



Low Level Concerns Policy

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Contents:

Statement of intent

1. Legal framework
2. Definitions
3. Roles and responsibilities
4. Prevention amongst staff
5. Reporting concerns
6. Self-reporting
7. Evaluating concerns
8. Acting on concerns
9. Record keeping
10. Monitoring and review

Appendices

- A. Low-level Concern Reporting Form

Statement of Intent

Highfields Primary School 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 school prides itself on creating a safe and prosperous environment for children, and our staff are expected to adhere to high standards of behaviour when it comes to professional conduct regarding children. 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, and other children.

1. 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 (2022) 'Keeping children safe in education 2022'
- DfE (2018) 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Physical Intervention Policy
- Staff Professional Conduct Policy
- Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Data Protection Policy for School Staff

2. 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 children 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.

An allegation can also relate to an adult's behaviour outside of work, and their relationships with others, if they have behaved in a way in their personal life that raises safeguarding concerns. These concerns do not have to directly relate to a child but could, for example, include;

- an arrest for the possession of a weapon;
- Drug related incident
- have, as a parent or carer, become subject to child protection procedures;
- are closely associated with someone in their personal lives (e.g. partner, member of the family or other household member) who may present a risk of harm to child/ren for whom the adult is responsible in their employment/volunteering

The term 'low-level' concern does not mean that it is insignificant, it means that the behaviour towards a child does not meet the threshold set above. 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.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Body 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.
- Guaranteeing 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 Head Teacher 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 children's 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 Designated Safeguarding Leads are 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 Head Teacher, 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 any actions taken.

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 children in a way that is respectful and appropriate for their level of authority and has due regard to the power imbalance between children and staff members.
- Understanding the importance of reporting low-level safeguarding concerns.
- Reporting any and all safeguarding concerns they may have about children immediately.
- Reporting any and all safeguarding concerns they may have about the behaviour of a member of staff immediately.

4. 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 children. 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 children.
- There is a significant power imbalance in the child-staff dynamic.
- There are more stringent expectations on their behaviour with regard to children due to their position as a public professional.

Staff will remain aware of the fact that all children 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 child and do not engage with children 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 reported to the DSL, Head Teacher or other nominated person immediately.

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 children, 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 children by pet names or terms of endearment or buying children 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 children.
- Using inappropriate language in the presence of children.

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 learning mentor 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 children inadvertently will be made aware and supported to correct this behaviour in line with the Staff Code of Conduct. The Head Teacher 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 children for staff members. All staff will read, understand, and adhere to the appropriate and inappropriate behaviour subsection of this policy, as well as the Staff Code of Conduct and the Staff Professional Conduct Policy

Staff will address any questions they have regarding safeguarding to any of the DSL team. 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. children 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 children that may indicate a safeguarding concern, and how to identify signs of abuse or harm in children.

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 Head Teacher 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.

5. Reporting Concerns

The school will promote a culture in which safeguarding children 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 Head Teacher, DSL, or other nominated person (Safeguarding Governor) 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. 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 Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher verbally, or by submitting a [Low-level Concern Reporting Form](#). When submitting concerns, staff will take care to ensure that they observe the Data Protection Policy for School Staff and the Allegations of Abuse against Staff Policy, and 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 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 Head Teacher, it should be reported to the Chair of Governors.

Where a low-level concern relates to a person employed by a supply agency or a contractor to work in the school, staff will also be required to report this to the Head Teacher, who will, in turn, inform the employer of the subject of the concern.

All concerns reported to the Head Teacher will be documented.

6. 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 or violates any of the schools safeguarding policies

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 Head Teacher and DSL's 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.

7. Evaluating Concerns

Where the Head Teacher 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 Head Teacher will discuss the concern with the DSL's, 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 Head Teacher will ensure they adhere to the Data Protection Policy, and the information sharing principles outlined in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, at all times.

To evaluate a concern, the Head Teacher and a member of the DSL team will:

- Speak to the individual who raised the concern to determine the facts and obtain any relevant additional information (this will only be the case where staff have not elected to remain anonymous)
- 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, external agencies 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.

8. 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, safeguarding policies and the law, the Head Teacher 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 Head Teacher will also, when possible, speak to the individual who shared the concern, outlining why the behaviour reported is consistent with school standards and the law. The Head Teacher 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.

The Head Teacher will discuss the concern with the DSL's (and if they have been involved, the LADO) to discern whether the behaviour, and the reporting of this behaviour, is indicative of ambiguity in the school's policies or procedures, or the training it offers to staff. Where such ambiguity is found, the DSL and Head Teacher will work together to resolve this with input from other staff members, as necessary.

Where the concern is low-level

Where the Head Teacher 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 Head Teacher and DSL holds a meeting with the individual about whom the concern was reported, during which they will:
 - Talk to the individual in a non-accusatory and sympathetic manner.
 - Inform them of how their behaviour was perceived by the individual who reported the concern (without naming them, where possible).
 - Clearly state what about their behaviour was inappropriate and problematic.
 - Discuss the reasons for the behaviour with the individual.
 - Inform the individual clearly what about their behaviour needs to change.
 - Discuss any support that the individual may require in order to achieve the proper standards of behaviour.
 - Allow the individual the opportunity to respond to the concern in their own words.
- The Head Teacher and DSL asks the individual to re-read the Staff Code of Conduct and/or relevant safeguarding policies, depending on the nature of the concern.

- The Head Teacher and DSL will consider whether the individual should receive guidance, supervision or any further training.
- Where considered appropriate in the circumstances, the Head Teacher 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 child or other individual has been made to feel uncomfortable by the individual's behaviour, they will be offered pastoral support, where appropriate.

The Head Teacher will ensure that all details of the low-level concern, including any resultant actions taken, are recorded and securely stored in line with the Data Protection Policy. The Head Teacher 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 behaviour does not improve over a longer period of time, the concerns will be escalated and dealt with in line with the Allegations of Abuse against Staff Policy.

Where the concern is serious

The Head Teacher 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 Head Teacher will then follow the procedures laid out in the Allegations of Abuse against Staff Policy.

9. Record Keeping

The school will retain all records of low-level concerns, including those that were found to be unfounded. The Head Teacher will ensure that all records include the most accurate and up-to-date information and will store them in the electronic low-level concerns file. The Head Teacher 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 Head Teacher and DSL's 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 Head Teacher and DSL's will keep records of these reviews.

Where any concerning patterns of behaviour have been identified with regard to a member of staff, the DSL's will consult with the Head Teacher 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 to whom the concerns pertain, unless there have been multiple low-level concerns made about the same individual. 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, these will be kept together, and 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, kept password-protected, and securely destroyed after the staff member to whom the concerns pertain has left the school.

When providing employment references, the school will ensure that any information provided confirms whether they are satisfied with the applicant's suitability to work with children, and only provide the facts of any substantiated safeguarding concerns or allegations, including a group of low-level concerns about the same individual, that meet the harm threshold.

Any repeated low-level safeguarding concerns or allegations which do not meet the harm threshold which have been found to be false, unfounded, unsubstantiated, or malicious will not be included in any reference.

The Head Teacher 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.

10. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Head Teacher and DSL team, and in response to any new safeguarding requirements or concerns surrounding the wider cultural issues in the school. The next scheduled review for this policy is September 2024

For use by designated safeguarding team upon receipt

Date and time concern received	
Signature	
Name	
Role	
Actions to be taken (<i>e.g. no action, investigation, reclassification as allegation meets the harm threshold</i>)	