

Whistle Blowing Policy

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WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY

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Whistle Blowing Policy

A. INTRODUCTION

The Policy is intended to help all employees of Hillcrest School who have major concerns over any wrong-doing relating to unlawful conduct, financial malpractice or dangers to the public or the environment. Specific examples could include:-

- a criminal offence (e.g. fraud, corruption or theft) has been/is likely to be committed
- a miscarriage of justice has been/is likely to occur
- the health or safety of any individual has been/is likely to be endangered
- the environment has been/is likely to be damaged
- public funds are being used in an unauthorised manner
- the School's Governance arrangements have or are not being observed or are being breached by pupils, staff employed or those working in Hillcrest School.
- sexual or physical abuse of any employee or service recipient is taking place (subject to the Child Protection Procedure in the case of children)
- discrimination is occurring to any member of staff or service recipient on grounds of sex, race or disability
- any other form of improper action or conduct is taking place
- information relating to any of the above is being deliberately concealed or attempts are being made to conceal the same.

The School's Governing Body has issued this Policy so as to enable you to raise your concerns about such malpractice(s) at an early stage and in the right way. The School's Governing Body would rather that you raised the matter when it is just a concern rather than wait for concrete proof.

If something is troubling you, which you think we should know about or look into, please use this policy. If, however, you are aggrieved about your personal position, please use any appropriate Staff Grievance Policy - which you can get from your Head Teacher. This Whistle Blowing Policy is primarily for concerns where the interests of others or of the organisation itself are at risk.

B. AIMS OF THE SCHOOLS WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY

The Policy aims to:

encourage employees in or working with Hillcrest School to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon their concerns;

- provide ways for employees in or working with Hillcrest School to raise those concerns and get feedback on any action taken as a result;
- ensure that employees in or working with Hillcrest School get a response to their concerns;
- ensure that employees in or working with Hillcrest School are aware how to pursue their concerns and the appropriate steps to take if they are not satisfied with any action;
- reassure employees in or working with Hillcrest School that if they raise any concerns in good faith and reasonably believe them to be true, they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation.

It is not intended to be used where other more appropriate procedures are available, for example:

- Grievances - (see Grievance Procedure – available from school office)
- Harassment - (see Anti-Harassment Policy and Procedure – available from school office)

- Complaints of misconduct against Governors (For further information, please contact Head Teacher)
- Child protection (see Child Protection procedures – available from school office)

C. WHO IS COVERED BY THE SCHOOLS WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY?

All employees in or working with Hillcrest School may use this Policy. This includes permanent and temporary employees, and employees seconded to a third party. Any concerns relating to the third party, if relevant to the employee's secondment, can also be raised under this Policy.

This Schools Whistle Blowing Policy will reviewed on an annual basis, by the Head Teacher and the School's Governing Body.

D. WHAT ASSURANCE DO YOU GET?

If you do raise a genuine concern under this Policy, you will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any form of retribution as a result. Provided you are acting in good faith, it does not matter if you are mistaken. Of course, this assurance is not extended to someone who maliciously raises a matter that s/he knows to be untrue.

The Governing Body will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a genuine concern. However, we recognise that you may nonetheless want to raise a concern in confidence under this Code. If you ask us to protect your identity by keeping your confidence, we will not disclose it without your consent. If the situation arises where we are not able to resolve the concern without revealing your identity (for instance because your evidence is needed in court), we will discuss with you whether and how we can proceed.

Remember that if you do not tell us who you are, it will be much more difficult for us to look into the matter or to protect your position or to give you feedback. Accordingly, while we will consider anonymous reports, this policy is not well suited to concerns raised anonymously.

E. WHAT IS THE LEGAL BACKGROUND?

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (hereinafter referred to as 'the Whistleblowers Act') protects employees against detrimental treatment or dismissal as a result of any disclosure of normally confidential information in the interests of the public. The Act only covers protected disclosures under six categories, namely; crime, illegality, miscarriage of justice, damage to health and safety, damage to the environment, and 'cover-ups' about these issues. To obtain protection employees must first disclose the information to the employer.

Therefore this Policy has been adopted to provide an avenue within the School to raise concerns. If an employee takes the matter outside the School, s/he should ensure that no disclosure of confidential information takes place and should take advice, if unsure, as the Public Interest Disclosure Act does not provide blanket protection and could leave employees in or working with Hillcrest School vulnerable to disciplinary or other action, if they disclose confidential information in circumstances not covered by the Act.

If you are unsure whether to use this Schools Whistle Blowing Policy or you want independent advice at any stage, you are advised to contact

- If applicable, your relevant trade union; or
- The independent charity Public Concern at Work on 020 7404 6609. Their lawyers can give you free confidential advice at any stage about how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.

F. HOW SHOULD A CONCERN BE RAISED?

As soon as you become reasonably concerned you should firstly raise the issue with your Head Teacher and/or Chairman of Governors.

Concerns may be raised orally or in writing. Employees who wish to make a written report should use the following format:

- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates)
- the reason why they are particularly concerned about the situation.

G. HOW WILL THE GOVERNING BODY RESPOND?

If the concern is raised orally, the person receiving the information should ask the employee to put it in writing as soon as practicable to ensure that it properly reflects the concerns that have been raised. The employee must also indicate if the concern is to be treated in confidence. The limit of that confidence will be checked out by the person receiving the information.

Once you have told the governing body of your concern, the governing body will look into it to assess initially what action should be taken. This may involve an internal inquiry or a more formal investigation. You will be told who may be handling the matter, how you can contact him/her and whether your further assistance may be needed. If you request it, the governing body or head teacher will write to you summarising your concern(s) and setting out how it will be handled.

When you raise the concern you may be asked how you think the concern(s) might best be resolved. If you do have any personal interest in the matter, we do ask that you tell us at the outset. Should your concern fall within another policy of the School (for example, the Grievance Policy), we will tell you.

While the purpose of this Policy is to enable us to investigate possible malpractice and take appropriate steps to deal with it, we will give you as much feedback as we properly can. If requested, we will confirm our response to you in writing. Please note, however, that we may not be able to tell you the precise action we take where this would infringe a duty of confidence owed by us to someone else.

Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example child protection) will normally be referred for consideration under that relevant procedure. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by Senior Management Team, internal audit or through the disciplinary process be referred to the police
- be referred to the external auditor
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

Usually, within two weeks of a concern being raised, the person looking into the concern will write to the person raising the concern:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how the School propose to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a full response
- saying whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supplying information on support available to you; and
- saying whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

Subject to any legal constraints, the relevant employee will normally be informed of the final outcome of any investigation.

H. WHAT SAFEGUARDS ARE THERE FOR THE PERSON RAISING THE CONCERN?

- The Governing Body will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect employees who raise a concern in good faith.
- Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures already taking place concerning the employee.
- No action will be taken against anyone who makes an allegation in good faith, reasonably believing it to be true, even if the allegation is not subsequently confirmed by the investigation.
- Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality as far as this is reasonably practical.
- Help will be provided to you in order to minimise any difficulties which you may experience. This may include advice on giving evidence if needed. Meetings may, if necessary be arranged off-site with you and for you being represented, if you so wish.

I. HOW CAN A CONCERN BE TAKEN FURTHER?

If you are unsure whether to use this Schools Whistle Blowing Policy or you want independent advice at any stage, you may contact:-

- If applicable, your relevant trade union; or
- The independent charity Public Concern at Work on 020 7404 6609. Their lawyers can give you free confidential advice at any stage about how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.

Employees who are not satisfied with the action taken by the Governing Body and feels it right to question the matter further, may consider the following possible contact points:-

- Audit Commission whistle blowing hotline 0845 0522 646 (matters of fraud or corruption)
- Health and Safety Executive, St Dunstan's House, 201, Borough High Street SE1 1GZ 020 7556 2100
- Commission for Racial Equality, Elliot House, 10 Allington Street, SW1E 5EH 020 7828 7022
- Equal Opportunities Commission, Overseas House, Quay Street, Manchester M3 3HN 0161 833 9244
- National Disabilities Council, Caxton House, Tothill Street, SW1H 9NA 020 7273 6190
- Independent Advocacy Service (for Community Care services for adults) Cambridge House, 151, Camberwell Road, SE5 0HF 020 7703 0261
- Children's Society, Edward Rudolph House, 69 Margery Street WC1X 0JL 020 7837 4299
- Standards Board for England & Wales, First Floor, Cottons Centre, Cottons Lane, London, SE1 2QG Telephone: 0845 078 8181 Fax: 020 7378 5001