

NURTURING TOUCH POLICY

Lakenheath Community Primary School



Version Number	1
Date of Policy	October 2025
Review Date	October 2026
Head Teacher's Signature	
Chair of Governors' Signature	

Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Details
1	October	New Policy

1. Introduction

At Lakenheath Community Primary School we recognise that positive, nurturing touch plays a vital role in children's social, emotional, and neurological development. In line with our commitment to safeguarding, wellbeing, and child development, this policy sets out the appropriate use of touch in our school to support children's emotional security, build trusting relationships, and ensure a safe and respectful environment.

2. The Neuroscience of Nurturing Touch

Research in developmental neuroscience highlights that positive, appropriate touch helps regulate stress responses, supports attachment, and fosters emotional resilience (Field, 2010; Coan, 2016). Studies show that touch activates the parasympathetic nervous system, lowering cortisol levels and promoting feelings of safety (Uvnäs-Moberg, 2009). Secure and affectionate interactions contribute to healthy brain development, particularly in early childhood, where they are linked to self-regulation, empathy, and social bonding (Porges, 2011).

This is particularly important where children have speech, language or other needs which impede communication, as is the case in our Specialist Provision Unit, Hedgehogs Class. These children often rely on nurturing touch as the bedrock of their communication (Stamatis, 2011).

3. Types of Nurturing Touch

In a school setting, nurturing touch may take different forms depending on the child's needs and the context. Any touch must be appropriate, non-intrusive, and responsive to a child's comfort level. Forms of nurturing touch include:



- Responsive touch: If a child initiates an appropriate physical interaction, the adult may reciprocate in an appropriate way to avoid creating a sense of rejection in the child.



- Reassuring touch: A light pat on the shoulder, a high-five, or a fist bump to offer encouragement and affirmation.



- Supportive touch: Holding a younger child's hand for reassurance or guidance, particularly in Early Years.



- Comforting touch: A brief side hug or a hand on the back when a child is distressed (with the consent of the child).



- Task-related touch: Touch necessary for educational or safety purposes, such as guiding a child's hand in learning activities or assisting with dressing (e.g., fastening a coat or tying shoelaces).



- Communicative touch: Touch which supports communication and stimulation, such as in intensive interaction (Sense, 2023).

4. Child Consent and Communication

While child consent is central to our approach, we recognise that some children may have limited verbal communication skills. Staff will assess a child's comfort and consent through both verbal and non-verbal cues, including body language, facial expression, and signs of withdrawal or tension.

Visual supports and consistent communication strategies will be used to help children express preference and consent wherever possible. Staff working with neurodiverse pupils will be supported to interpret these cues sensitively and to adapt their approach in response.

5. Legal Considerations and Safeguarding

UK law does not prohibit the use of reasonable and appropriate physical contact with children in educational settings. According to the Department for Education's guidance (Use of Reasonable Force, 2013), school staff are permitted to use physical contact where it is necessary for safety, such as preventing harm or providing comfort when appropriate.

However, all staff must ensure that:

- Touch is appropriate to the needs of the child.
- The child is comfortable with it.
- Touch is public, brief, and stage-appropriate to avoid any misinterpretation.
- Physical intervention is only used as a last resort.
- Any concerns regarding inappropriate touch are reported in line with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

6. Staff Responsibilities

All staff members are responsible for:

- Using professional judgment to determine when nurturing touch is appropriate.
- Being aware of individual children's backgrounds and sensitivities to touch.
- Respecting a child's preference not to be touched.
- Communicating clearly with children to ensure that any physical interaction is understood and welcomed.
- Reporting any concerns or disclosures to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

7. Staff Training

Staff receive regular training on:

- The appropriate use of nurturing touch and professional boundaries.
- Understanding and gaining child consent, including for non-verbal children.
- Reading and interpreting non-verbal communication cues.
- Supporting neurodiverse communication styles.
- Procedures for recording and reporting touch-related incidents or concerns.

Training is refreshed as part of safeguarding updates and professional development cycles, ensuring staff remain confident and consistent in their practice.

8. Professional Support and Guidance

Staff are supported in their practice by a range of professionals who contribute to a shared understanding of appropriate, effective, and child-centred touch. This may include:

- Occupational Therapists, who provide advice on sensory regulation, proprioceptive needs, and safe handling approaches.
- Speech and Language Therapists (SALT), who guide staff in using touch as part of communication strategies, including intensive interaction and sensory communication.
- Specialist Education Teachers and other external advisors, who support staff in aligning practice with the needs of neurodiverse pupils and children with complex communication or sensory needs.

Collaboration with these professionals ensures that approaches to touch are consistent, evidence-informed, and tailored to individual pupils' developmental and emotional profiles.

9. Monitoring and Accountability

The implementation of this policy will be monitored through:

- Safeguarding audits.
- Lesson and classroom observations.
- Professional development reviews and supervision discussions.
- Feedback from parents, pupils, and staff.

Leaders will review staff adherence to the principles of this policy as part of ongoing safeguarding and wellbeing monitoring.

10. Documentation and Recording

While not every instance of nurturing touch requires recording, staff should document occasions where touch is significant to a child's learning, emotional wellbeing, or behaviour support.

Where touch forms part of a planned intervention (e.g., intensive interaction or emotional regulation), this can be noted in class logs or support plans.

If there is any uncertainty about whether an instance should be recorded—particularly where the child or another adult expresses discomfort—staff should consult with the DSL. CPOMS should be used to document relevant incidents for transparency and safeguarding, especially where touch could be open to misinterpretation.

11. Parental and Pupil Engagement

We value open communication with parents and carers regarding this policy. Parents will be informed about the school's approach to nurturing touch and may raise any concerns with the school leadership team. Additionally, pupils will be educated about personal boundaries and the importance of consent in relationships.

12. Conclusion

Nurturing touch, when used appropriately, is a powerful tool in fostering emotional wellbeing and security in children. At Lakenheath Primary School we are committed to ensuring that all physical interactions are conducted safely, respectfully, and in the best interests of the child.

13. References

- Coan, J. A. (2016). 'Toward a Neuroscience of Attachment'. *Social Neuroscience*, 11(5), 1–5.
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- Porges, S. W. (2011). *The Polyvagal Theory*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Sense. (2023, April). *Intensive Interaction*. <https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/ways-of-communicating/intensive-interaction/>
- Stamatis, P. (2011). Nonverbal communication in classroom interactions. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 9.
- Uvnäs-Moberg, K. (2009). *The Oxytocin Factor*. Da Capo Press.

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains in line with best practices and current research.