



CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING
(Also known as 'Whistle Blowing')

Introduction

Sunningdale School is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees and others that we deal with who have serious concerns about any aspect of the school's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the school. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the school. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 encourages individuals to raise concerns about malpractice in the workplace and this policy document makes it clear that employees can raise serious concerns without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage and is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise those concerns within the school, rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.

The Policy applies to all employees and those contractors working for the school on school premises, for example, teachers, education support staff, and premises staff.

These procedures are in addition to the school's complaint procedures and other statutory reporting procedures applying to school areas. School managers are responsible for making service users aware of the existence of these procedures if and when necessary.

Aims and Scope of this Policy

This policy aims to:-

- encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied
- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in good faith.

There are existing procedures in place to enable you to lodge a

- grievance relating to your own employment. The Confidential Reporting Policy is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. These include:
 - conduct which is an offence or a breach of law
 - disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
 - health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
 - damages to the environment
 - the unauthorised use of public funds
 - possible fraud and corruption
 - sexual or physical abuse of clients, or
 - other unethical conduct
 - Headteacher incompetency

Thus any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of staff of the school or others acting on behalf of the school can be reported under the Confidential Reporting Policy. This may be about something that makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the school subscribe to; or

- is against the school's Standing Orders and policies; or
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

This policy does not replace the School's complaints procedure.

Safeguards, Harassment or Victimisation

The school is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees.

The school recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.

The school will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressure) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you 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 that already affect you.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, i.e. if and when, the matter goes to an investigatory stage and a disciplinary hearing, however, you may need to come forward as a witness.

Anonymous Allegations

This policy strongly encourages you to put your name to your allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously will be much more difficult for us to look into or to protect your position or to give feedback. Concerns raised anonymously are much less powerful and less likely to be effective, but they will be considered at the school's discretion.

In exercising this discretion the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised

- the credibility of the concern; and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

Untrue Allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If however, you make an allegation maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you. (The school will manage such situations using its agreed Disciplinary Procedure).

How to raise a concern

As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your immediate manager or their superior. This depends however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if you believe that management is involved you should approach the Chair of Governors. Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Staff who wish to make a written report are invited to use the following format:

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

All concerns received will be registered immediately with the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer: Jane Groom 5613901)

The earlier you express the concern the easier it is to take action. Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for your concern.

Advice and guidance on how matters of concern may be pursued can be obtained from: Human Resources - Leanne Questa (5612460)

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague or your trade union representative first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns. However, once you have raised a concern under the Confidential Reporting Policy you should be mindful that any further discussions with other parties may impede the maintenance of confidentiality. You may invite your trade union or friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

How the School will respond

The school will respond to your concerns. Do not forget that testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

Where appropriate the matters raised may:

- be investigated by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process
- be referred to the police
- be referred to the LADO
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

The overriding principle, which the school will have in mind, is the public interest. Concerns or allegations, which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues), will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. 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.

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, you will be informed

- 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 final response
- telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supply you with information on staff support mechanisms, and
- telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information

provided. If necessary, the school will seek further information from you.

Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish, a union or professional association representative or a friend can accompany you. The school will take steps to minimise any difficulties, which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings the Council will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure.

The school accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, we will inform you of the outcomes of any investigation.

The Responsible Officer

The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. That officer maintains records of concerns raised and the outcomes (but in a form which does not endanger your confidentiality) and will report as necessary to the school.

How the matter can be taken further

This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within the school to raise concerns. The Council hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken.

Before taking matters outside the school you may wish to take independent advice.

The following are possible external contact points:

- your trade union/professional association representative
- your local Citizens Advice Bureau
- the police
- relevant regulatory organisations
- the local Ombudsman
- the Information Commissioner