



St Edward's
School

Unity - Achievement - Faith

Whistleblowing Policy & Reporting Procedure 2021-2024

Reviewed and Approved by Pay Committee

On: 29th June 2021

Reviewed and Ratified at the St Edward's Full Governing Body

On: 15th July 2021

Next review date: Summer 2024

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS POLICY?

The School is committed to high standards of conduct and to compliance with legal obligations and good practice. It wants malpractice to be pointed out and dealt with and expects its employees, and others who help to deliver its services, to help with that. The Governors support this commitment for school employees. In line with that commitment, the School and the Governors encourage employees and others with serious concerns about any aspect of the Local Authority's or the Schools work to come forward and voice those concerns.

This policy encourages employees to raise genuine, serious concerns as "whistle-blowers" to the Governors or 'regulators' (the Local Government Ombudsman, External Audit, Standards Board for England, or Police), and provides a procedure for doing so. The School and Governors will take any action necessary in proportion to the nature of the complaint. The Policy explains how those who make whistleblowing disclosures reasonably and in the public interest will be protected from detriment such as victimisation or discipline.

The policy complies with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and the Enterprise & Regulation Reform Act (ERRA) 2013 and has the support of the relevant trade unions.

WHO IS PROTECTED / COVERED BY THE POLICY?

You are protected if you work for the School as:

- an employee
- an agency employee
- a trainee
- a worker who provides services on behalf of the School

The policy does **NOT** apply to raising grievances about an employee's personal situation and thus, does not replace existing procedures for personal differences or conflicts (for instance complaints about breaches of an employee's own contract of employment should be raised as a grievance). If you have concerns in this area you should consult the School's Grievance Policy or your immediate manager, or Human Resources who can advise you about the Grievance and other more appropriate procedures. You cannot raise the same issue under both the Whistleblowing Policy and another procedure.

Members of the Council may refer whistle-blowing concerns in accordance with this policy on behalf of themselves or their constituents if asked to do so by a third party. However, Members may not rely on the use of this policy as an alternative to raising any questions or concerns they may have that should otherwise be managed through the proper democratic processes of the Council, e.g. Overview & Scrutiny Committees, or call in procedures or the Standards Committee.

Services to Schools, Academies and other Educational Establishments

Councillors raising whistle-blowing concerns as a result of matters that have come to their attention as serving Members of the Council and in their capacity as a Councillor may not rely on this policy to remain anonymous in any investigation that may then follow.

The relevant status and legitimacy of Member referrals under the policy further to these distinctions will be determined by the Chief Finance Officer and Head of Human Resources in consultation with the Chief Executive. The Monitoring Officer will be consulted in that decision if relating to questions regarding the applicability of alternative democratic processes. The decision of officers will be final.

WHAT KINDS OF DISCLOSURES ARE COVERED?

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 specifies 'Qualifying Disclosures' as follows:

- a criminal offence
- a breach of a legal obligation
- a miscarriage of justice
- a danger to the health and safety of any individual
- damage to the environment
- deliberate covering up of information tending to show any of the above five matters

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THE WHISTLEBLOWER?

If you make a disclosure to someone within the School / Local Authority, you are expected to:

- reasonably believe that your disclosure is in the public interest
- reasonably believe that the disclosure is correct; and
- not make the disclosure for personal gain

DISCLOSURES TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS

If you are going to make a disclosure it should be made to the School / Council first as this Policy encourages employee to raise genuine and serious concerns to the Council or its regulators. However, if you feel unable to use the procedure described in this Policy the disclosure should be made to a prescribed person, so that your employment rights are protected.

If you decide you cannot go to the School / Local Authority with the disclosure first, you should contact a prescribed person or body.

Ofsted have published the details of what they will do after being informed of certain concerns about children's social care services:- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whistleblowing-about-childrens-social-care-services-to-ofsted>

FALSE ALLEGATIONS

Failure to comply with the expectations of paragraph 6 & 7, including, making a frivolous or malicious disclosure may result in disciplinary action being taken. A qualifying disclosure that is not confirmed by subsequent legislation will not lead to any action, penalty or detriment against the person making the allegation or disclosure.

However, where employees or other individuals knowingly make malicious or false accusations or allegations, these will be treated as an act of gross misconduct which is incompatible with their duties to the School/Local Authority.

HOW IS THE WHISTLE-BLOWER PROTECTED?

The law provides protection for workers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters. These are called 'qualifying disclosures' which are in the public interest and are detailed in paragraph 5.

If you reasonably believe that your disclosure is made in the public interest and you comply with the expectations of paragraph 6 & 7, you will be protected from any detriment as a result of making a disclosure. In particular, you will be protected from harassment or victimisation by a colleague.

Should it not be possible to resolve a concern without revealing your identity, we will discuss with you what steps we will take to protect you from unfair treatment or detriment. This may include agreement to alternative working arrangements during any consequential investigation into the allegations. However, if you want your identity to remain confidential we will where appropriate, respect your decision and not reveal your identity without your consent unless this is unavoidable/deemed necessary. It should be recognised that if there are reasonable grounds for believing the allegations to be true the public interest will rarely be served by taking no action.

Anonymous disclosures will be considered to the extent that it is reasonable and practicable to do so. It is often difficult to attach equal weight to anonymous allegations due to the investigator's difficulty in confirming or following up evidence. If you are unsure whether an incident should be reported under this policy you may wish to discuss the matter initially with your trade union representative, line manager, Headteacher, HR, Internal Audit, or one of the Statutory Officers. **If the concern is with regard to the Headteacher, you must approach the Chair of Governors directly.**

PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH A DISCLOSURE

Disclosures will be dealt with under the following stages. Not all disclosures will follow the full sequence of Stages, subject to the particular circumstances of each case. The action taken by the School will be reasonable and proportionate, depending on the nature of the concern.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

If an individual is aware or concerned about misconduct taking place inside the organisation that he or she thinks may damage or undermine the interests of the wider public they are advised in the first instance to share the details with their line manager to see if it can be resolved without a formal procedure. This may be done orally or in writing.

When making a disclosure, give as much information as possible about:

- the nature of the problem
- the background (with dates if possible)
- who is involved
- the reasons you are concerned

The Line Manager should decide on the basis of the information so provided, how the matter can be resolved. This may include informal resolution or formal consideration. The outcome will be explained to the whistle-blower.

If the individual is unable to raise the matter with his or her line manager they are advised to speak to the Headteacher or Human Resources who should consider whether the matter can be resolved informally as set out above or referred for formal consideration as detailed below.

Stage 2 – Formal Disclosure

If the individual feels unable to discuss their concerns with any of the above, or does not accept that the response at the informal stage is sufficient, or it is believed that senior management is involved in the

matter of concern, a formal disclosure may be made to one of the Statutory Officers (Monitoring Officer, Head of Legal & Democratic Services, Head of Financial Services or the Chief Executive). **will be made to the Governing Body.**

At this stage, the person making the disclosure (the 'whistle-blower'), will be asked whether he or she wishes their identity to be disclosed and will be reassured with regard to protection from possible reprisals or victimisation.

He or she may also be asked to consider making a written or verbal statement.

In the latter case, a brief summary of the interview will be made which will be agreed by both parties.

Details of the disclosure will be considered by the Statutory Officer or his representative, including any recommendations for further action.

Stage 3 – Initial Response to a Formal Disclosure

The Statutory Officer or representative who has received the disclosure will take any necessary urgent action and then decide how to respond to the disclosure, having regard to all the circumstances, including the evidence available. Preliminary inquiries may be made to help decide how best to respond in the public interest. Depending on the nature of the issue raised, the response, in the judgement of the Statutory Officer, may be one or more of the following:

- A management investigation
- A disciplinary investigation in accordance with School Policies
- A referral for consideration under another School procedure
- Referral to the Police
- Referral to External Audit
- An independent investigation
- Amend procedures
- Take no action due to lack of sufficient evidence
- Non-relevance/ significance to this Policy

The whistle-blower will be notified of the intended response to the disclosure and the reasons for it.

Stage 4 – Management Investigation

Where the decision has been made to carry out a Management Investigation, a senior manager or other person will be appointed as an investigating officer.

He or she will agree terms of reference with the Statutory Officer or representative and identify a date by when the investigation will be completed.

The investigation will be carried out under the strictest confidentiality. The investigation is essentially a 'fact finding' exercise, to establish what further action may be necessary and make recommendations accordingly.

The Investigating Officer will have regard to the human rights of any individuals affected by the investigation. The investigation may serve as the information gathering part of the School's disciplinary procedure. In such cases this will be made clear to any people who may be subject to such investigation and the usual right to be represented will be made clear.

Normal support arrangements e.g. Counselling/Chaplaincy will be available as required, to the whistleblower, accused and any others affected. **Counselling referral services not currently available.**

Stage 5 – Responding to Management Investigation

The Statutory Officer or representative will decide whether any further action is necessary as a result of the investigation report and recommendations. If the result of the investigation is that there is a case to be answered by any individual, the recognised procedure will be followed.

The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and the employee/councillor raising the concern will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information may be sought from the person raising the concern.

Where there is no case to answer, but the whistleblower held a genuine belief and acted in accordance with paragraphs 6 & 7 of this policy, the School and Governors will ensure that they suffer no reprisals or victimisation, as far as is reasonably practicable. Considerations will include the Council and Governor's duty to provide a healthy and safe working environment for all.

Where it is established that false allegations have been made and the whistleblower has not acted in accordance with paragraphs 6 & 7 of this policy, disciplinary actions may be taken against the whistleblower.

Stage 6 – Confirmation of the Outcome

So far as legally possible and subject to rights of confidentiality, the whistleblower will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and how the matter has been resolved. If he or she is dissatisfied with this response the whistleblower may take the matter further with the prescribed persons or organisations where justified under this procedure.

The outcome of the investigation will be recorded on the confidential investigation log maintained by Internal Audit.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTING THIS POLICY

The responsibility for ensuring that the School adheres to this Policy rests with all line managers. In schools this responsibility is also shared by the Governing Body.

How will the Policy be monitored?

The Governors and the School has a responsibility for registering the nature of all concerns raised and to record the outcome. The School's Internal Audit Section and Human Resources will jointly produce an annual report to the Audit Committee, which identifies any patterns of concern and assesses the effectiveness of the Policy.

Review

This procedure will be kept under review and any amendments will be subject to consultation with staff representatives.