

# HALL SCHOOL WIMBLEDON

## WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

### 1. POLICY STATEMENT

We are committed to conducting our business with honesty and integrity, and we expect all staff to maintain high standards in accordance with our Code of Conduct. However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring or to address them when they do occur.

This policy relates to the disclosure internally or externally by employees of suspected malpractice in the workplace, and applies to all employees. It is also available for use by other individuals performing functions in relation to Hall School Wimbledon, such as agency workers and contractors.

It is important to the business that any fraud, misconduct or wrongdoing by employees is reported and properly dealt with. The school therefore encourages all individuals to raise any genuine concerns that they may have about the conduct of others in the school, **which are in the public interest**. This policy and procedure sets out the way in which individuals may raise any concerns that they have and how those concerns will be dealt with.

- 1.1 The school expects the highest standards of conduct from all employees and governors and will treat seriously any concern raised about illegal or improper conduct
- 1.2 Any individual covered by this policy will be expected, through agreed procedures and without fear of retribution, to bring to the attention of the Head any serious impropriety or breach of procedure.
- 1.3 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
- 1.4 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. The school 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 school's responsibility to ensure that an investigation takes place:

- 2.1** Where the concerns are about **safeguarding children**, school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy must be followed.
- 2.2** It is a procedure in which the Head will be expected to act swiftly and constructively in the investigation of any concerns in accordance with the school's disciplinary procedure
- 2.3** Concern about a colleague's professional capability should **not** be dealt with using this policy (but see section 7 below).

### 3. When should it be used?

This policy and procedure is 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 he/she should use the school'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.

**Recent changes to the law** - A qualifying disclosure means any disclosure of information that in the reasonable belief of the worker is made in the public interest. This is why an employee will generally be precluded from being able to 'blow the whistle' about breaches of his or her own employment contract. The requirement that a whistleblower make a qualifying disclosure 'in good faith' has been removed. Therefore, while the employer can seek a declaration from the whistleblower that he or she is not knowingly making a false allegation, disciplinary action is likely to be appropriate only where there is clear evidence that the employee has misused this policy.

- 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 he/she has 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 he/she is concerned about does constitute illegal or improper conduct or is unsure about how to proceed may contact the Independent External Body (details below).
- 3.5** Financial regulations require that any suspicion of fraud, corruption or other financial irregularity is reported to Internal Audit for possible investigation. Normally an employee must first report any suspicion of such an irregularity to the Head or chair of governors.

#### **4. Principles**

- 4.1** Any matter raised under this policy and procedure will be investigated thoroughly, promptly and confidentially. Whilst the school 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
- 4.2** 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 he/she has raised a legitimate concern
- 4.3** Victimisation of a worker for raising a qualified disclosure will be a disciplinary offence
- 4.4** If misconduct is discovered as a result of any investigation under this policy the matter will be considered under the school's disciplinary procedure, in addition to any appropriate external measures
- 4.5** Maliciously making a false allegation is a disciplinary offence
- 4.6** An instruction to cover up wrongdoing is in itself 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**

- 5.1** In the first instance, unless the employee reasonably believes their Head to be involved in the wrongdoing, any concerns should be raised with the Head. If he/she believes the Head to be involved, then the employee should proceed straight to stage three (see 5.3).
- 5.2** The Head will arrange an investigation into the matter (either by investigating the matter himself/herself or immediately passing the issue to the chair of the school's governing body). 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.

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 as long as 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

- 5.3** The Head (or the person who carried out the investigation) will then report to the chair of governors/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 Head. 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

If the employee is concerned that their Head is involved in the wrongdoing, has failed to make a proper investigation or has failed to report the outcome of the investigation, he/she should inform the chair of the school's governing body, unless the concern is about safeguarding children (See 7).

The aim of this policy and procedure is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the school. 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 one of the following:

- HM Revenue and Customs
- The Financial Services Authority
- The Office of Fair Trading
- The Health and Safety Executive
- The Environment Agency
- The Director of Public Prosecutions
- The Serious Fraud Office
- The Education Funding Agency
- The Department for Education
- The National College for Teaching and Leadership

## **6. What should be done if an issue is raised with a member of staff?**

- 6.1** If a member of staff, other than the Head, is approached by a colleague on a matter of concern as defined in this document, he/she is advised to take the matter to the Head (but see 5).

## **7. Safeguarding children**

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

**7.2 Concerns about any of the following should be reported immediately in accordance with the school's detailed Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy:**

- 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

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

### **Generally**

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.

8. **Contacts**

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| <b>Whistleblowing Officer</b>   | Sheila O’Sullivan<br>020 8394 6148<br><a href="mailto:osullivans@hsw.co.uk">osullivans@hsw.co.uk</a>   |
| <b>Independent External Body</b>                                      | The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline:<br>0800 028 0285<br>Email: <a href="mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk">help@nspcc.org.uk</a>   |
| <b>Public Concern at Work</b><br>(Independent whistleblowing charity) | Helpline: (020) 7404 6609<br>E-mail: <a href="mailto:whistle@pcaw.co.uk">whistle@pcaw.co.uk</a><br>Website: <a href="http://www.pcaw.co.uk">www.pcaw.co.uk</a> |