



Whistleblowing Policy

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Together we **Exceed**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The reporting of workplace concerns is commonly known as ‘whistleblowing’ or ‘making a disclosure in the public interest.’
- 1.2 Exceed Academies Trust and each of our schools, takes seriously its responsibilities for good governance, the appropriate and efficient use of public money and resources and is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, integrity and accountability. Where any worker has a concern that might fall within the scope of this document, they are encouraged to report the matter following the guidelines within this policy.
- 1.3 The policy applies to all **workers** of the Trust/school. To be a ‘**worker**’ an individual must be:
 - An employee of the Trust/school
 - A Governor, Trustee or Member
 - Carrying out voluntary or casual work for the Trust/school
 - A Consultant working with the Trust/school
 - Contracted by an external organisation, to carry out work within the Trust/school
 - An agency worker
- 1.4 This policy is intended to encourage and enable workers to raise serious concerns within the school, by clearly setting out the process to make a disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
- 1.5 The Trust/school accepts that some workers may prefer to do this in a confidential way to avoid any public disclosure of their identity. This policy makes it clear that workers can raise concerns of illegal or improper conduct without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage.
- 1.6 This policy does not form part of any contract of employment or contract for services and it may be subject to change, withdrawal or replacement at any time.

2. Aims and Scope

- 2.1 Workers are encouraged to report any concerns they may have about any aspect of the Trust/school, the conduct of its staff, the trustees/Members/governors, or any other member of staff acting on behalf of the school.
- 2.2 In the first instance, the concerns should be reported to the Headteacher of the school. Concerns raised within the Trust central team should be directed to the Chief HR Officer. If concerns are in relation to the Headteacher, these should be reported to the Chief HR Officer. Any concerns in relation to governors, Trustees or Members, should be made to the Chief HR Officer or the Governance Manager.

2.3 This policy is not intended to deal with:

- Complaints relating to a person's own personal circumstances, as an employee of the Trust/school, such as matters relating to their own terms and conditions, the way they have been treated at work, or about personal differences or conflicts. In these cases, these should be referred to the Trust's Staff Grievance Procedure.
- Complaints about any third party organisation or about another member of the public

2.4 This policy aims to:

- Encourage workers to raise serious concerns of illegal or improper conduct, in the safe knowledge that they will be taken seriously and investigated appropriately
- Provide workers with guidance on how to raise concerns
- Ensure that workers have received a response to their concerns and that they are aware of how to escalate the issue, if they feel they are still unresolved
- Reassure workers that they will be protected from possible reprisal or victimisation, if they have raised a genuine concern, even if their concerns are unfounded
- The Trust will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of any worker raising a genuine concern, this may include disciplinary action.

2.5 Employees should report anything that:

- makes them feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, their experience or the standards they believe the school subscribes to;
- is against the Trust/school's policies and procedures;
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct, such as
 - Criminal offences (this may include, for example, types of financial impropriety such as fraud)
 - Failure to comply with a legal, including contractual, obligation
 - Miscarriages of justice
 - Endangering someone's health and safety
 - Damage to the environment
 - Covering up wrongdoing in any the above categories

2.6 If a worker discloses information which suggests that any member of staff has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against children, or related to a child;
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.

2.6.1 If a disclosure of this nature is made, then the statutory guidance, contained within the Department for Education publication Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 and, where relevant, the specific guidance given by the Secretary of State under sections 157 and 175 of the Education Act 2002 (namely Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education) will be followed. This is due to the specific obligations upon individuals who are responsible for reporting concerns, regarding the wellbeing of children and young people.

- 2.6.2 The local arrangements for reporting such concerns can be found on the website of the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board at <https://www.saferbradford.co.uk/report-a-concern>

There is an expectation that concerns which meet one or more of the above criteria are reported within 24 hours. The website referred to above gives guidance and identifies who is the Senior Manager from each agency and who can advise on each step of the process. These procedures are commonly referred to as the 'LADO' (Local Authority Designated Officer) procedures.

Qualifying Disclosures

- 2.7.1 The law provides protection for workers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters. These are called "qualifying disclosures". This policy is not designed to replace or be used as an alternative to the Trust's Staff Grievance Procedure.
- 2.7.2 A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest by a worker who has a reasonable belief that one of the following is being, has been or is likely to be committed:
- a criminal offence;
 - a miscarriage of justice;
 - an act creating risk to health and safety;
 - an act causing damage to the environment;
 - unauthorised use of public funds
 - an act of fraud or corruption
 - sexual or physical abuse of pupils
 - a breach of any other legal obligation; or
 - concealment of any of the above;

Protected Disclosures

- 2.8 The Trust/school is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of workers. Any disclosure of information as detailed above will only be a protected disclosure if it is made in the reasonable belief of the worker, that the disclosure is **in the public interest**.
- 2.8.1 No worker who uses this procedure, in the reasonable belief that the disclosure is in the public interest, will be penalised for doing so. A worker has the right not to be subjected to a detriment by any act or deliberate omission by another worker employed by the Trust/school on the ground that he or she has made a protected disclosure.
- 2.8.2 The Trust/school recognises that workers may wish to seek advice from, and be accompanied by, a trade union representative when disclosing a concern under this policy. It acknowledges and endorses that a trade union representative, providing advice and/or making a disclosure of information on behalf of one of their members, will not suffer detriment in their position within the Trust/school.

- 2.8.3 The Trust/school will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect workers when they raise a concern, that they believe is in the public interest to disclose.
- 2.8.4 In the absence of any reasonable belief, a worker who is found to have made an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain may be subject to disciplinary procedures.

Confidentiality and Anonymous Allegations

- 2.9.1 A concern reported under this policy will be treated confidentially. Unless the worker agrees, their identity will not be disclosed by the school in dealing with their concern in line with this policy.
- 2.9.2 However, this policy encourages workers to put their name to allegations whenever possible. Concerns expressed anonymously will be considered at the discretion of the Trust/school.
- 2.9.3 In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include:
 - the seriousness of the issues raised.
 - the credibility of the concern.
 - the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.
- 2.9.4 In the event of a concern disclosing alleged criminal activity, the worker may be asked to help the Police or other appropriate enforcement agencies. In the event of disciplinary action taken by the Trust/school, the worker may be asked to give evidence under the Trust's Disciplinary policy & procedure.

Untrue Allegations

- 2.10 If a worker reasonably believes that the claim was made in the public interest, but the claim is not confirmed following investigation, no action will be taken against the worker. However, maliciously making a false allegation is a disciplinary offence. If a claim is made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, then disciplinary action may be taken against the worker in the absence of any reasonable belief.

3. How to Raise a Concern

- 3.1 As a first step, workers should raise concerns with their immediate manager or the Headteacher/Chief HR Officer (Trust central team). This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if the worker believes that Senior Management or the Headteacher are involved, they should approach the Chief HR Officer. If the complaint is in relation to the school's Local Advisory Board or the Trust Board, then the Chief HR Officer or the Governance Manager (Trust central team) should be contacted in the first instance. The earlier a concern is raised, the easier it is to take action.

- 3.2 Workers may also decide that they wish to raise their concerns to persons or bodies identified by the Government, within the Education Sector. All contact information for these persons or bodies is available at Appendix B or by accessing the link below;
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies>
- 3.3 As the statutory protections for whistleblowers only apply in certain circumstances, workers are strongly encouraged to seek advice before making an external disclosure. If an external disclosure is made to an external body or agency, there may be a requirement for the worker to demonstrate why they thought the internal Trust/school procedure was not appropriate. Workers disclosing concerns externally, even in good faith, without first attempting to report internally, may face disciplinary action.
- 3.4 Workers are reminded that they must not disclose personal, sensitive, confidential or otherwise protected information to any person who is not authorised to receive it. Unauthorised disclosure of such information by a worker may result in disciplinary action.
- 3.5 If, as a consequence of a workers complaint, information is published, which turns out not to be true and which has the potential to damage another person's interests or reputation, there is a risk that they could be sued for defamation. Where it is clearly in the public interest for information to be brought out into the open immediately (even though it is untested and may ultimately turn out to be untrue or incorrect) a legal defence called "qualified privilege" is available. Concerns reported in good faith under this policy within the Trust/school will normally be covered by this defence. However, deliberate false statements will not.
- 3.6 If a worker is not a member of a trade union and/or they wish to obtain confidential advice about making a disclosure from an independent source, they should be signposted to the charity, "Protect", which can be accessed via its website at www.protect-advice.org.uk or by telephone on 0203 117 2520.
- 3.7 In the case of a concern being raised through school management, depending on the nature of the concern, the complainant will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for their concern. Concerns may be raised verbally or, preferably, in writing. Staff who wish to make a written report are invited to use the following format:
 - the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates).
 - the reason why they are particularly concerned about the situation.
 - why they think this concern is in the public interest to disclose
- 3.8 Workers may wish to consider discussing their concern with a colleague or trade union representative before making a disclosure and may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) who have had the same experience or concerns. However, they should each make a separate and individual disclosure and should then not discuss the matter further between themselves.
- 3.9 Workers have the right to invite a trade union representative, or a work colleague, to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns they have raised.

4. How the Trust/school will respond

- 4.1 Where concerns raised under this policy are referred to the Headteacher/Chief HR Officer, they will seek appropriate HR/legal advice as required. The reported matter may:
 - be investigated by management, Internal Audit, or through the disciplinary process.
 - be referred to the Police.
 - be referred to an external auditor
 - form the subject of an independent inquiry
 - be investigated by an independent investigating officer, appointed on behalf of the Trust/school.
- 4.2 Where concerns have been raised with any other party, appropriate action will be taken to ensure the concerns are dealt with in the most efficient manner. This may result in the decision to progress the concern(s) through any of the actions identified as part of point 3.1, or through another course of action that is deemed appropriate.
- 4.3 In order to protect individuals and those accused of illegal or improper conduct, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation of any kind is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.
- 4.4 Concerns or allegations, which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues), will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.
- 4.5 Some concerns may be resolved through action being taken without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.
- 4.6 It may be that the person dealing with the concern, may wish to meet with the person that has made the disclosure, in order to clarify certain details. Where any meeting is arranged as part of this procedure, the worker's trade union representative or work colleague may attend the meeting.
- 4.7 Within 10 working days of the date of the disclosure, (excluding periods of school closure) the party dealing with the concern(s), will write to the complainant and where possible will provide the information below where this is available:
 - acknowledging that the concern has been received.
 - indicating how the matter is to be dealt with.
 - giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response, telling the complainant whether any initial enquiries have been made.
 - telling the complainant whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.
- 4.8 The amount of contact between the persons considering the issues and the complainant will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the school may seek further information from the complainant.

- 4.9 Where a concern is disclosed about wrongdoing or harm to children, young people and/or vulnerable persons, the Trust/school will refer the matter for investigation by a person with sufficient and appropriate independence, experience and expertise in such matters to be able to adequately investigate the concern raised. Where appropriate it may be necessary to report the matter to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer).
- 4.10 The Trust/school will take steps to minimise any difficulties that complainants may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if they are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings the Trust/school will arrange for advice on the process to be given.
- 4.11 The Trust/school understands that the complainant needs to be assured that the matter has been sufficiently addressed. The relevant party, subject to any legal constraints and Data Protection/GDPR, will inform them of the outcome of any investigation that may take place.
- 4.12 Please note, complainants will not be given any information regarding possible sanctions against any employee that they have complained about.

5. How the matter can be taken further

- 5.1 This policy is intended to provide workers with a way in which to raise concerns within the Trust/school. The Trust/school hopes workers will be satisfied with any action taken. If they are not, and feel they wish to refer the matter outside the Trust/school, the following are possible contact points:
 - the central Multi-Academy Trust team (Governance Manager)
 - the Audit Commission (confidential reporting for suspected fraud)
 - your trade union
 - your local Citizens Advice Bureau
 - relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
 - a relevant voluntary organisation
 - prescribed persons or bodies, identified at Appendix B
 - the Police

Appendix A - Prescribed Persons and Bodies

Below is a list of the prescribed persons and bodies who a disclosure can be made to if an individual does not wish to make a disclosure directly to an employer. There is also a brief description about the matters you can report to each prescribed person (this is taken from the document ‘Whistleblowing: List of prescribed people and bodies, published by the Government). The guidance document is accessible by clicking on the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies>

Education Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills (“the Chief Inspector”)

Contact them about matters relating to the welfare of children provided with accommodation by boarding schools, colleges and residential special schools.

The Chief Inspector
Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 3155
Email: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)

Contact them about matters in relation to which the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation exercise functions under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Whistleblowing and malpractice
Complaints investigation manager
Ofqual
Earlsdon Park
53-55 Butts Road
Coventry
CV1 3BH

Tel: 0300 303 3344
Email: whistleblowing@ofqual.gov.uk
Online form: complaints.ofqual.gov.uk/new-concern

Secretary of State for Education

Contact them about matters relating to the following educational institutions in England:

- maintained schools
- maintained nursery schools
- independent schools (including academies and free schools)
- non-maintained special schools
- pupil referral units
- alternative provision academies
- 16-19 academies (and free schools)
- an institution within the further education sector
- special post-16 institutions

Ministerial and Public Communications Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0370 000 2288

Website: www.gov.uk/contact-dfe

Appendix B - Template Form for Whistleblowing

Making a public interest disclosure (whistleblowing)

This form is intended for use by any individual working for the school (including contractors, agency workers and volunteers) who wish to raise an issue about alleged wrongdoing. This form should be used to report wrongdoing within the school (for example, financial irregularities or health and safety concerns), rather than to raise a personal grievance (for example, if you would like to make an allegation of bullying or harassment, or are complaining that your contract of employment has been breached).

If you are unsure about whether your concerns are best dealt with under the Trust's whistleblowing policy or grievance policy, please read the above policies for guidance. If, having read the whistleblowing policy, you remain unsure about which procedure to use, please consult your Office Manager for further advice.

Once you have submitted this form, the Trust's whistleblowing policy will be invoked. This may result in an investigation, which will not involve anyone (for example, your line manager) you may have implicated below.

In certain circumstances, you can request that your concerns remain anonymous. Where possible, the Trust/school will respect a request for anonymity, but cannot guarantee that it will be able to do so.

This form should be completed and delivered to your Headteacher in an envelope marked "confidential" or sent as an email attachment with "confidential" in the subject line. If the concern is relating to the Headteacher, then the form should be sent to the Chief HR Officer (Trust central team) via hr@exceedacademiestrust.co.uk.

Formal public interest disclosure (whistleblowing)

Worker's name:	
Worker's job title:	
Worker's department:	
Date:	
Does your public interest disclosure relate to your line manager?	Yes/No

Summary of disclosure:

Please set out the details of the issue that you wish to raise, providing examples where possible, particularly dates, times, locations and the identities of those involved. You may attach additional sheets if required.

Individuals involved:

Please provide the names and contact details of any people involved in your concerns, including witnesses.

Outcome requested:

Please set out how you would like to see the issue dealt with, and why and how you believe that this will resolve the issue.

Declaration:

I confirm that the above statements are true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief. I understand that, if I knowingly make false allegations, this may result in the organisation taking disciplinary action against me.

Form completed by:

Signature:

For completion by the school:

Date form received by the school:

Name of recipient and job role:

Signature: