

Whistle Blowing Policy

1.0 Introduction

The Academy is committed to promoting the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. The Academy hopes that employees and others* who may have a serious concern about any aspect of the Academy, including policies, procedures, custom and practice or the legality of its actions or work requests, feel that they can come forward and voice these concerns with the Chair of Governors or Headteacher.

The Academy will ensure that, reasonably held concerns are investigated confidentially. 'Reasonably held' means concerns other than those which are found to be malicious. Malicious allegations, from employees, may lead to a full investigation and appropriate disciplinary action.

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the Academy. Employees may feel unable to express their concerns because they feel that speaking out would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Academy or they may fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances, employees may feel that it is easier to ignore their concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

This aim of this policy is to assure employees they are free to voice their concerns within the structure of the Academy without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage and to provide a mechanism for so doing so that it is not necessary to raise a concern outside of the Academy.

*The policy applies to all employees and those contractors working for the Academy. It also covers other stakeholders who have a contractual relationship with the Academy. For the purposes of this policy, employees means all persons / groups detailed here.

This policy is in addition to the Academy's Complaints Policy.

2.0 Aims and Scope

This policy aims to:

- encourage employees to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon those concerns
- provide avenues for employees to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure employees that they will receive a response to their concerns and how a concern can be progressed if the response is considered unsatisfactory
- reassure employees that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation

- Protect the Academy against malicious allegations.

There are existing procedures in place to enable employees to lodge a grievance relating to your own employment. This Whistle Blowing Policy is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures.

These include:

- 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 students and employees
- damage to the environment
- the unauthorised use of public funds
- possible bribes, fraud and corruption
- child protection
- behavior that falls below established standards of practice; or that amounts to improper or unethical conduct.

3.0 Safeguards

The Academy recognises that the decision to report a concern or “blow the whistle” can be difficult. The Academy encourages employees to report their concerns as rather than being detrimental, employee concerns may help the Academy to fulfil its legal and moral obligations.

The Academy will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to maintain confidences and protect any employee who raises a concern in good faith.

4.0 Confidentiality

Whilst the Academy will seek to maintain confidences, at the appropriate time, it may be necessary for an employee to come forward as a witness.

5.0 Anonymous Allegations

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful and might not be investigated or responded to depending upon:

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

6.0 Malicious Allegations

Disciplinary or other action may be taken if an employee is found to have made a malicious allegation.

7.0 How to raise a concern

As a first step, any concerns should be raised with the Headteacher. Concerns regarding the Headteacher should be raised with the Chair of Governors.

For Safeguarding concerns, the employee should contact the Headteacher or Designated Safeguarding Lead, (Deputy Headteacher) or member of the Senior Leadership Team. If an employee is unsure whether or how to raise a concern they can also contact the independent voluntary organisation Public Concern at Work on 020 74046609 for guidance or phone the NSPCC Whistleblowing helpline. The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline is available for staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally.

Staff can call 0800 0280285 – line is available from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, Monday to Friday and email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Financial concerns should be raised with the Headteacher, Director of Finance and Resources, the Chair of Governors or Chair of the Finance Sub Committee. If an employee feels unable to report their concerns in this way, they may report their concern to the Academy's auditors, (contact details are published in the Academy's financial statements available on the school website), or through the Education and Skills Funding Agency of the Department for Education

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. They should be raised promptly and should be supported with as much evidence as possible.

Employees are not expected to demonstrate that there are reasonable grounds for the concern.

Employees may wish to consider discussing their concern with a trade union representative. Employees may invite trade union or other representatives to be present during any meetings or interviews.

8.0 How the Academy will respond to an Employee Concern

The Academy will respond to all concerns where possible, (ie: with the employee, agency or union representative).

As appropriate, concerns raised may be:

- investigated by the Headteacher, (or their representative), the Academy's auditors / others ie: HR
- be passed on to the police
- be passed to the Education and Skills Funding Agency
- be passed to another external agency

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.

The overriding principle which the Academy will have in mind is the public interest. 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.

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the Chair of Governors or Headteacher will write to the employee raising a concern to: -

- acknowledge that the concern has been received
- indicate how the Academy proposes to deal with the concern
- provide an estimate of how long it will take to give a final response
- inform the employee whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supply employees with information on support mechanisms, and
- tell employees whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The frequency of contact between the Headteacher and employee will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided.

Meetings between the Academy and the employee(s) may take place off site.

The Academy will take steps to minimise any difficulties which an employee may experience as a result of raising a concern

The Academy accepts that employees need to be assured that reported matters have been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, the Academy will inform

employees of the outcome of any investigation.

9.0 The Responsible Person

The Chair of Governors and Headteacher have overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. The Headteacher may delegate responsibility for any investigations to a member of the senior team or to the external investigators. All records will be held securely.

10.0 Media & External Communications

Employees must not communicate with any member of the press or media or use social media without permission of the Governing Body.

11.0 Communication and Equal Opportunities

The Academy will make employees aware of this policy through the induction process and on an annual basis through the budget process and the Director of Finance and Resource's budget and year end presentation. Governors and employees will be reminded of the policy through meetings and emails. This policy will be available on the school's intranet.

- In implementing this policy, the Academy will ensure that all staff are treated fairly and within the provisions and spirit of Wood Green Academy's Equal Opportunities Policy. Where necessary, special attention will be made to ensure the policy is understood.

12.0 Related Policies and Documents

- Anti-Bribery, Corruption and Fraud Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Gifts and Hospitality Policy
- Financial Regulations/Standing Financial Instructions
- Disciplinary Policy
- ICT Policy
- Finance, Audit, Premises and Safety Sub Committee Constitution
- Safeguarding including Child Protection Policy
- Restraints Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Keeping Children Safe in Education DFE
- Working Together to Safeguard Children
- Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People in Education Settings

13.0 Policy Review

The Policy will be reviewed by the Finance Committee and the Governing Body every three years, or earlier if the Headteacher indicates that a change is required.

Date reviewed at Finance Sub Committee	November 2019
Date approved at Full Governors	November 2019
Date to be reviewed next	October 2022