

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY



The People's Learning Trust: Whistleblowing Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

The People's Learning Trust is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with this commitment, the Trust expects all members of the Trust / Academy community who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Trust's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

A person who raises a concern is protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA), which is incorporated into the Employment Rights Act 1996, as long as they have a reasonable belief that the complaint is made in the public interest. This legislation protects workers from victimisation, discrimination or disadvantage when they voice legitimate concerns, and their actions are not unlawful or contravene other forms of legislation.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that individuals know how to raise a concern, feel confident in raising concerns, and when concerns are raised, reassures them that the concern will be dealt with in confidence, and they will be protected from victimisation, discrimination or disadvantage.

This policy and procedure does not cover matters which are covered by other existing procedures, e.g. Dignity at Work and Grievance Procedure, Disciplinary Procedure, Complaints Procedure, etc.

3. SCOPE

This policy and procedure applies to :

- All employees who are employed by, or under, The People's Learning Trust Board of Trustees;
- All members of the Trust Board;
- Other individuals involved in providing services to the school and
- Partner organisations.

This Policy and Procedure covers serious concerns such as:

- Possible fraud, bribery, corruption, tax evasion and money laundering.
- The unauthorised use of public funds.
- Failures to comply with Standing Orders & Financial Regulations.
- A criminal offence being committed (past, present or likely to be committed).
- Disclosures related to miscarriages of justice.
- Damage to the environment.
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation.



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- Child protection issues.
- Health and safety risks (including risks to the public as well as others of the Trust community) if reported and not acted upon.
- Unauthorised use of public funds.
- Sexual, physical or other abuse of others.
- Other unethical/criminal conduct, including activity which amounts to modern slavery.
- Actions which are unprofessional, inappropriate or conflict with a general understanding of what is right and wrong.
- Any attempt to prevent disclosure of the above.

4. PRINCIPLES

- No Individual will be subject to victimisation or other detriment by reporting concerns which they believe to be true.
- Any concerns reported will be taken seriously and investigated.
- Individuals are encouraged to raise concerns as soon as possible.
- Disclosures made under this procedure will be treated seriously and sensitively, and where appropriate and possible, confidentially.
- Requests for anonymity, where made, will be considered, but there may be circumstances where anonymity cannot be granted, for example, in relation to prosecutions or disciplinary investigations where the individual may be required to provide witness evidence.
- Any person who is the subject of a whistleblowing allegation has legal rights which may be exercised and are independent of the Trust.
- Any person raising a concern must have a reasonable belief that it is in the public interest in line with Section 17 of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013. They must also believe that there are reasonable grounds for the concern and will be encouraged to co-operate with any investigation.
- Examples of public interest concerns are included in Section 3 above.
- Concerns which fall within the scope of other procedures (e.g. employee grievances or general complaints) will be referred for consideration under those procedures.
- All employees have a duty of confidentiality to the Trust. Where employees make external disclosures of information to the press or other media, disciplinary action may be taken.
- Employees may take legal action independent of the Trust. This includes the person who is the subject of the complaint, the complainant and the Trust.



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5. RAISING A CONCERN

The following table outlines the accountability for raising a concern:

Person who Concern relates to:	Raise with:
Concern about Employee (either Trust level or individual Academy level)	Line Manager in the first instance
Concern about the Line Manager	Headteacher / Principal (Academy level) or CEO (Trust level)
Concern about the Headteacher / Principal	CEO
Concern about the CEO	Chair of Trustees
Concern about Local Governing Board members (including Chair)	Chair of Trustees
Concern about Trustees (excluding Chair)	Chair of Trustees
Concern about the Chair of Trustees	Members

When raising a concern, individuals should provide as much information as possible, including:

- The background and history of the concern (including relevant dates, times, names, places, etc.)
- The nature of the concern (examples are given in 3.2)
- The reason why they are particularly concerned about the situation.
- The names of any colleagues /employees who are considered to be either directly involved or who can help with further information.
- Any other background information, e.g. lists of documents, etc.

Concerns should, ideally, be raised in writing as soon as possible.

All anonymous concerns will be treated seriously; however, without contact details, it may be difficult to clarify information, gain additional information or carry out an investigation.

Although it is not expected that individuals can prove allegations beyond a reasonable doubt, any allegations must be based on the reasonable belief of the person making the disclosure.

Note: Any whistleblowing disclosures or allegations made by members of the public should be handled in the same way as those made by employees.

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6. HOW THE TRUST WILL RESPOND

The Trust accepts that those raising concerns need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Therefore, subject to legal constraints, information will be provided on the outcome of any investigation to the whistleblower, as long as contact details have been provided.

To protect the whistleblower, the Trust / Academy will make initial enquiries to determine whether an investigation is appropriate, the form it should take, and who should conduct it. The overriding principle is

Concerns may, where appropriate, be resolved through agreed action without the need for a formal investigation. Where urgent action is required, this will be taken prior to the completion of any investigation.

Acknowledgement and Communication

Where the individual raising the concern has provided contact details, an acknowledgement will be issued within 10 working days by the Headteacher, a Trustee, or the Chair of the Local Governing Body. This acknowledgement will:

- Confirm that the concern has been received
- Indicate how it is proposed to deal with the matter
- Provide an estimate of the timescale for a final response
- Confirm whether initial enquiries have been made
- Advise whether further investigation will take place and, if not, the reasons why

The level of contact with the individual raising the concern will depend on the nature and complexity of the issue and the clarity of the information provided. Where necessary, further information may be requested.

Due to confidentiality requirements, it may not always be possible to provide detailed updates. However, subject to legal constraints, the Trust will seek to reassure the whistleblower that the matter has been properly addressed.

Investigation Process

If an investigation is required, an appropriate Investigating Officer will be appointed by the person receiving the concern. In some cases, this may be the same individual.

Where contact details have been provided, an investigation meeting will normally be held with the whistleblower unless they indicate that this is not required. The Investigating Officer will:

- Gather all relevant information and evidence
- Explain the investigation process and likely timescales



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- Confirm how the matter will be taken forward

Employees raising concerns are entitled to be accompanied by a trade union representative or workplace colleague.

If it is determined that the concern does not fall within the scope of the Whistleblowing Policy, the individual will be informed and advised how the matter will be addressed under an alternative procedure.

Employees Subject to a Concern

Employees who are the subject of a whistleblowing concern may be contacted as part of a formal investigation. They are entitled to representation by a trade union representative or colleague to ensure that the process is fair, open, and proportionate.

Where concerns raised are found to be unsubstantiated or untrue, no record will be retained in the employee's personnel file.

Outcomes and Reporting

The Investigating Officer will consider all evidence and submit recommendations to the Governing Body and/or Trust Board as appropriate. All cases involving financial irregularities will be reported to the Board of Trustees.

Where contact details have been provided, and subject to legal and confidentiality constraints, the whistleblower will be informed of the outcome of the investigation.

If an individual remains dissatisfied with the way a concern has been handled, they may take the matter further by contacting one of the external organisations listed in Section 8 of this policy.

Relationship with Other Procedures

Concerns or allegations that fall within the scope of other Trust procedures (such as complaints, grievances, or disciplinary procedures) will normally be referred and managed under those processes. Matters raised initially under the Whistleblowing Policy may also be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure where appropriate, in order to protect both those raising concerns and those who are the subject of allegations.

Non-Retaliation and Protection for Whistleblowers

The Trust is committed to fostering an open and transparent culture in which staff feel safe to raise concerns. The Trust operates a strict non-retaliation policy and will not tolerate any form of victimisation, harassment, disadvantage, or detrimental treatment against any individual who raises a concern in good faith, whether formally or informally.

Any individual who raises a genuine concern will be supported and protected, even if the concern is not substantiated, provided it was raised honestly and without malicious intent. The Trust will take all reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality wherever possible.



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Any employee, manager, or third party found to have attempted to intimidate, victimise, or retaliate against a whistleblower will be subject to disciplinary action, which may include dismissal. Where appropriate, such behaviour may also be referred to external authorities or professional bodies.

Safeguarding

In line with Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), all staff within The People's Learning Trust have a duty to report concerns regarding the conduct of a member of staff, volunteer, Governor, or Trustee.

- Concerns about the Headteacher should be reported to the CEO
- Concerns about the CEO should be reported to the Chair of the Trust Board

When an allegation is made, the Headteacher (or CEO, where appropriate) will consider whether the individual has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- Behaved in a way that indicates they may be unsuitable to work with children

7. WHAT TO DO IF A CONCERN IS RAISED WITH YOU

If you receive a concern under this procedure, you need to act quickly and with the utmost discretion. All concerns must be evaluated objectively, reviewing the facts as they appear. If appropriate, an investigating officer will be appointed.

In deciding how to progress the concern, you should consider the following:

- The quality of the information provided and whether all relevant information has been provided or is available.
- Whether there is any corroborating evidence available, such as supporting documentation or testimony of another individual.
- Whether there are obvious motives that may have led to an accusation, such as poor working relationships or the possibility of personal gain. There is also the possibility that a concern raised for the wrong reasons may also be true.
- An assessment of the seriousness of the concerns and the potential risks if they are correct or if they are not investigated.

Where an allegation involves a member of staff, the Investigating Officer may wish to contact the Trust's Director of People or the Chief Finance & Operating Officer for advice and assistance with any investigations.



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Depending on the seriousness of the concern and the amount of evidence available, management may wish to consider suspension of an employee in order that an investigation can be carried out unhindered or without further loss to the school. You are advised to consult the Trust's Director of People in this situation.

All cases of alleged fraud or financial irregularities must be referred to the Trust Board in the first instance, who will then liaise with the Trust's appointed external auditors. Cases involving benefit claimant fraud should be immediately referred directly to the Counter Fraud Whistleblowing Procedure Team

8. UNTRUE ALLEGATIONS

If an individual makes an allegation which they reasonably believe is in the public interest, but the matter is not confirmed by the investigation, then no action will be taken against them.

If an individual makes an allegation which turns out to be untrue, without reasonably believing the allegation to be made in the public interest (e.g. is made for personal gain), then the matter may be considered under the Trust's Disciplinary Procedure and disciplinary action may be pursued.

Employees may take legal action independently. This includes the person who is the subject of the complaint, the complainant and also the Trust / Academy.

9. MAKING A DISCLOSURE OUTSIDE THE TRUST

The Trust would encourage an individual to raise a concern internally in order to deal with the matter and remove or reduce any risk. However, if an individual has raised a concern internally and feels that this has not been dealt with satisfactorily or feels that the concern needs to be raised directly with an external body, such as a regulator, you are advised to seek advice before reporting a concern externally.

The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline to provide confidential advice, free of charge to anyone concerned about wrongdoing at work; telephone 020 3117 2520 or email whistle@protect-advice.org.uk

The following list provides details of external organisations that you may wish to contact:

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The Information Commissioner	The Office of the Information Commissioner Wycliffe House, Water Lane Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF Tel: 0303 123 1113 Email: casework@ico.org.uk Website: www.ico.org.uk
Merseyside Police	Merseyside Police HQ Canning Place Liverpool L1 8JX Tel: 0151 709 6010 Website: www.merseyside.police.uk/contact/af/contact-us/
The Environment Agency	National Customer Contact Centre PO Box 544 Rotherham S60 1BY Tel: 03708 506 506 Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk Website: www.gov.uk/environment-agency
Health and Safety Executive	Redgrave Court Merton Road Bootle L20 7HS Tel: 0845 300 9923 Website: www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm
HMRC	HMRC Fraud Hotline Tel: 0800 788 887 Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs/contact/reporting-tax-evasion
Protect (Formerly Public Concern at Work)	The Green House 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road London E2 9DA Tel: 020 3117 2520 Website: https://protect-advice.org.uk/contact-protect-advice-line