



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 only for the purpose of raising concerns about wrongdoing which are in the public interest. It 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, if a member of staff has a personal grievance, then it must be raised through the Grievance procedure (found in the Staff Handbook). It would not be appropriate for it to be raised through this procedure.

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 mistaken.

This policy takes account of the Whistleblowing Arrangements Code of Practice issued by the British Standards Institute and 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, Headteacher, members of the Senior Leadership Team, employees, consultants, contractors and trainees (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
- 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;
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

A 'whistleblower' 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 procedures.

If staff are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy, they should seek advice from the Headteacher. If the matter is in relation to an alleged wrongdoing by the Headteacher, then staff should seek the advice of the Designated Governor – Kelly Robinson - on krobinson@stepbystepschool.org.uk.

Staff are protected under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 should they wish to invoke whistle blowing procedures. Further guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-public-interest-disclosure-act/the-public-interest-disclosure-act>

Staff may also contact the charity [Protect](#) - formerly Public Concern at Work - which provides free confidential advice to workers who have concerns about wrongdoing in the workplace. The charity can be contacted by telephone on 020 7404 6609.

Appendix 1 provides a summary of what you can do if you have concerns regarding work based practice.

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. Staff reporting concerns should consider whether the incident was illegal, breached school procedures, put people in danger, or was an attempt to cover up any such activity. 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 Headteacher**
- **The Governor with responsibility for whistleblowing**

The Headteacher will arrange a meeting with the 'whistleblower' 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 Headteacher 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 Headteacher 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.

If it becomes apparent the concern is not of a whistle-blowing nature, the recipient should handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy/procedure (see page 5, linked policies).

The school will take notes and produce a written summary of the concern raised and provide the 'whistleblower' with a copy as soon as practicable after the meeting. The school will also aim to give the 'whistleblower' 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, in so far as it is possible to do so when following this policy and procedure. If it is necessary for anyone investigating that member of staff's concern to know the 'whistleblower'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. Whistleblowers 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, for example, by making malicious or repeated unsubstantiated complaints against colleagues, this could give rise to action under

the school's Disciplinary Procedure. If the Headteacher 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.

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 Headteacher 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 Headteacher 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.

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 'whistleblower' 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 the Headteacher will investigate any issue. In rare cases the school may refer the case to a governor panel, or appoint an external investigator 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 'whistleblower' has made false allegations maliciously, in bad faith or with a view to personal gain, the 'whistleblower' will be subject to disciplinary action under the school's Disciplinary Procedures.

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 Headteacher 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 Headteacher, including, where appropriate, the final 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 ‘whistleblowers’

It is understandable that ‘whistleblowers’ 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 Headteacher immediately. If the matter is not remedied, the member of staff should raise it formally using the school’s Grievance Procedure.

Staff must not threaten or retaliate against ‘whistleblowers’ 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.

Safeguarding

If a member of staff suspects that there is a serious safeguarding issue which they feel that the Headteacher is not taking seriously, or they believe there is a serious safeguarding issue involving the Headteacher, they should in the first instance contact the Designated Governor or the East Sussex Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

Links with other policies/procedures

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Staff Handbook
- Staff Code of Conduct

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 which spirals.
- 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, Headteacher, or the Designated Safeguarding Lead if the concern is relating to a welfare concern.
- If your concern is about your Headteacher, or you feel you need to take it to someone outside the school, contact The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on 07825 782793.
- 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.

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, School Business Manager, Headteacher or Health Assured.

Staff may also contact the charity [Protect](#) - formerly Public Concern at Work - which provides free confidential advice to workers who have concerns about wrongdoing in the workplace. The charity can be contacted by telephone on 020 7404 6609.

Step by Step school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

Policy	Whistle Blowing
Statutory requirement?	Yes
Approved	May 2020
Responsible Officer	GA
Responsible Governor/s	KR
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