Low-level Safeguarding Concerns Policy

THIS POLICY APPLIES ACROSS ALL TRUST SCHOOLS AND SERVICES

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Change Log	
Update:	**This policy was updated to accord with the 2024 iteration of Keeping Children Safe in Education and the Responsibilities of the DSL to 'Hold and share information'. In particular 'to keep detailed, accurate, secure written records of all concerns, discussions and decisions made including the rationale for those decisions.** **No further changes have been made because of the publication of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025.**
Location:	• Updated Legal Framework • Updated Roles and responsibilities • Updated Record Keeping • Updated References • Updated Appendix to include rationale for action points
Summary Date:	**21/08/2025**
Completed by:	**Julian Kenshole – Director of Governance**

Introduction

The Trust understands the importance of acknowledging, recording and reporting all safeguarding concerns, regardless of their perceived severity. We understand that, while a concern may be low-level, that concern can escalate over time to become much more serious.

Our schools pride themselves on creating a safe environment for pupils, and our staff are expected to adhere to high standards of behaviour when it comes to professional conduct regarding pupils. The school has clear professional boundaries which all staff are made aware of and will adhere to. We are committed to ensuring that any safeguarding concerns are dealt with as soon as they arise and before they have had a chance to become more severe, to minimise the risk of harm posed to our pupils and other children.

Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- DfE (2025) 'Keeping children safe in education 2025'
- DfE (2023) 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Safeguarding Children / Child Protection and Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Physical Intervention Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, a low-level concern is defined as any concern had about an adult's behaviour towards, or concerning, a child that does not meet the harms threshold (see below), or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral at the time of its reporting.
Low-level concerns refer to behaviour on the part of a staff member towards pupils that is considered inappropriate in line with statutory safeguarding advice, the Staff Code of Conduct, and the 'Appropriate and inappropriate behaviour' subsection of this policy.

Low-level concerns are differentiated from concerns that can cause harm. The harms threshold is the point at which a concern is no longer low-level and constitutes a threat of harm to a child. This threshold is defined as accusations that an adult 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 in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.
- Behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children, including behaviour that has happened outside of school.

While low-level concerns are, by their nature, less serious than concerns which meet the harms threshold, the school understands that many serious safeguarding concerns often begin with low-level concerns, e.g. being overly friendly with children. The school will ensure that all staff are aware of the importance of recognising concerns before they have an opportunity to escalate from low-level to serious.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Directors and Local Governing Committee is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the school complies with its duties under child protection and safeguarding legislation.
- Ensuring that policies, procedures, and training opportunities with regard to reporting safeguarding concerns are compliant and effective.
- Ensuring that there is an effective Staff Code of Conduct that outlines behavioural expectations.
- Ensuring that a suitably trained DSL has been appointed, alongside deputy DSLs where appropriate.
- Ensuring that there are robust reporting arrangements, including inter-agency collaboration.
- Ensuring that there are appropriate procedures in place to handle allegations and low-level concerns reported against members of staff.

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Being a point of contact for all staff when they have safeguarding concerns, whether serious or low-level.
- Assessing whether safeguarding concerns about staff members meet the threshold for being termed an allegation, or whether they are low-level concerns.
- Implementing this policy, and all related policies, throughout the school, and ensuring that staff adhere to it at all times.
- Safeguarding pupils' wellbeing and maintaining public trust in the teaching profession.
- Ensuring that all staff have undertaken safeguarding training.
- Ensuring that all staff have an ongoing awareness of low-level concerns and reporting procedures.

The DSL is responsible for:

- Being a point of contact for all staff when they have safeguarding concerns, whether serious or low-level.
- Assessing whether safeguarding concerns about staff members meet the threshold for being termed an allegation, or whether they are low-level concerns.
- Following all procedures outlined in this policy for acting upon low-level concerns.
- Liaising with the headteacher, staff members, the governing board and all relevant agencies to act upon concerns, where necessary.
- Keeping detailed, accurate and secure records of all low-level concerns and keeping records of decisions made regarding safeguarding concerns, including the rationale for those decisions.

The Trust Safeguarding Officer is responsible for:

- Providing impartial advice to the Headteacher and / or DSL.
- Where appropriate to conduct investigations on behalf of the Headteacher.
- Regular review reports of low-level concerns to identify patterns and to advise if escalation may be required.

Staff are responsible for:

- Adhering to all the relevant policies and procedures, including acting within the Staff Code of Conduct at all times.
- Interacting with pupils in a way that is respectful and appropriate for their level of authority and has due regard to the power imbalance between pupils and staff members.
- Understanding the importance of reporting low-level safeguarding concerns.
- Reporting any and all safeguarding concerns they may have about pupils immediately.
- Reporting any and all safeguarding concerns they may have about the behaviour of a member of staff immediately – this includes any member of staff using the building for other purposes/volunteers/visitors/contracted staff.

Prevention amongst staff

Appropriate and inappropriate behaviour

The school will ensure that all staff members are aware of the standards of appropriate behaviour expected towards pupils.

Staff will ensure that they pay due regard to the fact that:

- They are in a unique position of trust, care, responsibility, authority, and influence in relation to pupils.
- There is a significant power imbalance in the pupil-staff dynamic.
- There are more stringent expectations on their behaviour with regard to pupils due to their position as a public professional.

Staff will remain aware of the fact that all pupils under the age of 18, regardless of the phase and year group they are at within the school, are children by law – resultantly, staff will ensure that they do not assume maturity on behalf of a pupil and do not engage with pupils as they would with their own peers. Staff will be aware that where there is any doubt regarding whether the behaviour of another adult is appropriate, this should be immediately reported to the DSL and headteacher. If the concern is in respect of the Headteacher or other centrally employed Trust staff it should be reported to the Chief Executive Officer. If the concern is in respect to the Chief Executive Officer it should be reported to the Chair of the Board of Directors.

Inappropriate behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum, from inadvertent or thoughtless behaviour to behaviour which is ultimately intended to enable abuse. Examples of inappropriate behaviour that would constitute a low-level concern that should be reported to the DSL include, but are not limited to:

- Being overly friendly with children – this could include, but is not limited to, communicating with a child through personal social media or allowing inappropriate conversations or enquiries to occur with pupils, e.g. conversations that are about a staff member's personal life or are of a sexual nature.
- Having favourites – this could include, but is not limited to, calling pupils by pet names or terms of endearment, or buying pupils gifts.
- Taking photographs of children on their personal mobile phones or devices.
- Engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door.
- Humiliating pupils.

Staff will be aware that some of the above low-level concerns may meet the harms threshold depending on certain factors, e.g. the age or needs of the child or the content of exchanged messages, and that some of the above incidents may not be concerns in context, e.g. a pre-approved, one-to-one meeting with a child behind a closed door between the child and a school counsellor who has received all appropriate safety checks.

Staff will also be made aware that behaviour which raises concerns may not be intentionally inappropriate, and that this does not negate the need to report the behaviour. Staff members who engage in low-level inappropriate behaviour in relation to pupils inadvertently will be made aware and supported to correct this behaviour in line with the Staff Code of Conduct. The headteacher will also evaluate whether additional training would be beneficial for any staff members exhibiting concerning behaviour, or the staff cohort as a whole where low-level concerning behaviour is seen more widely.

School Culture

The school understands that spotting the early signs of harmful behaviour towards children can be difficult, and that many will be hesitant to report concerns they have about their colleagues' behaviour, particularly the behaviour of their superiors. Staff are encouraged to maintain an attitude that recognises that abuse can happen anywhere, in any setting, and that anyone can be a perpetrator regardless of their age, sex, level of authority, personality, etc.

The school will ensure that all staff members have received training as part of their induction that outlines appropriate behaviour towards pupils for staff members. All will be made aware of the 'Appropriate and inappropriate behaviour subsection' of this policy, as well as the Staff Code of Conduct.

Staff will address any questions they have regarding safeguarding to the DSL. The school will work to foster an environment where personal and professional boundaries are clearly set and respected for all individuals in the school community, e.g. pupils are not treated as friends and an appropriate professional distance is maintained by staff.

The school will ensure that all staff are sufficiently trained surrounding the reporting of safeguarding concerns as part of their induction, and that refresher training is conducted as necessary. The school will ensure that all staff understand how to recognise and report safeguarding concerns. Staff will be trained to identify inappropriate, concerning, or problematic behaviour towards pupils that may indicate a safeguarding concern, and how to identify signs of abuse or harm in pupils.

Evaluating school culture following concerns

The school will ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the school's culture and whether or not it has enabled the inappropriate behaviour to occur. The headteacher will review whether any changes need to be made to relevant policies or training programmes in light of any evaluations of the school's culture, in order to achieve an open and transparent culture that deals with all concerns promptly and appropriately.

Reporting concerns

The school will promote a culture in which safeguarding pupils is the uppermost priority, beyond any perceived professional loyalties to colleagues, ensuring that staff are actively encouraged to report concerns, regardless of their relationship with the staff member.

Staff will report all safeguarding concerns they have to the headteacher, DSL, or other nominated person immediately in line with the procedures laid out in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. Staff members will report concerns without undue delay. Where the report concerns a specific incident, staff members will report their concerns no later than 24 hours after the incident where possible. Staff members will be aware that concerns are still worth reporting even if they do not seem serious.

Staff members will report their concerns to the headteacher or deputy headteacher verbally, or by submitting a Low-level Concern Reporting Form – **See Appendix 1**. When submitting concerns, staff will take care to ensure that they observe confidentiality and follow the procedures for Allegations of Abuse Against Staff, to protect the identity of all individuals to which the concern pertains as far as possible.

Staff members may request anonymity when reporting a concern, and the school will endeavour to respect this as far as possible. The school will not, however, promise anonymity to staff members who report concerns in case the situation arises where they must be named, e.g. where it is necessary for a fair disciplinary hearing. In circumstances where it becomes necessary to identify an individual this should be discussed with the employee and explained to them as early as possible. Where possible, the school will try to encourage staff to consent to be named, as this will help to create a culture of openness and transparency. In line with the Whistleblowing Policy, staff will be protected from potential repercussions caused by reporting a genuine concern.

Where a low-level concern relates to the headteacher or other centrally employed Trust staff it should be reported to the Chief Executive Officer. If the concern is in respect to the Chief Executive Officer it should be reported to the Chair of the Board of Directors.

Where a low-level concern relates to a person who uses the building for other purposes, supply agency or a contractor to work in the school, staff will also be required to report this to the headteacher and DSL, who will, in turn, inform the employer of the subject of the concern. It may be necessary to discuss with the supply agency (or agencies), whether it is appropriate to suspend the supply teacher, or redeploy them to another part of the school, whilst an investigation is carried out. Whilst supply agencies will need to be fully involved and co-operate with any enquiries from the LADO, police and/or children's social care, the school may need to take the lead on an investigation. This is due to the fact that agencies will not have direct access to children or other school staff, therefore may find it difficult to collate evidence as part of an investigation. The school may also be required to liaise with the LADO in relation to the referral process.

Self-reporting

On occasion, a member of staff may feel as though they have acted in a way that:

- Could be misinterpreted.
- Could appear compromising to others.
- They realise, upon reflection, falls below the standards set out in the Staff Code of Conduct.

The school will ensure that an environment is maintained that encourages staff members to self-report if they feel as though they have acted inappropriately or in a way that could be construed as inappropriate upon reflection. The headteacher and DSL will, to the best of their abilities, maintain a culture of approachability for staff members, and will be understanding and sensitive towards those who self-report.

Staff members who self-report will not be treated more favourably during any resulting investigations than staff members who were reported by someone else; however, their self-awareness and intentions will be taken into consideration.

Evaluating concerns

Where the headteacher is notified of a safeguarding concern, they will use their professional judgement to determine if the concern is low-level or if it must be immediately escalated, e.g. where a child is at immediate risk of harm. When deciding if a concern is low-level, the headteacher will discuss the concern with the DSL and the Trust Safeguarding Officer, and will seek advice from the LADO where there is any doubt about whether the concern in fact meets the harm threshold. When seeking external advice, the headteacher will ensure they adhere to the Data Protection Policy, and the principles outlined in the 'Confidential and Information Sharing' section of in the Safeguarding Children / Child Protection and Policy.

To evaluate a concern, the headteacher and DSL will:

- Speak to the individual who raised the concern to determine the facts and obtain any relevant additional information.
- Interview and take witness statements from all parties concerned
- Review the information and determine whether the behaviour displayed by the individual about whom the concern was reported is consistent with the Staff Code of Conduct and the law.
- Determine whether the concern, when considered alongside any other low-level concerns previously made about the same individual, should be reclassified as an allegation and dealt with alongside the Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy.
- Consult with, and seek advice from the Trust Safeguarding Lead when in doubt over the course of action to follow.
- Speak to the individual about whom the concern has been raised to inform them of the concern and to give them an opportunity to respond to it.
- Ensure that accurate and detailed records are kept of all internal and external conversations regarding evaluating the concern, and any actions or decisions taken.

Acting on concerns

Where the concern is unfounded
If it is discovered upon evaluation that the low-level concern refers to behaviour that was not considered to be in breach of the Staff Code of Conduct, or the Law, the headteacher will speak to the

individual about whom the concern was made to discuss their behaviour, why and how the behaviour may have been misconstrued, and what they can do to avoid such misunderstandings in the future. The headteacher will also speak to the individual who shared the concern, outlining why the behaviour reported is consistent with school standards and the law. The headteacher will take care to ensure that conversations with individuals who reported concerns that transpired to be unfounded do not deter that individual from reporting concerns in the future.

Where the concern is low-level
Where the headteacher determines that a concern is low-level, the school will respond to this in a sensitive and proportionate manner. The following procedure will be followed:

- The DSL holds a meeting with the individual about whom the concern was reported, during which they will:

    o Talk to the individual in a non-accusatory and sympathetic manner.
    o Inform them of how their behaviour was perceived by the individual who reported the concern (without naming them, where possible).
    o Clearly state what about their behaviour was inappropriate and problematic.
    o Discuss the reasons for the behaviour with the individual.
    o Inform the individual clearly what about their behaviour needs to change.
    o Discuss any support that the individual may require in order to achieve the proper standards of behaviour.
    o Allow the individual the opportunity to respond to the concern in their own words.

- The DSL asks the individual to re-read the Staff Code of Conduct depending on the nature of the concern.
- The DSL and the headteacher will consider whether the individual should receive guidance, supervision or any further training.
- Where considered appropriate in the circumstances, the headteacher will develop an action plan, with input from the individual, that outlines ongoing and transparent monitoring of the individual's behaviour and any other support measures implemented to ensure the staff member's behaviour improves.
- Where it is necessary to undergo an investigation into the behaviour, this will be done discreetly, and information will only be disclosed to individuals on a need-to-know basis.
- Where any pupil or other individual has been made to feel uncomfortable by the individual's behaviour, they will be offered pastoral support, where appropriate.

The headteacher will ensure that all details of the low-level concern, including any resultant actions taken, are recorded (**see Appendix 2**) and securely stored in line with the Data Protection Policy. The headteacher will ensure that these records are kept organised and up-to-date, and that it is easy to refer back to them if any other concerns are reported about the same individual.

The specific approach to handling low-level concerns will be adapted on a case-by-case basis. It is unlikely that a low-level concern will result in disciplinary procedures; however, individuals may be given warnings in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure where behaviour does not improve once it is brought to their attention. Where it is deemed that the conduct is not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO, but may merit consulting with and seeking advice from the LADO then action should be taken in accordance with the LADO advice. Where behaviour does not improve over a longer period of time, the concerns will be escalated and dealt with in line with the Safeguarding Children / Child Protection Policy.

Where the concern is serious

The headteacher may decide upon evaluation that a concern is more serious than the reporter originally thought, e.g. when viewed in conjunction with other evidence or other concerns made about the same individual. Where this decision is made, the concern will be escalated, and dealt with as an allegation. The headteacher will then follow the procedures laid out in the Safeguarding Children / Child Protection Policy where the harm test might be met and will, in all cases, involve a referral to the LADO.

Record keeping

The school will retain all records of low-level concerns, including those that were found to be unfounded. The headteacher will ensure that all records include the most accurate and up-to-date information and will store them in the electronic low-level concerns folder hosted centrally by the Trust on Microsoft Teams. The headteacher will ensure that all low-level concerns are stored together, in an organised and consistent manner, to ensure they can be easily reviewed and analysed where necessary.

Records will include:

- A clear and comprehensive summary of the concern.
- The context in which the concern arose.
- Details of how the concern was followed up and resolved.
- A note of any action taken, decisions reached, and the outcome.
- The name of the individual sharing concerns – if the individual wishes to remain anonymous, this will be respected as far as reasonably possible.
- The rationale for decisions made regarding any concerns.

All low-level concerns will be recorded in writing - **see Appendix 2: Record of action of low-level concern.**

The DSL together with the Trust Safeguarding Lead will periodically review the recent low-level concerns made to ensure that they are being appropriately dealt with and to check for any concerning behaviour patterns amongst the staff cohort as a whole. The DSL will keep records of these reviews.

Where any concerning patterns of behaviour have been identified with regard to a member of staff, the DSL will consult with the headteacher to decide on a course of action. Where a pattern of behaviour has become so concerning that it meets the harms threshold, this will be referred to the LADO as soon as practicable. It should be considered whether there are any wider cultural issues within the school that enabled the behaviour to occur and where appropriate policies, including this one, could be revised, or extra training provided to staff to decrease the risk of it happening again.

Records of low-level concerns will not be kept in the personnel file of the individuals. Where a concern is thought to be serious and is processed as an allegation, records of this will be kept in staff personnel files. Where multiple low-level concerns have been made about the same individual, the concerns will be kept together in chronological order.

Where an allegation is made about an individual who has previously been subject to such allegations, or where a low-level concern is reclassified as a serious concern after meeting the harms threshold, all records of low-level concerns about that individual will be moved to the staff personnel file and kept alongside records of the allegation.

The DSL will ensure that all records are kept in a manner that is consistent with the Data Protection Policy. Records will be confidential and kept password-protected. Records of low level concern will kept

until the termination of employment and then securely destroyed (**minimum recommended by KCSIE**)

References

The school will only refer to concerns about a staff member in employment references where they have amounted to a substantiated safeguarding allegation, i.e. it has met the harms threshold and has been found to have basis through investigation, or where it is not exclusively a safeguarding issue and forms part of an issue that would normally be included in a reference, e.g. misconduct or poor performance. Low-level safeguarding concerns will not be included in a reference, unless they have comprised a pattern of behaviour that has met the harms threshold.

The headteacher will decide in exceptional circumstances if a reference cannot be provided or if certain questions asked by the prospective employer cannot be answered, with HR advice sought when appropriate.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually and in response to any new safeguarding requirements or concerns surrounding the wider cultural issues in the school.

Staff Conduct - Cause for Concern form

Concern in relation to: *(print name of member of staff)*		
Name of person completing form (print):		
Time of concern:	**Date of concern:**	**Place of concern:**

Concern:
Detailed Account: *Please bullet point. Do not interpret what is seen or heard; simply record the facts.* *After completing the form, pass it immediately to the Headteacher or if not available, the Designated Safeguarding Lead.*

Signature:	Date:

Please provide a copy to the Headteacher or the Designated Safeguarding Lead

Record of action of low-level concern in relation to staff conduct

Name:	
Job Title:	
School:	
Date of incident/concern:	
Initial concern reported to:	

Summary of concern(s):
- Obtain written details, signed and dated by the person receiving (see reporting form - Appendix 1)   - Record any information about times, dates and location of incident/s and names of any potential witnesses; and   - Record discussions about the child and/or member of staff.

Local Authority Designated Officer Discussion (if applicable) & Actions to be Taken

Contact made by:		**Date:**	

Outcome of Discussion:	
	Meets the harm threshold YES ☐ NO ☐
	Referral to LADO required YES ☐ NO ☐
	Allegation Management Meeting YES ☐ NO ☐

Action Points from LADO Call (if applicable)

What	Who	When
1.		
2.		

3.		

Actions to be Taken (Record any actions taken and decisions made)

Rationale for deciding on actions above

Date internal investigation concluded:	

Recommendation from investigation:	**Behaviours consistent with policy - NFA** ☐
	Recorded as LLC - **Informal Action** ☐
	          - **Formal Action Considered** ☐
	Discussion with LADO required;
	       - **Due to outcome of investigation** ☐
	       - **Due to frequency of concerns** ☐

Date of informal action	
Date of disciplinary hearing (if applicable)	
Date of appeal hearing (if applicable)	

Additional information
- Record any further actions required including monitoring and scheduled review meetings

Important Information
This form should be completed in all cases where a low-level concern has been raised against a member of staff.   A copy of this form should then be kept in the Schools Low Level Concern Folder hosted on Microsoft Teams

Signed by Headteacher	
Employee Signature	
Date	