



**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE  
STUDIO SCHOOL TRUST**

# **Dealing with allegations against staff**

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## Dealing with Allegations Against Staff

### 1) Rationale:

Employers have a duty of care to their employees. They should ensure they provide effective support for anyone facing an allegation and provide the employee with a named contact if they are suspended.

This guidance is about managing cases of allegations that might indicate a person would pose a risk of harm if they continue to work in regular or close contact with children in their present position, or in any capacity. It should be used in respect of all cases in which it is alleged that a teacher or member of staff (including volunteers) in a school has:

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

It is essential that any allegation of abuse made against a teacher or other member of staff or volunteer at the schools is dealt with very quickly, in a fair and consistent way that provides effective protection for the child and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.

### 2) Guidelines for dealing with allegations

The procedures for dealing with allegations need to be applied with common sense and judgement. Many cases may well either not meet the criteria set out above, or may do so without warranting consideration of either a police investigation or enquiries by local authority children's social care services. In these cases, local arrangements should be followed to resolve cases without delay.

Some rare allegations will be so serious they require immediate intervention by children's social care services and/or police. The LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) should be informed of all allegations that come to the school's attention that appear to meet the criteria so they can consult police and children's social care services as appropriate.

The following definitions should be used when determining the outcome of allegation investigations:

- a) **Substantiated**: there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove the allegation;
- b) **False**: there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation;
- c) **Malicious**: there is clear evidence to prove there has been a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation is entirely false;
- d) **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;
- e) **Unsubstantiated**: this is not the same as a false allegation. It means that there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation.

In the first instance, the School/Academy Principal or Chair of the local governing body should immediately discuss the allegation with the LADO. The purpose of an initial discussion is for the LADO to consider the nature, content and context of the allegation and agree a course of action. The LADO may ask the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors to provide or obtain relevant additional information, such as previous history, whether the child or their family have made similar allegations and the individual's current contact with children. There may be situations when the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors will want to involve the police immediately, for example if the person is deemed to be an immediate risk to children or there is evidence of a criminal offence. Where there is no such evidence, the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors should discuss the allegations with the LADO in order to help determine whether police involvement is necessary.

The initial sharing of information and evaluation may lead to a decision that no further action is to be taken in regard to the individual facing the allegation or concern; in which case this decision and a justification for it should be recorded by both the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors and the LADO, and agreement reached on what information should be put in writing to the individual concerned and by whom. The School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors should then consider with the LADO what action should follow both in respect of the individual and those who made the initial allegation.

The School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors should inform the accused person about the allegation as soon as possible after consulting the LADO. It is extremely important that the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors provides them with as much information as possible at that time. However, where a strategy discussion is needed, or police or children's social care services need to be involved, the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors should not do that until those agencies have been consulted, and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the accused.

The Trust will consider carefully whether the circumstances of a case warrant a person being suspended from contact with children at the school or whether alternative arrangements can be put in place until the allegation or concern is resolved. All options to avoid suspension should be considered prior to taking that step. (Please see further information on suspension below). Any decision around suspension must be made by the Executive Principal and the Chair of the Trust.

If the allegation is not demonstrably false or unfounded, and there is cause to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, a strategy discussion should be convened in accordance with *Working Together to Safeguard Children*. (DfE 2013)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children>

If the allegation is about physical contact, the strategy discussion or initial evaluation with the police should take into account that teachers and other staff are entitled to use reasonable force to control or restrain students in certain circumstances, including dealing with disruptive behaviour.

Where it is clear that an investigation by the police or children's social care services is unnecessary, or the strategy discussion or initial evaluation decides that is the case, the LADO should discuss the next steps with the School/Academy Principal or

Chair of Governors. In those circumstances, the options open to the school depend on the nature and circumstances of the allegation and the evidence and information available. This will range from taking no further action to dismissal or a decision not to use the person's services in future. Suspension should not be the default position: an individual should be suspended only if there is no reasonable alternative. The decision to suspend a member of staff must be made in consultation with the Executive Principal or Chair of the Trust.

In some cases, further enquiries will be needed to enable a decision about how to proceed. If so, the LADO should discuss with the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors how and by whom the investigation will be undertaken. In straightforward cases, the investigation should normally be undertaken by a senior member of the school staff.

However, in other circumstances, such as lack of appropriate resource within the school, or the nature or complexity of the allegation, the investigation will require an independent investigator who will be appointed by the Trust.

### **3) Supporting those involved**

The North Hertfordshire Studio School Trust has a duty of care to its 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 should be informed of concerns or allegations as soon as possible and given an explanation of the likely course of action, unless there is an objection by the children's social care services or the police. The individual should be advised to contact their trade union representative, if they have one, or a colleague for support. They should also be given access to welfare counselling or medical advice where this is provided by the employer.

The School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors should appoint a named representative to keep the person who is the subject of the allegation informed of the progress of the case and consider what other support is appropriate for the individual. Particular care needs to 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 should 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 strategy discussion is required, or police or children's social care services need to be involved, the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors 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 also be made aware of the prohibition on reporting or publishing allegations about teachers in section 141F of the Education Act 2002 (see below). 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.

#### **4) Confidentiality**

It is extremely important that when an allegation is made, the school makes every effort to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity while an allegation is being investigated or considered. The Education Act 2011 introduced reporting restrictions preventing the publication of any material that may lead to the identification of a teacher who has been accused by, or on behalf of, a student from the same school (where that identification would identify the teacher as the subject of the allegation). The reporting restrictions apply until the point that the accused person is charged with an offence, or until the Secretary of State or the General Teaching Council for Wales publishes information about an investigation or decision in a disciplinary case arising from the allegation. The reporting restrictions also cease to apply if the individual to whom the restrictions apply effectively waives their right to anonymity by going public themselves or by giving their written consent for another to do so or if a judge lifts restrictions in response to a request to do so.

The legislation imposing restrictions makes clear that "publication" of material that may lead to the identification of the teacher who is the subject of the allegation is prohibited. "Publication" includes "any speech, writing, relevant programme or other communication in whatever form, which is addressed to the public at large or any section of the public". This means that a parent who, for example, published details of the allegation on a social networking site would be in breach of the reporting restrictions (if what was published could lead to the identification of the teacher by members of the public).

In accordance with the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) guidance the police will not normally 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. In exceptional cases where the police would like to depart from that rule, e.g. an appeal to trace a suspect, they must apply to a magistrates' court to request that reporting restrictions be lifted.

The School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors should take advice from the LADO, police and children's social care services to agree the following:

- who needs to know and, importantly, exactly what information can be shared;
- how to manage speculation, leaks and gossip;
- what, if any information can be reasonably given to the wider community to reduce speculation; and
- how to manage press interest if and when it should arise.

#### **5) 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 should be given a full opportunity to answer the allegation and make representations about it. But the process of recording the allegation and any supporting evidence, and reaching a judgement about whether it can be substantiated on the basis of all the information available, should continue even if that cannot be done or 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 (DBS) from December 2012 where circumstances require that.

## **6) 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 should 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.

## **7) References**

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

## **8) Timescales**

It is in everyone's interest to resolve cases as quickly as possible consistent with a fair and thorough investigation. All allegations must be investigated as a priority to avoid any delay. Target timescales are shown below: the time taken to investigate

and resolve individual cases depends on a variety of factors including the nature, seriousness and complexity of the allegation, but these targets should be achieved in all but truly exceptional cases. It is expected that 80 per cent of cases should be resolved within one month, 90 per cent within three months, and all but the most exceptional cases should be completed within 12 months.

- For those cases where it is clear immediately that the allegation is unfounded or malicious, they should be resolved within one week.
- Where the initial consideration decides that the allegation does not involve a possible criminal offence it will be for the employer to deal with it, although if there are concerns about child protection, the employer should discuss with the LADO. In such cases, if the nature of the allegation does not require formal disciplinary action, the employer should institute appropriate action within three working days.
- If a disciplinary hearing is required and can be held without further investigation, the hearing should be held within 15 working days following the trust's Disciplinary Procedures.

### **9) Oversight and Monitoring**

The LADO has overall responsibility for oversight of the procedures for dealing with allegations; for resolving any inter-agency issues; and for liaison with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) on the subject. The LADO will provide advice and guidance to the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors, in addition to liaising with the police and other agencies, and monitoring the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible consistent with a thorough and fair process. Reviews should be conducted at fortnightly or monthly intervals, depending on the complexity of the case.

Police forces should also identify officers who will be responsible for:

- liaising with the LADO;
- taking part in the strategy discussion or initial evaluation;
- subsequently reviewing the progress of those cases in which there is a police investigation; and
- sharing information on completion of the investigation or any prosecution.

If the strategy discussion or initial assessment decides that a police investigation is required, the police should also set a target date for reviewing the progress of the investigation and consulting the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) about whether to: charge the individual; continue to investigate; or close the investigation. Wherever possible, that review should take place no later than four weeks after the initial evaluation. Dates for subsequent reviews, ideally at fortnightly intervals, should be set at the meeting if the investigation continues.

### **10) Suspension**

The possible risk of harm to children posed by an accused person should be evaluated and managed in respect of the child(ren) involved in the allegations. Some rare cases will require the Executive Principal and Chair of Trust to consider suspending the accused until the case is resolved. Suspension must not be an automatic response when an allegation is reported; all options to avoid suspension should be considered prior to taking that step. If the School/Academy Principal or

Chair of Governors is concerned about the welfare of other children in the community or the teacher's family, those concerns should be reported to the LADO or police. But suspension is highly unlikely to be justified on the basis of such concerns alone.

Suspension should be considered only in a case where there is cause to suspect child or other children at the school are at risk of significant harm or the case is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal. However, a person should not be suspended automatically: the Executive Principal or Chair of Trust must consider carefully whether the circumstances warrant suspension from contact with children at the school until the allegation is resolved, and may wish to seek advice from the Human Resources department and the LADO.

The Executive Principal or Chair of Trust should also consider whether the result that would be achieved by immediate suspension could be obtained by alternative arrangements. In many cases an investigation can be resolved quickly and without the need for suspension. If the LADO, police and children's social care services have no objections to the member of staff continuing to work during the investigation, the Executive/School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors/Trust should be as inventive as possible to avoid suspension. Based on assessment of risk, the following alternatives should be considered before suspending a member of staff:

- redeployment within the school so that the individual does not have direct contact with the child or children concerned;
- providing an assistant to be present when the individual has contact with children;
- redeploying to alternative work in the school so the individual does not have unsupervised access to children;
- moving the child or children to classes where they will not come into contact with the member of staff, making it clear that this is not a punishment and parents have been consulted; or
- temporarily redeploying the member of staff to another role in a different location within the trust.

These alternatives allow time for an informed decision regarding the suspension and possibly reduce the initial impact of the allegation. This will, however, depend upon the nature of the allegation. The potential permanent professional reputational damage to employees that can result from suspension where an allegation is later found to be unsubstantiated, unfounded or maliciously intended should be considered.

If immediate suspension is considered necessary, the rationale and justification for such a course of action should be agreed and recorded by both the Executive Principal or Chair of Trust and the LADO. This should also include what alternatives to suspension have been considered and why they were rejected.

Where it has been deemed appropriate to suspend the person, written confirmation should be dispatched within one working day, giving as much detail as appropriate for the reasons for the suspension. It is not acceptable for an employer to leave a person who has been suspended without any support. The person should be

informed at the point of their suspension who their named contact is within the organisation and provided with their contact details.

Children's social care services or the police cannot require the Executive Principal or Chair of Trust to suspend a member of staff or a volunteer, although they should give appropriate weight to their advice. The power to suspend is vested in the Executive Principal or the Directors of the Trust who are the employers of staff at the schools. However, where a strategy discussion or initial evaluation concludes that there should be enquiries by the children's social care services and/or an investigation by the police, the LADO should canvass police and children's social care services for views about whether the accused member of staff needs to be suspended from contact with children in order to inform the trust's consideration of suspension. Police involvement does not make it mandatory to suspend a member of staff; this decision should be taken on a case-by-case basis having undertaken a risk assessment.

### **11) Information Sharing**

In a strategy discussion or the initial evaluation of the case, the agencies involved should share all relevant information they have about the person who is the subject of the allegation, and about the alleged victim.

Where the police are involved, wherever possible the employer should ask the police to obtain consent from the individuals involved to share their statements and evidence for use in the employer disciplinary process. This should be done as their investigation proceeds and will enable the police to share relevant information without delay at the conclusion of their investigation or any court case.

Children's social care services should adopt a similar procedure when making enquiries to determine whether the child or children named in the allegation are in need of protection or services, so that any information obtained in the course of those enquiries which is relevant to a disciplinary case can be passed to the employer without delay.

### **12) Action following a criminal investigation or a prosecution**

The police or the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) should inform the employer and LADO immediately when a criminal investigation and any subsequent trial is complete, or if it is decided to close an investigation without charge, or not to continue to prosecute the case after person has been charged. In those circumstances the LADO should discuss with the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors whether any further action, including disciplinary action, is appropriate and, if so, how to proceed. The information provided by the police and/or children's social care services should inform that decision. The options will depend on the circumstances of the case and the consideration will need to take into account the result of the police investigation or the trial, as well as the different standard of proof required in disciplinary and criminal proceedings.

### **13) Action on conclusion of a case**

If the allegation is substantiated and the person is dismissed or the employer ceases to use the person's services, or the person resigns or otherwise ceases to provide his or her services, the LADO should discuss with the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors and their personnel adviser whether to refer the case to the ISA

(DBS from December 2012) for consideration of inclusion on the barred lists; or to refer to the Teaching Agency.

There is a legal requirement for employers to make a referral to the ISA where they think that an individual has engaged in conduct (including inappropriate sexual conduct) that harmed (or is likely to harm) a child; or if a person otherwise poses a risk of harm to a child. In such circumstances, the duty to refer an individual to the ISA arises where an employer has removed the individual from relevant work with children or the person has chosen to cease relevant work in circumstances where they would have been removed had they not done so. The ISA will consider whether to bar the person from working in regulated activity, which will include most work in schools and other educational establishments. The North Hertfordshire Studio School Trust has a statutory duty to make reports, and to provide relevant information to the ISA. Referrals should be made as soon as possible after the resignation or removal of the member of staff involved and within one month of ceasing to use the person's services.

Professional misconduct cases should be referred to the relevant regulatory body.

Where it is decided on the conclusion of a case that a person who has been suspended can return to work, the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors should consider how best to facilitate that. Most people will benefit from some help and support to return to work after a stressful experience. Depending on the individual's circumstances, a phased return and/or the provision of a mentor to provide assistance and support in the short term may be appropriate. The School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors should also consider how the person's contact with the child or children who made the allegation can best be managed if they are still a student at the school.

#### **14) Learning Lessons**

At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated, the LADO should review the circumstances of the case with the School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to the school's procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future. This should include issues arising from the decision to suspend the member of staff, the duration of the suspension and whether or not suspension was justified. Lessons should also be learnt from the use of suspension when the individual is subsequently reinstated. The LADO and School/Academy Principal or Chair of Governors should consider how future investigations of a similar nature could be carried out without suspending the individual.

#### **15) Action in respect of unfounded or malicious allegations**

If an allegation is determined to be unfounded or malicious, the LADO should refer the matter to the children's social care services to determine whether the child concerned is in need of support, or may have been abused by someone else. If an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the School/Academy Principal should consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the student who made it; or whether the police should be asked to consider if action might be appropriate against the person responsible, even if he or she was not a

student. In September 2010 the Crown Prosecution Service published guidance for the police on harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

#### **16) Further Information**

The Crown Prosecution Service published guidance for the police on harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. This can be found at

[http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/s\\_to\\_u/stalking\\_and\\_harassment/index.html](http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/s_to_u/stalking_and_harassment/index.html)

Guidance on employment records in its Employment Practices Code and supplementary guidance, which provides some practical advice on employment retention.

[http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data\\_protection/detailed\\_specialist\\_guides/employment\\_practices\\_code.pdf](http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/detailed_specialist_guides/employment_practices_code.pdf)

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