



CASTLE COURT
SCHOOL

WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY

Katie Johnson (Head)

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Purpose of the Policy

At Castle Court, we are committed to working with honesty and integrity and expects all staff to maintain the highest possible standards in accordance with the Staff Code of Conduct. 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 and to address them when they do occur. Staff are therefore encouraged to come forward and voice any concerns they may have about any aspect of the school's work.

It is often a member of staff who is the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the school. They may feel it is difficult to express their concerns because they are concerned that speaking up will be disloyal to colleagues. It is possible staff may fear harassment, victimisation or some other form of reprisal if they speak up. As a result, they may ignore the concern rather than report what may be just a suspicion of malpractice. However, the school believes that whistleblowers can assist in uncovering wrongdoing. This can help prevent accidents, financial scandals, criminal offences and regulatory breaches. It also ensures that we hold ourselves as a community to the highest standards.

This policy makes it clear that employees can share concerns without fear of reprisals. It applies to all staff, volunteers and those contractors working for the school on school premises and includes, for example, agency staff, builders, and drivers. It also covers those providing services under a contract with the school.

This policy and the accompanying procedure on whistleblowing enables staff to raise concerns internally and in a confidential fashion about fraud, malpractice, health and safety, criminal offences, miscarriages of justice, a failure to comply with legal obligations, inappropriate behaviour, unethical conduct or sexual harassment. The policy also provides, if necessary, for such concerns to be raised outside the organisation.

The Protected Disclosures Act 2014

This Act protects workers who 'blow the whistle' about wrongdoing. It states the types of disclosures which may be protected; the circumstances in which the disclosures are protected; and the persons who may be protected. The provisions introduced by the Act protects workers from being subjected to a 'detriment' by their employer. Detriment may take a number of forms, such as denial of promotion, facilities or training opportunities, which the employer would otherwise have offered.

Employees may make a claim for unfair dismissal if they are dismissed for making a protected disclosure.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- Demonstrate that the school will not tolerate malpractice
- Encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated, as appropriate
- Respect the confidentiality of staff raising concerns and will provide procedures to maintain confidentiality so far as is consistent with progressing the issues effectively
- Provide the opportunity for staff to raise concerns outside of the normal line management structure where this is appropriate
- Provide clear and simple procedures for raising concerns which are accessible to all members of staff
- Inform staff about the protections available to them if they raise a whistleblowing concern
- Reassure staff that they will not be victimised for raising a legitimate concern through the steps set out in the policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken. However vexatious or malicious allegations may be considered a disciplinary issue.

Scope of the policy

This procedure is separate from our adopted procedures regarding grievances. You should not use the whistleblowing procedure to raise concerns relating to your own personal circumstances, such as the way you have been treated at work. In those cases, the school's Discipline, Grievance and Capability Policy should be used, as appropriate.

This policy has been implemented to enable you to express a legitimate concern regarding suspected malpractice within the School. If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy, you should first seek advice from the Head.

Any concern that a person has regarding a suspicion of malpractice or wrongdoing in any aspect of the school life, or relating to the conduct of staff within school, or others acting on behalf of the school, can and should be reported. Members of staff are expected to report malpractice and wrongdoing and may be liable to disciplinary action if they knowingly and deliberately do not disclose information relating to such.

What is Malpractice or Wrongdoing?

Malpractice and wrongdoing may be about something which is:

- unlawful
- against the school's policies
- not in accordance with established or expected standards of practice
- improper conduct

The overriding consideration is that it would be in everyone's interest for such malpractice to be corrected and, if appropriate, sanctions to be applied.

The following are examples of issues which could constitute malpractice:

- An unlawful act or omission, whether criminal or a breach of civil law

- A breach of statutory requirements, particularly with regard to safeguarding
- A breach of, or failure to implement or comply with, school policy
- Failure to comply with appropriate professional standards
- Corruption or fraud of any type
- Any action that could result in physical danger to any person, or give rise to risk of significant damage to property
- Failure to take reasonable steps to report and rectify any situation which may give rise to loss of income to the school
- Using the school's powers and authority for any unauthorised or ulterior purpose
- Unfair discrimination in employment procedures
- Procedures that risk health and safety
- Damage to the environment
- Unethical conduct

What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing, malpractice or dangers at work. 'Malpractice' is not easily defined; however, it includes allegations of fraud, financial irregularities, corruption, bribery, dishonesty, acting contrary to the staff code of ethics, sexual harassment, criminal activities, or failing to comply with a legal obligation, a miscarriage of justice, or creating or ignoring a serious risk to health, safety or the environment (negligence).

A **whistleblower** is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to suspected malpractice within the School. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected malpractice affecting any of the School's activities (a whistleblowing concern), you should report it under this procedure.

If you feel unable to raise an issue with us or feel that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, you may report your concerns to other whistleblowing channels, such as:

- Protect, an independent whistleblowing charity (helpline: 020 3117 2502, email: whistle@protect-advice.org.uk, website: <https://protect-advice.org.uk/>).
- The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline (tel: 0800 028 0285 or email: help@nspcc.org.uk).

Confidentiality

We hope that you will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if you wish to raise a concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your

identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know your identity, this will be discussed with you.

If there is evidence of criminal activity, the Police will be informed in all cases.

We do not encourage you to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from you. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should discuss this with the Head 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 set out above.

Raising a whistleblowing concern

If wrongdoing in the workplace is suspected:

- Individuals should not be approached or accused directly
- Individuals should not attempt to investigate the matter themselves
- Individuals should not convey suspicions to anyone other than the Head or, if the suspicion relates to the Head, the Chair of the Governors
- As a first step, report the concern to the Head
- If the Head is involved in the matter of concern, report to the Chair of the Governors.

Concerns may be raised orally; however, it is advised that they are reported in writing. The report should:

- set out the background and history of the concern
- give relevant names, dates and places where possible
- state the reason why the situation is of concern

The earlier a concern is expressed, the easier it is to take appropriate action and resolve matters.

Complainants are not expected to prove the truth of allegations; however, they are required to demonstrate that there are sufficient grounds for concern.

How the School will Respond

When a concern is received by the Head they will:

- Meet with the person raising the concern within 7 working days of receiving their concern. The person raising the concern may be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative.

- Gain as much information as possible about the concern at the meeting and record the information. If it becomes apparent the concern is not of a whistleblowing nature, the Head will then handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy or procedure.
- Reiterate at the meeting, that the person raising the concern is protected from unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. If the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious, disciplinary action may be taken.
- Establish whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant further investigation. If there is:
 - The Head will arrange a further investigation, involving the Head, Governor, or member of the Senior Leadership Team, if appropriate. In some cases, there may be the need to bring in an external, independent body to investigate. In other cases, there may be a need to report to the police.
 - The person who raised the concern should be informed of how the matter will be investigated and given an estimated timeframe.

The school will take appropriate steps to minimise any difficulties the complainant may experience as a result of raising a concern. For example, if the complainant is required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings the school will advise about the procedures and support the complainant.

Outcome of the Investigation

Once the investigation is complete, the investigating person(s) will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether or not any wrongdoing has occurred. The report will include any recommendations and details on how the matter can be rectified, and whether or not a referral is required to an external organisation.

The school will inform the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

Beyond the immediate actions, where necessary the Head and Governors will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences.

If you are not satisfied that your concern is being properly dealt with, you will have a right to raise it in confidence with the Governing Body. Alternatively, you can follow the external procedure below if all internal processes have been exhausted.

External Procedures

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

However, if all internal procedures have been exhausted, you shall have a right of access to an external person/body. This may include (depending on the subject matter of the disclosure) HMRC, the Audit Commission, the Health and Safety Executive and/or the Local Authority Designated Officer (where the disclosure relates to a child protection issue).

It should be noted that under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, there are circumstances where you may be entitled to raise a concern directly with an external body where you reasonably believe:

- that exceptionally serious circumstances justify it;
- that we would conceal or destroy the relevant evidence;
- that you would be victimised by us; or
- where the Secretary of State has ordered it.

Even where extreme circumstances are thought to exist, you should under no circumstances approach a commercial body or the media with details of the suspected wrongdoing. If you approach any such body and/or where your concern is disclosed for personal gain, the school will consider this to be gross misconduct and immediate disciplinary action will be taken against you.

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 regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

Malicious Accusations

False, malicious, vexatious or frivolous accusations will be dealt with under our Disciplinary Policy.

Protection from Reprisal or Victimisation

It is understandable that staff are sometimes worried about possible repercussions as a result of a raising a whistleblowing disclosure. We aim to encourage openness and will support you if you raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if you turn out to be mistaken.

You will not suffer a detriment or be disciplined for raising a genuine and legitimate concern, provided you do so in good faith and following the whistleblowing procedures. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform the Head, Deputy or member of the Senior Leadership Team immediately. If the matter is not remedied, you may raise it formally using our Grievance Policy.

You must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. If you are involved in such conduct, you may be subject to disciplinary action.

Responsibility for the Policy

The responsibility for the effectiveness and efficiency of this policy rests with the Governing Body and Head. The Head and Senior leadership Team review procedures annually to ensure they remain effective.

The Head will maintain confidentially records of concerns, how they are dealt with and the outcomes reached. These records are available to the Governing Body for scrutiny.

Related Policies

- Staff code of conduct
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Disciplinary, Capability and Grievance Procedure
- Complaints Policy