

Birches Head Academy



Low Level Concerns Policy

Policy Information:

Date prepared	September 2023
Adopted by Governors	September 2023
Implementation Date	Immediate
Frequency of Review	Annually
Review Date	September 2024

Approved by Principal:

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Approved by Chair of Governors:

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Frank Field
Education Trust

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Our Vision

We value each one of our pupils and want as many staff as possible to know them as individuals, so we can support them to thrive and to feel safe, confident and valued. Our pupils are at the heart of our community and they play a key role in its success, actively contributing ideas and opinions to help shape the work of the Academy.

The Principal has a team in place to plan and deliver pastoral care, which is led by the Vice Principal, supported by

The **Senior Leadership Team** - this team has a strategic responsibility for all the pupils in the academy, to ensure they receive the support they need to progress academically and socially.

Heads of Learning responsible for the progress of each pupil in their year group, working with their team to identify barriers and put plans in place to meet individual needs, as well as monitoring progress of each pupil.

Form Tutors - the first point of contact for pupils, establishing positive relationships and understanding needs, form tutors champion their pupils and support them on a day to day basis.

Learning Coaches - where pupils need specific support, these non-teaching members of staff provide strategies to overcome barriers and achieve goals.

Attendance Officer - supporting attendance is a priority, and the attendance officer works with families to break down barriers to attending academy, alongside the rest of the team including the SEND Aspire team

All the team named above are crucial in the building of strong relationships so pupils can bring any concerns to them .

Links with other policies

This policy has obvious links with the wider safeguarding agenda and specifically all policies that make up the safeguarding suite of documents. It should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding Policy. When ratifying or reviewing the policy, links should be made with the other relevant policies.

Policy Statement

The policy outlines Birches Head Academy's approach to managing concerns about adults, which do not meet the allegation threshold of harm nor are considered serious enough to consider a referral to LADO.

For the purpose of this policy, the term 'staff' will refer to any adult associated with the Academy , i.e. whether working for or with the Academy , engaged as a paid employee, worker or self-employed contractor, volunteer, agency staff, governor or trustee.

This policy does not form part of any member of staff's contract of employment, and it may be amended at any time.

Roles, Responsibilities, and Implementation

The Frank Field Education Trust board has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy and for ensuring compliance with the relevant statutory framework. This committee delegates day-to-day responsibility for operating the policy and ensuring its maintenance and review to the Principal, with formal adoption agreed by the Local Governing Body.

Leaders and Managers have a specific responsibility to ensure the fair application of this policy and all staff are responsible for supporting colleagues and ensuring its success. The Academy is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all to share this.

Aims

To ensure that all concerns about adults can be identified and spoken about openly with the appropriate safeguarding team.

To ensure that all concerns about adults are recorded and dealt with appropriately.

To create an open and transparent culture which enable settings to identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour early; minimise the risk of abuse; and ensure that adults working for or with the Academy are clear about professional boundaries and act within them, in accordance with the ethos and values of the Trust.

To help ensure that adults consistently model the Academy's values and helps keep children safe.

To also protect adults working in Academy from potential false allegations or misunderstandings.

Definition

A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than a 'nagging doubt' – that an adult may have acted in a manner which:

- a) is not consistent with the Academy's Code of Conduct; and/or
- b) relates to their conduct either inside or outside of work which, even if not linked to a particular act or omission, has caused a sense of unease about that adult's suitability to work with children.
- c) doesn't meet the threshold of harm or is not considered serious enough for the Academy to refer to the local authority designated officer

Low-level concerns are differentiated from allegations which should be escalated through the appropriate procedure ie Disciplinary or LADO Review. An allegation is where 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 or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

While low-level concerns are, by their nature, less serious than allegations, the Academy understands that many serious safeguarding concerns, e.g. child sexual abuse, often begin with low-level concerns, e.g. subtle grooming by an offender. The Academy will ensure that all staff are aware of the importance of recognising concerns before they escalate from low-level to serious, wherever possible.

Staff do not need to be able to determine in each case whether their concern is a low-level concern, or if it is in fact serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO or meets the threshold of an allegation. Once staff share what they believe to be a low-level concern that determination should be made by the Principal.

The Academy 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 19, regardless of the phase and year group they are at within the Academy, 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 reported to the Principal immediately. If the Principal is unavailable then the Designated Safeguarding Lead must be informed.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Behaviour

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 Principal and/or DSL include:

- 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, that contravene professional boundaries.
- 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.
- Using inappropriate, sexualised, intimidating or offensive language.

This list is not exhaustive or designed to be exclusive.

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 Academy 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 Codes of Conduct. The Principal and/or DSL 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.

The Importance of Sharing Low-Level Concerns

Information sharing is essential for effective safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. It is a key factor identified in many serious case reviews (SCRs), where poor information sharing has resulted in missed opportunities to take action that keeps children and young people safe (Information sharing; Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers). All concerns, no matter how small, must be reported.

The Academy 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 Academy will ensure that all staff members have received training as part of their induction that outlines appropriate behaviour towards pupils for staff members. All staff will read, understand and adhere to the Code of Conduct and will address any questions they have regarding safeguarding to the Principal and/or DSL.

The Academy will work to foster an environment and culture where personal and professional boundaries are clearly set and respected for all individuals in the Academy community, e.g. pupils are not treated as friends and an appropriate professional distance is maintained by staff.

The Academy will ensure that all staff understand how to recognise and report safeguarding concerns. Staff will be trained to identify concerning or problematic behaviour towards pupils that may indicate a safeguarding concern, and how to identify signs of abuse or harm in pupils.

Reporting a Low-Level Concern

In line with the Academy's whistleblowing policy any concerns should be raised first with the Principal. In the absence of the Principal the concern should be raised with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The Principal will inform the DSL (or Deputy DSL) and if required their Human Resources Provider.

Concerns about the Principal must be reported to the Chair of governors who will inform the DSL/DDSL (if assessed to be a low-level concern and not meeting LADO threshold).

Concerns about a governor must be reported first with the Principal. In the absence of the Principal the concern should be raised with the DSL or DDSL.

Concerns about a Trustee must be reported to the CEO, who will inform the Chair of the Trust, the COO and the safeguarding trustee.

Concerns about the CEO must be reported to the Trust DSL (or Deputy DSL), who will inform the Chair of the Trust and the safeguarding trustee.

If a concern is reported to the DSL, as opposed to the Principal, the DSL must inform the Principal at the earliest opportunity.

Self-Reporting

Occasionally, an individual might find themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted or might appear compromising to others. Equally, an individual may, for whatever reason, have behaved in a manner which, on reflection, they consider falls below the standard set out in the Code of Conduct. In these instances, an individual may wish to self-report and this is encouraged. This can be positive for a number of reasons:

- 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 individual'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.

Any individual who wishes to self-report should speak with their Principal.

Response to a Low-Level Concern

In the event that a low-level concern is raised, the DSL will discuss the concern with the Principal and the Human Resources provider if required. The information will be reviewed to determine whether the behaviour:

- i. is entirely consistent with the Academy's Code of Conduct and the law;
- ii. constitutes a low-level concern;
- iii. is serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO; or
- iv. when considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been raised about the same individual, should be reclassified as an allegation and referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies.

Where necessary, the Academy will initially seek the advice of the Safeguarding Children Partnership team (maintaining the anonymity of the individual where possible).

Where appropriate, either the Principal or DSL will speak with 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).

Outcomes

The behaviour is entirely consistent with the Academy's Code of Conduct

The individual in question will be informed by the appropriate DSL what was shared about their behaviour so that they have an opportunity to respond. The individual in question will be informed that their behaviour is entirely consistent with the Academy's Code of Conduct.

The DSL 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 Code of Conduct and the law.

The current concern is low-level

The individual in question will be informed by either the DSL or Principal what was shared about their behaviour so that they have an opportunity to respond.

The DSL or Principal, (with advice from their HR Provider if necessary) will determine the most suitable response.

This may include:

- A conversation with the individual about their behaviour and why it was deemed to be a low-level concern
- Training
- Mentoring from an appropriate individual, e.g. a line manager
- Any support as identified by the individual themselves

In the event that the concern becomes a disciplinary matter, the Academy's Staff Disciplinary Policy will be followed.

The current concern is sufficiently serious enough to warrant a referral to the LADO or when considered with any other low-level concerns that have been shared about the same individual, should be reclassified as an allegation

In the event that the current concern should be referred to the LADO or reclassified as an allegation, the Academy's Managing Allegations Policy will be followed.

Recording

A low-level concerns record will be kept centrally by the DSL. This record will be accessible to the Principal, DSL and Deputy DSLs.

The concerns record will be kept in a chronological order as a running record. Each entry will have the time and date recorded, along with the name of the individual who has made the record and the outcome of the concern. The records will be kept confidential and will be held securely.

The records will be held centrally so that they can be easily reviewed by the Principal, DSL and Deputy DSL and any potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour spotted.

If a low-level concern in and of itself is deemed to be serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO, the records relating to the low-level concern will be placed on the individual's personnel file.

If a low-level concern (or group of concerns) is re-classified as an allegation, all previous records of low-level concerns relating to the same individual should be moved from the central low-level concerns file to the individual's personnel file.

If the low-level concern is raised about an individual who works with the Academy , but is not a member of staff, e.g. Agency Staff/Contractor, then any records relating to the concern will be shared with the individual's employer. If necessary, advice will be sought from the LADO on what can be shared and with whom.

The Principal, DSL and the Deputy DSL will be responsible for recording any concerns.

Review period

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Links to other academy policies

This Policy will be read in conjunction with other policies regarding the safety and welfare of children. These together make up the suite of policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in this academy.

The policies listed below are all available on the website:

- [Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Staff Conduct Policy](#)
- [Anti-Bullying policy](#)
- [Behaviour policy](#)
- [Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment in Academys policy](#)
- [Equality and Diversity Policy](#)
- [ICT Acceptable Use Policy](#)
- [Whistleblowing Policy](#)
- [Managing allegations against staff Policy](#)
- [E-Safety Policy](#)
- [First Aid Policy](#)
- [Attendance and Punctuality Policy](#)
- [Relationships and Sex Education](#)
- [Safer Recruitment](#)