WHITLESBLOWING POLICY

Speaking up safely. Raising concerns.
Protecting the public interest.



RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL

INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

This policy forms part of the Riverside Bridge School Policy Framework
and should be read alongside any related policies, procedures and guidance.

RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

OUR COMMITMENT

At Riverside Bridge School, every policy reflects our commitment to creating a safe, inclusive and ambitious school community in which every pupil is valued, every voice matters and every family is respected and supported.

Our policies translate our values into consistent practice. They support high expectations, clear responsibilities, effective partnership and informed decision-making, ensuring that the needs, rights, wellbeing and future outcomes of our pupils remain at the heart of our work.

We work collaboratively, act with integrity and continually reflect upon and improve our practice to achieve the best possible outcomes for every pupil.

POLICY PRINCIPLES

Our Policy Principles underpin how we work together and guide the decisions and actions we take to support every pupil and their families.



POLICY PURPOSE & FRAMEWORK

Riverside Bridge School policies set out the expectations, responsibilities and approaches that support safe, consistent and high-quality practice across the school. They translate our values, statutory responsibilities and professional expectations into clear guidance for everyday decision-making and practice.

Each policy forms part of the Riverside Bridge School Policy Framework and should be read alongside any related policies, procedures, statutory guidance and school frameworks referenced within the document.

Policies apply to the members of the school community identified within each document, including staff, governors, parents and carers, volunteers, contractors and other professionals where relevant. Everyone is expected to understand and apply the requirements appropriate to their role and to seek further guidance where clarification is required.

CURRICULUM DRIVERS



Our Drivers provide a shared golden thread across curriculum, school life, policy and leadership, helping ensure that our decisions and practice remain focused on the experiences and futures we want for every pupil.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

This policy sets out Riverside Bridge School's approach to this policy It explains the expectations, responsibilities and arrangements that support consistent practice and positive outcomes for pupils, staff and families.

Riverside Bridge School is committed to maintaining a culture of openness, integrity and accountability in which employees and other workers feel able to raise serious concerns about wrongdoing without fear of unfair treatment, victimisation or disadvantage.

Whistleblowing is an important part of effective governance. It enables concerns about serious wrongdoing to be raised promptly so that they can be considered, investigated where necessary and acted upon before further harm occurs.

This policy sets out the arrangements through which individuals may raise concerns about suspected wrongdoing within Riverside Bridge School or Partnership Learning. It should be read as part of the Trust's wider governance, safeguarding, financial and employment framework.

Partnership Learning is the employer and retains Trust-level responsibility for whistleblowing arrangements. Riverside Bridge School will operate the Trust-approved reporting and escalation routes while ensuring that the policy reflects current statutory whistleblowing protections.

Whistleblowing is concerned with wrongdoing that a worker reasonably believes is in the public interest. It is distinct from an individual employment grievance, a routine complaint or a concern that is properly dealt with under another procedure.

Current statutory protection does not depend on whether the whistleblower is ultimately proved correct. Broadly, protection arises where a worker reasonably believes that the disclosure is in the public interest and reasonably believes that the information tends to show one or more types of wrongdoing recognised by law.

Riverside Bridge School recognises that employees working within a specialist SEND environment may become aware of concerns relating to safeguarding, pupil welfare, health and safety, professional practice, financial management or organisational conduct. Staff must feel able to raise such concerns safely and through an appropriate route.

Safeguarding concerns about an individual child must always be reported immediately through the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding procedures. However, a wider safeguarding failure, systemic concealment, deliberate inaction or another concern meeting the statutory whistleblowing criteria may also constitute whistleblowing. The two processes may therefore operate alongside one another where appropriate.

Our responsibilities to staff

Riverside Bridge School will promote a culture in which concerns can be raised responsibly and without fear. Concerns will be treated seriously, sensitively and impartially, and confidentiality will be maintained as far as reasonably possible.

The school will ensure that concerns are directed to an appropriate person, conflicts of interest are avoided, initial assessment takes place promptly and individuals are kept informed as far as reasonably possible. Where formal meetings take place, employees may be accompanied by a recognised trade union representative or workplace colleague.

Where wrongdoing is established, appropriate action will be taken. An individual will not be criticised simply because a concern is not substantiated, provided the disclosure was raised responsibly and was not knowingly false.

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APPROVED BY: Governing Board

APPROVED ON: September 2026

REVIEWED DUE ON: September 2027

Section 01

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Enabling disclosure. Protecting the public interest. Supporting accountability.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear, safe and effective process through which workers can raise concerns about serious wrongdoing connected with Riverside Bridge School or Partnership Learning.

The policy is intended to encourage concerns to be raised at an early stage, ensure that they are directed to the correct person, support fair and proportionate assessment and protect qualifying whistleblowers from detriment. It also provides a framework for investigation, escalation, confidentiality and organisational learning.

This policy may be used by employees and other workers within the scope of statutory whistleblowing protections, including former employees, agency workers, certain contractors, trainees, apprentices and casual workers where applicable.

The statutory framework does not apply to every individual associated with the school. Volunteers and genuinely self-employed individuals may not fall within the statutory definition of a worker, although they may still raise serious concerns through another appropriate route.

The policy applies to wrongdoing alleged to have occurred at Riverside Bridge School, elsewhere within Partnership Learning, through actions undertaken on behalf of the Trust or through school or Trust governance arrangements.

Where a concern involves senior leaders, the Governing Board, Trust leadership or the Board of Trustees, the escalation route set out later in this policy will apply.

Section 02

LEGISLATIVE AND GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Applying statutory protection. Maintaining governance. Ensuring lawful practice.

The principal statutory framework for whistleblowing is contained within the Employment Rights Act 1996, as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and subsequent legislation.

The legal framework protects workers from detrimental treatment and dismissal where they make a protected disclosure and the applicable statutory conditions are met.

This policy will therefore be applied with regard to the Employment Rights Act 1996, Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, Equality Act 2010 where relevant, current whistleblowing regulations and guidance, the current list of prescribed persons and bodies, Partnership Learning governance arrangements, safeguarding requirements and relevant data protection and confidentiality law.

A qualifying whistleblowing disclosure is not simply any workplace concern. To qualify for statutory protection, the worker must reasonably believe that the disclosure is in the public interest and that the information disclosed tends to show one of the recognised forms of wrongdoing.

The worker does not have to prove that wrongdoing has definitely occurred before raising the concern.

The test is whether they reasonably believe that the relevant wrongdoing may have occurred, may be occurring or is likely to occur.

The current statutory test does not require the disclosure to have been made “in good faith” in order to qualify for protection. Motivation may be relevant to other matters, but it is not the legal gateway to whistleblowing protection.

Partnership Learning retains Trust-wide responsibility for whistleblowing arrangements. Riverside Bridge School will implement those arrangements locally in accordance with the Trust’s governance framework.

Section 03

WHAT IS WHISTLEBLOWING?

Identifying wrongdoing. Raising serious concerns. Acting in the public interest.

Whistleblowing occurs where a worker discloses information about suspected wrongdoing and reasonably believes that raising the matter is in the public interest.

The recognised statutory categories include:

- a criminal offence;
- a failure to comply with a legal obligation;
- a miscarriage of justice;
- danger to the health or safety of an individual;
- damage to the environment;
- deliberate concealment of information relating to any of these matters.

Within Riverside Bridge School and Partnership Learning, this may include concerns about fraud, corruption, misuse of public funds, serious safeguarding failures, deliberate concealment of wrongdoing, serious health and safety failures, falsification of records, significant legal non-compliance or other conduct falling within the statutory categories.

The public-interest element is important. Whistleblowing will usually concern matters capable of affecting pupils, staff generally, public funds, regulatory compliance, the school community, the Trust or the wider public.

A concern that relates only to an individual employee's personal employment circumstances will normally be dealt with under another procedure unless it also contains a genuine wider public-interest dimension.

Section 04

PROTECTION AND SUPPORT FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS

Protecting disclosure. Preventing detriment. Supporting confidence.

Riverside Bridge School and Partnership Learning are committed to ensuring that workers can raise public-interest concerns without fear of retaliation.

Where a worker makes a protected disclosure, employment law protects them from being subjected to detriment because they have raised the concern. This protection also applies in relation to dismissal where the statutory conditions are met.

Detriment may take many forms, including intimidation, harassment, victimisation, unfair exclusion, inappropriate disciplinary action, adverse career treatment or other disadvantage imposed because a worker raised a protected concern.

Any allegation that a whistleblower has been retaliated against will be taken seriously and addressed through the appropriate process.

The person raising the concern may seek support from a recognised trade union, a workplace colleague, ACAS, an independent legal adviser or another appropriate source. Reasonable adjustments will be made where required.

A concern that later proves to be mistaken or unsubstantiated does not in itself justify disciplinary action.

The fact that an allegation is not upheld does not mean that it was raised improperly.

Section 05

WHISTLEBLOWING, GRIEVANCES AND SAFEGUARDING

Using the right route. Protecting pupils. Avoiding procedural confusion.

Whistleblowing is not intended to replace the school's other employment, safeguarding or complaints procedures.

Personal concerns relating primarily to an employee's own pay, contract, working relationships, workload, treatment or other employment circumstances will normally be dealt with through the Grievance Policy, pay appeal arrangements, dignity-at-work procedures or another relevant employment process.

However, a concern does not stop being whistleblowing simply because the person raising it is personally affected. Where there is a genuine wider public-interest element, both routes may need to be considered.

Pupil and parent complaints will normally be addressed under the Complaints Policy.

Safeguarding requires particular care. Any immediate concern that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer harm must be reported without delay under the Child Protection and Safeguarding procedures. Staff must not wait for the whistleblowing process before taking necessary safeguarding action.

At the same time, wider or systemic safeguarding failures may amount to whistleblowing. Examples might include deliberate concealment of safeguarding information, repeated failure to follow safeguarding procedures, systemic failure to act on serious concerns or abuse of authority affecting pupil safety.

Where appropriate, safeguarding and whistleblowing procedures may run alongside each other.

Section 06

RAISING A CONCERN

Speaking up promptly. Using appropriate routes. Escalating safely.

A worker who reasonably believes that serious wrongdoing has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur should raise the matter as soon as reasonably practicable.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. The worker does not need to carry out their own investigation before reporting the matter.

Where possible, they should provide enough information to explain the nature of the concern, relevant dates, people involved, available evidence, whether the issue is ongoing and whether there is any immediate risk.

The normal reporting route is through the employee's Line Manager. Where this is inappropriate, or where the concern relates to the person who would normally receive it, the following escalation route applies:

Concern relates to	Raise the concern with
Line Manager	Headteacher
Headteacher	Chair of Riverside Bridge School Governing Board
Governing Board	Chief Executive Officer
Chief Executive Officer	Chair of the Board of Trustees
Board of Trustees	Trust Members

This reflects the Trust escalation structure already contained in the current policy.

Where an immediate risk to life, serious injury, safeguarding or serious criminal conduct exists, the individual should also take appropriate emergency or safeguarding action without waiting for the ordinary whistleblowing timetable.

The person receiving the concern will normally act as the Assessor unless another person is appointed because of a conflict of interest, need for specialist expertise or requirement for greater independence.

Section 07

ASSESSMENT AND INVESTIGATION

Assessing promptly. Investigating proportionately. Preserving independence.

The Assessor is responsible for the initial assessment of the concern.

A confidential meeting will normally be arranged with the person raising the concern within seven working days. Where there is immediate danger or serious risk, action will be taken sooner.

The purpose of the meeting is to understand the concern, gather relevant information, identify any immediate risk, determine whether whistleblowing is the correct procedure and consider what further action may be required.

The individual may be accompanied by a recognised trade union representative or workplace colleague. Following the meeting, the Assessor will normally make an initial recommendation within ten working days.

Depending on the circumstances, this may involve further investigation by the school or Trust, appointment of an independent investigator, safeguarding referral, referral to the police or another external agency, disciplinary action, use of another internal procedure or no further action where the available evidence does not support continued investigation. The current Trust policy already uses this seven-day and ten-day framework.

Any investigation will be proportionate, impartial, appropriately confidential and conducted by a person with suitable competence and independence.

Where criminal, safeguarding or regulatory proceedings are already underway, the school or Trust may adjust its internal investigation to avoid compromising those processes.

Section 08

OUTCOMES AND FURTHER ACTION

Responding appropriately. Correcting wrongdoing. Learning from concerns.

Following assessment or investigation, the concern may be substantiated in full, substantiated in part, not substantiated, referred to another procedure or escalated to an external authority.

Where wrongdoing is established, action may include disciplinary measures, safeguarding action, financial controls, governance action, policy change, training, supervision, referral to external authorities or another proportionate response.

The appropriate decision-maker will depend on the subject of the concern. Matters involving an employee will normally be handled through the relevant management or HR route. Concerns involving the Headteacher will be escalated through the Governing Board and Trust arrangements. Concerns involving the Governing Board, CEO or Board of Trustees will be escalated to the corresponding Trust governance level.

The person who raised the concern will be informed, as far as reasonably possible, whether the concern was considered, whether an investigation took place and whether appropriate action has been or will be taken. Detailed information about disciplinary action, third-party personal data or confidential safeguarding matters may not be disclosed.

The Trust's existing procedure uses 28 working days from the initial interview as the normal target for reporting the conclusion of an agreed investigation. Riverside Bridge School will retain this as a normal target where the complexity and nature of the case make it practicable.

Where the matter cannot be concluded within that period, an appropriate update should be provided unless this would compromise an investigation or legal process.

Section 09

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMOUS CONCERNS

Protecting identity. Sharing proportionately. Managing limitations.

Riverside Bridge School will treat whistleblowing concerns sensitively and will seek to protect the identity of the individual raising the concern wherever reasonably possible.

Absolute confidentiality cannot, however, be guaranteed.

There may be circumstances where identity must be disclosed, for example where required by law, necessary for safeguarding or criminal proceedings, required by a regulator, essential to a fair investigation or agreed by the individual.

Information will only be shared with those who need it for the purposes of assessment, investigation, safeguarding, decision-making or obtaining appropriate professional advice.

Anonymous concerns will still be considered. However, anonymity may make it harder to clarify the allegation, obtain further evidence, assess credibility or keep the whistleblower informed.

When an anonymous concern is received, the school will consider the seriousness of the matter, the specificity of the information, the risk to pupils or others, the evidence available and whether the allegations can be independently verified.

Where they feel able, individuals are encouraged to identify themselves so that concerns can be explored fully and appropriate protection can be provided.

Section 10

EXTERNAL DISCLOSURES

Using lawful routes. Seeking appropriate advice. Preserving protection.

Riverside Bridge School and Partnership Learning encourage workers to raise concerns internally where this is appropriate because this can enable prompt investigation and corrective action.
Internal reporting is not, however, an absolute legal prerequisite to a protected external disclosure.

A worker may make a disclosure directly to an appropriate prescribed person or body where the statutory conditions are met.

The Government maintains a current list of prescribed persons and bodies. Depending on the subject matter, relevant bodies may include the Department for Education, Health and Safety Executive, Information Commissioner, National Audit Office, Charity Commission, police or another prescribed regulator.

Workers considering an external disclosure should ensure that the body is prescribed for the subject matter concerned and should consider seeking advice from a trade union, solicitor, ACAS or Protect.
Disclosures to the media or other wider third parties are subject to more demanding statutory conditions.
The policy therefore does not state that such disclosure is prohibited in every circumstance.
Workers are strongly advised to obtain independent legal or professional advice before making a wider disclosure.

Section 11

FALSE OR MALICIOUS ALLEGATIONS

Distinguishing error from dishonesty. Protecting fairness. Maintaining confidence.

Riverside Bridge School encourages individuals to raise concerns where they reasonably believe wrongdoing may have occurred.

A concern that later proves to be mistaken, unsupported or unsubstantiated is not automatically malicious and will not in itself result in disciplinary action.

However, where there is evidence that an individual has deliberately fabricated an allegation, knowingly supplied false information, falsified evidence or used the procedure dishonestly with the intention of causing harm, the matter may be addressed through the appropriate disciplinary or other procedure.

Any finding that an allegation was malicious must itself be evidence-based and must not be inferred merely because the original concern was not substantiated.

Section 12

ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Providing guidance. Supporting disclosure. Reducing uncertainty.

An individual who is unsure whether a concern falls within this policy may seek confidential advice before making a formal disclosure.

School-based employees may seek advice from their Line Manager, the Headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Board, Partnership Learning HR or governance staff, depending on the circumstances and subject of the concern.

Independent advice may also be obtained from a recognised trade union, ACAS, Protect, a solicitor or another appropriate professional adviser.

Seeking advice does not affect the individual's legal rights.

Where the concern involves immediate risk to a child or another person, necessary safeguarding or emergency action must not be delayed while procedural advice is obtained.

Section 13

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Clarifying authority. Maintaining independence. Ensuring accountability.

Partnership Learning's Board of Trustees is responsible for ensuring that effective whistleblowing arrangements operate across the Trust. It will maintain Trust-level oversight, ensure significant concerns are escalated appropriately and review the effectiveness of the policy.

Trust Members provide the escalation route where a concern relates to the Board of Trustees.

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for Trust-level implementation of whistleblowing arrangements and for responding to matters escalated from school governance where appropriate. Where the concern relates to the CEO, it must be referred to the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

The Riverside Bridge School Governing Board will promote a culture in which staff feel able to raise public-interest concerns and will exercise those whistleblowing responsibilities delegated to it by Partnership Learning.

The Chair of the Governing Board is the escalation route for concerns about the Headteacher.

The Headteacher is responsible for promoting awareness of the policy, ensuring staff understand how to raise concerns and making sure immediate safeguarding or safety risks are acted upon.

Line managers must take whistleblowing concerns seriously, preserve confidentiality, avoid undertaking an unauthorised investigation and escalate the matter appropriately.

All staff are expected to raise serious concerns promptly, provide information honestly, cooperate with legitimate investigations and avoid victimising anyone who raises a concern.

Section 14

MONITORING AND REVIEW

Monitoring implementation. Learning from concerns. Maintaining compliance.

Partnership Learning will monitor the effectiveness of whistleblowing arrangements across the Trust.

Riverside Bridge School will support appropriate monitoring while preserving confidentiality and avoiding unnecessary disclosure of personal information.

Monitoring may include anonymised information about the number and nature of concerns raised, reporting routes, timescales, investigations, outcomes, referrals, allegations of retaliation and organisational learning.

The Governing Board may receive appropriate high-level assurance, but identifying information should only be disclosed where there is a legitimate governance reason and disclosure is lawful.

The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of the policy and know the reporting routes available to them.

This policy will be reviewed annually, and sooner where required because of changes to legislation, prescribed-person arrangements, Trust governance, regulatory requirements or lessons arising from serious whistleblowing cases.

Section 09

RELATED POLICIES & FRAMEWORKS

Connecting practice. Strengthening consistency.

This policy should be read alongside the current versions of:

- Staff Code of Conduct
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Equality, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy
- Financial Regulations Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Information Security Policy
- Partnership Learning governance arrangements
- current Keeping Children Safe in Education
- current Government list of prescribed persons and bodies for whistleblowing.