



Policy Title	Whistleblowing Policy	Version	3.0 Oct 21
Reviewed by	Governing Body	Review Date	Term 1 23/24
Approved by	FGB		2 YEARLY

Whistleblowing Policy

Slimbridge Primary School is committed to the highest possible standards of honesty, openness, probity and accountability. It seeks to conduct its affairs in a responsible manner, to ensure that all its activities are open and effectively managed, and that integrity and principles of public interest disclosure are sustained.

In compliance to Keeping Children Safe in Education Part 4, staff must acknowledge their individual responsibilities to bring matters of concern to the attention of senior management and/or relevant agencies. Although this can be difficult this is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk. You may be the first to recognise that something is wrong but may not feel able to express your concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues, or you may fear harassment or victimisation; these feelings, however natural, must never result in a child or young person continuing to be unnecessarily at risk. Remember it is often the most vulnerable children or young person who is targeted. These children need someone like you to safeguard their welfare.

In line with that commitment, we encourage staff, Governors, those working on behalf of the school and others that we deal with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the school's work to come forward and voice those concerns with a member of the senior leadership team. Where a member of staff decides to report a serious incident, whether anonymous or not, this will be treated as a 'protected, internal disclosure' i.e. there will be no adverse repercussions for the member of staff.

Purpose of this Policy

Staff are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the school. However, staff 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. Each person working at Slimbridge Primary School needs to realise that they not only have a right, but also a duty to report any improper actions or omissions.

We recognise and appreciate that staff who raise concerns regarding malpractice or wrongdoing are an asset to the school, not a threat. This policy makes it clear that they can raise concerns without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. The whistle blowing policy is intended to encourage and enable staff to raise serious concerns within the school. Although this can be difficult this is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk. Remember it is often the most vulnerable children or young person who is targeted. These children need someone like you to safeguard their welfare.

This policy aims to:

- encourage staff to feel confident in raising concerns and to question and act upon their concerns about practice
- provide avenues to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure that staff receive a response to their concerns and that they are aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied
- reassure staff that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have reasonable belief that they have made any disclosure in good faith.

Don't think what if I'm wrong - think what if I'm right?

"Absolutely without fail - challenge poor practice or performance. If you ignore or collude with poor practice it makes it harder to sound the alarm when things go wrong" (reproduced with acknowledgement to "Sounding the Alarm" – Barnardos)

Who is covered by this policy?

The policy applies to all school staff of the school staff, Governors and those carrying out work on school premises, for example agency workers, contractors, consultants. It also covers providers of works, services and supplies, including the school's external contractors and those providing services under a contract with the school in their own premises. However, to facilitate the reading of this policy, the terms 'staff' or 'members of staff' have been used, with the intention to cover all individuals mentioned above.

Scope of the policy

There are existing procedures in place to enable staff to lodge a grievance relating to their employment. The whistle blowing policy is intended to cover serious concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures, in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. These include:

- Conduct which is an offence or breach of the law
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation
- Disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- Health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other staff/volunteers
- Damage to the environment
- Information relating to the above issues that have been or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

Examples of the above categories are likely to include:

- The unauthorised use or misuse of public funds
- Possible fraud or corruption
- Sexual, physical or psychological abuse of service users
- Harassment and bullying of staff
- Breaches of codes of conduct

Therefore, any serious concerns that a member of staff has about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of others acting on behalf of the school or service

users, can be reported under the whistle blowing policy where the member of staff has a reasonable belief in those concerns, and they relate to one of the specific areas set out above.

Safeguarding against harassment or victimisation

The school is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of all staff. It is recognised that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If a member of staff has a reasonable belief that what they are saying is true, they have nothing to fear because they will be doing their duty to their employer and/or those for whom they provide a service.

The school will take a zero-tolerance approach to any act of harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures). The school will take appropriate action to protect staff when they raise a concern, by supporting the member of staff and consider action under the appropriate procedure (for example disciplinary) against the person or persons responsible for the reported acts, provided the member of staff:

- Discloses the information in good faith
- Believes the concern is true
- Does not act maliciously or make false allegations
- Does not seek any personal gain, and
- Provided the allegations relate to one of the categories covered by the scope of the policy and referred to above.

There are national guidelines to help you as a whistle blower. You can find out more on the protection of whistle blowers from the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#)

Unsubstantiated allegations

If a member of staff makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. If, however, an allegation is made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence but at the appropriate time, the whistle blower may be asked to come forward as a witness, and this will be discussed with them.

Anonymous allegations

This policy encourages staff to put their name to their allegation whenever possible. The school will take all concerns raised seriously. When carrying out an initial review of a concern, the school will consider the following factors:

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

Reasons for 'whistle blowing'

- each individual has a responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour
- to prevent the problem worsening or widening

- to protect or reduce risks to others
- to prevent becoming implicated yourself

What stops people from whistle blowing

- starting a chain of events which spirals
- disrupting the work or project
- fear of getting it wrong
- fear of repercussions or damaging careers
- fear of not being believed

How to raise a concern

- Staff members may raise concerns with the, Headteacher or the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
- If your concern is about the Headteacher, contact the Chair of Governors
- Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Staff members who wish to make a written report are asked to provide the background and history of the concern (including relevant dates) and the reason why they are particularly concerned about the situation.
- The earlier the concern is expressed, the easier it is to take action. In order to assist with investigation, staff members should provide as much detail and supporting evidence as possible.
- A member of staff is not expected to prove that an allegation is true, only to have sufficient grounds for concern.
- While concerns will usually be raised internally, the school recognises that staff may feel unable to do this, and that they may wish to contact an independent, external organisation such as the NSPCC Whistleblowing helpline hotline on; (0800 028 0285, 8am - 8pm Mon - Fri, Email; help@nspcc.org.uk) or the Gloucestershire Safeguarding LADO.
- A third option for staff who wish to raise concerns is to contact the Public Concerns at Work helpline 020 7404 6609. This helpline offers independent and confidential advice to workers who are unsure whether or how to raise a public interest concern.

How the school will respond

The school will investigate and respond to all concerns raised by staff members or service users through any channels.

While it is not essential that the concerns be provided in writing, the person receiving the concern, will ensure that a written account of it is made. This will help with the subsequent investigation by facilitating clear record keeping.

When a concern is raised directly with the school, they should undertake the following actions:

- Take the concern seriously
- Consider the concerns fully and objectively
- Recognise that raising a concern can be a difficult experience for staff
- Ensure confidentiality
- Refer to a manager of appropriate seniority, to agree the level at which the concern will be investigated and identify who will take responsibility for

coordinating the enquiry.

Staff members who are under investigation will not be involved in the investigation.

Initial enquiry

In order to protect the 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. If urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Purpose of the initial enquiry is to ascertain if the conduct or behaviour involves a member of the school staff, a senior manager or other member of staff, so that further enquiries and investigation can be progressed accordingly.

Preliminary enquiry

A Preliminary enquiry establishes the need to carry out an investigation. Further to the results of the initial and preliminary enquiries, and at the discretion of the senior leadership team/Chair of Governors, the following steps will then need to be considered:

- Concerns or allegations, which fall within the scope of specific procedures, e.g child protection and safeguarding or discrimination issues, will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. In the case of child protection the Gloucestershire LADO will be contacted.
- Where there is any financial impropriety, the concern should be referred to the Head or Chair of Governors, before taking any other action.
- Ensure that matters of a criminal nature are reported to the Police.
- Whether the disciplinary or other relevant management policies, procedures and processes of the school need to be applied.
- Appointment of an officer to carry out the investigation under these procedures.

Investigation

Depending on the nature of concerns, investigations may be carried out under the school's capability and/or disciplinary policy.

Investigation timescales

Within 14 days of a report being received, the person who is dealing with the concern raised will respond in writing:

- Acknowledging that the concern has been received
- Supplying information on staff support mechanisms, and
- Advising whether further investigations or action is required and, if not, why not.

A further update will also be provided 28 days after the report was received, advising of additional progress made and the estimated date a final response will be available. If the whistle blower has chosen to remain anonymous and non-contactable, they need to contact their original whistle blowing route in order to receive updates.

Investigation process

The impartial investigating manager appointed to undertake the investigation will establish the facts of the matter and assess whether the concern has foundation and can be resolved internally. Other people may need to be interviewed to provide further information and/or clarification concerning the issue(s) raised.

It is essential that written records of all interviews be kept throughout the investigation, together with written details of any action taken. The investigation will result in a written report and recommendations for corrective action which will be passed to the manager responsible for deciding whether formal action should be taken.

Where any meeting is arranged involving an individual member of staff, which can be off-site, a recognised Trade Union representative or a work colleague may also attend. The school will take steps to minimise any difficulties which may be experienced as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if a member of staff is required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the school will arrange for them to receive appropriate procedural and/or legal advice.

A member of staff raising a concern will be, subject to legal constraints, advised in writing of the outcome of the investigation and, where appropriate, what action is being taken.

Monitoring arrangements

The Head Teacher has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy.

The Head Teacher and Chair of Governors will ensure that the whistle blowing procedures are defined, documented, widely circulated and reviewed at appropriate intervals.

The practical aspects of monitoring are to assess whether:

- The policy is being used appropriately
- Concerns are being handled and investigated properly
- There are any discernible patterns of concern across the school
- The policy has been effective in identifying and deterring malpractice, and
- More needs to be done to raise awareness of the policy.

This policy should be read in accordance with the Child Protection and Safeguarding policy, Staff Code of Conduct, Staff Handbook, Capability and Disciplinary policies.