



SUTTON COLDFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This document sets out the School's policy and procedure for dealing with such concerns raised by employees. Allegations of child abuse against teachers and other staff and volunteers are to be dealt with in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory guidance for schools and colleges.

2. Background

- 2.1. As employees are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the school, it is important that they feel able to express their concerns without fear of harassment or victimisation. Otherwise they may find it easier to ignore the concern rather than report it. The Public Interest Disclosure Act (in force since January 1999) recognises this fact and is designed to protect employees, who make certain disclosures of information in 'the public interest', from detriment and/or dismissal. This policy builds on the provisions of the Act.
- 2.2. The Governing Board is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, employees and consultants, contractors, volunteers, casual workers and agency workers with concerns about any aspect of the school's work are encouraged to come forward and voice those concerns. This policy document makes it clear that employees can do so without fear of reprisals; it is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise concerns within the school rather than overlooking a problem or alerting anyone external to the school
- 2.3. This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment, and it may be amended at any time. It should be cross-referenced with the Staff Code of Conduct, Safeguarding and Child Protection policy, Health and Safety policy and procedures and Finance-related policies and procedures.

3. Aims of the Policy

- 3.1. This policy aims to:
- Provide avenues for employees to raise concerns internally as a matter of course, and receive feedback on any action taken;
 - Provide for matters to be dealt with quickly and appropriately; and ensure that concerns are taken seriously and treated consistently and fairly;
 - Reassure employees that they will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistleblowing where they have a genuine concern;
 - Allow employees to take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with the Governing Board's response.
- 3.2. A **whistleblower** is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the matters below. If employees have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities (a whistleblowing concern) they should report it under this policy. All employees have the right to raise concerns, which could be about the actions of other employees, private contractors, governors, volunteers or outside agencies.

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

- criminal activity;
- miscarriages of justice;
- danger to health and safety;
- damage to the environment;
- failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements;
- bribery;
- financial fraud or mismanagement;
- negligence;
- breach of the school's internal policies and procedures
- conduct likely to damage the school's reputation;
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information;
- public examination fraud
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

3.3. Before initiating the procedure, employees should consider the following:

- the responsibility for expressing concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour rests with all employees;
- employees should use line manager or team meetings and other opportunities to raise questions and seek clarification on issues which are of day-to-day concern;
- whilst it can be difficult to raise concerns about the practice or behaviour of a colleague, employees must act to prevent an escalation of the problem and to prevent themselves being potentially implicated.

3.4. This policy should not be used for complaints about an employee's personal circumstances, such as the way they have been treated at work. In these cases, an employee should use the school's Grievance Procedure; or if the matter relates to salary, the salary review procedures documented in the Pay Policy.

4. Safeguards

4.1. Harassment or Victimisation

4.1.1. The Governing Board recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the malpractice. The Governing Board will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect employees when they raise a genuine concern.

4.1.2. This does not mean that if an employee is already the subject of internal procedures such as disciplinary or redundancy, that those procedures will be halted as a result of that employee raising a concern under the Whistleblowing Policy.

4.2. Confidentiality

4.2.1. We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. The Governing Board will make every effort to protect an employee's identity if confidentiality is requested.

4.2.2. As indicated above, identity will be protected as far as possible, but should the investigation into the concern require the employee to be named as the source of the information, that this will be discussed with the employee before their name is disclosed.

4.3. Anonymous Allegations

4.3.1. Employees are encouraged to put their name to an allegation. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information and it is also more difficult to establish whether allegations are credible. Anonymous allegations will be considered at the discretion of the Governing Board. 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.

4.4. False Allegations

If an employee makes an allegation where they have a genuine concern, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against that employee. If, however, we conclude that an employee has made malicious or vexatious allegations, or with a view to personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against that employee.

4.5. Unfounded Allegations

4.5.1. Following investigation, allegations may be confirmed as unfounded. This outcome will be notified to the employee who raised the concern, who will be informed that the Governing Board deems the matter to be concluded and that it should not be raised again unless new evidence becomes available.

4.6. Support to Employees

4.6.1. It is recognised that raising concerns can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support will be made available, as appropriate, to both the employee(s) raising the concerns and the employee(s) subject to investigation.

5. **How to raise a Concern**

5.1. As a first step, an employee should normally raise concerns with their immediate manager or their manager's superior. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues and who is involved. For example, if an employee believes that their immediate manager or their manager's superior is involved, they should approach the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. An employee (including the Headteacher and members of the Senior Leadership Team) can by-pass the direct management line and the Governing Board if they feel the overall management and Governing Board of the school is engaged in an improper course of action. In this case, please refer to the section below on raising concerns outside the school.

5.2. Concerns are better raised in writing. The employee should set out the background and history of the concerns, giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reasons why they are particularly concerned about the situation. If an employee does not feel able to put the concern in writing, they should telephone or meet the appropriate person. It is important that, however the concern is raised, the employee makes it clear that they are raising the issue via the whistleblowing procedure.

5.3. The earlier an employee expresses the concern, the easier it is to take action.

5.4. Although an employee is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, they will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for the concern.

5.5. In some instances, it may be appropriate for an employee to ask the trade union to raise a matter on the employee's behalf.

- 5.6. At each meeting under this policy, the employee may bring a colleague or trade union representative. The companion must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

6. The role of the Senior Leadership Team

- 6.1. A member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) may be informed by an employee about concern(s) and that they are "blowing the whistle" within the procedure in person; or in writing or over the phone.
- 6.2. The member of the Senior Leadership Team will respond immediately by arranging to meet with the employee to discuss the concern(s) as soon as possible.

6.3. Stage One:

- 6.3.1. At the initial meeting the member of the Senior Leadership Team will establish that:
- there is genuine cause and sufficient grounds for the concern; and
 - the concern has been appropriately raised via the Whistleblowing Policy.
- 6.3.2. The member of the Senior Leadership Team will ask the employee, to put their concern(s) in writing, if they have not already done so. If the employee is unable to do this the member of SLT will take down a written summary of their concern/s and provide them with a copy after the meeting. They will make notes of the discussions with the employee. The employee's letter and/or notes made by the member of the Senior Leadership Team should make it clear that the employee is raising the issue via the whistleblowing procedure and provide:
- the background and history of the concerns; and
 - names, dates and places (where possible); and
 - the reasons why the employee is particularly concerned about the situation.
- 6.3.3. The employee should be asked to date and sign their letter and/or the notes of any discussion. The member of the Senior Leadership Team will positively encourage the employee to do this, as a concern expressed anonymously is much less powerful and much more difficult to address, especially if the letter/notes become evidence in other proceedings, e.g. an internal disciplinary hearing.
- 6.3.4. The member of the Senior Leadership Team should follow the policy as set out above and in particular explain to the employee:
- who they will need to speak to in order to determine the next steps (e.g. Headteacher);
 - what steps they intend to take to address the concern;
 - how they will communicate with the employee during and at the end of the process; and that a written response will be sent out within ten working days of that meeting.
 - that their identity will be protected as far as possible, but should the investigation into the concern require the employee to be named as the source of the information, that this will be discussed with the employee before their name is disclosed;
 - that the Governing Board will do all that it can to protect the employee from discrimination and/or victimisation;
 - that the matter will be taken seriously and investigated immediately; and
 - that if the employee's concern, though raised as a genuine concern, is not confirmed by the investigation, no punitive action will be taken against them.

The senior leader should explain to the employee, as a matter of fact, that:

- if clear evidence is uncovered during the investigation that they have made a malicious or vexatious allegation, disciplinary action may be taken against them; and
- the investigation may confirm their allegations to be unfounded in which case the Governing Board will deem the matter to be concluded and they will be expected not to raise the concern again, unless new evidence becomes available.

6.4. Stage Two:

6.4.1. Following the initial meeting with the employee, the member of the Senior Leadership Team should consult with the Headteacher or Chair of Governors to determine whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. A record will be made of the decisions and/or agreed actions.

6.4.2. It may be necessary, with anonymous allegations, to consider whether it is possible to take any further action. When making this decision, senior leaders should take the following factors into account:

- the seriousness of the issue(s) raised;
- the credibility of the concern(s); and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation(s) from attributable sources.

6.4.3. In some cases, it may be possible to resolve the concern(s) simply, by agreed action or an explanation regarding the concern(s), without the need for further investigation. However, depending on the nature of the concern(s) it may be necessary for the concern(s) to:

- be investigated internally;
- be referred to the police;
- be referred to the school's external auditor;
- form the subject of an independent enquiry.

6.4.4. Senior Leaders will use their knowledge and understanding of other school policies and procedures, e.g. grievance, disciplinary, harassment, child protection procedures, to ensure that concerns raised by employees are addressed via the appropriate procedure/process. Advice will be sought from the school's HR advisers as appropriate.

6.5. Stage Three

6.5.1. Within ten working days of a concern being received, the senior leader receiving the concern will write to the employee in order to:

- acknowledge that the concern has been received;
- indicate how they propose to deal with the matter;
- give an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response; and/or
- tell the employee whether any initial enquiries have been made; and
- tell the employee whether further investigations will take place, and if not why not; and/or
- let the employee know when they will receive further details if the situation is not yet resolved; and
- provide the employee with details of whom to contact should they be dissatisfied with this response (see below).

6.6. Stage Four

6.6.1. Members of the Senior Leadership Team will continue to deal with the matter as appropriate including the involvement of any external agencies. The Chair of Governors will be kept informed. The employee will be kept informed of the action being taken.

7. Raising Concerns outside the school

7.1. This policy is intended to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigation and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases, the employee should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally. The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for the employee to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. Employees are strongly encouraged to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. If an employee is not satisfied with the Governing Board's response, the member of the Senior Leadership Team will ensure that they are made aware with whom they may raise the matter externally:

- Protect* www.protect-advice.org.uk tel: 0203 117 2520
- Recognised Trade Union;
- External Auditor;
- Relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations;
- Solicitor

7.2. The member of the Senior Leadership Team will inform the employee that if they choose to take a concern outside the school, it is the employee's responsibility to ensure that confidential information is not disclosed, i.e. confidential information, in whatever format, is not handed over to a third party.

* Protect is a registered charity that employees can contact for advice to assist them in raising concerns about poor practice at work. The charity also provides advice to employers as to the possible ways to address these concerns.

7.3. Concerns about safeguarding practices can be raised externally using the NSPCC whistleblowing helpline. Employees can call 0800 028 0285 or email help@nspcc.org.uk.

8. Monitoring and Review

8.1. The Headteacher is responsible for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of this policy. The policy will be reviewed by the Governing Board every two years or sooner should the need arise.

Appendix 1: Summary of Whistleblowing procedures

The school's commitment

The Governing Board is committed to the highest possible standards of operation, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, employees and others with serious concerns about any aspect of the school's work are encouraged to come forward and voice those concerns



Stage 1- Making a disclosure

A senior leader may be informed by an employee about concern(s) and that they are "blowing the whistle" within the procedure in person; or in writing or over the phone. An initial meeting takes place with a member of the Senior Leadership Team, either on same day or the next working day.



Stage Two: Meeting with a member of the Senior Leadership Team

Following the initial meeting with the employee, the senior leader consults with the Headteacher or Chair of Governors to determine whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. A record is made of the decisions and/or agreed actions which are then followed up as appropriate. If the matter is to be dealt with under another school policy, this will be noted.



Stage Three: Maintaining communication with the employee

Within ten working days of a concern being received, the member of the Senior Leadership Team receiving the concern writes to the employee: acknowledging the concern and providing details on how the matter is to be dealt with. The employee is informed when they will receive further details if the situation is not yet resolved. In addition, the employee is provided with details of whom to contact should they be dissatisfied with this response.



Stage Four: Resolving the issue / maintaining communication

Members of the Senior Leadership Team will continue to deal with the matter as appropriate, including the involvement of any external agencies. The Chair of Governors is kept informed. The employee is kept informed of the action being taken.

INITIAL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name of policy/activity/project:

Whistle Blowing Policy

Is this a new or an existing policy/activity/project?

Revision of existing policy

Scope/timescales for project or activity (including review date):

Reviewed in March 2024 and to be reviewed in March 2026, or earlier if needed.

Policy/project lead:

Dr B. Minards (Headteacher)

Outline of main aims of this activity/policy/project:

To advise members of staff of the procedures to be followed if they wish to draw attention to issues of serious concern, which fall outside existing complaints procedures. To provide assurance that any issues raised will be dealt with in a correct and confidential manner.

Who will benefit/be affected by this policy/activity?

All employees of the school, the Governing Board, contractors, agency staff, suppliers etc.

If an existing policy/activity, do you have any data of use by or impact on different groups which may raise concerns over an equality impact?

No issues raised to date.

Does the activity have the potential to impact differently on groups due to a protected characteristic (race/ethnicity, gender, transgender, disability, religion & belief, age, sexual orientation, maternity/paternity) for :

No

(a) Students and members of the community? Which groups are likely to be affected?

The Governing Board, students, contractors, visitors, hirers of the premises, agency staff and suppliers

(b) Employees?

All members of staff

Does this activity make a positive contribution to the School's general or specific duties under the Equality Act 2010? If yes, please detail.

Yes – the Policy applies to all sectors of the school community equally

Having reviewed the potential impact of the policy/activity listed above, I believe a full impact assessment is **NOT required**.

Justification:

The policy is of equal benefit to all members of the school community, regardless of gender, race, religion, maternity/paternity, sexual orientation etc.

Name: Dr B. Minards Date: March 2024