. Within the Trust we have an informed, evidence-based decision to allow safe touch as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

EMAT want colleagues to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Hence, staff need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. Equally, when a child is in deep distress, our colleagues, through Team Teach and other de-escalation training, will know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding can be provided without touching. The training provided by Team Teach will physically support a child when needed. Through Team Teach colleagues are trained to understand pre-emptive and preventative methods to supporting a child to self-regulate and manage their emotions and their bodies safely; this is especially poignant when the child does not have Gillick competence or is unable to self-regulate, especially in EYFS and our primary providers.

It is crucial that all involved in our school community understand that not all holding is restraint, indeed restraint is only ever used as a last resort (Please see our Trust's Physical Intervention Policy for details). However, within the Trust we are clear that we use appropriate touch to support our children to self-regulate and be ready and prepared for learning and indeed life.

### 5. Different Types of Touch that may be used across our Academies

#### Casual/Informal/Incidental Touch

Colleagues, especially those in our Units and primary provisions use touch with children as part of a normal relationship, for example, comforting a child, giving reassurance and congratulating. This might include taking a child by the hand, patting on the back or putting an arm around the shoulders. The benefit of this action is often proactive and can prevent a situation from escalating. Other examples involve tying a child's shoe and guiding a child away from a hazard,

## General Reparative Touch

This is used by colleagues working with children who are having difficulties with their emotions, especially in our Unit and EYFS provisions. Healthy emotional development can require safe touch as a means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, angry or sad child. Touch used to regulate a child's emotions triggers the release of the calming chemical oxytocin in the body. Reparative touch may include patting a back, squeezing an arm, or hand or foot massage in line with individual learning plans and EHCP mandates.

## Contact Touch

Contact play is utilised namely by Unit, EYFS, and primary colleagues adopting a role similar to a parent in a healthy child-parent relationship. This will only take place when the child has developed a trusting relationship with the adult and when they feel completely comfortable and at ease with this type of contact. Contact play may include an adult chasing and catching the student or an adult and student playing a game of building towers with their hands when immersed in their learning.

Contact touch can also be utilised in our secondary academies by teachers to support performance, eg – the physical education teacher that supports a child with safely moving their body in gymnastics or dance from a piece of equipment, or a music teacher supporting a child to place their hands correctly on a musical instrument.

## 6. The Essentialness of Appropriate Touch

We define the appropriate use of touch in which abstinence would be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging. Indeed, studies have shown that young babies who have been deprived of early touch stimuli, build a resistance to touch and nurturing (despite the desperate need for positive touch) and the ability by the brain to handle and assimilate touch becomes impaired. In extreme cases, this lack of touch causes listlessness and depression. In translating these findings to a home or school setting, examples of appropriate touch would include the natural and beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a child who is in an acute state of distress. We have a clear understanding that to not reach out to the child in such circumstances could be neurobiologically damaging.

## 7. Supporting a Distressed Child

Failing to physically soothe a child when in the face of intense grief and/or upset can lead to a state of hyper-arousal in which levels of stress chemicals are released in the body and brain. In such states of distress, touch can often be the only means of maintaining a connection with the child when he or she can no longer hear or make use of words or soothing tone/eye contact and therefore is in danger of dissociating, with all the detrimental effects that this can bring.

Moreover, it may be in the best interests of a child to physically hold them if they are hurting either themselves, others, or are damaging property and is so incensed and are not in control of their actions that all verbal and non-verbal attempts to engage the child have failed. Such necessary interventions are referenced in the Trust's Physical Intervention Policy.

## 8. Touch as part of Daily Routines

Due to fears of abuse, touch as a natural and vital form of human connection has been almost vetoed in some schools. We know that it is unfeasible, unethical, impractical and unsafe to impose a 'No Touch Policy' (e.g. the child that has a medical emergency will need adults to support them by touch to assist take away from danger/assist with any discomfort/reassure). As part of our loco parentis obligations there are times where touch will be necessary for the wellbeing of the children in our care. We understand that carefully judged contingent and/or containing touch can be therapeutic (e.g. a child with an EHCP where the plan mandates touch to calm). Equally, we understand that when a child is in deep distress that with sufficient connection, psychological holding can sometimes be established *without* touching.

## 9. Guidelines for staff in the use of Safe Touch

*To ensure touch is only used appropriately the following guidelines are to be followed:*

- Teachers/support staff should be trained in all aspects of safe touch.
- Where touch is used, contact should be brief and gentle, on clothed or publicly visible parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair, shoes.

*Unsafe touch:*

- At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.
- No unsafe touch: All colleagues are trained to be fully cognisant of touch that is invasive, or which could be confusing, traumatising or experienced as in appropriate in any way whatsoever.
- Serious Breach: Should any such touch be used it would warrant the highest level of disciplinary action.

## 10. Complaints

In our academies we put the needs of the pupils first and parents/carers are positively encouraged to come into the academy to talk about any aspect of their child's education. On occasion, parents may have a worry or a concern and Initial contact regarding this is usually made through the child's class teacher. In most cases, any concerns or anxieties can usually be resolved at this stage.

However, if a parent or carer is not happy with the response, they may wish to follow EMAT's complaint process as set out in the EMAT Trust Complaints Policy.