



HOWE GREEN HOUSE

BISHOP'S STORTFORD

CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING (WHISTLEBLOWING) POLICY - SAFEGUARDING

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This policy is endorsed by	Governing Board and the Co-Headteachers
This policy is owned by	The Co-Headteachers
Review Body	Whole Governing Body

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Previous Reviews	

To be made available	YES
To be on website	YES
Internal staff only	NO
Internal students only	NO
Internal staff and students	YES

Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Policy – Safeguarding

Howe Green House School

This Policy also includes Little Oaks Nursery and Before and After School Provision

Statement of Intent

The governors and staff of Howe Green House School fully recognise the contribution it makes to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. We recognise that all staff, including volunteers, have a full and active part to play in protecting our pupils from harm.

All staff and governors believe that our school should provide a caring, positive, safe and stimulating environment, which promotes the intellectual, social, physical, and moral development of the individual child.

Introduction

The school is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, honesty and accountability. In line with this commitment, the Governing Body encourages employees with serious concerns about any aspect of the school's work to come forward and voice these concerns. This process is commonly referred to as "whistleblowing". It is recognised that staff may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the school. However, all staff should be aware of their duty to raise concerns where they exist, about the attitude or actions of colleagues. They may also fear harassment or victimisation which may lead them to ignore the concern rather than report what may be a suspicion of malpractice. Therefore, it is acknowledged that certain cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis. This policy is intended to encourage and enable staff to raise serious concerns and make it clear that staff can make reports without fear of reprisals.

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1. Aims

This policy aims to:

- Encourage individuals affected to report suspected wrongdoing 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 staff know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the school
- Set clear procedures for how the school will respond to such concerns
- Let all staff know the protection available to them if they raise a whistle-blowing 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)

2. Definition of whistle-blowing

Whistle-blowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is “in the public interest”. There are existing procedures in place to enable staff to lodge a grievance relating to their own employment. The Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Policy is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of the grievance procedure. Any serious concern that a member of staff has about an aspect of service provision or the conduct of staff or governors or others acting on behalf of the school can, and should be, reported under this policy.

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.

The concern may be something that makes employees feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, their experience or the standards to which they believe the school subscribes.

The school recognises that children cannot be expected to raise concerns in an environment where staff fail to do so therefore, a culture of openness and scrutiny from a staff perspective is essential to further promote the confidence of children feeling able to speak up and voice any concerns.

Not all concerns about the school 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.

When staff have a concern, they should consider whether it would be better to follow our staff grievance or complaints procedures.

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
- A free and confidential advice line

3. Safeguards

Harassment or Victimisation

The Governing Body recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisals from those who may be guilty of malpractice or from the school as a whole. The school will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action in order to protect a person who raises a concern in good faith. Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice raised by an individual will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or other procedure that is already affecting the individual.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal the identity if that is the wish of the individual. However, it must be appreciated that any investigation process may reveal the source of the information and that the individual may need to come forward as a witness and provide a statement, as part of the evidence or in order to pursue the complaint.

Anonymity

This policy encourages members of staff who raise concerns to put their name to the allegation whenever possible. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will be considered at the discretion of the school. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised;
- the credibility of the concern;
- the likelihood of obtaining the necessary information.

4. Procedure for staff to raise a whistle-blowing concern

4.1 When to raise a concern

Staff should consider the examples in section 2 when deciding whether their concern is of a whistle-blowing nature. Consider whether the incident(s) was illegal, breached statutory or school procedures, put people in danger or was an attempt to cover any such activity up.

4.2 Who to report to

School-based staff should report their concern to the Co-Headteachers. If the concern is about a Co-Headteacher, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the staff member should report their concern a Co-Chair of Governors.

4.3 How to raise the concern

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Staff who wish to make a written report are invited to use the following format:

- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates);
- the reason why the member of staff is particularly concerned about the situation.
- staff raising a concern should also include details of any personal interest in the matter.

It should be noted that the earlier a concern is expressed, the easier it is to take appropriate action.

Although staff are not expected to prove the truth of an allegation that is made, it will be necessary that they are able to demonstrate that there are sufficient grounds for concern. Advice and guidance on how specific matters of concern may be pursued can be sought from their trade union or professional association.

Staff may invite their trade union or professional association representative or work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns they have raised.

5. School procedure for responding to a whistle-blowing concern

5.1 Investigating the concern

When a concern is received by the Co-Headteachers or Co-Chairs of Governors – referred to from here as the ‘recipient’ – they will:

- Meet with the person raising the concern within a reasonable time. The person raising the concern may be joined by a trade union, professional association representative or a work colleague who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates.
- Get as much detail as possible about the concern 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 they are protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. If the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious, disciplinary action may be taken (see section 6 of this policy)

➤ Establish whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant further investigation. If there is:

- The recipient should then arrange a further investigation into the matter, involving the Governing Board, if appropriate. Decide whether the concern or allegation within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child safeguarding or discrimination issues), will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. In some cases, they may need to bring in an external, independent body to investigate. In others, they may need to report the matter to the police
- The person who raised the concern will be contacted within ten working days (term time) of a concern being raised, the Co-Headteachers (or Co-Chair of Governors) will write to the person who has raised the concern:
 - acknowledging that the concern has been received;
 - indicating how she/he proposes to deal with the matter;
 - giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
 - telling the person whether any initial enquiries have been made;
 - supplying the person with information on staff support systems;
 - telling the person whether further investigations will take place and, if not, why not.

It should be noted that some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. Equally some issues may be investigated without the need for initial enquiries. If urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Every effort will be made to resolve the matters raised as soon as possible, in the interests of the school, the person raising the concern and the person(s) being investigated. The amount of contact between the Co-Headteachers (or Chair of Governors) considering the issues and the member of staff raising the concern will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information may be sought from the person raising the concern. The school will take appropriate steps to minimise any difficulties, which a member of staff may experience as a result of raising a concern. For example, if staff are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the school will need to inform them and consider what steps are required to provide support. The school accepts that staff raising a concern need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, the person raising the concern will receive as much information as possible as the investigation progresses.

5.2 Outcome of the investigation

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 the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

Beyond the immediate actions, the Governing Board, Co-Headteachers 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.

6. 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 school will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the person making the allegation.

The school will try to ensure that the negative impact of either a malicious or vexatious allegation about any person is minimised. However, it acknowledges that it may not be possible to prevent all potential repercussions involved.

7. Escalating concerns beyond the school

The school encourages staff to raise their concerns internally, in line with section 4 of this policy. If the matter of concern is taken outside the school, the member of staff should ensure that, as far as possible, it is raised without confidential information being divulged. Other than in exceptional circumstances, it would be expected that staff have exhausted the internal routes available first, 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, linked to in section 3 of this policy, can also help staff when deciding whether to raise the concern to an external party.

8. Monitoring the policy

The Co-Headteachers and Co-Chair of Governors will register the nature of any concerns raised and record the outcome.

Date of Policy Update: March 2025

Next Review: March 2026

Reviewed by: The Governing Board

Signed by Co-Chairs of Governors: Sam Bristow and Ed Fielding

Signed by Co-Headteachers: Anna Lipani and Paul Bailey