MURDISHAW WEST PRIMARY and NURSERY SCHOOL

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Autumn 2026

Policy Title	WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY
School/HBC	School/Halton Model Policy
Written by	V Edwards
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Signed by Chair of Governors	D Cox
Date	
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Introduction
Staff, volunteers and visitors working within a school are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within it. 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.

Whistleblowing is the term used when someone who works within, or for a school raises a concern about a possible safeguarding, fraud, crime, danger or other serious risk that could threaten children, colleagues, the public or the school's own reputation. Blowing the whistle is more formally known as 'making a disclosure in the public interest'.

The Governing Body of Murdishaw West Primary 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.

This policy sets out the ways in which individuals may raise concerns that they have and explains how those concerns will be dealt with. It also gives protection to the person raising concerns.

The policy applies to all employees and applies equally to those designated as casual, temporary or agency workers and authorised volunteers, those on work experience and governors. It also applies to contractors working for the school or the council on the school's premises e.g., agency staff, builders, drivers, and covers suppliers and those providing services under a contract with the school in their own premises. Members of the public should raise concerns relating to any aspect of school business under the school's Complaints Procedure.

This policy is in addition to the school's/council's complaints procedures and other statutory reporting procedures, including safeguarding procedures. Employees should be made aware of the existence of these procedures.

<u>This policy has been developed taking into account:</u>
The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 protects whistle-blowers who report concerns from subsequent harassment, victimisation and other unfair treatment arising out of the disclosure. The Act is incorporated into the Employment Rights Act 1996, which already protects employees who take action over, or raise concern about, health and safety at work.

The sections of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 relating to protected disclosures.

This policy has been discussed with the relevant trade unions and has their support.

Equality Statement
This Whistleblowing Policy will operate at all stages in accordance with the duties to promote equality, to eliminate discrimination and to promote good relations between staff with protected characteristics as required under the Equality Act 2010.

Aims of this Policy
This policy aims to:

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

Scope of this Policy

It is important to know the difference between a 'Whistle-blow' and a 'Grievance.' A Whistle-blow has a public interest aspect to it, as it puts other at risk. A grievance by contrast has no public interest factors, as it is a complaint about a particular employment situation. A grievance should be reported using the Grievance Policy, not this policy.

This policy is not a substitute for and does not replace other relevant policies within the school. Where the concerns raised relate to a breach of one of those policies, they will be investigated under that policy. This policy is not intended to be used where other more appropriate procedures are available, for example:

- Disciplinary Procedure
- Safeguarding Policies and Procedures
- Complaints Procedure

Specific examples of concerns that could be raised under this policy, if a reasonable belief that one or more of them may have occurred or are likely to happen in the future, could include:

- conduct which is an offence or a breach of law;
- failure to comply with a legal obligation;
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice;
- racial, sexual, disability or other discrimination where other procedures, such as the school's Bullying and Harassment Procedure, do not apply;
- 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, bribery and corruption, including but not limited to, theft of property, financial irregularities, misuse of property and school systems, nepotism, conflicts of interest, or supplier kickbacks;
- sexual or physical abuse of a pupil. Disclosures of this nature must always be made and dealt with under the school's safeguarding procedures and in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education. However, the whistleblowing policy may be used to raise concerns about child protection/safeguarding issues if they are not dealt with in a timely manner;
- other unethical conduct; and

- actions which are unprofessional or inappropriate or conflict with a general understanding of what is right and wrong.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive but gives examples of potential malpractice. The overriding concern should be that it is in the public interest for the potential malpractice to be corrected and sanctions taken if need be. Thus, any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of school staff, governors, officers/members of the council or others acting on behalf of the school can be reported under the Whistleblowing 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 and the school subscribe to;
- is against the school's policies, procedures or School Governance Regulations 2013;
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

Safeguards and Protection

The School recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. The Governing Body of Murdishaw West Primary School will not tolerate any harassment, victimisation (including informal pressures), disadvantage, detrimental action or deliberate failure to act. The School will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern. Any member of staff who harasses or victimises a whistleblower may not only be personally liable but will be subject to disciplinary action.

Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will normally not be interrupted by any employment procedures that may already be underway. It is not the Governing Bodies intention to delay action taken under the disciplinary or other policies, pending the completion of investigations taken in accordance with this policy, unless the School considers that the merits of a particular case warrant this, or unless the matter becomes a police matter, which prevent further internal processes.

In all cases, the provisions of The Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) and Enterprise & Regulatory Reform Act (ERRA) will be adhered to. In order to receive the protection of PIDA, whistle-blowers will be required to show that they reasonably believed that the disclosure they are making is in the Public Interest. This should be done through the evidence they present when raising their concern. The procedure for making allegations is set out in this policy. Further information on the ERRA can be found at www.legislation.gov.uk

If you make an allegation that you reasonably believe to be in the public interest, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If it is found however, during the investigation that an allegation has been made vexatiously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

As a whistle blower, you are also given legal protection by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. If you make what is known as a “qualifying disclosure” under the 1998 Act to your employer or certain other persons/bodies, and you act reasonably and in the public interest, it will be unlawful to subject you to any detriment.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish (The identity of the whistleblower will only be released by the appropriate person if there is a legal

requirement to do so, such as a court order, or if the whistleblower gives written permission). This cannot be guaranteed however if you need to come forward as a witness. For example, if a hearing is needed, either by law, or under a School's procedure, the employee disclosing the concern may be required to give evidence. At all times, the appropriate person will ensure that all investigations, papers and any subsequent outcomes, reports and witness statements will be dealt with in the strictest confidence.

It may be possible to establish the truth about allegations from another independent source and the school will seek to do this where possible.

If the nature of the whistle blow requires disclosure to other people to conduct an investigation, then the whistle-blower who originally disclosed this will be informed.

Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation and receive the protection of PIDA whenever possible.

Where an individual chooses to report their concerns anonymously, such anonymity will be respected. However, our ability to investigate anonymous complaints can be hampered by not being able to further explore issues or obtain evidence during the investigative process. Furthermore, if we do not know who has provided the information, it is not possible to either reassure or protect you.

Concerns expressed anonymously may be less powerful and will only be considered at the discretion of the school. In exercising such discretion, the following factors may need to be taken into account:

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

If the allegation suggests criminal activity and the case warrants police assistance, the identity of the person reporting the details may be important at a later date if criminal proceedings are to be pursued effectively. Identification is therefore preferred and will assist the investigation.

How to Raise a Concern

As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your immediate line manager, Headteacher or Chair of Governors. 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 own manager is involved, you should approach one of the following:

- Headteacher - Vanessa Edwards
- Deputy Headteacher – Julie Phiilips
- Chair of the Governing Body – Derek Cox

The contact details for above persons can be found on the school's website.

These individuals may also provide advice and guidance on matters of concern under this policy. If you believe that senior management of the school is involved you may wish to approach a senior officer of the council; either the Operational Director for Education, Inclusion and Provision Division or the Safeguarding Children in Education Officer. Contact James Jordan at james.jordan@halton.gov.uk

Potential whistleblowers are advised against making any approaches to the press with your concern.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Individuals 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.

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.

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter as a collective concern if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns. It would be advisable if you are a member of a trade union to also consult with your Regional Centre regarding the concerns that you have before making any disclosure.

You may invite your trade union or a colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

Wherever possible, you should report your concerns or allegations internally. If you are unwilling or unable to report the matter internally, there are a number of other agencies you may be able to report your concerns to and which can be accessed at the following link: List of prescribed people and bodies

A Whistleblowing Advice Line ran by the NSPCC Helpline has officially launched. This has been developed to provide support to employees wishing to raise concerns over how child protection issues are being handled in their own or other organisations. The NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line can be reached on 0800 028 0285.

The advice line is not intended to replace any current practices or responsibilities of organisations working with children. The helpline advisors would encourage professionals to raise any concerns about a child to their own employer in the first instance. However, the advice line offers an alternative route if whistleblowing internally is difficult or professionals have concerns around how matters are being handled.

“Protect” is an advice line that aims to make whistleblowing work for individuals, organisations and society. It is a legal advice service that offers free expert and confidential advice on how best to raise your concern and your protection as a whistleblower. It can be accessed at https://protect-advice.org.uk/

How the Headteacher / Governing Body / Council will respond

If you confirm your wish to raise the concerns formally under this policy, a responsible person will be designated by the school management, where appropriate, or by the management of the council, to co-ordinate the response to the concerns you have raised, in consultation with the Director of Services or the Internal Audit Service as necessary. The responsible person will respond to you in accordance with this policy and where the responsible person is outside the management of the school, s/he will notify the council's Director of Services for registration, monitoring and annual reporting purposes.

Where possible, the matters raised may be:

- Investigated by Senior Leadership Team
- Progressed through internal procedure and / or audit
- Referred to the Police

- Referred to the external auditor
- The subject of an independent enquiry
- Dealt with via any other appropriate procedure, for example, child protection, abuse of vulnerable adults' procedure.

In order to protect anybody accused of misconduct, an initial investigation will be made to decide whether a full investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. If appropriate, Human Resources will be informed. Such testing out of your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them. The overriding principle which school management/the council will have in mind is the public interest.

Some concerns may be resolved following an initial investigation without the need for full investigation.

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

- acknowledge that the concern has been received;
- indicate how it is proposed to deal with the matter;
- provide an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- inform you whether any initial enquiries have been made;
- supply you with information on staff support mechanisms (where appropriate); and
- inform you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between you and any officers considering the issues will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. Where any meeting is arranged under this policy, away from school premises if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative or work colleague.

If, following initial investigation, a formal investigation of an allegation is required under this policy, this will be conducted in line with the process set out within the School's Disciplinary procedure.

The school will 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 school will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure. It is important for whistle-blowers to understand that making a whistle-blowing allegation doesn't give them an automatic right to anonymity, but does give them protection from harassment or victimisation and that the school will not tolerate any form of this from anyone working within or for the School and disciplinary action will be taken against any person victimising or harassing whistleblowers.

The Governing Body understands that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. We will therefore inform you in writing of the outcome of any investigation unless there is a compelling legal instruction not to.

If urgent action is required, for example if there is an urgent health and safety or safeguarding concern, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

The Responsible Officer

The Headteacher/Governing Body has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy and will maintain a record of all concerns raised and any outcomes. This record will be in a form, which does not compromise your confidentiality and may be officially delegated to a named officer to maintain.

The council's Director of Services has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy in respect of concerns raised formally outside the management of the school and will maintain appropriate records of concerns raised and report as necessary to the council.

How the Matter can be taken further

The school hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not satisfied, it is possible to appeal the decision by approaching the Headteacher/Governing Body. A review of the decision will then be taken.

If, following this, you are still unsatisfied with the outcome of the further investigation and any action taken and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the school, the following are possible contact points:

- NSPCC Whistleblowing Line
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- a relevant voluntary organisation
- the police
- organisations prescribed from time to time by the Secretary of State for the purpose of protected disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act

Further details can be found here.

Review

- This policy will be monitored to ensure consistency of application and adherence to the equalities legislation, to ensure that the policy operates in accordance with the duty to promote equality, to eliminate discrimination and to promote good relations between staff with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
- This policy will be monitored and reviewed in conjunction with recognised trade unions at least once every three years
- The employer will keep a record of Public Interest Disclosures, including all those made anonymously.