



Low level concerns
(about adults working with or around children)

Policy and Guidance
January 2023

Review in January 2024 or inline with any
KCSIE changes

1. Introduction

At The Grove School, we aim to create an open and transparent culture where all concerns about all adults involved with our school are dealt with promptly and appropriately. We aim 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 are clear about professional boundaries and act within these boundaries, and in accordance with our ethos.

Creating a culture in which all adults (including those that do not meet the threshold of an allegation) are shared responsibly and with the right person, and recorded and dealt with appropriately, is critical. If implemented correctly, this should encourage a more open and transparent culture, enable individual schools to identify concerning behaviour early, minimise the risk of abuse, and ensure that adults working with the school are clear about professional boundaries and act within these boundaries, and in accordance with the ethos and values of The Grove School.

This policy should be read alongside our Safeguarding and Child Protection, Whistleblowing and Staff Code of Conduct⁵ Policies.

2. Summary

It may be possible that a member of staff acts in a way that does not cause risk to children but is however inappropriate. We are committed to cultivating a culture of staff being able to, in a safe and professional manner, challenge behaviours that cause offense or cause an atmosphere of feeling uncomfortable.

All staff are requested to utilise their understanding of child on child abuse training and mindset when giving and receiving feedback on behaviour to/from colleagues and how to resolve low level behaviours within our workforce.

Any member of staff who has a concern about the action/s of another member of staff, volunteer or contractor, or who on reflection, recognises that their own actions could have been viewed as concerning should inform the Headteacher.

We recognise that a low-level concern about a member of staff may be raised by an external agency, community or family member. In this instance it will be the Headteacher's responsibility to have an open and honest discussion with the member of staff.

3. Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2021

The following is taken from Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2021 and identifies what may be considered behaviour relating to low level concern:

What is a Low-Level Concern (LLC)?

409. 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 out at paragraph 338 (and on page four of this policy in the red box). 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 working in or on behalf of the school or college 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.

410. 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
- Using inappropriate sexualised, intimidating or offensive language
- Erosion of boundaries

411. 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.

412. It is crucial that any such concerns, including those which do not meet the harm threshold (see part four - Section one), are shared responsibly and with the right person, and recorded and dealt with appropriately. Ensuring they are dealt with effectively should also protect those working in or on behalf of schools and colleges from potential false allegations or misunderstandings.

Here at The Grove School, we have created maintained a safe environment for our pupils to remain safe from harmful adults. Our Code of Conduct is robust and incorporates all of the above guidance. However, this guidance is to ensure staff/volunteers/partners are responsible for their actions at all times.

Examples that may need to be reported:

- Staff who befriend families online who they have met through their role at The Grove School.
- Staff who come to mind in Safer Recruitment/Safeguarding training ('flying low off radar')
- Staff who shout or speak disrespectfully to or about children.
- Staff who adopt risky 'alter egos' online.

- Staff who are online influencers and use their role within The Grove School to meet their own needs (for example, to promote their own needs (for example, to promote their own business or enterprise)
- Staff who 'like' or 'share' inappropriate/extreme material or opinions on social media (for example, making, liking or sharing derogatory comments about individuals or groups with protected characteristics)
- Staff who are unable to safeguard their own children
- Staff who display coercive/controlling behaviour outside or inside the workplace
- Staff who do not role model the ethos of modern Safeguarding in Education

Staff should be assured that we understand that dynamics/relationships within families, neighbours and friendship groups can break down and the Headteacher will be mindful of assessing delicate personal details. Concerns of this behaviour will be handled with respect alongside your human right to have a 'personal life' and protect from malicious allegations. However, any actions that impact on the wellbeing of children and/or vulnerable adults cannot be ignored.

Allegations

Any adult linked to our school who 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

Low-Level Concern:

Any Adult linked to our school who has behaved in a way that:

- Is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct and ethos of The Grove School including inappropriate conduct outside of work
- Does not meet the allegations threshold or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO

Appropriate

- Behaviour which is entirely consistent with our school's Code of Conduct, and the Law

4. Storing and use of low-level concerns and follow-up information

Low Level Concerns (LLC) information in the first instance will be informal. However, if once a staff member has challenged low level behaviour and it continues, the Headteacher will address the behaviour/conduct. A record of these discussions will be

stored securely within the school's safeguarding systems, with access only by the Headteacher and DSL.

This will be stored in accordance with the school's GDPR and data protection policies. The staff member(s) reporting the concern must keep the information confidential and not share the concern with others apart from the Headteacher and DSL. There may be instances where behaviour and conduct is witnessed by multiple staff members. All staff are responsible for addressing and reporting low level behaviour concerns as individuals and not as a group.

Low-Level Concerns will not be referred to in references unless they have been formalised into more significant concerns resulting in disciplinary or misconduct procedures. Should staff leave The Grove School, any record of low-level concerns which are stored about them will be reviewed as to whether or not that information needs to be kept.

Consideration will be given to:

- (a) Whether some or all of the information contained within any record may have any reasonably likely value in terms of any potential historic employment or abuse claim so as to justify keeping it, in line with normal safeguarding records practice, or
- (b) If, on balance, any record is not considered to have any reasonably likely value, still less actionable concern, and ought to be deleted accordingly

Process to Follow when a low-level concern is raised

The Headteacher will discuss reported concerns with the member of staff. It may not be necessary to name the complainant unless the concern is escalated to formal proceedings. (see relevant policy - Safeguarding; Complaint; Staff Code of Conduct; Whistleblowing)

The Headteacher will discuss

- What changes need to be made
- Agree a support plan if required
- Any further action
- Consequences of repeated behaviour/actions
- Time scale (normally immediate)

The Headteacher will be mindful of disguised compliance, where the staff member says what is required but minimises said behaviours/actions and little changes.

The member of staff will be directed not to discuss with colleagues and attempt to investigate where the reported concern came from.

Please remember this policy is focused at keeping children, community and staff safe.

Guidelines for Headteachers/DSL's

Implementation – the way in which the policy is communicated to staff is key. Carefully designed training that is engaging and includes scenario-based discussions should encourage buy-in from staff and volunteers and help to achieve the policy's objectives. In contrast, poor communication of the policy can create suspicion, confusion and toxicity which could be highly damaging to the organisational culture, decreasing rather than increasing reporting.

Allegations v concerns – the relationship between low level concerns and allegations should be made clear. For example, the Headteacher/DSL receiving the low-level concern must always consider whether it meets the threshold for reporting to the designated officer of the local authority as an allegation. If they are in any doubt, they should contact the designated officer for advice. Equally, a series of low-level concerns may cumulatively meet the threshold and need to be treated as such.

Reporting Lines – ideally all concerns should be reported to one person so that patterns can be identified.

Handling Concerns – handling concerns appropriately and proportionately will strengthen confidence of staff and volunteers. In contrast, handling concerns disproportionately or inappropriately will decrease rather than increase reporting. The way in which concerns are handled, and the identity of the person handling them, will necessarily depend on the context and nature of the concern being raised.

Retention and Recording concerns – the treatment of the personal data for the purpose of personal files and references is important. KCSIE requires schools to retain a copy of all substantiated, unsubstantiated or false allegations on a staff members personnel file but to refer only to substantiated allegations in references. Low-Level Concerns which do not individually or collectively meet the threshold for referral to the LADO will be retained in a confidential, school safeguarding file but not on personnel files or used on references. The recording of information should be done following the exercise of sound professional judgments to what information is necessary for safeguarding purposes. That information, once recorded, itself must be carefully treated, in terms of who has access to it, and who needs to know, oversee and review its contents (remembering that individuals have the right to access these records about them under data protection law).

Oversight and Review – the regular review of low-level concerns by the Headteacher and the DSL is required to ensure that the concerns are being handled appropriately and proportionately, that no concerns meet the threshold of an allegation, and that any subtle patterns of behaviour are spotted.

Getting these points right should create a solid foundation to a transparent culture in which all concerns are shared openly and acted on appropriately. By contrast it can be hard to retrieve a situation if these areas are not considered carefully at the outset.

