Pulford VA Lower School

Date of Policy: February 2026
Date of Review: February 2028

Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

Introduction

The School is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity, and expects all staff to maintain high standards in accordance with their contractual obligations and the School's policies and procedures.

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 or to address them when they do occur.

This procedure is not a substitute for normal line management processes but an addition to them. Staff should always first consider using normal line management for raising concerns. This procedure is only for the purpose of raising concerns about wrongdoing and is not a substitute or alternative for existing procedures such as the Grievance, Disciplinary Procedures for staff or the complaints procedure.

This procedure should only be used where all other existing internal procedures are felt to be inappropriate or when a member of staff, for whatever reason, feels inhibited in going through the normal line management. As an example, therefore, if a member of staff has a personal grievance then it must be raised through the grievance procedure; it would not be appropriate for it to be raised through this procedure. The existence of this procedure does not prevent staff from raising concerns through their trade union if they so wish. The procedure is therefore not a route through which employees can raise concerns about mismanagement, which may arise from weak management rather than malpractice.

Aims of Policy

- To encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected;
- To provide staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns;
- To reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns in good faith without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be a mistaken.

This policy takes account of the Whistleblowing Arrangements Code of Practice issued by the British Standards Institute and the charity Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work).
This policy does not form part of an employee's contract of employment and is not intended to have contractual effect. It is provided for guidance to all members of staff at the School and the School reserves the right to amend its content at any time.

This Policy reflects the School's current practices and applies to all individuals working at all levels of the organisation, including the Governors, Head teacher, members of the Leadership Team, employees, consultants, contractors, trainees, part-time and fixed-term workers, casual and agency staff (collectively referred to as "Staff" in this policy) who are advised to familiarise themselves with its content.

What is whistleblowing?

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

- criminal activity;
- child protection and/or safeguarding concerns; * See note at the end of this policy
- sexual or physical abuse
- miscarriages of justice;
- danger to health and safety;
- damage to the environment;
- failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements;
- financial fraud or mismanagement;
- negligence;
- breach of the school's internal policies and procedures including its Code of Conduct;
- conduct likely to damage the School's reputation;
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information;
- other unethical conduct
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

A 'whistle-blower' is a person who raises a genuine concern in good faith relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of the School's activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this policy. This policy should not be used for complaints relating to Staff's own personal circumstances, such as the way you have been treated at work. In those cases, you should follow the Grievance Policy and Procedure.

If Staff are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy they should seek advice from the Head teacher and if the matter is in relation to an alleged wrongdoing by the Head teacher then Staff should seek the advice of the Designated Governor. The Central Bedfordshire fraud hotline can be contacted on 03003008182 or email: tellusaboutfraud@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Raising A Whistleblowing Concern

The School hopes that in many cases Staff will be able to raise any concerns with their Line Manager, speaking to them in person or putting the matter in writing if they prefer. They may be able to agree a way of resolving a concern quickly and effectively. In some cases, they may refer the matter to the Governing Body.

However, where the matter is more serious, or you feel that your Line Manager has not addressed your concern, or you prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, you should contact one of the following:

The Head teacher

The Governor with responsibility for Whistleblowing matters – the safeguarding governors Preb David MacGeoch. The Head teacher will arrange a meeting with the 'whistle-blower' as soon as practicable to discuss their concern. They will record sufficient details to enable the matter to be thoroughly investigated. As a minimum, the Head teacher will record the name of the employee but also indicate whether the individual wishes his or her identity to remain confidential, if possible and the nature of the concern. In some cases, it will not be possible to maintain confidentiality and the Head teacher should explain this to the employee. In such instances, the employee will have the choice of either withdrawing or agreeing to his/her identity becoming known to enable the concern to be effectively dealt with.

Staff may bring a colleague or trade union representative to any meetings under this policy who must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.
The School will take notes and produce a written summary of the concern raised and provide the 'whistle-blower' with a copy as soon as practicable after the meeting. The School will also aim to give the ''whistle-blower'' an indication of how it proposes to deal with the matter.

Confidentiality
The School hopes that Staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if a member of staff wants to raise his or her concern confidentially, the School will endeavour to keep his or her identity secret as far as possible, when following this policy and procedure. If it is necessary for anyone investigating that member of staff's concern to know the 'whistle-blower's identity, the School will discuss this with the member of staff first.
The School does not encourage Staff to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if the School cannot obtain further information. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible and have been made in good faith. Whistle-blowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to one of the contacts listed above and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality.
If an individual misuses the policy and procedure e.g. by making malicious or repeated unsubstantiated complaints against colleagues this could give rise to action under the School's Disciplinary Procedure. If the Head teacher knows or has a suspicion that an employee comes into this category then s/he will take advice from the Designated Governor who will help to determine what action should be taken.

If you are in any doubt, you can seek advice from Public Concern at Work, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are:
Public Concern at Work (Independent whistle blowing charity)
Helpline: 020 7404 6609 E-mail: whistle@pcaw.co.uk Website: www.pcaw.co.uk
The NSPCC has a Whistleblowing Advice Line, which has been developed to provide support to employees wishing to raise concerns over how child protection issues are being handled in their own or other organisations.
The NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line can be reached on **0800 028 0285**.

Concerns Against Governors
If a concern against a Governor is received, then this will be treated in the same way as any other concern. It will receive the same serious consideration. The concern will be raised by the Head teacher, with the Chair of Governors, who will decide how it should be dealt with.
If the concern is against the Chair of Governors then clearly this process cannot be followed. In such circumstances, the concern will be taken directly to the Head teacher who will decide in consultation with the Governor with responsibility for Whistleblowing matters how it should be dealt with. In normal circumstances, such a concern would be referred to the Department for Education for action.

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

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for Staff to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. If the issue is regarding an allegation against a member of staff then please refer to the 'Allegations' policy which makes procedures clear: 'The legislation imposing restrictions makes clear that "publication" of material that may lead to the identification of the teacher who is the subject of the allegation is prohibited. "Publication" includes "any speech, writing, relevant programme or other communication in whatever form, which is addressed to the public at large or any section of the public". This means that a parent who, for example, published details of the allegation on a social networking site would be in breach of the reporting restrictions (if what was published could lead to the identification of the teacher by members of the public)'.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of School Staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a service provider. The law allows Staff to raise a concern in good faith with a third party, where the member of staff reasonably believes it relates mainly to their actions or something that is legally their responsibility. However, Staff are encouraged to report such concerns internally first. Staff should contact one of the other individuals set out above for guidance.
The CBC Confidential Reporting policy should be referred to where necessary.
Further information from CBC is available from:
Charles Warboys –Director of Resources–tel: 03003006147
https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/27/about_your_council/1073/corporate_management_team_cmt

More information can be found in the CBC confidentiality (whistleblowing) policy:

http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/schools-portal/finance/audits/control.aspx
or email tellusaboutfraud@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Investigation and Outcome
Once a member of Staff has raised a concern, the School will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. The School will inform the 'whistle-blower' of the outcome of its assessment. The member of staff raising the concern may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.
In most cases, a panel of three Governors will investigate any issue. In rare cases, the School may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including Staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable the School to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing. The School will aim to keep the member of staff informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent the School from giving specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. The member of staff is required to treat any information about the investigation as strictly confidential.

If the School concludes that a 'whistle-blower' has made false allegations maliciously, in bad faith or with a view to personal gain, the 'whistle-blower' will be subject to disciplinary action according to procedures laid down in the Schools personnel handbook:

https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/96/human_resources/564/schools_personnel_handbook/3

Whilst the School cannot always guarantee the outcome a particular member of staff is seeking, the School will try to deal with the concern fairly and in an appropriate way. If a member of staff is not happy with the way in which his or her concern has been handled, he or she can raise it with one of the other key contacts outlined above.

There are no rights of appeal against any decisions taken under this procedure. However, an employee or the Head teacher will have the right to refer any particular case to the Designated Governor for review.

Any member of staff raising a concern under the procedure will be kept informed of progress by the Head teacher, including, where appropriate, the outcome. However, in certain circumstances, e.g. where disciplinary action under the School's Disciplinary Procedure has resulted from the concern, it may not be appropriate to provide specific details due to the confidentiality and sensitivity of such matters

Protection and support for 'whistle-blowers'
It is understandable that 'whistle-blowers' are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. The School aims to encourage openness and will support Staff who raise genuine concerns in good faith under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern in good faith. Detrimental treatment would include dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If a member of staff believes that he or she has suffered any such treatment, he or she should inform the Head teacher immediately. If the matter is not remedied the member of staff should raise it formally using the School's Grievance Policy and Procedure.
Staff must not threaten or retaliate against 'whistle-blowers' in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.
All Staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing. Staff are invited to comment on this policy and suggest ways in which it might be improved. Comments, suggestions and queries should be addressed to the Head teacher in the first instance.

Safeguarding
If a member of staff suspects a serious safeguarding issue that they feel that the Head teacher is not taking seriously, or that they believe there is a serious safeguarding issue involving the Head teacher, they should, in the first instance, contact the Designated Governor, Preb David McGeoch.
This policy should be read in conjunction with the safeguarding policy, the statement for managing allegations against school staff and the Central Bedfordshire whistleblowing policy : https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/98/school_finance/545/internal_audits

It will be reviewed every 2 years. Next review due February 2028.

Policy endorsed by the Governing Body on February 2026.

Signed: Chair of the Governing Body

Equal opportunities
All young people will be treated equally, regardless of race, disability, creed or gender.
The policy will be applied regardless of culture, faith or belief.

Appendix 1
Don't think what if I'm wrong – think what if I'm right
Reasons for whistle blowing:

- Each individual has a responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour.
- To prevent the problem worsening or widening.
- To protect or reduce risks to others.
- To prevent becoming implicated yourself.

What stops people from whistle blowing:

- Starting a chain of events that spiral.
- Disrupting the work or project.
- Fear of getting it wrong.
- Fear of repercussions or damaging careers.
- Fear of not being believed.

How to raise a concern:

- You should voice your concerns, suspicions or uneasiness as soon as you feel you can. The earlier a concern is expressed the easier and sooner action can be taken.
- Try to pinpoint exactly what practice is concerning you and why.
- Approach your immediate manager, Head teacher, or the Designated Child Safeguarding Officer.
- If your concern is about your immediate manager/ Head teacher, or you feel you need to take it to someone outside the school contact The Local Authority
- Make sure you get a satisfactory response – don't let matters rest.
- You should then put your concerns in writing, outlining the background and history, giving names, dates and places where you can.
- A member of staff is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation but will need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the concern.
- Head teacher/ Policies/Whistleblowing policy 2016

What happens next?
You should be given information on the nature and progress of any enquiries. Your employer has a responsibility to protect you from harassment or victimisation.
No action will be taken against you if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith.
Allegations made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain will be seen in a different light and disciplinary action may be taken.

Self-reporting
There may be occasions where a member of staff has a personal difficulty, or perhaps a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging on their professional competence. Staff have a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their line manager so professional and personal support can be offered to the member of staff concerned. Whilst such reporting will remain confidential in most situations, this cannot be guaranteed where personal

difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children.

Further advice and support

It is recognised that whistle blowing can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support is available from your line manager, and/or your professional trade union.

Further Information:

Charles Warboys – Director of Resources

TEL: 0300 300 6147 EMAIL: charles.warboys@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Clint Horne – Head of Internal Audit and Risk

TEL: 0300 300 4758 EMAIL: Clint.Horne@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

24 Hours CBC Fraud Hotline

TEL: 0300 300 8182 EMAIL: tellusaboutfraud@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Monitoring Officer EMAIL: monitoringofficer@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Marcel Coiffait - Chief Executive

TEL: 0300 300 5637 EMAIL: marcel.coiffait@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Janet Cox - Assistant Director – Human Resources

TEL: 0300 300 6794 EMAIL: janet.cox@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

NSPCC National Whistleblowing Helpline for employees

TEL: 0808 800 5000 EMAIL: help@nspcc.org.uk

WEBSITE: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/dedicated-helplines/whistleblowing-advice-line