



STEP Academy Trust

Guidance for Dealing with Allegation of Abuse against Teachers and other Staff

DATE OF POLICY: SEPTEMBER 2016

DATE OF POLICY REVIEW: SEPTEMBER 2018

The aims of this guidance

1. 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 or college that provides education for children under 18 years of age 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; or
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she would pose a risk of harm to children.

2. This guidance relates to members of staff who are currently working in any STEP Academy regardless of whether the Academy is where the alleged abuse took place. Allegations against a teacher who is no longer teaching should be referred to the police. Historical allegations of abuse should also be referred to the police.

3. STEP Academy Trust has a duty of care to all our employees. We will ensure that effective support is provided for anyone facing an allegation and a named contact will be provided if an employee is suspended. It is essential that any allegation of abuse made against a teacher or other member of staff or volunteer in an academy 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.

Initial considerations

4. This procedure for dealing with allegations needs 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.

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

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

- 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;

- False: there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation;
- Unsubstantiated: there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.

7. In the first instance, the headteacher, or where the headteacher is the subject of an allegation, the chair of governors, (the 'case manager') should immediately discuss the allegation with the designated officer(s). The purpose of an initial discussion is for the designated officer(s) and the case manager to consider the nature, content and context of the allegation and agree a course of action. The designated officer(s) may ask the case manager to provide or obtain relevant additional information, such as previous history, whether the child or their family have made similar allegations previously and the individual's current contact with children. There may be situations when the case manager 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 possible criminal offence. Where there is no such evidence, the case manager should discuss the allegations with the designated officer(s) in order to help determine whether police involvement is necessary.

8. 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 case manager and the designated officer(s), and agreement reached on what information should be put in writing to the individual concerned and by whom. The case manager should then consider with the designated officer(s) what action should follow both in respect of the individual and those who made the initial allegation.

9. The case manager should inform the accused person about the allegation as soon as possible after consulting the designated officer(s). It is extremely important that the case manager 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 case manager should not do that until those agencies have been consulted, and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the accused. The case manager must consider carefully whether the circumstances of a case warrant a person being suspended from contact with children at the academy 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 and advice must be taken from the designated officer(s) and STEP Head of HR (see further information on suspension which follows).

10. If 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 the statutory guidance [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 academy staff are entitled to use reasonable force to control or restrain children in certain circumstances, including dealing with disruptive behaviour.

11. 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 designated officer(s) should discuss the next steps with the case manager. In those circumstances, the options open to the academy 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. Further advice must be sought from the Head of HR. Suspension should not be the default position: an individual should be suspended only if there is no reasonable alternative.

12. In some cases, further enquiries will be needed to enable a decision about how to proceed. If so, the designated officer(s) should discuss with the case manager how and by whom the investigation will be undertaken. In straightforward cases, the investigation should normally be undertaken by a senior member of the academy's staff.

13. However, in other circumstances, such as lack of appropriate resource within the academy, or the nature or complexity of the allegation, the allegation will require an independent investigator. Advice on appointing an independent investigator can be sought from the STEP Head of HR.

Supporting those involved

14. STEP Academy Trust has a duty of care to our employees. We will act to manage and minimise the stress inherent in the allegations process. Individuals will 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 will be advised to contact their trade union representative, if they have one, or a colleague for support. They will also be given details of our Employee Assistance Programme.

15. The case manager will 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 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.

16. 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. Parents 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. (In deciding what information to disclose, careful consideration should be given to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998, the law of confidence and, where relevant, the Human Rights Act 1998. Guidance should be sought from the STEP Head of HR).

17. Parents and carers should also be made aware of the requirement to maintain confidentiality about any allegations made against teachers whilst investigations are ongoing as set out in section 141F of the Education Act 2002 (see paragraph 19). If parents or carers wish to apply to the court to have reporting restrictions removed, they should be told to seek legal advice.

18. 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.

Confidentiality

19. It is extremely important that when an allegation is made, the academy makes every effort to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity while an allegation is being investigated or considered. The Education Act 2002 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 pupil 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 publishes information about an investigation or decision in a disciplinary case arising from the allegation (carried out by the National College for Teaching and Leadership). 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 provisions commenced on 1 October 2012.

20. 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).

21. 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, for example an appeal to trace a suspect, they must apply to a magistrates’ court to request that reporting restrictions be lifted.)

22. The case manager should take advice from the designated officer(s), 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.

Managing the situation and exit arrangements

Resignations and ‘settlement agreements’

23. 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. **A referral to the DBS must be made, if the criteria are met.** If the accused person resigns or their services cease to be used and the criteria are met, it will not be appropriate to reach a settlement agreement. A settlement agreement which prevents the academy from making a DBS referral when the criteria are met would likely result in a criminal offence being committed as the academy would not be complying with its legal duty to make the referral.

24. 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.

25. ‘Settlement agreements’ (sometimes referred to as 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 cases of refusal to cooperate or resignation before the person’s notice period expires. Such an agreement will not prevent a thorough police investigation where that is appropriate.

Record keeping

26. 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.

27. 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 checks 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 pension age or for a period of 10 years from the date of the allegation if that is longer.

28. The Information Commissioner has published guidance on employment records in its Employment Practices Code and supplementary guidance, which provides some practical advice on record retention. http://ico.org.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/topic_guides/employment

References

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

Timescales

30. It is in everyone's interest to resolve cases as quickly as possible consistent with a fair and thorough investigation. All allegations should 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.

31. For those cases where it is clear immediately that the allegation is unsubstantiated 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 academy to deal with it, although if there are concerns about child protection, the academy should discuss them with the designated officer(s). 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. Advice on the STEP Academy Trust's Disciplinary Procedure is available from the Head of HR.

Oversight and monitoring

32. The designated officer(s) 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 designated officer(s) will provide advice and guidance to the case manager, 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.

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

- liaising with the designated officer(s);
- 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.

34. 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.

Suspension

35. 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. In some rare cases that will require the case manager to consider suspending the accused until the case is resolved. Suspension should 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 case manager is concerned about the welfare of other children in the community or the teacher's family, those concerns should be reported to the designated officer(s) or police. But suspension is highly unlikely to be justified on the basis of such concerns alone.

36. Suspension should be considered only in a case where there is cause to suspect a child or other children at the academy is/are at risk of harm or the case is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal. However, a person should not be suspended automatically: the case manager must consider carefully whether the circumstances warrant suspension from contact with children at the academy or until the allegation is resolved, and must seek advice from the STEP Head of HR and the designated officer(s). In cases where the academy is made aware that the Secretary of State has made an interim prohibition order in respect of an individual at the academy, it will be necessary to immediately suspend that person from teaching pending the findings of the National College for Teaching and Leadership's (NCTL) investigation.

37. The case manager 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 designated officer(s), police and children's social care services have no objections to the member of staff continuing to work during the investigation, the case manager should be as inventive as possible to avoid suspension. Based on assessment of risk, the following alternatives should be considered by the case manager before suspending a member of staff:

- redeployment within the academy 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 academy 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, for example to an alternative academy within STEP Academy Trust.

38. 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 case manager should consider the potential permanent professional reputational damage to employees that can result from suspension where an allegation is later found to be unsubstantiated or maliciously intended.

39. If immediate suspension is considered necessary, the rationale and justification for such a course of action should be agreed and recorded by both the case manager and the designated officer(s). This should also include what alternatives to suspension have been considered and why they were rejected.

40. 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. The person must be informed at the point of their suspension who their named contact is within the organisation and provided with their contact details.

41. Children's social care services or the police cannot require the case manager 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 Headteacher and Governing Body of the academy. 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 designated officer(s) 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 academy 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.

Information sharing

42. 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.

43. Where the police are involved, the case manager 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.

44. 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.

Specific actions

Following a criminal investigation or a prosecution

45. The police should inform the employer and designated officer(s) 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 designated officer(s) should discuss with the case manager 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.

On conclusion of a case

46. If the allegation is substantiated and the person is dismissed or the academy ceases to use the person's services, or the person resigns or otherwise ceases to provide his or her services, the designated officer(s) should discuss with the case manager and the Head of HR whether the academy will decide to make a referral to the DBS for consideration of whether inclusion on the barred lists is required; and, in the case of a member of teaching staff, whether to refer the matter to the NCTL to consider prohibiting the individual from teaching.

47. There is a legal requirement for employers to make a referral to the DBS where they think that an individual has engaged in conduct that harmed (or is likely to harm) a child; or if a person otherwise poses a risk of harm to a child.

48. Where it is decided on the conclusion of a case that a person who has been suspended can return to work, the case manager 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 case manager 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 pupil at the academy.

In respect of malicious or unsubstantiated allegations

49. If an allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated or malicious, the designated officers(s) should refer the matter to the children's social care services to determine whether the child concerned is in need of services, or may have been abused by someone else. If an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the headteacher, should consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the pupil 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 pupil.

Learning lessons

50. At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated, the designated officer(s) should review the circumstances of the case with the case manager to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to the Academy Trusts 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 designated officers(s) and case manager should consider how future investigations of a similar nature could be carried out without suspending the individual.

APPENDIX 1

Contact Details for the Chair of Governors for each STEP Strategic Governing Body:

ACADEMY	CHAIR OF GOVERNORS	CONTACT DETAILS
Angel Oak Academy	Mark Deacon	Mdeacon61@gmail.com
Applegarth Academy	Mark Riddaway	markriddaway@hotmail.com
Breakwater Academy	Helen Hewitt	2helenhewitt@gmail.com
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High Cliff Academy	Helen Hewitt	2helenhewitt@gmail.com
Phoenix Academy	Christine Baldock	christine@alanbaldock.plus.com
White House Academy	Christine Baldock	christine@alanbaldock.plus.com
Wolsey Junior Academy	Mark Riddaway	markriddaway@hotmail.com

Contact Details for the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

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Bromley Council	020 8461 7669 lorrisa.webber@bromley.gov.uk lado@bromley.gov.uk
Southwark Council	Quality Assurance Unit duty number 020 7525 3297 Quality Assurance Unit service manager (LADO) 020 7525 0689
East Sussex County Council	LADO – Amanda Glover Amanda.glover@eastsussex.gov.uk 01323 466606 / 07825 782793