



Whistleblowing Procedure

Highworth Warneford School

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1. Aims

Employees will often be the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within any school. However, they may not express concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the school. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances, it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

We are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, we encourage employees and others with serious concerns about any aspect of the school's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

This procedure aims to

- Provide avenues for staff to raise concerns and receive feedback on any action taken;
- Allow staff to take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with Highworth Warneford School's response
- Reassure staff that they will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistleblowing in good faith.

There are existing procedures in place to enable staff to lodge a grievance relating to their own employment for example in relation to areas such as terms and conditions of employment; health and safety; work relations; new working practices; working environment and conditions; workload; organisation change, etc. This Disclosure Policy is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of that procedure.

2. Examples

The following is a non-exhaustive list of the sorts of concerns that might fall under this procedure:

- Criminal activity
- Miscarriages of justice
- Danger to health & safety
- Damage to the environment
- Financial fraud or mismanagement
- Bribery
- Failure to comply with legal or professional obligations or regulations
- Negligence
- Breach of the school's policies or procedures
- Conduct likely to damage the school's reputation
- Unauthorised disclosure of confidential information
- Concerns about the harm, or risk of harm, to children
- The deliberate concealment of any of the above

The overriding concern should be that it would be in the public interest for the malpractice to be corrected and, if appropriate, sanctions applied.

3. Safeguards

3.1 Harassment or Victimisation

Highworth Warneford School recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the malpractice. We will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect staff when they raise a concern in good faith – such harassment will be seen as a serious disciplinary offence to be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.

However, this does not mean that if staff are already the subject of disciplinary or other procedures, that those procedures will be halted as a result of their whistleblowing.

3.2 Confidentiality

We will do our best to protect a staff member's identity when they raise a concern and do not want their name to be disclosed. It must be appreciated that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by staff may be required as part of evidence gathered by the school, police or other authorities.

3.3 Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages staff to put their name to their allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, but they will be considered at the discretion of Highworth Warneford School.

In exercising the discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include:

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

3.4 Unfounded Allegations

If a member of staff makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by any investigation, no action will be taken against them. If, however, the member of staff makes malicious or vexatious allegations, disciplinary action may be taken against them.

4. How to Raise a Concern

As a first step, staff should normally raise concerns with one or both of the Whistleblowing Officers, who are currently the Headteacher and Chair of Governors.

Concerns are better raised in writing. Staff are invited to set out the background and history of their concern, giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reason why they are particularly concerned about the situation.

Once a member of staff has raised a concern, the school will arrange a meeting with them as soon as possible to discuss their concern. A member of staff may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this policy. The companion must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

The school will take down a written summary of the member of staff's concern and provide them with a copy after the meeting.

5. Response to a Concern

The school will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation and will inform the member of staff of the outcome of its assessment. The member of staff may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.

Typical responses will include:

- A change to policies or procedures to minimise future risk
- Other informal actions
- Management advice
- Internal investigations including disciplinary procedures
- Police involvement
- External auditor involvement
- An independent external enquiry

The school will aim to keep the member of staff who raised the concern informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent the school giving the member of staff specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. Any information about the investigation should be treated as confidential.

6. External Disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases staff should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for staff to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. The school strongly encourages staff to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external.

The independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. Their contact details are at the end of this procedure.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of the School/Trust's staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a supplier or service provider. In some circumstances the law will protect staff if they raise the matter with the third party directly. However, the school encourages staff to report such concerns internally first.

7. Contacts

Whistleblowing Officers	Andy Steele – Headteacher 01793 762426 asteede@warnerfordschool.org Malcolm Holbrook – Chair of Governors mholbrook@warnerfordschool.org
Public Concern at Work (independent charity)	Helpline: 020 7404 6609 www.pcaaw.co.uk whistle@pcaaw.co.uk
NSPCC Whistleblowing Hotline Available as an alternative route for staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally or have concerns about the way an issue is being handled by their school.	Helpline: 0800 028 028 help@nspcc.org.uk