
WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Recommended by:

Head of HR

Ratified by:

HR Committee

Signed:



Position on the Board:

Chair of the HR Committee

Ratification Date:

17.01.2025

Next Review:

Spring Term 2026

Policy Tier (Central/Hub/School):

Central

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy applies to anyone working for or on behalf of Central Region Schools Trust (Trust), including, but not limited to, employees, trustees, governors, casual workers, consultants, contractors, volunteers, supply staff, agency employees and trainee teachers.
- 1.2 People working within organisations are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong in the place in which they work. The Trust is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, we encourage employees and others working at or for the Trust who have concerns about any aspect of the Trust's work to come forward and voice those concerns.
- 1.3 The Trust Board and Local Academy Governing Boards are responsible for ensuring the operation of this policy with regard to matters relating to the Trust and its individual schools.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The law (Employment Rights Act 1996, Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013) provides protection for workers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters. These are called "qualifying disclosures". A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest by a worker who has a reasonable belief that:

- a criminal offence;
- a miscarriage of justice;
- an act creating risk to health and safety of pupils, members of the public as well as other employees;
- an act causing damage to the environment;
- possible fraud and/or corruption;
- sexual or physical abuse or harassment of pupils or other workers;
- any concern over the welfare of pupils or workers;
- a breach of any other legal obligation;
- concealment of any of the above; or
- other unethical conduct;

is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed. It is not necessary for the worker to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed - a reasonable belief is sufficient. The worker has no responsibility for investigating the matter - it is the Trust's or individual school's responsibility to ensure that an investigation takes place.

- 2.2 A worker who makes such a protected disclosure (see paragraph 2.1) has the right not to be dismissed, subjected to any other detriment, or victimised, because they have made a disclosure.
- 2.3 The Trust encourages workers to raise their concerns under this policy in the first instance. If, having read this policy, you are uncertain about whether it is the appropriate policy or how to proceed, please feel free to seek informal advice from the Trust's Head of HR at info@crst.org.uk or 0121 270 3117.

3.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 Everyone should be aware of the importance of preventing and eliminating wrongdoing at work. Workers should be watchful for illegal or unethical conduct and report anything of that nature that they become aware of.
- 3.2 The Trust promotes a whole school approach to Safeguarding. In accordance with individual schools' Safeguarding Policies and the latest version of the Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) statutory guidance, workers are encouraged to raise any concerns they have about inappropriate behaviour towards a child. This includes reporting any low-level concerns.

- 3.3 No worker will be victimised for raising a matter under this policy. This means that the continued employment and opportunities for future career progression or training of the worker will not be prejudiced because they have raised a legitimate concern.
- 3.4 Victimisation of a worker for raising a qualified disclosure will be considered a disciplinary matter and dealt with accordingly.
- 3.5 If misconduct is discovered as a result of any investigation under this policy, the Trust's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure may be invoked (in addition to any appropriate external measures).
- 3.6 Malicious/or false allegations will be considered a disciplinary matter. If the individual is a consultant, contractor, supplier or is employed by another organisation but working on behalf of the Trust and they make an allegation maliciously or for personal gain, this may result in them being removed from the approved list of contractors or the Trust may discontinue using their services.
- 3.7 An instruction to cover up wrongdoing is in itself a disciplinary matter. If told not to raise or pursue any concern, even by a person in authority, you should not agree to remain silent. You should report the matter in accordance with section 4 of this policy.
- 3.8 This policy is not designed to be a substitute for the Trust's disciplinary, grievance and harassment policies. If you have a concern unrelated to malpractice, please use the Trust's Grievance Policy, copies of which are available on SchoolBus, from your Principal/Head of School/line manager or from your normal HR contact.
- 3.9 This policy is for disclosures about matters other than a breach of an employee's own contract of employment. If you are concerned that your own contract has been, or is likely to be, breached, you should use the Trust's Grievance Policy.

4.0 HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

STEP 1

- 4.1 If you have a concern about malpractice, the Trust Board hopes that you will be able to raise the matter with your Principal/Head of School/line manager. If your concern is related to a child protection issue, you must follow the school's Safeguarding Policy.
- 4.2 Concerns may be raised verbally and/or in writing. If you wish to make a written report you are advised to include in your letter the background and history, (giving relevant dates) and give the reason why you are particularly concerned about the matter. You may also wish to seek advice from your trade union representative (if applicable) at this stage.
- 4.3 If you are personally involved in the matter you raise, you must state this from the outset. You may invite your trade union, a member of staff from Human Resources or a work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews (which may be arranged away from your normal workplace if you so wish) in connection with the concerns you have raised.
- 4.4 However, if you feel unable to raise the matter with your Principal/Head of School/line manager due to the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved, or if you believe that he/she may be involved, you should speak to the Chair of Governors.
- 4.5 If the concern is related to child protection, you may wish to raise it with the appropriate Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO):
- Birmingham LADO: 0121 675 1669 or ladoteam@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk
 - Sandwell LADO: 0121 569 4770 or sandwell_lado@sandwellchildrenstrust.org
 - Worcestershire LADO: 01905 846221 or lado@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk
- 4.6 The school will respond promptly to your concerns by assessing what action ought to be taken. This may involve

an internal investigation or a more formal inquiry. You will be told who is handling the matter (the Responsible Officer), how you can contact them and whether any more assistance from you will be required. In normal circumstances, the Responsible Officer will write to you acknowledging that your concern has been received within 7 working days of the concern being raised. The letter will also inform you of any relevant staff support mechanisms and agree arrangements for keeping you informed.

- 4.7 Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for an investigation. If urgent action is required this may be taken before any investigation is conducted.
- 4.8 Thereafter, the Responsible Officer will keep you informed of progress and the outcome of any investigations or decisions on the matter, including the content of any reports written.
- 4.9 The school will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the school will arrange for you to receive advice about the policy.

STEP 2 - OPTIONAL

- 4.10 If your concern relates to Health & Safety matters, you may speak to the Trust Head of Estates on 0121 270 3117.
- 4.11 Alternatively, you may wish to contact the Trust's Head of HR at info@crst.org.uk or 0121 270 3117, who can advise on the process or direct you towards the appropriate person with specialist knowledge.

STEP 3 - RAISING A CONCERN EXTERNALLY

- 4.12 While we hope that this Policy gives you the confidence to raise your concern with the Trust or school's management team, Trust Board or the Local Academy Governing Board, we would prefer that you raised your concern with the proper external regulator rather than not at all. The legislation sets out a number of bodies to which qualifying disclosures may be made.

These include:

- HM Revenue & Customs;
- the Financial Services Authority;
- the Office of Fair Trading;
- the Health & Safety Executive;
- the Environment Agency;
- the Audit Commission or External Auditor;
- the Information Commissioner's Office;
- the Pensions Regulator;
- the General Social Care Council;
- the Standards Board for England;
- the Director of Public Prosecutions; and
- the Serious Fraud Office.

- 4.13 A worker can make a disclosure (and still retain protection under the Employment Rights Act 1996) to a non-prescribed person (for example the police, Ofsted or the Department for Education) if certain conditions are met, namely: the worker reasonably believes the information is substantially true; the worker is not making the disclosure for personal gain; and, in all the circumstances, it is reasonable for the worker to make the disclosure. The worker must also: reasonably believe that he or she would be subject to a detriment by the employer if he or she made the disclosure directly to the employer or a prescribed person; reasonably believe that the employer would conceal or destroy evidence if the disclosure were put directly; or have previously made the same disclosure to the employer or a prescribed person to no avail.
- 4.14 You are strongly advised to seek independent advice before you raise any issue outside of the school.

5.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

- 5.1. The Trust undertakes to protect your identity and we will not disclose it without your consent. If the situation arises where it is not possible to pursue your concern without revealing your identity (e.g. the need to give evidence in court or at a disciplinary hearing), we will discuss with you how and if we can proceed.

6.0 THE ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS

- 6.1. Trade Unions are committed to the effective use of a Whistleblowing Policy. If you are considering raising concerns using this policy you may wish to seek advice from your trade union representative (if applicable) before doing so, particularly if you believe that the only course of action open to you is to raise your concern with an external body.

7.0 FURTHER ADVICE

- 7.1. You may wish to contact the Trust's Head of HR at info@crst.org.uk or 0121 270 3117.
- 7.2. However, if you want independent advice at any time, you may contact your trade union (if applicable) or the independent charity, Protect, on 020 3117 2520 or via their website: <https://protect-advice.org.uk>. They provide independent and confidential advice to workers who are unsure whether or how to raise a public interest concern.