

# **THE ALDERTON INFANT SCHOOL**

## **WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY**

**NOVEMBER 2015**

This school is committed to achieving high standards of integrity and accountability and expects the same commitment from its employees and others working in or for the school. As such the school wishes to promote an open environment that enables staff to raise issues in a constructive way and with confidence that they will be acted upon appropriately without fear of recrimination.

It is expected that most issues will be dealt with through the normal management systems/procedures, but the following procedures provides for action beyond these when all other reasonable avenues of complaint have been exhausted.

### **1. MAKING A PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE**

- 1.1 Staff should raise any concerns about the conduct or behaviour of employees, volunteers or others associated with the operation and organisation of the school as soon as possible. Verbal reports should be followed up in writing.
- 1.2 Concerns should normally be raised initially with the employees line manager. However, where having raised a concern there is a belief that a manager has failed to take appropriate action or the complaint relates to the employee's line manager, the complaint should be brought to the attention of a more senior manager, the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors or in exceptional circumstances, the Local Authority.
- 1.3 Where the complaint is serious e.g. involving fraud, theft or other potential gross misconduct, act quickly to report it but do not mention it to the subject of the complaint or other colleagues as that could prejudice any investigatory process.
- 1.4 It may be the case that you will have very genuine and justified suspicions of wrong-doing even though at the time of 'whistleblowing' you cannot point to concrete evidence. That should not deter you from going ahead and reporting the matter, particularly where it may involve potential risk to vulnerable people.

### **2. ACTION BY RECIPIENTS OF DISCLOSURES**

- 2.1 It would be inappropriate to have hard or fast rules and judgement must be exercised. While it is essential for problems to be tackled effectively and with the aim of righting wrongs, this may well be best achieved in many less serious cases by discussion with the 'offending' employee and securing a commitment as to future standards and corrective action. In other more serious cases the matter may need to be passed to a more senior level of management or directly to the Governing Body, as appropriate.

- 2.2 Where complaints are received from members of the public, the School's Formal Complaints Procedure must be followed, unless the complaint relates to the specific conduct or performance of an individual employee in which case the Disciplinary Procedures may need to be instigated.
- 2.3 Any written complaint/allegation should be given a written acknowledgement and confirmation that the matter will be looked into. Unless clearly made in a very low key way about minor matters, verbal complaints/allegations should receive a written acknowledgement in the same way.
- 2.4 In the event of the allegation being of a very serious nature, eg relating to a fraud or other potential gross misconduct offence, there may well be a need to involve the School's Auditors and/or the police. This should normally be agreed initially by the Chair of Governors who, in turn, should keep the Local Authority informed in view of any possible implications concerning public monies. Advice may be sought from the School's Legal Advisors before involving the police in any such internal complaint or allegation.
- 2.5 When any complaint or allegation has been looked into and resolved or dealt with, the person who raised the matter in the first instance should be notified of that, normally in writing unless common-sense indicates that it can be done more appropriately in a verbal, informal way. How much detail to give of findings and outcomes is a matter of judgement and it would, for example, be inappropriate to disclose details of disciplinary actions taken against another employee.

### **3. PROTECTING 'WHISTLEBLOWERS' AND COMPLAINANTS**

- 3.1 A 'whistleblower' may ask for their identity to be kept concealed. Frequently the answer will be yes, but in more serious cases where disciplinary action may have to be taken against others they may well have a right to know the source as well as the nature of such complaints. In any case the school is committed to doing as much as possible to ensure that well-being at work does not suffer as a result of the tensions that may result from the making or investigation of complaints.
- 3.2 If a person believes they are experiencing harassment or victimisation at work as a consequence of 'whistleblowing' they are strongly encouraged to bring this to an appropriate senior manager's attention at an early stage so that it can be addressed. The school will take any appropriate action necessary to ensure that such harassment or victimisation stops.
- 3.3 Whether or not work relationships suffer in this way it may well be that 'whistleblowers' will find the process of reporting wrong-doing and making statements etc stressful, particularly where there may be feelings of divided loyalties. In such circumstances the 'whistleblower' may welcome the opportunity to talk through these anxieties and feelings either with their manager, or possibly, with someone from a counselling service. This is to be encouraged.

#### **4. WHAT IF I RECEIVE A COMPLAINT ABOUT MYSELF?**

- 4.1 If the complaint or allegation is at all significant or made in a formal way, particularly by a member of the public or other external users, then you should inform your line manager, or Chair of Governors in the case of Headteachers – even if you believe or know the complaint to be groundless or unjustified.
- 4.2 Where a complaint or ‘grumble’ clearly does not justify taking up the line in this way, making a brief note on a file or diary or similar will often be appropriate and in your own best interests.

#### **5 A SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE**

- 5.1 As stated in (1) above, all staff have an obligation under the Code of Conduct to raise concerns in this way where they see that proper standards have clearly been breached or ignored. Nevertheless it is important that where deficiencies in service provision standards are involved rather than corruption, staff should satisfy themselves that the failing is serious and that the potential disadvantage to the public or the School is significant. Any unnecessarily over-zealous reporting would be inappropriate and counter-productive.

#### **6. MALICIOUS ACCUSATIONS**

- 6.1 Equally though if on investigation it is considered that an employee has made malicious allegations without real substance, then that in itself will be taken as a most serious matter and likely to result in disciplinary action.