



SPARKEN HILL
ACADEMY

Managing Allegations Against Staff

including Low-Level Concerns

Concerns and allegations about staff, supply staff, trainee teachers, volunteers and contractors

Version 1.6 | 2026–27

Document Control

Rev	Date issued	Prepared by	Approved	Comments
1.2	September 2022	RTL	13 Oct 2022	Updated with KCSIE 2022
1.3	September 2023	RTL	12 Oct 2023	Updated with KCSIE 2023
1.4	September 2024	RTL	10 Oct 2024	Updated with KCSIE 2024
1.5	September 2025	RTL	18 Sept 2025 (FGB)	Updated with KCSIE 2025
1.6	September 2026	RTL	08 Oct 2026 (Trust Board)	Updated for the final KCSIE 2026 and WTSC 2026; see summary below

Author	Mr R.Lilley, Principal and Designated Safeguarding Lead
Approved by	Trust Board, 08 October 2026
Next review	September 2027, or sooner if legislation or statutory guidance changes

What has changed in version 1.6

- Updated to Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (Part four now covers supply teachers, trainee teachers, volunteers and contractors) and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026. The 2018 Working Together reference is removed.
- Trainee teachers are named throughout. Every concern or allegation about an adult goes to the Principal, who considers whether an onward referral to the LADO is required.
- Governance terminology changed to the Trust Board; the Chair of the Trust Board is case manager where the Principal is the subject of an allegation.
- Low-level concerns are now recorded on StaffSafe, and DSLs cannot access records about themselves.
- The two duplicated sections on unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious allegations are merged. The out-of-date reference to preserving records for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse is removed.
- The DBS duty to refer, TRA referral, reporting restrictions for teachers, transferable risk and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 are set out more clearly.
- Sections on attendance, SEND, the Virtual School Head and alternative provision placements are removed, as these are covered in the Child Protection Policy 2026–27. Allegations about staff at alternative providers and at clubs using the premises remain covered.
- New key contacts table, quick-reference flowchart (Appendix 2) and Trust Board monitoring section.

Key Contacts

Principal and Designated Safeguarding Lead (case manager for allegations and decision-maker for low-level concerns)	Mr Richard Lilley 01909 534070
Chair of the Trust Board (case manager where the allegation concerns the Principal)	Phil Gawthorpe pgawthorpe@sparkenhill.com
Deputy DSL	Mrs Kate Phoenix, Vice Principal 01909 534065
Additional trained DSLs	Mrs Karen Gardiner 01909 534079; Mrs Deb White 01909 534067
Safeguarding Trustee	Mrs Clare Middleton
Business Manager (HR liaison and Single Central Record assurance)	Mrs Vicky Dashper
HR adviser	Mrs Urshula Flower
Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)	LADO@nottsc.gov.uk 0115 804 1272
Nottinghamshire MASH	0300 500 80 90
Police	999 in an emergency; 101 for non-emergencies
Disclosure and Barring Service	www.gov.uk/guidance/making-barring-referrals-to-the-dbs
Teaching Regulation Agency	www.gov.uk/government/organisations/teaching-regulation-agency

1. Purpose and Culture

As part of our whole-school approach to safeguarding, Sparken Hill Academy promotes an open and transparent culture in which all concerns about all adults working in or on behalf of the Academy are dealt with promptly and appropriately. Creating a culture in which concerns are shared responsibly and with the right person, recorded and dealt with appropriately, enables us to:

- identify inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour early;
- minimise the risk of abuse; and
- ensure that adults working in or on behalf of the Academy are clear about professional boundaries and act within them, in accordance with the ethos and values of the Academy.

We will deal with every concern and allegation quickly, fairly and consistently, in a way that protects children while also supporting the adult who is the subject of the concern. Our procedures will be applied with common sense and judgement.

2. Scope

This policy applies to concerns and allegations about any adult working in or on behalf of the Academy, including employed staff, supply and agency staff, trainee teachers, volunteers, contractors and Trustees, whether the behaviour happened in school, outside school or online. Section A covers allegations that may meet the harm threshold. Section B covers low-level concerns, which do not meet that threshold.

Concerns about the Academy's safeguarding practice, rather than about an individual adult, are raised under the Whistleblowing Policy. Allegations about the conduct of staff that do not relate to children are dealt with under the Academy's disciplinary procedures.

3. Legal and Statutory Framework

- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, Part four: Safeguarding concerns or allegations made about staff, including supply teachers, trainee teachers, volunteers and contractors;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026;
- the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (including the duty to refer to the DBS) and the Crime and Policing Act 2026;
- the Education Act 2002, including section 141F (reporting restrictions for allegations against teachers);
- the Teachers' Disciplinary (England) Regulations 2012 (Teaching Regulation Agency);
- UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025;
- the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010 and the Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended by the Employment Rights Act 2025);
- Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership procedures for managing allegations.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Trust Board	Ensures this policy is in place and effective, receives anonymised monitoring information (Section C) and nominates the Chair of the Trust Board to act as case manager where the Principal is the subject of an allegation.
Principal	Receives all concerns and allegations about adults, decides whether they meet the harm threshold, acts as case manager, and is the decision-maker for low-level concerns.
Chair of the Trust Board	Acts as case manager where an allegation or low-level concern relates to the Principal.
DSLs	Support the Principal, consider the safeguarding needs of the children involved, and make referrals to MASH where a child needs help or protection.
All staff and volunteers	Report every concern about an adult, however small, without delay. They must not investigate, confront the adult, or discuss the concern with others.

5. How to Raise a Concern About an Adult

- Report any concern or allegation about an adult to the Principal without delay. The Principal will consider whether the concern meets the harm threshold and whether an onward referral to the LADO is required.
- If the concern is about the Principal, report it to the Chair of the Trust Board, through the office marked "Confidential — for the attention of the Chair of the Trust Board".
- If there is a conflict of interest, or you feel the concern is not being acted on, contact the LADO directly (LADO@nottscc.gov.uk, 0115 804 1272). You may also use the Whistleblowing Policy.
- If a child is in immediate danger, call 999 and make a referral to MASH. Do not wait to speak to the Principal.
- Record what you saw or were told, factually, as soon as possible (Appendix 1). Do not investigate or speak to the adult concerned.

6. The Spectrum of Behaviour

The words "concern" and "allegation" are often used interchangeably. The focus is always on the behaviour being described, not the language used by the person raising it.

Concern or allegation that may meet the harm threshold (Section A)

It is alleged that the adult 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 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 (including behaviour outside school, known as transferable risk).

Low-level concern (Section B)

Any concern, no matter how small, even if no more than a sense of unease or a "nagging doubt", that an adult may have acted in a way that is inconsistent with the Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside work, and that does not meet the harm threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO. Low-level does not mean insignificant.

Appropriate conduct

Behaviour that is entirely consistent with the Staff Code of Conduct and the law.

Section A: Allegations That May Meet the Harm Threshold

A1. When this section applies

This section applies where it is alleged that an adult working in or on behalf of the Academy has behaved in any of the ways set out in the red box in Section 6. Where the behaviour happened outside work, the Principal will consider, with the LADO, whether there is a transferable risk to children at the Academy. If there is any doubt about whether a concern meets the harm threshold, the Principal will seek advice from the LADO.

A2. The case manager

The Principal is the case manager. Where the allegation concerns the Principal, the Chair of the Trust Board is the case manager. The case manager is identified at the earliest opportunity.

A3. Initial steps

- The case manager carries out basic enquiries to establish the facts, such as when and where the incident took place and who was present, without jeopardising any police or social care investigation. The adult concerned is not approached at this stage.
- The case manager discusses the allegation with the LADO, normally within one working day, to agree the course of action, including whether the police or children's social care need to be involved. Where there is an immediate risk to children or evidence of a possible criminal offence, the case manager contacts the police first and informs the LADO as soon as possible afterwards.
- The DSL considers the welfare of the child or children involved, and of any other children the adult has contact with, including in the adult's own family or community, and makes a referral to MASH where needed.
- Every discussion, decision and the reasons for it are recorded in writing.

A4. Informing the adult concerned

The case manager informs the adult of the allegation and the likely course of action as soon as possible after consulting the LADO. Where the police or children's social care are involved, only information agreed with them is shared.

A5. Suspension and alternatives

Suspension is not the default position. It is considered only where there is reason to suspect that a child is at risk of harm, or where the case is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal, and only once all alternatives have been considered. Alternatives include:

- redeployment within the Academy so that the adult has no direct contact with the child or children concerned;
- providing another adult to be present when the adult has contact with children;
- redeployment to alternative work so that the adult does not have unsupervised access to children;
- moving the child or children to classes where they will not have contact with the adult, making clear that this is not a punishment and after consulting their parents.

If suspension is necessary, the rationale, including the alternatives considered and why they were rejected, is agreed with the LADO and recorded. Written confirmation is given to the adult within one working day, with a named contact at the Academy. Where an interim prohibition order is made by the Secretary of State, the Academy will immediately suspend the individual from teaching.

A6. Supporting the adult concerned

The adult is given a named contact who keeps them informed of progress, and is told about support available, including through their trade union or professional association and occupational health or employee assistance CEFM. Staff are advised not to discuss the allegation with colleagues, parents or on social media. The Academy will not assume guilt and will treat the adult fairly throughout.

A7. Parents and carers

Parents or carers of the child or children involved are told about the allegation as soon as possible, if they do not already know, following agreement with the LADO, police or children's social care. They are kept informed of progress in relation to their own child, and of the outcome where there is no criminal prosecution, but are not given information about the adult's employment or any disciplinary action. They are made aware of the requirement to maintain confidentiality.

A8. Supply staff, agency staff, trainee teachers and contractors

- The Academy will not stop using an individual because of a safeguarding concern without finding out the facts and liaising with the LADO.
- The Academy leads on collecting information and providing it to the LADO, working fully with the agency, contractor or, for a fee-funded trainee teacher, the initial teacher training provider.
- The case manager discusses with the agency or provider whether the individual should be suspended or redeployed during the process, and shares information so that any previous concerns known to them are taken into account.
- Agencies and providers are told about this policy when the Academy uses their staff.

A9. Staff of other organisations

Where an allegation concerns an adult working for an organisation that uses the Academy premises (for example, a holiday or sports club), or an alternative provider where a pupil is placed, the Principal will report it to the LADO, inform the organisation's safeguarding lead, take any immediate action needed to safeguard children, and follow the Academy's lettings or alternative provision arrangements, which may include suspending the arrangement.

A10. Confidentiality and reporting restrictions

The Academy makes every effort to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity. The case manager takes advice from the LADO, police and children's social care on who needs to know, what can be shared, how to manage speculation and press interest, and what information can be given to the wider community. Under section 141F of the Education Act 2002, it is an offence to publish information that would identify a teacher who is the subject of an

allegation by a pupil until they are charged with an offence. Parents and carers are made aware of this, and anyone wishing to have the restrictions lifted will be advised to seek legal advice.

A11. Timescales

Allegations are dealt with as quickly as possible, avoiding unnecessary delay. Where reasonably practicable, the Academy aims for:

- cases where it is clear straightaway that the allegation is unfounded or malicious to be resolved within one week;
- appropriate action within three working days where formal disciplinary action is not needed;
- a disciplinary hearing within 15 working days where one is needed and no further investigation is required.

A12. Outcome definitions

Outcome	Meaning
Substantiated	There is sufficient evidence to prove the allegation.
Malicious	There is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation, and there has been a deliberate act to deceive, or to cause harm to the subject of the allegation.
False	There is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation.
Unsubstantiated	There is insufficient evidence either to prove or disprove the allegation. This does not imply guilt or innocence.
Unfounded	There is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made.

A13. At the conclusion of a case

- **After a police investigation or prosecution:** the case manager discusses with the LADO whether any further action, including disciplinary action, is appropriate, taking into account information from the police and children's social care.
- **DBS referral:** the Academy has a legal duty to refer to the DBS where it removes an individual from regulated activity (or would have done so had they not resigned or left) because they have harmed, or posed a risk of harm to, a child. This applies to staff, supply staff, volunteers and contractors.
- **Teaching Regulation Agency:** where a teacher is dismissed, or would have been dismissed had they not resigned, and a prohibition order may be appropriate, the Academy will consider a referral to the TRA.
- **Return to work:** where a suspended adult returns to work, the case manager plans their return, including support, and how contact with the child or children involved will be managed.
- **Unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious allegations:** the LADO and case manager consider next steps. If the child or person who made the allegation may need help, or the allegation may have been a cry for help, a referral to children's social care may be appropriate. If an allegation was deliberately invented or malicious, the Academy will consider appropriate action: for a pupil under the Relationships and Behaviour Regulation Policy, and for an adult, whether to involve the police.

A14. Records

The case manager keeps a clear record of every allegation, including a summary of the allegation, how it was followed up and resolved, any action taken and decisions reached, and whether it will be referred to in future references. A copy is given to the adult, in agreement with the police or children's social care where they are involved. The record is kept confidentially on the adult's personnel file until they reach normal pension age, or for ten years from the date of the allegation if that is longer.

Records of allegations found to be malicious or false are removed from the personnel file unless the adult consents to them being kept. They may be kept elsewhere for the purpose of identifying patterns and to inform any future references in line with KCSIE.

A15. References

Only substantiated allegations are included in references, provided the information is factual. Allegations found to be false, unfounded, unsubstantiated or malicious, including repeated allegations with these outcomes, are not referred to.

A16. Learning lessons

At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated, the case manager and the LADO review the circumstances to identify any improvements to the Academy's procedures or practice. This includes consideration of any suspension: whether it was justified, its duration, and how similar investigations could be carried out without suspension in future. For all other cases, the case manager considers the facts and decides whether improvements can be made.

A17. Non-recent allegations

Abuse can be reported no matter how long ago it happened. Non-recent allegations made by a child are reported to the LADO in line with Nottinghamshire procedures. Where an adult tells the Academy that they were abused as a child, they will be advised to report it to the police, and the Principal will inform the LADO where the alleged abuser may still work with children.

A18. Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 introduces a mandatory duty for those working with children to report known child sexual abuse. The Academy will update this policy and train staff when the duty comes into force. Until then, all concerns continue to be reported under this policy and the Child Protection Policy.

Section B: Low-Level Concerns

B1. What is a low-level concern?

A low-level concern is defined in the amber box in Section 6. Low-level concerns may arise in several ways, including through suspicion, a complaint, a concern raised by a colleague, a disclosure by a child, parent or other adult, pre-employment vetting checks, or an adult reporting their own behaviour (self-referral).

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- being over-friendly with children, or having favourites;
- taking photographs of children on a personal mobile phone or device;
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door;
- humiliating pupils, or using inappropriate language or making inappropriate comments;
- contacting pupils or parents through personal social media or messaging accounts;
- failing to follow the Online Safety and Acceptable Use Policy, including entering pupil information or images into generative AI tools that have not been approved by the Academy;
- sharing personal information inappropriately, or demonstrating poor professional boundaries.

B2. Online conduct

Staff should be aware that concerning online behaviour may relate to any of the four areas of online risk: content (for example, exposing children to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material, including pornography, material featuring extreme sexual or physical violence, racism, misogyny, self-harm, suicide, antisemitism, radicalisation, extremism, misinformation and conspiracy theories); contact (inappropriate online interaction with pupils, or facilitating harmful interactions, including with generative AI tools such as chatbots); conduct (online behaviour that increases the likelihood of harm, such as inappropriate image sharing); and commerce (exposing children to inappropriate advertising, scams or gambling).

B3. Our culture

We encourage all staff to share low-level concerns confidentially, including about themselves, by:

- making sure staff are clear about expected behaviour through the Staff Code of Conduct, induction and training, and are confident to distinguish appropriate behaviour from concerning behaviour in themselves and others;
- empowering staff to share concerns and to self-refer where their own behaviour may have been misunderstood;
- addressing unprofessional behaviour early and supporting the adult to correct it;
- responding sensitively and proportionately; and
- using concerns to identify any weaknesses in the Academy's safeguarding systems.

B4. How to share a low-level concern

Low-level concerns should be shared with the Principal as soon as possible, in person or using the Staff Behaviour Concern Form (Appendix 1). The form is available on the safeguarding boards outside the staffroom and in the admin corridor, from members of SLT, and electronically. Concerns about the Principal are shared with the Chair of the Trust Board.

Concerns about supply staff or contractors are also shared with the Principal, who will notify the individual's employer so that any pattern of behaviour can be identified.

B5. Responding to a low-level concern

The Principal is the decision-maker for all low-level concerns and may consult the other DSLs. The Principal will speak to the person who raised the concern (unless it was raised anonymously), to the adult concerned, and to any witnesses, and will decide on the appropriate response. This will usually be a supportive conversation reminding the adult of expected behaviour and any support or training needed. The Principal may seek advice from the LADO or HR where it is unclear whether a concern meets the harm threshold. If it does, it will be dealt with under Section A.

B6. Recording and reviewing low-level concerns

All low-level concerns are recorded in writing on StaffSafe, including details of the concern, the context, the action taken and the rationale for decisions. Paper forms are scanned onto StaffSafe and then destroyed securely. Records are kept confidential and secure, in line with UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025. All DSLs have access to StaffSafe, except to any records about themselves.

Records are reviewed at least termly so that potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified. Where a pattern is identified, the Principal will decide on a course of action, either through the disciplinary procedures or, where the behaviour now meets the harm threshold, by referral to the LADO under Section A. The Principal will also consider whether wider cultural or procedural issues contributed, and whether policies or training need to change.

Records are retained at least until the individual leaves employment. On leaving, the records are reviewed to decide whether any information has a reasonably likely value in relation to a potential future employment or abuse claim, which would justify keeping it, or whether it should be deleted.

B7. Confidentiality and references

Staff who report a concern must keep it confidential and share it only with the Principal or the DSL team. Low-level concerns are not included in references unless the concern, or group of concerns, has met the threshold for referral to the LADO and been found to be substantiated, or relates to issues that would ordinarily be included in a reference, such as misconduct or poor performance.

Section C: Training, Monitoring and Review

All staff are trained on this policy at induction and at the annual safeguarding update, including how to recognise and report concerns about adults and how to self-refer. The Principal and the Chair of the Trust Board complete training in managing allegations.

The Principal's termly safeguarding report to the Trust Board includes anonymised information on the number and type of allegations and low-level concerns, outcomes, timescales, and any learning or changes to practice. The Safeguarding Trustee reviews these arrangements as part of her annual safeguarding visit.

This policy is reviewed annually by the Principal and approved by the Trust Board, and sooner if legislation or statutory guidance changes. The next scheduled review is September 2027.

Linked Policies

Policy	How it links
Child Protection Policy 2026–27	Overarching safeguarding framework, including Section K on concerns and allegations about adults
Staff Code of Conduct	Expected standards of behaviour against which concerns are judged

Policy	How it links
Whistleblowing (Confidential Reporting) Policy	Raising concerns about safeguarding practice or where internal routes are not appropriate
Relationships and Behaviour Regulation Policy	Response to pupils who make malicious allegations
Restrictive practice / positive handling arrangements	Lawful use of reasonable force and recording
Online Safety and Acceptable Use Policy	Expected online conduct and use of technology, including generative AI
Volunteers Policy and safer recruitment arrangements	Checks and supervision of volunteers
Data Protection Policy	Handling and retention of records
Staff Supervision Policy	Supervision and support for staff

Appendix 1: Staff Behaviour Concern Form

Use this form to share any concern with the Principal, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, even if it is no more than a sense of unease or a “nagging doubt”, that an adult may have acted in a way that is inconsistent with the Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside work. You can also use it to self-refer. Give a concise, factual and chronological record, with the context in which the concern arose. Continue on a separate sheet if needed.

Name of adult the concern is about	
Their role	
Details of the concern (what, when, where, who was present)	
Your name and role	
Signed	
Date and time	

For completion by the Principal (or Chair of the Trust Board)

Received by, date and time	
Was the adult spoken to? If not, why not?	
The adult's response	
Action taken and rationale	
Advice sought from the LADO and/or HR?	Yes ☐ No ☐
Does the concern now meet the harm threshold?	Yes ☐ (follow Section A) No ☐
Recorded on StaffSafe (date)	
Signed and date	

This form is held securely on StaffSafe in line with the Academy's data protection arrangements. Low-level concerns are treated as confidentially as possible. In certain circumstances it may be necessary to share information with third parties for relevant and necessary reasons, including where a reporter has asked to remain anonymous.

Appendix 2: Quick Reference — Responding to a Concern About an Adult

Step	Action
1	If a child is in immediate danger, call 999 and make a MASH referral.
2	Report the concern to the Principal straight away. If it concerns the Principal, report it to the Chair of the Trust Board. If there is a conflict of interest, contact the LADO directly.
3	Record what you saw or heard, factually, on the Staff Behaviour Concern Form. Do not investigate, and do not approach the adult.
4	The Principal decides whether the concern may meet the harm threshold, seeking LADO advice if in doubt.
5	Harm threshold (Section A): the case manager makes basic enquiries, consults the LADO (normally within one working day), considers suspension or alternatives, and informs the adult and the parents as agreed.
6	Low-level concern (Section B): the Principal speaks to those involved, responds proportionately, records on StaffSafe and reviews for patterns.
7	At the conclusion: record the outcome, make any DBS or TRA referral, support the return to work, and review lessons learned.