



WAIMEA COLLEGE

Policies and Procedures

Procedure: Professional Boundaries Guidelines

Policy Reference: NAG 3 – Employer Responsibilities

Rationale

Secondary school teaching is a professional occupation. Teachers are bound by the professional standards contained in the Secondary School Teachers Collective Employment Agreement and the Education Council of Aotearoa, New Zealand's registration criteria and Education Council's Code of Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession. Teachers should also be guided by common sense in that they are the adult in the student/teacher relationship.

The Board of Trustees has a clear expectation that teachers at the school will at all times maintain the highest professional standards and conduct. An important element of these professional standards is maintaining professional boundaries between teachers and students.

A teacher is in a position of trust and power. Their actions must always be guided by the principle of: *what is in the best interests of the students and the whole school (including staff).*

Purpose

1. To ensure that all staff are fully aware of the importance of professional boundaries between themselves and students as part of their professional practice and to keep themselves and students safe.
2. To identify behaviour and practices which could undermine those professional boundaries and lead to the teacher/student relationship being compromised.
3. To identify the adverse consequences including disciplinary action which could occur if professional boundaries are not maintained.

Guidelines

1. General

- 1.1 Staff new to the college will receive advice on professional boundaries as part of the induction process.
- 1.2 Building positive relationships with students is a key ingredient to successful teaching and learning. This relationship should be based on mutual trust, respect and focused on the students' academic and pastoral needs.
- 1.3 There is an important distinction between being 'friendly' with students which is commendable and being 'their friend' which is to be avoided. A similar important distinction exists between being 'friendly' with students and being 'familiar'.

- 1.4 Teachers are employed primarily to deliver the curriculum and assess the progress and achievement of students. This process should take place in a safe environment where encouragement, good humour, enthusiasm and positive reflection are practiced.
- 1.5 Counsellors are employed to offer counselling services to students and staff (for a limited number of sessions).
- 1.6 Each member of staff has a specific role in a school e.g. Teacher, Dean, Counsellor or Support Staff. It is essential that individuals work within the scope of their own job description and respect the expertise of others.

2. Unsafe Behaviour/Practices (Keeping yourself and students safe)

The following behaviours and practices should be avoided as they have the potential to undermine professional boundaries and could give rise to complaints:

- 2.1 Touching students without their consent. Any contact should be initiated by the student and be in public. (See Physical Restraint Policy)
- 2.2 Communicating with students for social purposes via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, text messaging. It is preferable to use another Facebook page if necessary for any professional communication.
- 2.3 Texting, emailing students with personal comments. This is unwise at any time but particularly in the evenings, weekends or school holidays.
- 2.4 If you are conducting an activity with one student (such as 1:1 coaching, tutoring), other staff and the student's parents should be made aware of it.
- 2.5 Giving advice to students outside the teachers area of expertise e.g. depression, suicidal thoughts, sexual health, family relationship issues (they should be referred to the Guidance Department).
- 2.6 Making inappropriate comments or engaging in conversation with students on such topics as dating, their attractiveness, social life, etc.
- 2.6 Discussing confidential or sensitive information about students with other students (either privately or in a classroom setting).
- 2.7 Allowing students into your classroom or office for social reasons.
- 2.8 Discussing with students your own marital or personal problems.
- 2.9 If transporting one student in your vehicle, the student should be in the back seat and if possible another adult should know about this.
- 2.10 Socialising with students particularly at hotels, bars, nightclubs, parties or allowing them to visit your home.

- 2.11 Giving or accepting expensive or intimate gifts to/or from students.
- 2.12 If you need to see a student, endeavour to have others present or to be visible to others. (This however is dependent on the context).

3. Consequences of Unsafe Practices

Engaging in unsafe practices or behaviour of the type described above can:

- 3.1 Damage the professional reputation and standing of the teacher.
- 3.2 Lead to complaints from students, parents and colleagues.
- 3.3 More serious breaches can lead to formal complaints to the Board of Trustees, Ministry of Education or Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand. If the complaints are upheld they could result in disciplinary action including the possibility of dismissal and deregistration.

Reviewed: December 2018