



The Cowplain School

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Whistleblowing Policy

Reporting illegal or improper conduct (disclosures under the public interest disclosures Act 1998) or concerns about safeguarding children or young people

Adopted: Spring 2023

Next Review date: Spring 2027

Section 1

1.1 Aims of the Policy

This policy 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 the response of the school

This policy covers concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. It is not intended as recourse against financial or business decisions made by the school. Nor is it an alternative to well-established disciplinary or grievance procedures, which should be used to address concerns regarding individual employment matters. It may however overlap with other policies for dealing with complaints, with Codes of Conduct and with protocols for good working relationships within the school.

1.2 Rationale

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 was enacted to ensure a climate of greater frankness between employers and workers so that irregularities can be identified and addressed quickly, and to strengthen employment rights by protecting responsible workers who blow the whistle about wrongdoing or failures in the workplace. The policy set out in this document applies those statutory provisions to the administration of The Cowplain School.

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

The Cowplain School is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment the school encourages employees and others with serious concerns about any aspect of the work of the school to come forward and voice those concerns. It recognises that certain cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis. This policy makes it clear that staff can do so without fear of reprisals and is intended to encourage and enable staff to raise serious concerns within the school, rather than overlooking a problem or publicly disclosing the matter.

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:

- An unlawful or criminal offence
- A miscarriage of justice
- An act creating risk to health and safety
- An act causing damage to the environment
- Corrupt receiving of any gift or advantage
- Undue favour over a contractual matter or a job application
- Mistreatment or abuse of a client or a member of the public for whom the school has a responsibility
- Actions against the Financial Regulations relating to the school
- Improper conduct or unauthorised use of public funds
- A breach of any legal obligation; or
- 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 school's responsibility to ensure that an investigation takes place.

Members of staff are entitled to refuse to carry out instructions if they would result in any of the above, and disciplinary action will not result in these circumstances. (The list above is for guidance only and is not intended to be comprehensive).

1.2.1 Where the concerns are about safeguarding children or young people, the Principal or the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) should be notified (see 3.3 below).

1.2.2 It is a procedure in which the Principal or Chair of Academy Trust will be expected to act swiftly and constructively in the investigation of any concerns in accordance with the school's disciplinary procedure.

1.2.3 Concern about a colleague's professional capability should not be dealt with using this procedure (but see section 3.3.3 below).

1.3 Scope

This policy applies to all employees and Trustees. Other individuals performing functions in relation to the organisation, such as agency workers and contractors, should have access to it.

It is important to the school that any fraud, misconduct or wrongdoing by employees or Trustees of the school is reported and properly dealt with. The Academy Trust will, therefore, respond to all individuals who raise any genuine concerns that they may have about the conduct of others in the school, **which are in the public interest**. This policy sets out the way in which individuals may raise any concerns that they have and how those concerns will be dealt with.

1.3.1 The Cowplain School expects the highest standards of conduct from all employees and Trustees and will treat seriously any concern raised about illegal or improper conduct.

1.3.2 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 Academy Trust if the concerns relate to the Principal) any serious impropriety or breach of procedure.

1.3.3 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 When should the policy be used?

This procedure is for disclosures about matters other than a breach of an employee's own contract of employment. If an employee is concerned that his/her own contract has been, or is likely to be, broken he/she should use the school's Grievance procedures.

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 whistle blowing legislation

1.4.1 So this procedure is not designed to replace or be used as an alternative to the grievance procedure, which should be used where an employee is only aggrieved about his/her own situation. Nor should this policy apply where the employee simply disagrees with the way the school is run.

1.4.2 Employees must have reasonable grounds for believing the information they have is accurate and not just idle gossip or rumour.

1.4.3 An employee who makes such a protected disclosure has the right not to be dismissed, subject to any other detriment, or victimised, because he/she has made a disclosure, provided it has not been made maliciously. Any employee who uses this procedure will not be penalised for doing so. The employer will not tolerate harassment and/or victimisation of any employee raising concerns.

1.4.4 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 contact their Professional Association/Trade Union.

1.4.5 Financial regulations require that any suspicion of fraud, corruption or other financial irregularity is reported to the Education Funding Agency for possible investigation. Normally an employee must first report any suspicion of such an irregularity to the Principal or Chair of Academy Trust (but see 3.1.3), who will in turn report it to the Education Funding Agency.

Section 2

2.1 Principles

- Any matter raised under this procedure will be investigated thoroughly, promptly and confidentially, and the outcome of the investigation reported back to the employee who raised the issue.
- No employee will be victimised for raising a matter under this procedure. 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.
- Victimisation of a worker for raising a qualified disclosure will be a disciplinary offence.
- If misconduct is discovered as a result of any investigation under this procedure the matter will be considered under the disciplinary procedure, in addition to any appropriate external measures.
- Maliciously making a false allegation is a disciplinary offence.
- 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.

Section 3

3.1 Procedures

3.1.1 In the first instance, unless the employee reasonably believes his/her Principal to be involved in the wrongdoing, any concerns should be raised with the employee's Principal. If he/she believes the Principal to be involved, then the employee should proceed straight to stage 3 (see below 3.1.3).

3.1.2 The Principal/Chair of Academy Trust 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. The employee's statement will be taken into account and he/she will be asked to comment on any additional evidence obtained.

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 or Professional Association/Trade Union Representative along to any discussions, so long as the third party is not involved in the issue.

Where anonymity is requested efforts will be made to meet the request where appropriate but that might not always be possible. The earlier and more open the expression of concern the easier it will be to take appropriate action.

3.1.3 The Principal (or the person who carried out the investigation) will then report to the Chair of Academy Trust 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 Academy Trust. On conclusion of any investigation the employee will be told the outcome of the investigation and what the next steps will be. If no action is to be taken the reason for this will be explained.

If the employee is concerned that his/her 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 Academy Trust (s.head@cowplainschool.co.uk). 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

3.2 What should be done if an issue is raised with a member of staff?

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 3.1.1).

3.3 Safeguarding Children and Young People

3.3.1 All employees have a duty to report concerns about the safety and welfare of students.

3.3.2 Concerns about any of the following should be reported to the Principal or the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL):

- physical abuse of a student
- sexual abuse of a student
- emotional abuse of a student
- neglect of a student
- an intimate or improper relationship between an adult and a student

The school's DSL is J Colebrook (Head of School)

3.3.3 The reason for the concern may be the actions of a colleague (including a more senior colleague), a Trustee, another student or someone outside the school. Whatever the reason, concerns must be reported. Failure to report a Child Protection related allegation will be in itself, a disciplinary matter.

Section 4

4.1 Safeguards

4.1.1 Harassment or Victimisation

The 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. The school will take action to protect staff when a concern is raised. The school will not tolerate any resulting harassment or victimisation (including informal or indirect pressures) and will treat this as a serious disciplinary offence which will be dealt with under the proper procedures.

All parties should note that Whistleblowers are protected, by law, from suffering a detriment, bullying or harassment from another employee.

Any investigation into an allegation of malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures which already affect a member of staff.

4.1.2 Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and the school will do its best to protect a member of staff's identity if she/he does not want her/his name to be disclosed. If investigation of a concern discloses a situation which is sufficiently serious to warrant disciplinary action or police involvement then the member of staff's evidence may be important. The individual's name will not however be released as a possible witness until the reasons for its disclosure at this stage have been fully discussed with her/him.

4.1.3 Anonymous allegations

This policy encourages staff to put their name to an allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but they will be considered.

Staff should also bear in mind that if they do choose to raise a concern anonymously it will be more difficult for the matter to be investigated and for them to be provided with feedback. For this reason, where a member of staff wishes to raise a concern anonymously, this may best be done through her/his trade union.

4.1.4 Untrue allegations

If an allegation is made which is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against the member of staff unless it is considered that the individual has made malicious or vexatious allegations. In these circumstances, disciplinary action may be taken against the individual.

References

Employment Rights Act 1996

Public Interest Disclosures Act 1998

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.

A qualifying disclosure means any disclosure of information that in the reasonable belief of the worker is made in the public interest. 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 allegations, disciplinary action is likely to be appropriate only where there is clear evidence that the employee has misused the whistle blowing procedure. A consequence of the requirement that a disclosure be made in the public interest is that an employee will generally be precluded from being able to 'blow the whistle' about breaches of his or her employment contract.

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.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

- The Policy is reviewed every year by the Senior Leadership Team and Trustees as part of the self evaluation cycle. Appropriate action is taken if changes are required.
- The Chair of Academy Trust has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. Within his/her duty to ensure that the school acts lawfully, he/she will maintain a record of all concerns raised under this policy and the outcomes of any investigations.

A full copy of the School's Whistleblowing Policy is available on line at www.cowplainschool.co.uk

Date Reviewed and approved:	Spring 2023	Reviewed by:	JCK	Next Review:	Spring 2027
Summary of changes made:	Governors terminology amended to Trustees Governing Body terminology amended to Academy Trust Headteacher terminology amended to Principal DSL amended from NBT to JCK				