



HEARTS ACADEMY TRUST

Whistleblowing Policy

Reviewed: September 2023
Next Review: September 2024

HEARTS Academy Trust is committed to providing a happy, caring and safe learning environment for all within a values led context, where everyone feels valued and grows in confidence and independence.

We promote **HAPPINESS** through a creative, exciting and practical curriculum, which generates a love of, and interest in, learning and a resilience and hope which supports us through challenging times.

Great value is placed on pupils' self **ESTEEM** which is developed through a positive and motivated attitude to learning, a healthy lifestyle, good social skills, self-discipline and a positive self-image.

We promote the highest standards of **ACHIEVEMENT** in all areas of the curriculum and help all pupils to fulfil their potential regardless of gender, race or ability.

We foster **RESPECT and RESPONSIBILITY** for all by establishing good relations between the school, home and community. Pupils are taught respect for themselves, others and the environment. They are also taught to take full responsibility for their own choices and responsibility for themselves and their community.

We encourage **TRUTH** and honesty in all aspects of school life – relationships, work and the curriculum and learn to trust and accept others' individuality and uniqueness.

We develop **SPIRITUALITY and SERVICE** so that calm, quiet, reflective times which support deep thought are part of school life and beauty is appreciated. We promote a service culture that reflects our duty to support and show compassion to all members of the community and not just ourselves.



Children at the HEART

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Nominated Trustee with responsibility for whistleblowing:

Mrs Sharon Wilson

Nominated senior member of staff with responsibility for whistleblowing:

Mrs Debbie Rogan

What is Whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. The law provides protection for workers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters or "qualifying disclosures".

A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest by a worker who has a reasonable belief that there are wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

- criminal activity;
- miscarriages of justice;
- danger to health and safety;
- damage to the environment;
- failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements;
- bribery;
- financial fraud or mismanagement;
- negligence;
- breach of our internal policies and procedures including our Code of Conduct;
- conduct likely to damage our reputation or financial wellbeing;
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information;
- unethical behaviour; and
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this policy. This policy should not be used for complaints relating to your own personal circumstances, such as the way you have been treated at work. In those cases, you should use the Grievance Procedure

1. Introduction

It is important to the Trust that all stakeholders are aware that any concerns of a safeguarding nature linked to an allegation or low-level concern is reported following the Child Protection and Code of Conduct policies.

It is important that any suspected fraud, misconduct, malpractice or wrongdoing by workers or employees of the Trust is reported and properly dealt with. The Trust is committed to creating an open and supportive environment where individuals feel able to "speak up" about any genuine concerns regarding the alleged wrongful conduct of the employer, or about the conduct of a fellow employee, or any third party.

This policy sets out the framework for how issues can be raised confidentially internally, and/or if necessary, outside the management structure of the Trust to a prescribed body or other (see 2.1 below). All disclosures will be handled consistently and fairly and appropriate action will be taken by the Trust to resolve the issue in line with this policy.

This policy applies to all employees, LAB members, Trustees. Volunteers and other individuals engaged to work at or provide services to the schools, including agency workers and contractors, are encouraged to use it where appropriate.

The policy has formally been adopted by the Trust Board.

1.1. The law* provides protection for employees or workers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters. These are called "qualifying disclosures". A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest by an employee or worker who has a reasonable belief that there has been or is likely to be:

- a breach of any legal obligation;
- a miscarriage of justice;
- a criminal offence;
- a danger to the health and safety of any individual;
- damage to the environment; or
- deliberate concealment of information about any of the above

Some examples of qualifying disclosures in the school/Trust context may include:

- Fraudulent acts (e.g. manipulation of accounting records/finances, inappropriate use of funds, decision making for personal gain, abuse of position to influence decisions);
- Breaches of acceptable professional and ethical standards;
- Breaches of the Trust's Health and Safety policy entailing danger to staff or pupils; and/or
- Breaches of any of the Trust's policies including the Code of Conduct.

It is not necessary for the employee or worker to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed - a reasonable belief is sufficient.

For the purposes of this policy the term "whistle-blower" refers to the individual making the disclosure.

1.2. The whistle-blower must reasonably believe they are making the disclosure in the public interest (i.e. it affects others such as pupils in the school or members of the public). This means that personal grievances and complaints (e.g. a concern about their own contractual terms) are not usually covered by this policy and should be dealt with under the Trust's Grievance Procedure.

2. Raising concerns/making a disclosure

2.1. Initial concern

The Board of Trustees encourages the "whistle-blower" to raise the matter internally in the first instance. If the matter relates to a safeguarding concern, the procedure outlined in the Trust's Child Protection and Code of Conduct policies should be followed.

Concerns should normally be raised initially with the whistle-blower's line manager. Where the concerns relate to the whistle-blower's line manager, the complaint should be brought to the attention of a more senior manager, the Head of School, Executive Headteacher or the Chair of Trustees.

If the whistle-blower considers the matter too serious or sensitive to raise it internally they may refer the matter to an external prescribed body. A prescribed body is an organisation, normally with some regulatory function (for example the Health and Safety Executive), which is prescribed by the Secretary of State for the purposes of the Act

who an individual may make a protected disclosure to. Any such disclosure to a prescribed body will qualify for protection under the Act.

In the event that the whistle-blower feels a disclosure should be referred to an external prescribed body some of the relevant bodies are also set out below:

| Nature of disclosure: | External reporting/Prescribed body: |
|--|--|
| Fraud or financial malpractice (see 3.2 below) | Education & Skills Funding Agency https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency |
| Child Protection/Safeguarding issues | Local Authority Designated Officer Essex Duty Line: 03330 139 797 NSPCC Whistleblowing helpline: 0800 028 0285 Email: help@nspcc.org.uk |
| Data protection issues | Information Commissioner https://ico.org.uk/ |
| Health and Safety issues | Health and Safety Executive http://www.hse.gov.uk/ |
| Ofsted | Whistleblowing hotline 0300 1233155 (8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday) Email - whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk |
| Protect (Independent whistleblowing charity) | Helpline: (020) 3117 2520 Website: www.protect-advice.org.uk |

If a concern is raised verbally it should be followed up in writing wherever possible.

The whistle-blower has no responsibility for investigating the matter - it is the Trust's responsibility to ensure that an appropriate investigation takes place.

Where the complaint is serious, for example involving fraud, theft, safeguarding or other potential gross misconduct by an employee, the whistle-blower should act quickly to report it but should not mention it to the subject of the complainant or other colleagues as this could affect the investigatory process.

The timescales for handling disclosures will differ depending on the nature of the disclosure made but all disclosures (whether formal or informal) will be acknowledged within [2] working days.

2.2 Investigation

The line manager/manager/Trustee will arrange an investigation into the matter either by investigating the matter him/herself or immediately passing the issue to an appropriate person (except where they are the subject of the disclosure where an alternative suitable person will be appointed). The investigation may involve the whistle-blower and other individuals involved giving a written statement. Any investigation will be carried out promptly and confidentially.

If a whistle-blower wishes to remain anonymous this should be raised with the line manager/manager/Trustee to whom the initial disclosure is made. In some cases, this may be possible but in more serious cases where disciplinary action may have to be taken against others this may be more difficult. The Trust is committed to protecting the well-being of the whistle-blower whilst this policy is followed.

The whistle-blower's statement (where available) will be taken into account, and he/she will be asked to comment on any additional evidence obtained. The person responsible for the investigation may ask the whistle-blower to attend a meeting to gather all the information needed to ensure a clear understanding of the situation.

Where a meeting is held, the whistle-blower may be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague if they wish and where possible the dates/times will be agreed to facilitate this.

2.3 Outcome of the investigation

The person who carried out the investigation will take any necessary action, which may include reporting the matter to the Headteacher/appropriate manager/Chair of Trustees or an appropriate prescribed body (if this has not already taken place).

On conclusion of any investigation, the whistle-blower will be told the outcome of the investigation (in as much detail as is deemed appropriate by the Headteacher/manager/Chair of Trustees in the circumstances) and what action is to be taken or is proposed. If no action is to be taken, the reason for this will be explained.

Where a concern is raised anonymously the Trust will not ordinarily be able to provide feedback to the whistle-blower and any action taken as a result of an anonymous disclosure may be limited. The Trust will take all appropriate steps to investigate such a disclosure in line with the level of information provided. If an anonymous whistle-blower wishes to seek feedback from the Trust an appropriate anonymised email address should be provided.

2.4 Further action

Where having raised an initial concern and the whistle-blower has a genuine belief that the Trust has failed to take appropriate action or investigate the issue properly and they wish to pursue the matter further, they may report their concern to the (Headteacher/Executive Headteacher/Chair of Trustees or to an appropriate prescribed body (if this has not already been reported).

The Head of School/Executive Headteacher/Chair of Trustees may arrange for further investigation to be carried out, make any necessary further enquiries and/or make their own report. On the conclusion of any further investigation, they will take appropriate action which may include reporting the matter to a prescribed body if this has not taken place at an earlier stage in the process.

3. Other issues

3.1 Concerns raised by member of the public

Where complaints are received from members of the public, the Trust's formal complaints procedure will be followed, unless the complaint relates to the specific conduct or performance of an individual employee/worker in which case the Disciplinary Procedure may need to be instigated.

3.2 Criminal issues/fraud

In the event of the allegation being of a very serious nature, for example relating to a fraud or other potential gross misconduct offence, there may be a need to involve the Trust's auditors and/or the police or other appropriate authorities. This should normally be agreed initially by the CEO/Chair of Trustees who should, in turn, and where appropriate, keep the Education and School Funding Agency informed in view of any possible implications concerning public monies.

Academies:

The Trust must notify the Secretary of State via the Education & Skills Funding Agency of any instances of fraud, theft or irregularity where the value exceeds £5,000 individually, or £5,000 cumulatively in any financial year. Any unusual or systematic fraud, regardless of value, must also be reported.

Advice may be sought from the Trust's legal advisers before involving the police in any such internal complaint or allegation.

4. Protection and support for 'whistle-blowers'

4.1 Any whistle-blowers who make protected disclosures in line with this procedure have the right not to be dismissed, subjected to any other detriment, or victimised, because they have made a disclosure. This means continued employment and opportunities for promotion or training will not be affected because the whistle-blower has raised a legitimate concern.

4.2 Whistle-blowers should report any harassment or victimisation to an appropriate manager as soon as practicable. The Trust will take all reasonable steps to prevent/address such harassment or victimisation. Victimisation of a whistle-blower for making a protected disclosure will be considered a disciplinary matter and will be dealt with under the Trust's Disciplinary Procedure.

4.3 Whistle-blowers may find the process of reporting an issue/wrongdoing difficult and uncomfortable. The Trust will take all reasonable steps to support the whistle-blower which may include access to an external counselling service. The whistle-blower may also be referred to the charity [Public Concern at Work](#) for information and advice.

4.4 Staff must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action. In some cases, the whistleblower could have a right to sue an individual personally for compensation in an employment tribunal.

5. Malicious allegations/disclosures

5.1 If, following appropriate investigation, it is considered that an employee has made a malicious allegation without real substance and/or which could not be reasonably considered to be in the public interest, this will be taken as a serious matter and may potentially lead to disciplinary action in line with the Trust's Disciplinary Procedure.

5.2 Where other individuals engaged by the Trust make a malicious allegation, the Trust will investigate the allegation thoroughly and take appropriate action, which may include terminating the contract/arrangements with the individual.

5.3 If disciplinary action is required, the line manager (or the person who carried out the investigation) will report the matter to the Head of School/Executive Headteacher to start the disciplinary procedure.