



INSPIRATION THROUGH COLLABORATION

Whistleblowing

Approved by: Trust Board

Last reviewed: July 2023

Next review due: July 2024

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Scope

This policy is written and approved at board level but applies to all employees (which throughout this policy and procedure includes workers as defined and extended by the Employment Rights Act 1996), trustees, governors and members of schools, settings, and services, hereafter the 'organisations', within The Claxton Trust.

It has been created using a model policy created by Herts for Learning and has therefore been produced in consultation with external advisors and the professional associations/trade unions.

1. Introduction

It is important to The Claxton Trust that any fraud, misconduct or wrongdoing by employees, trustees or governors of the organisation is reported and properly dealt with. The trust and its local governing bodies will, therefore, respond to all individuals who raise any genuine concerns that they may have about the conduct of others in the trust, which are in the public interest. This policy and procedure set out the way in which individuals may raise any concerns that they have and how those concerns will be dealt with.

- the trust expects the highest standards of conduct from all employees, trustees and governors and will treat seriously any concern raised about illegal or improper conduct
- any individual covered by this policy will be expected, through agreed procedures and without fear of recrimination, to bring to the attention of the headteacher (or the chair of governors if the concerns relate to the headteacher) any serious impropriety or breach of procedure.
- employees who do not follow the steps identified in this procedure or other agreed internal procedures, and take their concerns to other outside sources (e.g., the press), may be subject to a formal disciplinary investigation
- this policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment, and it may be amended at any time. The organisation may also vary any time limits as appropriate in any case.

2. Background

The law provides protection for employees who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters. These are called 'qualifying disclosures'. A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest by the employee who has a reasonable belief that...

- a criminal offence
- a miscarriage of justice
- an act creating risk to health and safety
- an act causing damage to the environment
- a breach of any legal obligation
- a concealment of any of the above

...is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed. It is not necessary for the employee to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be committed - a reasonable belief is sufficient.

The employee has no responsibility for investigating the matter; it is the trust's responsibility to ensure that an investigation takes place:

- where the concerns are about safeguarding children or young people, the organisation's designated senior person for Child Protection must be notified
- it is a procedure in which the headteacher or chair of governors will be expected to act swiftly and constructively in the investigation of any concerns in accordance with the organisation's disciplinary procedure

- concern about a colleague's professional capability should not be dealt with using this policy

3. When should it be used?

This policy and procedure are for disclosures about matters other than a breach of an employee's own contract of employment. If an employee is concerned that their own contract has been, or is likely to be, breached they should use the organisation's grievance procedure.

Where a disclosure is merely an expression of opinion that fails to show that a legal obligation has been or is likely to be breached, it cannot amount to a protected or qualifying disclosure for the purposes of the whistleblowing legislation.

A qualifying disclosure means any disclosure of information that in the reasonable belief of the worker is made in the public interest.

- 3.1** This policy and procedure is not designed to replace or be used as an alternative to the school's grievance procedure, which should be used where an employee is only aggrieved about their own situation. This policy and procedure will also not apply where the employee simply disagrees with the way the school is run
- 3.2** Employees must have reasonable grounds for believing the information they have is accurate and not just idle gossip or rumour
- 3.3** An employee who makes such a protected disclosure has the right not to be subjected to detrimental treatment which includes, dismissal, disciplinary action, threats, or other unfavourable treatment, because they have made a disclosure, provided it has not been made maliciously. Any employee who uses this policy and procedure will not be penalised for doing so. The employer will not tolerate harassment and/or victimisation of any employee raising concerns.
- 3.4** An employee who is not sure whether the conduct they is concerned about does constitute illegal or improper conduct or is unsure about how to proceed should contact their professional association/trade union or Public Concern at Work, an independent charity who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are at the end of this policy.
- 3.5** Financial regulations require that any suspicion of fraud, corruption or other financial irregularity is reported to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for possible investigation. Normally an employee must first report any suspicion of such an irregularity to the headteacher or chair of governors (but see section 5), who will in turn report it to the accounting officer. It is the accounting officer's decision whether the matter is then reportable to the ESFA.

4. Principles

Any matter raised under this policy and procedure will be investigated thoroughly, promptly, and confidentially. Whilst the trust will aim to keep the employee informed of the progress of the investigation and likely timescales sometimes the requirement for confidentiality will prevent full information about the investigation and any consequential disciplinary action from being disclosed.

No employee will be victimised for raising a matter under this policy. This means that the continued employment and opportunities for future promotion or training of the employee will not be prejudiced because they have raised a legitimate concern.

Victimisation of a worker for raising a qualified disclosure will be a disciplinary offence.

If misconduct is discovered because of any investigation under this policy the matter will be considered under the organisation’s disciplinary procedure, in addition to any appropriate external measures.

Maliciously making a false allegation is a disciplinary offence.

An instruction to cover up wrongdoing is a disciplinary offence. If told not to raise or pursue any concern, even by a person in authority, employees should not agree to remain silent.

5. Procedure

Stage 1	In the first instance, unless the employee reasonably believes their headteacher to be involved in the wrongdoing, any concerns should be raised with the employee’s headteacher. If they believe the headteacher to be involved, then the employee should proceed straight to stage three.
Stage 2	The headteacher/chair of governors will arrange an investigation into the matter (either by investigating the matter himself/herself or immediately passing the issue to someone in a senior position or external to the organisation). The investigation may involve the employee and others involved giving written statements. Any investigation will be carried out in accordance with the principles set out above. The headteacher (or the person who carried out the investigation) will then report to the chair of governors/ local governing body who will take the necessary action, including reporting the matter to any appropriate department or regulatory agency. If disciplinary action is required, this will be taken forward by the headteacher/chair of governors/local governing body. On conclusion of any investigation, the employee will be told the outcome of the investigation and what the next steps will be (subject to issues of confidentiality). If no action is to be taken the reason for this will be explained
Stage 3	If the employee is concerned that their headteacher is involved in the wrongdoing, has failed to make a proper investigation, or has failed to report the outcome of the investigation, they should inform the chair of the local governing body. The aim of this policy and procedure is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating, and remedying any wrongdoing in the organisation. In most cases employees should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally and employees are strongly advised to seek advice before reporting a concern in this way. Employees who feel unable to follow this route, for whatever reason, have the option of contacting a prescribed person and the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014 lists the prescribed persons and the matters within their remit. For education issues this is likely to include Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Children’s services and skills, the Secretary of State for Education and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulator. A full list can be obtained from the charity, Public Concern, or the BEIS website.

Employees who want to use the procedure but feel uneasy about it may wish to consult their professional association/trade union initially and bring a colleague professional association/trade union representative along to any discussions. This is permitted if the third party is not involved in the issue.

Employees are not encouraged to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if further information cannot be obtained from the employee. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Employees who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to one of the contacts listed in section 8 of this policy and appropriate measures can be taken to preserve confidentiality although no guarantee can be given that this will always be possible.

If an employee, other than the headteacher, is approached by a colleague on a matter of concern as defined in this document, they are advised to take the matter to the headteacher.

7. Safeguarding children and young people

Separate to the obligations under this policy, all employees have a duty to report concerns about the safety and welfare of pupils/students.

Concerns about any of the following should be reported to the organisation's designated senior person for Child Protection (DSP):

- physical abuse of a pupil/student
- sexual abuse of a pupil/student
- emotional abuse of a pupil/student
- neglect of a pupil/student
- an intimate or improper relationship between an adult and a pupil/student

The reason for the concern may be the actions of a colleague (including a more senior colleague), a governor, another pupil/student or someone outside the organisation. Whatever the reason, concerns must be reported. Failure to report a Child Protection related allegation will be a disciplinary matter.

8. General

The legislation protecting individuals who makes a protected disclosure applies not only to employees, but also to any person who undertakes to do or perform personally (or otherwise) any work or service for the employer, regardless of the nature of the contractual relationship between them.

Section 43J of the Employment Rights Act 1996 provides that a settlement agreement made between an employee and employer cannot prevent future protected disclosures.

Any confidentiality obligations in contracts of employment that would prevent an employee making a protected disclosure will be void.

In line with the requirements of the [Academy Trust Handbook](#), this policy will be published on the trust's website and the websites of individual schools, settings and services within the trust.