



**Whistleblowing
Policy and Guidance
for
Safeguarding
and
Financial Impropriety**

Audience: All staff and Governors

Date of issue: July 2022

Woodcroft Primary School - Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance

(in line with Barnet LA Policy and Guidance.)

Introduction

Woodcroft Primary School's Governing Body and Barnet Council seek to run all aspects of school business and child safeguarding with full regard for highest standards of conduct and integrity.

This policy is mandatory for London Borough of Barnet maintained schools under paragraph 11.9 of the Scheme for Financing Schools under S.48 of the Schools Standards & Framework Act 1998.

Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on relevant partners, persons or bodies working with children to co-operate with a view to improving the well-being of children in the area of the local authority. It is this duty that supports early intervention to safeguard and promote children's and young people's wellbeing in order that good outcomes can be delivered. Failure to do so puts children at risk.

Read in conjunction with:

Whistleblowing for employees <https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing>

Keeping Children Safe in Education DfE (Sept 2022)

Working together to safeguard children (2018)

School Code of Conduct (Sept 2022)

Scheme for Financing Schools

<https://www.barnet.gov.uk/wwc-home/information-for-schools/school-funding-and-finance/financial-framework.html>

Context and Scope

- 1) It is the clear responsibility of all members of staff and volunteers to act on any concerns or information that gives them concern about the safety and wellbeing of a child or children arising from circumstances or events within the school or outside of school. Such a concern in a whistle blowing context may be related to:
 - The conduct or behaviour of a member of staff or volunteer towards an individual child or children.
 - Information that suggests a member of staff or volunteer is unsuitable to work with children.

- Belief that the Designated Safeguarding Lead, senior managers or Governors have failed to take appropriate action in response to safeguarding concerns raised.
- 2) The school is committed to tackling fraud and other forms of malpractice and treats these issues seriously. The type of activity or behavior, 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

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.

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

We recognise that some concerns may be extremely sensitive and therefore the system 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 school 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 safeguarding and financial mismanagement or impropriety. It is not for matters of more general grievance, which would be dealt with under school complaints and grievance procedures.

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 identify an explanation for the behaviour or activity causing concern.

At school level there are a number of 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 (or Designated Safeguarding Governor)
Designated Safeguarding Leads

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 either,

For Financial Matters

the **Council's Whistleblowing Officer** - who has powers to investigate all potential fraud or irregularity,

or,

the **Council's Monitoring Officer** – who has a duty to the Council to deal with illegality, maladministration and wrongdoing and is responsible for the overall operation and maintenance of the Council's whistleblowing policy. The Council's Whistleblowing telephone number is **020 8359 6123**.

For Safeguarding Matters

MASH - Any adult working or volunteering is also able to make referrals directly to Barnet Children's Services by calling the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on 02083594066

The **NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line** on 0800 028 0285. This anonymous, free of charge service provides support to employees wishing to raise concerns about how their organisation has handled a child protection concern.

The Police call 999

Respecting Confidentiality

Individuals reporting concerns or wrong doing should note:

- everything possible will be done to respect your confidentiality, if that is what you want. Sometimes, though, it is necessary to take a statement as part of the

investigation and enforcement process. In that case the issues will be discussed with you beforehand.

- Completely anonymous reports carry much less weight. They will only be acted upon at the discretion of the School / Council, 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.
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How will the matter be progressed?

The individual(s) in receipt of the information or allegation (the investigating officer(s)) 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, the police.

Records will be kept of work undertaken and actions taken throughout the investigation. The investigating officer(s), 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 you are already the subject of disciplinary, capability or redundancy procedure they will not necessarily be halted as a result of your whistleblowing.

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.

If you are not satisfied

If you are not satisfied with the response to your whistleblowing report within your school you can contact:

For Financial Matters:

The Chief Internal Auditor or Monitoring Officer. If you are not satisfied with the response from these officers who can contact the Chief Finance Officer or the Chief Executive, both of whom have personal responsibility for probity within the Council.

For Safeguarding Matters

Chris Munday
Strategic Director- Children & Young People
London Borough of Barnet, North London Business Park, Oakleigh Road
South, London N11 1NP
Tel: 020 8359 7099

The school hopes that you will be satisfied with the whistleblowing routes offered by this policy. But if you are not and you want to take the matter up outside the Council, you can contact your ward Councillor (if you live in the borough), the external auditor, the Department for Education & Skills, or the police, or take legal advice. If you do this make sure that you do not put yourself at legal risk by disclosing confidential information in circumstances where that is not allowed. Ask the person you contact about this.

Conclusion

Existing good practice within schools in terms of systems of safeguarding and 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.