

RIVERSIDE SCHOOL



Low-Level Concerns Policy

APPROVED BY GOVERNORS

RESPONSIBLE PERSON - HEADTEACHER

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Statement of Intent

Riverside 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 pupils, and our staff are expected to adhere to high standards of behaviour when it comes to professional conduct. 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 others.

1. Legal Framework

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

- UK General Protection Regulation (UK GDPR);
- Data Protection Act 2018;
- DfE (2024) 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'; and
- DfE (2023) 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'.

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Safeguarding Policy;
- Staff Code of Conduct;
- Raising Concerns in School Policy;
- Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy;
- Whistleblowing Policy;
- Regulation Support Policy; and
- Data Protection Policy.

2. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy a low-level concern is defined as any concern about an adult's behaviour or conduct 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 are differentiated from concerns that can cause harm. The harms threshold is the point at which concern is no longer low-level, and constitutes a threat of harm to a pupil. This threshold is defined as accusations that an adult has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed a pupil, other child or vulnerable young person;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against, related to, or effecting a pupil or other child or vulnerable young person;
- Behaved towards a pupil in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children or vulnerable young person;
- Behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children or vulnerable young people, 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.

For the purpose of this policy 'staff' will cover all adults in school, either employed directly

or indirectly or working in an unpaid role, this would include, but is not limited to, volunteers, work experience, contractors, guests and visitors and professionals from other agencies.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Board is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the school complies with its duties under pupil 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.
- 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 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.
- Assigning 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 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 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, volunteers, contractors and other adults in school 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.

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 professional.

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 headteacher, DSL or safeguarding lead 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 include, but are not limited to:

- Being overly friendly with pupils – this could include, but is not limited to, communicating with a pupil 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 pupils on their personal mobile phone or devices.
- 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 of needs of the pupil or the content of exchanged messages, and that some of the above incidents may not be concerns in context.

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, deputy headteachers 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.

School Culture

The school understands that spotting the early signs of harmful behaviour towards pupils 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 staff will read, understand and adhere to 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 or Safeguarding Leads. 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.

5. 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 relationships with the staff member.

Staff will report all safeguarding concerns they have to the headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead immediately in line with the procedures laid out in the Safeguarding Policy. Staff members will report concerns without undue delay. Where the report concerns a specific incident, 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, DSL or a safeguarding lead verbally, in writing and/ or by submitting a Low-Level Concern Record as appropriate. When submitting concerns, staff will take care to ensure that they observe 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 headteacher, it should be reported to the Chair of Governors.

Where a low-level concern relates to a person employed by a supply agency staff member or a contractor working in the school, staff will also be required to report this to the headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead who will, in turn, inform the DSL. The DSL will inform the employer of the subject of the concern and any other relevant school leaders.

All concerns reported will be documented in line with the Data Protection Policy.

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; or

- 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, DSL or a safeguarding lead 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 headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead 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 pupil is at immediate risk of harm. When deciding if a concern is low-level, the headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead will discuss the concern with the DSL and/ or the headteacher of a safeguarding lead, and the DSL 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 or DSL will ensure they adhere to the Data Protection Policy, and the information sharing principles outlined in the Safeguarding Policy, at all times.

To evaluate a concern, the headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead will:

- speak to the individual who raised the concern to determine the facts and obtain any relevant additional information.
- 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, and the law, the headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead 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. They will also speak to the individual who shared the concern, outlining why the behaviour reported is consistent with school standards and the law. They 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 headteacher or safeguarding lead will discuss the concern with the DSL (and the DSL, if they have been involved, discuss with 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 headteacher or a safeguarding lead will work together to resolve this with input from other staff members, as necessary.

Where the concern is low-level

Where the headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead 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 or a safeguarding lead 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 headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead will ask the individual to re-read the Staff Code of Conduct where appropriate due to the nature of the concern.
- The headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead will consider whether the individual should receive guidance, supervision or any further training.
- Where considered appropriate in the circumstances, the headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead 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, DSL or a safeguarding lead 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 DSL 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 headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead 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, DSL or a safeguarding lead 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 headteacher, DSL or a safeguarding lead will ensure that all records include the most accurate and up-to-date information and the headteacher and DSL will ensure they are stored in the electronic 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; and
- the name of the individual sharing concerns – if the individual wishes to remain anonymous, this will be respected as far as reasonably possible.

The DSL 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.

Where any concerning patterns of behaviour have been identified with regard to a member of staff, the DSL will consult with the headteacher and/ or deputy 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, including non-teaching staff, will be kept on Confide, the electronic safeguarding system. Where a concern is thought to be serious and is processed as an allegation, records of this will be kept on Confide and on the Allegations Spreadsheet. 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 added to Confide and the Allegations Spreadsheet, 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, protected and securely destroyed no earlier than 5 years 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 applicants' suitability to work with pupils or vulnerable young people, 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 unless deemed not to include would comprise safeguarding.

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.

10. Monitoring and Review

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

Appendix 1 – Low Level Concern Record Form



Please use this form to share 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:

- is not consistent with Riverside’s Staff Code of Conduct; and/ or
- relates to their conduct 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.

Where possible please speak with the headteacher, DSL or a member of the senior leadership team, as soon as possible. You can document your concern using this form and then pass this to the headteacher, DSL or a member of senior leadership when completed.

If the concern is about the headteacher, please pass it onto the Chair of Governors.

Allegation

Behaviour which indicates that an adult who works with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a pupil or may have harmed a pupil;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a pupil; or
- Behaviour towards a pupil or pupils in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to pupils.

Low-Level Concern

A concern – no matter how small, even if it is just a nagging doubt that an adult may have acted in a manner which:

1. Is not consistent with Riverside School’s Code of Conduct; and/ or
2. Relates to their conduct 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.

Appropriate Conduct

Behaviour which is entirely consistent with Riverside School’s Code of Conduct and The Law.

Name of adult writing this concern:

Name of adult whom this concern is about:

Date written:

Date when incident occurred (if different):

Signature:

Please write your concerns below:

You should provide a concise record – including brief context in which the low-level concern arose, and details which are chronological, and as precise and accurate as possible – of any such concern and relevant incident(s) (and please use a separate sheet if necessary). Consider any contextual information that may be appropriate to know.

Low-Level Concerns – Follow up

To be completed by a member of leadership, following discussions with member of staff whom the concern relates to.

Date:

Responses and Reflections

Next Steps

Signature: