



# TRUE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

<b>Whistleblowing (Raising Concerns) Policy</b>	
<b>Policy Ref Number: TLP0024</b>	<b>Reviewed by: Director of People &amp; Culture</b> <b>Approved by: People Committee</b>
<b>Policy Date: January 2025</b>	<b>Review Date: December 2027</b> Unless there are operational or legislative changes that require an earlier review.

## 1. AIM

---

This policy aims to:

- Encourage individuals affected to report suspected misconduct as soon as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated, and that their confidentiality will be respected
- Let all employees across the trust know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the trust
- Set clear procedures for how the trust will respond to such concerns
- Let all staff know the protection available to them if they raise a concern
- Assure 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 (though vexatious or malicious concerns may be considered a disciplinary issue)

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time. The policy applies to all employees or other workers who provide services to the trust in any capacity, including self-employed consultants, volunteers or contractors who provide services on a personal basis and agency workers.

## 2. 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.

## 3. DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

---

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.

Not all concerns about the trust, or individual schools in the trust, count as whistle-blowing. For example, personal staff grievances such as bullying or harassment do not usually count as whistle-blowing. If something affects a staff member as an individual, or relates to an individual employment contract, this is likely a grievance or should be considered under the Dignity at Work Policy.

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) has:

- [Further guidance](#) on the difference between a whistle-blowing concern and a grievance that staff may find useful if unsure

This policy does not cover members of the public and any reports received will be dealt with under the Trust Complaints Policy. Concerns around Child Protection should be referred through each individual schools' s Safeguarding Procedure.

We recognise that the decision to speak out and report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the misconduct. As a result, we will not tolerate any detrimental treatment (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern that you believe to be true.

If someone is found to have subjected a bona fide whistleblower to any detriment this will be dealt with under the Trust's disciplinary procedure. Should you believe that you have suffered a detriment as a result of raising a concern you should raise the issue through the Trust's grievance procedure.

Please be aware however, that should you already be the subject of disciplinary or redundancy procedures, the procedures will not be halted as a result of the whistleblowing report.

#### **4. EQUALITY, CONSISTENCY OF TREATMENT AND FAIRNESS**

---

The Governing and Trust Boards are committed to ensuring consistency of treatment and fairness. They will abide by all relevant equality legislation, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments where these are deemed either necessary or appropriate.

The procedures should be applied irrespective of the age, marital status (including civil partnership), sex, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, socio economic status or caring responsibility of the person concerned. This means that the policy may need to be adjusted to cater for the specific needs of an individual including the provision of information in alternative formats where necessary.

#### **5. LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES**

---

This policy links to the following policies:

- Trust Grievance Policy
- Trust Complaints Procedure
- Trust Dignity at Work Policy
- School Child Protection Policies

#### **6. OPEN DISCLOSURES**

---

The best culture at True Learning is one where people feel confident in the whistleblowing system and can speak up openly about concerns. This openness makes it easier to investigate the issue, gather more details, and find out if there are hidden motives. It also helps avoid unfair blame and reduces distrust or worry in the workplace.

#### **7. CONFIDENTIALITY**

---

Some individuals may not feel comfortable reporting concerns openly. In such cases, the policy allows them to request confidentiality. As far as we can, we try to keep all concerns raised under this policy confidential and only disclose details on a 'need to know basis'. We'll tell anyone involved in the process that they must keep the information confidential. There are, however, sometimes occasions where we will need to inform additional people about your concerns, for example in criminal or civil proceedings. There may also be times when we need to contact a regulatory body such as OFSTED, DBS or the LADO.

## **8. ANONYMOUS CONCERNS**

---

If you want to raise your concern anonymously, we'll make every effort to keep your identity confidential and only reveal it where necessary to those involved in investigating, however it can be hard to properly investigate anonymous complaints. Occasionally your identity will become apparent to other parties from the nature of the information you tell us.

We will investigate all concerns that are raised, even if they are raised anonymously. However, the more information that you can give us, the easier it is for us to progress our investigations. If you raise a concern on an anonymous basis, you should be aware that this may make it impossible for us to fully investigate your concerns. Click on the link below to submit information via an online form.

[Confidential Reporting Form](#)

## **9. UNTRUE ALLEGATIONS**

---

If you make an allegation that you believe to be true, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make allegations that you know to be false, then disciplinary action may be taken against you under the Trust's procedures.

## **10. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN**

---

As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your immediate manager or Head Teacher. However, depending upon the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice, this may not be appropriate.

Where this is the case you should report your concern directly to your Headteacher or to the Chief Executive Officer. If your concern relates to the Chief Executive Officer then you should report your concern directly to the Chair of Trustees.

Members of the central team should report their concern to the CEO. If the concern is about the CEO, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the central team staff should report the concern to the Chair of Trustees.

There are two ways to formally make a whistleblowing disclosure;

- Verbally, either face to face or by telephone, or
- In writing, either by sending a letter or email to the relevant person

It is preferable for concerns to be raised in writing and where this is the case the following details are requested;

- Your name and contact details
- Background information and history including details as to why you are concerned
- Whether the issue has already been reported to management and the outcome of this
- Whether you wish your name to remain confidential
- Whether you want feedback
- The names and jobs of any other employees who may support your concern.

Where reports are made verbally to one of the named officers they should attempt to ascertain the same information. The earlier you express the concern the easier it is to take action.

## **11. HOW WE WILL INVESTIGATE THE CONCERNS**

---

Within each individual school, the Governing Body have appointed the Head Teacher to be the point of contact for concerns raised under the Whistleblowing Procedure. They may ask to be supported by another member of the Strategic Leadership Team. In circumstances where the Head Teacher could not be independent and impartial, then the Chief Executive Officer or another person will be appointed by the Governing Body/Trust, i.e. an Independent Designated Officer will be established.

In order to protect individuals and those accused of misconduct or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

As part of the initial investigation, contact will be made with you to clarify your concerns, and obtain any further information that you may have. The recipient of your concern will:

- Meet with you within a reasonable time (no later than 10 working days) to discuss your concerns. You can bring a trade union or professional association representative to provide support.
- Get as much detail as possible about your concerns at this meeting, and record the information. If it becomes apparent the concern is not of a whistle-blowing nature, the recipient should handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy/procedure
- Reiterate, at this meeting, that you are protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. However, it is important to note that 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. We'll aim to keep you informed of its progress and outcome, but sometimes the need for confidentiality might restrict us from sharing detailed information.
- The amount of contact between the designated officer and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the designated officer will seek further information from you throughout the investigation.

## **12. COMMUNICATING THE OUTCOME**

---

Once the investigation – whether this was just the initial investigation of the concern, or whether further investigation was needed – 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, such as the local authority or police.

They will inform you of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality. Beyond the immediate actions, the CEO, trustees and other staff, if necessary, will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

Whilst we cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, we will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

If you're not happy with the way your concerns have been addressed, you should escalate your concerns to a more senior manager, who did not deal with your original concern. The senior manager will then determine

whether any further investigation is required. Once that manager has made a determination that will be the end of the procedure under this policy.

### **13. MALICIOUS OR VEXATIOUS ALLEGATIONS**

---

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made in good faith, but the investigation 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, the Trust will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the person making the allegation.

### **14. HOW THE MATTER CAN BE TAKEN FURTHER**

---

The Trust encourages staff to raise their concerns internally, in line with this policy, but recognises that staff 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](#).

The Protect [advice line](#) can also help staff when deciding whether to raise the concern to an external party. If you do take the matter outside the Trust, you should ensure that you do not disclose confidential information.

### **15. SUPPORT**

---

We understand that raising concerns can be upsetting and stressful.

We operate an Employee Assistance Helpline through Vivup. Vivup provides a free, confidential telephone and web-based information support service providing you with access to experienced professionals, consultants and counsellors. The contact number for Vivup is 03303 800658, and they can offer you emotional support 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

We also have trained mental health first aiders who work across all sites within the Trust. If you feel you need to talk to someone, please contact a mental health first aider directly or alternatively contact the HR Team who will be able to put you in contact with one of our trained mental health first aiders.

You can also seek support from Protect. Protect is an independent whistleblowing charity and they operate a confidential helpline.

Their details are:

Helpline: 0203 117 2520

Email: [whistle@pcaw.co.uk](mailto:whistle@pcaw.co.uk)

Website: [www.pcaw.co.uk](http://www.pcaw.co.uk)