



Tudhoe Learning Trust

Dealing with Allegations
of
Abuse Against
Staff

Policy and Procedure

Approved by: Trust Chief Executive Officer **Date:** November 2019

Last reviewed on: September 2020

Next review due by: September 2021

Introduction

Each school within the Trust takes its responsibility of care for its pupils seriously and fully endorses the principles and practice of Every Child Matters. We recognise that any possibility that a member of staff may have hurt a student must be investigated thoroughly, but in a way that does not prejudice either the student or the member of staff. Any investigation of an allegation of abuse against a member of staff must follow the objective, professional standards and routines described here.

Allegations of abuse against staff should not be dealt with under the school's general complaints procedure.

The allegations of abuse by staff procedures are based on the following:

[Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education \(Statutory Guidance from 1.1.07\), Chapter 5](#)

The framework for managing cases of allegations of abuse against people who work with children is set out in:

[Working together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children \(March 2010\)](#)

and

[Dealing with allegations of abuse against teachers and other staff: Guidance for local authorities, head teachers, school staff, governing bodies and proprietors of independent schools. DfE October 2012](#)

In applying this policy, the Trust schools will not unlawfully discriminate in respect of any of the protected characteristics as defined under the Equality Act and specified below:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership

The operation of this Policy will be kept under review and such changes will be made as deemed appropriate.

Initial allegation made to the school

Any allegation of abuse of a pupil by a member of staff must be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) / Head Teacher. Should the initial allegation first be made to any other member of staff then that member of staff must either request the person raising the allegation to report it to the DSL or if that is not possible to pass details of the allegation to the DSL immediately.

Should the allegation be made against the DSL or Head Teacher than this should be brought to the attention of the Chief Executive Officer or Trust DSL immediately.

Should the allegation meet any of the following criteria then the DSL should report the allegation to the local authority designated officer the same day that the allegation is received that a teacher or member of staff or volunteer at the school has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child or;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or;
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he would pose a risk of harm if they work regularly or closely with children.

Initial Consideration

The Designated Safeguarding Lead / Head Teacher will discuss the matter with the 'local authority designated officer' (LADO) at Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership and provide any further details of the allegation and the circumstances in which it was made.

The contact details are:

Position: LADO
Organisation: Durham County Council
Email address: lado-gcsx@durhamgcsx.gov.uk

The DSL should not investigate the allegation at this stage. The discussion will also consider whether there is evidence or information that establishes that the allegation is false or unfounded.

If the allegation is not patently false and there is cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, the local authority designated officer will immediately refer to children's social care and ask for a LADO meeting to be convened straight away in accordance with Working Together to Safeguard Children.

In those circumstances the LADO meeting should include the local authority designated officer, the Head Teacher and/or the DSL and a representative from HR.

If there is not cause to suspect that "significant harm" is an issue, but a criminal offence might have been committed, the local authority designated officer will immediately inform the police and convene a similar discussion to decide whether a police investigation is needed. That discussion may be held jointly with children's social care representatives of the school and any other agencies involved with the child.

Action following initial consideration

Where the initial consideration decides that the allegation does not involve a possible criminal offence it will be for the Head Teacher to deal with it in consultation with the Trust HR Manager. In such cases, if the nature of the allegation does not require formal disciplinary action appropriate action should be instituted within three working days. If a disciplinary hearing is required and can be held without further investigation, the hearing should ideally be held within 15 working days.

Where further investigation is required to inform consideration of disciplinary action

the Head Teacher and Trust Chief Executive Officer should discuss who will undertake that. The investigation will be undertaken in accordance with the Trust Disciplinary Procedure.

On receipt of the report on the findings of the disciplinary investigation, the Head Teacher should consult the Chief Executive Officer and Trust HR Manager, must decide whether a disciplinary hearing is needed within two working days. If a hearing is needed it should be held in accordance with the Trust Disciplinary Policy.

In any case in which children's social care has undertaken enquiries to determine whether the child or children are in need of protection, the Trust Chief Executive Officer should take account of any relevant information obtained in the course of those enquiries when considering disciplinary action.

The local authority designated officer should continue to liaise with the school to monitor progress of the case and provide advice or support when required or requested.

Once the case has been brought to a conclusion, the local authority designated officer may make one of the following determinations in relation to the case:

- **Substantiated:** there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove the allegation;
- **False:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation;
- **Malicious:** there is clear evidence to prove there has been a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation is entirely false;
- **Unfounded:** there is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made. It might also indicate that the person making the allegation misinterpreted the incident or was mistaken about what they saw. Alternatively, they may not have been aware of all the circumstances;
- **Unsubstantiated:** this is not the same as a false allegation. It means that there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation.

Case subject to police investigation

If the police and/or Crown Prosecution Service decide not to charge the individual with an offence, or decide to administer a caution, or the person is acquitted by a Court, the police should wherever possible aim to pass all information they have which may be relevant to a disciplinary case to the CEO within three working days of the decision. In those circumstances the CEO and the local authority designated officer should proceed as described above.

In any case in which children's social care has undertaken enquiries to determine whether the child or children are in need of protection, any information obtained in the course of those enquiries which is relevant to a disciplinary case should also be passed to the school and the Head Teacher should request this information.

Supporting those involved

Employers have a duty of care to their employees. The Trust will act to manage and minimise the stress inherent in the allegations process. Support for the individual is key to fulfilling this duty. Individuals will be informed of concerns or allegations as agreed with the local authority designated officer and as soon as possible and given an explanation of the likely course of action.

The person who is the subject of the allegation will be kept informed of the progress of the case and consideration will be given to what other support is appropriate for the individual. Particular care will be taken when employees are suspended to ensure that

they are kept informed of both the progress of their case and current work-related issues. Social contact with colleagues and friends will not be prevented unless there is evidence to suggest that such contact is likely to be prejudicial to the gathering and presentation of evidence.

Parents or carers of a child or children involved should be told about the allegation as soon as possible if they do not already know of it. However, where a LADO meeting is required, or police or children's social care services need to be involved, the case manager should not do so until those agencies have been consulted and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the parents or carers.

Parent or carers should also be kept informed about the progress of the case, and told the outcome where there is not a criminal prosecution, including the outcome of any disciplinary process. The deliberations of a disciplinary hearing, and the information taken into account in reaching a decision, cannot normally be disclosed, but the parents or carers of the child should be informed that the matter has been investigated and has been dealt with appropriately. If required, Parents and carers should also be made aware of the prohibition on reporting or publishing allegations about teachers in section 141F of the Education Act 2002. If parents or carers wish to apply to the court to have reporting restrictions removed, they should be told to seek legal advice. In cases where a child may have suffered significant harm, or there may be a criminal prosecution, children's social care services, or the police as appropriate, should consider what support the child or children involved may need.

Resignations and 'settlement agreements'

If the accused person resigns, or ceases to provide their services, this should not prevent an allegation being followed up in accordance with this 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 children, including any in which the person concerned refuses to cooperate with the process.

Wherever possible the accused will be given a full opportunity to answer the allegation and make representations about it. The process of recording the allegation and any supporting evidence, and reaching a judgement about whether it can be substantiated will be on the basis of all the information that is available, the process may continue even if the accused does not cooperate. It may be difficult to reach a conclusion in those circumstances, and it may not be possible to apply any disciplinary sanctions if a person's period of notice expires before the process is complete, but it is important to reach and record a conclusion wherever possible.

So-called 'settlement agreements', by which a person agrees to resign if the employer agrees not to pursue disciplinary action, and both parties agree a form of words to be used in any future reference, should not be used in these cases. Such an agreement will not prevent a thorough police investigation where that is appropriate. Nor can it override the statutory duty to make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service or Teacher's Regulation Agency where circumstances require that.

Record keeping

Details of allegations that are found to have been malicious should be removed from personnel records. However, for all other allegations, it is important that a clear and comprehensive summary of the allegation, details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, and a note of any action taken and decisions reached, is kept on the

confidential personnel file of the accused, 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 a reference, where appropriate. It will provide clarification in cases where future DBS Disclosures reveal information from the police about an allegation that did not result in a criminal conviction and it will help to prevent unnecessary re-investigation if, as sometimes happens, an allegation re-surfaces after a period of time. The record will be retained at least until the accused has reached normal retirement age or for a period of 10 years from the date of the allegation if that is longer.

The Information Commissioner has published guidance on employment records in its Employment Practices Code and supplementary guidance, which provides some practical advice on employment retention.

References

Cases in which an allegation was proven to be false, unsubstantiated, unfounded or malicious will not be included in employer references. A history of repeated concerns or allegations which have all been found to be unsubstantiated, malicious etc. will not be included in any reference.

Further Information

Further information, advice and support can be obtained from Tudhoe Learning Trust at office@tudhoelearningtrust.co.uk Tel: 01388 811765.