



Bales College

Low-level Concerns about Staff Policy

2024-25

Low-level Concerns about Staff Policy

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1. Introduction

Bales College (“the 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 about Staff 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. This policy is in addition to the School’s Safeguarding Policy and adds to the material presented at the School’s INSET day on 1 September 2023.

Bales College promotes an open and transparent culture in which all concerns about all adults working in or on behalf of the School (including supply teachers, volunteers and contractors) are dealt with promptly and appropriately. Creating a culture in which **all** concerns about adults are shared responsibly and with the right person, and are recorded and dealt with appropriately, is critical. This encourages an open and transparent culture, helping us identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour early. It minimises the risk of abuse and ensures that adults working in or on behalf of the School are clear about professional boundaries and act within these boundaries, and in accordance with the ethos and values of the School. See Part Four of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023 (KCSIE 2023) and Bales College’s Safeguarding Policy for how to deal with allegations that might indicate a person would pose a risk of harm if they continue to work with children.

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 may have acted in a way that is inconsistent with the Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work. The term ‘low-level’ concern does not mean that it is insignificant. Early identification and prompt management of all concerns about the behaviour of adults who work or volunteer with children is critical to effective safeguarding. KCSIE 2023 requires low-level concerns to be shared.

Everyone is required to share their low-level concerns using the school’s LLC report form which ensures a formalised mechanism for reporting low-level concerns;

- To allow staff to self-report to the School to protect themselves in situations where they may have found themselves compromised;
- To identify patterns of behaviour that are concerning;
- To ensure the School continues to have a culture of safeguarding in which all staff understand their responsibility to raise concerns.

Staff should therefore

- a) **report any behaviour by another adult** towards a pupil or another child that may have concerned them
- b) **self-report** in any situation where they feel their behaviour towards a pupil or another young person could be misinterpreted or misconstrued or leave them vulnerable

2. Concerns regarding the behaviour of another adult towards a child

A low-level concern should be reported when a member of staff is concerned about the behaviour of another adult towards a pupil or another child. This is not just where it is clear that a professional boundary has been broken: anything which causes staff to have a 'nagging doubt' about the way in which other adults behave or interact with pupils should be notified, in order to protect both pupils and the members of staff involved. Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum, from such as the inadvertent or thoughtless, or behaviour that may look to be inappropriate.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being over friendly with children;
- having favourites;
- taking photographs of children on their personal mobile phone, having forgotten to use the school-provided camera phone.
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door; or,
- using inappropriate sexualised, intimidating, or offensive language.

3. Self-reporting

From time to time an individual may find him/herself in a situation which might appear compromising to others, or which could be misconstrued. For example, a teacher might sense that a discussion about sensitive topics in RSE makes a group uncomfortable and that they might have considered the discussion inappropriate. Self-reporting this as a concern is one way for the teacher to ensure that the situation is properly understood and not misconstrued.

Equally, an individual may, for whatever reason, have behaved in a manner which on reflection he/she considers falls below the standard set out in the School's Staff Code of Conduct. Self-reporting in these

circumstances is encouraged as it demonstrates both awareness of the expected behavioural standards and self-awareness as to the individual's own actions or how these might be perceived.

4. Reporting Low-level Concerns

Low-level concerns must be shared solely with the via a form located in the School Office (also see APPENDIX). Once the Head has received the low-level concern, they will 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);
- Review the information and determine whether the behaviour in question is consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct and the law or constitutes a low-level concern;
- If they are in any doubt, seek advice from the LADO – on a no-names basis if necessary;
- 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);
- The Head will ensure that appropriate and detailed records are kept of all internal and external conversations regarding the concern and context, their determination, the rationale for their decision and any actions taken, and retain records in accordance with the Low-level Concerns about Staff Policy;

Almost always, there will be a perfectly innocent explanation for what has occurred, and staff should not feel awkward about making a report or being the subject of a report. Reporting these types of concerns is a neutral act and the Head will, on receiving a report, follow the steps above in response to the concern raised.

A member of staff who shares a low-level concern, or a more serious allegation, in good faith will suffer no detriment as a result and will benefit from the protection set out in the School's Whistleblowing Policy.

Some of the circumstances in which staff should raise a low-level concern:

- any incident where s/he feels his/her actions or behaviour towards a pupil or that of another adult, may have been misinterpreted or may

have given rise to a risk of misinterpretation

- any use by an adult of sexually inappropriate language, references or jokes to a pupil;
- any adult being overfriendly with pupils, for example, allowing first names to be used, or encouraging the use of nicknames of staff or pupils;
- email, messaging, use of social media sites or other communication between adults and pupils outside agreed protocols;
- any incident of physical contact with a pupil when no one else is present, including as a point of good practice when administering first aid or medical treatment (School medical staff are exempt from this requirement), and including physical demonstrations in one-to-one sports coaching, music lessons, etc;
- any incident where a staff member has been alone with a pupil or pupils in a vehicle where this has not been authorised in advance;
- any social contact with pupils outside of School (other than planned/authorised events, educational visits or trips, or insignificant incidents such as passing a pupil in the street or in a shop or noticing they are sitting, separately, in the same restaurant or cinema) particularly where the member of staff and/or pupil(s) is/are under the influence of alcohol;
- if a pupil becomes aware of and/or uses a staff members home address, mobile or home phone number, or non-school e-mail address;
- the fact of, and explanation for, any one-to-one contact with a pupil on School trips, particularly if this takes place in a private space such as a bedroom;
- any incident where, for whatever reason, a member of staff has not complied with the Staff Code of Conduct.

This is not an exhaustive list. Staff who are unsure of whether to complete a neutral notification are at liberty to discuss the matter with a member of the safeguarding team on a no-names basis. However, following such a discussion, should it be felt that the matter reaches the threshold for notification the member of staff will be expected to refer it to the Head in the usual way. If in doubt, a referral should always be made.

5. Recording Low-level Concerns

All low-level concerns (even those which turn out to be of no concern) will be recorded in writing. The record will set out the details of the concern, the context in which the concern arose and action taken. The name of the individual sharing their concerns should also be noted but

if the individual wishes to remain anonymous that should be respected as far as possible. Records are stored securely by the Head

The Head will review all LLC records when a new LLC is received so that any patterns of concerning problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified. They may identify patterns of behaviour by a particular member of staff, or by a specific type of behaviour across the school. They will consider whether the reported matter is a low-level concern and whether it should be reclassified as an allegation and dealt with as outlined in the Safeguarding Policy. Where there is in any doubt whatsoever about the classification of a reported concern, the Head will seek advice from the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on a no-names basis

The Head will also consider whether the concern also potentially raises misconduct or capability issues – taking advice from HR on a named or no-names basis where necessary – and, if so, refer the matter to HR.

Where there are multiple low-level concerns regarding the same individual these will be kept in chronological order as a running record, and with a timeline alongside. These may be used to demonstrate a pattern of behaviour.

6. Reviewing Low-level Concerns

The Head will report to the Proprietor about the implementation of the Low-Level Concerns about Staff Policy and any evidence of its effectiveness, e.g. by including reference to it in safeguarding reports and providing relevant data. The Proprietor will also review an anonymised sample of low-level concerns at least annually, to ensure that these concerns have been responded to promptly and appropriately.

Where a pattern of behaviour is identified in respect of a specific individual, the Head 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.

7. Data Protection and Confidentiality

The School will always respect the personal data of staff (and others, where they may be identifiable) in implementing the Low-level Concerns about Staff Policy and in keeping records of low-level concerns secure.

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 Safeguarding Policy. All staff are entitled, under data protection law, to ask to see the content of any low-level concern(s) retained by the School under the Low-level Concerns about Staff Policy as it relates to them personally and to make any reasonable objection as to the fairness or accuracy of that content.

For further information, please refer to the School's Data Protection Policy.

8. Retaining Records of Low-level Concerns

Low-level concerns will be retained securely by the School 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). In most cases, any low-level concerns which are held relating to them will be retained at least until the individual leaves the School or for the same duration as that individual's personnel files are kept after leaving the School. Concerns will not be included in any onward reference, except as set in the *References* section below.

9. References

Only those low-level safeguarding concerns (or groups of concerns) that have met the threshold for referral to the LADO and are therefore substantiated, can be detailed in a reference.

10. **Review**

Policy agreed July 2024

Signed: Ben Moore

Head

Signed: William Moore

Proprietor

Policy Review Date: July 2025

This Policy shall be reviewed annually.

Low Level Concern Form

Please use this form to share 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 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.

Remember, a low-level concern is different to an allegation. See the table below for a definition:

Allegation

Behaviour which indicates 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 he or she 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.

Low-Level Concern

Any concern – no matter how small, even if no more than a ‘nagging doubt’ – that an adult may have acted in a manner which:

- Is not consistent with an organisation’s Code of Conduct, and/or
- Relates to their conduct outside of work which, even if not linked with 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 the organisation’s Code of Conduct, and the law.

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).

Please use a separate sheet if necessary. The record should be timed and dated.

Details of CONCERN:

Name of Staff member :	Role :
	Time and Date :

This part of the form can be used by management to consider and address any unprofessional behaviour and support any individual to correct it at an early stage and to record any subsequent action(s).

Received by :	
At [time] :	Date :
WAS THE STAFF MEMBER SPOKEN TO? [Good practice will require a response]. NO <input type="checkbox"/> - Give a brief but valid reason/explanation for not;	
YES <input type="checkbox"/> - Please complete detail below - STAFF MEMBER'S RESPONSE TO CONCERN :	
ACTION TAKEN :	
Was advice/guidance sought from the LADO and/or Human Resources? Yes : <input type="checkbox"/> No : <input type="checkbox"/>	
Signed :	Dated :

This record form will be held securely, either digitally or in paper form, in one central file in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.