



**Woodbrook Vale School  
Policy Document**

**Whistleblowing Policy**

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Headteacher's Signature: ..... *Fraser* ..... Date: 16 January 2024  
Print name: Rachael Fraser

Chair of Trustee's Signature: ..... *Gavin C Brown* ..... Date: 16 January 2024  
Print name: Gavin Brown

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# Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

## Policy Statement

- Whistleblowing is when an employee reports suspected wrongdoing at work. Officially, this is called 'making a disclosure in the public interest.'
- We are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. This whistleblowing policy and procedure supports this commitment.
- Relevant trade unions and professional organisations have been consulted about this policy and procedure, and it has their support.

## Scope

- It gives employees and others (eg teaching staff; support staff; supply teachers; volunteers) with genuine concerns about malpractice or wrongdoing in the school a way to voice those concerns without fear of victimisation.
- Often it is those closest to an organisation who realise that there is something wrong. Sometimes people are reluctant to act upon their concerns because they think that they are being disloyal, or because they are afraid that they might be victimised if they speak up.
- There are existing procedures in place (e.g. Grievance, harassment and bullying) which make provision for employees to lodge a concern relating to their own employment. This whistleblowing policy is intended to complement those procedures by covering concerns that appear to fall outside their scope. This concern may be about something that is:
  - Unlawful or criminal activity, including financial or fraudulent malpractice such as embezzlement, bribery, corruption, dishonesty, etc.
  - Against establishment standards of practice
  - Improper conduct.
- Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures, e.g. child protection or financial irregularities will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

## Purpose

- The purpose of this policy is to provide you with the help and support you need to speak up when making a disclosure in the public interest and be confident that you can do so safely. We will take your concerns seriously and ensure that they are dealt with promptly and fairly.

## How to raise a concern

- You can raise concerns orally or in writing, making a note so that you have a record. This note should include what occurred, where and when, and also who you submitted the complaint to and when.
- The nature and seriousness of the issue will influence who you decide to raise it with. Initial concerns should be raised with your immediate line manager, the Headteacher or an Audit Trustee. An 'Audit Trustee' is the Trustee identified as the first point of contact for whistleblowing queries by the governing board. Contact details for the Audit Trustee are available from the school website.
- If the employee believes that this Trustee is implicated, then the employee should approach the Chair of Trustees. If the Chair of Trustees is the Audit Trustee, then they should approach the Vice Chair of Trustees.

- Within 48 hours, you will be contacted to arrange a meeting to discuss your concerns. Before the meeting, it would be helpful if you write down what you consider the problem to be, giving names, dates and places where possible. If there are any other documents that you think might be helpful, please try to bring these with you. You are advised to take a friend, colleague or school professional association / union representative with you to the meeting.
- You are encouraged to raise your concern in person, or through your professional association / union representative on your behalf, because concerns that are expressed anonymously are difficult to investigate. However, the school will exercise its discretion in deciding whether to investigate an anonymous allegation. The factors taken into account will include:
  - the seriousness of the issues raised;
  - the credibility of the allegation; and
  - the likelihood of being able to confirm the allegation from attributable sources.

### **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, you should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to an external body such as a regulator. 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. Contact details for this organisation can be found at the end of this document.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of our staff, but they may sometimes relate to action of a third party, such as a supplier or service provider. The law allows you to raise a concern in good faith with a third party, where you reasonably believe it relates mainly to their actions or something that is legally their responsibility. However, we encourage you to report such concerns internally first.

### **How we will respond**

- After the initial meeting has taken place, the person you contacted will arrange for discreet initial enquiries to be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and if so, what form it should take.
- You will be written to within 10 days of your initial meeting to:
  - acknowledge that your concern has been received
  - outline our understanding of what the issues are; and
  - indicate how we propose to deal with the matter.
- If a decision is made that it is appropriate for an investigation to be carried out, this will be completed by an Investigating Officer. This person, if not implicated in the initial concern, will usually be a deputy headteacher. However, it may sometimes be necessary for a concern to be referred to the police, an external auditor, or for it to be the subject of an independent enquiry. In addition, where it is established that the complaint involves issues like bullying or unlawful discrimination, it will be necessary to involve HR.
- If an investigation is carried out, you will always be informed of the final outcome. It might not be possible to give you full details if the outcome contains personal, confidential or sensitive information.

## How will the school treat whistleblowers?

- If you make an allegation in good faith but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If you knowingly make false or malicious allegations, disciplinary action may be taken against you.
- Disciplinary action will be taken against any member of staff who tries to stop another employee from raising a concern or who is responsible for any act of recrimination or victimisation against an employee who raises a concern.
- Where an employee may have been party themselves to an act of possible gross misconduct on which they are now 'blowing the whistle' this could be considered in mitigation. They are not, however, exempt from disciplinary action.
- Disciplinary action may be taken against employees if they contact the media with concerns about conduct at work without first following the steps set out in this policy.
- The Governing Board and the school will make every effort to protect an employee's identity when s/he raises a concern and does not want her/his name to be disclosed. It must be appreciated however, that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by the employee may be required as part of the evidence.
- If you raise a concern, you will be given the opportunity to feed back any issues or problems you may have experienced as a result. The purpose of this is to ensure that employees who have raised concerns in good faith do not suffer as a result.

For further free, confidential whistleblowing advice please contact Protect (The Whistleblowing Charity) on 020 3117 2520 or <https://protect-advice.org.uk/contact-us/>