



# WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

*This policy refers to both Wellington Senior School and Wellington Prep School*

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## **1. What is Whistleblowing?**

In this policy 'Whistleblowing' means the reporting by employees of suspected misconduct, illegal acts or failure to act within the School.

The aim of this Policy is to encourage employees and others who have serious concerns about any aspect of the School's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the School. 'Whistleblowing' is viewed by the School as a positive act that can make a valuable contribution to the School's efficiency and long-term success. It is not disloyal to colleagues or the School to speak up. The School is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of service and the highest possible ethical standards in public life and in all of its practices. To help achieve these standards it encourages freedom of speech.

If you are considering raising a concern you should read this Policy first. It explains:

- the type of issues that can be raised;
- how the person raising a concern will be protected from victimisation and harassment;
- how to raise a concern; and
- what the School will do.

If you are unsure whether to use this Policy or want independent advice at any stage, you may contact the independent charity Public Concern at Work tel: 020 7404 6609. Their advisers can give you free confidential advice on how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.

## **2. What is the aim of the Policy and when does it apply?**

### **2.1. Aims of the Policy**

The Policy is designed to ensure that you can raise your concerns about wrongdoing or malpractice within the School without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination, disadvantage or dismissal.

It is also intended to encourage and enable you to raise serious concerns within the School rather than ignoring a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.

This Policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns at the earliest opportunity and to question and act upon concerns about practice;
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken;
- ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied;
- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have made any disclosure in good faith.

## 2.2. Scope of this Policy

**This Policy is intended to enable those who become aware of wrongdoing in Wellington School affecting some other person or service, to report their concerns at the earliest opportunity so that they can be properly investigated.**

The Whistleblowing Policy is not intended to replace existing procedures:

- if your concern relates to your own treatment as an employee, you should initially speak with the Director of HR. It may be necessary to raise the issue through the existing grievance or harassment procedures.
- if a parent has a concern, it should be raised under the Complaints Policy.
- general concerns may be raised in accordance with the Low Level Concerns Policy, which is annexed to the Staff Code of Conduct.

## 2.3. Who can raise a concern under this Policy?

The Policy applies to all:

- employees of Wellington Senior School or Wellington Prep School;
- employees of contractors working for the School, for example, agency staff, builders and drivers;
- employees of suppliers;
- those providing services under a contract or other agreement with the School in their own premises;
- volunteers working with the School.

## 2.4. What should be reported?

Any serious concerns that you have about service provision or the conduct of officers or members of the School or others acting on behalf of the School that:

- make you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards;
- are not in keeping with the School's constitution and policies;
- fall below established standards of practice; or
- are improper behaviour.

These might relate to:

- conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law (a criminal offence has been committed or failing to comply with any other legal obligation);
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice;
- racial, sexual, disability or other discrimination;
- health and safety of the public and/or other employees;
- damage to the environment;
- unauthorised use of public funds or other assets;
- possible fraud and corruption;
- neglect or abuse;
- other unethical conduct.

This list is not exhaustive.

### **3. Protecting the Whistleblower**

#### **3.1. Your legal rights**

This policy has been written to take account of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 which protects workers making disclosures about certain matters of concern, when those disclosures are made in accordance with the Act's provisions and in good faith.

The Act makes it unlawful for the School to dismiss anyone or allow them to be victimised on the basis that they have made an appropriate lawful disclosure in accordance with the Act.

Rarely, a case might arise where it is the employee that has participated in the action causing concern. In such a case it is in the employee's interest to come into the open as soon as possible. The School cannot promise not to act against such an employee, but the fact that they came forward may be taken into account.

#### **3.2. Harassment or victimisation**

The School is committed to good practice and high standards and to being supportive of you as an employee.

The School recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If you honestly and reasonably believe what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer, your colleagues and those for whom you are providing a service.

The School will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of a whistleblower (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith and will treat this as a serious disciplinary offence which will be dealt with under the disciplinary rules and procedure.

#### **3.3. Support to you**

Throughout this process:

- you will be given full support from Senior Management;
- your concerns will be taken seriously; and
- the School will do all it can to help you throughout the investigation.

If appropriate, the School will consider temporarily re-deploying you for the period of the investigation.

For those who are not School employees, the School will endeavour to provide appropriate advice and support wherever possible.

#### **3.4. Confidentiality**

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if that is your wish. If disciplinary or other proceedings follow the investigation, it may not be possible to take action as a result of your disclosure without your help, so you may be asked to come forward as a witness. If you agree to this, you will be offered advice and support.

### 3.5. Anonymous allegations

This Policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. If you do not tell us who you are it will be much more difficult for us to protect your position or to give you feedback. This Policy is not ideally suited to concerns raised anonymously.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but they may be considered at the discretion of the School. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the seriousness of the issue raised;
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources.

### 3.6. Untrue allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith and reasonably believing it to be true, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, the School will recognise your concern and you have nothing to fear. If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, appropriate action that could include disciplinary action may be taken.

## 4. Raising a concern

### 4.1. Who should you raise your concern with?

This will depend on who or what the concern relates to and the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved. **If your concern relates to child protection, please refer to the Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Procedures for guidance on the disclosure process.**

For all other concerns, you should normally raise them with:

- Your Line Manager;
- Director of HR;
- Another member of the Leadership Team or the Headmaster.

The address for correspondence is Wellington School, South Street, Wellington, Somerset, TA21 8NT.

If, exceptionally, the concern is about the Headmaster of the School your concern should be raised with the Chair of Governors who will decide how the investigation will proceed. This may include external investigation. Correspondence in this regard should be sent to the Clerk to Governors.

### 4.2. How to raise a concern

You may raise your concern by telephone, in person or in writing. The earlier you express your concern, the easier it is to take action. You will need to provide the following information:

- the nature of your concern and why you believe it to be true;
- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates).

Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of your suspicion, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that you are acting in good faith and there are reasonable grounds for your concern.

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns.

You may invite your trade union, professional association representative or a friend to be present for support during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

## **5. What the School will do**

The School will respond to your concerns as quickly as possible. Do not forget that testing your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

The overriding principle for the School will be the public interest. In order to be fair to all employees, including those who may be wrongly or mistakenly accused, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

The investigation may need to be carried out under terms of strict confidentiality, i.e. by not informing the subject of the complaint until (or if) it becomes necessary to do so. In certain cases, however, such as allegations of ill treatment of others, suspension from work may have to be considered immediately. Protection of others is paramount in all cases.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by management or through the disciplinary/grievance process;
- be referred to the police;
- be referred to the external auditor;
- be referred to the Local Authority and put through established child protection/abuse procedures;
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the person investigating your concern will write to you:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how the School proposes to deal with the matter;
- supplying you with information on support mechanisms;
- telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

Please be aware that safeguarding concerns will be dealt with in line with the Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Procedures.

The amount of contact between you and the officers considering the issues will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of your information. It is likely that you will be interviewed to ensure that your disclosure is fully understood.

Any meeting can be arranged away from your workplace, if you wish, and a union or professional association representative or a friend may accompany you in support.

The School will do what it can to minimise any difficulties that you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are asked to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the School will arrange for you to receive appropriate advice and support.

You need to be assured that your disclosure has been properly addressed. Unless there are any legal reasons why this cannot be done, you will be kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation.

## **6. How the matter can be taken further:**

This Policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within the School to raise concerns. The School hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not, and you feel it is right to take the matter outside the School, the following are the School's prescribed contacts:

- your trade union;
- the police;
- other relevant bodies prescribed by legislation.

If you raise concerns outside the School you should ensure that it is to one of these prescribed contacts. A public disclosure to anyone else could take you outside the protection of the Public Interest Disclosure Act and of this Policy.

You should not disclose information that is confidential to the School or to anyone else, such as a client or contractor of the School, except to those included in the list of prescribed contacts.

This Policy does not prevent you from taking your own legal advice.

## **7. Review of the Policy**

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Director of HR.

## **8. Corporate Recording and Monitoring**

The Director of HR will maintain a corporate register containing all whistleblowing concerns that are brought to her attention. All officers allocated to look into a concern must ensure the Director of HR is provided with sufficient details for the corporate register.

The Director of HR will review the corporate register and produce an annual report for the Governing Board at the end of each calendar year if there is anything to report.

The report will include a summary of the concerns raised, to which department they related, the post to which the concerns related (if not confidential) and any lessons learned. The report will not include any employee names. The aim of this is to ensure that:

- the School and/or the relevant department learns from mistakes and does not repeat them; and
- there is a consistent of approach across the departments.

The corporate register will be available for inspection by external audit, after removing any confidential details.