WHISTLEBLOWING

Policy & Procedure No.	**OP06**
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References to

Employee Handbook
HR03 Staff Discipline, Conduct & Grievance
OP03 GDPR & Data Protection
OP01 Complaints
ED02 Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

1. Introduction

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within their school. However, they may not say anything because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the school's managers. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. It may be easier for them to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

The school is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. So, we expect employees, and others we deal with, who have serious concerns about the school's work, to come forward and voice them.

It is recognised that many cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.

This policy document makes it clear that you can raise concerns without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. This Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within a school rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside. These rules are important but underlying the rules is the commitment of the school's governing body that the school should have, and encourage, a culture of improvement and openness and not control and blame.

The policy applies to all employees (regardless of contract type), volunteers and those contractors working on school premises, for example, agency staff, builders and drivers. It also covers suppliers and those providing services under a contract with the school in their own premises.

These procedures do not stand-alone and are in addition to, for example, the school's grievance procedures and other personnel procedures as well as the complaints and other relevant reporting procedures agreed by governors. Where other procedures are activated simultaneously, a clear agreement will be reached between the responsible officer who is investigating the concern and the individual making the report about the separate procedures with agreed programmes for each and an agreement as to whether or not information can be shared for the purposes of each procedure.

2. Aims and Scope of this Policy

At Amberley Court School (ACS) there are existing procedures in place for you to lodge a grievance relating to your own employment.

Concerns of a child protection nature must be referred to the Senior Designated Professional for Safeguarding (DSL) Claire Collacott, and dealt with in accordance with school child protection procedures.

This Policy is intended to cover major concerns that may fall outside those procedures. These include:

- conduct which is a criminal 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
- sexual, physical or verbal abuse
- other unethical conduct

Thus, any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision, the conduct of staff employed by the school or others acting on behalf of it, can be reported under this policy.

This may be about something that:

- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the school subscribes to
- is against the School's policies
- amounts to improper conduct

This policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on 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 reprisals or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in the public interest

3. Safeguards: Harassment or Victimisation

The Headteacher, Governing Body and Directors are committed to good practice and high standards and want to be supportive of employees.

They recognise that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If you believe 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.

They will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern with a reasonable belief and in the public interest.

Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence, or be influenced by, disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect you.

4. Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may need to come forward as a witness, or agree to your identity being disclosed, or the details of your concerns shared with others.

This policy encourages you to put your name to your concerns whenever possible.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will be considered at the discretion of the Management and/or external agencies, as appropriate.

In exercising this discretion, the factors to be considered would include:

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

The responsible officer may ask you to explain your original concern in further detail if his/her investigation fails to substantiate it.

5. False or Unproven Allegations

If you express a concern with a reasonable belief of a potential breach, 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, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

6. How to Raise a Concern

As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your line manager or a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). You should also feel able to approach the Headteacher if the concern relates to a member of the SLT. Equally, if the concern regards the Headteacher, the Deputy Headteacher should be contacted. This depends on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the misconduct.

If you believe that the SLT in its entirety is a concern or you do not feel comfortable approaching them due to the nature of the concern, then a Governor or the Chair of Governors (David Johns) will receive the complaint and investigate appropriately.

The concern can be stated orally, but will be recorded in writing, or in writing. This can be in electronic format or hard copy. The person you contact, whether it is your line manager, a member of the SLT, the Headteacher, a Governor or the Chair of the Governing Body will confirm receipt of the concern in writing within ten days and:

- indicating how we propose to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- tell you whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supply you with information on staff support mechanisms
- tell you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

They will also indicate whether they are going to investigate your issue themselves (this is the generally accepted format) or, if there may be a continuity issue (annual leave, sickness etc), nominate an appropriate member of staff and/or governor, to do so in their stead. The nominee will not have been involved in the issue themselves and will know how to carry forward this policy.

7. Contacts for Independent External Advice

Public Concern at Work: www.pcaw.org.uk
Tel no: 0203 117 2520

Audit Commission whistleblowing hotline: Tel. No: 0303 444 8346.

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with your line manager first and you might 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, professional association representative or a friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised. Anyone who helps you will need to respect the confidentiality of the investigation.

8. Local Authority Involvement

The Local Authority has several Contact Officers who are trained in dealing with concerns and advising on an individual basis and these can be used as and when required. In most instances the guidance within this policy, and the pathway set out in section 6, should be followed.

The Contact Officers can give you advice on how to deal with your concerns and they can take forward a concern for investigation if the concern is companywide. Any advice they give you will be strictly confidential. You do not have to use any Contact Officer. If for example you have a problem which you feel has a legal aspect (for example if you think the conduct complained of could be a breach of the law) you may feel it more appropriate to deal with the Legal Contact Officer. If it relates to financial problems the Internal Auditor might be more appropriate.

The Contact Officer will be responsible for ensuring that you are kept informed of the progress of your complaint, and for ensuring that you are aware, as far as possible, of the outcomes and any action which results. If you are concerned about any aspect of your complaint once you have made it, you should speak to the Contact Officer.

If you have a complaint about the Monitoring Officer or the staff of the Monitoring Officer's which you would otherwise have taken to the Monitoring Officer, you should go to the Chief Operating Officer.

Concerns may be raised orally initially but should be recorded 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 they are particularly concerned about the situation

The earlier you express the concern the easier it is to act.

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 concern.

Once contact has been made an initial assessment of the complaint will lead to a decision about whether further investigation is needed, whether a different procedure should be used or whether the complaint does not justify further action. You will be kept informed of the outcome.

The Local Authority will respond to your concerns. Do not forget that a Contact Officer or an investigator testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

The person you contact, whether it is the Contact Officer, Responsible Officer or the Monitoring Officer, will either deal with your issue or nominate someone to do so who will not have been involved in the issue themselves and will know how to carry forward this policy. This may involve an interview to take a detailed account of your concerns and any evidence available.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process
- be referred to the police
- be referred to the Governing Body
- be referred to an external auditor
- form the subject of an independent inquiry, for example, through the Local Safeguarding Board for child abuse

In order to protect individuals who may be the subject of your concern and people against whom allegations of misdeeds or possible malpractice are being made, the responsible officer will make initial enquiries to decide whether a fuller investigation is appropriate. He/she will also decide what form the investigation should take.

If the concern is about vulnerable individuals or a criminal activity, action will be taken promptly to protect the individual and prevent further offences. The overriding principle which the Local Authority will have in mind is the public interest. If the person nominated to deal with your issue finds aspects of the concern/s that fall outside the scope of this Policy but which still need to be addressed, they will normally be referred for consideration to an appropriate party, usually the SLT or Headteacher if a school based issue, but will not be allowed to delay any ongoing investigation.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for external investigation. If urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Within ten working days of a concern being raised externally, with the person dealing with your issue, they:

(i) will write to you
- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how we propose to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- tell you whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supply you with information on staff support mechanisms
- tell you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

(ii) will inform the Monitoring Officer that an issue has been raised under this policy

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 Local Authority will seek further information from you.

Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative or a friend.

The Local Authority will take steps to minimise any difficulties which 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 Local Authority will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure and where appropriate financial or other support can be accessed.

The Local Authority accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly investigated. Thus, subject to legal constraints, we will inform you of the outcome of any investigation.

9. The Monitoring Officer

Reporting to the Monitoring Officer does not endanger your confidentiality and they will report as necessary to the Council. The report would include a quarterly, anonymised report, to the Standards Committee on the number and general nature of reports received by the Monitoring Officer. They will also be responsible for ensuring that proper and timely progress is made in dealing with any complaint and that the principles and requirements of this policy are met.

Contact Details:

tony.kershaw@westsussex.gov.uk

Address

Director of Law and Assurance
County Hall
Chichester
PO19 1RQ

10. How the Matter Can be Taken Further

This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within the school to raise concerns. The Governing Body hope that the person raising the concern, and the person that the concern has been raised about, will be satisfied with the investigative procedure, the outcomes of the investigation and the actions taken regarding the outcomes.

If you are not, and you feel it is right to take the matter to the Local Authority or external agencies, there are the most relevant points of contact for you.

The following are possible further contact points:

- the external auditor
- your trade union
- your local Citizens' Advice Bureau
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- a relevant voluntary organisation
- the police
- the local County Councillor (where appropriate)
- other appropriate authorities or legal bodies.

If you do take the matter outside the school or governing body of the school, you should ensure that you do not disclose confidential information unless you check with the investigating officer or a Contact Officer as to what information should be disclosed and to whom. This should always be done in writing as it may be required as evidence later.

END

POSITION	Headteacher	**NAME**	**James Eagle**	**SIGNATURE**	***J Eagle***	**DATE**	**01/09/2026**
POSITION	Governor	**NAME**	**Dave Johns**	**SIGNATURE**	***D Johns***	**DATE**	**01/09/2026**
POSITION		**NAME**		**SIGNATURE**		**DATE**	