



Low Level Concerns Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Chadsgrove School understands the importance of a positive culture where concerns can be identified and spoken about openly and acknowledges that this is a key element of a strong safeguarding system. This Low-Level Concerns Policy seeks to ensure that all staff who work with children behave appropriately and to enable the early identification and prompt and appropriate management of concerns.
- 1.2. As part of its whole school approach to safeguarding, Chadsgrove will ensure that it promotes an open and transparent culture in which all concerns about all adults working in or on behalf of the School (including supply staff, volunteers and contractors) are dealt with promptly and appropriately.
- 1.3. All staff need to be informed about and be able to identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour and understand the importance of sharing concerns when they observe behaviour which violates the School's Code of Conduct.
- 1.4. Behaviour which is not consistent with the standards and values of Chadsgrove School, and which does not meet the organisational expectations outlined in the School's Code of Conduct, needs to be addressed. Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum – from the inadvertent or thoughtless, through to that which is ultimately intended to enable abuse.
- 1.5. Creating a culture in which all concerns about adults (including allegations that do not meet the harm threshold) are shared responsibly and with the right person, recorded and dealt with appropriately, is essential. If implemented correctly, this should:
 - Encourage an open and transparent culture
 - Enable the school to identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour early
 - Minimise the risk of abuse
 - Ensure that adults working in or on behalf of the School are clear about professional boundaries and act within these boundaries, in accordance with the ethos and values of the School

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The purpose of this Policy is to create and embed a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which the clear values and expected behaviour which are set out in the School's Code of Conduct are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff.
- 2.2. This Policy enables all staff to share any concerns, no matter how small, about their own or another member of staff's behaviour with the Headteacher.
- 2.3. This policy applies to all staff whether working in or on behalf of the School, engaged as a paid employee (including supply staff), worker or contractor, unpaid member of staff or volunteer. It also includes Governors.

3. Aims

3.1. The aims of this policy are to:

- Ensure that staff are clear about what appropriate behaviour is
- Ensure that staff are confident in distinguishing expected and appropriate behaviour from concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour – in themselves and others
- Empower staff to share any low-level concerns with the Headteacher and to help all staff to interpret the sharing of such concerns as a neutral act
- Address unprofessional behaviour and support the individual to correct it 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 Local Authority Designated Officer ('LADO')
- Provide for responsive, sensitive and proportionate handling of such concerns when they are raised
- Help identify any weaknesses in the School's safeguarding system
- Create an environment where staff are encouraged and feel confident to self-refer

4. Allegations that Potentially Meet the Harm Threshold

4.1. The term 'allegation' means it is alleged that an adult who works with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child and/or
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child and/or
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children and/or
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children

Allegations of this nature are considered to have potentially met the 'harm threshold'.

4.2. Allegations that potentially meet the harm threshold may indicate a person would pose a risk of harm if they continue to work in their present position, or in any capacity with children in a school.

4.3. Allegations that meet harm threshold are dealt with in through the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy (Policy Number 73) and the Disciplinary Procedure Policy (Policy Number 83)

5. Concerns or Allegations that do not Meet the Harm Threshold

5.1. Concerns or allegations that do not meet the harm threshold are referred to as 'low-level concerns'. This does not mean that the concerns are insignificant; it means that an adult's behaviour towards a child does not meet the harm threshold set out above.

5.2. 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') that an adult may have acted in a way that:

- Is inconsistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work and
- Does not meet the allegation threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO. However, it may merit consulting with, and seeking advice from the LADO, on a no-names basis if necessary

6. Respecting the Rights of All

- 6.1. Chadsgrove School will always respect the personal data of staff (and others, where they may be identifiable) in implementing the Low-Level Concerns Policy and in keeping records of low-level concerns secure.
- 6.2. The Data Protection Act 2018 includes a specific provision which permits organisations to process even the most sensitive personal data where necessary for the purposes of protecting children from harm. Although sharing of low-level concerns will not always involve legally sensitive categories of data, the safeguarding purpose is the same as that under the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- 6.3. A proportionate approach is taken when considering what personal data is in fact necessary to share and record by way of low-level concerns, in each case, in order to support the safeguarding purpose and to ensure the information is accurate, fair and as far as possible recorded in neutral terms.
- 6.4. If a member of staff who raises a low-level concern does not wish to be named, then Chadsgrove will respect their wishes as far as possible. However, staff should be aware that in certain circumstances this anonymity may need to be waived (as explained further in section 8.1).
- 6.5. All staff are entitled, under data protection law, to ask to see the content of any low-level concerns retained by the School under the Low-Level Concerns Policy as it relates to them personally and to make any reasonable objection as to the fairness or accuracy of that content. Chadsgrove will process such requests within the period prescribed by law, subject always to any necessary protection of the rights of third parties and unless any other relevant exemptions apply (including if complying with the request would be likely to prejudice the safeguarding purpose of the Low-Level Concerns Policy).
- 6.6. All personal data processed in connection with the Low-Level Concerns Policy will be processed in accordance with the School's Privacy Notice.

7. Sharing Low-Level Concerns

- 7.1. It is important that low-level concerns are shared with the Headteacher as soon as reasonably possible and, in any event, within 24 hours of becoming aware of it (where the concern relates to a particular incident). However, it is never too late to share a low-level concern.
- 7.2. If the Headteacher is absent for any reason, low-level concerns should be shared with the Deputy Head Teacher who will ensure they inform the Headteacher immediately on their return.
- 7.3. If any low-level concern relates to the behaviour of the Headteacher, this will be referred to the Chair of Governors.
- 7.4. If there is a conflict of interest in sharing a low-level concern with the Headteacher, the low-level concern will be shared with the Chair of Governors, unless there is conflict of interest in doing so, in which case it will be reported directly to the LADO.

8. Confidentiality and Whistleblowing

- 8.1. Staff are encouraged to consent to be named when sharing low-level concerns, as this will help to create a culture of openness and transparency. If the staff member who raises a low-level concern does not wish to be named, Chads Grove will respect that person's wishes as far as possible. However, there may be circumstances where the staff member will need to be named (for example, where disclosure is required by a court or local authority, or under a fair disciplinary process) and, for this reason, Chads Grove will not promise anonymity to members of staff who share low-level concerns.

9. Self-Reporting

- 9.1. Occasionally a member of staff may find themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted or might appear compromising to others. Equally, a member of staff may, for whatever reason, have behaved in a manner which, on reflection, they consider falls below the standard set out in the School's Code of Conduct. Self-reporting in these circumstances can be positive, for a number of reasons, and staff are encouraged to self-report on the basis that:
- It is self-protective, in that it enables a potentially difficult issue to be addressed at the earliest opportunity
 - It demonstrates awareness of the expected behavioural standards and self-awareness as to the member of staff's own actions or how they could be perceived; and
 - It is an important means of maintaining a culture where everyone aspires to the highest standards of conduct and behaviour.

10. Recording Low Level Concerns

- 10.1. The concern can be shared verbally with the Headteacher in the first instance or a written summary of it can be provided to them.
- 10.2. Where the low-level concern is provided verbally, the Headteacher will make an appropriate record of the conversation, either contemporaneously or immediately following the discussion and will exercise sound professional judgment in determining what information is necessary to record for safeguarding purposes. This concern is recorded on CPOMS staff safe. CPOMS staff safe is accessed, by staff with appropriate authority using two factor authentication.
- 10.3. Where a low-level concern relates to a person employed by a supply agency or a contractor, the School will notify that person's employer so that any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

11. Responding to Low Level Concerns

- 11.1. Once the Headteacher has received the low-level concern, they will – not necessarily in the below order but in an appropriate sequence according to the nature and detail of the particular concern shared with them:
- Speak to the person who raised the low-level concern (unless it has been raised anonymously).
 - Speak to any potential witnesses (unless advised not to do so by the LADO/other relevant external agencies, where they have been contacted).

- Speak to the individual about whom the low-level concern has been raised (unless advised not to do so by the LADO/other relevant external agencies, where they have been contacted).

11.2. The Headteacher will then review the information and determine whether the behaviour in question:

- Is entirely consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct and the law
- Constitutes a low-level concern
- Is not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO but may merit consulting with and seeking advice from the LADO, and on a no-names basis if necessary
- When considered with any other low-level concerns previously raised about the same person, could now meet the threshold of an allegation, and should be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, and in accordance with the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Part 4 of KCSIE 2022, and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by the School's Local Safeguarding Partnership
- In and of itself meets the threshold of an allegation and should be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, and in accordance with the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Part 4 of KCSIE 2022, and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by the School's Local Safeguarding Partnership
- Ensure that appropriate and detailed records are kept of all internal and external conversations regarding the concern, their determination, the rationale for their decision and any actions taken, and retain records in accordance with this Low-Level Concerns Policy
- Consider whether the concern also potentially raises misconduct or capability issues, taking advice from the HR Department of Worcestershire Children First, as necessary

11.3. If the Headteacher is in any doubt, they will seek advice from the LADO, on a no-names basis if necessary.

11.4. If it is determined that the behaviour is entirely consistent with the School's Code of Conduct for staff and the law, the Headteacher will update the individual in question and inform them of any action taken. The Headteacher will also speak to the person who shared the low-level concern to provide them with feedback about how and why the behaviour is consistent with the School's Code of Conduct and the law.

11.5. If it is determined that the behaviour constitutes a low-level concern, the Headteacher will respond in a sensitive and proportionate way – on the one hand maintaining confidence that such concerns when raised will be handled promptly and effectively, whilst on the other hand protecting staff from any potential false allegations or misunderstandings. Any investigation of low-level concerns will be done discreetly and on a need-to-know basis.

11.6. Most low-level concerns by their very nature are likely to be minor. Some will not give rise to any ongoing concern and, accordingly, will not require any further action. Others may be most appropriately dealt with by means of management guidance and/or training. In many cases, a low-level concern will simply require a conversation with the individual about whom the concern has been raised.

- 11.7. Any such conversation with individuals in these circumstances will include being clear with them 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 which is agreed with the individual, and regularly reviewed with them, may also be appropriate.
- 11.8. Some low-level concerns may also raise issues of misconduct or poor performance. The Headteacher will also consider whether this is the case – by referring to the School's disciplinary and/or capability procedure and taking advice from Human Resources on a named or no-names basis where necessary.
- 11.9. If the Headteacher considers that the School's disciplinary or capability procedure may be triggered, they will refer the matter to Human Resources. If Human Resources advise that the School's disciplinary or capability procedure is triggered, the individual will have a full opportunity to respond to any factual allegations which form the basis of capability concerns or a disciplinary case against them.
- 11.10. Staff should be aware that when they share what they believe to be a low-level concern, the Headteacher will speak to the adult who is the subject of that concern (unless advised not to do so by the LADO/other relevant external agencies, where they have been contacted) – no matter how 'low' level the concern may be perceived to be, to gain the subject's account – and to make appropriate records, which may be referenced in any subsequent disciplinary proceedings.
- 11.11. How Chadsgrove School responds to a low-level concern may be different depending on the employment status of the individual who is the subject of the concern - i.e. whether they are an employee or worker to whom the School's disciplinary and/or capability procedure would apply; or a contractor, Governor, or volunteer. The School's response will be tailored accordingly.
- 11.12. If a behaviour is not sufficiently serious to consider a referral to the LADO but, nonetheless, merits consulting with and seeking advice from the LADO, and on a no-names basis if necessary, then action (if/as necessary) will be taken in accordance with the LADO's advice
- 11.13. If a behaviour, when considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been shared about the same individual, could now meet the threshold of an allegation, or in and of itself meets the threshold of an allegation, then it will be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, and in accordance with the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Part 4 of KCSIE 2022 and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by the School's Local Safeguarding Partnership.

12. Retention of Records

- 12.1. Chadsgrove will retain all records of low-level concerns (including those which are subsequently deemed by the Headteacher to relate to behaviour which is entirely consistent with the School's

Code of Conduct for staff) in CPOMS staff safe which is an online service protected by two factor authentication and accessed only by authorised members of staff.

- 12.2. Where multiple low-level concerns have been shared regarding the same individual these will be kept in chronological order as a running record, and with a timeline alongside. These records will be kept confidential and held securely with access afforded only to a limited number of individuals such as the Headteacher and Deputy Head Teacher.
- 12.3. Low-level concerns will be retained securely by Chadsgrove for as long as deemed relevant and necessary for a safeguarding purpose unless the School is required to disclose by law (for example, where the threshold of an allegation is met in respect of the individual in question).
- 12.4. In most cases, once a staff member leaves the School, any low-level concerns which are held relating to them:
 - will be retained for the same duration as that individual's personnel file and
 - will not be included in any onward reference, except as set out in Section 14 (References) below

13. Review of low-level concerns

- 13.1. The Headteacher will review the central low-level concerns file periodically 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 of these reviews will be made.
- 13.2. Where a pattern of behaviour is identified in respect of a specific individual, the Headteacher will also consider whether any wider cultural issues are at play that may have enabled the behaviour and/or whether the School should arrange for additional training or a review of any of its policies to reduce the risk of it happening again.

14. References

- 14.1. Where a low-level concern (or group of concerns) has met the threshold for referral to the LADO and is found to be substantiated, it will be referred to in a reference.
- 14.2. Low-level concerns (or a group of concerns) which have not met the threshold for referral to the LADO which relate only to safeguarding will not be included in references unless they relate to issues which would normally be included in a reference, for example, misconduct or poor performance.

15. The Role of Governors

- 15.1. The Headteacher will regularly inform Governors about the implementation of the Low-Level Concerns Policy and any evidence of its effectiveness, for example, by including reference to it in any safeguarding reports and providing any relevant data.

- 15.2. An anonymised sample of low-level concerns will be reviewed by a Governor annually, in order to ensure that these concerns have been responded to promptly and appropriately.

16. Linked Policies

- 16.1. This Low-Level Concerns Policy operates in conjunction with the following policies:

- Volunteer Policy (Policy Number 47)
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy (Policy Number 73)
- Disciplinary Procedure Policy (Policy Number 83)
- Online Safety and Acceptable Use Policy (Policy Number 87)
- Confidential Reporting - Whistle Blowing Policy (Policy Number 88)
- Staff Code of Conduct (Policy Number 100)

17. Monitoring and Review

- 17.1. The Low-Level Concerns Policy will be monitored to ensure that it is being effectively implemented in practice and will be reviewed annually by the Headteacher and/or Governing Body and in response to any relevant legislative, statutory or regulatory changes and/or changes in relevant guidance and/or safeguarding best practice.