# St. John's Primary School




# Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

*"You should be protected from things that could harm you."*

Article 36 United Nations Rights of the Child

Thinking
Learning
Caring

## 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 not a substitute for normal line management processes but an addition to them. Staff should always first consider using normal line management for raising concerns. This procedure is only for the purpose of raising concerns about wrongdoing and 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, therefore, if a member of staff has a personal grievance, then it must be raised through the grievance procedure; it would not be appropriate for it to be raised through this procedure. The existence of this procedure does not prevent staff from raising concerns through their trade union if they so wish. The procedure is therefore not a route through which employees can raise concerns about mismanagement which may arise from weak management rather than malpractice.

## 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 a 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 Headteacher, members of the Senior Leadership Team, employees, consultants, contractors, trainees, part-time and fixed-term workers, casual and agency staff (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
- 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 Policy and Procedure.

If Staff are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy, they should seek advice from the Headteacher and if the matter is in relation to an alleged wrongdoing by the Headteacher then Staff should seek the advice of the Deputy Headteacher or Schools Professional Advisor at Education.

## 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. They may be able to agree a way of resolving a concern quickly and effectively.

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 Deputy Headteacher

The Senior Advisor to the School

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.

Staff may bring a colleague or trade union representative to any meetings under this policy who must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

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 e.g., 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 Senior Advisor who will help to determine what action should be taken.

If you are in any doubt, you can seek advice from Public Concern at Work, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are: Public Concern at Work (Independent whistle blowing charity)

Helpline: 020 7404 6609

E-mail: whistle@pcaw.co.uk

Website: www.pcaw.co.uk

## External disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases Staff should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for Staff to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. 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 external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of School Staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a service provider. The law allows Staff to raise a concern in good faith with a third party, where the member of staff reasonably believes it relates mainly to their actions or something that is legally their responsibility. However, Staff are encouraged to report such concerns internally first. Staff should contact one of the other individuals set out above for guidance.

## 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 Head/Deputy Headteacher will investigate any issue. In rare cases the School may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including Staff 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 Policy and Procedure, following guidance and advice from the HR business partner.

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 Senior Advisor 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 Policy and 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. 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 Headteacher in the first instance.

## Safeguarding

If a member of staff suspects that there is a serious safeguarding issue that they feel that the Headteacher is not taking seriously or that they believe there is a serious safeguarding issue involving the Headteacher they should in the first instance, contact the Deputy Headteacher who may contact the Senior Advisor.

## Change History

| Version | Date Issued | Issued by | Reason for Change | Presented To | Approved by: | Date |
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| 0.1 | November 2022 | Jamie Hazley | Updated and brought onto consistent format | All Staff | | |
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