



P19 – Whistleblowing policy

Policy Owner: Chief Operating Officer

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Version Control Information

Reason for Amendment	Role	Date	Main Changes
Annual review	Chief People Officer	Michaelmas 2024	Updated to new template Review on reporting lines to take into account the Group structure.
Out of cycle review	Chief Operating Officer	Lent 2025	Review to ensure relevant to SCH References to CPO removed and replaced with COO

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1. Aims

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 to prevent such situations occurring, and to address them when they do occur. The aim of this policy is:

- 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 without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

2. Legislation

This policy is informed by the following legislation:

- Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998)

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 St Dunstan's Education Group

The governing body has ultimate responsibility for ensuring the Group (as defined below) has robust whistleblowing procedures but delegates day-to-day responsibility to the Head of St Dunstan's Education Group (the Head) and the St Dunstan's Executive Team (DET).

The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Governing Body has a duty to receive and ensure the proper investigation of whistleblowing concerns addressed to them.

The Safeguarding Governor is responsible for receiving and ensuring the proper investigation of whistleblowing concerns related to safeguarding addressed to them.

3.2 The Head of St Dunstan's Education Group

The Head is responsible for receiving and ensuring the proper investigation of whistleblowing concerns addressed to them.

3.3 St Dunstan's Executive Team

Members of DET (COO, CFO, heads of the schools) are responsible for receiving and ensuring the proper investigation of whistleblowing concerns addressed to them.

The heads of the schools are specifically responsible for receiving and ensuring the proper investigation of whistleblowing concerns addressed to them relating to the conduct of a member of staff towards pupils at their school.

3.4 Line managers

Line managers are responsible for receiving and ensuring the proper investigation of whistleblowing concerns addressed to them.

3.5 Staff

All staff are responsible for raising concerns related to suspected malpractice, wrongdoing or dangers at work in line with this procedure.

4. Whistleblowing policy

4.1 Introduction

This policy and procedure reflects our current practices and applies to every individual working for the Group, including its subsidiaries, irrespective of their status or position in the organisation. It therefore includes the Head of the Group, members of DET, senior and middle leaders, teachers, professional services' staff, consultants, contractors, trainees, volunteers, part-time or fixed-term employees, casual and agency staff (all collectively referred to as 'you' and 'staff' in this policy) who are advised to familiarise themselves with this policy.

This policy does not form part of any employee's terms and conditions of employment and is not intended to have any contractual effect. The Group reserves the right to amend this policy at any time.

The Group is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity and expects all staff to maintain high standards in accordance with their contractual obligations.

4.2 What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected malpractice, wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Criminal activity
- Child protection and/or safeguarding concerns
- 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 our internal policies and procedures including our staff code of conduct and expectations as listed in the staff handbook
- Conduct likely to damage the Group, or the individual schools' 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 that they believe is in the public interest relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concern related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this policy.

This policy should not be used for complaints relating to your own employment position or personal circumstances at work, such as the way you have been treated at work. In those cases, you should use the Grievance Policy and Procedure or Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy as appropriate.

If staff are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy, they should seek advice from the Director of People or their DET link.

4.3 Confidentiality

We hope that our staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if you want to raise a concern confidentially, we will endeavour to keep your identity confidential in so far as it is possible to do so when following this policy and procedure. If it is necessary for anyone investigating your concern to know your identity, we will discuss this with you first. If disciplinary or other proceedings follow the investigation, it may not be possible to take action as a result of a disclosure without your help, so you may be asked to come forward as a witness. If you agree to this, you will be offered support.

Although a concern may be made anonymously, we encourage staff to put their name to their allegation whenever possible. Concerns that are expressed completely anonymously are less powerful and proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible and to protect your position or to give feedback on the outcome of investigations.

We will consider anonymous concerns at our discretion, taking into account factors such as the seriousness of the issue raised, the credibility of the concern and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources.

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 you are in any doubt, you can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are:

Protect

(Independent whistleblowing charity)

Helpline: **020 3117 2520**

E-mail: whistle@protect-advice.org.uk

Website: protect-advice.org.uk

4.4 Raising a whistleblowing concern

We hope that in many cases, you will be able to raise any concerns with your line manager, speaking to them in person or putting the matter in writing if you prefer. Together, you may be able to agree a way of resolving the concern quickly and effectively.

Where your concern is regarding potential poor or unsafe practice or potential failures in our safeguarding regime, you should raise this initially with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Where this matter has not, in your view, been addressed to your satisfaction, you should take the

matter to the Head of the relevant school. Where your concern relates to the conduct of a member of staff towards pupils, your concern should be taken directly to the Head of the relevant school and without delay. Where this matter has not, in your view, been addressed to your satisfaction, you should take the matter to the Head of the Group and / or Chair of Governors.

Where the matter of concern is too serious for you to feel comfortable speaking with your line manager or where the matter has not been addressed satisfactorily, or if you would prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, then you escalate as follows by contacting the following:

- A member of the DET
- The appropriate Head of school (and immediately so if the matter concerns the conduct of a member of staff towards pupils at their school)
- The Head
- The Safeguarding Governor
- The Chair of Governors or Deputy Chair of Governors

It would be helpful if you can provide as a minimum the following information:

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

We will arrange a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern. We may ask you for further information about the concern raised in this meeting or at a later stage.

We will take down a written summary of the concern raised and provide you with a copy as soon as practicable after the meeting. It will also aim to give you an indication of how it proposes to deal with the matter.

4.5 Investigation and outcome

After the meeting, we will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation required. We will inform you of the outcome of this assessment. You may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information of the concerns you have raised.

In some cases, we may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter (this may include externally appointed persons). The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable us to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

We will aim to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. We will endeavour to complete its investigation within a reasonable timeframe. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us from giving specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action or other action taken as a result. You are required to treat any information about the investigation as strictly confidential.

If we conclude that a whistleblower has made false allegations maliciously or with a view to personal gain, the whistleblower may (where they are an employee) be subject to disciplinary action under our Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

4.6 If you are not satisfied

Whilst we cannot always guarantee the outcome you are seeking, we will try to deal with the concern fairly, professionally and in an appropriate way. If you are not happy with the way in which your concern has been handled, you can raise it with the Chair of Governors or Deputy Chair of Governors.

4.7 External disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. We would expect that in almost all cases, raising the concern internally would be the most appropriate course of action and you should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally. However, the law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concern to another prescribed person, such as a regulator or professional body. 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 externally. The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed people and bodies for reporting certain types of concern (see “Further Information” below).

Where your concern is regarding our safeguarding practices, and you feel unable to raise it internally or have concerns about the way your concern is being handled by us, you can contact the NSPCC whistleblowing advice line on 0800 028 0285 – 0800 to 2000, Monday to Friday or email: help@nspcc.org.uk.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of Group employees, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a service provider. In some circumstances, the law will protect you if you raise the matter with the third party. However, you are encouraged to report such concerns internally first. You should contact one of the other individuals set out above for guidance.

4.8 Protection and support for whistleblowers

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We are committed to good practice and high standards. We aim to encourage openness and will support Staff who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a genuine and legitimate concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats, or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform the Head of the Group immediately. If the matter is not remedied to your satisfaction, you should raise it formally using our Grievance Policy and Procedure.

No member of staff must threaten or retaliate against an individual who has raised a concern in any way. We will not tolerate any such harassment or victimisation, and anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

However, to ensure the protection of all our staff, those who raise a concern frivolously, maliciously and/or for personal gain and/or make an allegation they do not reasonably believe to be true and/or made in the public interest will also be liable to disciplinary action.

4.9 Further information

Protect (formerly known as Public Concern at Work) is a source of further information and advice at protect-advice.org.uk. Protect provides free, confidential whistleblowing advice, and can be contacted online via its website: protect-advice.org.uk/contact-protect-advice-line or by telephone on 020 3117 2520.

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 Director of People or Head in the first instance.

5. Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed by the Director of People and Chief Operating Officer annually. At every review, the policy will be approved by the Full Governing Body.

6. Links with other policies

This Whistleblowing Policy links to the following policies:

- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure (Group)
- Grievance Policy and Procedure (Group)
- Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy (Group)