



DEAN CLOSE FOUNDATION

The Dean Close Foundation

Whistleblowing Policy (W035)

“At the Dean Close Foundation our aim is for every individual to Flourish, and our core values, Love, Courage and Contribution, serve as the cornerstones of the organisation. The Foundation is committed to fostering an educational and workplace culture built on integrity, openness, and mutual respect, ensuring that everybody feels valued, supported and challenged. We believe that each pupil, parent, employee and volunteer has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the community, develop their expertise, take thoughtful risks, and drive positive change. By upholding and embodying these values, which spring from the Christian ethos of Dean Close, the Foundation creates an environment where everyone can thrive and succeed, and which makes a positive impact on the wider community”.

Registered Charity No: 1086829

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THE DEAN CLOSE FOUNDATION

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

- This policy has been authorised by the Trustees of The Dean Close Foundation (the “**Charity**”) for all of its schools, (the “**School**”).
- This policy will be reviewed periodically by the CFOO (Chief Finance and Operations Officer), and submitted to the Trustees Board for oversight and signing off.

Introduction

1. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 applies to all organisations. It protects workers from victimisation when they blow the whistle (make a disclosure in the public interest) inside and, where there is a good reason, outside an organisation. It encourages people to raise concerns about malpractice in the workplace and helps ensure that organisations are able to focus on the message rather than the messenger so that serious malpractice is not covered up.
2. Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within a school. However, they may not voice their concerns because they feel that speaking out would be disloyal to their colleagues or the School. They may also be worried about being harassed or victimised. In these circumstances, some people might find it easier to ignore the issues, rather than report what may be just a suspicion of malpractice.
3. It is important to strike a balance between the right of the individual member of staff to speak freely and the right of the School or colleagues to protect themselves against false or malicious accusations.
4. It can be hard to raise a concern, especially if it could have an impact on friends, colleagues or managers. A whistleblowing policy/procedure shows how concerns about malpractice, either inside or outside the School, can be raised whilst protecting whistleblowers from the threat of victimisation or dismissal.
5. Any disclosure made in ‘good faith’ will be protected by this policy if the whistleblower has a reasonable suspicion that malpractice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur.

Definition

6. Whistleblowing inside the workplace is defined as the reporting by workers or ex-workers of wrongdoing such as fraud, malpractice, mismanagement, breach of health and safety law or any other illegal or unethical act either on the part of management, the Trustees or by fellow employees. Employees may include, Trustees, volunteers, contractors and outside agencies or others.

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Principles supporting the procedure

7. The Trustees and Senior Management Teams in the School are committed to the highest possible standards of conduct, openness, honesty and accountability. In line with that commitment they expect staff to tell them about any serious concerns they might have about any aspect of the School's work or colleagues. All staff have a legal duty to pass on any concerns involving the safeguarding or protection of children to someone who can deal with it. This will include concerns about fellow professionals, or anyone who works with, or comes into contact with, children. We recognise that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis. All staff have a legal duty to pass on any concerns, however low level, involving safeguarding

8. This policy document confirms that staff will be able to express their concerns without fear of being victimised, or penalised in any way. It aims to encourage and enable staff to raise concerns internally, rather than ignoring the problem or taking it outside the organisation.

About this policy

9. This policy applies to all employees, students on placement, Trustees, volunteers, agencies and anyone else who has access to pupils or the School. This includes contractors working on site, school suppliers and those providing services either to pupils or the School. All staff will be encouraged to re-read this policy at least annually.

10. Where the procedure refers to a manager or supervisor, this will normally mean the Warden, the CFOO, a Head of a school, a member of any SLT, a Head of Department or the Chaplain.

11. This procedure is separate from the School's adopted procedures regarding grievances. Individuals should not use the whistleblowing procedure to raise grievances about their personal employment situation.

12. This procedure is separate from the School's adopted procedures regarding complaints.

13. This procedure should be used to raise serious concerns. These may include:

- conduct which has failed, or is likely to fail, to comply with a legal obligation;
- disclosure related to miscarriages of justice;
- actions which endanger the health or safety of any individual, including risks to children or the public as well as other workers;
- damage to the environment;
- theft or misuse of School property or assets;
- the unauthorised use of School funds;
- possible fraud or corruption;

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- serious departure from professional standards;
- sexual or physical abuse of children / service users / workers;
- neglect or emotional abuse of children
- serious breach of School regulations;

This is not a complete list.

14. From 6 April 2026, disclosures relating to sexual harassment are formally recognised as protected whistleblowing disclosures under the Employment Rights Act 1996. Employees who raise concerns about sexual harassment are legally protected from detriment or unfair dismissal as a result of making such disclosures. Sexual harassment is recognised as a serious form of wrongdoing and may be reported via the School's whistleblowing channels. Employees are encouraged to raise concerns where they experience or witness such behaviour and will be supported and protected when making disclosures in good faith. The Foundation is committed to ensuring that no individual who raises a concern will suffer any detriment, disadvantage, or retaliation as a result of doing so.

15. All employees have a duty to report fraud and offences of a criminal or child protection nature. They should use their own judgement but it is better to report suspicions using these procedures rather than ignore concerns.

16. Employees can use these procedures to report concerns about service provision, or the conduct of staff or other people. This might include something that:

- goes against orders and/or policies of the School,
- falls below established standards or practice;
- could be viewed as improper conduct; or
- makes individuals feel uncomfortable and goes against their experience of right and wrong.

Communicating concerns internally in a safe environment.

17. Where there are serious concerns expressed about wrong doing, these will be dealt with seriously and the whistleblower protected. The Dean Close Foundation does not tolerate harassment or victimisation in any form and will take action to prevent it. Whistleblowers will be treated as witnesses not complainants. Victimising people who raise genuine concerns will be treated as a disciplinary offence.

18. At the same time, it is also a disciplinary offence to make allegations that are untrue or malicious.

Reporting concerns

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19. When concerns arise staff should first contact the Warden, the Head DCS, Head DCPS, Head DCPPS, Head DCSJS, Head DCAS, Head DCKHS or the CFOO.

Wider disclosure

20. Whilst it is preferable that any concerns are not taken to someone outside the School without first going through these internal procedures, there may be a good reason for doing so. Reasons could be that senior managers are involved, or there are serious health and safety issues or possible discrimination.

21. The external sources which could be used are:

- The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)
- Any member of the Board of Trustees
- Police
- Health & Safety Executive
- Audit Commission
- HMRC
- Department of Education
- The Independent Schools Inspectorate

22. Staff who decide to take the matter outside the School need to be aware that they should be careful not to reveal any confidential information.

23. Whistleblowers must:

- reasonably believe that they will be victimised if they raise the matter internally;
- reasonably believe a cover up is likely;
- have already raised the matter internally and the issues have not been addressed.

24. Contracts of employment usually stipulate a duty not to disclose any matters that could be considered confidential. This prevents employees from publicly disclosing employers' confidential information unless it is in the public interest to do so, or unless the School has failed to deal with the issue properly.

Confidentiality

25. All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal the identity of the whistleblower. However, in order to investigate the matter properly, the investigating officer may need to ask for files or question other employees, so it is impossible to guarantee complete confidentiality.

26. Some cases are clearly so serious that police may have to be involved. In these cases it may be necessary to reveal the identity of individuals.

27. While these procedures are being carried out, all parties will need to agree that the issue will be kept confidential.

28. Pupils may also have information which should be raised in the public interest. The School will ensure that there are proper procedures in place for them to air their concerns, such as a students' complaints procedure.

Anonymous allegations

29. It is far better for staff to put their name to any allegations, because anonymous allegations are not as powerful as those put forward by a named individual. However, anonymous allegations will be investigated as far as possible.

Untrue allegations

30. If allegations are made in good faith but it is not confirmed by the investigation no action will be taken against the whistleblower. If, however, an allegation is considered to be made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against the individual.

Role of trade unions

31. The School recognises that individuals may wish to seek advice and be represented by their trade union when following these procedures.

Responding to a concern

32. The School will always respond to concerns, but an investigation does not mean that it has accepted or rejected concerns.

33. Where appropriate the matters raised may be:

- investigated by managers, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process;
- investigated under other procedures such as child / adult protection;
- investigated under procedures designed to deal with allegations made against professionals;
- referred to the Police;
- referred to an external auditor or other independent external investigation;
- the subject of an inquiry;
- investigated under other forms of prosecution and inspection such as the protection of public health and safety;

34. The School will make initial enquiries to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it will take. If the matter falls within the scope of specific procedures

(for example, Child Protection or discrimination issues) it will normally be considered under those procedures.

The procedures

35. The person raising the concern should:

- raise their concern with the Warden, the Head DCS, Head DCPS, Head DCPPS, Head DCSJS, Head DCAS, Head DCKHS or the CFOO. They can do this in writing, or by talking to them about it. They have the right to ask for the matter to be treated confidentially;
- if the Warden, the Head DCS, Head DCPS, Head DCPPS, Head DCSJS, Head DCAS, Head DCKHS or CFOO believes the concern to be genuine and that it is appropriate to use the Whistleblowing Procedure, they will contact the Chairman of Trustees;
- if it is alleged that the Chairman of Trustees is involved in the malpractice, another member of Board of Trustees should be contacted;
- if the individual feels unable to discuss the matter with the Warden, the Head DCS, Head DCPS, Head DCPPS, Head DCSJS, Head DCAS, Head DCKHS or the CFOO they can take it directly to the Chairman of Trustees. If this is the case, the member of staff will be asked to justify why they feel unable to raise their concern in the normal way;
- if the individual thinks that they might be victimised, or their concerns are being ignored, they may feel unable to raise the issue with any member of the school staff or Trustee body. In these cases, they should contact OFSTED or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

The role of the person investigating the complaint (Investigating Officer):

36. The Investigating Officer (which in usual circumstances will be a Head or the CFOO) should:

- interview the member of staff privately within five working days, or straight away if there is a risk of loss of life, serious injury or if the matter involves Child Protection;
- get as much information as they can from the person making the complaint about the malpractice. If it is a Child Protection or safeguarding issue, the Investigating Officer will only need brief facts to decide whether to follow the specific Child Protection / Safeguarding procedures, and what action to take;
- discuss with the individual what further steps should be taken and keep them informed of any actions;
- advise on the best way forward if the matter does not fall under the School's Whistleblowing Procedure;
- report all matters raised under this procedure to the Chairman of Trustees.

37. A recognised Trade Union representative, work colleague or other person may be asked to attend the interview with the Investigating Officer. The person carrying out the interview may also ask another member of the School Senior Management Team to join them if they wish.

38. Within ten working days of the interview, the Investigating Officer should recommend to the Chairman of Trustees one or more of the following options. That the matter be:

- investigated internally by the School;
- investigated by external auditors appointed by the School;
- reported to The Local Authority Designated Officer
- reported to the Police;
- reported to the Department of Education;
- pursued by the whistleblower using other procedures if their concerns do not fall within these procedures;
- considered closed with no further action by the School.

39. The following examples can be considered grounds on which no further action need be taken:

- The Investigating Officer is satisfied that there is no evidence and it is unlikely that malpractice, as defined by these procedures, has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur;
- The Investigating Officer believes that the individual is not acting in good faith;
- The matter is already (or has been) the subject of proceedings under one of the School's other procedures or policies;
- The matter is already the subject of legal proceedings, or has already been reported to the Police, Children's Social Care Service the external auditors, the DfE or another public authority;

40. The person who receives the Investigating Officer's recommendations must ensure that it is acted on fully unless there is a good reason for not doing so. If there is a good reason for ignoring the recommendation, it must be reported to the next meeting of the Trustees. The whistleblower's identity will be kept confidential unless they are happy to be named, or unless there are grounds to believe that they have acted maliciously. If there are no such grounds, the identity will only be revealed if:

- they have to do so by law;
- the information is already known;
- it is revealed in confidence to a qualified lawyer in order to get legal advice;
- the whistleblower has to provide evidence at a disciplinary hearing or other proceedings.

41. The whistleblower will be told the outcome of any investigations within 28 days. The information will be sent in writing to the individual's home address. If the individual has

not had a response within 28 days, they may appeal to the Chairman of Trustees, but they must inform the Investigating Officer before doing so.

42. The individual may discuss the matter in confidence at any time with a qualified lawyer in order to get legal advice. The School will ensure as far as possible, that the individual is protected from any form of victimisation or discrimination.

Recording, monitoring and evaluation

43. If there are any safeguarding or child protection issues, staff will need to follow the Child Protection and or Safeguarding Procedures.

44. All staff should be fully aware of the School's whistleblowing policy and feel able to voice concerns about the attitude or actions of colleagues. If a member of staff believes that a reported allegation or concern of a safeguarding nature is not being dealt with properly, they should report the matter to the Warden, the Head DCS, Head DCPS, Head DCPPS, Head DCSJS, Head DCAS, Head DCKHS or CFOO as appropriate.

45. If a member of staff believes that other concerns are not being dealt with appropriately they should contact the Chairman of Trustees. They can also contact their trade union. The most senior member of staff dealing with the disclosure will keep records and monitor progress. These should be kept in a safe location.

If the whistleblower is dissatisfied

46. If any member of staff is unhappy with the response, they can take the matter to a higher level or one of the organisations listed in this policy. Although the School cannot guarantee that they will respond to all matters in the way that the individual might wish, the School will always try to deal with the matter fairly and properly. This policy should help all parties achieve their aims.

Independent advice

47. Any member of staff who is not sure whether to use these procedures, or who wants independent advice at any stage, can contact the School Public Concern at Work. The issue needs to be of public concern and affect a third party.

Their lawyers offer free confidential advice at any stage to people who are worried about something that is going on at work, or who are unsure about what to do next.

They also advise people who have already raised concerns that have not been addressed and where the risk remains. They can be contacted on their website at Protect

<https://protect-advice.org.uk/>

or by calling 020 3117 2520.

Review

48. Trustees will review this policy at least every two years to assess its progress and performance. All staff and people working within the School will be made aware of the policy.

Procedure – how to raise a concern

49. You should first raise your concern with the Warden, the Head DCS, Head DCPS, Head DCPPS, Head DCSJS, Head DCAS, Head DCKHS or the CFOO. You can do this in writing or by talking to them about it. You have the right to ask for the matter to be treated confidentially.

50. If you feel unable to discuss the matter with any of the above you can take it directly to the Chairman of Trustees. If this is this case, you will be asked to justify why you feel unable to raise your concerns in the normal way.

51. If the Chairman of Trustees is allegedly involved in the malpractice, another member of the Board of Trustees should be contacted.

52. If you feel you might be victimised, or there might be a cover up, or your concerns are being ignored, you may feel unable to raise the issue with staff at School. In these cases, you should contact an external organisation such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

53. If, at any stage, you feel that your concerns are not being dealt with properly, you should move on to the next stage. You must put your concerns in writing within 48 hours at each stage.

54. If you are not sure what to do, or you want independent advice at any stage, you can contact Protect on 020 3117 2520 or visit their web site at <https://protect-advice.org.uk/>

Investigating Officer – response to a concern

55. The Investigating Officer should:

- Interview you within seven working days, in confidence, or straight away if there is a danger to loss of life, serious injury or the matter involves child protection.
- Get as much information as they can from you about the alleged malpractice.
- If it is a child protection or safeguarding issue, they will only need brief facts to decide whether to follow specific Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures, and what action to take.
- Discuss with you what further steps should be taken, and keep you informed of any actions.
- Advise you on the best way to deal with your concerns if it does not fall under the School's Whistleblowing Procedure.
- Report all matters raised under this procedure to the Chairman of Trustees.

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