

# Dealing with allegations against staff – guidance

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## Overview

1. This guidance is intended to support SPTA Academies in 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 School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA) 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 if they work regularly or closely with children.
2. This relates to members of staff who are currently working in SPTA regardless of whether their place of work is where the alleged abuse took place. Allegations against a teacher who is no longer teaching should be referred to the police.
3. SPTA has a duty of care to employees. SPTA should provide effective support for anyone facing an allegation and provide the employee with a named contact if they are suspended. It is essential that any allegation of abuse made against a teacher or other member of staff or volunteer in SPTA 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. 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.
5. Some rare allegations will be so serious they require immediate intervention by children's social care services and/or police. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) should be informed of all allegations that come to an 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;
  - **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:** there is insufficient evidence to either to prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.
7. In the first instance, the Principal (or Chair of the Academy Advisory Body, if the allegation relates to the Principal) should immediately discuss the allegation with the LADO. The purpose of an initial discussion is for the LADO and the Principal to consider the nature, content and context of the allegation and agree a course of action. The LADO may ask the Principal to provide or obtain relevant additional information, such as previous history, whether the child or their family has made similar allegations previously and the individual's current contact with children. There may be situations when the Principal 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 Principal should discuss the allegations with the LADO in order to help determine whether police involvement is necessary.
8. The Principal or Academy Advisory Body (AAB) Chair should contact SPTA HR and their Regional Director of Education to inform them of the allegation and relevant information relating to the case to date (e.g. guidance from the LADO).
9. 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 Principal and the LADO, and agreement reached on what information should be put in writing to the individual concerned and by whom. The Principal should then consider with the LADO what action should follow both in respect of the individual and those who made the initial allegation.

10. The Principal should inform the accused person about the allegation as soon as possible after consulting the LADO. It is extremely important that the Principal 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 Principal should not do that until those agencies have been consulted, and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the accused. The Principal, in conjunction with both SPTA HR and the Regional Director of Education, 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 (see further information on suspension below).
11. If there is cause to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, a strategy discussion will be convened by the LADO in accordance with *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.
12. 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 Principal. 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. Suspension should not be the default position: an individual should be suspended only if there is no reasonable alternative.
13. In some cases, further enquiries will be needed to enable a decision about how to proceed. If so, the LADO should discuss with the Principal 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.
14. However, in other circumstances, such as lack of appropriate resource within the Academy, or the nature or complexity of the allegation will require an independent investigator. In this instance, please contact SPTA HR team who will be able to provide further information.

**Supporting those involved**

15. SPTA has a duty of care to employees. SPTA should act to manage and minimise the stress inherent in the allegations process. Support for the individual is vital 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 counseling or medical advice through SPTA's Occupational Health provision.
16. The Principal 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. This may include support via occupational health or employee welfare arrangements. 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.
17. 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 Principal 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.
18. 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.
19. 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

20. 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 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 pupil from the same Academy (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
- Until the Secretary of State publishes information about an investigation or decision in a disciplinary case arising from the allegation
- 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
- If a judge lifts restrictions in response to a request to do so.

The provisions commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012.

21. 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.
22. 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).
23. 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).

24. The Principal 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.

### **Managing the situation and exit arrangements**

#### **Resignations and 'settlement agreements'**

25. 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 – see paragraph 49.** 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.
26. 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.
27. 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 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.
28. So-called 'settlement agreements', by which an employee agrees to resign if the Principal 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**

29. 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.
30. 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 retirement age or for a period of 10 years from the date of the allegation if that is longer.
31. 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 false, unsubstantiated, unfounded or malicious should also not be included in any reference.

### **Timescales**

32. 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. The time taken to investigate and resolve individual cases depends on a variety of factors including the nature, seriousness and complexity of the allegation.
33. Where the initial consideration decides that the allegation does not involve a possible criminal offence it will be for the Principal to deal with it, although if there are concerns about child protection, the Principal should discuss them with the LADO. In such cases, if the nature of the allegation does not require formal disciplinary action, the Principal should institute appropriate action. If disciplinary action is required this will be managed in accordance with the SPTA Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

## Oversight and monitoring

34. 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 Principal, 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 are usually conducted at fortnightly or monthly intervals, depending on the complexity of the case.
35. Police forces are responsible for identifying 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.
36. If the strategy discussion or initial assessment decides that a police investigation is required, the police will normally 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, will usually be set at the meeting if the investigation continues.

## Suspension

37. 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 Principal 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 Principal 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.

38. 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 Principal must consider carefully whether the circumstances warrant suspension from contact with children at the Academy or until the allegation is resolved, and must liaise with SPTA HR, the Regional Director of Education and the LADO prior to enforcing any suspension. 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 NCTL's investigation.
39. The Principal 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 Principal should be as inventive as possible to avoid suspension. Based on assessment of risk, the following alternatives should be considered by the Principal 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. .
40. 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 Principal 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.

41. If immediate suspension is considered necessary, the rationale and justification for such a course of action should be agreed and recorded by both the Principal and the LADO, following consultation with SPTA HR and the Regional Director of Education. This should also include what alternatives to suspension have been considered and why they were rejected.
42. 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 a Principal 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.
43. Children's social care services or the police cannot require the Principal 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 SPTA (the Employer). 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 SPTA's decision regarding 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 fully assessed the risk.

### **Information sharing**

44. 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.
45. Where the police are involved, wherever possible the Principal should ask the police to obtain consent from the individuals involved to share their statements and evidence for use in the SPTA 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.
46. 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 Principal without delay.

## Specific actions

### Following a criminal investigation or a prosecution

47. The police should inform the Principal 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 Principal 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.

### Conclusion of a case

48. If the allegation is substantiated and the person is dismissed or the Principal 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 Principal and SPTAHR whether the Academy will decide to make a referral to the DBS for consideration of inclusion on the barred lists is required ( see [Guidance on Referrals to the DBS](#)). In the case of a member of teaching staff, they should also discuss whether to refer the matter to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) to consider prohibiting the individual from teaching.
49. **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.**
50. Where it is decided on the conclusion of a case that a person who has been suspended can return to work, the Principal 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 Principal 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.

### Malicious or unsubstantiated allegations

51. If an allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated 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 services, or may have been abused

by someone else. If an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the Principal 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**

52. At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated, the LADO should review the circumstances of the case with the Principal to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to the Academy'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 Principal should consider how future investigations of a similar nature could be carried out without suspending the individual.