



# Whistleblowing Policy

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*For the purposes of this policy, any reference to “employee” includes Members, Trustees, Governors, Staff and volunteers. This policy also extends to contractors working on behalf of the Trust and they are also referred to as “employee”.*

## Introduction

Learning for Life Trust (“the Trust”) is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, employees and others with concerns about any aspect of the Trust’s/Academy’s work have a duty to come forward and voice those concerns. This policy intends to support that duty and seeks to encourage and enable employees and others to raise concerns so that the Trust can take prompt action.

Employees within the Trust/Academy are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the organisation. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Trust. Indeed, it may also be the case that someone with a concern is not aware how best to raise concerns. It is important to stress that any concern raised through this Policy will be treated confidentially and with the utmost seriousness.

This Policy also makes it clear that legitimate concerns can be raised without fear of reprisals. It is human nature to be apprehensive about raising a concern and consequently someone may also fear harassment or victimisation for doing so. In these circumstances, despite their concern, someone may find it easier to ignore it rather than report what may be just a suspicion of wrongdoing. The Trust is committed, as part of its overall approach and ethical framework, to provide a process and procedure that encourages freedom of speech so that this does not happen.

To ensure an effective framework for receiving and dealing with concerns, this policy aims to:

show who the policy applies to;

- describe what kind of activity should be reported through this mechanism;
- explain how an employee should raise a concern within the Trust;
- provide safeguards to protect and support individuals raising concerns and those the subject of concerns;
- describe how the Trust will respond to concerns brought to its attention;
- describe how employees will receive feedback on the action taken; and
- describe how an employee can take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with the response.

As part of our whole Trust approach to safeguarding, we aim to promote an open and transparent culture in which all concerns about all adults working in or on behalf of the school (including supply teachers, volunteers, contractors and external providers using the school premises for the purposes of running activities for children) are dealt with promptly and appropriately.

## Who this policy applies to

The policy applies to all Trust employees and elected and co-opted members of the Trust including those employees employed in our academy schools.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Trust’s Fraud Policy and Bribery Policy which state that there is a duty on individuals to report any suspicion or concern they may have that other employees are involved in actual or potential fraudulent or corrupt activities. Once a concern has been raised the procedure within this policy must be followed.

The provisions of this Policy are for all those individuals detailed above. These arrangements are not directly available to members of the public. The Trust's complaints procedure should be used where a member of the public wishes to raise a concern.

## What sort of activity should be reported

It is impossible and inappropriate to try to provide an exhaustive list of activities that would constitute misconduct or malpractice, but broadly speaking, the Trust would expect to receive concern relating to something which:

- (a) is a breach of the Academy's policies or procedures;
- (b) falls below established standards or practice;
- (c) amounts to improper conduct, including something that may be:
  - unlawful conduct;
  - a failure to comply with a statutory or legal obligation;
  - a failure to comply with DfE guidance including the Academy Trust Handbook;
  - a neglect of duty;
  - maladministration, misconduct or malpractice;
  - an actual or possible miscarriage of justice;
  - a health and safety risk or action which involves risks to the public (includes pupils) as well as other staff;
  - action that has caused or is likely to cause danger to the environment;
  - action that has caused or is likely to cause physical danger to any person or risk serious damage to school property;
  - misuse or unauthorised use of public or other funds;
  - fraud, corruption or unethical conduct;
  - breaches of financial regulations or policies
  - a failure to comply with Trust and School safeguarding policy and procedures;
  - unfair discrimination or harassment related to the protected characteristics – age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation;
  - Failure to comply with Trust IT acceptable use policy;
  - undermining of fundamental British values or promoting radical and/or extremist views;
  - sexual, physical or emotional abuse of members of staff or pupils;
  - mistreatment of any person;
  - any attempt to prevent disclosure of any of the issues listed.

In the event of a dispute concerning an individual's own employment, employees are encouraged to use the provisions of other policies covering disciplinary, grievance, harassment and recruitment and selection procedures.

Where the matter does not relate to your own employment position, it may be appropriate to use the provisions of the Whistleblowing Policy. Equally, where the actions of one employee is impacting on a number of others and directly or indirectly affecting the service being provided, it may be appropriate to address the concern adopting the Whistleblowing policy.

This Policy is not intended for disagreements with Trust/Academy policy. However, if you reasonably believe that in following a policy an action, as listed above, is likely to occur, you should of course report it.

Although it is likely and often appropriate to start a formal investigation into matters raised, it is also possible that a

more informal approach is recommended subject to the nature of the allegations made.

It is important to note that all concerns raised are considered on an individual basis and it is therefore not appropriate to set out, within this policy, any firm or suggested rules for how a particular type of concern is best dealt with.

## Allegations in relation to child protection

If the concern raised relates to a child protection issue, the DSL, Head teacher or Chair of the Governors/Trust Board will consult the LA Designated Officer (LADO) for Child Protection. A decision will be made as to whether to make a referral to the LA Safeguarding Hub.

In relation to child protection concerns, anyone can make a referral to the LA Safeguarding Hub. This can be made either before raising their concern with the DSL, Headteacher or Governors/Board of Trustees, or when the Head teacher or Chair of Governors/Trust Board fails to take action after the concern has been raised and the member of staff remains concerned about the situation.

In such cases, the Governors/Trustees will refer to the Allegations management section of the Child Protection procedures, local authority advice – '[Allegations against staff](#)' issued by the Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP).

## Whistleblowing officers

In order to provide employees with a recognised and consistent contact point, two Whistleblowing Officers have been designated. These are:

- The Accounting Officer, Mr C Steele. [csteele@learningforlifetrust.co.uk](mailto:csteele@learningforlifetrust.co.uk)
- Chair of Trustees, Mr H Morgan [hmorgan@learningforlifetrust.co.uk](mailto:hmorgan@learningforlifetrust.co.uk)

These officers will, as described in subsequent sections of this Policy, be the initial points of contact for employees who wish to use the Whistleblowing procedures. The Whistleblowing Officers will seek to assist an employee to raise a concern effectively.

Any subsequent changes in officers will be communicated immediately.

## How to raise a concern

### Staff & Trustees/Governors

The Trust through the provisions of this Policy encourages employees to raise concerns as early as possible to make it easier to take effective action. Normally and preferably, employees should raise concerns within their own section or department. This could be with the employees own line manager, School Business Manager, Head teacher, Deputy Head teacher or Designated Safeguarding Lead. In certain instances, this may not be appropriate because of the seriousness or sensitivity of the issues involved or indeed the involvement of certain persons in the alleged wrongdoing.

Where an employee feels it is appropriate to raise a concern outside their normal management arrangements, one of the Whistleblowing Officers should be contacted.

Notwithstanding the provisions of this Policy, the Trust's Fraud Policy requires actual or potential breaches to be reported to the Accounting Officer or Chief Finance Officer. However, this requirement should not prevent or deter employees from raising concerns through the whistleblowing policy.

When reporting a concern, employees are urged to carefully consider who, given the nature of the specific concern, they should report it to.

When raising a concern employees are also encouraged to set out the background and history of the concern, giving names, dates, places and amounts where possible, and the reason for their concern. Absolute proof is not required as long as you can demonstrate reasonable grounds for the allegation. It is more important that concerns are raised than seeking to provide all the available evidence at the outset. If further information is needed this can be obtained if necessary, by further investigation. Specialist officer may be appointed to assist in an investigation.

Individuals raising a concern are therefore not permitted to undertake their own investigations, surveillance or to interview or visit any 'witnesses' as this could jeopardise a formal investigation.

The Trust recognises that employees may wish to seek advice from their trade union and indeed may invite their trade union (or professional association) to raise a matter on their behalf.

Employees are encouraged to give their name when raising a concern. If an employee chooses to raise a concern anonymously it will be taken further at the discretion of the designated Whistleblowing Officers. In exercising this discretion, certain factors will be taken into account:

- the seriousness of the issues raised;
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

## Safeguards

### Harassment or Victimisation

The Trust recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal. The Trust will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take the appropriate action to attempt to protect employees who raise a concern in good faith. However, this does not mean that if an employee raising a concern is already the subject of other employment procedures e.g. disciplinary or redundancy, that those procedures will be halted or suspended.

The Trust will take steps to minimise any difficulties that the employee(s) may experience as a result of raising a concern. An employee might, as a last resort, be required to give evidence in Court or in disciplinary hearings. The Trust will advise and support the employee about this, if necessary, to reduce any anxiety they may have.

### Confidentiality

The Trust will do its best to protect the identity of an employee who raises a concern and does not want his or her name to be disclosed to colleagues and / or the person(s) under investigation. Where an investigation takes place, the investigating officers will not disclose your identity unless they are required to do so by law. This might happen if a formal, written statement is needed as evidence for example or where the matter is referred to a third party such as the Police for investigation. In no circumstances will the employee's identity be revealed before he or she is consulted.

### Untrue or Malicious Allegations

The Trust's intention in having a Whistleblowing Policy is to encourage employees to raise legitimate concerns. Consequently, if an employee makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. Where, however, an employee is shown to have made malicious or vexatious allegations, or indeed undertaken their own investigations, surveillance or interviewed or visited witnesses, disciplinary action may be taken.

## How the Trust will respond

The action taken by the Trust will depend on the nature of the concern. In order to protect individuals and the Trust, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Concerns or allegations that fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection, disciplinary or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. The matters raised will be investigated internally to establish basic facts. At that stage a decision will be made on whether:

- to complete the investigation internally;
- to refer the matter to our External or Internal Auditor;
- to refer the matter directly to the Police;
- to organise an independent inquiry;
- to be passed to the DfE;
- to be referred to the LADO if there is concern relating to child protection, or if that person is not available the relevant LA Safeguarding Hub.
- take no action.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for a formal investigation.

## Feedback to Employees raising a concern

The Trust will inform the employee who raised the concern where possible, practical and appropriate within ten working days of a concern being received either in writing or by other means as appropriate:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how it proposes to deal with the matter;
- stating whether any initial enquiries have been made;
- stating if further investigations will take place, and if not, giving reasons.

The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and the employee(s) who raised the concern will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. Initial contact with the employee(s) may be outside of the work place to protect their identity and, if necessary and mutually acceptable, subsequent meetings may be held away from work and / or outside normal working hours.

When any meeting is arranged, the employee(s) who raised the concern may be accompanied by a Trade Union or professional association representative, colleague or other representative of their choice as long as that person is not involved in the concern being discussed.

The Trust accepts an employee who raised a concern may need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, he/she will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.

It is recognised that instances may arise where a concern has been raised but not proven, that results in the whistleblower and accused resuming a working relationship together. This in turn may give rise to concerns of potential victimisation or harassment. Where this is the case, reference should be made to the Trust's Human Resources advisor.

## The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

This Act became Law on 2nd July 1999. Its purpose is to protect employees from victimisation as a result of raising a concern in good faith. It does this by affording protection to employees who raise concerns in accordance with certain

criteria. Similarly, the Act also describes where protection will not be available when a disclosure is made in certain ways.

### Protected Disclosures

Protection will be afforded to an employee where the concern is made in good faith and has been raised in the first instance within the Trust or to a Solicitor in the process of obtaining legal advice.

Any concern raised in good faith to one of the Whistleblowing Officers or to an employee's own management will, all things being equal, qualify as a protected disclosure. Other circumstances where protection through the Act is applicable are where a disclosure is made:

- to a prescribed Regulatory Body (i.e. Health and Safety Executive);
- to a wider audience (press) if made internally first or to a prescribed Regulatory Body.

Protection would also be afforded albeit in exceptional circumstances, where the employee raised a concern outside the Trust where they have a real and reasonable fear that they would suffer victimisation or that the information would be concealed or indeed the matter is exceptionally serious.

In the event of an employee being dismissed or victimised, the Act allows that employee the right to compensation at an employment tribunal.

### Unprotected Disclosures

Any disclosure not meeting the criteria for protection will be unprotected. This means for example that an employee making a malicious disclosure or one made hastily to the media will not be protected.

This Act is a complicated piece of legislation. Employees are however encouraged to seek specific advice from their Trade Union or own solicitor.

The provisions of the 1998 Act address the implications that an employee may otherwise face under their contract of employment from making a disclosure. Employees should also be aware that any person about whom a disclosure is made may have rights under the common law of defamation if that disclosure contains anything that is not accurate. However, the common law defence of defamation will normally apply where any person in making a disclosure that is not accurate acts in good faith and without malice. Again, any specific legal advice as to an employee's own position should be obtained independently.

### How The Matter Can Be Taken Further

This policy is intended to provide employees with an avenue to raise concerns within the Trust. However, should an employee feel dissatisfied with the Trust's response, and feels it is right to take the matter further then they have the right to do so independently.

It should be remembered that failing to raise the matter within the Trust first may result in the disclosure being unprotected within the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

Employees who are in any doubt regarding the provisions of the Policy should contact the Trust's Human Resource advisor or their Trade Union or staff representative. Advice as to whether or how a matter should be raised should be sought by contacting one of the Whistleblowing Officers.

Employees may wish to contact other bodies that regulate the industry such as:

- Health & Safety Executive
- Environment Agency



- Department for Education (DfE)
- Audit, Finance and Risk Committee Chair
- External Auditor: Saint & Co
- Internal Auditor: SKL Education

## The Audit & Risk Committee

In accordance with its Terms of Reference for the oversight of the internal control and governance framework of the Trust, the Audit & Risk Committee will review this Policy and consider its effectiveness through a process of annual review.