



# Whistleblowing Policy

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## 1. Aims

This policy aims to:

- encourage individuals affected to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated and that their confidentiality will be respected
- let all staff in the school know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the school
- set clear procedures for how the school will respond to such concerns
- let all staff know the protection available to them if they raise a whistleblowing concern
- assure staff that they will not be victimised for raising a legitimate concern through the steps set out in the policy even if they turn out to be mistaken (though vexatious or malicious concerns may be considered a disciplinary issue).

This policy does not form part of any employee’s contract of employment and may be amended at any time. The policy applies to all employees or other workers who provide services to the trust in any capacity including self-employed consultants or contractors who provide services on a personal basis and agency workers.

## 2. Legislation

It is a requirement to have clear whistleblowing procedures in place is set out in the [Academy Trust Handbook](#).

This policy has been written in line with the above document, as well as [government guidance on whistleblowing](#). We also take into account the [Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998](#).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

## 3. Definition of whistleblowing

Whistleblowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is “in the public interest”. Examples of whistleblowing include (but are not limited to):

- criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption
- childrens’ or staffs’ health and safety being put in danger
- failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement
- breaches of financial management procedures

- › attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest
- › damage to the environment.

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above.

Not all concerns about the school count as whistleblowing. For example, personal staff grievances such as bullying or harassment do not usually count as whistleblowing. If something affects a staff member as an individual, or relates to an individual employment contract, this is likely a grievance.

When staff have a concern they should consider whether it would be better to follow our staff grievance or complaints procedures.

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) has:

- › [further guidance](#) on the difference between a whistleblowing concern and a grievance that staff may find useful if unsure
- › a free and confidential [advice line](#).

#### **4. Procedure for staff to raise a whistleblowing concern**

##### **How to raise the concern**

Concerns should be made in writing wherever possible. They should include names of those committing wrongdoing, dates, places and as much evidence and context as possible. Staff raising a concern should also include details of any personal interest in the matter.

##### **Who to report to**

Staff should report their concern to the Headteacher. If the concern is about the Headteacher, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the staff member should report their concern to the Chair of Trustees.

As a first step you should normally raise concerns with your immediate line manager or the Headteacher. This will depend, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is thought to be involved in the wrongdoing.

#### **5. School procedure for responding to a whistleblowing concern**

The action taken will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters raised may:

- be investigated internally by the school (this may include support from S4S HR);
- be referred to the police;
- be referred to the external auditor;
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

In order to protect individuals and the school, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Support from S4S HR will be sought.

These will be made confidentially and every attempt made to protect the employee. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation.

Within ten working days of a concern being received, the school will write to you:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how we propose to deal with the matter;
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made;
- telling you whether further investigations will take place and, if not, why not.

The amount of contact between those officers considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved, and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought from you.

When any meeting is arranged, you have the right, if you so wish, to be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative or a friend who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates.

If you should become involved in further investigations or procedures (e.g., disciplinary proceedings or a criminal trial) as a result of using this procedure, you will be given every proper support and assistance. The school are concerned with ensuring that no-one using this procedure is disadvantaged or unfairly treated.

The school Council accept that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, you will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.

### **5.1 Investigating the concern**

When a concern is received by the Headteacher/Chair of Trustees- referred to from here as the 'recipient' - they will:

- › Meet with the person raising the concern within a reasonable time. The person raising the concern may be joined by a trade union or professional association representative
- › Get as much detail as possible about the concern at this meeting, and record the information. If it becomes apparent the concern is not of a whistleblowing nature, the recipient should handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy/procedure
- › Reiterate, at this meeting, that they are protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. If the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious, disciplinary action may be taken
- › Establish whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant further investigation. If there is:
  - the recipient should then arrange a further investigation into the matter, involving the Headteacher/Chair of Trustees, if appropriate. In some cases, they may need to bring in an external, independent body to investigate. In other cases, they may need to report the matter to the police
  - the person who raised the concern should be informed of how the matter is being investigated and an estimated timeframe for when they will be informed of the next steps.

## **5.2 Outcome of the investigation**

Once the investigation – whether this was just the initial investigation of the concern, or whether further investigation was needed – is complete, the investigating person(s) will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether or not any wrongdoing has occurred. The report will include any recommendations and details on how the matter can be rectified and whether or not a referral is required to an external organisation, such as the local authority or police.

They will inform the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

Beyond the immediate actions, the Headteacher, Trustees and other staff if necessary will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

Whilst we cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, we will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

## **6. Malicious or vexatious allegations**

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made in good faith, but the investigation finds no wrongdoing, there will be no disciplinary action against the member of staff who raised the concern.

If, however, an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the school will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the person making the allegation.

## **7. Escalating concerns beyond the school**

The school encourages staff to raise their concerns internally, but recognises that staff may feel the need to report concerns to an external body. A list of prescribed bodies to whom staff can raise concerns with is included [here](#).

The Protect advice line can also help staff when deciding whether to raise the concern to an external party.

## **8. Approval**

This policy will be reviewed every three years.

These procedures have been agreed by the Board of Trustees, who will approve them whenever reviewed.

## **9. Links with other policies**

This policy links with our policies on:

- › Staff grievance policy
- › Complaints procedure
- › Safeguarding and child protection policy.