Whistle-blowing policy

The Warriner Multi Academy Trust

Drafted/ Reviewed by:	Catherine Musgrove (HR Director)	**Date:** 19th August 2026
Approved by:	The Trust Board	**Date:** 17th September 2026
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1. Aims

This policy aims to:

- Encourage individuals affected to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated, and that their confidentiality will be respected
- Let all staff in the trust know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the trust
- Set clear procedures for how the trust will respond to such concerns
- Let all staff know the protection available to them if they raise a whistle-blowing concern
- Assure staff that they will not be victimised for raising a legitimate concern through the steps set out in the policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken (though vexatious or malicious concerns may be considered a disciplinary issue)
- Ensure staff know that they are protected by law and that a non-disclosure agreement, confidentiality clause or 'gagging clause' in a settlement agreement or employment contract cannot stop them from making a protected disclosure in the public interest

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

This policy applies to all employees, officers and trustees. Other workers, including consultants, contractors, agency staff and those on work placements, are also encouraged to use it.

2. Legislation

The requirement to have clear whistle-blowing procedures in place is set out in the Academy Trust Handbook.

This policy has been written in line with the above document, as well as government guidance on whistle-blowing. We also take into account the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Definition of whistle-blowing

Whistle-blowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is "in the public interest". Examples of whistle-blowing include (but are not limited to):

- Criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption
- Pupils' or staff health and safety being put in danger
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory or policy requirement
- Breaches of financial management procedures
- Breaches of exam board procedures

- Sexual harassment
- Attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest
- Damage to the environment

A whistle-blower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above. These concerns should be reported under this policy.

Not all concerns about the trust, or individual schools in the trust, count as whistle-blowing. For example, personal staff grievances such as bullying or harassment do not usually count as whistle-blowing. If something affects a staff member as an individual, or relates to an individual employment contract, this is likely a grievance.

If a complaint involves personal circumstances alongside wider concerns (e.g. pupil health and safety), the staff member must consult with the Trust HR department to decide the most appropriate reporting procedure.

When staff have a concern they should consider whether it would be better to follow our staff grievance or complaints procedures.

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) has:

- Further guidance on the difference between a whistle-blowing concern and a grievance that staff may find useful if unsure
- A free and confidential advice line

4. Procedure for staff to raise a whistle-blowing concern

4.1 When to raise a concern

Staff should consider the examples in section 3 when deciding whether their concern is of a whistle-blowing nature. Consider whether the incident(s) was illegal, breached statutory or trust procedures, put people in danger or was an attempt to cover any such activity up. Staff may want to seek HR advice on the nature of the concern and whether it is of a whistleblowing nature.

4.2 Who to report to

Staff should report their concerns to any of the following;

- Head Teacher or Head of School (School based staff)
- HR and Governance Director; Catherine Musgrove c.musgrove@wmat.org (Central staff or school based staff)
- Vice chair of Trust Board; Mark Howarth m.howarth@warrinermat.org (If it is believed that the post holders referred to in the first 2 options maybe involved in the wrong doing in some way)

Any initial recipient of a concern from a member of staff, even if the concern has not been labelled as “whistle-blowing” should fully document it and consider if it meets the whistleblowing criteria and seek advice from HR if they are unsure.

4.3 How to raise the concern

Concerns should be made in writing wherever possible. They should include names of those committing wrongdoing, dates, places and as much evidence and context as possible. Staff raising a concern should also include details of any personal interest in the matter.

Staff are encouraged to give their name when reporting an allegation, to help the trust take the investigation further. However, a complainant’s right to anonymity will be respected.

A proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if further information cannot be obtained from the staff member. This will also make it more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible.

Staff who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should consult with the HR and Governance Director, and appropriate measures can be taken to protect confidentiality where possible.

5. Trust procedure for responding to a whistle-blowing concern

5.1 Investigating the concern

When a concern is received by one of the post holders in section 4.2 – referred to from here as the 'recipient' – they will:

- Meet with the person raising the concern within a reasonable time. The person raising the concern may be joined by a trade union or professional association representative
- Get as much detail as possible about the concern at this meeting, and record the information. If it becomes apparent the concern is not of a whistle-blowing nature, the recipient should handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy/procedure
- Reiterate, at this meeting, that they are protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. If the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious, disciplinary action may be taken (see section 6 of this policy)
- Establish whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant further investigation. If there is:
    - The recipient should then arrange a further investigation into the matter. This will be carried out by a Trust senior leader, Governor or Trustee as appropriate. In some cases, they may need to bring in an external, independent body to investigate. In others, they may need to report the matter to the police
    - The person who raised the concern should be informed in writing of how the matter is being investigated and an estimated timeframe for when they will be informed of the next steps

Throughout any investigation, the trust will provide wellbeing check-ins for both the complainant and the subject(s) of a concern. Where appropriate, support and signposting to manage expectations, protect emotional wellbeing and maintain professional confidence will be offered.

5.2 Outcome of the investigation

Once the investigation – whether this was just the initial investigation of the concern, or whether further investigation was needed – is complete, the investigating person(s) will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether or not any wrongdoing has occurred. The report will include any recommendations and details on how the matter can be rectified and whether or not a referral is required to an external organisation, such as the local authority or police.

They will inform the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

Beyond the immediate actions, the CEO, trustees and other staff, if necessary, will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

Whilst we cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, we will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

6. Malicious or vexatious allegations

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made with the reasonable belief that the disclosure is in the public interest and meets the definition of whistle-blowing as listed in section 3, but the investigation finds no wrongdoing, there will be no disciplinary action against the member of staff who raised the concern.

If, however, an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the trust will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the person making the allegation.

7. Escalating concerns beyond the trust

The trust encourages staff to raise their concerns internally, in line with section 4 of 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 is included here.

It is advised that staff seek advice before reporting a concern to an external body. The Protect advice line, linked to in section 3 of this policy, can help staff when deciding whether to raise the concern to an external party.

8. Approval

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years.

These procedures have been agreed by the board of trustees, who will approve them whenever reviewed.

9. Links with other policies

This policy links with our policies on:

- Staff grievance policy
- Complaints procedure
- Child protection and Safeguarding policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Disciplinary Policy