Low-level Concerns Policy

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Contents:

Statement of intent
1. Legal framework
2. Definitions
3. Roles and responsibilities
4. Prevention amongst staff
5. Reporting concerns
6. Self-reporting
7. Evaluating concerns
8. Acting on concerns
9. Record keeping
10. Monitoring and review

Statement of intent

Grey Court 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 students, and our staff are expected to adhere to high standards of behaviour when it comes to professional conduct regarding students. 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 students and other children.

1. Legal framework

This policy is to be read and applied in accordance with the current version of KCSIE and applicable statutory guidance. In particular, but not limited to

- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- 'Keeping children safe in education 2026'
- 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026'

This policy operates in conjunction with Achieving for Children's School's Model Safeguarding and Child protection Policy and with the following Grey Court school policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Physical Intervention Policy
- Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy

Where statutory guidance or local safeguarding arrangements are updated, this policy will be read and applied in accordance with the current version.

2. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, a low-level concern is defined as any concern about an adult's behaviour towards, or concerning, a child 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 refer to behaviour on the part of **all adults working in or on behalf of the school**, including employees, supply teachers, trainee teachers, volunteers, contractors and other individuals, towards students that is considered inappropriate in line with statutory safeguarding advice, the Staff Code of Conduct, and the 'Appropriate and inappropriate behaviour' subsection of this policy.

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.

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 above. 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 harms threshold or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.

The KCSIE test is about whether an allegation is that an adult:

- has behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child;
- may have committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- has behaved towards a child in a way indicating they may pose a risk of harm; or
- has behaved in a way indicating they may not be suitable to work with children.

KCSIE 2026 expressly recognises that low-level concerns can arise from, for example:

- suspicion;
- a complaint;
- a disclosure by a child;
- a parent/carer;
- another adult inside or outside the organisation;
- vetting checks.

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.
- humiliating a child

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.

The culture of our school is such that staff are encouraged to pass on low level concerns to the DSL, Deputy DSL, or the headteacher. These concerns will be recorded and dealt with appropriately.

Ensuring they are dealt with effectively will also protect those working in or on behalf of the school from potential false allegations or misunderstandings.

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. 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.

3. Roles and responsibilities

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.
- Guaranteeing that there is an effective Staff Code of Conduct that outlines behavioural expectations.
- Ensuring that a suitably trained DSL has been appointed, alongside deputy DSLs where appropriate.
- 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 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.
- Safeguarding students' 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 headteacher is the ultimate decision-maker in respect of all low-level concerns. The headteacher will consult with the DSL and/or other appropriate persons as necessary.

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.
- Keeping detailed, accurate and secure records of all low-level concerns and keeping records of decisions made regarding safeguarding concerns, including the rationale for those decisions.

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 students in a way that is respectful and appropriate for their level of authority and has due regard to the power imbalance between students and staff members.
- Understanding the importance of reporting low-level safeguarding concerns.
- Reporting any and all safeguarding concerns they may have about students immediately.
- Reporting any and all safeguarding concerns they may have about the behaviour of a member of staff 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 expected towards students.

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 students.
- There is a significant power imbalance in the student-staff dynamic.
- There are more stringent expectations on their behaviour with regard to students due to their position as a public professional.

Staff will remain aware of the fact that all students under the age of 18, regardless of the phase and year group they are at within the school, are children by law – resultantly, staff will ensure that they do not assume maturity on behalf of a student and do not engage with students 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 DSL, headteacher or other nominated person 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 to the DSL include, but are not limited to:

- 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 students, 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 students by pet names or terms of endearment or buying students 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.

- Humiliating students

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 school 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 students inadvertently will be made aware and supported to correct this behaviour in line with the Staff Code of Conduct. The headteacher 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 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 school will ensure that all staff members have received training as part of their induction that outlines appropriate behaviour towards students 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. 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. students 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 students that may indicate a safeguarding concern, and how to identify signs of abuse or harm in students.

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 students is the uppermost priority, beyond any perceived professional loyalties to colleagues, ensuring that staff are actively encouraged to report concerns, regardless of their relationship with the staff member.

Staff will report all safeguarding concerns they have to the headteacher, DSL, or Deputy DSL immediately in line with the procedures laid out in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. Concerns must be shared promptly and without undue delay. Staff should not wait until they have gathered further evidence or established that a concern is substantiated. 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 or DSL verbally, or using the Low level Concern Reporting Form. When submitting concerns, staff will take care to ensure that they observe the Confidentiality Policy and 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 there is a conflict of interest in reporting to the headteacher the concern should be reported directly to the LADO -Local Authority Designated Officer .

Email: LADO@achievingforchildren.org.uk Telephone: 07774 332675 Online: LADO referral form

Where a low-level concern relates to a trainee teacher, person employed by a supply agency or a contractor to work in the school, staff will also be required to report this to the headteacher, who will, in turn, inform the training provider or employer of the subject of the concern. Low-level concerns relating to trainee teachers, supply staff and contractors will be notified to their training provider or employer so that any potential patterns of inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour can be identified

All concerns reported to the headteacher will be documented in line with the Records Management Policy. Low level concerns will be logged on the staff area of CPOMS, which can be seen only by the headteacher, DSL and Deputy DSL.

In line with the **Evaluating concerns** section of this policy, if the school receives an allegation of a low-level safeguarding concern regarding an organisation that has hired the school premises, the school will follow its usual safeguarding procedures and process for managing allegations.

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

To evaluate a concern, the headteacher 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 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. The headteacher will also speak to the individual who shared the concern, outlining why the behaviour reported is consistent with school standards and the law. The headteacher will take steps 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 discuss the concern with the DSL (and if they have been involved, 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 will work together to resolve this with input from other staff members, as necessary.

Where the concern is low-level

Where the headteacher 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 headteacher 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 asks the individual to re-read the Staff Code of Conduct

- The DSL and the headteacher will consider whether the individual should receive guidance, supervision or any further training.
- Where considered appropriate in the circumstances, the headteacher 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 student or other individual has been made to feel uncomfortable by the individual's behaviour, they will be offered pastoral support, where appropriate.

The headteacher will ensure that all details of the low-level concern, including any resultant actions taken, are recorded and securely stored in line with the Records Management Policy and the Data Protection Policy. The headteacher 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 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 will then follow the procedures laid out in the Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy.

9. Record keeping

The school will maintain a clear, accurate and confidential written record of all low-level concerns, including concerns that are subsequently found to be unfounded or are not considered to require further action.

All records will be held securely in the staff safeguarding area of CPOMS and access will be restricted to the headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), and to any other person where access is necessary and authorised for safeguarding, employment or legal purposes.

Each record will contain, as appropriate:

- a clear and comprehensive summary of the concern;
- the context in which the concern arose;
- the name of the individual about whom the concern has been raised;
- the name of the person who raised the concern, unless they have requested anonymity, in which case this will be respected as far as reasonably possible;
- details of how the concern was followed up and investigated;
- any relevant information obtained from the person who raised the concern, the individual concerned and any witnesses;
- the actions taken, decisions reached and outcome;
- the rationale for the decisions and actions taken; and
- details of any advice sought from the LADO or other external agency.

Low-level concern records will be kept confidential, stored securely and processed in accordance with the UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018, the school's Data Protection Policy and Records Retention Schedule.

The school will retain low-level concern records for as long as is necessary for safeguarding, employment and legal purposes and in accordance with the school's Records Retention Schedule. In accordance with KCSIE, the school will normally retain records of low-level concerns at least until the individual concerned leaves their employment, unless a different retention period is required by law or the school's approved retention arrangements provide otherwise.

Records will not be retained indefinitely. At the end of the applicable retention period, records will be securely deleted or destroyed unless there is a lawful reason for retaining them for longer.

The fact that an individual leaves the school will not, in itself, result in the immediate deletion of low-level concern records. The school will retain such records in accordance with the applicable retention period and will consider whether any information needs to be retained because of an ongoing safeguarding, disciplinary, employment or legal matter.

The DSL will periodically review low-level concern records to identify any patterns of inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour involving an individual or the wider staff cohort. Such reviews will be recorded, including any decisions or actions arising from them.

Where a pattern of behaviour indicates that the individual may meet the harm threshold, the concern will be escalated and managed in accordance with the school's Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy and, where appropriate, referred to the LADO. Where a pattern does not meet the harm threshold but indicates a need for further action, the school will consider appropriate disciplinary, management, supervision, training or other measures.

Where a low-level concern is subsequently reclassified as an allegation because the harm threshold is met, the record will be managed in accordance with the school's Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy and applicable safeguarding and employment procedures. Relevant records will be retained and linked appropriately so that the full history and rationale for decisions can be understood.

The school will ensure that records of low-level concerns are maintained in a way that enables appropriate safeguarding patterns to be identified while ensuring that personal information is not retained or disclosed for longer than is necessary and proportionate.

Information relating to low-level concerns will not normally be included in employment references where it relates exclusively to safeguarding. Where information arising from a low-level concern relates to matters that would ordinarily be included in a reference, such as substantiated misconduct or poor performance, the school will consider whether it is appropriate and lawful to include that information, in accordance with KCSIE, employment law, data protection requirements and the school's reference policy.

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.