



Moorlands
Learning Trust

Whistleblowing Policy

	Position/Committee	Date
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MOORLANDS LEARNING TRUST WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

- CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING CODE FOR EMPLOYEES

(Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998)

RATIONALE

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within their organisation. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to their employer. 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.

The Trust (which includes its schools), is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with local government 'Best Value' principles the Trust is also committed to improving the performance of all its functions. The Trust expects its employees, supply staff, its contractors', employees and any staff who are training but not employed by the Trust, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Trust or its schools' work to raise those concerns. The Trust accepts that employees may prefer to do this in a confidential way that avoids any public disclosure of their identity.

This Code makes it clear that employees can do so without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. The Code is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the Trust or a Trust school rather than overlooking a problem or reporting it outside.

The Code applies to all employees and workers of the Trust and to persons employed by bodies in a contractual relationship with the Trust or its schools undertaking Trust functions or providing goods or services to the Trust or its schools.

OBJECTIVES

As an employee of the Trust this Code aims to:

- Encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice.
- Provide a way for you to raise those concerns and to be told of any action taken.
- Ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied.
- Reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisal or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in the public interest.

This Code is intended to deal with concerns not coming within the Grievance and Disciplinary Policy, for example:

- 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.
- Possible fraud and corruption, facilitation of tax evasion or other criminal activity.
- Sexual or physical abuse.
- Other unethical conduct.

Any serious concerns you have about any aspect of service provision, the conduct of employees or members of the Trust, or others acting on behalf of the Trust, can be reported under this Code. This may be about something that:

- Makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the Trust subscribes to.
- Is against the Trust or its policies.
- Falls below established standards of practice, or
- Amounts to improper conduct.

This policy is not to be used for raising concerns which are private individual matters (eg issues relating to your contract of employment) as they can be addressed under the Trust's Grievance Policy.

SAFEGUARDS

Harassment or Victimisation

The Trust is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees.

The Trust recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.

The Trust will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern that you reasonably believe to be in the public interest.

CONFIDENTIALITY

A concern reported under this Code will be treated confidentially. Unless you agree, your identity will not be disclosed by the Trust in dealing with your concern within this Code. In the event of a concern disclosing alleged criminal activity, you may be asked to help the police or other appropriate enforcement agency. In the event of disciplinary action taken by the Trust you may be asked to give evidence under the disciplinary procedure.

ANONYMOUS ALLEGATIONS

This Code encourages you to put your name to your allegations whenever possible.

Concerns expressed anonymously will be considered at the discretion of the Trust. In exercising this discretion the factors to be taken into account include:

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

UNTRUE ALLEGATIONS

If you make an allegation which you reasonably believe to be in the public interest, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, or which the Trust does not accept is reasonably in the public interest, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your immediate line manager. If the complaint is about your immediate line manager you should contact a Deputy Head/Deputy Principal to raise your concerns. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if you believe that a senior leadership team member is

involved, you should approach the Headteacher at the Trust school. If the concerns are regarding the Headteacher contact the CEO and if they are about the CEO, contact the Chair of Trustees (chairoftrustees@moorlandslearningtrust.co.uk).

Concerns may be raised verbally or 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 you are particularly concerned about the situation.

The earlier you express the concern the easier it is to take action.

Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for your concern.

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns.

You may invite your trade union representative, or a work colleague, to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

HOW THE TRUST WILL RESPOND

The Trust will respond to your concerns.

Initially all concerns raised under this Code will be referred to the Headteacher at each Trust school (if the concerns involve the Headteacher, the matter will be referred to the CEO, if they involve the CEO the matter will be referred to the Chair of Trustees), who will determine whether the matters raised should:

- Be investigated by leadership, our external accountants/auditors, or through the disciplinary process.
- Be referred to the police.
- Form the subject of an independent process.

In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, 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 action within the Trust without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Once a concern has been referred to the Headteacher/CEO/Chair of Trustees they will endeavour to write to you as soon as reasonably practicable: 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 you whether any initial enquiries have been made.
- Telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

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

Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish, your trade union representative or a work colleague can accompany you.

The Trust will take steps to minimise any difficulties that 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 Trust will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure.

The Trust accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. The Headteacher/CEO/Chair of Trustees, subject to any legal constraints, will inform you of the outcome of any investigation.

THE RESPONSIBLE PERSON

The Headteacher in each Trust school has overall responsibility for the implementation of this Code, with the CEO and Chair of Trustees retaining oversight. The Headteacher maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcome and will be reported to the Local Governing Body and the CEO who will report to the Board of Trustees.

HOW THE MATTER CAN BE TAKEN FURTHER

This Code is intended to provide you with a way within the Trust to raise concerns. The Trust hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not, and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the Trust, the following are possible contact points:

- The Department for Education.
- National Audit Office.
- Your trade union.
- Your local Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations.
- A relevant voluntary organisation.
- The police.

If you do take the matter outside the Trust, you should ensure that you do not disclose confidential information to any person who is not authorised to receive it.

We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. Protect operates a confidential helpline. Helpline: Protect Advice Line: 020 3117 2520 or complete the online webform, <https://protect.tfaforms.net/f/Contact-the-Advice-Line>. Business Support: 020 3455 2252.

An untrue allegation that a person has committed a criminal offence may be defamatory. Concerns raised within the Trust under this Code will normally be protected by qualified privilege as a defence to defamation proceedings unless made maliciously.