LOW LEVEL CONCERNS POLICY

ODBST Level 1 Statutory Policy:	**ALL** Schools require this policy with **no changes** allowed to core text. No changes are necessary to personalise this with school name and branding, as this is a Trust level policy for use, without change, by all schools, **except** where a school contact is required as identified in the content of the policy. LGBs will **note** adoption in LGB meetings. Review will take place at Trust level, and schools will be notified of updates and review dates as necessary.
Other related ODBST policies and procedures:	Staff Code of Conduct Safeguarding and Child Protection policy Teachers' Standards (for teaching staff)
Committee responsible:	FRAPP
Approved by:	Trust Board
Date Approved:	9th July 2024, policy effective from 1st September 2024
Review Date:	1st September 2025

Overview

ODBST takes a whole Trust approach to safeguarding. This document is part of our whole ODBST safeguarding suite of policies and should be read in conjunction with those. It is compliant with 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' 2024 and the required statutory content, so is applicable to all ODBST schools. This policy seeks to ensure that all of our children are safe and that all adult conduct is questioned and managed accordingly.

Whilst acknowledging the pressure that schools are under, it remains essential that they continue to be safe places for children. This policy supports Trustees, Local Governing Bodies, Senior Leadership Teams and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) so they can continue to have appropriate regard to KCSiE 2024 and keep their children safe.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners should make sure their approach is child-centred. This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child.

1. Policy statement

1.1. The ODBST and schools recognise their statutory and moral duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils and understands that staff play a vital role in meeting these responsibilities.

1.2. The ODBST and school works to ensure that we promote an open and transparent culture in which all concerns about adults working in or on behalf of the school are dealt with promptly and appropriately.

2. Scope

2.1. All employees employed at this school including:

- Teachers
- Support staff
- Supply teachers
- ODBST Staff
- Volunteers
- Local Authority visiting staff
- Contractors

2.2. The term 'staff' throughout this policy refers to all of the above.

3. Policy aims

3.1. To help create a culture in which all concerns about adults are shared responsibly and with the right person and are recorded and dealt with appropriately.

3.2. To enable schools to identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour early.

3.3. To minimise the risk of abuse occurring.

3.4. To 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.

3.5. To help create an environment where staff are comfortable to self-refer, where, for example, they have found themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted, might appear compromising to others, and/or on reflection they believe they have behaved in such a way that they consider falls below the expected professional standards.

4. Definition

4.1. The term 'low level' concern does not mean that it is insignificant. It means that the behaviour towards a child does not meet the harm threshold for an allegation

4.2. 'Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024, 433)' defines a low-level concern as:

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, or
- humiliating pupils.

5. Avoiding low level concerning behaviour

5.1. Behaviour defined as a 'low level concern' can exist on a spectrum, from the inadvertent or thoughtless, or behaviour that may look to be inappropriate but is not in specific circumstances, through to that which is ultimately intended to enable abuse.

5.2. Staff education and reinforcement on avoiding circumstances which may put them in a difficult situation is key to avoiding the need for dealing with these types of concerns.

5.3. ODBST ensures that staff are clear about what appropriate behaviour is through their induction and regularly reinforcement of documents such as:

- Staff Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding and Child Protection policies and regular training
- Teachers' Standards (for teaching staff)

6. Reporting a low-level concern

6.1. Low level concerns about a member of staff should be reported to the DSL and/or Headteacher as per the school's Child Protection procedures. If the concern is about the Headteacher this should be reported to the Chair of Governors.

6.2. Low level concerns about supply staff, contractors and local authority visiting staff will also be reported to their employers.

6.3. Low level concerns about ODBST central staff should be reported to the CEO, or if the concern is about the CEO, then to the Chair of Trustees.

7. Dealing with a low-level concern

7.1. Where a concern is raised about the practice or behaviour of a member of staff, this information must be recorded in writing and passed to the Headteacher.

7.2. The Headteacher must then make an assessment to determine if the matter is a 'low level concern' or an 'allegation' and follow one of the following routes:

- allegations that meet the harm threshold will be referred to the LADO for advice;
- low level concerns that the school feel may need further guidance on will be referred to the LADO for advice;
- low level concerns that the school feel they can deal with internally will be dealt with via the school's usual child protection investigation process;
- the school will engage with its HR provider where it is necessary to undertake further investigation and/or deal with the concern under relevant processes.

8. Recording a low-level concern

8.1. All low-level concerns should be formally recorded in writing by a member of staff when they are made aware of them. This record should then be passed to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors if the concern is about the Headteacher.

8.2. The record should include:

- details of the concern;
- the context in which the concern arose;
- the outcome of the investigation and any action taken, and
- the name of the individual sharing their concerns (if known) (unless the individual wishes to remain anonymous which must be respected as far as possible).

8.3. Relevant records will be retained confidentially on Bromcom and on the personnel file. Low-level concerns raised should be reviewed regularly to identify patterns that may involve more than one member of staff. All records must be kept in line with data protection principles.

9. Reviewing a low-level concern

9.1. Records will be reviewed so that potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

9.2. Where a pattern of such behaviour is identified, the Headteacher will decide on a course of action, which may include:

- disciplinary investigation and/or proceedings;
- management advice, including recommendations for training;
- referral to the LADO (where a pattern of behaviour moves from a concern to meeting the harm threshold);
- the school will take advice, where appropriate, from their HR provider in respect of low-level concerns.

9.3. The school will also review appropriate policies and training, or other wider cultural issues in the school, to see whether anything needs to be done to minimise the risk of similar behaviour happening again.

9.4. As previously stated in 8.3, relevant records will be retained confidentially in Bromcom on the personnel file. All records must be kept in line with data protection principles.

9.5. Low level concerns will not be included in a reference unless they relate to issues which would normally be included in a reference (e.g. misconduct or poor performance). Low level concerns which relate solely to safeguarding will not be included in a reference.

9.6. A low-level concern (or group or pattern of concerns) which has met the harm threshold, and has therefore been referred to the LADO, may be included in a reference depending on the circumstances.

10. Related guidance

10.1.The policy links to the following guidance documents:

10.1.1. Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE) - 2024

10.1.2. ODBST Code of Conduct

10.1.3. Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy