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# Whistleblowing Policy

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This policy has been adopted by Pathfinder Multi Academy Trust and is applicable across all schools that make up the Trust. In line with the MAT's Scheme of Delegation, this Policy must be duly applied by each Local Governing Committee and the Headteacher of each school in Pathfinder Multi Academy Trust.

Where there are specific details or any discretions in the policy that apply to an individual school or Local Governing Committee this has been made clear within the wording of the policy.

This policy will be reviewed in line with the agreed timetable for policy review or sooner as events or legislation changes require.

Date Adopted: **February 2023**

Date for Review: **February 2025**

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Pathfinder Multi Academy Trust strives at all times to ensure that it operates with probity and high ethical standards. However, we are not complacent and we recognise that malpractice can occur. Any of us at one time or another may have concerns about what is happening at work. Most concerns are easily resolved. However, it might be more difficult to know what to do if the concern is related to one of the following:
- conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law
  - disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
  - health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
  - the abuse of a vulnerable person
  - damage to the environment
  - the unauthorised use of public funds
  - misreporting of performance information
  - possible fraud and corruption
  - other unethical conduct
- 1.2 The Trust wants you to feel able to raise your concerns about such malpractice at an early stage and in the right way. We would rather that you raised the matter when it is just a concern rather than wait for proof.
- 1.3 This Whistleblowing Policy is primarily for concerns where the interests of others or the Trust itself are at risk and there is a public interest in you making the disclosure. The kinds of issues described in paragraph 1.1 are obvious examples. If your concerns are about your own employment position though, then it is more likely that the Grievance Procedure should be followed. You can get this from your Headteacher or by contacting the Trust's Operations Team. Sometimes your concern may have elements of both. For example, if you were being told to take an excessive number of students on a trip without the appropriate staffing levels and this would affect both you and the wider community. We would prefer you to raise such concerns rather than worry about the appropriate procedure.

## 2 Our assurances to you

### 2.1 Your safety

The Trust is committed to this policy. If you raise a genuine concern under this policy (even if it proves to be mistaken) you will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any form of retribution as a result. Not only is the Trust committed to this but you also have legal protection under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. Of course, we do not extend this assurance to someone who maliciously raises a matter they know is untrue. If you make an allegation, frivolously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

### 2.2 Your confidence

We will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a genuine concern. Disciplinary action may be taken against those who victimise a person reporting a concern. A whistleblower may have the right to sue anyone involved in such conduct and the Trust could be held liable if it has not taken all reasonable steps to prevent the victimisation.

We hope that you will feel able to raise concerns openly as this will make it much easier to resolve any issues. We also know that others may well try to deduce the source of any complaint. However, we recognise that you may nonetheless want to raise a concern in confidence under this policy. If you ask us to protect your identity by keeping your confidence, we will not normally 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. Despite your request for confidentiality, there may be circumstances therefore, where the Trust must disclose your identity.

### 2.3 **Anonymous complaints**

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.

## 3 **How we will handle the matter**

- 3.1 Once you have told us of your concern, we will look into it to assess initially what action should be taken. This may involve an internal inquiry or a more formal investigation. We will tell you who is handling the matter, how you can contact them and whether your further assistance may be needed. If you request it, we will write to you summarising your concern and setting out how we propose to handle it.
- 3.2 When you raise your concern you may be asked how you think the matter might best be resolved. If you do have any personal interest in the matter, we ask that you tell us at the outset. If your concern falls more properly within another policy we will tell you.
- 3.3 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.

## 4 **How to raise a concern**

- 4.1 Concerns may be raised orally or in writing. Whether a written or oral report is made it is important that relevant information is provided covering:
  - Your name and a contact point. As referred to above it will be more difficult for the Trust to pursue issues if concerns have been expressed anonymously.
  - The background and history of the concern giving relevant dates and names and positions of those who may have contributed to your concern.
  - The reason why you are particularly concerned about this situation.
- 4.2 You may invite your trade union, professional association representative or a friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

## 5 How to report a concern internally

### 5.1 Step One

If you have a concern about malpractice, we hope you will feel able to raise it first with your Headteacher, line manager or Chair of the school's Local Governing Committee. The person receiving your disclosure will consider the nature of your concerns and decide on the most appropriate course of action.

### 5.2 Step Two

If you feel unable to raise the matter with somebody within the Trust at the level provided above, for whatever reason, or if you remain concerned having done so, please raise the matter with the Chair of the Trust Board or the CEO. If your concern relates to the Chair of the Trust Board, you should raise the matter with the Trust's CEO.

## 6 How to report a concern externally

6.1 The Trust encourages staff to raise their concerns internally, inline with this policy, but recognises that staff may feel the need to report concerns to an external body. A list of prescribed bodies to whom staff can raise concerns with can be [found here](#).

## 7 Independent advice

7.1 If you are unsure whether to use this policy or you want independent advice at any stage, you may contact:

- if applicable, your union; or
- The independent charity Protect which provides free, confidential advice on how best to raise your concern and your protection as a whistleblower. For more information, visit <https://protect-advice.org.uk/> or call 020 3117 2520.

## 8 Scope of policy

8.1 This policy applies to all employees of the Pathfinder Multi Academy Trust and other people working for the Trust, such as agency staff and consultants. Governors may also raise concerns through this policy.

8.2 It is possible that contractors who work for the Trust may come across matters which cause them concern and which relate to the actions of the Trust/school or its employees. Contractors are invited to follow the procedures set out in this policy and are assured that they will not suffer any form of retribution for having raised a genuine concern, even if it proves to be unfounded.

8.3 These procedures are in addition to the Trust's Complaints Procedure and other statutory reporting procedures.

## 9 Responsibility for the success of this policy

9.1 The Board of Trustees have overall responsibility for this policy, and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this policy.

- 9.2 All staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing.

## 10 If you are dissatisfied

- 10.1 This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within the Trust to raise concerns. While we cannot guarantee that we will respond to all matters in the way that you might wish, we will try to handle the matter fairly and properly. By using this policy you will help us to achieve this. The Trust hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not, and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the Trust, the following are possible contact points:

- your local Citizens Advice Bureau
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- the Ombudsman