GIGGLESWICK
SCHOOL

Low Level Concerns Policy (including Self-Referral)

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Reviewed by	Headmaster Head of the Prep School Nominated Governor for Safeguarding
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1 RATIONALE

This policy should be read in conjunction with Giggleswick School's ("the School") Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, Staff Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Policy, to enable staff to share their concerns, no matter how small, about their own or another member of staff's behaviour.

The purpose of the policy is to create and embed a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which the clear values and expected behaviour which are set out in the School's Code of Conduct are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff. The School deals with all concerns about adults working in or on behalf of the School appropriately and promptly. It is never too late to report a concern.

The School seeks to create an environment where staff are encouraged and feel confident to self-refer, where, for example, they have found themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted, might appear compromising to others, and/or on reflection they believe they have behaved in such a way that they consider falls below expected professional standards.

This policy seeks to:

- ensure that staff are clear about, and confident to distinguish between, expected and appropriate behaviour from concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour – in themselves and others, and the delineation of professional boundaries and reporting lines;
- empower staff to share any low-level concerns with the Headmaster or DSL
- help staff address unprofessional behaviour and help the individual to correct such behaviour at an early stage;
- identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour – including any patterns – that may need to be consulted upon with (on a no-names basis if appropriate), or referred to, the LADO;
- provide for responsive, sensitive and proportionate handling of such concerns when they are raised; and
- help identify any weaknesses in the organisation's safeguarding system.

This policy applies to **all** staff at the School – including members of the Governing Body. Where a low-level concern relates to a person employed from a supply agency or a contractor, that concern will be notified to their employers, so that any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

2 DEFINING 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; and
- does not meet the harm threshold 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 pupils;
- having favourites;
- taking photographs of pupils on their mobile phone, contrary to school policy;
- engaging with a pupil on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door, or
- humiliating pupils.

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. Appendix 1 refers to the spectrum of behaviour (Farrer & Co, 2023).

Low-level concerns may arise in several ways and from a number of sources. For example: suspicion; complaint; or disclosure made by a child, parent or other adult within or outside of the organisation; or as a result of vetting checks undertaken.

As a reminder, the harm threshold is when anyone working in a school (including volunteers, supply staff and contractors) 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 (which includes behaviour that may have happened **outside** school posing a transferable risk to children).

Responses and actions to behaviours that may meet the harm threshold are contained specifically within section 6 of the School's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, 'Concerns About a Member of Staff'. These should be reported to the Headmaster (or DSL in his absence) without delay. Concerns about the Headmaster should be reported to the Chair of Governors.

3 RESPONSIBILITIES OF STAFF

It is important that **all** staff are clear of the expectations the School stipulates from them as contained in the Staff Code of Conduct. This is covered annually by the DSL, and as part of the School's induction for new staff.

It is crucial that **any** concerns in relation to a staff member's behaviour, including those which do not meet the harm threshold, are shared responsibly and with the Headmaster (or the DSL in his absence). This should be done without delay and certainly within 24 hours.

Where there are concerns/allegations about the Headmaster, this should be referred to the Chair of Governors (whose contact details can be found in the School's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures document).

4 DEALING WITH LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS

It is crucial that all low-level concerns are shared responsibly with the right person, and recorded and dealt with appropriately. Ensuring they are dealt with effectively should also protect those working in the School from becoming the subject of potential false low-level concerns or misunderstandings.

4.1 Reporting a Low-Level Concern

All low-level concerns may be shared verbally with the Headmaster (or DSL in his absence) in the first instance, but must then be recorded in writing.

The record should include:

- details of the concern;
- the context in which the concern arose; and
- action taken.

Staff may download and submit a low-level concerns form which is posted in the Safeguarding Channel of the School Staff Team – a copy may be found at Appendix 3 to this policy.

The name of the individual sharing their concerns should also be noted, but if the individual wishes to remain anonymous then that will be respected as far as reasonably possible. Where the low-level concern is provided verbally, the Headmaster (or recipient of the concern) should make an appropriate record of the conversation, either at the time or immediately following the discussion, paying heed to the details above.

The DSL will maintain a low-level concerns log, which is accessed only by them and the Headmaster.

4.2 How to Self-Refer

Occasionally a member of staff may find themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted, or might appear compromising to others. Staff should, wherever possible, **proactively self-report** – for example, if they know they are going to be in a situation which would be deemed a breach of the staff code of conduct, including, for example, where a member of staff (i) has a child who is a pupil in the school – they may have the mobile phone number of their child's friend, (ii) plays in an external sports team with a current pupil and they may be on a WhatsApp group with them, and (iii) is having to drive a pupil somewhere – for example for an urgent medical appointment.

Equally, a member of staff may, for whatever reason, have behaved in a manner which, on reflection, they consider falls below the standard set out in the School's Staff Code of Conduct. They should self-refer to the DSL. This is often best done verbally. The DSL will record and log all cases of self-referrals from staff.

4.3 Reviewing of Records

Whenever a low-level concern is recorded, records are reviewed so that potential patterns of concerning, inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour can be identified.

Where a pattern of such behaviour is identified, the School will decide on a course of action, either through disciplinary procedures or where a pattern of behaviour moves from a low-level concern to meeting the harm threshold, in which case it should be referred to the LADO.

Low-level concerns are reviewed periodically at the Weekly Safeguarding Meeting (HM, 2M, DSL, AH(Pastoral), Prep Head) so that consideration is given to whether there are wider cultural issues within the School that enabled any such behaviour to occur and where appropriate policies could be revised, or extra training delivered to minimise the risk of it happening again. It is a standing item on Safeguarding Meetings. Whilst not all details are necessarily shared, identified issues are taken forward to SLT meetings so that they may give a view as to whether an adjustment to practice or the Code of Conduct is needed.

5 RESPONDING TO A LOW-LEVEL CONCERN

The Headmaster is the ultimate decision maker in respect of all low-level concerns. In certain circumstances, the Headmaster will consult with the DSL, particularly if the report of a low-level concern was made to the DSL in the first instance.

When responding to a low-level concern, the Headmaster will, in the first instance, decide that it is a low-level concern and should not be reclassified as a higher level concern/allegation and dealt with under the appropriate procedure below.

The circumstances in which a low-level concern might be reclassified are where:

- the threshold is met for a higher-level concern/allegation;
- there is a pattern of low-level concerns which collectively amount to a higher-level concern/allegation; or
- there is other information which when taken into account leads to a higher-level concern/allegation.

Where the Headmaster is in any doubt whatsoever, advice will be sought from the LADO, if necessary, on a 'no-names' basis.

Having established that the concern is low-level, they will be investigated through a series of conversations with:

- the individual raising the concern;
- any potential witnesses to the concerning behaviour;
- the colleague whose behaviour has been called into question; and
- where necessary, the LADO team.

The information collected will help to categorise the type of behaviour and determine what further action may need to be taken. All of this needs to be recorded along with the rationale for decisions and action taken. Reports about supply staff and contractors will be notified to their employers, so any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

Most low-level concerns by their very nature are likely to be minor and will be dealt with by means of management guidance, training, etc. In dealing with a low-level concern with a member of staff, this will be approached in a sensitive and proportionate way. In many cases, a low-level concern will simply require a conversation with the individual about whom the concern has been raised.

Any conversation with a member of staff following a concern will include being clear with the individual as to why their behaviour is concerning, problematic or inappropriate, what change is required in their behaviour, enquiring what, if any, support they might need in order to achieve and maintain that, and being clear about 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 may be required. Some concerns may trigger the school's disciplinary, grievance or whistleblowing procedures, which will be followed where appropriate. Some concerns may be related to performance management and advice may be sought from the School's HR manager.

6 MONITORING OF LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS

The primary purpose of sharing low-level concerns is to support colleagues in correcting inappropriate behaviour. In most cases, a constructive conversation with the subject of the concern will be all that is required. Consideration will be given as to who is best placed to have the conversation, but in most cases, this will be the Head of Department. It is important that the conversation is conducted in a supportive manner, rather than as a disciplinary intervention.

Repetition of such behaviour, leading to further concern(s) being raised, will mean the Second Master and Headmaster will become part of the conversation and advise on changes that need to be made.

The School follows Farrer & Co's recommendation (Sept 2023) to keep low-level concerns on a separate, central low-level concerns file held on the School's SharePoint. The file is confidential, passworded and there is restricted, role-based access for the Headmaster, Second Master and DSL.

The record of a low-level concerns will be retained until at least the individual concerned leaves the School. When a staff member leaves and/or takes up new employment, that

creates a natural point at which the content of their file will be reviewed to ensure it still has value (either as a safeguarding measure or because of its possible relevance to future claims), and a decision made on that basis as to whether it is necessary to keep. Where the decision to retain the record is made, it will be retained for a standard retention period in line with usual personnel records (seven years following the end of employment). If there is a clear safeguarding purpose for retaining specific information, then – in line with other records of safeguarding value – such information will be retained for the longer term; longer-term retention is also justified where a record may be necessary to keep in connection with an employment claim, or a claim brought by a pupil.

Low-level concerns will not form part of a reference, unless they relate to issues which would normally be included in a reference, for example, misconduct or poor performance, or a pattern of behaviour has been identified that meets the harm threshold and will therefore have been brought to the attention of the LADO, and substantiated.

Records will remain confidential in accordance with the School's Data Protection policies and GDPR.

No record will be made of the concern on the individual's personnel file unless either:

- the concern (or group of concerns) has been reclassified as a higher-level concern, or
- the concern (or group of concerns) is sufficiently serious to result in formal action under the school's grievance, capability or disciplinary procedure.

7 FURTHER REFERENCES

Farrar & Co – Developing and implementing a low-level concerns policy: a guide for organizations which work with children – Adele Eastman, Owen O'Rorke, Kate Fudakowski and David Smellie. Sept 2023

https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/clients-and-sectors/safeguarding/developing-and-implementing-a-low-level-concerns-policy.pdf

Department for Education, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025

Working together to Safeguard Children, DfE (2023). Statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

APPENDIX 1 SPECTRUM OF BEHAVIOUR

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.

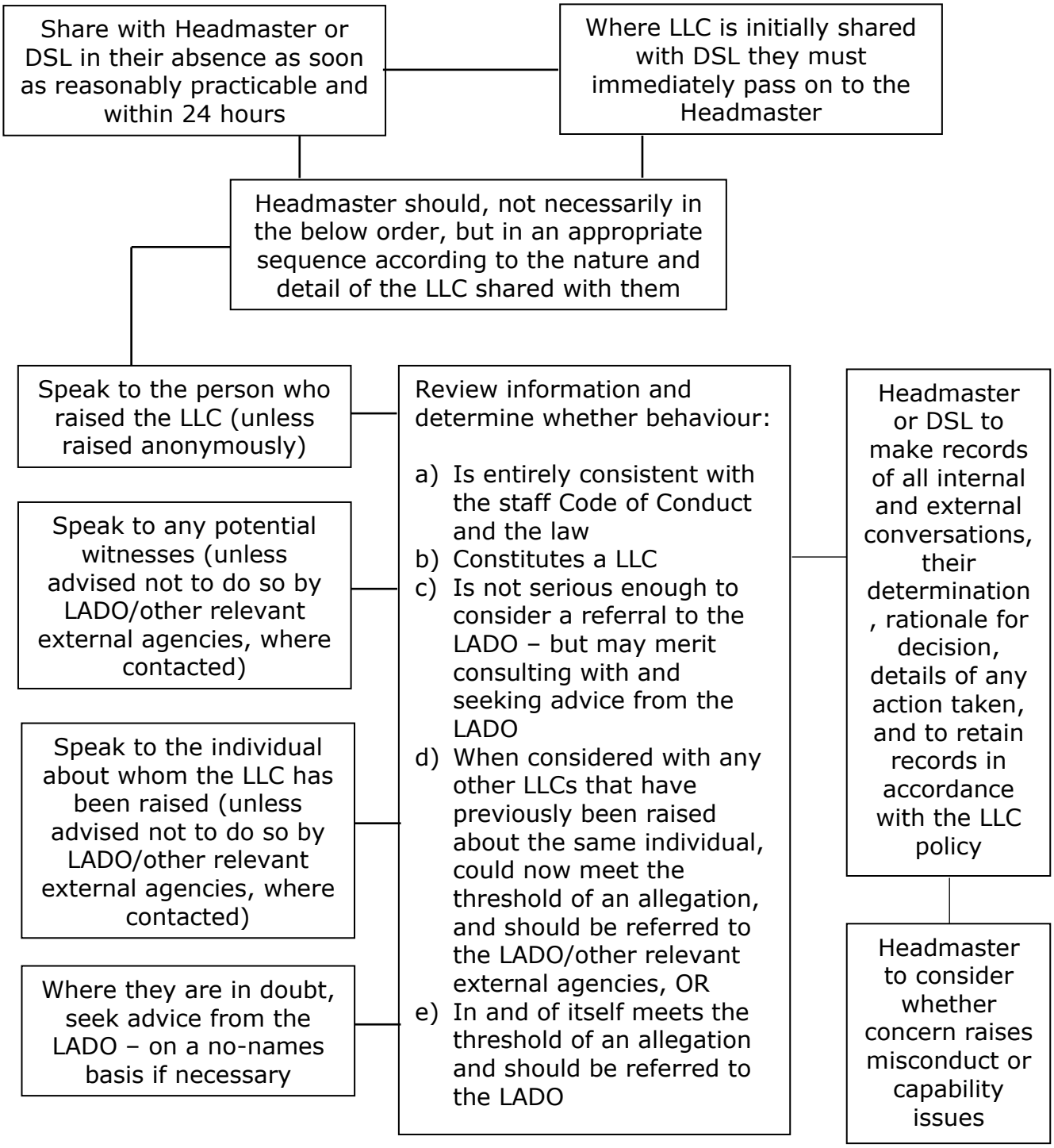
Appropriate conduct

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

APPENDIX 2 SHARING LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS

If a member of staff has an **allegation that may meet the harm threshold**, they should follow the procedure set out in Section 6 of the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

If a member of staff has what they **believe** to be a concern that does not meet the harm threshold, i.e. a low-level concern, they should take the action below



APPENDIX 3 LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS FORM

Recording Form for Low-Level Concerns

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 our staff 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.

Process

1. **Remember to download and save a copy of this form first.**

2. 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).

3. The record should be signed, timed and dated. You may submit this concern anonymously, but it is helpful if you consent to giving your name. If you wish to remain anonymous, then that will be respected as far as reasonably possible.

4. Then, please email to the Headmaster (**sehart@giggleswick.org.uk**), copying **safeguarding@giggleswick.org.uk** or print and fill in by hand.

5. **Please do not delay reporting a concern – certainly this should be done as soon as practicable and within 24 hours.**

Please type or complete in black pen	
Date	
Time	
Place	
Member of staff and position	
Full name(s) of pupils involved	

Details of Concern	
Please include: • details of the concern; • the context in which the concern arose; and • action taken	
Signed by	
Print name	
Date of completion	

This record will be held securely in accordance with Giggleswick School's low-level concerns policy.

Please note that low-level concerns will be treated in confidence as far as possible, but the School may in certain circumstances be subject to legal reporting requirements or other legal obligations to share information with appropriate persons, including legal claims and formal investigations.