



THE ST. BART'S
ACADEMY
— TRUST —

Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure

September 2021

The St. Bart's Academy Trust

Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure

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Contents

ACAS Definition.....	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Aim of the procedure.....	5
3. Principles of the Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure.....	6
4. Concerns To Which The Whistleblowing Procedure Can Apply	6
5. The Public Interest Disclosure Act	7
6. Who Can Use This Procedure?	7
7. How Do You Raise A Serious Concern?	7
8. How Are Concerns Dealt With?	8
Situations Of Imminent Danger	8
Initial Assessment/Meeting	8
Investigations	9
Anonymous Reporting	9
Confidentiality	10
Record Keeping	10
9. Support Available.....	10
10. What Happens If The Concerns Are Not Founded?	11
11. How To Take The Matter Further.....	11
12. Monitoring and review	11
13. External Contacts List	12
Trade Unions	12
Safeguarding Children Boards	13
Keeping Children Safe In Education Document	13
Appendix 1 - Issues to consider at Initial Assessment / Fact Finding meeting	14

ACAS Definition

ACAS defines whistleblowing as bringing information about a wrongdoing to the attention of employers or relevant organisation.

This is commonly referred to as 'blowing the whistle'. The law that protects whistle-blowers is for the public interest - so people can speak out if they find malpractice in an organisation. Blowing the whistle is more formally known as 'making a disclosure in the public interest'.

Qualifying disclosures are disclosures of information where the worker reasonably believes (and it is in the public interest) that one or more of the following matters is either happening, has taken place, or is likely to happen in the future.

- 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
- Deliberate attempt to conceal any of the above.

If a worker is going to make a disclosure it should be made to the employer first, or if they feel unable to use the organisations procedure the disclosure should be made to a prescribed person, so that employment rights are protected.

1. Introduction

This procedure has been adopted by the St. Bart's Multi-Academy Trust and is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of all staff.

The Trust is proud of the high standards of openness, integrity and accountability within its schools, and is dedicated to providing a quality service to pupils, parents, governors and schools partners. The schools promotes good educational practices and are committed to addressing poor practices.

Individuals who work for the school are often the first people to realise there may be something seriously wrong. However you may not want to 'speak up' about it in case you seem disloyal to colleagues or you are concerned about being victimised or discriminated against. You might be worried that you could be wrong or it might just seem too complicated and therefore it may seem easier to say nothing.

You have a responsibility to raise concerns about poor practices within school. In addition all staff and volunteers within schools must comply with the Government "Keeping Children Safe in Education" guidance. This includes taking action to protect a child who may be at risk of harm. It is advisable that this document is read in conjunction with the "Keeping Children Safe in Education" document. Any employee becoming aware of inappropriate activity is therefore obliged, and Governors and the Principal encourage you, to report it. You have a right to be protected from reprisals if you do raise concerns.

The school recognises staff may wish to seek advice and be accompanied by their Trade Union when using the provisions of this policy and acknowledges and endorses the role representatives play in this area.

The procedure has been consulted on with recognised Teaching and Support Trade Unions and its operation will be kept under review. The procedure is non-contractual and can be varied by mutual agreement of all parties concerned.

2. Aim of the procedure

The school has a number of different policies and procedures in place to deal with different types of concerns. For example, the grievance procedure for employees to raise matters relating to their conditions of employment, the complaints procedure for parents to raise concerns, and a safeguarding policy to investigate allegations of abuse.

The Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure is not intended to replace the school's standard procedures. The aim of the procedure is to:

- provide a process in which serious concerns (which fall outside the scope of other procedures) can be raised and dealt with
- provide a means by which staff can receive support when concerns have been raised
- encourage and enable employees to raise their concerns within the school initially, rather than overlooking the problem or raising the matter externally.

It is important to note that an investigation into the concerns raised might be carried out under one of the other procedures. For example, an allegation of improper conduct may be investigated in line with the Disciplinary Procedure.

3. Principles of the Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure

This procedure is based on the following principles:

- The Trust's primary duty of care is to children and young people, and other users of our services
- The Trust has a duty of care to colleagues; to ensure they feel safe and supported
- Employees raising concerns will be offered full support
- Concerns raised internally will be dealt with seriously and will be thoroughly investigated
- The Trust will not tolerate any harassment, bullying or detriment to employees raising legitimate concerns
- The Trust will not tolerate employees making malicious and vexatious allegations.

4. Concerns To Which The Whistleblowing Procedure Can Apply

The Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure applies when a person has a serious concern that wrongdoing by the school; (its staff, volunteers, contractors or suppliers) has occurred. For example:

- a breach of recognised standards of professional practice;
- suspected conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law, including criminal activity;
- suspected breach of St. Bart's Multi-Academy Trust policies/procedures;
- fraud, corruption or unauthorised use of public funds
- practice which poses a danger to health and safety
- physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect (including from individuals in senior roles and/or a position of trust)
- personal contact with children and young people which is contrary to the organisation's policies and codes of conduct
- inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- improper conduct / unprofessional behaviour inside or outside of school, such as name calling, bullying or racial abuse
- behaviour likely to bring the school into disrepute
- conduct which may be deemed unethical
- Knowledge about an individual's personal circumstances which may indicate they could be a risk to children or unsuitable to work with children
- cover up of any wrong doing, such as the examples listed above.

This list is not exhaustive.

This procedure should not be used for complaints relating to your own personal circumstances, such as disciplinary matters, grievance issues, job evaluation or pay. In these instances, please contact the Headteacher/Principal for advice on which procedure is the most appropriate to address the issue.

5. The Public Interest Disclosure Act

The Public Interest Disclosure Act protects the public interest by providing a remedy for individuals who suffer workplace reprisal for raising a genuine concern, whether it is about child safeguarding, financial malpractice, danger or other wrong doing. The Act covers all workers including agency staff. It does not cover the self-employed or volunteers. The Act also provides protection should individuals have difficulty gaining a reference from an employer because they have raised a concern.

Protection under the Act extends to disclosures concerning wrongdoing that took place overseas, and, where the law applying to the misconduct, was outside of the United Kingdom.

For employees to rely on this legal protection you should reasonably believe that the disclosure is in the public interest and

- a) that a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed;
- b) that a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject;
- c) that a miscarriage of justice has occurred is occurring or is likely to occur;
- d) that the health and safety of any individual has been, is being or likely to be endangered;
- e) that the environment has been, is being or is likely to be damaged, or;
- f) that information tending to show any matter falling within any one of the preceding paragraphs has been, or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

Even when you do not have the protection of the law, the school will protect and support you so long as you act in good faith.

6. Who Can Use This Procedure?

You can use the Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure if you are:

- an employee (including permanent, temporary, fixed term, and casual staff or a student on placement)
- a volunteer working in the school
- an employee in an organisation which provides a service under contract to the school (this includes private contractors, external partner agencies and the Local Authority)
- an agency worker or supply Teacher provided to the school, via a contract with an employment agency

This procedure should not be used for complaints relating to your own personal circumstances, such as disciplinary matters, grievance issues, job evaluation or pay. In these instances please contact the Principal for advice on which procedure is the most appropriate to address the issue.

7. How Do You Raise A Serious Concern?

You can raise your concerns orally or in writing. You must state you are raising an issue under the Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure and specify whether you wish your identity to be kept confidential. Any concerns should be resolved as close to its source as possible. Therefore in

the first instance, concerns should be reported to your line manager, the senior leadership team or the Principal. However this may not always be appropriate for example, where:

- You have already spoken with the appropriate person and they have not taken up your concerns
- The appropriate person is already aware of the circumstances and have failed to act upon them, or
- it is their own behaviour which is a cause for concern.

In such cases where you feel you cannot talk to your line manager/Principal, or if you prefer to talk with someone outside your direct management you can do so as follows:

You can raise your concerns with the Principal, Chair of the Local Governing Committee, the Trust, or with the Trade Union.

The Trusts appointed trustee for reporting concerns is: **Colin Hopkins – chopkins@sbmat.org**

For matters relating to the provision of care and protection of children you may contact the Statutory Complaints Officer or the Assistant Director of Learning Services who may allocate the matter to a Local Authority representative to investigate.

The person to whom your disclosure is made will ask you to formalise your concerns in writing either before or after the first meeting if you have not already done so. Your formal written disclosure will be acknowledged and the person dealing with it will keep a record of further action taken.

You are entitled to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative at any meeting in relation to your disclosure. Your companion will be asked to respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent disclosure.

8. How Are Concerns Dealt With?

Situations Of Imminent Danger

In the first place the Principal, the person whom you made the disclosure to needs to make sure that no one is at serious risk or in danger. If they are, concerns must be reported immediately so that the relevant people or external agencies are alerted, to ensure that prompt action is taken to protect them.

Initial Assessment/Meeting

The person to whom the report is made should assess whether the issues raised are ones to which the confidential reporting procedure applies. If they are not they should refer you to the correct procedure to follow, for example the Grievance Procedure.

If the matter appears to be one to which the confidential reporting procedure applies, the person to whom you raised your complaint will acknowledge your complaint within **5** working days and meet with you within a reasonable timeframe (no more than **10** working days) to discuss the issues raised and to obtain full details of your concerns using the initial assessment form (**Appendix 1**).

You may be accompanied to any meeting by a trade union representative or work colleague.

Following your initial meeting, the person to whom the concerns have been raised will write to you within a reasonable timeframe (no more than **10** working days) and provide you with the following:

- A copy of this procedure
- A written record of the meeting
- Confirmation as to whether the concerns will be investigated and if not, why not
- How the concerns will be dealt with in the short term, including whether any initial enquiries have been made
- An estimate of how long the investigation will take to provide a final response (see section “Investigations” below)
- Support available during the process
- A point of contact to be contacted during the investigation should you experience any detriment as a result of raising the concerns.

Investigations

Investigations may be undertaken a suitably trained person i.e. Principal, internal management or a school governor. In some cases the matter will need to be referred to the police for an independent inquiry.

As far as possible, the person conducting the investigation will endeavour to complete it within **20** working days. However, complex investigations may take longer. Any investigation taking longer than **20** working days will be reviewed and you will be kept informed of any delays.

Although you will be informed of when the investigation is concluded you may not necessarily be informed of the outcome or details regarding the investigation.

Anonymous Reporting

Anonymous concerns are much more difficult to deal with and employees are encouraged to put their name to the allegation.

In deciding whether it is possible to deal with anonymous concerns the following will be taken into account;

- the seriousness of the issues raised;
- the credibility of the concern;
- the likelihood of being able to confirm the allegation.

Anonymous allegations cannot be guaranteed to be investigated if the above criteria are not satisfied.

In addition proper investigation may prove difficult if the investigator cannot obtain further information from the individual, or give feedback, and the investigating officer is unable to ascertain whether the disclosure was made in the reasonable belief that the disclosure was in the public interest.

The individual should reveal their identify to the person with whom the concerns are raised and measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality as appropriate.

Confidentiality

Every effort must be made to keep the identity of an individual who makes a disclosure under this procedure confidential, at least until any formal investigation is under way. In order not to jeopardise the investigation into the alleged malpractice, **the individual will also be expected to keep the fact that they have raised a concern, the nature of the concern and the identity of those involved confidential.** Although every effort will be made to preserve the anonymity of the individual raising the concern, there may be exceptional circumstances in which, because of the nature of the investigations or disclosure, it will be necessary to disclose the identity of the individual. This may occur in connection with associated disciplinary or legal investigations or proceedings. If in the view of the investigating officer such circumstances exist, you will be informed that your identity is likely to be disclosed.

If it is necessary for you to participate in an investigation, the fact that you made the original disclosure will, so far as is reasonably practicable, be kept confidential and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect you from any victimisation or detriment as a result of having made a disclosure.

Record Keeping

The school will keep its own record of all concerns raised under this policy in a secure environment.

9. Support Available

Individuals who raise serious concerns will inevitably feel anxious or may experience shock if witnessing something unpleasant. The person receiving the information is responsible for ensuring support. Employees should feel confident that their concerns will be treated seriously and sensitively.

The process of investigating concerns can be lengthy. The employee will be kept informed of developments and supported throughout. Employees who have genuine concerns should not be put off either raising them in the first place or seeing them through the investigation process because of a lack of support. The school will ensure that you are not left feeling vulnerable and isolated.

Members of staff who raise genuinely held concerns in good faith under this procedure should not be subjected to any detriment as a result of their disclosure. Detriment includes unwarranted disciplinary action, victimisation or threats. If the individual believes they have been subjected to a detriment within the workplace as a result of raising concerns under this procedure they should inform the person to whom the disclosure was made immediately. If the matter is not remedied the employee may raise a grievance under the Grievance Procedure.

In all circumstances you (the employee) may wish to contact the Principal, line manager or a Trade Union representative for support. You may also seek advice and support from the Dove Counselling Service (Tel: 01782 683155) and/or the Education Support (previously Teacher Support Network) (Tel: 08000 562 561). A referral to Occupational Health can also be made.

10. What Happens If The Concerns Are Not Founded?

If the employee has acted in the public interest they will not be penalised in any way. In such cases the school will do what it can to support both parties.

However, the school must protect the organisation and its staff from false and malicious claims. Disciplinary action will be considered where any member of staff is found to have raised concerns frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain.

11. How To Take The Matter Further

Although every attempt should be made to deal with serious concerns internally in the first instance, if you believe that the concerns you have raised have not been dealt with satisfactorily, or, you reasonably believe that you might be victimised or vital evidence stolen or destroyed, you can make an “external disclosure”.

To make an external disclosure you must:

- Make the disclosure in the reasonable belief that the disclosure is in the public interest
- Reasonably believe that the information disclosed, and any allegation contained in it, are true;
- Ensure the disclosure is not for personal gain;
- Ensure that in all circumstances of the case it is reasonable to make the disclosure.

Examples of organisations that you can make an external disclosure to are:

- A member of the school’s Local Governing Committee/Director/member of the Trust’s Board as appropriate
- OFSTED
- Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)
- Safeguarding Children Board/Partners
- The Police
- A professional body such as the Trade Union
- The Health & Safety Executive
- The Information Commissioner

If you do raise matters outside the school you must not disclose confidential information, for example individual’s names or personal circumstances.

Please note in particular that it is rarely (if ever) appropriate to make a disclosure to the media and employees are strongly advised not to do so with taking advice from their Trade Union.

12. Monitoring and review

This policy will be monitored to ensure consistency of application and adherence to the equalities legislation, to ensure that it operates in accordance with the duty to promote equality, to eliminate discrimination and to promote good relations between staff with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

This policy will be reviewed at regular intervals by the Trust in conjunction with recognised trade unions.

13. External Contacts List

Trade Unions

GMB

Telephone: 01782 272755

NAHT

Telephone: 01543 410676

NASUWT

Telephone: 03330 145550

Email: advice@mail.nasuwat.org.uk

NEU

Telephone: 0121 6474397

Email: west.midlands@neu.org.uk

UNISON

Telephone: 01782 236750

Email: ul-stokecity@unison.org.uk

UNITE

Telephone: 01782 219800

Safeguarding Children Boards

If you think a child is in immediate danger telephone 999

Stoke-on-Trent www.staffsscb.org.uk

Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Referral Team: Telephone: 01782 235100

(Mon – Thurs 8:30am – 5:00pm Fri 8:30am – 4:30pm)

Emergency Duty Team Telephone: 01782 234234

(Out of hours 5pm to 8.30am))

Staffordshire www.staffsscb.org.uk

General Enquiries Telephone: 01785 277151 Email: ssscb.admin@staffordshire.gov.uk

First Response Service: Telephone: 0800 1313 126

(Mon – Thurs 8:30am – 5:00pm Fri 8:30am – 4:30pm)

Emergency Duty Service: Telephone: 0345 604 2886 Mobile: 07815 492613

(Out of Hours - 5pm to 8.30am))

Cheshire www.cescp.org.uk/

Telephone: 01606 271566 Email: LSCBEast@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Cheshire East Consultation Service Telephone: 0300 123 5012 (office hours)

Emergency Duty Team 0300 123 5022 (outs of office hours 5pm to 8.30am)

Shropshire <http://www.safeguardingshropshireschildren.org.uk/>

Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership Telephone: 01743 254259

Email: SSCPBusinessUnit@shropshire.gov.uk

First Point of Contact (FPOC) Telephone: 0345 678 9021

Emergency Social Work Team Telephone: 0345 678 9040 selecting option 1

(Out of Hours 5pm to 8.30am)

Keeping Children Safe In Education Document

[Keeping Children Safe Education – September 2021](#)

[Keeping children safe in education \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Appendix 1 - Issues to consider at Initial Assessment / Fact Finding meeting

Before meeting:	Notes:
Date of Meeting:	
Persons present:	
<p>Who else has been made aware of the employee's disclosure?</p> <p>Consider friends, family, colleagues, external agencies etc.</p>	
<p>Confidentiality</p> <p>Discuss the requirement for the employee themselves to maintain confidentiality, including the fact they have raised a concern, the nature of the concern and the identity of those involved</p>	
After meeting:	Notes:
Write to the employee providing the following:	
A copy of the Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure	
A written record of the meeting in the section "discussion notes"	
Confirm whether the concerns will be investigated and if not, why not	
Confirm how concerns will be dealt with in the short term and if any initial enquiries have been made	
Confirm support available during the process	
Confirm point of contact	

Discussion Notes:



THE ST. BART'S ACADEMY

— TRUST —

St. Bart's Multi-Academy Trust
c/o Belgrave St. Bartholomew's Academy,
Sussex Place, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST3 4TP
www.sbmat.org T: 01782 486350

