

Whistleblowing Policy

Introduction

We are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability and we encourage employees and others working with us to raise any concerns about any aspect of our work to come forward and voice those concerns. In some instances, concerns may need to be expressed on a confidential basis.

This procedure encourages employees to raise serious concerns, without fear of reprisal or victimisation, internally within the school rather than overlooking a problem or raising the matter outside.

It applies to all employees, including those working on school premises who are not directly employed by the school. It also covers suppliers and those providing services under a contract with us in their own premises.

Other complaints procedures

This procedure is separate from our **complaints procedure** and other statutory procedures applying to the school. Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice under this procedure will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect an individual.

Aim and scope

This procedure aims to ensure individuals are:

- encouraged to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provided with avenues to raise concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- given a response to their concerns and are aware of how to pursue them if not satisfied
- reassured that they will be protected from reprisals or victimisation if they have a reasonable belief any disclosure has been made in good faith.

There are existing procedures in place to enable individuals to lodge a grievance relating to their own employment including issues relating to harassment and bullying. This procedure is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. These include:

- conduct which is, has been, or is likely to be, an offence or breach of law
- conduct that has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur, as a result of which we fail to comply with a legal obligation. For example unauthorised use of public funds, possible fraud and corruption, or other unethical conduct, discrimination of any kind and waste/frivolous expenditure
- disclosures related to past, current or likely miscarriages of justice
- past, current or likely health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees (see below)
- past, current or likely damage to the environment

Concerns like these can be reported under the confidential disclosure procedure. This may be about something that you:

- feel uncomfortable about in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe we subscribe to; or
- are against our standing orders and policies; or
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

Confidentiality

All concerns raised will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if this is your wish. However, in certain cases, it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality if you are required to come forward as a witness.

Anonymous allegations

Whenever possible you should put your name to your allegation as concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful than those that are attributed to a named individual. However, anonymous allegations will be considered and investigated at our discretion.

In exercising the discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

Untrue allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith that is not subsequently confirmed by an investigation, no action will be taken. Disciplinary action will only be taken against individuals who knowingly make false, malicious or vexatious allegations.

How to raise a concern

General

Concerns can be raised verbally or in writing. A concern raised in writing should:

- set out the background and history of the concern, giving names, dates and places where possible
- the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.

The earlier a concern is raised the easier it is to take action. Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, you need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for your concern.

A trade union or professional association may raise a matter on behalf of an employee.

Step One - Raising a Concern

Whenever possible you should raise your concern with your immediate manager or the headteacher. If this is not appropriate, you should approach the Chair or Vice-Chair of Governors.

If you believe that none of these avenues would be appropriate, or if you feel you need additional advice, you may find the following local authority contacts useful:

Education & Libraries - contact Grahame Ward on 01622 696551 or Marilyn Hodges on 01622 694992

Social Services - contact Ann Kitto (Mid Kent) on 01233 652144, or Anthony Mort (County Services) on 01622 696363

Strategic Planning - contact Alan Loft on 01622 221955

Corporate Services - contact Geoff Wild on 01622 694302

Senior management contact points:

Peter Gilroy (Chief Executive) on 01622 694000

Janet Armstrong (Senior Audit Manager) on 01622 694567

Independent Helpline Public Concern at Work 020 7040 6609

Suspected financial irregularities should be reported to the Chief Internal Auditor.

Step Two - How we will respond

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

- be investigated internally by management through the disciplinary or other internal process
- be referred to the police
- be referred to the local authority
- 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. Concerns or allegations which fall

within the scope of specific procedures (e.g., child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Within 10 working days, the responsible person 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
- informing you if any initial enquiries have been made
- whether further investigations will take place and, if not, why not

Contact

The amount of contact between those 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.

Attending meetings

When any meeting is arranged you have the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or a workplace colleague who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates.

Support

We will take steps to minimise any difficulties you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, we will advise or arrange for you to have advice about the procedure.

We will not tolerate harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take action to protect individuals who raise a concern in good faith.

We accept that you need to be assured that concerns will be properly addressed and, subject to legal constraints, will provide information about the outcomes of any investigations.

How the matter can be taken further

This procedure is intended to provide individuals with an avenue to raise concerns within the school. If you are not satisfied, and feel it is right to take the matter further, the following are possible contact points:

- Public Concern at Work 020 7404 6609
- Audit Commission 020 7630 1019
- a local Kent County Council member
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- a solicitor
- the police

If a matter is taken outside the school, you must take all reasonable steps to ensure that confidential or privileged information is not disclosed.

Public interest disclosure

Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 gives employees two safeguards in respect of disclosures of information.

- An employee is entitled not be subjected to any detriment by virtue of having made a protected disclosure.
- The dismissal of any employee directly due to the individual having made such a disclosure will automatically be unfair.

Signed:Date:
(Chair of Governors)