

Whistleblowing Policy

2023-24



Pride
Passion
Partnership
Professionalism
Positivity

Purpose

This policy is designed to enable all employees to notify the Chief Executive (CEO) or the Chair of Directors of any reasonable suspicion of illegal or improper conduct that is made in the public interest and which would not normally be revealed due to fears of victimisation or retribution. This Procedure sets out the way in which individuals may raise a protected disclosure and how those disclosures will be dealt with.

This policy has been devised in accordance with the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 which offer protection to employees who "blow the whistle" on their employer by making a qualifying disclosure.

A disclosure is not protected unless the employee reasonably believes that the disclosure is made in the public interest.

The Procedure aims to:

- Encourage employees to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns of malpractice
- Provide avenues to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- Ensure that employees receive a response to their concerns and are aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied
- Reassure employees that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if the disclosure is a qualifying disclosure.

Application of the Policy

The Procedure can be used by any person who works or who has worked for the Trust. There is a separate procedure for pupils and parents to raise concerns about school related issues.

Whistleblowing occurs when a concern is raised about danger or illegality that affects others. The person 'blowing the whistle' will not necessarily be directly affected by the danger or illegality. Consequently the whistleblower is not likely to have a personal interest in the outcome of any investigation into the concern(s). This is different from a complaint or grievance where the complainant is alleging that they have been personally poorly or unfairly treated.

The Procedure is not intended to cover matters that concern day to day issues relating to an employee's terms and conditions of employment or a complaint about another employee which can usually be referred to their line manager, HR Manager and/or their trade union representative, or if necessary be pursued using the Trust's Grievance Procedure.

In order for a disclosure to be protected under the Procedure, it must be made in the public interest.

Any concerns that employees have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of employees, Directors or others acting on behalf of an individual school or the Trust can be reported under the Whistleblowing Procedure and must relate to:

- A criminal offence
- A failure to comply with a legal obligation
- A miscarriage of justice
- A danger to the health and safety of an individual
- Damage to the environment
- A failure to comply with the trust's policies and procedures
- A significant breach of child protection and/or safeguarding policy and procedures
- Any conduct which may damage the trust's reputation
- A deliberate attempt to conceal to any of the above

In practice, as well as relating to the points outlined above, the disclosure could be about:

- Something that makes them feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, their experience or the standards to which they believe the Trust subscribes; or
- Something that is against the Trust's procedures, rules and policies; or
- Something that falls below established standards of practice; or
- Something that amounts to improper conduct; or
- The unauthorised use of public funds; or
- Fraud and corruption; or a significant breach of child protection and/or safeguarding policy and procedures
- Homophobic, racial, religious, sexual or physical abuse of children, staff, Directors, or other users or
- Conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law;
- Disclosures related to actual or potential miscarriages of justice;
- Health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees;
- Other unethical conduct;

Other parties may have a role within the Procedure including: the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for concerns relating to Child Protection, the Health and Safety Manager as well as outside organisations such as Public Concern at Work. Specific roles and responsibilities are outlined in Appendix A.

Key Principles

The Procedure is designed to support the Directors' and senior staff commitment to the highest possible standards of conduct, openness, honesty and accountability. In line with that commitment it is expected that staff will report any serious concerns they might have about any aspect of the trust's work or colleagues.

All staff have a professional 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. These have to be dealt with in accordance with local child protection procedures.

A key commitment is that staff will be able to express their concerns without fear of being victimised or penalised in any way. The Procedure aims to encourage and enable staff to raise concerns internally, rather than ignoring the problem or taking it outside the organisation.

A whistleblower will not be victimised for raising a matter under this procedure. Victimisation of a whistleblower for raising a qualified disclosure will be a disciplinary offence.

Stage 1: Reporting concerns

Concerns should be raised with the CEO, Headteacher or line manager as soon as any suspected malpractice becomes apparent. As the whistleblower would normally be a witness to events, and not a complainant, they do not need to wait for proof of malpractice before raising concerns.

If the whistleblower feels that they cannot raise the matter with their line manager (for example, if it is suspected that that person already knows about the malpractice, or appears to be ignoring it or where it is suspected that they may be involved), then the whistleblower will need to consider which of the following people may be the most appropriate:

- The CEO
- The Headteacher
- The Business Support Officer
- The Chair of Directors
- The Chief Operating Officer (COO)

When reporting a concern the whistleblower should provide as much information and detail as possible. In particular you should provide the full names of the people involved, including the names of staff or contractors, dates of events and any relevant documentation.

Initial enquiries will be made by the line manager within 3 days to determine whether the concern falls within the scope of the procedure and if so, whether an investigation is appropriate; the whistleblower will be kept informed of progress and action being taken.

When making a decision the line manager will consider whether continuing with an investigation is in the public interest.

The CEO will receive the line manager's recommendations and 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 not acting on the recommendations, these must be reported to the next meeting of the Board of Directors.

Stage 2: Investigation

If it is determined that an investigation is to be undertaken the next steps will include:

- An interview with the whistleblower within 10 working days of the initial concern being raised.
- The whistleblower can be accompanied at the interview by a trade union representative or a work place colleague;
- If the initial concerns were made verbally, then the whistleblower will be asked to provide a written statement;
- The whistleblower will receive a written acknowledgement of the report and be informed of the action being taken to investigate the concern;
- The whistleblower, where possible, will be kept informed of the progress and likely timescales of the investigation unless the investigating officer believes that there is a risk of the investigation being prejudiced;
- In some circumstances, the matter will be referred to an outside agency such as the Police.

Stage 3: Conclusion of the investigation and subsequent action

If the allegation is not proven or there is insufficient evidence on which to base a conclusion, the whistleblower will be advised accordingly.

In cases where action is necessary as a result of the allegation, a report will usually be sent to the CEO or the Chair of Directors, who will be responsible for implementing the recommendations in the report.

The whistleblower will be advised when the investigation is complete but it may not always be possible to provide the details of the findings as this may be confidential.

Other points to note.

Confidentiality

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 it is impossible to guarantee complete confidentiality.

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.

While these procedures are being carried out, all parties will need to agree that the issue will be kept confidential. 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 manager will only reveal the identity 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; or
- The whistleblower has to provide evidence at a disciplinary hearing or other proceedings.

Anonymous Allegations

Whistleblowers are encouraged to give their name when raising concerns. From a practical perspective, anonymous allegations are likely to be more difficult to investigate, and protection against reprisals and feedback can be afforded only to identifiable individuals.

Whilst it is accepted that anonymous allegations do not carry the same weight, any such reports received by the Trust will be considered at its discretion. In exercising this discretion account will be taken of the seriousness, credibility of the matters raised and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from the sources quoted.

The decision whether to investigate an anonymous allegation will be made by the CEO or the Chair of Directors.

Untrue Allegations

If the allegation was considered to be made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against the individual.

Dissatisfaction

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.

Policy Owner and Contact Details

Dr. Penny Barratt, CEO

For further information on the Policy, please contact via email
penny.barratt@thebridgetrust.academy or phone 020 7619 1000

Next Review Date: September 2024

Appendix A

Sources of Advice and Support

Staff can receive advice from a relevant professional in the Trust before making a report under this procedure. This will include:

- Local Authority Designated Officer, LADO (020 7527 8066)
- Premises and Estates Manager
- Business Support Officer, Sarah Lynch

Employees who suspect fraud, corruption or other financial irregularities should ensure this is reported to the CFO for possible investigation. Normally, the employee would first report any suspicion of such irregularity to their Head of School or line manager who will in turn report it to the CFO. In most cases this will be done through the line management structure.

Exceptionally, if employees believe the matter cannot be resolved in this way, they should report it direct to the CEO.

Employees who have concerns which relate to Child Protection should ensure this is reported to the LADO for possible investigation. Normally, the employee would first report any suspicion of such irregularity to their Headteacher who will in turn report it to the LADO.

In most cases this will be done through the line management structure. Exceptionally, if employees believe the matter cannot be resolved in this way, they should report it direct to the LADO.

The following organisations outside the School can also be contacted:

- Audit Commission Public Interest Disclosure Act Hotline Tel: 020 7630 1019
- Public Concern at Work 020 7404 6609 or visit their website <http://www.pcaw.co.uk/>

For a full list of bodies and persons to whom you can make a disclosure see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies>

Alternatively, you may wish to ask for confidential help from your trade union.