
Whistleblowing Policy

Reviewed: 18.01.2022

Next Review: Term 3 2025



Fairfields
School

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Whistleblowing Policy

Policy Statement

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (the "Act") places a legal responsibility on employers to ensure that matters of serious public concern can be addressed.

The County Council and the Governing Body are committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with this commitment the School encourages individuals with serious concerns about an activity in the School to voice those concerns. This also applies to concerns about the actions of staff and governors and external organisations in their dealings with the School.

This policy is provided as a reference document to outline how issues can be raised internally, and if necessary, outside the leadership structure of the School; it documents our assurance that concerns will be seriously considered and appropriate action taken. Additionally, it:

- provides the basis on which individuals can raise serious concerns they may have, and receive feedback on action taken,
- allows individuals to take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with the School's response, and
- outlines the protection from reprisals or victimisation for 'whistle-blowing'

It should be noted that any clause within a worker's contract of employment is void if it attempts to prevent an individual from making a protected disclosure under the Act. This code does not remove or diminish the existing contractual or statutory rights of employees.

Scope of the Whistleblowing Policy

This policy applies to all employees; however, the Act also covers those contractors working for the School on its premises. It also covers suppliers and those providing services under a contract with the School in their own premises. However, the following types of concern should be raised under different policies.

- Employees with concerns about their own employment should refer to the school's Grievance Policy.
- Concerns that an employee has been bullied or harassed should be raised under the school's Anti-Bullying and Harassment policy.

Any external person seeking to raise a concern should refer to the school's Complaints Procedure.

The term '**individual**' used throughout this document means any school employee, worker, agency staff or contractor who is considering raising, or has raised, a concern.

The term '**Appropriate Person**' used throughout this document means a person internal to the employer to whom concerns may be raised and through whom appropriate investigations and action will be taken.

Protected Disclosure

A protected disclosure is any disclosure of information that is made in the public interest and in the reasonable belief of the worker may show that one of more of the following is either happening at the present time, took place in the past or is likely to happen in the future:

- A criminal offence
- A miscarriage of justice
- An act creating risk to health and safety
- An act causing damage to the environment
- A breach of any other legal obligation; or
- Concealment of any of the above

An individual does not have to raise a grievance in order to make a 'protected disclosure'; however, if the employee intends to raise the matter as a grievance, this intention must be clearly stated.

Responsibilities

The Chair of Governors has overall responsibility for:

- the maintenance and operation of this policy
- maintaining a record of concerns raised and the outcomes, and
- reporting as necessary to the Governing Body, and/or the Employer.

All school employees, workers, agency staff, contractors and governors have a responsibility to:

- properly adhere to this policy, and
- raise any concerns they have in accordance with this policy.

Advice on using this policy

If an individual is unsure whether or not to use this policy, or wants independent advice at any stage, they can contact Protect (the UK's whistleblowing charity - formally Public Concern at Work) which is an independent charity. They can give free, confidential and practical advice at any stage on whether and how to raise a concern about danger or wrongdoing at work.

Protect Advice (Public Concern at Work/Whistleblowing) Telephone (general enquiries): 020 3117 2520

You can also use their online form: <https://protect-advice.org.uk/contact-protect-advice-line/>

Advice may also be sought from the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, or the individual's Trade Union or Professional Association.

Safeguards to protect individuals from unfair treatment

The school encourages individuals to come forward with genuine concerns in the knowledge that they will be taken seriously. The school recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make.

No individual will be victimised, harassed or treated unfairly for raising a genuine concern under this policy. This means that the continued employment and opportunities for future promotion or training of the worker will not be prejudiced because he/she has raised a genuine concern.

The school will not tolerate, and will treat as a disciplinary offence:

- any harassment or victimisation of an individual who has raised a concern under this policy, or
- any attempt to prevent an individual from raising a concern under this policy.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of the individual raising the concern if that is their wish. However it must be appreciated that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information, and statements made by the individual may be required as evidence. Information about the disclosure and the identity of the individual who has made the disclosure will only be shared with those who need to know for the purposes of investigating and resolving the matter.

Anonymous disclosures

The school encourages individuals to put their name to allegations made. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful as the ability of the school to gather crucial information from that individual is not possible.

However, such complaints will be considered at the discretion of the school. 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 being able to confirm that the allegation is from attributable sources, and
- the ability to trace the source of unfounded or malicious allegations.

Untrue allegations

If an allegation is made but is not confirmed/ upheld by the investigation, no action will be taken against the individual raising the concern and they will continue to have protection from unfair treatment.

Malicious allegations

If an individual makes an allegation which is found to be malicious, vexatious, or made for personal gain, this will be considered as a disciplinary offence, potentially amount to gross misconduct, and will be handled appropriately.

When to raise a concern

Individuals are encouraged to raise their concerns at the earliest opportunity. The earlier concerns are expressed, the easier it is to take action and the more effective that action is likely to be.

Who to raise the concern with

Raising concerns with the Appropriate Person internally

The school encourages individuals to raise concerns internally with an Appropriate Person.

The following are considered by the school to be Appropriate Persons:

- the Headteacher
- the Chair of Governors, or
- if the person does not feel they can raise the concern with the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, a person identified in Appendix A.

Raising concerns externally

If the employee does not feel able to raise the concerns internally, it is recommended that they take advice from Public Concern at Work.

The individual may then consider reporting the concern externally

How to raise a concern internally

Concerns should be raised in writing, where possible, setting out the background and history of the concern, giving as much information as possible including names, dates and places, and the reason why the individual is concerned about the situation.

Individuals who do not feel able to put their concerns in writing can telephone or ask to meet with the Appropriate Person.

Individuals may ask their trade union to raise a Protected Disclosure on their behalf.

The School's approach when a concern is raised

Initial Steps

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, or other appropriate body
- be referred to an External Auditor, or
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for further investigation.

The Appropriate Person receiving the concern will determine:

- whether an investigation is appropriate, and, if so,

- o what the scope of the investigation will be,
- o who will undertake it,
- o what third parties may need to be involved and
- o what form the investigation should take. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Within 14 calendar days of receiving the concern, the Appropriate Person will write to the individual who raised the concern (if known), and will:

- acknowledge the concern
- indicate how the matter will be dealt with,
- tell the individual whether further investigations will take place, and
- o if not, why not, or
- o if so, who is investigating and what the individual can expect to happen next,
- give an estimate of how long it is likely to take to provide a final response, and
- tell the individual about any relevant internal or external support mechanisms.

Internal Investigation

The investigator will conduct a proportionate investigation, taking any of the following steps, as appropriate to the circumstances:

- interviews of any potential witnesses, including the individual who has raised the concern,
- interviews of anyone accused of any wrongdoing,
- requests for written information or any other evidence from any relevant person,
- reviews of any relevant documentation and evidence, and/or
- contact with any appropriate third party.

The amount of contact between the investigator considering the issue and the person who has raised the concern will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. Individuals should not expect a running commentary on the investigation and must be mindful that some matters may be confidential.

When any meeting is arranged with the individual, they will be given the right to be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative or a work colleague who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates. Individuals may not be accompanied by an external person.

Records

The investigator will keep appropriate records of work and actions taken throughout an internal investigation.

Conclusion of the Investigation

The investigator will consider how best to report their findings and what (if any) corrective action they propose is taken. This may include some form of disciplinary action or third party referral.

The Appropriate Person will review the investigator's reported findings and will determine what action will be taken.

The school accepts that individuals need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Therefore, the Appropriate Person will provide them with a summary response to their disclosure, sharing an overview of what steps have been taken to investigate. Individuals should not expect to be given a copy of an investigator's findings. Outcomes and actions will only be shared if this is appropriate in the circumstances. Specifically, any disciplinary steps for other workers cannot be shared with the individual for confidentiality reasons.

Where the individual continues to have serious concerns

This policy provides individuals with appropriate avenues to raise concerns, and the school hopes that individuals will be satisfied that the school has responded appropriately to those concerns.

However, if the individual has serious concerns after the school's internal procedures are complete, they should seek to resolve this with the Appropriate Person.

If the individual continues to have serious concerns, they are reminded they may take advice from Public Concern at Work who can provide independent advice about whether and how to raise concerns externally.

Raising concerns externally

If it is potentially a criminal matter individuals should raise it with the police.

The school expects individuals to have fully considered and exhausted all internal options under this policy before making an external disclosure.

There are a number of bodies which have been prescribed by the Secretary of State for the purpose of receiving disclosures; details of these bodies can be found at:

- www.gov.uk/whistleblowing, or:
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2>

If making a disclosure to one of these prescribed bodies, the individual must:

- be making a Protected Disclosure
- reasonably believe that the allegations of wrongdoing are substantially true, and
- ensure that they do not disclose confidential information which is unrelated to the issue being raised.

Data Protection

Any data collected as part of this procedure is held securely. It is accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of completing that specific procedure; process or activity.

Records are retained and destroyed in accordance with the organisations Retention Schedule.

Inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with the organisation's Data Protection Policy immediately. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which may be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.

Appendix 1 Advice and Information

Protect

Protect (formally Public Concern at Work) is an independent charity organisation which can provide guidance and training to employers on whistleblowing and can also offer free advice to employees unsure whether or how to raise a concern about workplace wrongdoing.

Protect

The Green House
244-254 Cambridge Heath Road
London E2 9DA

Telephone (general enquiries and helpline): 020 3117 2520

Website: <https://protect-advice.org.uk/advice-line/>

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

ACAS operates a nationwide network of helplines which deal with queries about employment matters, including the rights and obligations arising out of employment law. The service is available to any individual or organisation free of charge. Any worker who contacts ACAS will wish to bear in mind the distinction between seeking information about the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, and the requirements attached to making a protected disclosure.

Acas East Midlands

Apex Court, City Link, Nottingham, NG2 4LA. Tel: 0300 123 1150

General Helpline numbers 0300 123 1100

Customers with a hearing or speech impairment may prefer to contact Acas using the Text Relay service by dialling **18001 0300 123 1100**