



**Federation of
Westminster Special Schools
& Bi-Borough Inclusion Service**

Allegations against Staff Policy

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1. Introduction

All schools are under an absolute duty to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils at the school, and to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State in so doing. The Federation of Westminster Special Schools takes this responsibility seriously and will ensure that any allegation of abuse made against a teacher or other member of staff or volunteer in the school is dealt with fairly, quickly and consistently, in accordance with the DfE guidance.

The procedure documented within this policy must be used in any case where it is alleged that a teacher or other member of staff or a volunteer at the school has:

- behaved towards a child or children in a way that has harmed or may have harmed a pupil
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or
- behaved towards a pupil or pupils in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.

All members of staff in the school will be made aware of this policy during induction.

2. How concerns arise

Concerns about the possible abuse of pupils by staff will usually arise in one of two ways, either:

- a direct allegation by a pupil or a third party, for example a parent
- an observation by a member of staff that the behaviour of a colleague is inappropriate or potentially or actually abusive.

In either case the concern must be recorded and reported to the Assistant Head Pastoral and Headteacher immediately unless the allegations against the Assistant Head Pastoral or Headteacher in which the case should be reported to the Executive Headteacher. For allegations against the Executive Headteacher, it must be reported to the Chair of Governors.

As this is a statutory duty, we expect all members of staff in the school, where they have concerns, to report them in accordance with this policy.

3. Initial action

The Headteacher, designated safeguarding lead, Executive Head or Chair of Governors will ensure that they have a full understanding of what is being alleged from the member of staff

or third party, only speaking to the pupil if it is unavoidable or if it is the pupil making the allegation.

No one in the school may investigate the incident by interviewing either those directly involved or any witnesses; to do so could prejudice a fair hearing at a later date.

The Headteacher, designated safeguarding lead, Executive Head or Chair of Governors will simply establish that:

- an allegation has been made
- the general nature of the allegation
- when and where the incident is alleged to have occurred
- who was involved
- any other persons present

The matter will not be discussed with the person who is the subject of the allegation at this stage.

4. Consultation and referral

It is important to ensure that even allegations that appear to be less serious are seen to be followed up and taken seriously and that they are examined objectively by someone independent of the school concerned. If the allegation meets any of the criteria set out in section 1 above, the Headteacher, designated safeguarding lead Executive Head, Head of School or Chair of Governors must report it to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) via the Local Authority on the same day.

If it is unclear whether the threshold for referral has been reached, the Headteacher, designated safeguarding lead, Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors can consult the LADO.

5. Initial consideration of the allegation

The LADO's first step will be to discuss the allegation with the Headteacher, designated safeguarding lead, Executive Head or Chair of Governors to confirm details of the allegation and establish that it is not demonstrably false or unfounded.

If the parents/carers of the child concerned are not already aware of the allegation, the LADO will also discuss how and by whom they should be informed.

In some circumstances the school may advise parents of an incident involving their child straight away, for example, if the child has been injured while at school or in a school related activity, and requires medical treatment.

The Headteacher or (or should it be a member of SLT in case both are not on site?) Executive Head will usually inform the accused person about the allegations as soon as possible after consulting the LADO. However, where a strategy discussion is needed, this will be deferred until after consultation with the Police has taken place and there is agreement about what information can be disclosed to the person.

If the person accused is a member of a union or professional association s/he will be advised to contact that organisation at the outset.

6. Strategy Meeting / Evaluation with Police

If the allegation is not demonstrably false or unfounded, a formal referral will be made and a strategy meeting planned. A strategy discussion will be convened in accordance with “Working Together to Safeguard Children”.

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

- a Police investigation of a possible criminal offence;
- enquiries and assessment under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 if a child is in need of protection or under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 if the child appears to be in need of services;
- consideration by the employer of disciplinary action in respect of the individual.

A senior school representative (Executive Head, Headteacher, designated safeguarding lead or Chair of Governors) will attend any strategy meeting, unless there are good reasons not to do so, and provide details about the circumstances and context of the allegation and the pupil and member of staff concerned.

7. Suspension

The possible risk of harm to pupils posed by an accused person needs to be assessed and managed – in respect of the pupil or pupils involved in the allegation, and any other children in the accused individual’s home, work or community life.

Suspension will be considered in any case where:

- there is cause to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm;
- the allegation warrants formal investigation by the police;

- there is a likelihood that evidence may be tampered with, or witnesses intimidated;
- the allegation is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal from contact with the pupils until the allegation is resolved. In deciding whether to suspend a member of staff, the school will consider advice given at a strategy meeting and any risk assessment.

8. Action where police or local authority investigation is not necessary

If the complaint or allegation is such that:

- it is clear that a criminal and/or child protection enquiries are not necessary, or
- the strategy discussion or initial evaluation decides that is the case;

The Headteacher or Executive Head will discuss the next steps with the LADO.

In those circumstances the options open to the school depend on the nature and circumstances of the allegation and the evidence and information available, and will range from taking no further action or giving professional advice as part of an informal warning to conducting formal disciplinary action that could lead to dismissal or lesser formal warning.

If the nature of the allegation does not require formal disciplinary action/investigation, the Headteacher or Executive Head will institute appropriate action within three working days. This would normally be professional advice or an informal warning - although a record will be kept of this.

Where further enquiries will be needed to enable a decision about how to proceed, the Headteacher or Executive Head will agree with the LADO how and by whom the investigation will be undertaken.

In straightforward cases such investigation should normally be undertaken by a senior member of the school's leadership team. However, if there is a lack of appropriate resources within a school or if the nature or complexity of the allegation so requires, an independent investigator will be appointed.

On receipt of the report of the disciplinary investigation, the Headteacher or Executive Head should consult the LADO and decide whether a disciplinary hearing is needed within two working days. If a hearing is needed, a minimum of 10 working days' notice must be given.

9. Action where police or local authority investigation is necessary

The Police or the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) should inform the school and LADO straight away:

- If it is decided to close an investigation without arrest or charge, or
- If it is decided not to prosecute after the person has been charged, or
- when a criminal investigation and any subsequent trial is complete.

In those circumstances, the LADO will discuss with the Headteacher or Executive Head whether any further action, including disciplinary action is appropriate and, if so, how to proceed. The information provided by the policy and the local authority will inform that decision.

10. Referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

If, on conclusion of the case, the school ceases to use the accused person's services, or the accused person resigns or ceases to provide his or her services, the school will make a referral to the DBS, if the criteria are met. If a referral is appropriate, the report will be made within one month. Consideration will also be given as to whether a referral to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) is also required.

11. Supporting those involved

The Executive Head or Headteacher will notify the parents or carers of the child or children involved as soon as possible if they are not already aware of it – subject to section 5 above.

The deliberations of a disciplinary hearing and the information taken into account in reaching a decision will not normally be disclosed, but the parents or carers of the child should be told the outcome. The school will also keep the person who is the subject of the allegations informed of the progress of the case and consider what other support is appropriate for the individual.

Access to counselling services should be provided and if the person is suspended, the school should also keep the individual informed about developments at school. If the person is a member of a union or professional association s/he should be advised to contact that body at the outset.

12. Confidentiality

Any investigation will be done in confidence. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity while an allegation is being investigated or considered.

No-one in the school may provide any information to the press or media that might identify an individual who is under investigation, unless and until the person is charged with a criminal offence.

No-one in the school may disclose any information to anyone about the details of an investigation, as this may prejudice the right of the person under investigation to a fair hearing.

13. Resignations and compromise agreements

Where a person is under investigation tenders his or her resignation or ceases to provide their services, the investigation into the allegation will still need to be completed in accordance with guidance. It is important that every effort is made to reach a conclusion in all cases of allegations bearing on the safety or welfare of pupils, including any in which the person concerned refuses to cooperate with the process.

The Federation will not enter into “compromise agreements” by which if a person agrees to resign, the school agrees not to pursue disciplinary action and both parties agree a form of words to be used in any future reference.

14. Record keeping

If anyone in the school has any concerns that may lead them to consider that an investigation is required, they must record and report the information to the Headteacher, Executive Head or Chair of Governors, as soon as is practicable.

The Executive Head or Headteacher will ensure that:

- a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made
- details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved
- a note of any action taken and decisions reached, is kept on a person’s confidential personnel file, and a copy provided to the person concerned.

The purpose of the record is to enable accurate information to be given in response to any future request for reference. At the conclusion of the investigation, if the person under investigation is exonerated, the school will write to the person confirming this, and send a copy to the LADO and place a copy on the person’s personnel file.

15. Timescales

The school will endeavour to follow the timescales set out in the guidance for such investigations, as long as this is consistent with a fair and thorough investigation. However, it is acknowledged that serious and complex allegations are unlikely to be resolved quickly, particularly where specialist evidence is needed, or the matter comes to a contested trial.

16. Oversight and monitoring

The school will work closely with the LADO who has overall responsibility for oversight of the procedures for dealing with allegations.

The school will cooperate in supplying statistical information required by the LADO for DfE returns and Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) monitoring purposes.

In cases where it is decided on the conclusion of the case that a person who has been suspended can return to work, the school will consider how best to facilitate that.

17. Learning lessons

At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated the Headteacher or Executive Head will review the case with the LADO to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to school or the LSCB procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

18. Actions in respect of malicious allegations

In the rare event that an allegation is shown to have been deliberately invented or malicious, the Headteacher or Executive Head will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the pupil who made it. The Police will be asked to consider whether any action might be appropriate against the person responsible if s/he was not a pupil.

19. Allegations concerning staff not directly employed by the school

In some cases, the school will need to consider an investigation case in which normal disciplinary procedures do not apply, and may need to act jointly with another organisation. That will be necessary when, for example, an allegation is made against a supply teacher provided by an employment agency or business, or against a person employed by a contractor, or a volunteer provided by a voluntary organisation. In some cases normal disciplinary procedures may not be appropriate because the person is a volunteer or self-employed.

Although in those cases, the school will not have a direct employment relationship with the individual, the school will cooperate in an investigation, and in reaching a decision about whether to continue to use the person's services, or to provide the person for work with children in future, and whether to report the person to DfE.

Appendix I: A Guide for Staff Faced with an Allegation of Abuse

This handout provides information for staff and volunteers who work with children and are faced with an allegation of abuse against them

Introduction

Any allegation of abuse is likely to cause anxiety and concern. This guide is intended to help you be as well informed as possible should you be faced with an allegation. It provides an explanation of the process and offers information about appropriate support and guidance.

Your employer's senior manager, responsible for dealing with allegations, should immediately consult the LADO who is responsible for the management and oversight of individual cases, if it is alleged that a member of staff or volunteer has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a pupil, or may have harmed a pupil; or
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a pupil; or
- behaved in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with pupils.

You should be told about the allegation as soon as possible, but this may be delayed if Police or Children's Social Care need to agree what information can be disclosed. If the senior manager and LADO are clear that an allegation is demonstrably false, you should also be informed of this and told that no further action will be taken.

What happens next?

If there is cause to suspect a pupil has been, or could be, harmed or a criminal offence might have been committed, a strategy discussion will be held, involving Police, the LADO, your employer, Social Care and other agencies as appropriate.

The aim of the strategy discussion will be to share relevant information, plan and determine whether an investigation needs to be conducted by:

- Social Care under child protection procedures
- Police regarding any possible criminal offences
- Your employer under disciplinary/capability procedures

Internal Investigations

Your employer may need to conduct an internal investigation in order to decide how to proceed. It may be conducted by a senior member of staff or by an independent person, depending on the availability of resources and the nature / complexity of the case. It may

also need to be delayed so as not to prejudice possible criminal proceedings and investigation which usually have to take precedence. Your employer will inform you of this.

Volunteers and Supply Workers

If you are a supply worker or volunteer, the placing agency should be involved and co-operate in any investigation. If disciplinary procedures do not apply, an investigation may still be necessary to assess your suitability to work with children.

Resignations and Compromise agreements

Your employer should try to reach a conclusion regardless of whether you resign or otherwise cease to provide your services, or if you refuse to co-operate. They must not use a “compromise agreement,” i.e. allow you to resign without disciplinary action and with an agreed reference.

Timescales

Cases should be dealt with as quickly as possible consistent with a fair and thorough investigation. Government guidance sets out target timescales, but these will depend on factors such as the nature, seriousness and complexity of the allegation. Your case will be monitored in order to avoid unnecessary delay. However, delays can often occur if criminal proceedings are taken

Suspension

Suspension is a neutral act, not a sanction. It should not be automatic and alternatives should be considered. Your employer has the final decision but should take into account the views of Police and Social Care if they are involved.

Suspension should be considered in all cases where:

- there is cause to suspect a pupil is at risk of significant harm, or
- the allegation warrants a Police investigation, or
- it is serious enough to be grounds for dismissal

If suspension is being considered, your own agency’s procedures will apply and will normally involve an interview with you having the right to be accompanied by a Trade Union representative or a friend. If such a meeting does occur it is not an examination of the evidence but an opportunity for you to make representations concerning suspension. If you are to return to work after suspension, your employer should consider how best to manage this, e.g. mentoring.

Your manager should advise you about seeking adequate support for yourself. This may include a range of options including:

Support

- advice to contact your Union representative
- being given the name of a contact who will keep you up to date with progress of the case
- being given the name of a contact to keep you up to date with work activities if suspended (you
- should not discuss the case with colleagues)
- an offer the services of the Staff Counselling Service and / or Occupational Health if available to your agency.

You are also advised to contact your GP if you feel your health is being affected.

Notifications

Confidentiality should be respected and people only told on a 'need to know' basis. If the matter becomes subject to speculation, your employer, after appropriate consultation, may need to issue a statement for parents, children or the public.

Record Keeping

A comprehensive summary of the case should be kept on your confidential personnel file and retained for a period determined by a Hearing Panel. This includes allegations found to be without substance. You should be provided with a copy of the summary. Other agencies, if involved, will keep their own records.

Independent Safeguarding Authority

Your employer, and placing agency if appropriate, have a statutory duty to report details of the case to the ISA where an independent panel will consider the case of barring you from, or placing restrictions on, working with children or young people, if:

- you are dismissed for misconduct or because you are otherwise considered unsuitable to work with children, or
- you resign before a disciplinary process is completed and your employer considers that the evidence was sufficient to consider dismissal

If you are referred, you will be sent a letter explaining the process, including your right to make representation.

Alleged criminal offence

If the Police decide to investigate, you may be arrested or invited to assist voluntarily with the investigation. You should contact your Trade Union and / or a solicitor for advice. If arrested or interviewed, you should be cautioned: *“You do not have to say anything but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence.”*

At the police station you will be entitled to free and independent legal advice. You can see a Duty Solicitor, but if you want to use your own make sure he/she specialises in criminal law.

If ‘assisting with the investigation’ and not under arrest, you should be told that you are free to leave if you wish to do so. If arrested, you will be seen by the Custody Officer who will explain your rights in detail, including the right to have someone informed and to consult and read the “Code of Practice” that covers treatment during detention and interview. The Custody Officer will maintain a record of your period of detention.

Following arrest you can usually be held for up to 24 hours, after which you must be charged or released. This can be extended up to 36 or 96 hours by a Superintendent or Magistrate, respectively, depending on the seriousness.

Decisions about charging rest with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) who act independently of the police. If you admit the offence, the CPS may advise a caution, i.e. a formal warning about your actions. A caution will be recorded by the Police and may influence a decision about instituting proceedings should you offend again. A caution could affect your ability to work with children in the future, and in sexual abuse cases, could result in you being placed on the Sex Offenders Register. You should seek advice from your solicitor before agreeing to accept a caution.

If the CPS advises the Police to charge you, this will be carried out by the custody officer. You will then either be released on bail to appear in court at a future date or kept in custody to appear at the next available court. The responsibility for the prosecution will lie with the CPS.

After criminal proceedings it may still be that your employer decides to take disciplinary action. In any case you will be informed of any proposed actions as soon as possible after completion of criminal proceedings.

At any time during an allegation investigation/enquiry please do ask questions if you are not clear what is happening or why.

Staff involved in making enquiries do recognise the anxieties raised by such matters but must ensure a fair and thorough approach at all times. If you feel this is not happening please do raise this with your manager.