

# **Hexham First School**

## **Low Level Concern Policy 2023**



**Date written: January 2023    Review period : annually or sooner if required**

## Introduction

This Policy concerns the reporting of low level concerns about staff by fellow staff members and is part of Hexham First School's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and must be read in conjunction with Hexham First School's Staff Code of Conduct, Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy 2022 / 23 and KCSE 2022.

## Aims

At Hexham First School, we take safeguarding incredibly seriously. This includes ensuring that all adults who work with children do so in a way that is in accordance with the ethos and policies set out by the school, including the Staff Code of Conduct. We set out to create and embed a culture of honesty and transparency in which the school's values and expected behaviour, which is set out in the Staff Code of Conduct, are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff. Being able to report low level concerns, or indeed to self-report if a mistake has been made is an important part of that culture. Staff should feel able to discuss with the Headteacher or additional Designated Safeguarding Lead any difficulties or problems that they experience in their relationships with pupils or colleagues, so that appropriate advice can be provided, or action taken.

As part of their whole school approach to safeguarding, Hexham First School ensures that it promotes an open and transparent culture, in which all concerns (no matter how small) about all adults working in or on behalf of the school (including supply teachers, volunteers and contractors), are dealt with promptly and appropriately. Creating a culture in which all concerns about adults (including allegations that do not meet the harm threshold) are shared responsibly and with the right person, recorded and dealt with appropriately, is critical. Further, this allows Hexham First School to identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour early; minimise the risk of abuse; and ensure that adults working in or on behalf of the school are clear about professional boundaries and act within these boundaries, and in accordance with the ethos and values of the school.

**This policy builds on learning from best practice across the world and is informed by the following document.**

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

## 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 or college may have acted in a way that:

- is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work even if the behaviour 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, or
- humiliating children.

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.

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.

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 schools and colleges from becoming the subject of potential false low-level concerns or misunderstandings.

Key Reference Document: Read this document for further information about Low-Level Concerns, which is referenced in KCSIE 2022. It provides excellent case studies and the learning from Serious Case Reviews about opportunities for reporting low level concerns which were missed and which led to abuse occurring.

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

## **Identifying Types 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;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children

### **Low-Level Concern**

**Any concern – no matter how small, even if no more than a ‘nagging doubt’ – that an adult may have acted in a manner which:**

- is not consistent with an organisation’s Code of Conduct, and/or;
- relates to their conduct outside of work which, even if not linked to a particular act or omission, has caused a sense of unease about that adult’s suitability to work with children.

### **Appropriate Conduct**

- Behaviour which is entirely consistent with the organisation’s Code of Conduct, and the law.

## **Who Does this Policy Apply to?**

Low level concerns may be reported by or about anyone associated with the School whether they are a paid employee (including supply teacher), contractor, or unpaid member of staff or volunteer. It also includes anyone who is part of the Governing Body.

## **How to raise a concern**

A member of staff who has a concern about another member of staff should inform the Headteacher about their concern, using a Low-Level Record of Concern Form (LLC).

The LLC will be available to staff via Google Drive in the Safeguarding Advice and Resources folder and from the Designated Safeguarding Leads and Headteacher. A copy is annexed to this Policy.

If the Headteacher cannot be contacted or the concern is about the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors should be contacted instead. Members of staff have the right to remain anonymous as far as reasonably possible.

Do not discuss it with another colleague. Complete the LLC form and return it to the Headteacher without delay. If they are not available, then you should contact the Chair of Governors. You may also want to discuss the concern in the first instance with the Headteacher without completing a LLC. The Headteacher will collect as much evidence as possible by

speaking, where possible, with the person who raised the concern, to the individual involved and any witnesses. The Headteacher may discuss the concern with the Designated Safeguarding Lead if appropriate.

### **Storing and use of Low-Level Concerns and follow-up information**

LLC forms and follow-up information will be stored securely within the school's safeguarding systems, with access only by the Headteacher and Chair of Governors. This will be done in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR. The staff member(s) reporting the concern must keep the information confidential and not share the concern with others apart from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors.

Reports about supply staff and contractors will be notified by the Headteacher to their employers so any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

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 Hexham First 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:

- a) 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
- b) if, on balance, any record is not considered to have any reasonably likely value, still less actionable concern, and ought to be deleted accordingly.

### **Monitoring and Review**

The school will monitor records so that any potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified. Where a pattern of such behaviour is identified, the school will decide on a course of action, either through its disciplinary procedures or where a pattern of behaviour moves from a concern to meeting the harm thresholds, in which case it will be referred to the LADO. Consideration will also be given to whether there are wider cultural issues within the school or college that enabled the behaviour to occur and where appropriate policies could be revised, or extra training delivered to minimise the risk of it happening again.

The Headteacher has a strong and open relationship with the Northumberland LADO Service and will consult the LADO if there is any doubt as to whether a concern meets the harm threshold. This also ensures that the school balances its duty of care to the child as well as to the member of staff.

The Headteacher will report on low level concerns (anonymised) to the Governing Body Safeguarding Lead Governor and the implementation of this Policy and any need for review at their termly meeting.

## Hexham First School Staff Low-Level Concern Form (LLC)

Please return this form to the Headteacher. If the concern is about the Headteacher, please return to the Chair of Governors. 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 Hexham First School's Staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work even if the behaviour does not meet the allegation threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.

Northumberland County Council LADO : Louise Prudhoe

[LADO@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:LADO@northumberland.gov.uk)

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).

The record should be signed, timed and dated.

**Name of staff member about whom you have a concern:**

**Details:**

**Name of individual raising the concern:  
Signed:**

**Time & Date:**

**Received by At: (Time) On: (Date)**

**Action Taken: (Specify) Name of person investigating the concern:**

**Signed:**

**Time & Date:**

*This record will be held securely in accordance with Hexham First School's Low-Level concerns policy. Please note that low-level concerns will be treated in confidence as far as possible, but Hexham First 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.*