



# Allegations of abuse made against staff and volunteers working with children

Last reviewed: November 2020

This document applies to all schools and operations of the Vale Academy Trust. [www.vale-academy.org](http://www.vale-academy.org)

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## Key contacts

The Designated Officer in each school is the headteacher.

Contact regarding any possible allegation must also be made directly with a member of the [Local Authority Designated Officer \(LADO\) Team](#) as soon as possible.

The Designated Officer and Safeguarding Team manager for Oxfordshire County Council is Alison Beasley

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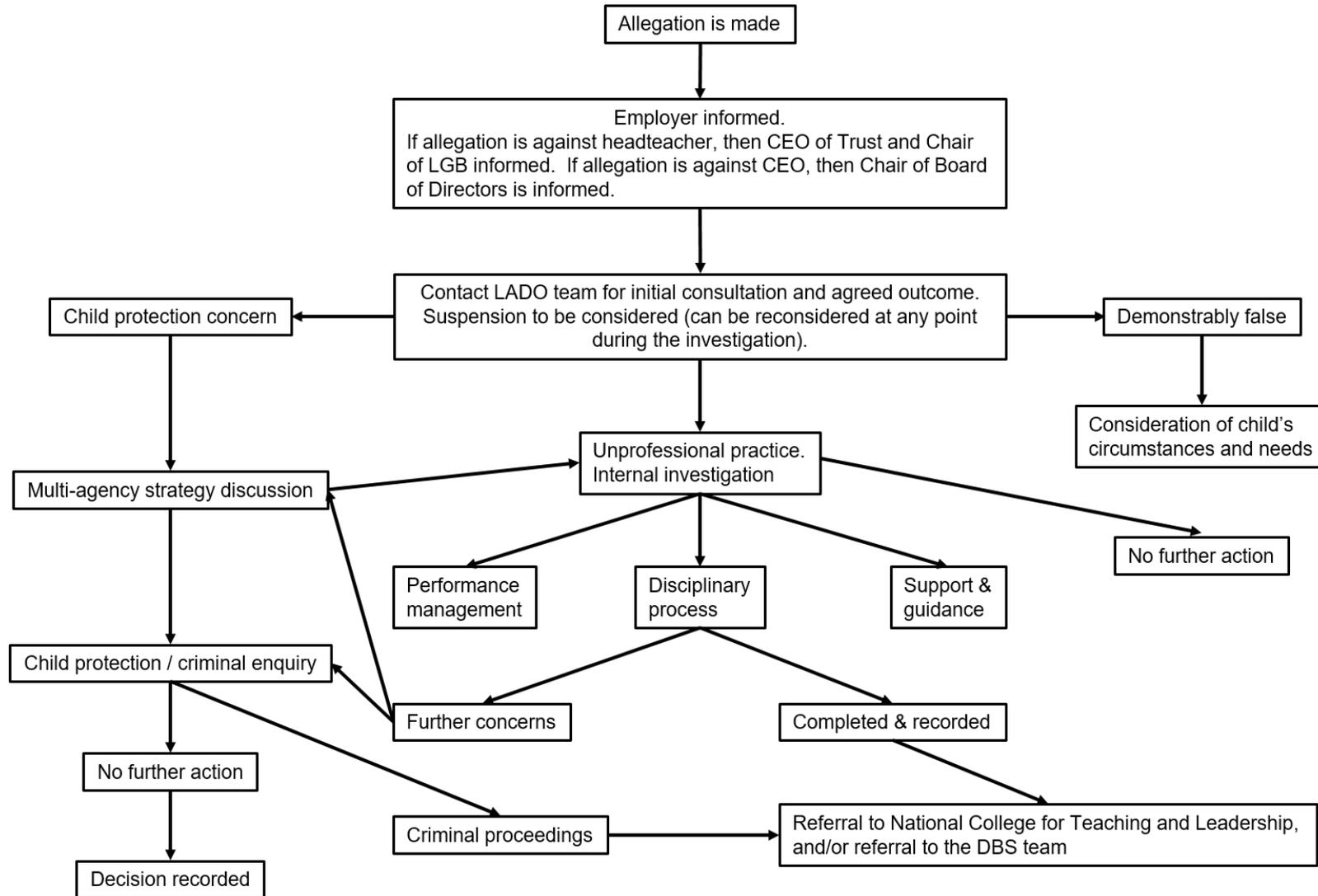
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### **SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES/INITIAL ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN**

1. In the first instance, the allegation should be discussed with the School's designated officer, or where the designated officer is the subject of an allegation, the CEO of the Vale Academy Trust. If the CEO is the subject of an allegation, then it should be raised with the Chair of the Board of Directors.
2. Ensure appropriate safeguarding measures are in place during the referral/investigation process.
3. Do not seek to investigate the allegation yourself or interview the child.
4. You must consult with a member of the LADO team for the Local Authority as soon as possible after receiving the allegation. No actions should be taken until the LADO team has been contacted.
5. Ideally obtain details of the "allegation" in writing, ideally signed and dated by the person receiving the allegation, and counter signed and dated by the lead for child protection. Record all actions taken with time/date and who took the action.
6. An investigating officer will be appointed by the CEO of the Vale Academy Trust ('the Trust'), in consultation with Police, and Local Authority if the joint decision is made that a formal investigation is the appropriate course of action.
7. Suspension should never be an automatic response. Appropriate criteria should be applied in all cases. We consider suspension to be a neutral act and we must consider whether any suspension is appropriate and reasonable, and also if there are any other alternatives to suspension. If you are considering suspending an employee you will need agreement from either the CEO or the HR Director. You will then need to complete a Suspension Risk Assessment form.
8. Consider the need for disciplinary action, taking advice from the HR Director in respect of the employee where it is clear that a reportable offence has not been committed.

9. However, any disciplinary action must be kept separate from Child Protection investigations except when there is agreement between the Designated Officer/Assistant Designated Officers for the Local Authority and those in charge of the investigation.
10. Investigations by the Police or CAFAT will take priority over an internal investigation by the establishment.
11. When issues are resolved, the member of the LADO team who is leading will write to all relevant parties with findings.

# Allegations Procedure Flowchart



# What's the difference between an allegation and a complaint?

## Allegations

An allegation, in the context of the statutory obligations on organisations, relates to any individual who works or volunteers in any capacity with children and where there is a concern that this person has or may have ;

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have hurt 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 they may pose a risk of harm to children, or
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children

In all cases where the concern about an individual falls into one of the categories above this will be considered to be an allegation, if it relates to a child, i.e. an individual who has not yet attained the age of 18.

In all such cases the allegation must be reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) as soon as possible, but **must be within 24 hours. Under no circumstances should the organisation/ agency carry out any investigation or take any action until the matter has been referred to the LADO.**

## Complaints

Complaints are generally expressions of dissatisfaction or concern that may relate to the delivery of a service by a team or individual.

A complaint may also be an expression of dissatisfaction about procedures or policy or the way procedures and policies are implemented by any team, team member or organisation.

The Trust has a Complaints Procedure and all such complaints received should be addressed following the policy which can be found on its website: [www.vale-academy.org](http://www.vale-academy.org).

Where there is no indication that the complaint relates to harm or potential harm to a child there is no need to refer to the LADO.

# Allegations of abuse made against staff and volunteers working with children

## Duties as an employer and an employee

1. This part of the 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 with children in school. It should be used in respect of all cases where it is alleged that anyone working in the school or college that provides education for children under 18 years of age (including supply teachers and volunteers) has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have hurt 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 they may pose a risk of harm to children, or
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children

2. This part of the guidance relates to members of staff who are currently working in any school or college regardless of whether the school or college is where the alleged abuse took place. Allegations against a staff member who is no longer working or volunteering should be referred to the police. Historical allegations of abuse should also be referred to the police.

3. 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. It is essential that any allegation of abuse made against a member of staff or volunteer in the work place 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 designated officer(s) should be informed of all allegations that come to a setting'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.
- **Unsubstantiated:** there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.

- **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;

7. In the first instance, the allegation should be discussed with the designated officer, or where the designated officer is the subject of an allegation, the CEO of the Vale Academy Trust. If the CEO is the subject of an allegation, then it should be raised with the Chair of the Board of Directors. The purpose of an initial discussion is for the designated officer to consider the nature, content and context of the allegation and agree a course of action. The designated officer may ask for 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 where the person reporting the allegation 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, it should be discussed with the designated officer in the first instance in order to help determine whether police involvement is necessary.

8. Suspension should be considered and discussed but not be an automatic response to an allegation. In some cases there may be no alternative, but consideration should always be given to alternative actions. For example, the staff member could be placed in a role where they do not have contact with children and young people. A suspension risk assessment may be considered at this point (see full details under suspension section below).

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 the designated officer who will decide what information should be put in writing to the individual concerned and by whom. The designated officer will also decide what action should follow both in respect of the individual and those who made the initial allegation.

10. The designated officer should inform the accused person about the allegation as soon as possible. It is important that they are provided 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 designated officer must not do that until those agencies have been consulted, and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the accused. Employers must consider carefully whether the circumstances of a case warrant a person being suspended from contact with children at the school or college 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 which follows).

11. 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 2018](#). If the allegation is about physical contact, the strategy discussion or initial evaluation with the police should take into account that the member of staff in a school or certain other situations is 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 designated officer decides the next steps. In those circumstances, the options open to the employer 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 designated officer will decide how and by whom the investigation will be undertaken. In straightforward cases, the investigation should normally be undertaken by a senior member of staff from the employer.

14. However, depending on the nature or complexity of the allegation it may require an independent investigator.

## **Supporting those involved**

15. 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 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 counselling or medical advice where this is provided by the employer.

16. The designated officer 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 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 designated officer should not do so until those agencies have been consulted and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the parents or carers. If appropriate 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. 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 given some feedback in confidence.

18. Parents and carers should also be made aware of the requirement to maintain confidentiality about any allegations made against teachers whilst investigations are on-going as set out in [section 141F of the Education Act 2011](#) (also see paragraph 20, below). 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.

20. In deciding what information to disclose, careful consideration should be given to the provisions of the [Data Protection Act 2018](#), the law of confidence and, where relevant, the [Human Rights Act 1998](#).

## **Confidentiality**

21. It is extremely important that when an allegation is made, the employer makes every effort to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity while an allegation is being investigated or considered. For teachers, 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 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 provisions commenced on 1 October 2012.

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 designated officer, police and children's social care services should 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 Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) must be made, if the criteria are met.

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. 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.

27. An employee subject to an investigation of a safeguarding nature might approach the Trust to seek to end their employment by a mutual agreement or settlement agreement. Entering into such an agreement is inappropriate where there is a serious concern regarding the employee's suitability to work with children and is contradictory to safeguarding guidance. A settlement agreement which prevents the employer from making a DBS referral when the criteria are met would likely result in a criminal offence being committed as the employer would not be complying with their legal duty to make the referral.

### **Record keeping**

28. 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.

29. 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.

30. 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.

## References

31. 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

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. 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.

33. 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 employer to deal with it, although if there are concerns about child protection, the employer 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 in line with the Disciplinary Procedure.

## Oversight and monitoring

34. The designated officer 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 will liaise with the police and other agencies, and monitor 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.

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

- Liaising with the designated officer;
- 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 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**

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 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 designated officer is concerned about the welfare of other children in the community or the employee's family, those concerns should be reported to the designated officer 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 school or college 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 designated officer must consider carefully whether the circumstances warrant suspension from contact with children at the employee's place of employment or until the allegation is resolved, and may wish to seek advice from HR.

39. Suspension does not imply any assumption of guilt and is a neutral act. Where the decision is made to suspend an employee, the period of suspension will be as brief as possible and kept under regular review.

40. The CEO may suspend an employee, with advice from HR.

41. Wherever possible, the employee will be notified of the decision to suspend them by the head teacher or a director/governor in person and the reasons will be explained. This will be confirmed in writing.

42. Where the employer is made aware that the Secretary of State has made an interim prohibition order in respect of an individual at the school or college it will be necessary to immediately suspend that person from teaching pending the findings of the NCTL's investigation.

43. The designated officer 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, 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 designated officer before suspending a member of staff:

- Redeployment within the establishment 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 establishment so the individual does not have

unsupervised access to children;

- In schools possibly 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 site.

44. 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 designated officer 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.

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

46. 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.

47. Children's social care services or the police cannot require the designated officer 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 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 designated officer 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 employer of 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.

48. Employees will be given contact information for the academy's Employee Assistance Programme and encouraged to access this support.

49. Employees will be suspended on full pay unless they become ill and are certified by a GP as unfit to work. In these circumstances normal sick pay entitlement will apply.

## **Information sharing**

50. 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.

51. 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.

52. 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**

53. The police should inform the employer 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 the person has been charged. In those circumstances the designated officer should decide 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**

54. 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 designated officer should decide whether the employer will make a referral to the DBS for consideration of inclusion on the barred lists is required. In the case of a member of teaching staff whether to refer the matter to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) to consider prohibiting the individual from teaching using the Teacher Misconduct: referral form.

55. 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.

### **Ending a period of suspension and returning to work**

Where it is decided on the conclusion of a case that a person who has been suspended can return to work, only the CEO can end a period of suspension.

56. When this is agreed the designated officer 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 designated officer 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 in contact with the individual.

### **In respect of malicious or unsubstantiated allegations**

57. If an allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated or malicious, the designated officer 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 employer should consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the child 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, this is particularly relevant in schools.

### **Learning lessons**

58. At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation *is* substantiated, the Trust should review the circumstances of the case to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to the Trust'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.

### **Further information**

59. See the Crown Prosecution Service published [guidance for the police under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997](#).