

Whistleblowing Policy

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1. Introduction

The Trust intends and expects that all decisions, policies and procedures will be underpinned at all times by its vision and values:

Our aim:

To create centres of educational excellence that inspire all pupils to turn their potential into performance

To achieve this our schools will:

Provide a broad and balanced curriculum that allows pupils to develop their talents and ambitions

Deliver the highest quality learning opportunities facilitated by excellent teachers

Inspire our pupils to become confident, motivated and respectful individuals ready to make a positive contribution to society

The Trust will support our schools by:

Maximising the resources and expertise available to individual schools

Providing a platform for the sharing of excellent practice

Challenging and developing staff to turn their potential into performance

1.1. Aims and Scope

This policy outlines what you should do if you suspect something happening at work is putting people in danger, or is illegal or unethical.

This policy applies to all employees, contractors, consultants, officers, trainees, volunteers, casual and agency workers.

If you are an employee, this policy does not form part of your contract of employment.

1.2. Other Linked Policies and Documents

- Grievance Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Staff Complaints Procedure

2. Policy Statement

The Park Academies Trust aims to maintain the highest standards of integrity in everything it does. However, all organisations can occasionally be affected by conduct that is dangerous, against the law or breaches ethical or professional codes. Should you have any such concerns, we encourage you to report them immediately — this is called ‘whistleblowing’. You can be assured that, if raised in good faith, we will take your concerns seriously, they will be thoroughly investigated, and you can be confident there will be no reprisals.

3. Guidance and Procedures

3.1 Guidance

The law provides protection for workers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters. These are called "qualifying disclosures". This code is not designed to replace or be used as an alternative to the grievance or other linked procedures.

A qualifying disclosure in relation to Whistleblowing is one made **in the public interest** by a worker who has a reasonable belief that one of the following is being, has been or is likely to be committed-

- any activity you suspect is criminal;
- any activity you suspect puts health and safety at risk;
- any activity you suspect may damage the environment;
- any activity you suspect breaches our policy on bribery and corruption;
- any failure to comply with legal or regulatory obligations;
- any failure to meet professional requirements; and/or
- any attempt to conceal one or more of these activities.

Any disclosure of information as detailed above will only be a protected disclosure if it is made in the reasonable belief of the worker that the disclosure is **in the public interest**.

Speak to your line manager, Academy Principal or, if you prefer, HR, if you are not sure whether something you have become aware of is covered by this policy. Note that if your complaint is about the way people are behaving towards you, then you should refer to our policy on Bullying and Harassment, or to our Grievance Policy, for guidance on how to proceed.

In most cases, you should start by raising your concerns with your Academy Principal either face-to-face or in writing.

If you would prefer not to go to your Principal, you should write to **Clerk to the Trustees**. You should also do this if your concerns are of a very serious nature.

Your letter should say that you are raising your concerns under this policy and then explain what they are. Include all the key facts, dates, and the names of the people involved.

3.2 Investigation Procedure

You will be invited to a meeting to discuss your concerns, and you are entitled to be accompanied at this and any subsequent meetings by a colleague or trade union representative. If you bring a companion, we ask that you both agree to keep your disclosures confidential before and after the meeting and during any investigation that may follow.

After the initial meeting, we will investigate your concerns and we may ask you to attend further meetings. To investigate properly, we may involve specialists with particular knowledge or experience of the issues you have raised.

You will be kept informed about how our investigations are progressing and how long they are likely to take. Sometimes, however, we may be unable to give you details about the investigation (or any action it leads to) as we need to protect confidentiality and comply with legal obligations. We understand this may be frustrating and we seek to keep you updated as far as possible.

Your concerns will be addressed fairly, but we cannot guarantee the outcome of our investigations will be the one you want. If you are not satisfied with how we have conducted the investigations, you can take the matter further using our Appeal policy.

Most concerns are raised with us in good faith, but occasionally someone makes a false allegation out of malice or because they believe they have something to gain. Anyone found doing this will face action under our Disciplinary Policy and is at risk of being dismissed for gross misconduct.

3.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

There is a significant difference between wanting to keep your concerns confidential and making a disclosure anonymously. We actively discourage anonymous whistleblowing. Concerns raised anonymously are very difficult — and sometimes impossible — to investigate. We can't properly establish whether your allegations are credible without being able to ask you for more details or for clarification, and this makes it hard to reach an informed decision. This is why we urge you not to report matters anonymously.

You are always encouraged to raise concerns openly, and if you prefer to do so in confidence, we will do all that we can to ensure your identity remains hidden. We may want to disclose your identity to people involved in the investigation, but will always discuss this with you first.

You are protected from reprisals for good faith reporting under this policy but if you are still worried we encourage you to discuss this with us and we will explore how far we can go in keeping your concerns confidential.

3.4 Protection for Whistleblowers

If you raise a concern in good faith under this policy, we will support you fully even if we find through our investigations that you made a mistake or that there has been no breach of policy, legal obligation etc. However, if you feel you have been treated detrimentally as a result of raising a concern, please let us know. First inform your manager and, if the matter remains unresolved, please follow the formal process in our Grievance Policy.

All whistleblowers are afforded the same protection, so you must not threaten others who have raised concerns or carry out reprisals against them. You may

face disciplinary action which could include dismissal for gross misconduct, if such acts take place. You may also face legal action from the whistleblower in these circumstances.

You can seek further advice on whistleblowing, protecting confidentiality, and being protected from reprisals from the independent charity Public Concern at Work, which offers a confidential helpline on 020 7404 6609; www.pcaw.org.uk.

3.5 Taking your concerns outside the Company

This policy outlines the process for raising, investigating, and resolving wrongdoing within the workplace. It is rarely necessary – or, from our point of view, desirable – for anyone outside the Company to become involved when a whistleblowing allegation is made.

In some exceptional circumstances, you may need to go to an external body — an industry regulator, for example — and the independent charity Public Concern at Work can direct you towards the appropriate regulator for the type of issue you want to raise.

This policy covers the actions of third parties such as suppliers, service providers, and clients, as well as our staff. Should you have concerns about a third party, you are encouraged to raise them with us before approaching anyone else. HR, your manager or Academy Principal will be able to explain how you should proceed.

Alerting the media to a concern — particularly before or during an internal investigation — is almost never justified or appropriate in any situation. We strongly discourage you from doing so, and will treat any contact with the press as a serious disciplinary issue justifying dismissal unless exceptional circumstances exist.

We would normally expect you to have taken all reasonable steps to deal with the matter internally or with an external regulator, and to have taken full advice from a lawyer or Public Concern at Work before being justified in approaching the press.