



## Vanguard Learning Trust

*As a group of local primary and secondary schools, Vanguard Learning Trust's mission is to serve its local community by providing outstanding, inclusive education. We have a collective purpose and responsibility to provide effective teaching, through a curriculum based on equality of opportunity and entitlement that allows our young people to shine both in and out of the classroom. Each school in the Trust has its own ethos, which also complements the Trust's vision and values, and the common aspiration that all young people can achieve their potential.*

# Preventing sexual harassment at work policy

Summer 2025

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## **Section 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Commitment to the prevention of sexual harassment**

Vanguard Learning Trust (VLT) is committed to providing a safe, inclusive and supportive work environment free from sexual harassment and to ensuring the safety and dignity of all employees. Sexual harassment and the victimisation of staff who report sexual harassment are unlawful and will not be tolerated. This policy outlines the Trust's commitment to preventing and addressing sexual harassment in the workplace.

### **1.2 Consequences of sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment can have serious consequences for individuals and the Trust including loss of morale, poor work performance, impact of wellbeing and ill health, increased turnover of staff, legal claims, and damage to its reputation. The impact of harassment and bullying in the workplace can also impact an individual's health and their family and social relationships.

### **1.3 Addressing reports of sexual harassment**

The Trust takes reports of sexual harassment seriously. It will address them promptly and sensitively and only share information on a 'need to know basis'. Sexual harassment by an employee may be treated as gross misconduct leading to dismissal without notice pay under the VLT disciplinary policy and procedures. Acts of sexual harassment may also amount to a safeguarding concern and may also require consideration of transferable risk under keeping children safe in education (KCSIE).

### **1.4 A zero-tolerance approach**

Whilst any action in response to conduct amounting to sexual harassment will depend on the facts and circumstances, VLT is committed to taking and enforcing a zero-tolerance approach of sexual harassment towards its staff.

### **1.5 Dealing with reports of sexual harassment**

Any report of sexual harassment, including those carried out by third parties, as well as VLT staff, will be initially dealt with in accordance with this policy.

### **1.6 Investigation of concerns**

VLT will ensure that whenever a concern of sexual harassment is received, or otherwise knows of a possible occurrence of sexual harassment, the investigation will remain confidential, as far as it is reasonably possible to do so. All staff at all levels of the Trust are required to co-operate with any investigation of sexual harassment. Consideration will also be given whether the allegation amounts to a low-level concern or whether it meets the threshold for reporting as a safeguarding concern under KCSIE, in addition to whether transferable risk is something that needs to be considered.

## **Section 2: Scope and purpose of this policy**

### **2.1 Sexual harassment within and outside of the workplace**

This policy covers the prevention of sexual harassment that may take place within and/or outside of the workplace in the course of employment or engagement, including but not limited to working from home, business trips, at work-related events or social functions, on social media, or an out-of-work situation where the incident is relevant to a person's suitability to carry out their role.

### **2.2 Framework for leaders**

This policy sets out a framework for leaders to deal with sexual harassment and it applies to:

- all staff including employees, irrespective of seniority, service, working hours, or type of contract of employment (permanent, fixed term or temporary), consultants, apprentices, volunteers, those undertaking work experience, agency workers; and

- third parties, such as students, parents, suppliers or visitors to Trust premises.

### **2.3 Contract of employment**

This policy does not form part of an employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. VLT may also vary application of this procedure, including any time scales for action, as appropriate.

### **2.4 Responsibility for this policy**

The board of trustees has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy but has delegated responsibility for overseeing its implementation to the CEO and the schools' headteachers.

## **Section 3: Unwanted conduct: what is sexual harassment?**

### **3.1 Definition of sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. It can be physical, verbal or non-verbal and it has the purpose and/or effect of violating a person's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. Staff may experience sexual harassment from:

- Other staff
- Parents/carers
- Governors and trustees
- Students

### **3.2 A range of conduct**

Sexual harassment covers a range of conduct which can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour, which the alleged harasser may or may not perceive as harmless, including but not limited to:
  - suggestive looks, staring, or leering
  - sexual propositions
  - requests or demands for sexual favours
  - sexual gestures
- Sexual comments, stories, or jokes.
- Comments on someone's appearance, with explicit sexual references or with sexual undertones and implications.
- Intrusive questions about a person's private or sex life, or a person discussing their own sex life without a clear invitation to do so.
- Posting and/or sharing offensive social media and/or internet content of a sexual nature.
- Sending, displaying, and/or circulating sexually explicit material, including but not limited, to emails, text messages, WhatsApp messages, video clips, and images sent by mobile phone or posted on the internet.
- Initiating or spreading sexual rumours about a person.
- Unwanted physical conduct including unwelcome touching, hugging, massaging, patting, pinching, pushing, grabbing, or kissing.
- Continually asking for and/or suggesting sexual activity after it has been made clear that the questions and/or suggestions are not welcome.
- Wolf-whistling and catcalling.
- Treating someone less favourably because they have submitted or refused to submit to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, or that is related to gender reassignment or sex, in the past.

### **3.3 Who can experience sexual harassment**

Anyone can experience sexual harassment, regardless of their sex and the sex of the alleged harasser. It can be carried out by men, women and people of any gender identity or sexual orientation.

### **3.4 Aggravating factors**

VLT will consider any aggravating factors; for example abuse of power by a senior employee over a more junior colleague and/or previous harassing behaviour by the harasser; and intersecting forms of harassment such as racialised sexual harassment and sexual harassment targeted at LGBTQ+ people, when deciding the appropriate disciplinary action to take.

## **Section 4: Purpose or effect of unwanted conduct**

### **4.1 Intention of the alleged harasser**

If unwanted conduct is intended to violate a person's dignity or create an offensive environment, the effect that it has on the individual is irrelevant. This is because the alleged harasser's intention alone can establish the offence, regardless of the actual impact on the victim; this principle emphasises that the mere act alone is sufficient to be considered sexual harassment.

### **4.2 Violation of dignity**

Conduct can have the effect of violating a person's dignity or create an offensive environment and so amount to sexual harassment regardless of whether the alleged harasser intended for this outcome.

### **4.3 Objection to conduct and frequency of conduct**

Conduct does not need to be explicitly objected to in order to be considered unwanted. Unwanted conduct can occur as a single instance and does not need to be repeated to constitute sexual harassment.

### **4.4 An intimidating, offensive, degrading environment**

Conduct does not have to be specifically directed at an individual to constitute sexual harassment as it may still create an intimidating, offensive, or degrading environment for them.

### **4.5 Previously welcomed sexual conduct**

Sexual conduct that was previously welcomed can become unwanted conduct amounting to sexual harassment at any time.

### **4.6 Informal resolution**

Under the informal stage, employees who feel that they have been subjected to sexual harassment should inform the other person(s) involved, if appropriate and they feel able to do so, that their conduct is regarded as unwelcome, offensive and/or interfering with work. The aim of the informal stage is to allow an opportunity for resolution without recourse to the formal procedure.

Where the complainant feels uncomfortable in approaching the other individual directly, assistance may be sought from a senior leader who will make the initial approach if required. If assistance from a senior leader is sought in making such an approach, this action will not be considered to be a disciplinary sanction.

This preliminary stage does not detract from the sensitivity or the potential seriousness of the situation. Rather, it allows complainants greater flexibility in choosing the most appropriate option they wish to follow having sought advice.

## **Section 5: Active prevention of sexual harassment**

### **5.1 Steps to prevent sexual harassment**

VLT recognises that employers are required by law to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of employees in the course of their employment. The Trust recognises that whilst there is no prescribed minimum expectation of what an employer can do to prevent sexual harassment at work, there are reasonable steps that can help prevent sexual harassment including, but not limited to:

- ensuring that this preventing sexual harassment at work policy is in place, regularly reviewed and well communicated to all;
- ensuring that all policies are cross-referenced and interact well with this policy;
- ensuring that the effectiveness of policies is evaluated through means such as centralised records allowing trends to be analysed, anonymous staff surveys, asking questions to obtain an accurate picture of sexual harassment within the workplace;
- ensuring that proactive opportunities are provided to workers to disclose or raise issues about sexual harassment such as but not limited to, sickness or return to work meetings, one-to-one meetings, appraisal meetings and exit interviews;
- ensuring all members of staff understand how to report sexual harassment which they may have been subjected to or witnessed and the process to follow if sexual harassment is disclosed to them;
- regular mandatory prevention of sexual harassment training for all, including acceptable/non-acceptable conduct;
- operating a zero-tolerance workplace culture in relation to sexual harassment;
- undertaking risk assessments in relation to sexual harassment, identifying the risks, including power imbalances and the control measures necessary to minimise them; and
- promoting a culture of transparency where staff feel empowered and are encouraged to speak up by providing both formal and informal channels to report sexual harassment without the fear of repercussions.

### **5.2 Education about sexual harassment**

VLT will ensure that amongst its staff, reasonable steps will be taken to prevent sexual harassment and pre-emptively educate via:

- providing effective induction and adding statements to contracts of employment and engagement;
- ensuring regular mandatory anti-sexual harassment training for all staff;
- ensuring this policy is readily available and accessible to all staff; and
- communicating the steps that will be taken in response to a report of sexual harassment and what the possible outcomes may be. For example, warning a colleague about their behaviour, banning the employee from attending events, reporting any criminal acts to the police, or sharing information in line with the Trust's statutory duty.

### **5.3 Criminal offence**

It will be considered at an early stage whether a report of sexual harassment amounts to a potential criminal offence and whether the police should be informed. Sexual harassment amounting to a criminal offence may include, but is not limited to, sexual assault, indecent exposure, voyeurism, stalking, and offensive communications.

### **5.4 Informing the police/local authority designated officer (LADO)**

The decision to inform the police will belong to the employee, unless VLT considers that there is a serious and immediate risk of harm to the employee or another individual, in which case it is likely that the concern will amount to a safeguarding concern under KCSIE and will need to be reported to

the LADO by the school/Trust. The LADO will follow their own procedures in considering what other agencies, if any, to inform. A decision to inform the LADO and/or police of a report of sexual harassment will not be taken lightly, and the employee's co-operation will be sought in advance of doing so where possible. If the LADO/police do become involved, the school/Trust will liaise with the LADO/police regarding the internal investigation into the report of sexual harassment and any subsequent disciplinary process, in order to prevent any prejudice to any criminal investigation and/or legal proceedings.

## **Section 6: Third parties**

### **6.1 Awareness of this policy**

The Trust will make third parties aware of this policy and ensure that it is readily available and accessible to all. It will be shared with all individual contractors and companies that the Trust has engaged the services of at the start of each academic year.

### **6.2 Possible actions in dealing with a third party**

This policy makes clear that the Trust will not tolerate sexual harassment of its staff and sets out the actions that may be taken if a third party sexually harasses a staff member, including speaking with or writing to the alleged third-party harasser or their superior (or both) about their behaviour, banning the alleged third-party harasser from school premises (including parents and family members), banning the alleged third party harasser from working within or for the Trust, banning the third-party organisation and persons employed by the third party from premises, events, meetings, or contacting employees, terminating any business relationship with the third party, reporting criminal acts to the police, or sharing the information in line with any statutory or regulatory duty.

### **6.3 Minimising the risk**

VLT will also undertake the following steps to minimise the risk of sexual harassment of its staff by third parties:

- putting up signs in Trust workplaces setting out acceptable and unacceptable behaviour; and
- including a term in all contracts, including service levels agreements with third parties notifying them of the Trust's policy on sexual harassment and requiring them to adhere to it.

### **6.4 Concerns about a third party**

Where the concern raised is about someone other than an employee, such as a third party, eg. a contractor, parent, visitor, agency staff, the school/Trust will consider what action may be appropriate to protect the employee and anyone involved pending the outcome of the investigation, bearing in mind the reasonable needs of the school/Trust and the rights of that person. Where appropriate, the matter will be discussed with the third party. Appropriate action might be speaking or writing to the person and/or their employer about their conduct; or, in appropriate cases, banning the person from the premises or terminating the Trust's contract with them/their employer.

## **Section 7: Reporting sexual harassment**

### **7.1 Advice and support**

If an employee is not certain whether an incident or series of incidents amounts to sexual harassment, they should initially contact the school's HR lead or director of people (DoP) for central team staff, informally for advice and support. If the reported concern is about the school's HR lead or the DoP, they should refer it to another senior leader. Informal advice, in line with the procedures of this policy, may be sought from a trade union representative.

### **7.2 Disclosing sexual harassment**

If an employee wishes to disclose sexual harassment they should speak to the school's HR lead, a senior leader, or the headteacher (CEO for central team employees). The person listening to the reporter of sexual harassment may ask questions to establish the facts and document the answers.

An employee may choose to make a formal disclosure under this policy if:

- The informal stage is unsuccessful in bringing a resolution;
- The employee does not wish to address the matter under the informal procedure (section 4.6); or
- The serious nature of the disclosure means that an informal procedure is inappropriate.

A senior leader can also initiate the formal procedure should they become aware that sexual harassment has taken place. Senior leaders will not make a personal judgement on the validity of the disclosures and will always ensure that the matters are investigated. Senior leaders will have received training on how to manage and respond to such disclosures. This training will be updated annually.'

### **7.3 Staff who witness sexual harassment**

Staff who witness sexual harassment or victimisation are encouraged to take appropriate steps to address it and will be supported where they do so. Depending on the circumstances, this could include:

- intervening where they feel able to do so;
- supporting the victim to report it or reporting it on their behalf;
- reporting the incident where they feel there may be a continuing risk if it is not reported; and
- co-operating in any investigation into the incident.

### **7.4 Support for witnesses**

All individuals reporting concerns and witnesses will be provided with appropriate support and will be protected from victimisation.

### **7.5 Steps to address reported concerns of sexual harassment**

Staff reporting concerns should be aware that once a formal investigation is commissioned, they will not be informed of the specific findings and/or sanctions if relevant as this is a confidential process. They should, however, be reassured that the Trust is taking prompt action to deal with the matter and will be interviewed as part of the investigation. Should staff be dissatisfied with how the matter is being dealt with, they can raise a grievance in accordance with the Trust's grievance procedures. A copy of the procedures can be located on the Trust's policy drive

## **Section 8: Formal investigations**

### **8.1 The Trust's disciplinary policy and procedures**

An investigation will be carried out in line with the Trust's disciplinary policy and procedures. The commissioning officer will be the headteacher or the CEO for central team employees and an external investigating officer may be commissioned to lead the investigation. Depending on the allegation, an initial fact-finding process may be carried out. All investigations will be carried as

promptly as possible. The person who has made a disclosure will be updated by the headteacher every 10 working days on the expected timeline of the process. As stated in section 7.5, staff reporting concerns should be aware that once a formal investigation is commissioned, they will not be informed of the specific findings and/or sanctions if relevant as this is a confidential process. The person who has made a disclosure will be updated by the headteacher every 10 working days on the expected timeline of the process.

### **8.2 Consideration for action in line with KCSIE**

If, following the investigation, it has been concluded that there is a case to answer to, consideration will be given at this point in relation to whether the conduct either amounts to or continues to amount to a reportable safeguarding concern under KCSIE, in addition to any transferable risks that may require consideration under KCSIE. There may be a decision to wait until the disciplinary panel's decision is made following the hearing.

### **8.3 Resignation during/after the investigation**

Where the alleged harasser resigns part way through an investigation or following the investigation, the school/Trust will consider whether it is appropriate or not in the circumstances to proceed to a disciplinary hearing in the alleged harasser's absence. If the concerns have been assessed as amounting to a reportable safeguarding concern under KCSIE the process will be seen through to completion in order to come to one of the 5 outcomes under KCSIE. In any event, the headteacher (CEO for central team employees) will arrange a meeting with the employee who has reported the concerns to provide an update and to discuss next steps.

### **8.4 Management of working relationships**

Whether or not the employee's report of sexual harassment is upheld, and where the alleged harasser has not been dismissed because of the reported concern, the school/Trust will consider how best to manage any ongoing working relationship between the employee and the person concerned promptly. It may be appropriate to arrange some form of facilitated conversation, mediation and/or counselling or to change the duties, working location or line management of one or both parties by agreement. It will also be considered whether or not some form of facilitated conversation, mediation and/or counselling would be beneficial to any witnesses involved.'

### **8.5 False information and dishonesty**

The employee who raised the concern will not be disciplined or treated detrimentally because they have reported a concern of sexual harassment or if their reported concern was not upheld. If there is evidence that shows or indicates that a staff member has deliberately provided false information or has acted dishonestly as part of an investigation, they may be subject to action under the VLT disciplinary policy and procedures which could result in dismissal.

## **Section 9: Protection and support for those involved**

### **9.1 Retaliation or victimisation**

A staff member who reports a concern of sexual harassment or who participates in any investigation conducted under this policy must not suffer any form of retaliation or victimisation as a result of reporting a concern. Anyone found to have retaliated against or victimised someone in this way may be subject to the procedures in the Trust's disciplinary policy and procedures.

### **9.2 Definition of victimisation**

Victimisation is subjecting a person to a detriment because they have:

- raised a concern (whether formally or otherwise) that someone has sexually harassed them or someone else such as another staff member or third party connected to the employer;

- supported someone to make a report of sexual harassment;
- given evidence in relation to a reported concern of sexual harassment;
- brought legal proceedings for sexual harassment under the Equality Act; or
- given evidence or information in connection with legal proceedings for sexual harassment under the Equality Act.

### **9.3 Actions that may constitute victimisation**

Victimising a person may include, but is not limited to:

- unreasonably denying their requests at work, for example annual leave requests;
- unreasonably denying them opportunities at work, for example promotions;
- bullying behaviour such as intimidation, mockery, being rude and/or dismissive;
- socially isolating them so they do not have the confidence to raise a grievance; or
- unfairly dismissing them.

### **9.4 Reporting retaliation or victimisation**

If an employee believes they have suffered any such treatment they should inform the headteacher (CEO for central team employees). If the matter is not remedied to their satisfaction, they can raise it formally using the Trust's grievance procedures.

### **9.5 Disciplinary action**

Anyone found to have retaliated against or victimised someone for making a report of sexual harassment or assisting with an investigation under this policy may be subject to the VLT disciplinary policy and procedures.

### **9.6 Confidential counselling**

Access to confidential counselling, which is available on request for anyone affected by, or accused of, sexual harassment. The details are available in confidence from the school's HR lead in each school/the central team.

### **9.7 External support**

Support and guidance can also be obtained from the following external services:

- The Equality Advisory and Support Service ([www.equalityadvisoryservice.com](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com))
- Protect ([www.protect-advice.org.uk](http://www.protect-advice.org.uk))
- Victim support ([www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk))
- Rape crisis ([www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk))
- Rights of Women (England and Wales) ([www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk))
- ACAS ([www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk))
- Equality and Human Rights Commission ([www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com))
- Education Support helpline - free and confidential emotional support for teachers and education staff ([www.educationsupport.org.uk](http://www.educationsupport.org.uk))

## **Section 10: Confidentiality, record keeping and data protection and training**

### **10.1 Confidentiality during all procedures**

Confidentiality is an important part of the procedures provided under this policy. Everyone involved in the operation of the policy, whether making a report or involved in any investigation, is responsible for observing the high level of confidentiality that is required. Details of the investigation and the names of the person raising the concern and the person accused must only be disclosed on a 'need to know' basis. Information about a concern by or about a staff member may be placed on their personal file, along with a record of the outcome and of any notes or other documents

compiled during the process. These will be processed in accordance with the VLT data protection policy.

### **10.2 Retention and storage of data**

As part of the application of this policy, the Trust may collect, process and store personal data in accordance with the VLT data protection policy. Requirements of Data Protection Legislation (being the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018) and any implementing laws, regulations and secondary legislation, as amended or updated from time to time will be complied with. Records will be kept on the employee's personnel file in line with the retention policy and in line with the requirements of the Trust Data Protection policy, both of which are available via the Trust's website. Breaches of confidentiality may give rise to disciplinary action under the VLT disciplinary policy and procedures.

### **10.3 Training**

All new staff will attend training on the prevention of sexual harassment as part of their induction programme. It is expected that all VLT staff proactively support training and initiatives to prevent sexual harassment by attending events and workshops. All employees of VLT will take part in refresher training on the prevention of sexual harassment on an annual basis.

#### **Version history**

<b>First issue/revision date</b>	<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Summary of changes if not first issue</b>
July 2025	Board of trustees	New policy