

Low-Level Concerns Policy

In all its dealings with international students and their families and UK schools, Oxford Guardians (OG) will follow the general standards laid out by The Association for the Education and Guardianship of International Students (AEGIS) in their Code of Practice, which are as follows:

- To promote and provide best and legal practice in the guardianship and hosting of all international students at schools, colleges and universities, particularly those under 18 years of age.
- To respect and support the rights, religions and customs of the international student.
- To uphold the stated ethos and values of the school attended by students in our guardianship.
- To comply with the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 and the Education Act (2002) and adhere to the guidance of the Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 (KCSIE) updated September 2024.
- To ensure all international students have 24 hour emergency contact with a responsible adult in the UK.
- To put in place arrangements which maintain appropriate contact with the international student, the overseas parents and guardianship family and to ensure all appropriate records are up to date.
- To provide both pastoral and educational support as outlined in any literature and agreements.
- To adhere to the AEGIS grievance procedures.
- To have appropriate insurance for guardianship arrangements and to comply with UK legislation.

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Section 1.0 Policy Statement

Oxford Guardians (OG) understands the importance of a positive culture where concerns can be identified and spoken about openly and acknowledges that this is a key element of a strong safeguarding system. This Low-Level Concerns Policy seeks to ensure that all staff who work with children behave appropriately and to enable the early identification and prompt and appropriate management of concerns.

As part of our all-inclusive approach to safeguarding the company will ensure that it promotes an open and transparent culture in which all safeguarding concerns and allegations about all adults working with children are dealt with promptly and appropriately.

Creating a culture in which all safeguarding concerns and allegations about adults, including those that do not meet the harm threshold, are shared responsibly and with the right person, recorded and dealt with appropriately, is critical. If implemented correctly, this should encourage an open and transparent culture; enable the company to identify inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour early; minimise the risk of abuse; and ensure that adults working in or on behalf of the company are clear about professional boundaries and act within these boundaries, and in accordance with the ethos and values of the company.

This Low-Level Concerns Policy operates in conjunction, as appropriate, with the following:

Safeguarding Policy.

Staff Code of Conduct.

Whistleblowing policy as a section of the Safeguarding policy.

DPA and UKGDPR policy.

Oxford Guardians is required to self-report to AEGIS any significant safeguarding concerns or situation which could appear compromising or be misconstrued, or where behaviour has fallen below expected standards.

Section 2.0 Introduction to the concept and importance of sharing low-level concerns

Behaviour which is not consistent with the standards and values of the company, and which does not meet the organisational expectations encapsulated in the company's Staff Code of Conduct, needs to be addressed early. Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum – from the inadvertent or thoughtless, through to that which is intended to enable abuse.

All staff need to be informed about and be able to identify inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour and understand the importance of sharing concerns when they observe behaviour which violates the company's child centric ethos.

Section 3.0 What is a Low -Level Concerns Policy?

The Low-Level Concerns Policy enables all staff to share any concerns with the DSL/DDSL, no matter how small, about company colleagues' behaviour and to remind colleagues that Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.

Section 4.0 What are the aims of the Low-Level Concerns Policy?

The aims of the Low-Level Concerns Policy are to:

- a. To ensure that staff are clear about and confident in distinguishing appropriate from concerning behaviour and the delineation of professional boundaries and reporting lines
- b. To empower staff to share any low-level concerns with the DSL/DDSL and to help all staff to interpret the sharing of such concerns as a neutral act;
- c. Address unprofessional behaviour and support the individual to correct it at an early stage.
- d. Identify inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour – including any patterns – that may need to be consulted upon with (on a no-names basis if appropriate), or referred to, the Local Safeguarding partnership (LSP) and or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).
- e. Provide responsive proportionate and sensitive handling of such concerns when they are raised and help identify any weaknesses in the company's safeguarding.

Section 5.0 Definitions

Who does the policy apply to?

All staff working for and with the company as a consultant, e.g. Local Guardians and Homestay Hosts, or a payrolled member of staff e.g. administrative assistant or manager.

DSL means Designated Safeguarding Lead.

DDSL mean Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Concern that may meet the threshold: Means the behaviour might indicate a person would or could pose a risk of harm to a child or has behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

Concern or allegation that does not meet the harm threshold: Low-level concern; the term does not mean that it is insignificant. A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt' that an adult working with children may have acted in a way that is contrary to the company ethos of care for children or does not meet the harm threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to merit a referral to the LADO.

Staff do not need to be able to determine in each case whether the behaviour in question constitutes a low-level concern, or if it may meet the harm threshold. Once staff share what they believe to be a low-level concern, that determination should be made by the Director in consultation with the DSL if/as appropriate.

Low-Level Concerns Form – see appendix 1 for the standard safeguarding form used to report any concern related to safeguarding including low-level concerns.

Section 6.0 Data Protection and Confidentiality

The company will always respect the personal data of staff (and others, where they may be identifiable) in implementing the Policy and in keeping records of low-level concerns secure.

The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR includes a specific provision which permits organisations to process even the most sensitive personal data where necessary for the purposes of protecting children from harm. Although sharing of low-level concerns will not always involve legally sensitive categories of data, the safeguarding purpose is the same as that under the company Safeguarding Policy.

A proportionate approach must be taken by all to considering what personal data is in fact necessary to share and record by way of low-level concern(s) in each case in order to support the safeguarding purpose and to ensure the information is accurate, fair and as far as possible recorded in neutral terms.

All staff may, under data protection law, ask to see the content of any low-level concern(s) retained by the company under the Low-Level Concerns Policy as it relates to them personally and may make any reasonable objection as to the fairness or accuracy of that content. The school will process such requests within the period prescribed by law, subject always to any necessary protection of the rights of third parties and unless any other relevant exemptions apply. If the content of a low-level concern is disputed, it may not be appropriate for the company to delete or alter the original record, but a note may be recorded alongside reflecting the staff member's alternative account or objection(s).

Section 8.0 Who should staff share low-level concerns with?

It is important that low-level concerns are recorded as soon as reasonably possible and, in any event, within 24 hours of becoming aware of it (where the concern relates to a particular incident) – although it is never too late to share a low-level concern.

If the DSL or manager is absent for any reason, low-level concerns should be shared with the DDSL who will ensure they inform the DSL immediately on their return.

If any low-level concern relates to the behaviour of the Director, it should be reported directly to another member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

Section 9.0 Should staff who share low-level concerns be able to remain anonymous?

Everyone is encouraged to consent to be named when sharing low-level concerns, as this will help to create a culture of openness and transparency. If the colleague who raises a low-level concern does not wish to be named, the company will respect that person's wishes as far as possible. However, there may be circumstances where an initial low-level concern crosses over the Safeguarding threshold and the colleague who raised the concern may be named to attend a court or local authority to give evidence. Consequently, the company cannot promise anonymity.

Section 10 How should low-level concerns be shared and recorded?

Concerns should be reported in the first instance via the company reporting system Inlocoparentis and supported through the Safeguarding Form. A concern may be shared verbally with a manager or DSL/DDSL when they will make a record of the conversation either contemporaneously or immediately after on notes on the low-level concerns log. The recorder is expected to use professional judgement as to what information is necessary for safeguarding purposes.

Section 11 What is the response to a reported concern?

Once received it will be investigated by:

- Speaking to the person who raised the concern.
- Speak to witnesses. (unless advised not to by the LSP/ LADO If the concern has been raised to that level).
- Speak to the reported individual, unless advised otherwise by the LSP/LADO or relevant external agency.
- Review the information to determine if: the behaviour is in fact appropriate.
 - the behaviour constitutes a concern.
 - whether there is doubt that the concern may in fact meet the harm threshold. In which case the LADO will be consulted.
- Confirm to the reporter that a record of the incident(s) has been added to the log along with any agreed outcomes.
- Ensure that appropriate and detailed records are kept of all internal conversations, their determination including the rationale for that decision.

Section 12 What action will be taken if it is determined that the behaviour is entirely consistent with the law and company Safeguarding Policy?

The DSL will inform the person reporting the concern of the decision.

Section 13 What action will be taken if it is determined that the behaviour constitutes a low-level concern?

Any investigation will be conducted discreetly and, on a need, to know basis. Most low-level concerns are likely to be minor, will not give rise to any ongoing cause for concern nor require further action.

Others may be most appropriately dealt with by management training or guidance and in many cases will simply require a conversation explaining clearly why their behaviour has been problematic or concerning and what change is required.

Section 14 What action is taken if the behaviour reaches the harm threshold?

The concern will be reported to the LSP/LADO in accordance with the Company safeguarding policy, KCSIE 2024 and relevant procedures of the child's school/ homestay LSP.

Section 15 How long and where should low level concerns be held?

Records will be kept in the low level concerns log within the safeguarding protected folder. The records will be kept for as long as the personnel involved are employed by Oxford Guardians.

Section 16 When will low-level concerns be discussed with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)?

The company weekly meeting of the SLT has a standing safeguarding agenda and initial indications of potential low-level concerns will be discussed and actionable instructions given to managers as appropriate.

Section 17 Policy Review

We recognise that best practice evolves over time, consequently this policy will be reviewed according to our comprehensive policy review calendar.

Reviewed By	Position	Date
KT Bacon	DSL	07/12/2024

Reviewed By	Position	Date
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L Dyer	DDSL	06/01/2025