

Whistleblowing Policy

RIDGEWAY EDUCATION TRUST

Approved by the Trust Board: 06 December 2022

Review date: December 2025

Introduction

1. All schools and academy trusts are required to have appropriate procedures in place for handling whistleblowing and for ensuring school staff know who they can contact if they wish to raise a concern.
2. This document explains the types of concerns that can be raised under this procedure, the legal protection for whistleblowers and how whistleblowing concerns will be handled.
3. This procedure should be followed for any whistleblowing matters raised by employees of the school, supply staff and workers (including agency workers).
4. The term 'Headteacher' has been used throughout this procedure, however depending on the size and structure of the school the Headteacher's role in the procedure may be delegated to other members of the senior leadership team, school business managers or senior managers as appropriate. Where the Headteacher is subject to these procedures, it will be managed by the Executive Headteacher in conjunction with the Chair of the Local Governing Body. Where the Executive Headteacher is subject to these procedures, it will be managed by the Chair of the Trust Board.

Policy Statement

5. Ridgeway Education Trust and its schools are committed to the highest possible standards of:
 - Openness
 - Inclusiveness
 - Accountability
 - Integrity

Aim of procedure

- To encourage those working in the Trust and its schools to report suspected wrongdoing promptly, in the knowledge that it will be taken seriously
- To provide guidance on how to raise concerns
- To reassure staff that they are able to raise genuine concerns made in the public interest without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken

What is Whistleblowing?

6. Whistleblowing is when a worker reports certain types of wrongdoing or misconduct within an organisation.
7. The wrongdoing disclosed must be in the public interest. This means it must affect others (e.g. pupils, colleagues, general public).
8. The wrongdoing must relate to or show one of the following:
 - a criminal offence

- a failure to comply with a legal obligation
 - a possible miscarriage of justice
 - a Health & Safety risk
 - damaging the environment
 - misuse of public money
 - corruption or unethical conduct
 - abuse of pupils, students or other users
 - deliberate concealment of any of these matters
 - any other substantial and relevant concern.
9. The concern could be about something that happened in the past, is currently happening or likely to happen in the future.
10. Concerns or complaints that employees wish to raise formally, about their own employment, should normally be raised using the Trust's Grievance Procedure, unless the employee believes the concern is in the public interest. This includes for example, concerns related to working conditions, working relations, employment rights or bullying or harassment.

Legal protection for whistleblowers

11. Whistleblowers are protected by law from being treated unfairly or losing their jobs because they 'blow the whistle'.
12. Whistleblowers must hold a reasonable belief that the concern they are raising is in the public interest.
13. The school's governing body will provide all reasonable protection for those who raise concerns made in the public interest.
14. The school's Local Governing Body (or in the case of central Trust employees, the Trust Board) will be responsible for ensuring that appropriate personal support is offered both to a worker raising a concern and to any worker against whom allegations have been made under this procedure.
15. Although an employee has certain legal obligations of confidentiality to the Trust its schools, in a limited set of circumstances, whistleblowing may override these obligations. This guidance sets out the circumstances under which these disclosures may lawfully be made.

Procedure for raising a whistleblowing concern

Whistleblowing anonymously or confidentially

16. Concerns can be raised anonymously, but the school or person receiving the allegation may not be able to take it further if they haven't been provided with all the information they need.

17. Whistleblowers can give their name but request confidentiality and in these circumstances, every effort will be made to protect their identity.
18. All disclosures made under this procedure will be treated sensitively, consistently and fairly.

Step 1- Deciding who to report the concern to

19. Concerns can be raised verbally or in writing.
20. You can raise your concern with your line manager. Alternatively, you can raise the matter with the School Headteacher, Trust Executive Headteacher, the Chair of Governors or Chair of the Trust Audit & Risk Committee.
21. Reporting concerns to the media, in most cases will lead to the loss of your whistleblowing law rights.
22. Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of your concerns, you will need to demonstrate that you have sufficient evidence or other reasonable grounds to raise them.
23. You may wish to obtain advice from a trade union representative, the Citizen's Advice Bureau or Protect at <https://protect-advice.org.uk/what-is-whistleblowing/>.
24. You can be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague to any meetings that are required.

Step 2

25. The person with whom you have raised your concern will decide what action is needed. They may ask you to provide further information. They will write to you within 10 school days to let you know how your concern will be dealt with.
26. The information you can expect to receive is:
 - an indication of how the concern will be dealt with
 - an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
 - whether any initial enquiries have been made
 - whether further investigations will take place, and if not why not
 - information about support available for you
27. The person with whom you have raised your concern will at the same time notify the HR Manager that a whistleblowing allegation has been made.
28. Advice on dealing with concerns is available from the HR Manager, together with such external advisors as considered appropriate by the Trust.

Step 3

29. Initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate.
30. An investigation may be carried out, depending on the nature of the allegations and the evidence/information presented. Full details of the investigation may be withheld from you to protect the confidentiality of other people.
31. Information will need to be passed on to those with a legitimate need to have this information and it may be necessary for you to provide a written statement and act as a witness in any subsequent disciplinary proceedings or enquiry.
32. Where an investigation is necessary, it may take the form of one or more of the following:
 - an internal investigation by the Headteacher, Executive Headteacher, a senior member of staff, a governor or trustee, which may, for example, take the form of a disciplinary investigation
 - an investigation being initiated with the Trust internal auditors
 - a referral to the police
 - the setting up of an external independent investigation

Step 4

33. You will be informed of the outcome of any investigation, in writing, and/or of any action taken, subject to the constraints of confidentiality and the law.
34. If you do not feel your concern has been addressed adequately you may raise it with an independent body such as one of the following as appropriate:
 - your trade union
 - the Citizens Advice Bureau
 - a relevant professional body or regulatory organisation
 - a relevant voluntary organisation
 - the police
 - the Local Government Ombudsman
 - Equality and Human Rights Commission(See the Annex for further details).
35. If there is an issue of an exceptionally serious nature which you believe to be substantially true, then you may disclose the issue to someone other than those listed in paragraph 21. In determining whether it is reasonable for you to have made a disclosure the identity of the person to whom the disclosure is made will be taken into account. Disclosures to anyone outside of the recognised bodies listed in paragraphs 35 and the Annex may (depending on the circumstances) not be protected disclosures under the Act.

36. You have a duty to the Trust and to the school not to disclose confidential information. This does not prevent you from seeking independent advice at any stage or from discussing the issue with the charity Protect at <https://protect-advice.org.uk/what-is-whistleblowing/> in accordance with the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

Review and Reporting of the Procedure

37. The Trust has overall responsibility for this procedure which has been reviewed with reference to equalities, human rights and discrimination legislation, and requirements laid out in the Academies Financial Handbook. Confidential monitoring of the procedures is undertaken by the Chair of the Trust Audit & Risk Committee, in order to gather data to help establish whether the procedure is operated in a fair and consistent manner. In undertaking monitoring the Trust will not identify individuals.

Annex - External bodies and organisations

You can in certain circumstances as detailed in the Act blow the whistle to an external organisation rather than your employer. There is a list of prescribed people or bodies that you can go to. Choose the correct one for your issue. A full list can be found online at Gov.Uk:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/431221/bis-15-289-blowing-the-whistle-to-a-prescribed-person-list-of-prescribed-persons-and-bodies-2.pdf

Some of the bodies that may be relevant for schools' staff are:

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| Ofsted | Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD Tel: 0300 123 3155 Email: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk |
| Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation | Casework Manager, Ofqual, Spring Place, Coventry Business Park, Herald Avenue, Coventry CV5 6UB Tel: 0300 303 3346 Public.Enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk Online reform form: www.ofqual.gov.uk/complaints-and-appeals/whistleblowing/ |
| National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) Or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) | The NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line is for anyone with child protection concerns in the workplace. The helpline provides support and advice to those who feel unable to get a child protection issue addressed by their employer. It can be contacted anonymously on 0800 028 0285. Oxfordshire LADO: https://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/local-authority-designated-officer-lado |
| Health and Safety Executive | Tel: 0300 003 1647 Online form: http://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/raising-your-concern.htm www.hse.gov.uk |
| The Local Government Ombudsman | Address: PO Box 4771, Coventry. CV4 0EH Web: www.lgo.org.uk |

Data Protection and Freedom of Information

The Office of the Information Commissioner, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, SK9 5AF

Tel: 0303 123 1113 Email: casework@ico.gsi.gov.uk