



TEAM Multi-Academy Trust

Whistle-blowing Policy

This Policy was adopted by the TEAM Multi-Academy Trust
Board of Trustees on

Date: 11th May 2021

Signed: Paul Ginnings (on behalf of the Board of Trustees)

Signed: Ian Thomas (Trust Chief Executive Officer)

Reviewed: May 2022, May 2023

Next Review Due: May 2024

Policy for Whistle-blowing

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the Trust. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Trust. 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.
- 1.2 The Board of Trustees are 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.
- 1.3 The policy document makes it clear that you can do so without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. This Whistle-blowing Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns **within** the Trust rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.
- 1.4 The policy applies to all employees and applies equally to those designated as casual, temporary, agency, authorised volunteers or work experience, Trustees, Governors and those contractors working for the school on school premises, for example, agency staff, builders, and drivers.
- 1.5 These procedures are in addition to the Trust's complaints procedures and other statutory reporting procedures.

2. Aim and Scope of this Policy

- 2.1 This policy aims to: -
 - encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice; 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.
- 2.2 There are existing procedures in place to enable you to lodge a grievance etc relating to your own employment. The Whistle-blowing 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/pupils as well as other employees;
- damage to the environment;
- the unauthorised use of public funds;
- possible fraud and corruption - see Note below;
- sexual or physical abuse of pupils where a referral under Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures is not appropriate;
- other unethical conduct.

2.3 Any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of school staff, Trustees, Governors or others acting on behalf of the school can be reported under the Whistle-blowing Policy. This may be about something that:

- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the governors subscribe to; or
- is against the schools established policies; or
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

2.4 This policy does **not** replace the Trust's complaints procedures.

3. Safeguards

3.1 The Trustees are committed to good practice and high standards and want to be supportive of employees.

3.2 It is recognised 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.

3.3 The Trustees will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.

3.4 Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect you.

4. Confidentiality

4.1 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, however, you may need to come forward as a witness.

5. Anonymous Allegations

5.1 This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible.

5.2 Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will be considered in the context of the following factors: -

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

6. Untrue Allegations

6.1 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 frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

7. How to Raise a Concern

7.1 As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with the Head of School. 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 your Head of School is involved you may wish to approach Ian Thomas, CEO or Paul Ginnings, Chair of Trustees. You also have the right for all academies to approach the Education and Skills Funding Agency, ESFA and for church schools the Diocese of Exeter.

7.2 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.

7.3 The earlier you express the concern the easier it is to take action.

7.4 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.

7.6 You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague 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.

7.7 You may invite your Trade Union, Teacher Association, representative or a friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

8. How the Trust Will Respond

8.1 The Trust will respond to your concerns. Do not forget that testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them. If you confirm your wish to raise your concerns formally under the policy, a responsible person will be designated by the Trust to co-ordinate the response to the concerns you have raised.

8.2 Where appropriate, the matters raised may: -

- be investigated by Trust, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process;
- be referred to the external auditor;
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

8.3 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 Trust 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.

8.4 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.

8.5 Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the responsible person will write to you: -

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how it is proposed 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;
- supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms (where appropriate), and
- telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

8.6 The amount of contact between those 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, further information will be sought from you and you will be required to respond within ten

working days

- 8.7 Where any meeting is arranged, away from school premises if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a Trade Union or Teacher Association representative or a friend.
- 8.8 The Board of Trustees 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 arrangements will be made for you to receive advice about the procedure.
- 8.9 It is accepted that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, you will be informed of the outcome of any investigation.

9. The Responsible Officer

- 9.1 In respect of concerns raised internally within the school the CEO will maintain a record of concerns raised and the outcome and will report as necessary to the Board of Trustees. Matters raised by to the Diocese or Education and Skills Funding Agency will be monitored by a senior officer.

10. Contacts

- Ian Thomas, CEO e-mail: ceo@team-mat.org.uk
- Paul Ginnings, Chair of Trustees e-mail: pginnings@team-mat.org.uk
- Director of Education, Exeter Diocese
e-mail: education@exeter.anglican.org.uk
- Education and Skills Funding Agency, ESFA
e-mail:
<https://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/school-complaints-form>