Whistleblowing Policy

Overley Hall School

Approved by:	Senior Leadership Team, SAS Board
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Contents

Introduction..... 3

Legislative framework and guidance. 4

Intended outcomes. 4

Definitions. 5

Responsibilities. 7

Process..... 8

Malicious or vexatious allegations 12

Links with other policies. 12

Introduction

Overley Hall School is committed to the highest standards of openness, integrity and accountability. Employees with any concerns about our work or way of working must come forward and voice these concerns. This includes concerns about staff, senior leaders, contractors (external professionals coming into school) or Support and Scrutiny Board Members.

It does not matter if the individual who raises the concern is mistaken about it – staff do not have to prove anything about the allegation they are making but must have a genuine concern, believe that they are acting in the public interest, and that their disclosure highlights past, present or likely future wrongdoing.

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 school know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the school
- Set clear procedures for how the school 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)

Legislative framework and guidance.

Department for Education (DfE) – Complain about a school

Department for education (DfE) Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) (2026) Statutory guidance for schools and colleges

Independent School Standards – Concerns about a school

Independent School Standards Part 3 – Welfare, Health and safety of pupils.

GOV.UK.Whistleblowing for employees.

GOV.UK Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

This policy complies with our funding agreement.

Intended outcomes.

Whistleblowing in schools for children and young people is an essential part of the safeguarding procedure and therefore all staff should familiarise themselves with this policy and their responsibilities.

The outcomes of this policy are that:

- Placing authorities, relatives, parents/ guardians, relatives and inspection bodies are all reassured knowing that whistleblowing is an essential part of Overley Hall School's culture as we aim to achieve the highest standards for our young people.

- Individuals affected are encouraged 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
- All staff know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by Overley Hall School
- Clear procedures are set for how the school will respond to such concerns
- All staff know the protection available to them if they raise a whistle-blowing concern
- Staff are assured 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)

Only concerns that are reported can be investigated and therefore if an employee has a genuine/sincere concern (whether there is direct evidence or not) it should be reported.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time. The policy applies to all employees or other workers who provide services to the school in any capacity including self-employed consultants or contractors who provide services on a personal basis and agency workers.

Definitions.

Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is when an employee of an organisation passes on information that they reasonably believe shows wrongdoing or a cover up. Whistle-blowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is "in the public interest".

This might be about activity that is:

- illegal
- affects others health and safety

- a miscarriage of justice
- about poor practice or leadership
- failure to meet statutory requirements
- covering up wrongdoing
- financial malpractice
- damaging to the environment
- damaging to the reputation of Overley Hall School

Examples of whistle-blowing include (but are not limited to):

- Criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption
- Learners' or staffs' health and safety being put in danger
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement
- Breaches of financial management procedures
- Attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest
- Damage to the environment

As long as you fit the criteria for whistleblowing, you are protected under the UK whistle blowing law.

Whistleblower

A whistle-blower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above.

If you report your concern to the media in most cases you will lose your UK whistle blowing law rights

Issues that are not classed as whistleblowing:

Complaints from learners, parents, relatives, professionals not employed by Overley School (e.g. social workers) these will be dealt with using the Complaints Policy.

Staff personal grievances e.g. bullying, harassment, discrimination unless they are in the public interest. These will be dealt with using the Staff Grievance 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

Responsibilities.

Every employee should be aware of the importance of preventing and eliminating wrongdoing at work. It is each employee's responsibility to be mindful of illegal or unethical conduct and report anything of that nature that they become aware of.

Whistleblowing can either be carried out confidentially (where you name is not given unless you agree) or anonymously (where your name is not given at all). Confidentiality will be respected unless management are required to share the information given as a matter of law or public interest. If you choose to whistle blow anonymously the investigation may not be able to progress if you do not provide all of the information that is needed.

Failure to whistle blow any perceived or actual wrongdoing is a disciplinary offence and disciplinary procedures will be followed. If an employee is asked to cover up wrongdoing this should be reported to at least one level above the person who requested this.

Victimisation of an employee for raising a qualified disclosure will result in disciplinary procedure.

Process.

Ideally concerns about poor or unacceptable practice should be reported and addressed before they reach the whistleblowing stage. Staff are encouraged to raise questions relating to any aspect of practice that may cause them concern to a senior manager or if regarding a general issue in staff meetings.

If your concern is of a safeguarding nature you should raise it with one of your designated safeguarding leads (DSL's):

Beverley Doran – Bev.doran@overleyhall.com
Dee Marshall – Dee.marshall@overleyhall.com
Mandy Peever – Mandy.peever@overleyhall.com
Lorna Deakin – lorna.deakin@overleyhall.com
Rachel Hawley – Rachel.hawley@overleyhall.com

Low-Level Concerns, Allegations and LADO Referrals

The school recognises the distinction between low-level concerns, safeguarding allegations and whistleblowing concerns relating to staff, volunteers, contractors and other adults working with children.

A low-level concern is any concern, no matter how small, that an adult may have acted in a way that is inconsistent with the Staff Code of Conduct, professional standards or expected boundaries, even if the behaviour does not meet the threshold for a safeguarding allegation. Low-level concerns should be reported to the Headteacher and managed in accordance with the school's Low-Level Concerns Procedure.

Where there is a concern that an adult working with children may have:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;

- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children; or
- Behaved in a way that may indicate they are unsuitable to work with children;

the matter must be reported immediately to the Headteacher (or the Proprietor/Chair where the concern relates to the Headteacher). Consideration must be given to an immediate referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026*.

Concerns that meet the harm threshold must not be managed solely through whistleblowing, disciplinary, grievance or line-management procedures. Safeguarding procedures and LADO referral requirements take precedence where applicable.

If you have a concern regarding this policy in the first instance you should tell the Headteacher (Bev Doran) or Assistant Heads (Dee Marshall/ Rachel Hawley). If you feel that you cannot share this information with them or the concern is regarding them you can report your concern directly to the Chair of the Support & Scrutiny Team, Liz Hyner.

You may contact OFSTED or Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Board if you have a legitimate reason why you do not wish to report to those listed above. This is only relevant to whistleblowing in the event of you having:

- a genuine belief that the concern will be covered up
- the feeling that you will be treated unfairly within Overley Hall School if you whistleblow.
- you have already followed the whistle-blowing procedure and it has not been acted on or resolved.

Overley Hall School expects that all employees allow the senior management to follow the Whistleblowing Policy and procedure in the first instance.

When a concern has been raised it will be taken seriously and acted on immediately. It is acknowledged that ‘blowing the whistle’ is always difficult and can potentially cause ill feeling. The open and honest sharing of concerns using transparent procedures is an essential safeguarding mechanism if problems are not to escalate.

Procedure for staff

It is important that you carefully identify what is wrong.
Why is it wrong? – is what is happening illegal/ against government guidelines? Ensure that you have the facts not opinion.

Write down what you have witnessed:

- Background and history of your concern
- Names, dates and places (where possible)
- Have others witnessed the same? If so ask them to do the same.
- Reason why you are concerned about this situation

At the earliest opportunity make your concerns known
Keep copies of your report, all correspondence and other relevant information (in a way that doesn’t break confidentiality/ data protection).

Ask to be kept informed about the outcome of the investigation.

Any employee who whistleblow’s will be provided with confidential support by a member of the management team to discuss any concerns. The employee will also be consulted about what measures are to be implemented to protect them and ensure they can continue to carry out their duties.

Employees are reassured that any matter that is raised will be investigated thoroughly, promptly and confidentially and the outcome/update reported back to them within 30 days of an issue being raised. If an investigation takes longer than this the employee will be kept updated to reassure them that the concern is being dealt with properly.

Action for managers.

Act immediately
Address the concern using the relevant policies

Question/ interview the whistleblower to ensure there is a genuine case for concern – carefully and comprehensively record the discussion and give some feedback about your intended actions.

Share this information with another elected manager unless it is about this person in which case they should share it with the Proprietor (Mrs Brown).

If you suspect a criminal act contact First Response Team
Notify a fellow senior manager or Proprietor about the concern and action taken.

Ensure any evidence (written/material) is not tampered with (store correctly – confidentiality/ data protection).

Ensure a plan is in place to ensure the safety of all.

Keep a chronological record of all action taken.

If criminal activity is discovered as a result of any investigation under this procedure the relevant authorities will be informed.

If safeguarding concerns are discovered during an investigation the Safeguarding Policy will be followed.

Consider whether formal notification to OFSTED is necessary. If so make a notification, inform significant agencies/ stakeholders.

If as a result of whistleblowing a serious complaint of allegation is being made about a member of staff, OFSTED will be notified.

The disciplinary procedure must be followed if:

- Misconduct is discovered as a result of any investigation under this policy
- Somebody is found to have made a malicious allegation under this policy

Malicious or vexatious allegations

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made in good faith, 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

Links with other policies.

Anti-bullying Policy
Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
Code of Conduct Policy
Complaints Policy
Disciplinary Policy
Health & Safety Policy
Allegation & Grievance policy