LOW LEVEL CONCERNS POLICY

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Related Policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy

1. Policy Statement

Learning Pathways Academy Trust ("the Trust") is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people within its academies. The Trust recognises that effective safeguarding depends upon creating a culture where everyone feels responsible for keeping children safe and where concerns about the behaviour of adults are raised, listened to and addressed appropriately.

The Trust expects all adults working in or on behalf of its academies to maintain the highest standards of professional conduct and to understand the importance of maintaining appropriate relationships and boundaries with pupils. This includes employees, volunteers, governors, trustees, agency workers, contractors and visitors who undertake work on behalf of the Trust.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that concerns about the behaviour of adults that do not meet the threshold for an allegation of harm are still recognised, recorded and responded to appropriately. The Trust understands that behaviours which appear minor in isolation may, when considered collectively or over time, indicate a potential safeguarding concern. Early identification and appropriate management of such concerns supports a culture of vigilance and helps to prevent situations from escalating.

A low-level concern does not mean that an individual has acted in a way that has harmed a child or that they pose a safeguarding risk. However, addressing concerns at an early stage enables professional boundaries to be reinforced, provides opportunities for reflection and learning, and ensures that the Trust maintains a safe environment for pupils and staff.

The Trust is committed to ensuring that all concerns are handled fairly, proportionately and confidentially, whilst ensuring that safeguarding remains the responsibility of every person working within our academies.

2. Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear and consistent approach for identifying, reporting, recording and responding to low-level concerns across Learning Pathways Academy Trust.

The Trust recognises that an open and transparent culture is a fundamental part of effective safeguarding. Staff should feel confident that they can raise concerns without fear of embarrassment, criticism or retaliation, provided concerns are raised honestly and in good faith.

This policy aims to:

- promote a culture where concerns are reported promptly;
- encourage professional curiosity and reflection;
- ensure concerns are considered objectively and proportionately;

- provide clarity regarding the difference between low-level concerns and allegations that require external referral;
- identify patterns of behaviour that may require further action;
- support staff in understanding and maintaining professional boundaries; and
- ensure compliance with safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance.

The Trust believes that addressing concerns early supports both safeguarding and staff wellbeing by providing clarity, support and appropriate guidance where needed.

3. Legislative and Guidance Framework

This policy has been developed with regard to the statutory safeguarding responsibilities placed upon schools and trusts and should be read alongside current safeguarding guidance.

The Trust will have regard to:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children;
- Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures;
- relevant guidance issued by the Department for Education;
- employment legislation and principles of fair process;
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

KCSIE recognises the importance of creating a culture in which all concerns about adults working with children are shared responsibly and addressed appropriately. This includes concerns that do not meet the harm threshold but may indicate behaviour that is inconsistent with professional expectations or the Trust's Staff Code of Conduct.

4. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all adults working in or on behalf of Learning Pathways Academy Trust, including:

- teachers
- support staff;
- senior leaders;
- temporary and agency workers;
- supply staff;
- volunteers;
- governors and trustees;
- contractors;
- visitors undertaking work within Trust schools.

The policy applies regardless of whether the concern arises during working hours or outside normal working hours, where the behaviour relates to the individual's role or position of trust.

Concerns may arise from conduct:

- within an school setting;
- during educational visits or trips;
- during online or digital communication;
- through social media activity;
- outside the workplace where professional boundaries may be affected.

The Trust recognises that adults working with children are in positions of trust and that expectations of professional behaviour extend beyond the classroom or school environment.

5. Principles Underpinning the Management of Low-Level Concerns

Learning Pathways Academy Trust recognises that maintaining an effective safeguarding culture requires all adults to understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The Trust is committed to ensuring that low-level concerns are managed in a way that is fair, proportionate and supportive, whilst always prioritising the safety and wellbeing of pupils.

The Trust adopts the following principles when responding to low-level concerns:

Openness and transparency

The Trust encourages all adults to raise concerns, including where they are uncertain whether a behaviour constitutes a safeguarding issue. Staff should not feel that they need to make a judgement about the seriousness of a concern before reporting it. It is the responsibility of appropriate leaders to assess and respond to concerns appropriately.

Early identification and prevention

The Trust recognises that small concerns, when considered individually or collectively, may provide valuable information about professional practice and safeguarding culture. Recording and reviewing concerns enables leaders to identify patterns, provide support and take action before concerns escalate.

Fairness and proportionality

Low-level concerns will be considered carefully and responded to proportionately. A low-level concern does not automatically indicate misconduct, and the purpose of responding is not punitive. The Trust will seek to understand the circumstances, provide appropriate guidance where needed and ensure that professional expectations are understood.

Confidentiality

Information relating to low-level concerns will be handled sensitively and shared only with those who need to know in order to safeguard pupils, support decision-making or fulfil legal responsibilities.

Professional reflection and learning

The Trust recognises that mistakes, misunderstandings and errors of judgement can occur. Where appropriate, addressing a low-level concern provides an opportunity for professional reflection, development and reinforcement of expectations.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

The Trust Board has overall responsibility for ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place across Learning Pathways Academy Trust. The Board will ensure that appropriate policies, procedures and systems exist to support the identification and management of safeguarding concerns.

The Trust Board will ensure that safeguarding remains a priority and that leaders have appropriate support, resources and accountability to implement this policy effectively.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are effective across all Trust academies and that Headteachers understand their responsibilities in relation to low-level concerns.

The CEO will provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders and will ensure that any concerns relating to Headteachers are managed appropriately.

Headteachers have responsibility for implementing this policy within their school and for ensuring that a culture exists where concerns can be raised openly and without fear.

The Headteacher will:

- ensure concerns are received, considered and recorded appropriately;
- determine whether a concern meets the threshold for referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO);
- seek advice from the DSL, HR advisers or LADO where appropriate;
- ensure investigations are conducted fairly and proportionately;
- maintain accurate and confidential records;
- ensure patterns of behaviour are reviewed.

Where a concern relates to the Headteacher, the matter should be reported to the Chair of Governors and the CEO.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

The DSL will support the Headteacher in assessing safeguarding implications and ensuring that concerns are managed appropriately.

The DSL may provide advice regarding:

- safeguarding risk;
- professional boundaries;

- whether further safeguarding action is required;
- whether information should be shared with external agencies.

The DSL will also support the identification of patterns or themes that may indicate wider safeguarding learning.

The Trust HR Manager will provide advice and guidance regarding employment processes where appropriate. This may include advising on:

- professional expectations;
- management action;
- disciplinary procedures;
- employee rights and fair process;
- record keeping requirements.

HR advice will not replace safeguarding decision-making, and safeguarding concerns will always remain the responsibility of school leaders.

Every adult working within Learning Pathways Academy Trust has a responsibility to safeguard children and promote a culture where concerns are raised.

All adults must:

- familiarise themselves with this policy and the Staff Code of Conduct;
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries;
- report concerns promptly;
- avoid assuming that someone else will report a concern;
- cooperate fully with any review or investigation.

7. Definition of a Low-Level Concern

A low-level concern is any concern, no matter how small, about an adult working in or on behalf of the Trust that is inconsistent with the expectations set out within the Staff Code of Conduct or professional standards, but which does not meet the threshold for referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

A low-level concern may relate to behaviour that causes discomfort, uncertainty or concern about an adult's judgement or professionalism. It may be something that appears insignificant when viewed in isolation but could become relevant if similar behaviours are repeated or form part of a pattern.

Examples of behaviours that may constitute a low-level concern include situations where an adult:

- appears to have blurred professional boundaries with a pupil;
- uses language or humour that may be inappropriate;
- behaves in a way that could be perceived as overly familiar;

- demonstrates poor judgement;
- fails to follow safeguarding procedures;
- communicates with pupils through inappropriate channels;
- behaves in a way that could be misunderstood.

A low-level concern does **not** mean that an individual has harmed a child or that they pose an immediate safeguarding risk. However, the Trust believes that recording and addressing such concerns contributes to maintaining a safe and professional environment.

8. Difference Between a Low-Level Concern and an Allegation

It is essential that all adults understand the difference between a low-level concern and a concern that meets the threshold for an allegation.

A concern meets the harm threshold where there is information suggesting that an adult working 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 in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm;
- behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

Where information suggests that the harm threshold may be met, the Headteacher must take immediate action and seek advice from the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) without delay.

A concern must not be managed through this policy where there is any indication that a child may have been harmed or may be at risk of harm.

Where there is uncertainty about whether a concern meets the threshold, advice should always be sought from the LADO.

9. Examples of Low-Level Concerns

Low-level concerns can arise in many different circumstances. The examples below are intended to provide guidance and are not an exhaustive list.

A low-level concern may include:

- an adult being over-friendly or overly familiar with a pupil;
- showing favouritism towards a particular pupil;
- using inappropriate jokes, comments or language;
- sharing unnecessary personal information with pupils;
- having inappropriate conversations with pupils;
- contacting pupils through personal social media accounts or unauthorised communication methods;
- using personal devices to photograph pupils;
- failing to maintain appropriate professional boundaries;

- spending unnecessary time alone with a pupil;
- not following agreed safeguarding procedures;
- behaviour that could be perceived as intimidating, dismissive or unprofessional.

The Trust recognises that context is important. Each concern will be considered individually, taking into account the circumstances, intent, impact and any previous concerns.

10. Reporting a Low-Level Concern

Learning Pathways Academy Trust recognises that an open and transparent culture depends upon adults feeling confident and supported to raise concerns. All adults working within the Trust have a responsibility to report any concern regarding the behaviour of another adult where they believe it may be inconsistent with professional expectations or the Staff Code of Conduct.

Staff should report concerns as soon as reasonably practicable. They should not delay reporting because they are uncertain whether the concern is significant enough to warrant action. It is the responsibility of leaders to consider the information provided and determine the appropriate response.

Concerns should normally be reported to the Headteacher of the relevant school. Where a concern relates to the Headteacher, it should be reported to the Chair of the Local Governing Committee and the CEO.

Where a concern relates to the CEO, it should be reported to the Chair of the Trust Board.

Concerns may initially be raised verbally; however, they must be recorded in writing as soon as possible to ensure that an accurate record is maintained. The Trust's Low-Level Concern Reporting Form should be used wherever possible.

The report should include sufficient detail to allow the concern to be understood, including:

- what happened;
- when and where the incident or behaviour occurred;
- who was involved;
- any witnesses;
- any immediate action taken.

Staff should avoid investigating concerns themselves. Their responsibility is to report concerns and provide factual information. The responsibility for assessing, investigating and determining an appropriate response rests with the appropriate leader.

11. Self-Reporting

Learning Pathways Academy Trust recognises that where adults working with children there may be occasions where an individual reflects that their own behaviour could have been misunderstood or may not have met the expected professional standard.

The Trust encourages a culture where adults feel able to self-report concerns about their own conduct. Self-reporting demonstrates professional awareness, honesty and a commitment to maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Examples of situations where self-reporting may be appropriate include where an adult believes they have:

- unintentionally crossed a professional boundary;
- made an error of judgement;
- communicated in a way that could be misunderstood;
- failed to follow an expected procedure;
- acted in a way that does not reflect the Staff Code of Conduct.

Where an individual self-reports promptly and openly, this will be taken into consideration when determining the appropriate response. Self-reporting does not prevent the Trust from taking action where required; however, it demonstrates a willingness to reflect and address concerns.

12. Responding to and Investigating Low-Level Concerns

Where a concern has been raised, the Headteacher (or appropriate person responsible for managing the concern) will undertake an initial review to determine whether the matter:

- does not require any further action;
- can be addressed through informal guidance or professional discussion;
- requires further investigation;
- meets, or may meet, the threshold for referral to the LADO.

The Trust will ensure that low-level concerns are considered objectively and proportionately. The purpose of reviewing a concern is not to assume wrongdoing, but to establish the facts, understand the circumstances and ensure that professional standards and safeguarding expectations are maintained.

Where appropriate, the Headteacher may seek advice from the DSL, HR advisers or the LADO before determining the next steps.

An investigation into a low-level concern may involve:

- reviewing the information provided;
- speaking with the person who raised the concern;
- obtaining information from relevant witnesses;
- reviewing relevant documentation, emails, messages or records;

- speaking with the adult concerned and providing an opportunity for them to respond.

The individual who is the subject of the concern will be treated fairly and will be given an opportunity to provide their perspective. The Trust recognises the importance of avoiding assumptions and ensuring that concerns are assessed based on evidence.

Investigations will be conducted promptly, fairly and confidentially. The level of investigation will be proportionate to the nature of the concern.

13. Possible Outcomes and Actions

Following consideration of a low-level concern, the outcome will depend upon the circumstances, evidence available and any relevant history.

Possible outcomes may include:

No Further Action

Where the concern is assessed as unfounded, insignificant or not requiring further intervention, no further action may be taken. The concern will still be recorded appropriately to ensure there is an accurate safeguarding record.

Professional Discussion

Where appropriate, the Headteacher may hold a professional discussion with the individual concerned. This provides an opportunity to clarify expectations, reinforce professional boundaries and support reflective practice.

A professional discussion is not a disciplinary sanction but forms part of effective management and safeguarding practice.

Advice, Guidance or Support

The Trust may provide additional guidance, coaching, mentoring or support where this would assist the individual in understanding expectations and maintaining professional standards.

This may include:

- reviewing the Staff Code of Conduct;
- discussing professional boundaries;
- additional safeguarding reminders;
- targeted training or support.

In some circumstances, a low-level concern may identify behaviour that requires formal management action. Where there is evidence that professional standards have not been met, the Trust's Disciplinary Policy may be followed.

The decision to commence formal action will be based on the facts available and will follow a fair and proportionate process.

If further information becomes available which indicates that the harm threshold may have been met, the matter will no longer be managed under this policy and will be referred immediately to the LADO.

14. Recording, Retention and Review of Low-Level Concerns

Learning Pathways Academy Trust recognises the importance of maintaining accurate and confidential records of low-level concerns. Effective record keeping enables leaders to identify patterns of behaviour and ensures that concerns are not considered in isolation where there may be a wider safeguarding issue.

Each school will maintain a confidential Low-Level Concerns Record.

Records will include:

- the name of the individual concerned;
- the date the concern was raised;
- details of the concern;
- information considered;
- actions taken;
- decisions reached;
- the rationale for decisions;
- any follow-up actions required.

Records must be factual, objective and avoid unnecessary opinion or speculation.

Low-level concern records will be stored securely and accessed only by those with a legitimate safeguarding or management responsibility.

Records will be retained in accordance with statutory guidance, the Trust's Data Protection Policy and retention schedule. In line with safeguarding expectations, records relating to low-level concerns should generally be retained until the individual leaves employment, unless there is a lawful reason for a different retention period.

Where an employee transfers between Trust schools, relevant information will be managed appropriately and shared where necessary to support safeguarding responsibilities.

15. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Information relating to low-level concerns will be treated sensitively and confidentially. The Trust recognises that unnecessary sharing of personal information can be harmful and undermines confidence in safeguarding processes.

16. Identifying Patterns and Emerging Concerns

The Trust recognises that a single low-level concern may not indicate a significant safeguarding issue. However, repeated concerns relating to the same individual, even where each concern appears minor in isolation, may indicate a developing pattern of behaviour.

Headteachers and DSLs will periodically review low-level concern records to identify:

- repeated concerns relating to an individual;
- themes or trends;
- common areas of professional boundary difficulty;
- opportunities for wider organisational learning.

Where a pattern emerges, leaders will consider whether further action is required, including whether the concern should be escalated through safeguarding or employment procedures.

The purpose of reviewing patterns is not to prejudge individuals, but to ensure that safeguarding information is considered collectively and appropriately.

17. False, Malicious or Unfounded Concerns

Learning Pathways Academy Trust recognises that concerns may occasionally be raised which are found not to be substantiated following review.

A concern that is found to be unfounded, mistaken or based on a misunderstanding will not result in action against the person who raised it, provided it was raised honestly and in good faith.

However, where there is clear evidence that a concern has been deliberately fabricated, maliciously motivated or raised with the intention of causing harm, appropriate action may be taken.

The Trust will always seek to maintain a balance between encouraging openness and ensuring that safeguarding processes are not misused.