**Introduction**

At our school, we have a positive touch policy. This means that as a member of staff you are able to physically guide, touch or prompt children in appropriate ways at the appropriate times. It is extremely important that you have read and understood this policy to appreciate the reasons why we may choose to hold/touch children and the appropriate ways in which we do so.

**Positive Touch at Howard House School**

* There are occasions when it is entirely appropriate and proper for staff to have contact with students, but it is crucial that they only do so in ways appropriate to their professional role. A ‘no touch' approach is impractical for most staff and may in some circumstance be inappropriate.
* When physical contact is made with students it should be in response to their needs at the time, be 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 what is appropriate with one child in one set of circumstances may be inappropriate in another, or with a different child. Staff should therefore, use their professional judgement at all times.
* Staff should be aware that even well intentioned physical contact may be misconstrued by the child, an observer or by anyone to whom this action is described. Staff should never touch a child in a way which may be considered indecent. Always be prepared to explain actions and accept that all physical contact be open to scrutiny. Staff must not engage in rough play, tickling or fun fights with students.
* Extra caution should be exercised where a child is known to have suffered previous abuse or neglect. Such experiences may sometimes make a child exceptionally needy and demanding physical contact and staff should respond sensitively by deterring the child through helping them to understand the importance of personal boundaries.
* Staff supervising PE and games or providing musical tuition may be required to initiate physical contact with students to support a child to perform a task safely, to demonstrate the use of a particular piece of equipment/instrument or to assist them with an exercise. Contact under these circumstances should be done with the student’s agreement, for the minimum time necessary and in an open environment. Staff should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the student.

In all situations where physical contact between staff and students takes place, staff must consider the following:

* the student’s age and level of understanding
* the student’s individual characteristics and history
* the location where the contact takes place (it should not take place in private without others present)
* Physical contact is never made as a punishment, or to inflict pain. All forms of corporal punishment are prohibited.
* Physical contact will not be made with the participant’s neck, breasts, abdomen, genital area, other sensitive body parts, or to put pressure on joints. Physical contact must never become a habit between a member of staff and a particular student.

Please note that although we have a touch policy and believe that contingent touch can be a positive experience for the children that we care for, this does not mean that you have to touch children, and it should also be realised that some children will not want to be touched. Please respect this.