

# Touch Policy



<b>Policy Statement</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Aims</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Types of Touch</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Guidelines</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Transparency and Consent</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Disability Accommodations</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Trauma-informed Approach</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Feedback and Communication Channels</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Ongoing Training and Professional Development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Regular Policy Review and Feedback</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Complimentary Policies</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>4</b>

## Policy Statement

Bird College recognises that touch is essential in order to provide a finely tuned and high-quality learning experience for the students under our care. Used in a pedagogical context, and with empathy, touch supports proprioceptive development and enhances the development of technical skills.

The College endeavours to provide a caring and learning environment where both students and staff feel comfortable and protected. Students are able to express their wish not to be touched and should feel at all times they can approach a member staff to discuss any issues relating to touch and being touched.

This policy sets out to clarify the reasons and conditions for touch and it also aims to provide clear guidelines for staff teaching in each sector of the college (short courses, Pre-Professional Foundation course, and FE/HE programmes).

## Aims

- To enhance the learning experience by providing clear guidelines on the use of touch.
- To raise awareness about the physical requirements of specific movements or techniques while respecting student boundaries.
- To support students in achieving their best physical and technical potential in a safe and inclusive environment.
- To foster a culture of respect, inclusivity, and continuous feedback within the college community.

## Types of Touch

1. **Facilitative Tactile Feedback:** Used to reinforce the student's ability to connect and relate to movement kinaesthetically, while respecting individual comfort levels.
2. **Manipulative Tactile Feedback:** Applied when the teacher aims to correct physical awareness or movement execution, ensuring the student's consent and comfort are prioritised.
3. **Guidance Tactile Feedback:** Provided to guide the student through a specific action, with continuous monitoring of the student's verbal and non-verbal responses to ensure comfort and consent.

## Implementation

- Tutors will seek the student's explicit approval before any form of physical contact. Consent and non-consent should be documented where possible.
- The policy will be included in both student and staff Policies and handbooks OneDrive Link, on the college's website, and will be reviewed regularly to incorporate feedback and evolving best practices.
- Touch will be used positively to support teaching and learning strategies, as well as part of specific feedback methodologies that align with the student's comfort levels
- If a staff member has concerns about a student's comfort with touch, they will consult with the Assistant Principal (Student Wellbeing) or another designated safeguarding officer to take appropriate actions.

- Students are encouraged to communicate their preferences regarding touch using any of the provided channels, including private conversations, emails, anonymous feedback forms, or scheduled meetings with a designated staff member.

## **Guidelines**

### **Transparency and Consent**

Staff must clearly communicate the purpose of using touch as a pedagogical tool. Whenever possible, this should include an explanation of the rationale behind physical contact.

Consent must be obtained from students prior to any form of touch.

Age, gender, and cultural factors should be carefully considered by staff as they might dictate the type and purpose of touch. Staff should be attentive to both verbal and non-verbal cues indicating a student's comfort or discomfort with touch. Any indication of discomfort should prompt immediate cessation of contact.

To strengthen the focus on consent, the college adopts a proactive to obtaining consent. For example, we consider it good practice for staff to ask before the class begins if there are any students who prefer not to be touched. An example of a question could be: "I may use tactile feedback in class today if I feel the need to do so, please raise your hand if you prefer not to be touched". Staff are also encouraged to use consent check-ins throughout the class, where staff regularly asks for consent, especially before new types of touch are introduced.

The use of touch should be regularly discussed between members of staff.

### **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity**

Staff should be mindful of cultural, religious and individual differences that may affect a student's comfort with touch. Efforts should be made to understand and respect these differences by discussing preferences with students at regular intervals.

In regard to gender-specific considerations, such as transgender and non-binaries gender identities, staff should inquire about and respect students' pronouns and preferences related to physical contact, which can vary widely across different gender identities.

### **Disability Accommodations**

Staff should be mindful of provisions for students with different abilities, ensuring that alternative teaching methods are available when touch is not appropriate or desired. This could include the use of verbal instructions, visual demonstrations or tactile learning aids that do not require direct physical contact.

### **Trauma-informed Approach**

A trauma-informed approach is adopted, recognising that some students may have past experiences that affect their comfort with touch. Staff must create an environment where students feel safe to express their boundaries.

## **Feedback and Communication Channels**

Students are provided with multiple avenues to express their preferences or concerns regarding touch. For example, verbal communication at the start or end of the class, tutorials, meetings with personal tutor, digital communication. In addition, students inform the Assistant Principal (Student Wellbeing) or another member of staff who will make the students' preferences known to the teaching staff.

## **Ongoing Training and Professional Development**

Regular training on equality, diversity, inclusion, and consent is mandatory for all staff. This training covers the appropriate use of touch, understanding consent and creating an inclusive environment.

Staff is also educated on the latest EDI research and practices to ensure they remain informed and sensitive to student needs.

## **Regular Policy Review and Feedback**

The touch policy is reviewed regularly, incorporating feedback from both students and staff to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

An annual review meeting is scheduled to discuss any concerns or improvements to the policy, with input from a diverse range of students and staff members.

## **Complimentary Policies**

- Safeguarding Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Student Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy

## **Conclusion**

Bird College prioritises the Touch Policy to be more inclusive, trauma-informed, and sensitive to the diverse needs of its students. This helps to adopt a learning environment that respects all students' boundaries and promotes a culture of respect and inclusivity.

## Appendix

Gender Differences: Research shows that men and women often interpret touch differently. For instance, women are generally more comfortable with affectionate touch in both public and private settings compared to men, who may interpret the same gesture as more intrusive depending on the context and relationship (Stier & Hall, 1984; Hall & Veccia, 1990). Therefore, the policy could mention in appendices (perhaps) that tutors be mindful of these gendered perceptions and ensure that any touch is appropriate and consensual for the given situation.

Cultural Sensitivity: Cultural background also plays a critical role in how touch is perceived. Some cultures, such as those in East Asia, may have more reserved norms around physical touch, especially in professional or educational settings, whereas others might be more open to touch as a form of communication (Hall, 1966). This means that tutors need to be particularly cautious about applying touch with students from different cultural backgrounds to avoid discomfort or misunderstanding.

Age Considerations: Younger children, particularly in early childhood education, tend to rely on touch as a part of emotional development and behavioral control. Studies have shown that touch can help reduce stress and improve conformity among younger students (Cekaite & Bergnehr, 2018). However, as students grow older, their preferences for physical contact shift, and they may become more sensitive to touch based on their personal boundaries and past experiences (Hertenstein et al., 2006). Tutors should be aware of these developmental changes and adjust their behavior accordingly.

### References:

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