



# HOLMEWOOD HOUSE SCHOOL

*'Kindness, aspiration & self-belief'*

<b>Policy Holder</b>	DSL & HR
<b>Date Approved</b>	October 2024
<b>Approval</b>	SLT
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## Low-Level Concerns Policy

*Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.*

KCSIE

### I. Policy Statement

Holmeewood House 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. 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 safeguarding concerns and allegations about all adults working with children are dealt with promptly and appropriately.

Creating a culture in which all safeguarding concerns and allegations about adults (including those that do not meet the harm threshold) are shared responsibly and with the right person, recorded and dealt with appropriately, is crucial. If implemented correctly, this should encourage an open and transparent culture; enable the School to identify inappropriate, problematic or concerning 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.

## 2. Policies

This Low-Level Concerns Policy has been compiled in line with the Kent Local Authority requirements; details of how to report concerns can be accessed here:

<https://www.theeducationpeople.org/our-expertise/partner-providers/kent-county-council-providers/safeguarding/reporting-concerns-and-making-referrals-in-kent/>

The policy is also supported by ISBA's policy guidance Version: 1.3 (issued August 2024) and operates in conjunction with the following:

- School's Staff Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding Policy
- Positive Handling Policy
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Capability Procedure
- Grievance Procedure
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy

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

Behaviour which is not consistent with the standards and values of the School 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 inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour and understand the importance of sharing concerns when they observe behaviour which violates the School's Staff Code of Conduct.

## 4. 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 DSL and /or HR Manager.

## 5. What is the purpose of the Low-Level Concerns Policy?

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.

## 6. 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 inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour – in themselves and others, and the delineation of professional boundaries and reporting lines;
- empower staff to share any low-level concerns with the DSL and /or HR Manager.

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 inappropriate, problematic or concerning 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.

## **7. 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), worker or contractor, or unpaid member of staff or volunteer. It also includes anyone who is part of the Governance Body.

### **Concern or allegation that may meet the harm threshold:**

This means the behaviour in question might indicate that a person would pose a risk of harm if they continue to work in their present position, or in any capacity with children (i.e. in connection with their employment or voluntary activity) – 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.

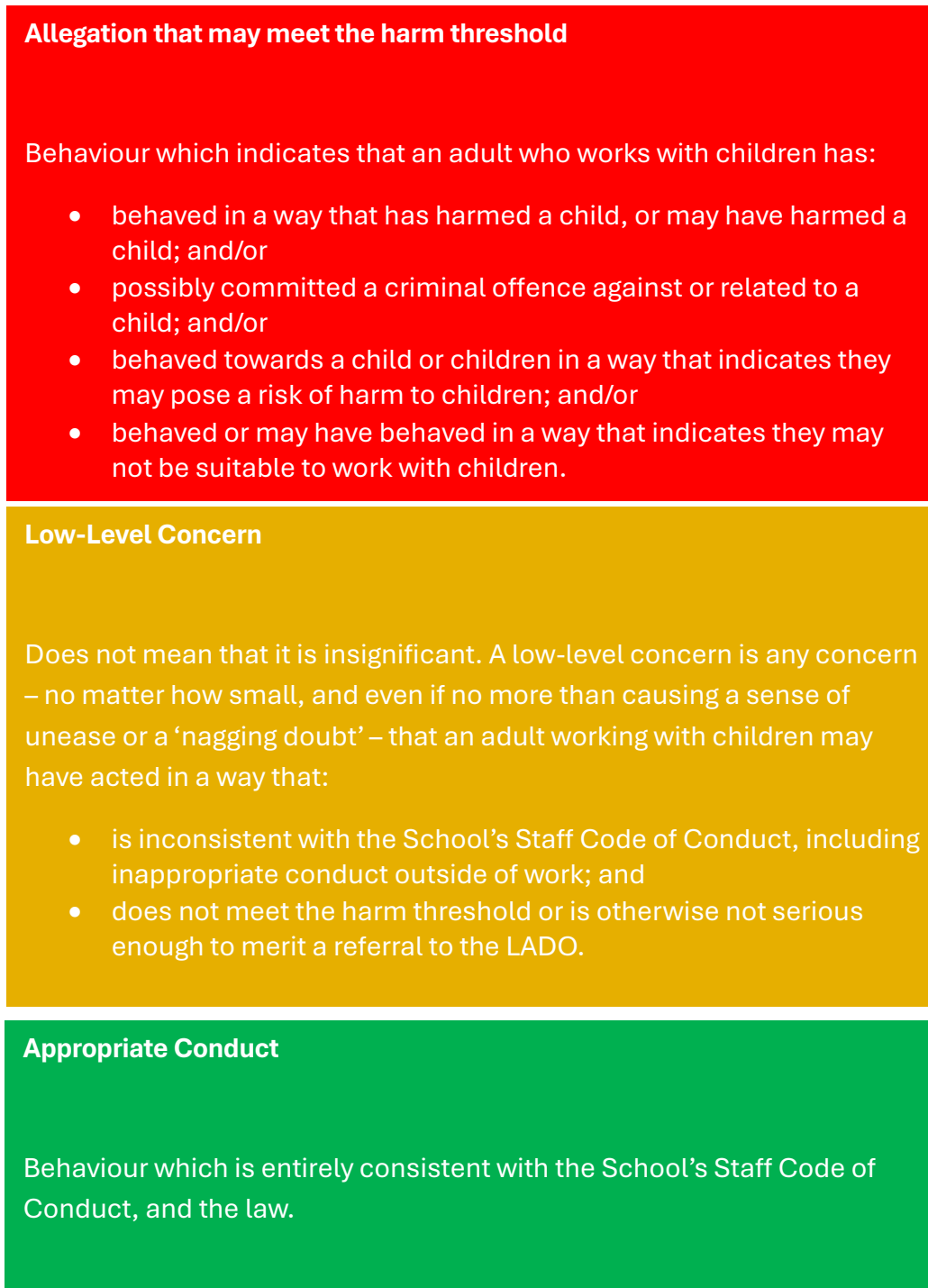
### **Concern or allegation that does not meet the harm threshold:**

This 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 with children 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 harm threshold; or is otherwise not serious enough to merit a referral to the LADO.

Staff do not need to be able to determine in each case whether the behaviour in question constitutes a low-level concern, or if it may meet the harm threshold. Once staff share what they believe to be a low-level concern, that determination should be made by the DSL and HR in consultation with the Head.

The following diagram further illustrates the distinction between a concern or allegation that may meet the harm threshold, and a concern or allegation that does not meet the harm threshold – i.e. a low-level concern.



## 8. 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.

*This policy applies to the whole school including EYFS and Boarding*      *Low-Level Concerns Policy 2024*

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 Policy.

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.

If a member of staff who raises a low-level concern does not wish to be named, then the School will respect their wishes as far as possible. However, staff should be aware that in certain circumstances this anonymity may need to be waived (as explained further in paragraph below).

All staff may, under data protection law, 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 may 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 Notices and its Data Protection Policy.

## **9. Who should staff share low-level concerns with?**

It is important that low-level concerns are shared initially with DSL and /or HR Manager 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. The DSL and / or the HR Manager will then share the concern with the Head.

If any low-level concern relates to the DSL or the HR Manager these should be referred directly to the Head.

If there is a conflict of interest in sharing a low-level concern with the Head, 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.

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

## **10. Should staff who share low-level concerns be able to remain anonymous?**

*This policy applies to the whole school including EYFS and Boarding*      *Low-Level Concerns Policy 2024*

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 who raises the concern 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.

### **11. Should staff share concerns about themselves (i.e. self-report)?**

The School's aim is to create an environment where staff are encouraged and feel confident to self-report. Staff should share concerns about themselves in line with this policy.

The School also has a Whistleblowing Policy which encourages staff to come forward and raise concerns relating to unsafe practices.

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 or has a child who plays in an external sports team/ musical group 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. Self-reporting in these circumstances can be positive for a number of 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.

### **12. How should low-level concerns be shared and recorded?**

The concern can be shared verbally or a written summary of it can be provided with the option of submitting a Low-Level Concerns Form. See Appendix A. This is also available on the Forms section of the SharePoint Home Page.

Where the low-level concern is provided verbally, an appropriate record of the conversation, either contemporaneously or immediately following the discussion will exercise sound professional judgment in determining what information is necessary to record for safeguarding purposes. This information is held securely and subject to usual confidential protocols. A log of

incidents/record of concern is kept and the total incidences of low-level concern are reported as part of the annual safeguarding review to governors.

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.

### **13. How should a low-level concern be responded to?**

Once what is believed to be a low-level concern has been received by the DSL or the HR Manager, the following should be put in motion:

- Speak in person 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).

Review the information and determine whether:

- (a) the behaviour is in fact appropriate – i.e. is entirely consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct and the law;
- (b) the behaviour constitutes a low-level concern;
- (c) there is any doubt as to whether the information which has been shared about a member of staff as a low-level concern in fact may meet the harm threshold, in which case they will consult with the LADO;
- (d) in and of itself the behaviour may meet the harm threshold, and should be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies; or
- (e) when considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been shared about the same individual, the behaviour may meet the harm threshold and should be referred to the LADO/ other relevant external agencies.

Ensure that appropriate and detailed records are kept of all internal and external conversations regarding the concern or allegation, their determination, the rationale for their decision and any actions taken, and retain records in accordance with the Low-Level Concerns Policy.

Consider whether the concern or allegation also potentially raises misconduct or capability issues – taking advice as necessary.

### **14. 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?**

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

14.2 The HR Manager 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.

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

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 inappropriate, problematic or concerning, 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 HR Manager will also consider whether this is the case – by referring to the School’s disciplinary and/or capability procedure and taking advice from retained legal advisors on a named or no-names basis where necessary.

If the HR Manager considers that the School’s disciplinary or capability procedure may be triggered, they will refer the matter to the Bursar/retained legal advisors. If they advise that the School’s disciplinary or capability procedure is 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 with the DSL this will be shared with the HR manager who 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 need to 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. The School’s response will be tailored accordingly. In all cases, the HR Manager will write to the adult who is the subject of that concern with a summary of actions.

**16. What action will be taken if it is determined that the behaviour:**



In and of itself may meet the harm threshold, or when considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been shared about the same individual, may meet the harm threshold?

Then it will be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, and in accordance with the School's Safeguarding Policy, Part 4 of KCSIE 2024 and the relevant procedures and practice guidance stipulated by the School's Local Safeguarding Partnership.

### **17. 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 HR Manager / DSL to relate to behaviour which is entirely consistent with the School's Staff Code of Conduct) in a **central low-level concerns file** in a password protected folder.

Where multiple low-level concerns have been shared regarding the same individual these need to be kept in **chronological order** as a running record, and with a timeline alongside. Where the concern relates to a number of individuals, a separate file should be kept for **each individual** staff member with these records also kept **chronologically**. These records will be kept **confidential** and held securely with access afforded only to a limited number of individuals such as the HR Manager and Chair of Governors.

### **18. How often should the central low-level concerns file be reviewed?**

18.1 The DSL will review the central low-level concerns file periodically to ensure that all such concerns are being dealt with promptly and appropriately, and that any potential patterns of inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour are identified. A record of these reviews will be made.

Where a pattern of behaviour is identified in respect of a specific individual, the DSL 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.

### **19. How long should records of a low-level concern be kept?**

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 harm threshold 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:

- will be retained for the same duration as that individual's personnel file; and
- will not be included in any onward reference, except as set out at paragraph 20.

### **20. References**

Low-level concerns will not be included in references unless they relate to issues which would normally be included in references, for example, misconduct or poor performance. A low-level

concern which relates exclusively to safeguarding (and not to misconduct or poor performance) will not be referred to in a reference.

## **21. What is the role of the Governing Board?**

The Head and DSL will regularly inform the Governing Board 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 Board will also review an anonymised sample of low-level concerns at regular intervals, in order to ensure that these concerns have been responded to promptly and appropriately.

## **22. 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 HR Manager and DSL and in response to any relevant legislative, statutory or regulatory changes and/or changes in relevant guidance and/or safeguarding best practice.



## Holmewood House School Low-Level Concerns Form

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 the School’s Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work, and
- does not meet the harm threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to merit a referral to the LADO.

You should provide a concise record (online/electronically or hard copy) – 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.

### Details of concern

Name of staff member:

Department & Role:

Signed: Time & Date:

This form should be sent / given to the HR Manager and / or the DSL.

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

Action Taken: (Specify)

Signed: Time & Date:

*This record will be held securely in accordance with the School’s Low-Level Concerns Policy. Please note that low-level concerns will be treated in confidence as far as possible, but the 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.*