PEPONI
HOUSE

Low-Level Concerns Policy

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RATIONALE

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Staff Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Policy, to enable staff to share their concerns, no matter how small, about their own or another member of staff's behaviour.

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 School's Staff Code of Conduct are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff. The School deals with all concerns about adults working in or on behalf of the School appropriately and promptly.

The School seeks to create an environment where staff are encouraged to, 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 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 Head or the Deputy Head Pastoral (DHP)
- 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)
- 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 PHPS.

DEFINING A LOW-LEVEL CONCERN

A low-level concern is one that does not meet the harm threshold as stated in the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. That is, when anyone working in a school (including volunteers, supply staff and contractors) has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she may pose a risk of harm to children
- 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 school posing a transferable risk to children).

Responses and actions to behaviours that may meet the harm threshold are contained specifically within:

- The School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy; and
- 'Arrangements For Dealing With Safeguarding Concerns Or Allegations Of Abuse/Concerns Raised In Relation To Teachers And Other Staff (Including The Head, Board, Supply Staff And Volunteers)'.

These should be reported to the Head 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 School 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 outside authorities.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being over friendly with children;
- having favourites;
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door; or
- using inappropriate 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 School stipulates from them as contained in the Staff Code of Conduct and Staff Handbook. This is covered annually by the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), and as part of the School'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 with the Head or DHP. This should be done without delay.

Where there are concerns/allegations about the Head, these should be referred to the Board member responsible for child protection.

Staff members who are concerned about how their behaviour may have been interpreted, or who, on reflection, have re-evaluated their behaviour as possibly being in contradiction to the Staff Code of Conduct and expectations, may self-refer to the Head or DHP.

DEALING WITH LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS

All low-level concerns may be shared verbally with the Head or DHP in the first instance, but must then be recorded in writing via CPOMS if they are linked to a pupil of the school.

The record should include:

- details of the concern;
- the context in which the concern arose; and
- action taken.

Records will remain confidential in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.

RESPONDING TO A LOW-LEVEL CONCERN

The Head or DHP will in the first instance satisfy herself 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 as per the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

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 Head or DHP is in any doubt whatsoever, advice will be sought from outside authorities, if necessary, on a 'no-names' basis.

Having established that the concern is low-level, the Head or DHP 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 Head or DHP should collect as much evidence as possible by speaking:

- directly to the person who raised the concern; and
- to the individual involved and any witnesses if appropriate.

The information collected will help 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 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.

Most low-level concerns by their very nature are likely to be minor and will be dealt with by means of management guidance, training, etc. In dealing with a low-level concern with a member of staff, this will be approached in a sensitive and proportionate way. In many cases, a low-level concern will simply require a conversation with the individual about whom the concern has been raised.

Details of the concern will be recorded along with the rationale for decisions and action taken.

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 School'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 the School's HR manager.

MONITORING OF LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS

The Head will securely retain confidential files on low-level concerns on CPOMS within the 'Staff Confidential' category. Potential patterns will be monitored by the School's Senior Leadership Team to ensure that all such concerns are being dealt with promptly and appropriately, and that any potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour are identified. A record will be kept of this review within SLT minutes.

No record will be made of the concern on the individual's personnel file (and no mention made in job references) unless either:

a. the concern (or group of concerns) has been reclassified as a higher-level concern, or

b. the concern (or group of concerns) is sufficiently serious to result in formal action under the School's Grievance, Capability or Disciplinary procedures.