



## Low-level Concerns Policy

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## **Introduction**

Parbold Douglas Church of England Academy is committed to acknowledging, recording and reporting **all** safeguarding concerns, regardless of their perceived severity.

This policy focuses on low-level concerns regarding adults' behaviour with respect to children, including: the option of adults to share such concerns about the behaviour of other adults, or the option of adults to self-report such concerns about their own behaviour. The policy applies where an adult who works with children may have acted in a way that contravenes the school's Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work, and does not meet the harm threshold, or is otherwise not serious enough to merit a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The behaviour may not relate directly to a particular child or children but may nonetheless raise an issue or issues of concern with respect to safeguarding a child / children, and may potentially call into question the adult's suitability to work with children.

Whilst this policy does not focus on the sharing of low-level concerns (i) about adults by children, or (ii) in the context of child-on-child abuse, or (iii) in the context of adults' behaviour towards adults at risk, we believe that the same fundamental principles should nonetheless apply. Further information may be found in our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

This policy applies to all staff. For the context of this policy, 'staff' should be interpreted very widely to mean anyone associated with Parbold Douglas Church of England Academy – i.e. whether working in or on behalf of the organisation, engaged as a paid employee (including supply teacher), worker or contractor, or unpaid member of staff or volunteer. It also includes anyone who is part of the Trust Board.

## **Our Safeguarding Culture**

Parbold Douglas Church of England Academy seeks to create a culture within which all such concerns can be raised openly and promptly.

Our culture (defined by [our principles](#)) sets the context for how we work and operate as a team. This includes an emphasis on challenging one another, speaking up, and listening to the voices of all – everyone is valued. This helps create a positive culture where we seek to enable **all** concerns to be identified and spoken about openly - a key element of a strong safeguarding system.

Our staff are expected to adhere to high standards of behaviour when it comes to professional conduct regarding pupils. The school has clear professional boundaries (informed by [Guidance for Safer Working Practice](#)) which all staff are made aware of. 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 other children.

## **Legal Framework**

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

- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- DfE 'Keeping children safe in education' [KCSIE]
- DfE 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'

## **Parbold Douglas CE Academy**

Low-level Concerns Policy [Last updated: Sept 2024] [Review: Sept 2025]

The policy is informed by the Safer Recruitment Consortium's 'Guidance for Safer Working Practice' (2023) and Farrer and Co's 'Developing and implementing a low-level concerns policy: a guide for organisations which work with children' (2022).

This policy operates in conjunction with a number of other school policies, including the following:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Intimate Care Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy

### **What is a Low-level Concern?**

The term 'low-level' concern does not mean that it is insignificant. 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
- does not meet the harm threshold (see below) or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.

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, contrary to school policy
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door, or
- humiliating children.

Low-level concerns are differentiated from concerns that can cause harm. The harms threshold is the point at which a concern is no longer low-level and constitutes a threat of harm to a child. This threshold is defined as accusations that 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 in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children, 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, Parbold Douglas Church of England Academy recognises that many serious safeguarding concerns often begin with low-level concerns.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Governing Board**

In reviewing the impact of this policy, the Safeguarding Governor will review an anonymised sample of low-level concerns at regular intervals (usually annually), in order to ensure that these concerns have been responded to promptly and appropriately.

The governing board is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the school complies with its duties under child protection and safeguarding legislation.
- Ensuring that policies, procedures, and training opportunities with regard to reporting safeguarding concerns are compliant and effective.
- Ensuring that there is an effective Staff Code of Conduct that outlines behavioural expectations.
- Ensuring that there are appropriate procedures in place to handle allegations and low-level concerns reported against members of staff.

### **Headteacher**

The headteacher will regularly inform the Trust Board about the implementation of the low-level concerns policy and any evidence as to its effectiveness. For example, by providing any relevant data so that trends and patterns can be identified. Low-level concerns will be reported in the Headteacher's Termly report.

The headteacher is also responsible for:

- The creation of a school culture that enables **all** concerns to be raised openly and promptly.
- Being a point of contact for all 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.
- Keeping detailed, accurate and secure records of all low-level concerns and any actions taken.
- 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.

### **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)**

The DSL is responsible for:

- Being a point of contact for all 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.
- 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.

### **Staff**

Staff are responsible for:

- Adhering to all the relevant policies and procedures, including acting within the Staff Code of Conduct.
- Interacting with pupils in a way that is respectful and appropriate.
- 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 adults immediately.
- Reflecting on their own behaviour and having the awareness to self-report, in line with this policy.

## **Sharing and Recording Low-level Concerns**

### **Sharing concerns about other adults**

Parbold Douglas Church of England Academy 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. The steps outlined in this policy illustrate how staff and visitors at Parbold Douglas Church of England Academy are able to report concerns quickly, easily and confidentially.

**To share/report a low-level concern, staff should speak verbally to the Headteacher or complete a low-level concern form (Appendix A) and submit this to the Headteacher.**

**Where a concern is shared verbally, the Headteacher will ask that a low-level concern form is completed, ensuring a clear written record of the concern. Often, this will be completed immediately by the Headteacher, with the staff member who has shared the concern.**

**Where a low-level concern relates to the Headteacher, it should be shared with the Chair of Governors; up-to-date contact details are displayed in the staff room and are available from the School Business Manager.**

All low-level concerns **must**, ultimately, be reported to the Headteacher. In the absence of the Headteacher, the concern should be shared with the DSL. The DSL will then share the concern with the Headteacher at the earliest opportunity.

Printed copies of the school's low-level concern form are available in the school staffroom, the photocopying room, and from the Headteacher. Digital copies are available for staff to download from OneDrive (within both the 'Staff Handbook' folder).

Staff will report concerns as soon as reasonably possible. Where a concern relates to a specific incident, this should usually be within 24 hours. However, **it is never too late to share a concern.**

If the staff member who shares the concern does not wish to be named, then the school will respect that person's wishes as far as possible. In some cases, and depending on the action taken subsequently, this may not be possible. There may be circumstances where the staff member who raises the concern will need to be named (for example, where it is necessary in order to carry out a fair disciplinary process) and, for this reason, anonymity will never be promised to members of staff who share low-level concerns. Usually, Parbold Douglas Church of England Academy will encourage staff to consent to be named, as this will help to create a culture of openness and transparency.

If a staff member wishes to discuss their low-level concern (prior to completing the form), they should speak to the DSL or the Headteacher. If the former, then the DSL will inform the Headteacher of the discussion in a timely fashion according to the nature of each particular low-level concern.

Staff do not need to be able to determine in each case whether the behaviour in question constitutes a low-level concern, or if it may meet the harm threshold. Once staff share what they believe to be a low-level concern, that determination will be made by the Headteacher and in consultation with the DSL if/as appropriate.

### **Sharing concerns about themselves (Self-reporting)**

Occasionally a member of staff may find themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted, or might appear compromising to others. They may also realise, on reflection, that their conduct falls below the standards set out in the Staff Code of Conduct or another school policy.

Self-reporting in these circumstances can be positive for a number of reasons: 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 individual's own actions or how they could be perceived; and, crucially, it is an important means of maintaining a culture where everyone aspires to the highest standards of conduct and behaviour.

**The process for self-reporting is the same as the process for sharing a concern about another adult.**

The Headteacher 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.

### **Evaluating and Responding to Low-level Concerns**

The Headteacher is the ultimate decision maker in respect of all low-level concerns, although it is recognised that depending on the nature of some low-level concerns, the Headteacher may consult with the DSL and take a more collaborative decision making approach.

All low-level concerns will be responded to in a sensitive and proportionate way – on the one hand demonstrating that such concerns when raised will be handled promptly and effectively whilst, on the other hand, protecting staff from any potential false low-level concerns or misunderstandings.

Once the Headteacher has received what is believed (by the person raising it) to be a low-level concern, they will respond according to the nature and detail of the particular concern shared. They will:

- Speak to the person who raised the concern;
- Speak to any potential witnesses if appropriate;
- 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);
- review the information and determine whether:
  - the behaviour is in fact appropriate – i.e. entirely consistent with the Staff Code of Conduct and the law,
  - the behaviour constitutes a low-level concern,
  - there is any doubt as to whether the information which has been shared about a member of staff as a low-level concern in fact may meet the harm threshold, in which case they should consult with their LADO,
  - in and of itself the behaviour may meet the harm threshold, and should be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, or
  - when considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been shared about the same individual, the behaviour may meet the harm threshold, and should be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies,
- make appropriate records (usually on the reverse of the low-level concern form – Appendix A) of:
  - all internal conversations – including with the person who initially shared the low-level concern, the adult about whom the concern has been shared (subject to the above), and any relevant witnesses (subject to the above);
  - all external conversations – for example, with the LADO/other external agencies (where they have been contacted, and either on a no-names or names basis);
  - their determination;
  - the rationale for their decision; and
  - any action taken.

**Where it is determined that the concern is unfounded**

If it is determined, upon evaluation, that the low-level concern refers to behaviour that was entirely consistent with the school's Staff Code of Conduct and the law, the headteacher 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 may be able to do to avoid such misunderstandings in the future.

The headteacher will also speak to the individual who shared the concern, outlining why the behaviour reported is consistent with the Staff Code of Conduct and the law. The headteacher 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 will also consider whether the report 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 will work together to resolve this with input from other staff members, as necessary.

**Where it is determined that the behaviour constitutes a low-level concern**

Where the headteacher determines that a concern is low-level, the school will respond to this in a sensitive and proportionate manner. Any investigation will be discreet and on a need-to-know basis.

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. The headteacher will discuss with the individual:

- why their behaviour is inappropriate, problematic or concerning,
- what change is required in their behaviour,
- what, if any, support they might need in order to achieve and maintain that,
- and 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.

Some low-level concerns may also raise issues of misconduct or poor performance which are unrelated to safeguarding. The Headteacher will consider whether this is the case by referring to the school's disciplinary and capability procedures and taking advice from relevant professionals.

Low-level concerns which are shared about supply staff and contractors will be notified to their employers, so that any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

If the Headteacher is in any doubt as to whether the information which has been shared about a member of staff as a low-level concern in fact meets the harm threshold, they will consult with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

**Where it is determined that the harm threshold is met**

If it may be determined that the behaviour (i) in and of itself may meet the harm threshold, or (ii) when considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been shared about the same individual, may meet the harm threshold.

If this is the case, it will be referred to the LADO / other relevant external agencies, and in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Part 4 of KCSIE.

## **Record keeping**

The school will retain all records of low-level concerns, including those that were found to be unfounded. The headteacher will ensure that all records include the most accurate and up-to-date information and will store them in the central low-level concerns file (electronic). Records will be confidential and password-protected. They will be stored securely for seven years after the staff member to whom the concerns pertain has left employment at the school – they will then be securely destroyed. All records are kept in a manner that is consistent with the Data Protection Policy and Records Management Policy.

The headteacher will ensure that all low-level concerns are stored together, in an organised and consistent manner, to ensure they can be easily reviewed and analysed where necessary. Where multiple low-level concerns have been made about the same individual, these will be kept together, and in chronological order.

Records will include:

- A clear summary of the concern (including the context in which the concern arose).
- Details of any action taken, decisions reached, and the outcome.
- The name of the individual sharing concerns – if the individual wishes to remain anonymous, this will be respected as far as reasonably possible.

The headteacher will periodically review the recent low-level concerns made with the Safeguarding governor to ensure that they are being appropriately dealt with and to check for any concerning behaviour patterns amongst the staff cohort as a whole. Records of these reviews will be kept.

Where any concerning patterns of behaviour have been identified with regard to a member of staff, the headteacher will decide on a course of action and discuss this with the DSL and the Safeguarding governor. Where a pattern of behaviour has become so concerning that it meets the harm threshold, this will be referred to the LADO as soon as practicable.

Records of low-level concerns will not be kept in the personnel file of the individuals to whom the concerns pertain, unless there have been multiple low-level concerns made about the same individual. Where a concern is thought to be serious, records of this will be kept in staff personnel files.

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 harm threshold, all records of low-level concerns about that individual will be moved to the staff personnel file and kept alongside records of the allegation.

The school will only refer to concerns about a staff member in employment references where they have amounted to a substantiated safeguarding allegation, i.e. it has met the harm threshold and has been found to have basis through investigation, or where it is not exclusively a safeguarding issue and forms part of an issue that would normally be included in a reference, e.g. misconduct or poor performance. Low-level concerns will not be included in a reference, unless they have comprised a pattern of behaviour that has met the harm threshold.

## **Monitoring and Review**

This policy is reviewed **annually by the Education and Welfare Committee** and is recommended for approval by the **Trust Board**.





## **Appendix B: Spectrum of Behaviour**

### **Concern or allegation that may meet harm threshold**

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 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.

### **Low-level concern**

Does not mean that it is insignificant. 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 with children may have acted in a way that:

- is inconsistent with an organisation’s staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work; and
- does not meet the harm threshold, or is otherwise not serious enough to merit a referral to the LADO.

### **Appropriate conduct**

Behaviour which is entirely consistent with the organisation’s staff code of conduct, and the law.