



GREENWOOD ACADEMIES TRUST

Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

Version 10

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1. Introduction

We are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, we expect colleagues who have serious concerns about any aspects of our work to come forward and voice those concerns.

Colleagues are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within an organisation. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to others or to the Trust. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report a suspicion of malpractice. This policy encourages employees to raise such concerns using the internal mechanisms set out below.

This policy makes it clear that you can raise legitimate concerns without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. It is intended to encourage and enable all colleagues to raise serious concerns within the Trust rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.

This policy should be used to raise serious concerns **which are in the public interest and where an individual genuinely feels there is evidence of malpractice, impropriety or wrongdoing.**

2. Aims

This policy aims to

- encourage individuals to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and looked into, and that their confidentiality will be respected
- let all colleagues know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing
- set clear procedures for how we will respond to such concerns
- let all colleagues know the protection available to them if they raise a whistle-blowing concern
- assure colleagues 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 (though vexatious or malicious concerns may be considered a disciplinary issue).

This policy does not form part of any colleague's contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

We will always deal with concerns raised under this policy fairly and in an appropriate way, but we cannot guarantee that any particular desired outcome will always come about.

3. Legislation

The requirement to have clear whistle-blowing procedures in place is set out in the [Academy Trust Handbook](#).

This policy has been written in line with the above document, as well as [government guidance on whistle-blowing](#). We also take into account the [Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998](#).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

4. Definition of whistle-blowing and scope of this policy

This policy is designed to be used **only by colleagues or by those who work with us on a voluntary, contractual or agency basis (collectively referred to as 'colleagues' or 'staff' in this document).**

We seek always to establish a working environment where concerns can be aired openly without the need necessarily to resort to formal process.

Not all concerns about the trust, or individual schools in the trust, count as whistle-blowing.

As in other areas, many concerns can be dealt with if they are raised informally with your line manager, or with an appropriate leader. Issues that affect you as an individual are likely best dealt with as a grievance if informal discussions do not resolve the matter.

Whistle-blowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is “in the public interest”.

Examples of whistle-blowing include (but are not limited to)

- criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption
- pupils’ or staff health and safety being put in danger
- failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement
- breaches of financial management procedures
- attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest
- damage to the environment.

A whistle-blower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above. Anyone not covered by this policy should refer to our Complaints Policy for details of how to raise a concern.

Protect is a whistleblowing charity which has:

- [further guidance](#) on the difference between a whistle-blowing concern and a grievance that colleagues may find useful if unsure
- a free and confidential [advice line](#).

5. Procedure for colleagues to raise a whistle-blowing concern

5.1 When to raise a concern

You should consider the examples in section 4 when deciding whether your concern is of a whistle-blowing nature. Consider whether the incident(s) was illegal, breached statutory or trust procedures, put people in danger or was an attempt to cover any such activity up.

5.2 Who to report to

Wherever you work in our trust, you can report whistle-blowing concerns to one of the following people:

- the Chief Executive Officer, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer or the Corporate Affairs Director
- the Chair of Trustees.

If you need to obtain the contact details for any of these people, you can email admin@greenwoodacademies.org and ask for them.

Any other member of staff receiving a whistleblowing concern must refer it immediately to one of the above.

5.3 How to raise the concern

Concerns should be raised in writing wherever possible. You should include the names of those committing wrongdoing, dates, places and as much evidence and context as possible. You should also include details of any personal interest in the matter.

5.4 Anonymous concerns

Concerns raised anonymously will only be considered under this policy if the person reported to believe their seriousness merits it.

6. Trust procedure for responding to a whistle-blowing concern

6.1 Looking into the concern

If you have raised a whistle-blowing concern, the person receiving the concern (referred to from here on in as the 'recipient') will first notify the Corporate Affairs Director, who has overall responsibility for the operation of this policy and will be able to offer advice throughout the process. If it is inappropriate to involve the Corporate Affairs Director, then the CEO or DCEO must be informed.

The 'recipient' retains ownership of the process and will be the ultimate decision-maker – they may choose to deal with the matter as 'fact-finder' themselves or to appoint another person of appropriate seniority to act as 'fact-finder'.

The 'fact-finder' will

- contact you within a reasonable time in order to get as much detail as possible about the concern
- sometimes arrange to meet with you to discuss things further - you may be joined by a trade union or professional association representative for this meeting if you wish
- record the information you discuss in writing
- reiterate that you are protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern (however, if the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious, disciplinary action may be taken (see section 6 of this policy))
- establish whether they believe there is sufficient cause for concern to recommend formal investigation.

If it becomes apparent that the concern is not of a whistle-blowing nature, the 'fact-finder' will tell the 'recipient' and the 'recipient' will let you know whether or not they believe it should be dealt with using another policy or procedure. This will not always be the case.

The 'fact-finder' will share their findings with the 'recipient' and the 'recipient' may then decide to commission a formal investigation. If they decide to do this, the 'recipient' will then

- arrange a formal investigation into the matter, which may be led by an 'investigator' of sufficient seniority; often, they may need to bring in an external, independent person or body to act as 'investigator' and in others, they may need to report the matter to the police
- inform you of how the matter is being investigated and an estimated timeframe for when you will be informed of the next steps.

6.2 Outcome of the investigation, if one is arranged

Once the investigation is complete, the 'investigator' will prepare a report for the 'recipient' 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, such as the local authority or police.

The 'recipient' will then inform you of the outcome of the investigation via a letter. They will usually make you aware of any actions that are being taken, although some details may have to be withheld if they would breach the confidentiality of others.

Beyond the immediate actions, the CEO, trustees and others, if necessary, will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

7. Malicious or vexatious allegations

Colleagues are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made in good faith, but this process finds no wrongdoing, there will be no disciplinary action against the member of staff who raised the concern.

If, however, an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, we will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the person making the allegation.

8. Escalating concerns beyond the trust

We encourage colleagues to raise their concerns internally, in line with this policy, but we also recognise that there may be times when colleagues may feel the need to report concerns to an external body. A list of prescribed bodies to whom staff can raise concerns with is included [here](#).

9. Approval

These procedures have been agreed by the board of trustees, who will approve them whenever reviewed.