

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

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Next Review Due: October 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

The Heathland Whitefriars Federation is committed to the highest possible standards of conduct, openness, honesty and accountability and takes seriously any issues of malpractice or wrongdoing. Workers are often the first to realise there may be something seriously wrong within the workplace and the Federation expects workers who have serious concerns about any aspect of the running of the Federation to come forward and voice those concerns and to feel supported when doing so.

This procedure has been designed to comply with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) which protects workers who disclose reasonable concerns about serious misconduct or malpractice at work, often referred to as 'whistle blowing'. This Act makes provision on the kinds of disclosures which may be protected, the circumstances in which such disclosures are protected and persons who may be protected.

This policy and procedure applies to all Federation employees, including permanent, temporary and agency workers, volunteers plus staff working for the Federation's contractors and suppliers.

2. WHAT IS 'WHISTLEBLOWING'?

Whistleblowing inside the work place is the term used to describe reporting by employees or ex-employees, of wrongdoing on the part of management, the Board of Directors or by fellow employees. Malpractice or wrongdoings include:

- a criminal offence;
- the breach of a legal obligation;
- a miscarriage of justice;
- a danger to the health and safety of any individual;
- damage to the environment; or
- deliberate **covering up of information tending to show any of the above.**

3. PROTECTING THE WHISTLE BLOWER

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 a whistle blower is protected from detriment and unfair dismissal. The Federation will support and not discriminate against concerned employees who apply the Whistleblowing procedure, provided any claim is made in good faith.

4. WHEN SHOULD WHISTLEBLOWING PROCEDURES BE USED?

- 4.1 If an employee has concerns about wrongdoing at the Federation and feels that those concerns are sufficiently serious to require reporting, this procedure outlines what should be done.

- 4.2 Each individual member of staff should feel able to speak freely on such matters. However, the Federation and colleagues have the right to protect themselves against unfounded false or malicious accusations.
- 4.3 Whistle blowing should only be used when the party implementing the procedure (Representor) has reasonable grounds for believing that a serious offence has been or may be committed. It must never be used without good grounds, falsely or maliciously.
- 4.4 Whistleblowing is not appropriate for dealing with issues between an employee and the Federation which relate to the employee's own employment or rights or employment conditions generally. Alternative dispute resolution procedures for that purpose are outlined in the employment terms and conditions.
- 4.5 Whistleblowing is not appropriate for dealing with pupil complaints, which will be dealt with under the separately published Complaints procedure.
- 4.6 Whistleblowing is not appropriate to specific cases of child safety or safeguarding which will be dealt with under the procedures specified in that connection. If any staff member has concerns that a pupil is being dealt with unfairly in school, they should raise their concern, in the first instance with the Executive Headteacher or Child Protection Officer.

5 THE PROCEDURE

- 5.2 Any issue raised will be kept confidential while the procedure is being used.
- 5.3 The Representor (the person raising the concern) should raise their concern with their line manager. This may be done orally or in writing.
- 5.4 However, if the concern relates to the Representor's line manager or any person to whom he or she reports, other than the Executive Headteacher, the Representor should raise the issue with the Executive Headteacher;
- 5.5 If the concern relates to the Executive Headteacher, the Representor should raise the matter with the Chair of the Board of Directors.
- 5.6 The person with whom the matter is raised is referred to as the "Assessor". The Assessor will:
- Interview the Representor as soon as possible within seven working days, in confidence. Early interview will be essential if the concern relates to an immediate danger to loss of life or serious injury or risk to pupils;
 - Obtain as much information as possible from the Representor about the grounds for the belief of wrongdoing;
 - Consult with the Representor about further steps which could be taken;
 - Advise the Representor of the appropriate route if the matter does not fall under this Procedure;
 - Other than in the case of paragraph 5.4, report all matters raised under this procedure to the Chair of the Board of Directors.
- 5.7 At the interview with the Assessor, the Representor may be accompanied by a recognised trade union representative or a work colleague. The Assessor may be accompanied by a member of the Federation staff to take notes.

The Assessor may at any time disclose the matter to a professionally qualified lawyer for the purpose of taking legal advice. The Assessor may also disclose the issue, in confidence, to other suitable professionals, such as independent HR consultants or school governance providers in order to assess the nature of the case and to inform the outcome of the investigation.

- 5.8 Promptly within ten working days of the interview, the Assessor will recommend one or more of the following:
- The matter be further investigated internally by the Federation;
 - The matter be further investigated by external consultants appointed by the Federation;
 - The matter be reported to an external agency;
 - Disciplinary proceedings be implemented against an employee;
 - The route for the Representor to pursue the matter if it does not fall within this procedure; or
 - That no further **action is taken by the Federation.**
- 5.9 The grounds on which no further action is taken include:
- **The** Assessor is satisfied that, on the balance of probabilities, there is no evidence that wrongdoing within the meaning of this procedure has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur;
 - The Assessor is satisfied that the Representor is not acting in good faith;
 - The matter is already (or has been) the subject of proceedings under one of the Federation's other procedures or policies;
 - The matter concerned is already (or has been) the subject of legal proceedings, or has already been referred to an **external agency.**
- 5.10 The recommendation of the Assessor will be made to the Executive Headteacher. However, should it be alleged that the Headteacher is involved in the alleged wrongdoing; the recommendation will be made to the Board of Directors.
- 5.11 The Executive Headteacher or Chair of the Board of Directors, as appropriate, will ensure that the recommendation is implemented unless there is good reason for not doing so in whole or in part. Such a reason will be reported to the next meeting of the Board of Directors.
- 5.12 The Representor's identity will be kept confidential unless the Representor otherwise consents or unless there are grounds to believe that the Representor has acted maliciously. In the absence of such consent or grounds, the Assessor will not reveal the identity of the Representor except:
- Where the Assessor is under a legal obligation to do so;
 - Where the information is already in the public domain; or
 - On a legally privileged basis to a professionally qualified lawyer for the purpose of obtaining legal advice.
- 5.13 The conclusion of any agreed investigation will be reported by the Assessor to the Representor promptly within twenty eight working days of the initial interview.

- 5.14 All responses to the Representor will be made in writing and sent to the Representor's home address.
- 5.15 If the Representor has not had a response within the above time limit or such reasonable extension as the Federation requires, the Representor may go to an appropriate external agency, under paragraph 7, but will inform the Assessor before doing so.
- 5.16 The Representor may at any time disclose the matter on a legally privileged basis to a professionally qualified lawyer for the purpose of taking legal advice.

6 MALICIOUS ACCUSATIONS

- 6.1 A deliberately false or malicious accusation made by a Representor is a disciplinary offence and will be dealt with under the Federation's disciplinary procedure, as well as potentially exposing the Representor to legal liability.

7 INFORMING EXTERNAL AGENCIES

- 7.1 Within the Federation all staff have a duty of confidentiality. The duty of confidentiality is implied by the law in every contract of employment and prohibits employees from publicly disclosing employers' confidential information, unless it is in the public interest that the information is disclosed or unless the Federation fails to follow required procedures. Other legal restrictions on the disclosure of information, for example under data protection legislation, may also apply.
- 7.2 Whistleblowing to an external agency without first going through the internal procedure is a breach of the Federation's Code of Conduct. If a worker is unsure whether or how to raise a concern or wants confidential advice, contact can be made with the independent charity Public Concern at Work on 020 7404 6609 or at whistle@pcaw.co.uk. Their lawyers can provide free confidential advice on how to raise a concern about serious malpractice or wrongdoing at work. The external agencies which may be used if disclosure is permitted under paragraph 5.14 are:
- A solicitor in the course of obtaining legal advice
 - Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education (0300 123 3155)
 - The Secretary of State for Education / the Department for Education / the ESFA. (In these circumstances, the DfE/ESFA will assess whether all school processes have been applied and that the Assessor has done everything possible to resolve the issue. If this is not the case, the DfE/ESFA will refer the matter back to the Assessor) (0370 000 2288);
 - A Member of Parliament (HL: Gareth Thomas: 020 8861 6300 or 020 7219 4243/ WF: Bob Blackman: 020 8421 3323 or 020 7219 4243);
 - Health and Safety Executive (0300 003 1747);
 - Police (101)
- 7.3 Whistleblowing to the media is not appropriate or permitted in any circumstances.

8 CONFIDENTIAL EMPLOYEE ENQUIRIES

- 8.1 Employees may, on a confidential basis seek prior guidance from the Executive Headteacher if they wish to establish whether any course of conduct on their part or

on the part of another employee may amount to wrongdoing under these procedures. Such enquiry shall be kept confidential. The Executive Headteacher will attempt to provide guidance on the basis of the information provided, but such guidance shall not prejudice the rights of the Federation or any person under these procedures.