

SODBURY VALE FEDERATION

Dealing with Allegations of Staff Abuse Policy

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1. TABLE OF CONTENTS

2. <u>VERSION HISTORY</u>	1
3. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	2
4. <u>INITIAL ALLEGATION MADE TO THE SCHOOL</u>	2
5. <u>INITIAL CONSIDERATION</u>	3
6. <u>ACTION FOLLOWING INITIAL CONSIDERATION</u>	3
7. <u>CASE SUBJECT TO POLICE INVESTIGATION</u>	4
8. <u>CONFIDENTIALITY</u>	4
9. <u>SUPPORTING THOSE INVOLVED</u>	5
10. <u>RESIGNATIONS AND ‘COMPROMISE AGREEMENTS’</u>	5
11. <u>RECORD KEEPING</u>	6
12. <u>REFERENCES</u>	6

2. VERSION HISTORY

Version Number	Reason for Issue	Date of Issue
1	Initial Issue For Federation	Sept 2022
2	Review and update	Sept 2024

3. Introduction

Sodbury Vale Federation and the schools within it, takes its responsibility of care for its students seriously. 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 schools' general complaints procedure.

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

- Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education
- Keeping Children Safe in Education

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)

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

4. Initial allegation made to the school

Any allegation of abuse of a student by a teacher must be reported to the designated school Designated Safeguarding Lead, Executive Headteacher. 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 Designated Safeguarding Lead or if that is not possible to pass details of the allegation to the Designated Safeguarding Lead immediately.

Should the allegation be made against the Designated Safeguarding Lead then this should be brought to the attention of the Chair of Governors immediately.

Should the allegation meet any of the following criteria then the Designated Safeguarding Lead should report the allegation to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) 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.

5. Initial Consideration

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will discuss the matter with the LADO and provide any further details of the allegation and the circumstances in which it was made.

The contacts details are:

Name: Jon Goddard
Telephone number: 01454 868508
Email. *lado@southglos.gov.uk*. P

The Designated Safeguarding Lead 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 LADO will immediately refer to children's social care and ask for a strategy discussion in accordance with Working Together to Safeguard Children to be convened straight away. In those circumstances the strategy discussion should include the local authority designated officer and the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

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 should immediately inform the police and convene a similar discussion to decide whether a police investigation is needed. That discussion will also involve the school and any other agencies involved with the child.

6. Action following initial consideration

Where the initial consideration decides that the allegation does not involve a possible criminal offence it will be for the Designated Safeguarding Lead to deal with it in consultation with school governors. 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 be held within 15 working days.

Where further investigation is required to inform consideration of disciplinary action the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the school governors should discuss who will undertake that with the local authority designated officer.

The investigating officer should aim to provide a report to the employer within 10 working days.

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

- 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. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.

On receipt of the report of the disciplinary investigation, the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the school governors should consult the LADO, and decide whether a disciplinary hearing is needed within two working days. If a hearing is needed it should be held within 15 working days.

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 school governors and Chair of Governors should take account of any relevant information obtained in the course of those enquiries when considering disciplinary action.

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

7. 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 Executive Headteacher within three working days of the decision. In those circumstances the Executive Headteacher and the LADO 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 Executive Headteacher should request this information.

8. Confidentiality

The school will make 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. The reporting restrictions apply until the point that the

accused person is charged with an offence or the individual waives their right to anonymity by going public themselves.

9. Supporting those involved

Employers have a duty of care to their employees. They should 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 person who is the subject of the allegation should be kept informed of the progress of the case and consideration should be given to 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 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 told the outcome in confidence. 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.

10. Resignations and 'compromise 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 'compromise 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 where circumstances require that.

11. 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.

12. 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, malicious etc. should also not be included in any reference.