



Whistle Blowing Policy

Written by	Jo Knapp
Ratified by Trustees	
Date for Review	November 2023
Signed - Chair of Trustees	(Sue Trentini)
Signed - Chief Executive Officer	(Lee Hessey)

Our Ambition: To be the highest performing MAT in the country
Our Mission: To improve the communities we serve for the better

Vision

All children make at least good progress; no underperforming cohorts, groups or academies; all academies within the trust strive to be outstanding

1. Introduction

This policy and procedure applies to all employees (which throughout this policy and procedure includes workers) and trustees. Other individuals performing functions in relation to the organisation, such contractors, should have access to it.

It is important to the trust that any fraud, misconduct or wrongdoing by employees or trustees of the academy is reported and properly dealt with. The Trustees will, therefore, respond to all individuals who raise any genuine concerns that they may have about the conduct of others in the academy, **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 Forge Trust expects the highest standards of conduct from all employees and trustees 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 recrimination, to bring to the attention of the Principal (or the Chair of trustees if the concerns relate to the Principal) 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. It 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 academy's responsibility to ensure that an investigation takes place:

- 2.1** Where the concerns are about **safeguarding children or young people**, the academy's designated senior person for Child Protection must be notified (see 7 below);
- 2.2** It is a procedure in which the Principal or Chair of Trustees will be expected to act swiftly and constructively in the investigation of any concerns in accordance with the academy'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 academy's complaints 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 academy's complaints 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 academy 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 seek advice from the Principal, Chair of trustees or designated safeguarding lead;
- 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 Principal or Chair of Trustees (but see section 5), who will in turn report it to Internal Audit. Similar principles apply to academies where the Funding Agency must be informed.

4. Principles

- 4.1** Any matter raised under this policy and procedure will be investigated thoroughly, promptly and confidentially. Whilst the academy 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 academy'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 Principal to be involved in the wrongdoing, any concerns should be raised with the employee's Chair of Trustee. If he/she believes the Principal to be involved, then the employee should proceed straight to stage three (see below 5.3);
- 5.2** The Principal/Chair of trustees will arrange an investigation into the matter (either by investigating the matter himself/herself or immediately passing the issue to someone in a senior position). 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 Principal (or the person who carried out the investigation) will then report to the Chair of trustees 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 Principal/Chair of Trustees in consultation with the Trust's HR advisory team. 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 Principal 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 Trustees. The aim of this policy and procedure is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the academy. 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 Principal, 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 Principal, (but see 5).

7. Safeguarding children and young people

- 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 to the academy's Designated Senior Person for Child Protection (DSP):
- 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), a trustee member, another pupil/student or someone outside the trust. 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.