

Policy title	Low Level Concerns
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Purpose

The purpose of the 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 Centre's Code of Conduct are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff. We deal with all concerns about adults working in or behalf of the Centre appropriately and promptly.

Policy statement, provision and safeguards

RBET-Norfolk seeks to create an environment where staff are encouraged and feel confident 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 expected professional standards.

This policy seeks to

- ensure that staff are clear about and confident to distinguish between, 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 Headteacher;
- help staff address unprofessional behaviour and help the individual to correct such behaviour 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 LADO;
- provide for responsive, sensitive and proportionate handling of such concerns when they are raised;
- help identify any weaknesses in the organisation's safeguarding system. This policy applies to all staff at RBET - Norfolk.

Defining a low-level concern

A low-level concern is one that does not meet the harm threshold as stated in the Centre's Safeguarding Policy. That is, when anyone working in the Centre (including volunteers, supply staff and contractors) 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 (which includes behaviour that may have happened outside Centre posing a transferable risk to children).

Responses and actions to behaviours that may meet the harm threshold are contained specifically within the Centre's Policy, 'Dealing with Allegations Regarding Staff'. These should be reported to the Headteacher without delay.

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' (i.e. they believe it could be a concern) – that an adult working in or on behalf of the Centre 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 allegations threshold or is otherwise not considered 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;
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door; or,
- using inappropriate sexualised, intimidating or offensive language.

Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum, from the inadvertent or thoughtless, or behaviour that may look to be inappropriate, but might not be in specific circumstances, through to that which is ultimately intended to enable abuse.

Responsibilities of staff

It is important that all staff are clear of the expectations the Centre stipulates from them as contained in the Staff Code of Conduct. This is covered as part of the Centre's induction for new staff.

It is crucial that any concerns in relation to a staff member's behaviour, including those which do not meet the harm threshold, are shared responsibly and with the Headteacher. This should be done without delay.

Where there are concerns/allegations about the Headteacher, this should be referred to the Chair of Governors (whose contact details can be found in the Centre's Safeguarding Policy document).

Staff members who are concerned about how their behaviour may have been interpreted, or,

on reflection, re-evaluate their behaviour as one that may have been in contradiction to the Centre's code of conduct and expectations, should self-refer to the Headteacher.

Dealing with low-level concerns

All low-level concerns may be shared verbally with the Headteacher in the first instance but must then be recorded in writing using the Centre's safeguarding software. The record should include:

- details of the concern
- the context in which the concern arose
- action taken

The name of the individual sharing their concerns should also be noted, but if the individual wishes to remain anonymous then that should be respected as far as reasonably possible. Where the low-level concern is provided verbally, the Headteacher should make an appropriate record of the conversation, either at the time or immediately following the discussion, paying heed to the details above. Records will be signed, timed and dated. Records will remain confidential in accordance with the Centre's Data Protection policies and GDPR.

In dealing with a low-level concern with a member of staff, this will be approached in a sensitive and proportionate way.

Any conversation with a member of staff following a concern will include being clear with the individual 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 may be required. Some concerns may trigger the Centre's disciplinary, grievance or whistleblowing procedures, which will be followed where appropriate. Some concerns may be related to performance management and advice may be sought from Red Balloon Central Services HR.

Responding to a low-level concern

The Headteacher will, in the first instance, satisfy themselves that it is a low-level concern and should not be reclassified as a higher-level concern/allegation and dealt with under the appropriate procedure below.

The circumstances in which a low-level concern might be reclassified are where:

- (a) the threshold is met for a higher-level concern/allegation;
- (b) there is a pattern of low-level concerns which collectively amount to a higher-level concern/allegation or;
- (c) there is other information which, when taken into account, leads to a higher-level concern/allegation.

Where the Headteacher is in any doubt whatsoever, advice will be sought from the LADO, if necessary, on a 'no-names' basis.

Having established that the concern is low-level, the Headteacher will discuss it with the individual who has raised it and will take any other steps to investigate it as necessary. If the concern has been raised via a third party, the Headteacher should collect as much evidence as possible by speaking:

- directly to the person who raised the concern, unless it has been raised anonymously;
- to the individual involved and any witnesses.

The information collected will help them to categorise the type of behaviour and determine what further action may need to be taken. All of this needs to be recorded along with the rationale for their decisions and action taken. Reports about supply staff and contractors will be notified to their employers, so any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

Monitoring low-level concerns

All reported low level concerns will be recorded. All records will be kept confidential and stored securely in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

The Governor with responsibility for safeguarding will be made aware that a low level concern has been made and will ensure the matter has been appropriately addressed, reporting to the governing body, or where deemed appropriate, referring to the Chair of Governors in a timely manner.

Records of low-level concerns should be reviewed so that potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified and responded to.

Where a pattern of behaviour is identified, the Headteacher should decide on a course of action. This might be internal disciplinary procedures, or referral to the LADO if the harm threshold is met.

The Headteacher must consider if any wider cultural issues in Centre that enabled the behaviour to occur and if appropriate policies could be revised or extra training delivered to minimise the risk of recurrence. Such monitoring will address circumstances of unrelated incidents involving more than one individual, indicating an institutional issue. The rationale for all decisions and actions taken must be recorded.

Other RBET - Norfolk policies that should be read in conjunction with this one

- Staff Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding policy