



Bedfield and Wetheringsett Cof E Primary Schools Managing Allegations of abuse against Staff Policy and Procedure

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The Mustard Seed

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed,
 when it is
 grown, it becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air
 come and lodge in its branches." Matthew 13:31 – 32

The Mustard Seed

**"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed... nothing
 will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20-21**



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POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR ALL STAFF

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy applies to all employees, workers and volunteers of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust ('the Trust'), including those staff working centrally within the Trust and not regularly working within a school.

1.2 The Trust is required by law to make arrangements to ensure that its functions are carried out with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. This includes having effective systems in place to promote safe practice, to prevent unsuitable people from working with children and young people; and to challenge poor and unsafe practice. There is considerable national guidance on these issues, in addition to Suffolk's Safeguarding Partnership 'Arrangements for managing allegations of abuse against people who work with children or those who are in positions of Trust', which this document is intended to enact.

1.3 This policy and procedure will apply in all cases where it is alleged that a person in a position of trust, who in the course of their work (including volunteering) 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; or
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children- this includes behaviour taking place inside or outside of school

1.4 Whilst some behaviours may not constitute a criminal offence, and some may not reach the threshold of harm, consideration will need to be given as to whether they may indicate unsuitability to work with children.

1.5 Concerns may arise due to the person's behaviour at work, or outside of work, if it is considered to have implications for their ability to operate professionally. If concerns arise about the behaviour of a person who works or volunteers with children, in regard to their own children, the Police and/or Directorate of Health, Wellbeing and Children's Services need to consider further action. This may include informing the Trust as the person's employer and the LADO in order to assess whether there may be implications for children with whom the person has contact at work. The LADO may also become involved in the detail of a person's conduct of their private life when it indicates a lack of appropriate professional judgement.

2 Scope

2.1 This procedure aims to ensure that all allegations against staff and volunteers are dealt with thoroughly and appropriately whilst striking a balance between the need to protect children from abuse and the need to protect staff and volunteers from false, malicious or unfounded accusations.

2.2 All staff and volunteers should understand what to do if they receive an allegation against another member of staff or if they themselves have concerns about the behaviour of another member of staff. Failure to report conduct which meets the criteria set out in 1.3 above may be dealt with under the Trust's Disciplinary Procedure.

2.3 There may be up to 3 strands in the consideration of an allegation:

- A police investigation of a possible criminal offence;
- Enquiries and assessment by children's social care about whether a child is in need of protection or in need of services;
- Consideration by the school of disciplinary action in respect of the individual.

2.4 It is for a Headteacher to deal with all cases, unless they involve allegations against the Headteacher, in which case the Chair of the Local Governing Body (LGB) or Trust CEO will assume the role assigned, in this procedure, to the Headteacher. All cases will require close and regular liaison between the Trust/school and the Local Authority.

3 Low level concerns

3.1 A low-level concern is a behaviour towards a child by a member of staff that does not meet the harm threshold, is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, and may be as simple as causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt'. For example, this may include:

- Being over-friendly with children
- Having favourites
- Taking photographs of children on a personal device
- Engaging in 1-to-1 activities where they can't easily be seen
- Humiliating pupils

Low-level concerns can include inappropriate conduct inside and outside of work.

3.2 All staff should share any low-level concerns they have using the reporting procedures set out in our child protection and safeguarding policy. Concerns should be recorded in writing as low level concerns (see Appendix 2), in line with the Code of Conduct. We also encourage staff to self-refer if they find themselves in a situation that could be misinterpreted. If staff are not sure whether behaviour would be deemed a low-level concern, we encourage staff to report it.

All reports will be handled in a responsive, sensitive and proportionate way.

Unprofessional behaviour will be addressed, and the staff member supported to correct it, at an early stage.

This creates and embeds a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which our values and expected behaviour are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff, while minimising the risk of abuse.

Our procedures for dealing with allegations will be applied with common sense and judgement.

4 Reporting Allegations

4.1 All allegations which meet the criteria set out in 1.3 should be reported straight away.

4.2 Any allegation of abuse by a member of staff on a pupil must be reported to the Headteacher. Should the initial allegation first be made to any other member of staff then that member of staff must either request the person raising the allegation to report it to the Headteacher or if that is not possible to pass details of the allegation to the Headteacher immediately.

4.3 Should the allegation be made against the Headteacher then this should be brought to the attention of the Chair of the LGB of the School immediately. If they are not available the Trust CEO should be contacted without delay. For the purposes of this policy Headteacher is used throughout, where it could refer to the Chair of the LGB/ Trust CEO.

4.4 Should the allegation meet any of the following criteria then the Headteacher should report the allegation to the LADO the same day that the allegation is received: A person in a position of trust, who in the course of their work (including volunteering) 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; or
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children- this includes behaviour taking place inside or outside of school.

5 Initial consideration

5.1 The Headteacher will discuss the matter with the LADO and, where necessary, obtain further details of the allegation and the circumstances in which it was made. The discussion should also consider whether there is evidence/information that establishes that the allegation is false or unfounded.

5.2 If the allegation is not patently false and there is cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, the LADO will immediately refer the matter to the Police, and ask for a strategy discussion to be convened as soon as possible to decide whether a police investigation is needed. The strategy discussion should include the LADO and the Headteacher.

5.3 In cases where the Police determines that the allegation does not meet the threshold of abuse s/he may decide that a strategy discussion is not necessary and that the matter can be dealt with by the School under the Trust's Disciplinary Procedure.

5.4 If there is not cause to suspect that 'significant harm' is an issue, but where a criminal offence may have been committed, the LADO should immediately inform the Police and convene a similar discussion to decide whether a Police investigation is needed. That discussion will involve the Headteacher and any other agencies involved with the child.

6 Cases subject to a School Investigation

- 6.1 Where, following a strategy discussion, the initial consideration determines that the allegation does not involve a possible criminal offence it will be for the School to manage the next steps.
- 6.2 In such cases, if the nature of the allegation does not require formal disciplinary action, the Headteacher should institute appropriate action within 3 working days and confirm in writing to the LADO what action has been taken.
- 6.3 If a disciplinary hearing is required and can be held without further investigation, this should take place within 15 working days.
- 6.4 Where further investigation is required to inform consideration of disciplinary action, the Headteacher, in consultation with the LADO, the Chief Executive Officer and /or HR, will decide who will be appointed to investigate and the allegations to be investigated. In some settings and circumstances it may be appropriate for the disciplinary investigation to be conducted by an independent person. The investigating officer should aim to provide a report to the Headteacher within 10 working days. Prior to the submission of the report to the Headteacher the investigating officer should discuss the preliminary findings with the LADO to ensure all elements of safeguarding have been investigated, that children are kept safe and that the Trust can properly meet its statutory safeguarding responsibilities.
- 6.5 Upon receipt of the report on the disciplinary investigation, the Headteacher should consult the LADO, the Chief Executive Officer and HR and decide whether a disciplinary hearing is needed within 2 working days. If a hearing is required it should be held within 15 working days.
- 6.6 In any case in which children's social care has undertaken enquiries to determine whether the child or children are in need of protection, the Headteacher should take account of any relevant information obtained in the course of those enquiries when considering disciplinary action.
- 6.7 The LADO should continue to liaise with the School to monitor progress of the case and provide advice/support when required/requested. This liaison may take place with the Trust's HR provider on behalf of the school/Trust.

7 Cases subject to Police Investigation

- 7.1 If a criminal investigation is required the Police will aim to complete their enquiries as quickly as possible consistent with a fair and thorough investigation and will keep the progress of the case under review.
- 7.2 A target date should be set at the outset for reviewing progress of the investigation and consulting the CPS about whether to proceed with the investigation, charge the individual with an offence, or close the case.
- 7.3 Wherever possible that review should take place no later than 4 weeks after the initial strategy discussion and, if the decision is to continue to investigate the allegation, dates for subsequent review should be set at that point.
- 7.4 If the Police and/or CPS decide not to charge the individual with an offence, or decide to

administer a caution, or the person is acquitted by a Court, the Police should, wherever possible, aim to pass all information they have which may be relevant to a disciplinary case to the Headteacher within 3 working days of the decision. In those circumstances the Headteacher and the LADO should proceed as described in paragraph 6 above.

7.5 If the staff member or volunteer is convicted of an offence, the Police should inform the Headteacher straight away so that appropriate action can be taken.

8 Suspension

8.1 The possible risk of harm to children posed by an accused person needs to be effectively evaluated and managed in respect of the child(ren) involved in the allegations. In some cases that will require the Headteacher to consider suspension pending resolution of the case.

8.2 Suspension will normally be considered only:

- (a) Where there is a reasonable belief that the employee's continued presence at work may put themselves or others at risk; or
- (b) Where there is a reasonable belief that the employee's continued presence at work may present a risk of damage to the Trust's property and/or reputation; or
- (c) Where there is a risk that the employee's continued presence at work may compromise or prejudice the disciplinary process, including any investigation; or
- (d) Where relationships have broken down.

8.3 However, suspension should not be an automatic response to an allegation without careful thought and consideration of the circumstances of the case.

8.4 The Headteacher must carefully consider whether the circumstances of the case warrant a person being suspended from contact with children at school until the allegation is resolved, and should seek advice from the LADO, Chief Executive Officer and / or HR. A risk assessment should be carried out for each individual case to determine whether the member of staff should be suspended. The assessment should take into account the context of the allegation, background information in relation to the member of staff, and any outcome following the strategy discussion. It should also take into account whether a temporary transfer or period of paid leave is appropriate as an alternative to suspension. The assessment should be recorded and a copy kept on file. The suspension should be regularly reviewed and a note of each review should also be kept on file.

8.5 The Headteacher should also consider whether the result that would be achieved by suspension could be obtained by alternative arrangements. For example, redeployment so that the individual does not have direct contact with the child concerned, or providing an assistant to be present when the individual has contact with children.

8.6 Whilst the decision to suspend rests with the Headteacher, in cases where a strategy discussion or initial evaluation concludes that there should be enquiries by social care and/or an investigation by the Police, the LADO should canvass views from the

Police/social care about whether the accused member of staff should be suspended from contact with children to inform consideration of suspension.

8.7 Where an individual is suspended, written confirmation should follow as soon as practicable. The individual should be informed at that point who their named contact is within the School/Trust and provided with their contact details.

8.8 In cases where it is decided upon conclusion of the case that a person who has been suspended can return to work, the Headteacher should consider how best to facilitate such return. Depending on the individual's circumstances, a phased return and/or the provision of a mentor to provide assistance and support in the short term may be appropriate. The Headteacher should also consider how the person's contact with the child or children who made the allegation can best be managed if they are still attending the school.

9 Referral to DBS/NCTL

9.1 If an allegation is substantiated and the individual is dismissed or the Trust ceases to use the individual's services, or the individual resigns or ceases to provide his or her services, the Trust should consult the LADO as to whether a referral to the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) is required. If a referral is appropriate the report should be made within one month.

9.2 If the individual is a qualified teacher, a referral of the case should also be made to the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) within one month.

10 Supporting those involved

SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYEE

10.1 The Trust has a duty of care to their employees. They should act to manage and minimise the stress inherent in the allegations and any subsequent disciplinary process. Support for the individual is key to fulfilling this duty. Individuals should be informed of concerns or allegations as soon as possible and given an explanation of the likely course of action, unless there is an objection by the local authority, social care services or the Police. The individual should be advised to contact his/her trade union representative (if they are a member), or a colleague for support. They should also be encouraged to access the Trust's wellbeing service, which may provide access to welfare counselling/medical advice.

10.2 The Trust should appoint a named representative to keep the person who is the subject of the allegation informed of the progress of the case and consider what other support is appropriate for the individual. That may include support from occupational health. Particular care needs to be taken when employees are suspended to ensure that they are kept informed of both the progress of their case and current work related issues. Social contact with colleagues and friends must not be prevented unless there is evidence to suggest that such contact is likely to be prejudicial to the gathering and presentation of evidence.

SUPPORTING THE PARENTS/CARERS

10.3 Parents or carers of a child or children involved should be told about the allegation as soon as possible if they do not already know of it. The Headteacher should consult with the LADO about how and by whom they should be informed. However, where a strategy discussion is required, or the Police or local authority children's social care

services need to be involved, the Headteacher should not do so until those agencies have been consulted and have agreed the information which can be disclosed to the parents/carers.

10.4 Parents/carers should also be kept informed about the progress of the case, and told the outcome where there is not a criminal prosecution, including the outcome of any disciplinary process. The deliberations of a disciplinary hearing, and the information taken into account in reaching a decision, cannot normally be disclosed, but the parents or carers of the child should be told the outcome in confidence. In deciding what information to disclose, careful consideration should be given to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998, the law of confidence and, where relevant, the Human Rights Act 1998.

10.5 In cases where a child may have suffered significant harm, or there may be a criminal prosecution, local authority social care services, or the police as appropriate, should consider what support the child or children involved may need.

11 Confidentiality

11.1 Every effort should be made to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity while an investigation is being investigated/considered.

11.2 All proceedings will remain confidential to the parties concerned. The details of proceedings of any investigatory interviews and/or hearings and appeals will not be reported other than to those who have a role in the proceedings.

11.3 Any enquiries from the press should be directed to the Headteacher and/or the Trust's Chief Executive Officer.

12 Resignations and Settlement Agreements

12.1 The fact that an individual tenders his or her resignation, or ceases to provide services, must not prevent an allegation being followed up in accordance with these procedures. It is important that every effort is made to reach a conclusion in all cases of allegations bearing on the safety or welfare of children, including any in which the person concerned refuses to cooperate with the process.

12.2 Wherever possible the individual should be given a full opportunity to answer the allegation and make representations about it, but the process of recording the allegation and any supporting evidence, and reaching a judgement about whether it can be regarded as substantiated on the basis of all the information available should continue, even if that cannot be done or the individual does not cooperate. It may be difficult to reach a conclusion in those circumstances, and it may not be possible to apply any disciplinary sanctions if a person's period of notice expires before the process is complete, but it is important to reach and record a conclusion wherever possible.

12.3 Settlement agreements by which an individual agrees to resign from his/her employment in order to avoid disciplinary action, **must not be used in these cases**. In addition, there should not be any agreement by the Trust/school as to the content of a future reference. In any event, such an agreement will not prevent a thorough police

investigation where that is appropriate. Nor can it override the statutory duty to make a referral to the DBS and NCTL where circumstances require that.

12.4 For avoidance of doubt and to provide safeguards, no Settlement Agreement can be entered into without the express authorisation of the Trust's Chief Executive Officer. In any case where Settlement Agreements are approved, the Trust must comply with ESFA policy which may include disclosure information which would otherwise be considered confidential.

13 Record keeping

13.1 It is important that a clear and comprehensive record of any allegation is made even if police/disciplinary action is not taken or proven. This should include details of the allegation, how the allegation was followed up and resolved and a note of any action taken, including any sanctions imposed.

13.2 These notes must be kept on the individual's confidential personnel file.

13.3 The purpose of the record is to enable accurate information to be given in response to any future request for a reference if the individual leaves the Trust's employment. It is also important that accurate and detailed information is held in the event that the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) makes requests for further information. A comprehensive record of all allegations will provide clarification in cases where a future DBS disclosure reveals information from the police about an allegation which did not result in a criminal conviction. The record should be retained until normal retirement age or for ten years if that is a longer period of time.

13.4 A record should also be placed on the child's file.

14 Action in respect of unfounded allegations

14.1 If an allegation is determined to be unfounded, the LADO should refer the matter to children's social care to consider whether the child concerned is in need of protective services, or has been abused by another individual.

14.2 In the case of a pupil deliberately inventing or making a malicious allegation, the Headteacher should consider talking action in accordance with the School's Behaviour Management Policy.

14.3 If it is clear to the Headteacher and the LADO that the allegation is demonstrably false or unfounded, the member of staff should be informed orally and in writing of the allegation, that it is without foundation and that no further action will be taken. Where appropriate, and if requested, support should be offered, which could include Occupational Health and counselling services. If an allegation made by a member of staff is proved to be false and/or malicious, an investigation should take place in accordance with the Trust's Disciplinary Policy and Procedures. The Police may also consider taking action against the individual making the allegation.

15 Learning lessons

15.1 Upon the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated the LADO should review the circumstances of the case with the Headteacher [and the Chief Executive Officer] to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to the

Trust/School's practices to help prevent similar events in the future.

Appendix 1 | Summary of Process

Allegation made to the Trust

1. Allegations should be reported to the Headteacher immediately unless the allegation is about the Headteacher, in which case it should be reported to the Chair of the LGB who will inform the LADO immediately.
2. The allegation should not be investigated by the Trust/school, at this stage.
3. The Headteacher/Chair of the LGB should report the allegation to the LADO the same day.

Initial consideration

4. The LADO will discuss the matter with the Headteacher/Chair of the LGB and obtain further details of the allegation and the circumstances in which it was made. The discussion should also consider whether there is evidence/information that establishes that the allegation is false or unfounded.
5. The LADO will determine whether a strategy discussion to be convened as soon as possible.
6. The LADO and Headteacher/Chair of the LGB/ Trust CEO should be included in the strategy discussion. The LADO will determine which other agencies should be included in this meeting e.g. Police, social care etc.
7. The Headteacher/Chair of the LGB/ Trust CEO, in consultation with LADO should consider whether suspension is appropriate.

Action following initial consideration

8. Where the initial consideration decides that the allegation does not involve a possible criminal offence it will be dealt with by the Trust.
9. If the nature of the allegation does not require formal disciplinary action the Headteacher/ Chair of the LGB/ Trust CEO should institute appropriate action within 3 working days and confirm in writing to the LADO what action has been taken.
10. Where further investigation is required to inform consideration of disciplinary action the Headteacher/Chair of the LGB/ Trust CEO in consultation with the LADO will decide who should undertake such investigation. The investigating officer should aim to provide a report to the Trust/school within 10 working days, having ensured the LADO is satisfied that all elements of safeguarding have been investigated.
11. On receipt of the report of the investigation the Headteacher/Chair of the LGB/ Trust CEO should consult the LADO and decide whether a hearing is needed within 2 working days. If a hearing is required it should be held within 15 working days.

12. In any case in which children's social care has undertaken enquiries to determine whether the child or children are in need of protection, the Trust/school should take account of any relevant information obtained in the course of those enquiries when considering disciplinary action.
13. The LADO should continue to liaise with the Trust/school to monitor progress of the case and provide advice/support when required or requested.

Referral to DBS/ TRA

14. If the allegation is substantiated and the person is dismissed or the Trust ceases to use the individual's services, or the individual resigns or otherwise ceases to provide his/her services, the LADO should discuss with the Trust/school and HR whether a referral to the DBS/ TRA is required (referred to in paragraph 9).

Appendix 2 | Record of low-level concern



HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL

Record of low-level concern

Name of employee/supply staff/volunteer:
Position held:

Name of person completing this form:
Position held:

Summary of low-level concern(s):
(Including date(s) and contextual information)

Initial action taken and decisions reached:

**How low-level concern was followed up and by whom:
(Including date of meetings/ discussions held and who was present)**

**Outcome of investigation:
(Including rationale)**

Employee Comments:

Signed / Dated:

Signed (Headteacher) : _____ **Date:** _____

Signed (Employee) : _____ **Date:** _____

A copy of this form should be stored electronically on the school's low level concerns file until the employee leaves the school, when it will be deleted. The school will normally only refer to concerns about a staff member in employment references where they have amounted to a substantiated safeguarding allegation.