



Telford Infant School

LOVING LEARNING

Every child to be an inquisitive, resilient and successful learner who is eager for their next challenge.

Low Level Concerns Policy

Manager:	Headteacher
Date of latest update:	September 2023
Date of next review:	September 2024

*This Policy is available for Staff and Governors on One Drive and in the staffroom.
It is also available for parents on the school website and on request from the school office.*

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1 RATIONALE

This policy should be read in conjunction with Telford Infant School School's ("the School") Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, 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 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 Headteacher;
- 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 Board.

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, 2020).

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 in the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. These should be reported to the Headteacher without delay.

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 DSLs, 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 Headteacher. This should be done without delay and certainly within 24 hours.

Where there are concerns/allegations about the Headteacher, this should be referred to the Chair of Governors (whose contact details can be found in the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy document, in the staffroom and on the school website).

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 Headteacher in the first instance, but must then be recorded in writing, using the yellow concern forms.

The record should include:

- 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 then that should be respected as far as reasonably possible. Where the low-level concern is provided verbally, the Headteacher should make an appropriate record of the conversation, either at the time or immediately following the discussion, paying heed to the details above. Records will be signed, timed and dated.

The DSL will maintain a low-level concerns log.

4.2 How to Self-Refer

Staff members who are concerned about how their behaviour may have been interpreted, or, on reflection, re-evaluate their behaviour as one that may have been in contrary to the staff Code of Conduct and expectations, 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.

4.2 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 Senior Leadership Team meetings 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.

5 RESPONDING TO A LOW-LEVEL CONCERN

The Headteacher is the ultimate decision maker in respect of all low-level concerns. In certain circumstances, the Headteacher/DSL will consult with the Deputy DSL.

When responding to a low-level concern, the Headteacher 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 Headteacher 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, the Headteacher will discuss it with the individual who has raised it and will take any other steps to investigate it as necessary. If the concern has been raised via a third party, the Headteacher should collect as much evidence as possible by speaking:

- directly to the person who raised the concern, unless it has been raised anonymously; and
- to the individual involved and any witnesses.

The information collected will help them 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 their 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.

Details of the concern will be recorded along with the rationale for decisions and action taken. 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 advice service.

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 Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher. 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 Deputy Head and Headteacher will need to take further advice on changes that need to be made.

The record of a low-level concerns will be retained for three years after the individual leaves employment with the School. 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, Jane Foster, Owen O’Rorke and David Smellie. 2020

<https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/clients-and-sectors/safeguarding/low-level-concerns-guidance-2020.pdf>

Department for Education, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1181955/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2023.pdf

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

APPENDIX 1 SPECTRUM OF BEHAVIOUR

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 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, it means that the adult's 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 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 allegation threshold, or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO - but may merit consulting with and seeking advice from the LADO, and on a no-names basis if necessary.

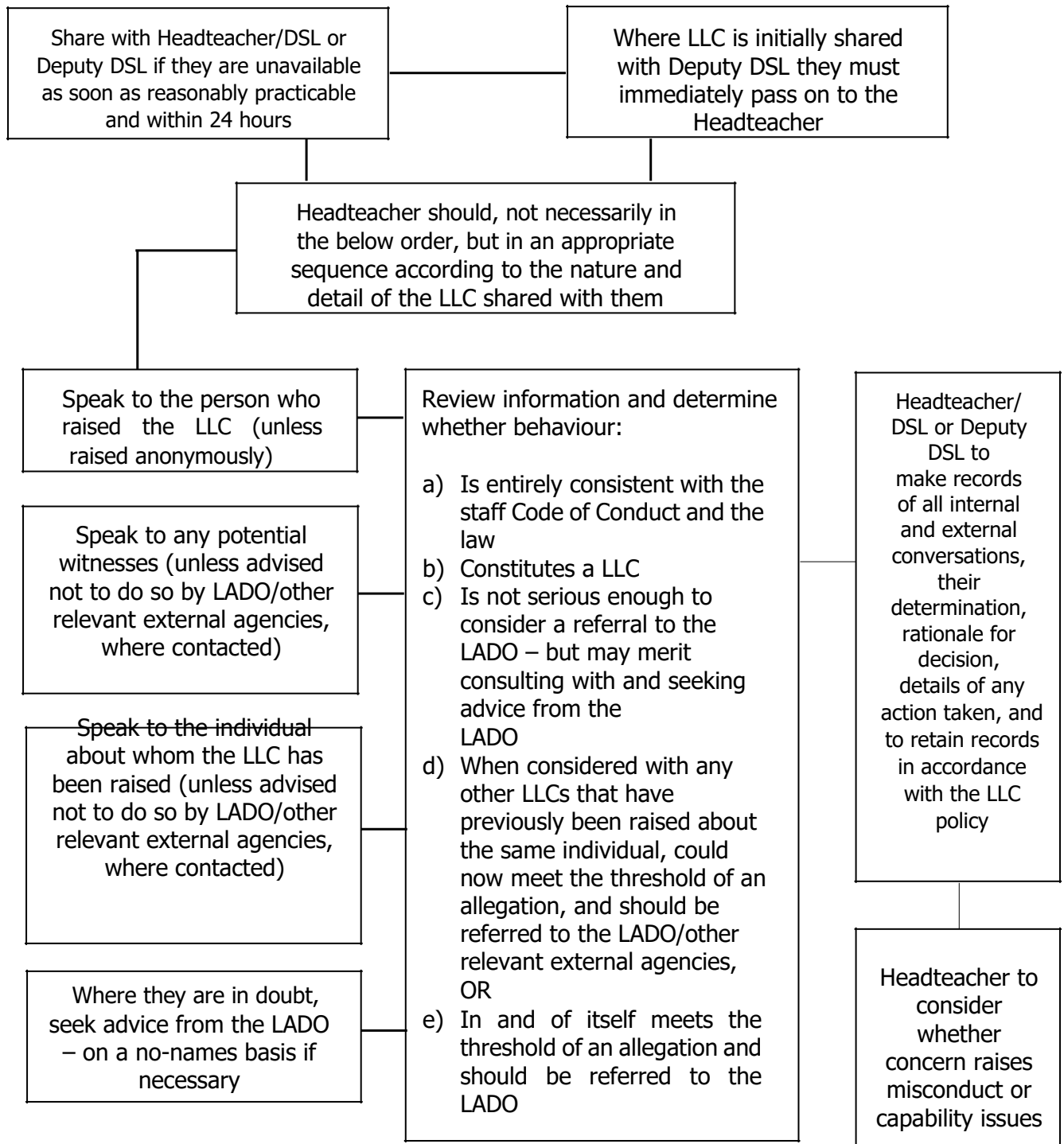
Appropriate Conduct

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 the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

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 CONCERNS FORM

Form D (yellow paper) – This form must be completed in black ink



Logging a concern about the behaviour of a member of staff or volunteer

(N.B. This form should be used for recording and reporting all allegations of abuse by and all concerns about the behaviour of staff and volunteers that are in breach of the Staff Behaviour policy (code of conduct). All allegations and all such concerns must be reported to the Headteacher* without delay)

About the member of staff or volunteer whose behaviour is causing concern or is subject of the allegation:	
Name (print):	
Job Title (print):	
Date (of writing this record):	Time (of writing this record):
About the person reporting the concern/allegation and completing this form:	
Name (print):	
Job Title (print):	
Signature:	
What is the nature of the specific allegation or concern about behaviour (brief headline)?	
Record the following factually: When? (date & time of incident); What exactly has raised your concern (what happened, what did you see/hear/find out or what were you told)? Where did your concerns arise? Who else - were any pupils or other staff present or involved? N.B. Please record any direct disclosures/statements/ allegations/comments using the child or adult's exact words in quotation marks	
NB if additional pages are used, these must be attached securely to this form	
Did you do anything or speak to anyone else before reporting the incident/concern to the Headteacher* (if yes, please provide names and details)?	
Any other relevant information:	
Date and time incident/concern was first shared with Headteacher*. N.B. It is not necessary to complete this form before speaking to the Headteacher* – the circumstances may mean you need to speak to the Headteacher* first as a matter of priority:	

Check to make sure your report is clear; and will be clear to someone else reading it next year

NOW PLEASE PASS THIS FORM TO THE HEADTEACHER*
(Headteacher* to complete sections overleaf)

* In the event that the allegation/concern is about the Headteacher, this form must be passed to the Chair of Governors, who should complete the second part of the form.