Safeguarding Guidance – Low Level Concerns

September 2021

Education Safeguarding Lead, School Effectiveness

Background

As all DSLs will now be aware, KCSIE 2021 has added a new section into Part 4 to highlight the need for a process to deal with allegations against staff that may not meet the threshold. A low-level concern, as explained in KCSIE p.95, does not refer to a concern that is insignificant, it is simply a concern about a member of staff that "*does not meet the threshold as set out at paragraph 338*".

A low-level concern can refer to any nagging doubt regarding any member of staff that their behaviour, either in or outside of school, is inappropriate and/or inconsistent with the staff code of conduct.

Why is this important to address?

Clarity and congruence about values and expectations of those that work with children is vital to the safeguarding culture in schools. Staff conduct, both in and out of school, can not only demonstrate their suitability for working with children, but also sends a strong message about the culture of the school and safety of the children.

Marcus Erooga discusses the "slippery slope" of boundary violations towards abuse. This refers not just to safeguarding boundaries, but to all boundaries within the workplace and society. Erooga points out that Local Safeguarding Children Practice Reviews (previously known as Serious Case Reviews) highlighted a number of low-level boundary violations in those who went on to abuse children in educational settings. This included:

- Undermining other members of staff
- Disrespecting junior staff
- Having "favourites"
- Making inappropriate remarks/comments
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It's important to highlight that **not all** of those who display the above types of behaviour are going to go on to abuse, however, those organisations in which boundaries are adhered to in every respect in which staff perform their role, are likely to be the safest environments for children.

What can you do?

1. Ensure that you have an up to date staff code of conduct. Ideally this should be written in conjunction with staff – it will mean better buy-in from staff and a true understanding of the culture of your school.
2. Spend time ensuring that your middle managers buy into the code of conduct and school culture, therefore securing consistency of response and culture across ALL areas of the school
3. Use your inset time to write the code of conduct and test the understanding of professional boundaries – what are the grey areas and how can you overcome this together?

Think about what is and isn't acceptable behaviour outside of school – pay particular attention to online behaviour, social media, drugs and alcohol. Remember that just because something does not break the law doesn't mean it is ok for a professional with responsibility for children. What does your school expect of its workforce?

4. Create and reinforce a robust mechanism for sharing, reporting and recording low-level concerns
5. Ensure records are held centrally to allow the visibility of patterns of behaviour
6. Encourage the sharing of all concerns, but do this in a positive way, securing by-in from all members of staff and not in a way that creates an atmosphere of suspicion or toxicity
7. Remind staff of the process for reporting concerns, and provide regular updated information at staff briefings.

For further guidance on Safer Working Practices, and an excellent INSET resource visit www.saferrecruitmentconsortium.org or click here

If you feel you would like further support, or have specific queries relating to this guidance, contact the Education Safeguarding Lead for further guidance.

If you are unsure whether something meets the professional allegations threshold, contact the LADO for support.

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