

1. Introduction

The school has adopted this policy and the accompanying procedure on whistleblowing to enable members of staff to raise concerns internally and in a confidential fashion about matters such as fraud, malpractice, health and safety, criminal offences, miscarriages of justice, and failure to comply with legal obligations, inappropriate behaviour or unethical conduct. The policy also provides, if necessary, for such concerns to be raised outside the organisation.

2. Elements of the Policy

The school is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity, and expects all staff to maintain high standards. However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The school's policy on whistleblowing is intended to demonstrate that the school:

- Will not tolerate malpractice;
- Respects the confidentiality of staff raising concerns and will provide procedures to maintain confidentiality so far as is consistent with progressing the issues effectively;
- Will provide the opportunity to raise concerns outside of the normal line management structure where this is appropriate;
- Will invoke the school's disciplinary policy and procedure in the case of false, malicious, vexatious or frivolous allegations;
- Will provide a clear and simple procedure for raising concerns, which is accessible to all members of staff.

3. Procedure

This procedure is separate from the school's adopted procedures regarding grievances. Employees should not use the whistleblowing procedure to raise grievances about their personal employment situation. See Grievance Procedure.

Concerns about staff conduct regarding child protection should follow procedures in the Keeping Children Safe Policy.

This procedure is to enable members of staff to express a legitimate concern regarding suspected malpractice within the school.

Malpractice is not easily defined; however, it includes allegations of fraud, financial irregularities, corruption, bribery, dishonesty, acting contrary to the staff code of ethics, criminal activities, or failing to comply with a legal obligation, a miscarriage of justice, or creating or ignoring a serious risk to health, safety or the environment.

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to suspected malpractice within the school. Employees who have any genuine concerns related to suspected malpractice affecting any of the school's activities (a whistleblowing concern) should report it under this procedure.

If employees feel unable to raise an issue with the school or feel that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, they may use other whistleblowing channels, such as:

- Protect (an independent whistleblowing charity) (helpline: (020) 3117 2520, email: whistle@protect-advice.org.uk, website: www.pcaw.co.uk).
- The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline (tel: 0800 800 5000 or email: help@nspcc.org.uk).

4. Confidentiality

It is hoped that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this procedure. If employees wish to raise a concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep their identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know the employee's identity, this will be discussed with the employee.

If there is evidence of criminal activity, the Police will be informed in call cases.

Employees are not encouraged to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from employees. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should discuss this with the headteacher and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. Employees who are in any doubt can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are set out above.

5. Raising a Whistleblowing Concern

If the whistleblowing concern is related to safeguarding, a member of staff should express their concern to the headteacher in line with our Keeping Children Safe Policy. Any other concerns can be brought to the attention of the headteacher or the bursar.

A meeting will be arranged with the employee as soon as possible to discuss their concern. The employee may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this procedure. The companion must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation. The employee may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information as the concerns raised are investigated. Any concern raised will be investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner, and appropriate corrective action will be pursued. The member of staff making the allegation will be kept informed of progress and, whenever possible and subject to third party rights, will be informed of the resolution. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. Staff should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.

A member of staff who is not satisfied that their concern is being properly dealt with will have a right to raise it in confidence with the chair of trustees. Alternatively, staff may follow the external procedure below.

6. External Procedures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing within the School. In most cases you should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

However, where all internal procedures have been exhausted, a member of staff shall have a right of access to an external person/body. This may include (depending on the subject matter of the disclosure) HMRC, the Police, the Audit Commission, the Health and Safety Executive and/or the Local Authority Designated Officer (where the disclosure relates to a child protection issue).

It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate for staff to alert the media.

It should be noted that under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, there are circumstances where a member of staff may be entitled to raise a concern directly with an external body where the employee reasonably believes:

- That exceptionally serious circumstances justify it;
- That the school would conceal or destroy the relevant evidence;
- Where they believe they would be victimised by the school;
- Where the Secretary of State has ordered it.

We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone externally. The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

7. Malicious Accusations

False, malicious, vexatious or frivolous accusations will be dealt with under the School's Disciplinary Procedure.

8. Protection from Reprisal or Victimisation

It is understandable that staff are sometimes worried about possible repercussions as a result of raising a whistleblowing disclosure. We aim to encourage openness and will support you if you raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if you turn out to be mistaken.

No member of staff will suffer a detriment or be disciplined for raising a genuine and legitimate concern, providing that they do so in good faith and following the whistleblower procedures. Staff must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct may be subject to disciplinary action.