



Lower Darwen Primary School

We are proud of our school.

Low Level Concerns Policy and Guidance Procedures

September 2024

Agreed by:

Head Teacher: Steven Cumbo

Staff: shared with staff (03/09/2024)

Governors: S. Scotting (chair of governors)

Date for Review: September 2025

Introduction

At Lower Darwen Primary, we aim to create an open and transparent culture where all concerns about all adults involved with our school are dealt with promptly and appropriately. We aim to identify any concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour early; minimise the risk of abuse; and ensure that adults working in or on behalf of our school are clear about professional boundaries and act within these boundaries, and in accordance with our school ethos.

Chapter 2 of [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#) sets out the guidance on safeguarding children from people in a position of trust and further detail is provided in Part Four of [Keeping children safe in education](#) September 2024.

This policy should be read alongside our Safeguarding and Child Protection and Staff Code of Conduct Policies.

We acknowledge that having completed a comprehensive Vetting and Barring Check confirms that an individual has not been discovered to present a risk to children; it is not predictive about potential risk. Research shows that the majority of organisational child sex offenders did not have a previous criminal record at the time they offended, although they may subsequently be found to have had numerous previous victims. We must therefore continue to have an ongoing culture of vigilance and maintain a mind-set of 'it could happen here'.

All new staff will receive a copy of this policy.

Summary

It may be possible that a member of staff acts in a way that does not cause risk to children but their conduct is however inappropriate. A member of staff who has a concern about another member of staff, supply staff, volunteer or contractor who, on reflection, recognises that their actions could have been viewed as a risk should inform a Designated Safeguarding Lead about their concern using the 'Confidential Note' tool within Staffsafe. If the Designated Safeguarding Lead cannot be contacted, the Chair of Governors should be contacted instead.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

Lower Darwen Primary School will always respect the personal data of staff (and others, where they may be identifiable) in implementing the Low-Level Concerns 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 and Child Protection Policy.

In each report being considered, in order to support the safeguarding concern and, to ensure the information is accurate, fair, and as far as possible recorded without bias in neutral terms, a proportionate approach must be taken when considering what personal data is necessary to share and record by way of low-level concern(s).

If a member of staff who raises a low-level concern does not wish to be named, then the school will respect their wishes as far as possible. However, staff should be aware that in certain circumstances this anonymity may need to be waived.

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 Policy as it relates to them personally and to make any reasonable objection as to the fairness or accuracy of that content. The school will process such requests within the period prescribed by law, subject always to any necessary protection of the rights of third parties and unless any other relevant exemptions apply (including if complying with the request would be likely to prejudice the safeguarding purpose of the Low-Level Concerns Policy). If the content of a low-level concern is disputed, it may not be appropriate for School to delete or

alter the original record, but a note may be recorded alongside reflecting the staff member's alternative account or objection(s).

All personal data processed in connection with the Low-Level Concerns Policy will be processed in accordance with the School's Privacy policies.

Should staff who share low-level concerns be able to remain anonymous?

Staff are encouraged to consent to be named when sharing low-level concerns, as this will help to create a culture of openness and transparency. If the staff member who raises a low-level concern does not wish to be named, this School will respect that person's wishes as far as possible. However, there may be circumstances where the staff member will need to be named (for example, where disclosure is required by a court or local authority, or under a fair disciplinary process) and, for this reason, Lower Darwen Primary School will not promise anonymity to members of staff who share low-level concerns.

Should staff share concerns about themselves (i.e., self-report)?

Occasionally a member of staff may find themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted or might appear compromising to others. 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. Self-reporting in these circumstances can be positive for a number of reasons, and staff are encouraged to self-report on the basis that,

- 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 member of staff'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.

Lower Darwen Primary School's aim is to create an environment where staff are encouraged and feel confident to self-refer.

Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2023

The following is taken from [Keeping children safe in education](#) September 2024 and identifies what may be considered behaviour relating to a low level concern:

What is a low-level concern (LLC)?

Paragraph 427. 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 or college 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 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
- humiliating children.

Paragraph 428. 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.

Paragraph 429. 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

Paragraph 430. 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 or on behalf of school from becoming the subject of potential false low-level concerns or misunderstandings.

Clarity around Allegation vs Low Level Concern vs Appropriate Conduct

Allegation:

Any adult linked to our school who 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
- Multiple occasions of low level recorded.

Appropriate:

- Behaviour which is entirely consistent with our school's Code of Conduct, and the Law.

Low Level Concern:

Any adult linked to our school who has behaved in a way that, or an adult working in or on behalf of the school or college 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.

How should low-level concerns be shared and recorded?

The concern will be shared in writing using the 'Confidential Note' tool on Staffsafe which the DSL or Head Teacher will amend as required.

KCSiE 2024 - *Schools and colleges can decide where these records are kept, but they must be kept confidential, held securely and comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) either contemporaneously or immediately following the discussion/receipt of the log and will exercise sound professional judgment in determining what information is necessary to record for safeguarding purposes.*

Where a low-level concern relates to a person employed by a supply agency or a contractor, that concern will be raised with their employers by the Head Teacher, so that any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified. How an organisation responds to a low-level concern may be different depending on the employment status of the individual who is the subject of the concern - i.e., whether they are an employee, or worker to whom the organisation's disciplinary procedure would apply; or a contractor, Governor or volunteer who may be subject to alternative procedures.

The DSL will inform the Head Teacher of all the low-level concerns and within one working day according to the nature of each particular low-level concern. The Head Teacher will be the ultimate decision maker in respect of all low-level concerns.

Storing and use of Low-Level Concerns (LLC) and follow up information

LLC forms and follow-up information will be stored securely within the schools safeguarding systems, with access only by the Head Teacher and DSL. This will be stored in accordance with the school's GDPR and data protection policies.

The staff member(s) reporting the concern must keep the information confidential and not share the concern with others apart from the Head Teacher or the DSL.

Low-Level Concerns will not be referred to in references unless they have been formalised into more significant concerns resulting in disciplinary or misconduct procedures.

Whenever staff leave Lower Darwen Primary School, any record of low-level concerns which are stored about them will be reviewed as to whether or not that information needs to be kept.

Consideration will be given to:

- whether some or all of the information contained within any record may have any reasonably likely value in terms of any potential historic employment or abuse claim so as to justify keeping it, in line with normal safeguarding records practice; or
- if, on balance, any record is not considered to have any reasonably likely value, still less actionable concern, and ought to be deleted accordingly.

How we will respond to a Low-Level Concern, see Flow Chart on page 10

Once the DSL/Headteacher has received the low-level concern, we will – not necessarily in the below order but in an appropriate sequence according to the nature and detail of the particular concern shared:

- speak to the person who raised the low-level concern (unless it has been raised anonymously).
- speak to any potential witnesses
- speak to the individual about whom the low-level concern has been raised
- if the Head Teacher is in any doubt, they will seek advice from the LADO or the Safeguarding in Schools Officer
- review the information and determine whether the behaviour in question is, entirely consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct and the law
- constitutes a low-level concern.
- is not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO but may merit consulting with and seeking advice from the LADO or Safeguarding in School Officer
- when considered with any other low-level concerns previously raised about the same person, could now meet the threshold of an allegation, and should be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, and in accordance with the School's Safeguarding Policy, Part 4 of KCSIE 2024, and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by Salford Safeguarding Children's Partnership; or
- in and of itself meets the threshold of an allegation and should be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, and in accordance with the School's Safeguarding Policy, Part 4 of KCSIE 2022, and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by the Local Authority
- ensure that appropriate and detailed records are kept of all internal and external conversations regarding the concern, their determination, the rationale for the decision and any actions taken and retain records in accordance with the Low-Level Concerns Policy

- consider whether the concern also potentially raises misconduct or capability issues – taking advice from Human Resources (HR) or Legal Services on a named or no-names basis where necessary – and, if so, refer the matter to HR, Legal Services

What action will be taken if it is determined that the behaviour constitutes a low-level concern?

The Headteacher will respond in a sensitive and proportionate way – on the one hand maintaining confidence that such concerns when raised will be handled promptly and effectively, whilst on the other hand protecting staff from any potential false allegations or misunderstandings. Any investigation of low-level concerns will be done discreetly and, on a need-to-know basis.

Most low-level concerns may be innocuous. 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. This will often involve informing the member of staff's line manager, who may in some instances provide ongoing guidance or training, as well as the Blackburn with Darwen HR department. In many cases, a low-level concern will simply require a conversation with the individual about whom the concern has been raised.

- any such conversation with individuals in these circumstances will include being clear with them 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 change
- 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 which is agreed with the individual, and regularly reviewed with them, may also be appropriate. This approach will be managed by Blackburn with Darwen HR department in most instances.

Some low-level concerns may also raise issues of misconduct or poor performance. The Head Teacher will also consider whether this is the case – by referring to the School's disciplinary and/or capability procedure and taking advice from Blackburn with Darwen HR or taking specialist advice as necessary on a named or no-names basis where necessary.

If the Head Teacher considers that the School's disciplinary or capability procedure may be triggered, they will refer the matter to HR. If HR advise that the School's disciplinary or capability procedure is triggered, the individual will have a full opportunity to respond to any factual allegations which form the basis of capability concerns or a disciplinary case against them.

Staff should be aware that when they share what they believe to be a low-level concern, the Head Teacher will speak to the adult who is the subject of that concern no matter how 'low' level the concern may be perceived to be, to gain the subject's account – and to make appropriate records (as above), which may be referenced in any subsequent disciplinary proceedings.

How Lower Darwen Primary School responds to a low-level concern may be different depending on the employment status of the individual who is the subject of the concern - i.e., whether they are an employee or worker to whom the School's disciplinary and/or capability procedure would apply, or a contractor, Governor, or volunteer. The School's response will be tailored accordingly.

Whilst not sufficiently serious to consider a referral to the LADO nonetheless merits consulting with and seeking advice from the Safeguarding In Schools Officer/LADO, Then action (if/as necessary) will be taken in accordance with the Safeguarding in Schools Officer/LADO's advice; or

When considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been shared about the same individual, could now meet the threshold of an allegation, or in and of itself meets the threshold of an allegation

Then it will be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, and in accordance with the School's Safeguarding Policy, Part 4 of KCSIE 2024 and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by the Local Authority.

How should low-level concerns be held?

Lower Darwen Primary School will retain all records of low-level concerns (including those which are subsequently deemed by the Head Teacher to relate to behaviour which is entirely consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct) in the school safeguarding files.

Where multiple low-level concerns have been shared regarding the same individual these will be kept in chronological order as a running record, and with a timeline alongside. These records will be kept confidential and held securely with access afforded only to a limited number of individuals such as the DSL, Head Teacher, Chair of Governors, Safeguarding Governor or HR.

How often should the central low-level concerns file be reviewed?

The DSL will review the central low-level concerns file periodically to ensure that all such concerns are being dealt with promptly and appropriately, and that any potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour are identified. A record of these reviews will be made.

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

How long should records of a low-level concern be kept?

Low-level concerns will be retained securely by Lower Darwen Primary 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, once a staff member leaves the School, any low-level concerns which are held relating to them:

- will be retained until the individual leaves the School and as required by law
- will not be included in any onward reference, except as set out below
- Low-level concerns will be retained on the School's central low-level concerns file (securely and applying appropriate access restrictions) unless and until further guidance provides otherwise.

References

Where a low-level concern (or group of concerns) has met the threshold for referral to the LADO and is found to be substantiated, it will be referred to in a reference.

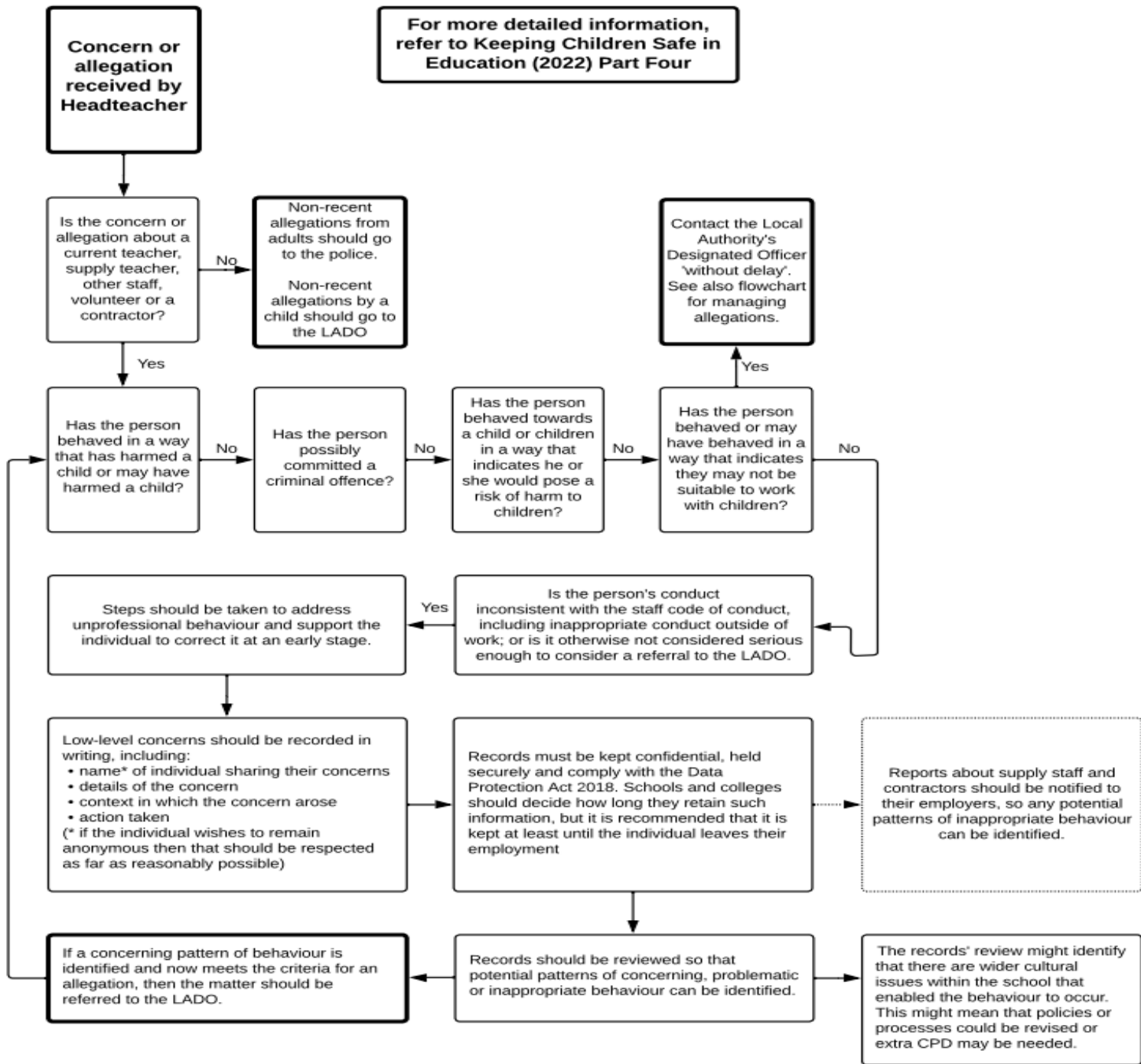
Low-level concerns should not be included in references unless they relate to issues which would normally be included in a reference, for example, misconduct or poor performance. It follows that a low-level concern which relates exclusively to safeguarding (and not to misconduct or poor performance) should not be referred to in a reference.

What is the role of the Governing Body?

The DSL will regularly inform the Governing Body, via the appropriate sub-committee, about the implementation of the Low-Level Concerns Policy and any evidence of its effectiveness, e.g., by including reference to it in any safeguarding reports and providing any relevant data. The Governing Body will also review an anonymised sample of low-level concerns at regular intervals, in order to ensure that these concerns have been responded to promptly and appropriately.

Managing low level concerns raised in relation to teachers, including supply teachers, other staff, volunteers and contractors

For more detailed information, refer to Keeping Children Safe in Education (2022) Part Four



What is a low level concern?

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 in KCSIE. 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 or college 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 allegations threshold or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.

Head Teacher: Steven Cumbo

Designated Safeguarding Lead: Joanne Phoenix

Safeguarding Governor: Emily Taylor (*via school*)

Local Area Designated Officers: Jonathan Lenewski 01254666488