

Low-Level Concerns Policy

Member of Staff Responsible	Designated Safeguarding Lead
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Distribution:	All

Policy Statement

Rokeby School (“the School”) understands the importance of a positive culture where concerns can be identified and spoken about openly and acknowledges that this is a key element of a strong safeguarding system. The School seeks to create and maintain a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which all concerns are shared responsibly, recorded appropriately and dealt with promptly and effectively. This Low-Level Concerns Policy seeks to ensure that all staff who work with children behave appropriately and to enable the early identification and prompt and appropriate management of concerns.

As part of its whole school approach to safeguarding, the School will ensure that it promotes an open and transparent culture in which all concerns about all adults working in or on behalf of the School (including supply teachers and trainee 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. If implemented correctly, this should encourage an open and transparent culture; enable the 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 Low-Level Concerns Policy operates in conjunction (as appropriate) with the following:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures
- Performance Management Policy – Teaching Staff
- Performance Management Policy – Support Staff
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct

Introduction to the concept and importance of sharing low-level concerns

Behaviour which is not consistent with the standards and values of an organisation, and which does not meet the organisational expectations encapsulated in the School's Staff Code of Conduct, needs to be addressed. Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum – from the inadvertent or thoughtless, through to that which is ultimately intended to enable abuse.

All staff need to be informed about and be able to identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour and understand the importance of sharing concerns when they observe behaviour which violates the School's Staff Code of Conduct.

Please see appendix I for spectrum of behaviour.

What is the Low-Level Concerns Policy?

The Low-Level Concerns Policy enables all staff to share any concerns, no matter how small, about their own or another member of staff's behaviour with the Headmaster. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.

The purpose of the Low-Level Concerns 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 Staff Code of Conduct are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff.

What are the aims of the Low-Level Concerns Policy?

The aims of the Low-Level Concerns Policy are to:

- ensure that staff are clear about what appropriate behaviour is, and are confident in distinguishing 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, and to help all staff to interpret the sharing of such concerns as a neutral act;
- address unprofessional behaviour and support the individual to correct it 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 Local Authority Designated Officer ("LADO");
- provide for responsive, sensitive and proportionate handling of such concerns when they are raised; and
- help identify any weaknesses in the School's safeguarding system.

Definitions

Who does the policy apply to?

- The policy applies to all **staff** whether working in or on behalf of the School, engaged as a paid employee (including supply teacher and trainee teachers), worker or contractor, or unpaid member of staff or volunteer. It also includes anyone who is part of the Governing Body.
- **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** means the DSL at the School, Lucia Sanderson.

- **Governing Body** means those individuals who are responsible for the School's governance, i.e. the Governors.
- **Headmaster** means the Headmaster of the School, Jason Peck.
- **Concern or allegation that may meet the harm threshold.** This means the behaviour in question might indicate a person will pose a risk of harm if they continue to work in their present position, or in any capacity with children. i.e. – a concern is raised/it is alleged that they have:
 - 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.

Concern (including an allegation) that does not meet the harm threshold – i.e. a low level concern.

The term 'low-level concern' does not mean that it is insignificant; it means that an adult's behaviour towards a child does not meet the harm 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 School's Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work and online; 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, on a no-names basis if necessary.

Although it is important that staff feel comfortable with, and are clear about, the concept of low-level concerns, and know what to do if they have such a concern, they do not need to be able to determine in each case whether their concern is a low-level concern, or if it is not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO, or whether it meets the threshold of an allegation. Once staff share what they believe to be a low-level concern, that determination should be made by the Headmaster.

Examples of low-level concerns may include, but are not limited to:

- being over-friendly with children;
- having favourites;
- engaging in one-to-one contact with a child in a manner inconsistent with School procedures;
- expressing discriminatory, prejudicial or inappropriate views about a child or group of children;
- failing to treat pupils with dignity and respect or acting in a manner inconsistent with the school's commitment to equality, inclusion and safeguarding;

- behaviour which may undermine the school's anti-discriminatory culture or safeguarding ethos.
- using inappropriate language;
- taking photographs of pupils on a personal device;
- communicating with a pupil through personal social media, private messaging platforms, gaming platforms, artificial intelligence tools or other unauthorised digital channels;
- inappropriate use of technology, artificial intelligence or digital communication tools when interacting with pupils.
- or, any other behaviour which may give rise to concerns about professional boundaries.

Please see Appendix 1 for a diagram illustrating the spectrum of behaviour and the position of a low-level concern with that spectrum.

Low-Level Concerns Form means the online CONFIDE form illustrated at Appendix 2.

School Culture

The school promotes an open and transparent culture in which all concerns about all adults working in or on behalf of the School are dealt with promptly and appropriately.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

The 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 and Procedures.

A proportionate approach must be taken by all to considering what personal data is in fact necessary to share and record by way of low-level concern(s) in each case in order to support the safeguarding purpose and to ensure the information is accurate, fair and as far as possible recorded in neutral terms.

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 the 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 Notice - Staff and its Data Protection Policy.

Who should staff share low-level concerns with?

It is important that low-level concerns are shared with the Headmaster/DSL as soon as reasonably possible and, in any event, within 24 hours of becoming aware of it (where the concern relates to a particular incident) – although it is never too late to share a low-level concern.

If the Headmaster is absent for any reason, low-level concerns should be shared with the DSL/Deputy Head Pastoral who will ensure they inform the Headmaster immediately on their return.

If any low-level concern relates to the behaviour of the Headmaster, it should be referred to the Chair of Governors.

If there is a conflict of interest in sharing a low-level concern with the Headmaster, the low-level concern should be shared with the Chair of Governors, unless there is conflict of interest in doing so, in which case it should be reported directly to the LADO.

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, the 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, the 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. 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 School's Staff Code of Conduct, including, for example, where a member of staff (i) has a child who is a student 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 student and they may be on a WhatsApp group with them; and (iii) is having to drive a student 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. Staff are expected to report any incident, investigation, arrest, charge, caution, court order or other matter that may affect their suitability to work with children in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures. Self-reporting in these circumstances can be positive for several 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.

The school's aim is to create an environment where staff are encouraged and feel confident to self-report.

How should low-level concerns be shared and recorded?

The concern can be shared verbally with the Headmaster in the first instance, or a written summary of it can be provided to them via CONFIDE. Where the low-level concern is provided verbally, the Headmaster will make an appropriate record of the conversation, either contemporaneously or immediately following the discussion and will exercise sound professional judgment in determining what information is necessary to record via CONFIDE for safeguarding purposes.

Where a low-level concern relates to a person employed by a supply agency or a contractor, the School will notify that person's employer so that any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

How should a low-level concern be responded to?

Once the Headmaster has received the low-level concern, they will – not necessarily in the below order but in an appropriate sequence according to the nature and detail of the particular concern shared with them:

- Speak to the person who raised the low-level concern (unless it has been raised anonymously).
- Speak to any potential witnesses (unless advised not to do so by the LADO/other relevant external agencies, where they have been contacted).
- Speak to the individual about whom the low-level concern has been raised (unless advised not to do so by the LADO/other relevant external agencies, where they have been contacted).
- If they are in any doubt, seek advice from the LADO – on a no-names basis if necessary.
- Review the information and determine whether the behaviour in question:
 - (i) is entirely consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct and the law;
 - (ii) constitutes a low-level concern;
 - (iii) is 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;
 - (iv) when considered with any other low-level concerns previously raised about the same person, indicates a pattern of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour and 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 and Child Protection Policy and Procedures, KCSIE, and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by the School's Local Safeguarding Partnership; or
 - (v) 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 and Child Protection Policy and Procedures, KCSIE, and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by the School's Local Safeguarding Partnership.
 - (vi) Ensure that appropriate and detailed records are kept via CONFIDE of all internal and external conversations regarding the concern, their determination, the

rationale for their decision and any actions taken, and retain records in accordance with the Low-Level Concerns Policy.

- (vii) Consider whether the concern also potentially raises misconduct or capability issues, taking specialist advice where necessary and, if so, to follow the School's disciplinary or capability procedures.

What action will be taken if it is determined that the behaviour is entirely consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct and the law?

The Headmaster will update the individual in question and inform them of any action taken (as above).

The Headmaster will speak to the person who shared the low-level concern – to provide them with feedback about how and why the behaviour is consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct and the law.

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

The Headmaster 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 by their very nature are likely to be minor. 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. 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 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 which is agreed with the individual, and regularly reviewed with them, may also be appropriate.

Some low-level concerns may also raise issues of misconduct or poor performance which are unrelated to safeguarding. The Headmaster will consider whether this is the case by referring to the school's disciplinary and/or capability procedure and taking specialist advice where necessary on a named or no names basis where necessary.

If the Headmaster decides that the School's disciplinary or capability procedure should be 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 Headmaster will speak to the adult who is the subject of that concern (unless advised not to do so by the LADO/other relevant external agencies, where they have been contacted) – 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 the 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.

What action will be taken if it is determined that the behaviour merits contact with the LADO or referral to other external agencies?

If the behaviour of a staff member was not sufficiently serious to consider a referral to the LADO but merits consulting with and seeking advice from the LADO, then action (if/as necessary) will be taken in accordance with the LADO's advice.

If the behaviour of a staff member 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 and Child Protection Policy and Procedures, KCSIE and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by the School's Local Safeguarding Partnership.

How should low-level concerns be held?

The School will retain all records of low-level concerns (including those which are subsequently deemed by the Headmaster to relate to behaviour which is entirely consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct) online via CONFIDE.

Where multiple low-level concerns have been shared regarding the same individual these will be recorded via CONFIDE in chronological order as a running record. These records will be kept confidential and held securely with access afforded only to a limited number of individuals.

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

The Headmaster will review the central low-level concerns records regularly and at least termly to identify themes, trends, patterns of behaviour and any wider safeguarding or cultural issues within the School.

Where a pattern of behaviour is identified in respect of a specific individual, the Headmaster 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 may arise from a single incident or from a pattern of behaviour which, when viewed in isolation, may not appear significant. The purpose of review is to identify any emerging patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour at the earliest possible stage.

Low-level concerns will be retained securely by the 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:

- I.2 will be retained for a further seven years in accordance with the School's HR record retention procedures;
- I.3 will not be included in any onward reference, except as set out at in the 'References' section below.

Low-level concerns will be retained on CONFIDE - the school's central low-level concerns recording system (securely and applying appropriate access restrictions) unless and until further guidance provides otherwise.

Concerns that subsequently meet the allegations threshold

Where a concern is initially recorded as a low-level concern but is subsequently referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and determined to meet the allegations threshold, including where an allegation is substantiated, it will no longer be treated as a low-level concern. Such matters will be managed in accordance with the applicable statutory guidance, retention requirements and requirements relating to employment references. The retention periods and reference arrangements set out in this policy for low-level concerns will not apply where alternative safeguarding or statutory requirements apply.

References

References will be provided in accordance with statutory safeguarding guidance, legal obligations and the school's safer recruitment procedures. Information relating to substantiated safeguarding allegations will be disclosed where required by law or statutory guidance. Low-level concerns that do not meet the allegations threshold will not normally be referred to in employment references unless required by law or safeguarding guidance.

What is the role of the Governing Body?

The Headmaster will regularly inform the Governing Body 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, to ensure that these concerns have been responded to promptly and appropriately.

Monitoring and Review

The Low-Level Concerns Policy will be monitored to ensure that it is being effectively implemented in practice and will be reviewed annually by the Headmaster and in response to any relevant legislative, statutory or regulatory changes and/or changes in relevant guidance and/or safeguarding best practice.

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 the School'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, on a no-names basis if necessary.

Appropriate Conduct

Behaviour which is entirely consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct, and the law.

Appendix 2 - Example Low-Level Concerns Form

Low-Level Concerns Form via CONFIDE

← → ↺ confide.thesafeguardingcompany.com/Concern/New 🔍 ☆ 📄 👤 ⋮

CONFIDE Ready School (Parish School) Harry Smith

Resources ▾ Test Training ▾ Help

Report a Concern

Name(s) of Person(s)

ⓘ Please add the Person(s) who are the subject of this concern and add any other Person(s) you want associated to it.

Concern Summary

Concern Date/Time

Details of Concern

Location of Incident

Action Taken

Attachment

ⓘ Please attach any media that is relevant to this concern.

FOR EVERYONE. Help Centre

This record will be held securely in accordance with the School's Low-Level Concerns Policy and relevant data protection legislation.

Please note that low-level concerns will be treated confidentially and shared only on a need-to-know basis wherever possible. However, the School may, in certain circumstances, be required to share information in order to fulfil its safeguarding responsibilities, comply with legal or regulatory obligations, or respond to requests from relevant authorities, including the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), the police, Children's Social Care, regulatory bodies, or as part of legal proceedings or formal investigations.

LADO service - 07774 332675

The sharing of information will always be proportionate, necessary and in the best interests of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children
