



# Low-Level Concern Policy

Signed:  **Headteacher**

 **Chair of Governors**

**Date: September 25**

**Review Date: September 26**

## Rationale

This policy should be read in conjunction with our Child Protection Manual and Procedures, Staff Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Policy, to enable staff to share their concerns, no matter how small, about their own or another member of staff's behaviour.

The purpose of the policy is to create and embed a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which the clear values and expected behaviour, are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff. Our school deals with all concerns about adults working in or on behalf of the school appropriately and promptly.

Our school seeks to create an environment where staff are encouraged and feel confident to self-refer, where, for example, they have found themselves in a situation that could be misinterpreted, might appear compromising to others, and/or on reflection, they believe they have behaved in such a way that they consider falls below expected professional standards.

This policy seeks to:

- Ensure that staff are clear about, and confident to distinguish between, expected and appropriate behaviour from concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour – in themselves and others, and the delineation of professional boundaries and reporting lines;
- Empower staff to share any low-level concerns with the DSL;
- Help staff address unprofessional behaviour, and help the individual to correct such behaviour at an early stage;
- Identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour – including any patterns – that may need to be consulted upon with (on a no-names basis if appropriate), or referred to the LADO;

- Provide for responsive, sensitive and proportionate handling of such concerns when they are raised;
- Help identify any weaknesses in the organisation's safeguarding system.

### **Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2021**

The following is taken from Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2021:

407. *As part of their whole school approach to safeguarding, schools and colleges should ensure that they promote an open and transparent culture in which all concerns about all adults working in or on behalf of the school or college (including supply teachers, volunteers and contractors) are dealt with promptly and appropriately.*

408. *Creating a culture in which all concerns about adults (including allegations that do not meet the harms threshold (see Part Four - Section one)) are shared responsibly and with the right person, recorded and dealt with appropriately, is critical. If implemented correctly, this should encourage an open and transparent culture; enable schools and colleges to identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour early; minimise the risk of abuse; and ensure that adults working in or on behalf of the school or college are clear about professional boundaries and act within these boundaries, and in accordance with the ethos and values of the institution.*

### **Defining a Low-Level Concern**

A low-level concern is one that **does not** meet the harm threshold as stated in the school's Safeguarding Policy. That is, when anyone working in a school (including volunteers, supply staff and contractors) has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she may pose a risk of harm to children;
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children (which includes behaviour that may have happened **outside** school posing a transferable risk to children).

Responses and actions to behaviours that may meet the harm threshold are contained specifically within school's Safeguarding Policy, 'Allegations Regarding Staff (or volunteers)'. These should be reported to the Headteacher without delay.

A low-level concern is **any** concern – **no matter how small**, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt' (i.e. they *believe* it could be a concern) – that an adult working in or on behalf of the Academy may have acted in a way that:

- Is inconsistent with the Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work; and
- Does not meet the allegations threshold, or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- Being over friendly with children;
- Having favourites;
- Taking photographs of children on their mobile phone;
- Engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door; or,
- Using inappropriate sexualised, intimidating or offensive language.

Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum, from the inadvertent or thoughtless, or behaviour that may look to be inappropriate, but might not be in specific circumstances, through to that which is ultimately intended to enable abuse.

### **Responsibilities of Staff**

It is important that **all** staff are clear of their expectations. This is covered annually by the Designated Safeguarding Lead, and as part of the induction for new staff.

It is crucial that **any** concerns in relation to a staff member's behaviour, including those which do not meet the harm threshold, are shared responsibly and with the DSL. This should be done without delay.

Where there are concerns/allegations about the DSL, this should be referred to the Chair of Governors.

Staff members who are concerned about how their behaviour may have been interpreted, or, on reflection, re-evaluate their behaviour as one that may have been in contrary to the Staff Code of Conduct and expectations, should self-refer to the DSL.

### **Dealing with Low-Level Concerns**

All low-level concerns may be shared verbally with the DSL in the first instance, but must then be recorded in writing (this may be done over email or using the CPOMS and 'child-child' confidential reporting area).

The record should include:

- Details of the concern;
- The context in which the concern arose;
- Action taken.

The name of the individual sharing their concerns should also be noted, but if the individual wishes to remain anonymous then that should be respected as far as reasonably possible.

Where the low-level concern is provided verbally, the DSL should make an appropriate record of the conversation, either at the time, or immediately following the discussion, paying heed to the details above. Records will be signed, timed, and dated.

Records will remain confidential in accordance with Data Protection policies and GDPR.

## **Responding to a Low-Level Concern**

The DSL will in the first instance satisfy themselves that it is a low-level concern and should not be reclassified as a higher-level concern/allegation and dealt with under the appropriate procedure below.

The circumstances in which a low-level concern might be reclassified are where:

- (a) The threshold is met for a higher-level concern/allegation;
- (b) There is a pattern of low-level concerns which collectively amount to a higher-level concern/allegation; or
- (c) There is other information which when taken into account leads to a higher-level concern/allegation.

Where the DSL is in any doubt whatsoever, advice will be sought from the LADO, if necessary, on a 'no-names' basis.

Having established that the concern is low-level, the DSL will discuss it with the individual who has raised it, and will take any other steps to investigate it as necessary. If the concern has been raised via a third party, the Head of School should collect as much evidence as possible by speaking:

- Directly to the person who raised the concern, unless it has been raised anonymously;
- To the individual involved and any witnesses.

The information collected will help them to categorise the type of behaviour and determine what further action may need to be taken. All of this needs to be recorded along with the rationale for their decisions and action taken. Reports about supply staff and contractors will be notified to their employers, so any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

Most low-level concerns by their very nature are likely to be minor and will be dealt with by means of management guidance, training etc. In dealing with a low-level concern with a member of staff, this will be approached in a sensitive and proportionate way. In many cases, a low-level concern will simply require a conversation with the individual about whom the concern has been raised.

Any conversation with a member of staff following a concern will include being clear with the individual as to why their behaviour is concerning, problematic or inappropriate, what change is required in their behaviour, enquiring what, if any, support they might need in order to achieve and maintain that, and being clear about the consequences if they fail to reach the required standard or repeat the behaviour in question. Ongoing and transparent monitoring of the individual's behaviour may be appropriate. An action plan or risk assessment may be required. Some concerns may trigger the Academy's disciplinary, grievance or whistleblowing procedures, which will be followed where appropriate. Some concerns may be related to performance management, and advice may be sought from the Academy HR officer/advisor.

## **Monitoring of Low-Level Concerns**

The DSL will securely retain confidential files on low-level concerns. A central log will be shared and monitored by the Headteacher on a regular basis to ensure that all such concerns are being dealt with promptly and appropriately, and that any potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour are identified. A record will be kept of this review within safeguarding governor meeting minutes.

No record will be made of the concern on the individual's personnel file (and no mention made in job references) unless either:

(a) The concern (or group of concerns) has been reclassified as a higher-level concern; or (b) The concern (or group of concerns) is sufficiently serious to result in formal action under the School's grievance, capability or disciplinary procedure.

### **Further Clarity around Allegation vs. Low-Level Concern vs. Appropriate Conduct**

#### **Allegation**

Behaviour which indicates that an adult who works with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.

#### **Low- Level Concern**

Any concern, no matter how small, even if no more than a 'nagging doubt' that an adult has acted in a manner which:

- Is not consistent with an organisation's Code of Conduct; and/or
- Relates to their conduct outside of work that, even if not lined to particular act or omission, has caused a sense of unease about that adult's suitability to work with children.

#### **Appropriate Conduct**

- Behaviour which is entirely consistent with the organisations Code of Conduct, and the law.

# Flowchart for Dealing With Allegations

