

Applecroft School



Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

Reporting illegal or improper conduct
(Disclosures under the public interest
disclosure Act 1998)

Person Responsible:	Headteacher
Review Cycle:	Annual
Date of Issue:	January 2026
Review Date:	January 2027

Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

1) Introduction:

School Vision:

'To be a positive and inspiring community that nurtures each individual and empowers leaders for life'.

School Mission Statement:

'Nurturing Potential, Inspiring Minds, Changing Lives'.

School Values:

- Ambition and Leadership
- Kindness and Supportiveness
- Respect and Honesty
- Determination and Resilience.

The aim of this Policy is to encourage employees and others who have serious concerns about any aspect of the School to voice those concerns and feel secure in doing so.

It is important that any fraud, misconduct, or wrongdoing is reported and properly dealt with. The School encourages all individuals to raise any concerns they may have about the conduct of others or the way in which the school is run.

The School is committed to the principles of honesty and integrity. A culture of openness and accountability is critical to ensuring these values are authentically lived by.

This policy applies to all employees, workers, agency staff, contractors, service providers, volunteers, and trustees of the school.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment, and it may be amended at any time.

2) Scope:

If your concern relates to how you have been treated this should be raised under the grievance or bullying and harassment policies.

The whistleblowing policy will not replace any existing policies or procedures. If misconduct is discovered as a result of any investigation under this policy the School's disciplinary policy will be used.

The School encourages individuals to disclose any concerns they may have regardless of whether they are covered by this or another policy.

3) What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing means the reporting of information which relates to actual or suspected wrongdoing related to a "qualifying disclosure".

A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest by a worker who has a reasonable belief that:

- a criminal offence
- a miscarriage of justice
- an act creating risk to health and safety
- an act causing damage to the environment
- a breach of any other legal obligation

- concealment of any of the above is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed.

It is not necessary for a whistleblower to have proof of such an act for the protections of this policy to apply. They must only have a reasonable belief.

Potential whistleblowers should have reasonable grounds for believing the information they are disclosing is accurate.

Where a disclosure fails to show that one of the six categories of wrongdoing has been or is likely to be occur, it cannot amount to a qualifying disclosure for the purposes of the whistleblowing legislation.

Potential whistleblowers are encouraged to seek support from a senior manager or their trade union representative if they are unsure whether to make a disclosure or to access support in making a disclosure, regardless of whether it is qualifying or not.

4) Protections for Whistleblowers:

This policy has been written to take account of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and other relevant legislations, which protects workers making disclosures.

A whistleblower who makes a qualifying disclosure has the right not to be dismissed, subjected to any detriment, or victimised, because they have made a disclosure.

Victimisation of a whistleblower for raising a qualifying disclosure will be a disciplinary offence. The School will not dismiss anyone on the basis that they have made an appropriate lawful disclosure in accordance with the law and this policy.

Whistleblowers may seek support and advice from organisations such as the whistle blowing charity Protect (<https://protect-advice.org.uk> / 020 3117 2520) or ACAS (www.acas.org.uk).

5) Obligations for the Whistleblower:

An instruction to cover up wrongdoing is in itself a disciplinary offence. A whistleblower who is told not to raise or pursue any concern, even by a person in authority, should not agree to remain silent.

Whistleblowing to an external agency without first using the procedure below may be considered a breach of the School's Staff Code of Conduct.

It is not appropriate to whistle blow to the media in any circumstances and may be considered gross misconduct.

Maliciously making a false allegation is a disciplinary offence.

6) Confidentiality:

The School encourages individuals to voice their concerns openly. If anyone wishes to raise concerns confidentially, the School will make every effort to keep their identity secret.

The School will consult with the whistleblower before divulging their identity to any party, including an investigator.

The School does not encourage anonymous disclosures as this may makes it harder to establish the credibility of an allegation and may make investigation difficult or impossible. Anonymous concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as far as is possible under this policy.

7) The School's Commitment:

Any matter raised under this policy and procedure will be investigated thoroughly, promptly and confidentially.

Whilst the school will aim to keep the employee informed of the progress of the investigation and likely timescales, sometimes the requirement for confidentiality will prevent full

information about the investigation and any consequential disciplinary action from being disclosed.

8) Obligations for the Board of Trustees:

An appropriate representative of the School (Headteacher or named trustee) will inform Hertfordshire County Council as the maintaining authority of any qualifying disclosures at the earliest opportunity.

Concerns regarding financial irregularity will be reported to the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS); where concerns relate to child protection these will be handled in keeping with the relevant policy of the School and reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where the threshold is met.

It is a requirement under the Academies Trust Handbook that academy trusts must have procedures for whistleblowing, and trustees must agree the whistleblowing procedure. The trust will appoint at least one trustee and one member of staff who other staff can contact to report concerns and must ensure all staff are aware of the process and how concerns will be managed.

The Academies Trust Handbook sets out a requirement that the board of trustees must notify the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) as soon as possible, of any instances of fraud, theft and/or irregularity exceeding £5k individually, or £5k cumulatively in any financial year. Unusual or systematic fraud, regardless of value, must also be reported.

9) Whistleblowing Procedure:

Stage 1 - Disclosure

The whistleblower should initially raise their concern to their line manager. They may do this orally or in writing.

If the concern relates to the line manager or any person to whom they report (other than the Headteacher) the whistleblower should raise the issue with the Headteacher.

If the concern relates to the Headteacher, the whistleblower should raise this with the Chair of Trustees.

Stage 2 - Investigation

The School will arrange an investigation into the concerns raised. This will take place as soon as is reasonably practicable.

The investigation may involve the whistleblower and other individuals involved meeting with the investigator and giving a written statement.

At any investigatory meetings the whistleblower is entitled to be accompanied by a recognised trade union representative or a work colleague.

Step 3 - Report to Trustees

The investigator will report to the named representative of the Board of Trustees before any further action is taken. The representative of the Board of Trustees will decide on potential outcomes including, but not limited to:

- invoking the School's disciplinary process, or other relevant policy
- referral to the police, Hertfordshire County Council department, government department or regulatory agency
- no further action.

On conclusion of any investigation, the whistleblower will, as far as is practicable and where it is reasonable to do so, be told the outcome of the investigation and what the School has done, or proposes to do, about it. If no action is to be taken, the reason for this will be explained.

Step 4 - Escalation

If, on conclusion of stages 1, 2 and 3 the whistleblower reasonably believes that the appropriate action has not been taken, they should report the matter to the proper authority.

The legislation sets out a number of bodies to which qualifying disclosures may be made. These include:

- The Financial Conduct Authority (formerly the Financial Services Authority)
- The Health and Safety Executive
- The Environment Agency
- His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Children's services and skills
- The Secretary of State for Education
- The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulator.

A full list can be obtained from the charity, Protect or the BEIS (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) website. Alternatively, an employee may contact their professional association or trade union representative for guidance.

Data Protection:

When an individual makes a disclosure, the school will process any personal data collected in accordance with its data protection policy. Data collected from the point at which the individual makes the report is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of dealing with the disclosure.

Contacts:

The School's appointed member of staff for this purpose is the Headteacher, Lisa Withe. The School's appointed Trustee for this purpose is the Chair of Trustees, Louise Gardner. Or contact the independent whistleblowing charity Protect Helpline 020 3117 2520 / email: whistle@protect-advice.org.uk