



Bedwas Junior School Whistleblowing Policy

Introduction

The Governing Body seeks to run all aspects of school business and activity with full regard for high standards of conduct and integrity. In the event that members of school staff, or Governors become aware of activities which give cause for concern, the following whistleblowing policy, or code of practice, acts as a framework to allow concerns to be raised confidentially and provides for a thorough and appropriate investigation of the matter to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion.

What is the Difference Between Making a Complaint and Blowing the Whistle?

When someone blows the whistle they are raising a concern about danger or illegality that affects others (e.g. stakeholders). The person blowing the whistle is usually not directly, personally affected by the danger or illegality. Consequently, the 'whistleblower' rarely has a personal interest in the outcome of any investigation into their concern - they are simply trying to alert others. For this reason, the 'whistleblower' should not be expected to prove the malpractice. He or she is a messenger raising a concern so that others can address it.

This is very different from a complaint. When someone complains, they are saying that they have personally been poorly treated. This poor treatment could involve a breach of their individual employment rights or bullying and the complainant is seeking redress or justice for themselves. The person making the complaint therefore has a vested interest in the outcome of the complaint and, for this reason, is expected to be able to prove their case.

For these reasons, it is not in anyone's interests if an organisation's whistleblowing policy is used to pursue a personal grievance. Bedwas Junior School has a complaints procedure which is the appropriate avenue for making a complaint.

Throughout this policy, the term "whistleblower" denotes the person raising the concern or making the complaint.

The Governing Body recognises that some concerns may be extremely sensitive and has therefore developed a system, which allows for the confidential raising of concerns within the school environment but also has recourse to an external party outside the management structure of the school.

The Governing Body is committed to creating a climate of trust and openness so that a person who has a genuine concern or suspicion can raise the matter with full confidence that the matter will be appropriately considered and resolved.

The provisions of this policy apply to matters of financial mismanagement and impropriety and not matters of more general grievance, which would be dealt with under school grievance procedures.

The Scope of the Policy

This policy is applicable to all employees at Bedwas Junior School. The type of activity or behaviour, which is dealt with under this policy includes:

- manipulation of accounting records and finances;
- inappropriate use of school assets or funds;
- decision-making for personal gain;
- any criminal activity;
- abuse of position;
- fraud and deceit;
- serious breaches of school procedures which may advantage a particular party (for example tampering with tender documentation, failure to register a personal interest);
- deliberate concealment of the above.

What action should the 'Whistleblower' take?

The 'whistleblower' is encouraged to raise the matter internally in the first instance to allow those school staff and Governors in positions of responsibility and authority the opportunity to right the wrong and give an explanation for the behaviour or activity.

At school level there are two designated individuals to specifically deal with such matters and the 'whistleblower' is invited to decide which of those individuals would be the most appropriate person to deal with the matter:

- Headteacher
- Chair of Governors

The 'whistleblower' may prefer to raise the matter in person, by telephone or in written form marked private and confidential and addressed to one of the above named individuals. All matters should be treated in strict confidence and anonymity respected wherever possible.

Alternatively if the 'whistleblower' considers the matter too serious or sensitive to raise within the internal environment of the school, the matter should be directed to:

Caerphilly LA Complaints Officer

Address: Penallta House, Tredomen Park, Ystrad Mynach, Hengoed. CF82 7PG

Telephone Number: 01442 864 833

Respecting Confidentiality

Individuals reporting wrongdoing should note:

- Everything possible will be done to respect your confidentiality, if that is what you request. However, it is sometimes necessary to take a statement as part of the investigation and enforcement process. In this instance, issues will be discussed with beforehand;
- Completely anonymous reports carry much less weight. They will only be acted upon at the discretion of the school, Governing Body or LA, having regard to the seriousness of the issues, the credibility of the report and the likelihood of obtaining confirmation elsewhere;
- The earlier you express concern the easier it is to take action;
- You will not be required to prove your allegation but you will be asked to give as much detail as possible. It is much better to do this in writing but as an alternative you can speak to someone at a meeting.

How will the matter be progressed?

The individual(s) in receipt of the information or allegation will carry out a preliminary investigation. This will seek to establish the facts of the matter and assess whether the concern has foundation and can be resolved internally. The initial assessment may identify the need to involve third parties to provide further information, advice or assistance, for example involvement of other members of school staff, LA legal, personnel or finance officers and the police.

Records will be kept of work undertaken and actions taken throughout the investigation. The investigating officer, possibly in conjunction with the Governing Body, will consider how best to report the findings and what corrective action needs to be taken. This may include some form of disciplinary action or third party referral such as the police.

The 'whistleblower' will be informed of the outcome of the investigation when the matter is completed unless this is not possible for legal reasons. Sometimes this can take a long time, especially if there is a long investigation or court proceedings are involved. Depending on the nature of the allegation and whether or not it has been substantiated, the matter will be reported to the governing body and the LA.

Protection from reprisal

Anyone who makes a report in good faith will be protected from victimisation or reprisal. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 gives statutory protection for employees who report in good faith on crime, illegality, or deliberate concealment of these. The protection covers reports to the employer or a regulating authority. The Act protects the employee from being subjected to discipline or dismissal or any other detriment from making the report.

If a member of staff is already the subject of disciplinary, capability or redundancy procedure it will not necessarily be halted as a result of the whistleblowing procedure.

Raising unfounded malicious concerns

Individuals are encouraged to come forward in good faith with genuine concerns with the knowledge they will be taken seriously. If individuals raise malicious unfounded concerns or attempt to make mischief, this will also be taken seriously and may constitute a disciplinary offence or require some other form of penalty appropriate to the circumstances.

Conclusion

Existing good practice within schools in terms of systems of internal control both financial and non-financial and the external regulatory environment in which schools operate ensure that cases of suspected fraud or impropriety rarely occur. This whistleblowing policy is provided as a reference document to establish a framework within which issues can be raised confidentially internally and if necessary outside the management structure of the school. This document is a public commitment that concerns are taken seriously and action will be taken.

Policy written by Paul Warren
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Nicholas Jones