BELONG
CE Multi Academy Trust

Whistleblowing Policy



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Love, Hope, Community and Compassion

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1. Aims

At Belong Multi-Academy Trust, we are committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity, accountability, and transparency across all aspects of our work. We recognise that staff and other individuals working with or for the Trust are often the first to identify concerns about potential wrongdoing. This Whistleblowing Policy is designed to empower and support those individuals to speak up safely and confidently.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Encourage prompt reporting of suspected wrongdoing, with the assurance that concerns will be taken seriously, investigated appropriately, and treated confidentially.
- Provide clear guidance to all staff on how to raise concerns about conduct or practices within or involving the Trust.
- Outline the procedures the Trust will follow in response to whistleblowing disclosures.
- Inform staff of the protections available to them when raising concerns in good faith.
- Reassure staff that they will not face victimisation or detriment for raising legitimate concerns, even if they are mistaken—while also making clear that malicious or vexatious allegations may lead to disciplinary action.

This policy applies to all employees and individuals providing services to the Trust in any capacity, including agency workers, self-employed consultants, and contractors. It does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

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 requirement
- Breaches of financial management procedures
- 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.

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.

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.

4.2 Who to report to

School-based staff should report their concern to the headteacher. If the concern is about the headteacher or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the staff member should report their concern to the chair of governors.

Central team staff should report their concern to the CEO. If the concern is about the CEO, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the central team staff should report the concern to the chair of the board of directors

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.

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

5.1 Investigating the concern

When a concern is received by the headteacher / chair of governors / CEO / Chair of the Board of Director – 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, involving the CEO or Board of Directors if 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 of how the matter is being investigated and an estimated timeframe for when they will be informed of the next steps

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 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.

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.

The Protect advice line, linked to in section 3 of this policy, can also help staff when deciding whether to raise the concern to an external party.

8. Approval

This policy will be reviewed every 3 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 policy