

# AFRICA EDUCATIONAL TRUST (AET)

## Child Protection Policy

The following policy draws on the guidelines produced by the Charity Commission, the Keeping Children Safe Consortium and the child protection policy produced by UNICEF. It reflects the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This policy also applies to vulnerable adults.

### **Statement of Intent**

The aim of this policy is to ensure that through the work of Africa Educational Trust, children are protected from abuse and exploitation, both directly and indirectly. We believe that child protection is paramount to our work regardless of their age<sup>1</sup>, gender, religious beliefs, racial origin or ethnic identity, culture, class, disability or sexual orientation. AET recognises that abuse comes in many forms, including physical, sexual and emotional, and that bullying and neglect also constitute abuse.

This policy is applicable to and must be adhered to by all staff working in AET in UK, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda. AET staff/representative(s) are responsible for briefing all partners as to their accountability under the policy, and to promoting their own development of child protection policies and practice.

Any allegations of child abuse in connection with the work of AET and people involved with the organisation will be taken seriously. The Executive Director will handle any concerns raised by staff members together with the (internally) named member of staff responsible child protection process and training. For employees, failure to adhere to the Child Protection policy could lead to dismissal or constitute Gross Misconduct. For others (volunteers, supporters, donors, partners), their individual relationship with AET may be terminated.

The policy is to be reviewed on an annual basis.

### **The Policy**

To achieve a child-safe organisation, staff, volunteers and partners need to:

- Increase their awareness of what constitutes child abuse
- Understand how to respond to concerns or disclosures of abuse
- Minimise any potential risks to children through:
  - i) Following a systematic recruitment and selection process for staff, consultants and volunteers
  - ii) Following guidelines for recording and publishing images of children
  - iii) Working with communities and authorities to improve local capacity to prevent and deal with situations of child abuse
  - iv) Following a code of conduct

### **I) Recruitment and Selection of Staff**

All persons under recruitment will be expected to:

- Undergo a face-to-face interview. For permanent members of staff this will include a panel of more than one interviewer.
- Provide 2 character references that are not family members and to whom the candidate has been known for over two years.
- Read and adhere to the child protection statement and related policies.
- Undergo a CRB check if the candidate will come into direct contact with children over a sustained period of time (UK only).
- Make management aware of any criminal convictions, including spent convictions.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of child protection legislation the term 'child' refers to anyone up to 18 years of age.

## **II) Communications involving children and use of images**

Africa Educational Trust understands the sensitive issue around the publishing of information and images of children. Whilst acknowledging the need to use personal stories and images of children, AET is committed to the rights and protection of children and encourages its partners to respect children's dignity and identity through:

- The responsible use of children's images and stories. All images are to be screened ensuring they do not impinge on a child's dignity and privacy.
- Obtaining permission from parent/guardian and child where applicable
- Respecting a child's need for anonymity for their protection and wellbeing, and using a different name for published materials

## **III) International work and child protection policy**

As the majority of AET's work takes place outside the UK, we acknowledge that there are different interpretations of what constitutes 'abuse' and how these cases are dealt with. As part of this agreement we therefore commit to promoting child protection policies and standards with all partner organisations and stakeholders, believing that strengthening grass-roots knowledge of child protection issues will reduce the risk of such occurrence. AET acknowledges that many of the children directly or indirectly impacted through its work are extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation especially girls, those affected by HIV/AIDS, orphans, those living in extreme poverty and those living in conflict affected regions.

### **Keeping children safe from harm:**

We have a responsibility to protect children we work with. We will seek out training opportunities for all staff involved in children's work to ensure that they develop and maintain the necessary skills and understanding to safeguard children are able to recognise the signs and symptoms of possible abuse and neglect, and know the procedures for reporting and recording their concerns.

## **IV) Code of Conduct**

The code of conduct outlines what behaviour is deemed acceptable when dealing with children. All staff and partners should adhere to the following code of conduct when they have contact (direct and non-direct) with children. This includes community resource persons, literacy facilitators/teachers and those directly employed by partners to work with children.

### **Do:**

- Treat children equally, fairly and with respect
- Manage groups of children without resort to corporal punishment
- Encourage the participation of children in decision making within their schools, communities and the wider world
- Empower children to understand their rights, including the right to be safe from abuse
- Be sensitive to individual beliefs and religions
- As far as possible, ensure that you have another adult present with you when you have contact with children
- Try and be visible when you are with a child
- Be aware of situations that pose a risk and manage these accordingly
- Obtain the consent from a child before taking their photo or interviewing them
- Wait for appropriate physical contact to be initiated by the child e.g. holding hands
- Report any concerns or disclosure of abuse in line with the reporting framework

### **Do Not:**

- Physically hit or threaten to injure a child e.g. as part of class discipline
- Engage in any sexual activity (contact or non-contact) with children under the age of 18
- Put a child in danger
- Engage in a relationship with a child that could be deemed exploitative

- Spend excessive time alone with one child away from others
- Share activities or spaces with children that are outside of a standard professional capacity
- Perform tasks of a personal nature that the child is capable of doing for themselves (e.g. washing)
- Verbally or emotionally abuse a child by acting in a way that shames or degrades them
- Endorse the participation of a child/young person in abusive activities e.g. bullying
- Make suggestive or discriminatory comments

### **Recording and reporting incidents**

- Recording and reporting concerns should be informed by the principle of the best interest of the child
- We will ensure that staff and others are clear what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children, including providing guidance on confidentiality and information sharing
- AET will develop and make available a standard report form
- Each office should have available relevant contact details for child protection services, social services, police and emergency medical help.
- A staff member should discuss any concerns immediately with the manager for that location. This should be done in private.
- The manager will then report to the designated staff member for child protection, who will work with the manager to ensure the appropriate action is taken
- We will take seriously any concerns raised and take appropriate action is taken to support and protect children where concerns of possible abuse arise.

As AET delivers projects in partnership with schools and communities, AET and partner staff should be ready to advise school and community leaders on the right action to take and on referral pathways available to them.

### **Ramifications of misconduct**

- In the case of an allegation by a named individual from a verifiable source, the accused individual will be suspended (on full pay if relevant) pending outcome of an independent investigation.
- The area manager, in consultation with the executive director and designated child protection officer, will determine appropriate disciplinary measure and other steps to take, including whether the incident should be reported to the police.