

GOSFORTH GROUP

CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING OF CONCERNS (“WHISTLEBLOWING”)

1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to promote and protect responsible whistleblowing where staff, contractors, suppliers or volunteers have concerns about malpractice in the school.

2 What is whistleblowing?

Sometimes whistleblowing is called speaking up or raising a concern. It is all about ensuring that if someone sees something wrong in the workplace, they are able to raise this within their organisation, to a regulator, or wider. Whistleblowing ultimately protects customers, staff, beneficiaries, and the organisation itself by identifying harm before it's too late.

Whistleblowing inside the workplace is the reporting about alleged wrongdoing such as:

- **Criminal offences**
- **Breaches of any legal obligation**
- **Miscarriages of justice**
- **Danger to the health and safety of any individual**
- **Damage to the environment**
- **The deliberate concealment of information about any of the above**

For a more complete description please see <https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing>

3 POLICY STATEMENT

This policy reflects Gosforth Group and Trustees' commitment to safeguarding children and young people, good practice, valuing staff and seeking continuous improvement in service delivery.

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong in their place of employment. However, they may not express their 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 to report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

Gosforth Group Trustees are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees and others that we deal with who

have concerns about any aspect of the trust's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.

This policy document makes it clear that you can do so without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. The policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise concerns within the school rather than overlooking a problem or "blowing the whistle" outside.

4 AIMS OF THIS POLICY

This policy aims to:

- make you feel confident to raise concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice;
- give you avenues to raise your concerns and receive feedback on any action taken;
- guarantees that you receive a response to your concerns and ensures that you are aware of the process to follow if you are not satisfied;
- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation.

There are existing procedures in place if you have a grievance relating to your own employment or consider that you are being harassed (due to your race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age) or if you are concerned about health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as to other employees. Indeed, you are under a legal obligation to report to your supervisor or manager any work situation which you consider to represent:

- a danger to the health and safety of yourself, fellow employees or members of the public; or
- a shortcoming in the trust's arrangements for health and safety.

If you are reluctant to raise such health and safety concerns with your supervisor or manager, or if you have raised them and are concerned about the response, then arrangements exist for you to raise the health and safety concerns with the City Council's Health and Safety Section based in the Corporate Services Division and/or with a health and safety or trade union representative.

This policy is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures or where it is considered that the relevant policy or procedure has not been followed, e.g.:

- practices which fail to safeguard children or young people including the sexual or physical abuse of service users;
- conduct which is an offence or a breach of law;
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice;
- health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees;
- damage to the environment;
- the unauthorised use of public funds;
- fraud and corruption;
- any attempt to prevent disclosure of any of the above; or
- other conduct which gives you cause for concern.

Therefore any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of your staff or members of the school or others acting on behalf of the trust or board of trustees can be reported under this policy. This may be about something that:

- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the board of trustees subscribes to; or
- is against the board of trustee's Scheme of Delegation and policies; or
- falls below established standards of practice as outlined in the Code of Conduct; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

This policy supplements and does not replace the trust's complaints procedure, the grievance procedure and other procedures established to deal with aspects of harassment and with health and safety concerns.

5 SAFEGUARDS FOR COMPLAINANTS

5.1 Harassment or victimisation

The Trustees are committed to good practice and high standards and aim to be supportive of its staff.

The Trustees recognise that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. However uncovering malpractice will be doing a service to Gosforth Group MAT. You will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.

The Trustees will fulfill their responsibilities to ensure that you are not harassed, victimised or otherwise disadvantaged when you raise a concern. Any employee engages in any form of victimisation or harassment against you because of raising a concern may be subject to disciplinary action. Any Trustee who engages in any form of victimisation or harassment against you as a result of raising a concern may be subject to the appropriate sanction.

Allegations by an employee who is the subject of disciplinary investigations or proceedings concerning the conduct of those proceedings can only be raised through the disciplinary appeals procedures.

5.2 Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence wherever possible and every effort will be made to preserve your anonymity if you so wish. You may need however to come forward as a witness, but if you wish to be supported by a representative of your choice then this would be available to you.

5.3 Anonymous allegations

This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but they will be considered so far as is possible or practicable by the Trustees.

5.4 Untrue allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If however, you make an allegation maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

6 HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

To whom you report your concern depends on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. As a first step you should raise concerns with your immediate line manager or Principal. Principals who have concerns about a member of staff should follow appropriate procedures in relation to specific areas of concern.

If you believe that your Principal is involved you should approach the Chief Executive Officer.

Concerns regarding a member of the MAT Executive team should be raised with the Chief Executive Officer and if the matter relates to the CEO then the concern should be raised with the Chair of Trustees.

If the concern is regarding any member of an Academy Advisory Group, or the Board of Trustees, advice should be sought from the Chair of Trustees. Where the Chair of Trustees is involved the concern should be reported to the CEO

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing.

The earlier you express the concern, the easier it will be to take action. You can get confidential, independent advice from the charity Protect on 020 3117 2520. Their website is www.protect-advice.org.uk

Concerns can be raised through your trade union or professional association who will advise and support you as appropriate. You can invite your trade union or professional association representative or a fellow worker to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

7 HOW YOUR CONCERN WILL BE DEALT WITH

The Trustees, Principal or line manager will respond to your concerns, and it will be necessary to investigate your concerns but this is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

Within three working days of a concern being raised, you will be sent a written acknowledgement of the concern which has been raised.

Within 10 working days you will receive a further response:

- indicating how it is proposed to deal with the matter;
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- telling you whether any enquiries have been made;

- supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms.

Where appropriate, matters raised may:

- be investigated by the school/ local authority/ Academy Advisory Group/ Board of Trustees, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process;
- be referred to the police or other statutory agencies;
- be referred to the external auditor.

In order to protect individuals and those about whom concerns are raised, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. 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.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

The amount of contact between you and the individual considering the issues will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the investigating officers will seek further information from you.

Where any meeting is arranged, and this can be off-site if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative or a fellow worker.

The Trustees/ Academy Advisory Groups will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of realising 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 procedure.

The Trustees and Academy Advisory Groups accept that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, you will be informed of the outcome of any investigation.

8 HOW THE MATTER CAN BE TAKEN FURTHER

This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within the trust to raise concerns. The Trustees and Academy Advisory Groups hope you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you remain dissatisfied, and you feel it is right to take the matter outside of the trust, you may wish to take advice from your trade union, your local Citizens Advice Bureau or your legal advisor on the options that are available to you.

One possibility is that you may wish to rely on your rights under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. This Act gives you protection from victimisation if you make certain disclosures of information in the public interest. The provisions are quite complex and include a list of prescribed persons outside of the school who can be contacted in certain circumstances. You should seek advice on the effect of the Act from the persons referred to above.

If you do take the matter outside of the Trustees, you should ensure that you do not disclose information where you owe a duty of confidentiality to persons other than the school (e.g. service users) or where you would commit an offence by making disclosure.

If for any reason you do not wish to use the internal arrangements set out above, or require additional support and advice, a list of external agencies is given below. This is not exhaustive. A fuller list is available in the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) (Amendment) Order 2003 at www.legislation.hms.gov.uk and at www.protect-advice.org.uk where there is a great deal of useful further information.

Public Sector Audit Appointments		www.psaa.co.uk
Care Quality Commission	03000 616161	www.cqc.co.uk
Environment Agency	03708 506506	www.environment-agency.gov.uk
Food Standards Agency	0207 2768000	www.food.gov.uk
General Social Care Council	0207 3975100	www.gsc.org.uk
Health and Safety Executive	0870 1545500	www.hse.gov.uk
Regulator of Social Housing	0300 1245225	www.gov.uk
Information Commissioner	0303 1231113	www.ico.gov.uk
The Pensions Regulator	0345 6007060	www.thepensionsregulator.co.uk
Protect	020 31172520	www.protect-advice.org.uk

Advice about your rights is also available from:

Citizens Advice Bureau (Newcastle City)	0300 3309055
Newcastle Law Centre	0191 2304777

September 2021

Date approved:

Signed:

September 2022

Date to be reviewed: