



WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Intent

Shirley High School is committed to open and honest communication and ensuring that we demonstrate our values in all actions applied by the school to the highest possible standards in integrity – we will always treat whistleblowing as a serious matter.

In line with the school's commitment to openness, probity and accountability, members of staff are encouraged to report concerns. This policy will work to ensure that, if an employee sees or suspects that something is wrong, they will raise this with the school. This is known as "blowing the whistle" – a phrase that is used throughout this policy and should be viewed as a positive action of speaking up.

This policy seeks to ensure that any member of staff who suspects malpractice knows how to raise concerns and what procedures are in place to deal with the concern.

Where this policy necessitates personal or special category data to be processed, it will be done so in accordance with the school's Data Protection Policy. This policy will not be confused with the procedure on dealing with harassment at work or the school's Grievance Policy and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

This policy will:

- Give confidence to members of staff when raising concerns about conduct or practice that is potentially illegal, corrupt, improper, unsafe or unethical, or which amounts to malpractice or is inconsistent with school standards and policies.
- Provide members of school staff with avenues to raise concerns.
- Ensure that members of staff receive a response to the concerns they have raised and feedback on any action taken.
- Offer assurance that members of staff are protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistleblowing action undertaken in good faith and within the meaning of the PIDA.

Under this policy, any of the following can raise a concern:

- Employees of the school
- Voluntary workers working with the school
- Trainees, such as student teachers

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- ESFA (2023) 'Academy trust handbook 2023'
- DfE (2023) 'Keeping children safe in education 2023'
- GOV.UK (2012) 'Whistleblowing for employees'
- Sir Robert Francis (2015) 'Freedom to speak up report'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Records Management Policy
- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Grievance Policy



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- Virtual Meeting Policy

2. The Public Interest Disclosure Act

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) protects employees who “blow the whistle” where the employee reasonably believes that the disclosure falls within the remit of the prescribed person or body, and that the information and any allegations are substantially true. Disclosures made under this procedure will be monitored for statistical purposes as required under the PIDA. The details of any disclosure will remain confidential.

The principal is the first point of contact for whistleblowing queries. If the allegation is related to the principal, the concern will be raised with the chair of governors.

Any member of the school community or the general public is able to “blow the whistle”; however, the PIDA only protects employees. The Non-employees section of this policy includes further details on how whistleblowing affects non-employees.

3. Definitions

Whistleblowing is when an employee reports suspected wrongdoing, or ‘qualifying disclosures’, at work to their employer.

As outlined by the PIDA, **qualifying disclosures** pertain to when any of the following takes place:

- A criminal offence has been committed, is likely to be committed or is being committed
- A person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject
- A miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur
- The health or safety of any individual has been, is being or is likely to be endangered
- The environment has been, is being or is likely to be damaged
- Information tending to show any matter falling within any of the preceding points has been, is being or is likely to be deliberately concealed

In the public interests means that an individual acted outside of their own personal interest – they acted for more than personal gain. It is not necessary for the disclosure to be of interest to the entire public. The following considerations are often used as a test to establish whether something is within the scope of public interest:

- The number of people in the group whose interests the disclosure served
- The nature of the interests and the extent by which individuals are affected by the wrongdoing disclosed
- The nature of the wrongdoing disclosed
- The identity of the alleged wrongdoer

Blacklisting refers to an individual who is being refused work because they are viewed as a whistleblower.

4. Roles and responsibilities

The governing board will be responsible for:

- Establishing and agreeing to the whistleblowing procedure.
- Ensuring the agreed whistleblowing procedure is published on the trust’s website.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and undertaking any necessary reviews, e.g. in relation to good practice recommendations or changes in legislation.
- Ensuring all members of the school community have access to this policy.
- Investigating, in liaison with the headteacher, any concerns that are raised.



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- Ensuring this policy provides an open and transparent framework where employees of the school can raise their concerns.
- Taking the necessary action against members of staff following an investigation into any alleged malpractice.
- Ensuring that the minutes of the governing board include a record of the school's whistleblowing arrangements and who, both internally and externally, staff members should report concerns to.
- Appointing one governor and one member of staff to act as points of contact for staff members when reporting concerns.
- Ensuring that all concerns raised by whistleblowers are responded to properly and fairly.
- Ensuring that whistleblowing forms part of the staff behaviour policy as part of a wider approach to having in place appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures.

The Principal will be responsible for:

- Ensuring all members of staff have read and understood this policy.
- Receiving, investigating and responding to any concerns that have been raised by school staff.
- Being the first point of contact regarding whistleblowing.
- The chair of governors will be responsible for receiving any concerns raised about the headteacher.
- All members of staff will be responsible for:
- Raising any concerns that meet the definitions in the 'Definitions' section of this policy.
- Being truthful and reasonable with any concerns that they have.
- Not raising malicious or unfounded concerns.

The chair of governors will be responsible for receiving any concerns raised about the principal.

All members of staff will be responsible for:

- Raising any concerns that meet the definitions in the [Definitions](#) section of this policy.
- Being truthful and reasonable with any concerns that they have.
- Not raising malicious or unfounded concerns.

Harassment or Victimisation

The Governing Body 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 Body will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect employees when they raise a concern in good faith.

5. Non-employees

The PIDA and the Employment Rights Act 1996 do not protect non-employees as far as whistleblowing is concerned. Irrespective of this, the school will not allow harassment, dismissal or exclusion for any non-employee who raises a genuine concern.

Where an individual feels that they have been unfairly treated following blowing the whistle, they should make a complaint under the school's Complaints Procedures Policy.

Governors are not employees and, while they are responsible for ensuring there is a whistleblowing procedure in place, they are not protected under the PIDA.

6. Good practice principles

The school will implement the core whistleblowing principles, as outlined in the 'Freedom to speak up report', to ensure that whistleblowing procedures are fair, clear and consistent.



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The school will implement a **culture of change** by ensuring the following principles are reflected in our ethos and values – there will be a culture:

- Of safety in the school.
- Where people feel confident with raising concerns
- Free from bullying.
- Of visible leadership
- Of valuing staff.
- Of reflective practice.

By providing a clear procedure for mediating and resolving cases, as outlined in the [Procedure](#) section of this policy, the school will ensure that all cases are efficiently handled. This procedure includes:

- How to raise and report concerns.
- How investigations will be conducted.
- How the school will mediate and resolve disputes.

The school will implement **measures to support good practice** by ensuring adherence to the following principles:

- Offering relevant training to staff
- Providing the necessary support to staff
- Providing support to staff who are seeking alternative employment
- Being transparent
- Being accountable
- Conducting an external review of any concerns raised, where necessary
- Undertaking regulatory action as required
- Informing staff what protection is available to them if they report someone
- Ensuring that alternative whistleblowing channels are in place for members of staff who feel unable to raise an issue with their employer

The school will ensure there are **particular support measures in place for vulnerable groups** by adhering to the following principles:

- Ensuring non-permanent staff are taught, and receive training on, the same principles as permanent staff
- Ensuring trainees are subject to all the safeguarding and whistleblowing principles
- Ensuring staff from ethnic minorities are supported, as they may feel particularly vulnerable when raising concerns
- Ensuring staff are empowered and protected, enabling them to raise concerns freely

Procedure for raising a concern

- 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, s/he should approach the Principal or Chair of Governors. An employee (including the Principal and members of the leadership team) can by-pass the direct management line and the Governing Body if s/he feels the overall management and Governing Body of a school is engaged in an improper course of action.
- 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 s/he is particularly concerned about the situation. If an employee does not feel able to put the concern in writing, s/he should telephone or meet the appropriate person. It is important that, however



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the concern is raised, the employee makes it clear that s/he is raising the issue via the whistle-blowing procedure.

- The earlier an employee expresses the concern, the easier it is to take action.
- Although an employee is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, s/he will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for the concern.
- In some instances it may be appropriate for an employee to ask the trade union to raise a matter on the employee's behalf.
- 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.
- Appropriate whistleblowing procedures will be put in place for concerns about poor or unsafe practice and potential failures in the school's safeguarding system to be raised with the SLT.
- If a member of staff feels like they are unable to raise a safeguarding-related concern with the school, or feels that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, they are able to contact the NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline on 0800 028 0285 or the LADO.

The investigation

- A senior manager may be informed by an employee about concern(s) and that s/he is "blowing the whistle" within the procedure in person, or in writing, or over the phone.
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- The senior manager should respond immediately by arranging to meet with the employee to discuss the concern(s) as soon as possible.

Stage One:

At the initial meeting the senior manager should establish that:

- there is genuine cause and sufficient grounds for the concern; and
- the concern has been appropriately raised via the Whistle-blowing Policy.

The senior manager should ask the employee to put their concern(s) in writing, if s/he has not already done so. If the employee is unable to do this the senior manager will take down a written summary of his/her concern/s and provide him/her with a copy after the meeting. The senior manager should make notes of the discussions with the employee. The employee's letter and/or senior manager's notes should make it clear that the employee is raising the issue via the whistle-blowing 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.

The employee should be asked to date and sign their letter and/or the notes of any discussion. The senior manager should 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.

Stage Two:

Following the initial meeting with the employee, the senior manager should consult with the Principal or Chair of Governors to determine whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. A record should be made of the decisions and/or agreed actions.



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It may be necessary, with anonymous allegations, to consider whether it is possible to take any further action. When making this decision, senior managers 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.

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 external auditor;
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

Senior Managers should have a working knowledge and understanding of other school policies and procedures, e.g. disciplinary, equal opportunities, child protection, to ensure that concerns raised by employees are addressed via the appropriate procedure/process.

Stage Three

Within ten working days of a concern being received, the manager receiving the concern must write to the employee:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how they propose to deal with the matter;
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response; and/or
- telling the employee whether any initial enquiries have been made; and
- telling the employee whether further investigations will take place, and if not why not; and/or
- letting the employee know when s/he will receive further details if the situation is not yet resolved; and
- providing the employee with details of whom to contact should s/he be dissatisfied with this response

Raising Concerns outside of school

The aim of this policy is 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 his/her 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 Body's response, the manager should ensure that s/he is made aware with whom s/he may raise the matter externally:

- 'Public Concern at Work' <http://www.pcaw.co.uk> tel no 0207 404 6609;
- recognised trade union;
- the external academy auditor
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations;
- a solicitor;
- borough LADO



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The manager should stress to the employee that if s/he chooses 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.

7. What the school asks of whistleblowers

The purpose of this policy is to enable individuals to raise concerns in confidence, without any fear of reprisal. It is important that whistleblowers:

- Do not talk about the concern outside the school unless it is to report the concern through the proper external channels, e.g. the LA.
- Declare any personal interest in the matter, as the policy is designed to be used in the interest of the public and not for individual matters.

8. Appeal process

If no action is to be taken and/or the individual is not satisfied with the way the matter has been handled, they can make a complaint under the school's Complaints Procedure Policy.

9. Unfair treatment

An individual can take a case to an employment tribunal if they feel that they have been treated unfairly as a result of whistleblowing. Further information can be sought from the Citizen's Advice Bureau, the whistleblowing charity Protect, or from an individual's trade union.

Any claims of unfair dismissal need be made within three months of the investigation ending.

10. Monitoring and review

The governing board will review this policy as stated in this policy, ensuring that all procedures are up-to-date – the next review date for this policy is November 2024

Any changes made to this policy will be communicated to all members of staff.

We want all at SHS to believe in and maintain the values of our school:

