

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY



Whistleblowing Policy

(1) Introduction

The Trust is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with this commitment, the trust encourages employees with serious concerns about the trust's work to come forward and voice those concerns. This also applies to concerns about the activities of staff, Governors and external organisations in their dealings with the school.

(2) Aims of this Policy

The aims of this policy are to:

- provide the basis on which employees can raise any such concerns they may have, and receive feedback on action taken;
- allow employees to take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with the trust's response; and
- reassure staff that they can raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals of victimisation for 'whistle blowing'.

(3) Key Points

(i) The Policy

There are existing procedures in place to enable employees to raise grievances about their own employment. This policy is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of individual grievances.

The concern may be regarding an issue that:

- is unlawful;
- is against the school's policies;
- amounts to improper conduct;
- seems likely to harm somebody or the environment;
- represents a cover-up of these sorts of issues.

This policy applies to all employees.

(ii) Safeguards

Harassment or victimisation

The Board recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisals from those responsible for the malpractice. The trust will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take all possible measures to protect employees who raise genuine concerns under this Policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

However, if an employee makes allegations that are malicious or vexatious or with a view to personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against them.

Confidentiality

The trust will make every effort to protect the identity of employees who raise concerns and do not want their name to be disclosed. It must be appreciated, however, that the investigation may reveal the source of the information, and statements made by the employees who raised the issue may be required as part of the evidence.

The trust encourages employees to put their name to allegations made. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, but they will be considered at the discretion of the trust. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken account of will include:

- the seriousness of the issue raised;
- the credibility of the concern;
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources;
- untrue allegations

(iii) How to raise a concern

The earlier that employees express their concern the easier it is to take action. As a first step an employee in a school should normally raise concerns with their Headteacher or Chair of Governors. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is thought to be involved in the malpractice.

Concerns should be raised in writing. This should set out the background and history of the concern, giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reason why the employee is concerned about the situation. An employee who does not feel able to put their concerns in writing should telephone or meet the Headteacher or Chair of Governors.

Employees may invite their trade union or professional association to raise the matter in conjunction with them.

(iv) How will the school respond?

The action taken by the school will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters raised may for example:

- be investigated internally;
- be referred to the Police

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. Some concerns may be

resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. Within two weeks of a concern being received the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will endeavour to write to the employee who raised the issue:

- acknowledging that the concern has been raised;
- indicating how it proposes to deal with the matter;
- where possible, giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- telling the employee whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the investigators considering the issue and the employee who has raised the issue 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 the employee.

When any meeting is arranged with the employee, they will be given the choice to be accompanied by a representative or fellow worker who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates. Any companion must respect the confidentiality of the concern raised, the meeting and any subsequent investigation.

The school accepts that employees need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Therefore, subject to legal or contractual constraints, employees will receive appropriate information about the outcomes of any investigations.

(v) Taking the issue further

The policy is intended to provide employees with an avenue to raise relevant concerns within the school. It is hoped that employees will be satisfied with the action taken as a result. If an employee is not satisfied, and feel it is right to take the matter outside the school, the following are possible contact points, some or all of which may be appropriate:

- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations;
- the Local Authority
- the Police
- the charity Public Concern at Work (see website for information or telephone 020 7404 6609)

If an employee does take the matter outside of the school, they must make sure that they do not disclose otherwise confidential information.