



**Education
Partnership
Trust**

Creating outstanding schools
which transform learning, lives
and communities

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY



Document Control

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Education Partnership Trust is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity and it expects all staff to maintain the highest professional standards. However, all

organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring or to address them when they do occur.

- 1.2 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time after consultation with our recognised Trade Unions.

2.0 AIMS

- 2.1. To encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected.
- 2.2 To provide staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns.
- 2.3 To reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns in good faith without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- 2.4 To support the mission, vision and values of the trust and its establishments.

3.0 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE POLICY?

- 3.1 The trust has overall responsibility for this policy, and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this policy.
- 3.2 The trust will ensure that all Headteachers, managers and other staff who may deal with concerns or investigations under this policy receive regular and appropriate guidance.
- 3.3 All staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing.

4.0 WHO IS COVERED BY THIS POLICY?

- 4.1 This policy applies to all individuals working at all levels of the trust, including directors, employees, consultants, contractors, trainees, homeworkers, part-time and fixed-term workers, casual and agency staff, and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

5.0 WHAT IS WHISTLEBLOWING?

- 5.1 Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

- criminal activity
- miscarriages of justice
- danger to health and safety
- damage to the environment
- failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements
- bribery
- financial fraud or mismanagement
- negligence
- breach of our internal policies and procedures
- conduct likely to damage our reputation

- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information
- concerns about the harm or risk of harm to children
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters

- 5.2 A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to any of the above. If a member of staff has any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any trust activities (a whistleblowing concern), they should report it under this policy.
- 5.3 This policy should not be used for complaints relating to a member of staff's own personal circumstances, such as the way they have been treated at work. In those cases, staff should follow the trust's Grievance Policy or Dignity at Work Policy as appropriate.
- 5.4 If a member of staff is uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy, they should seek advice from the Whistleblowing Lead at the Trust, whose contact details are provided in Table 1 of this policy.

6.0 RAISING A WHISTLEBLOWING CONCERN

- 6.1 Staff should in the first instance raise a concern with their line manager or Headteacher (or the EPT Whistleblowing Lead where concern involves the Headteacher). Staff may tell them in person or put the matter in writing if preferred. They may be able to agree a way of resolving the concern quickly and effectively.
- 6.2 However, where the matter is more serious, or a member of staff feels that their line manager and the Headteacher has not addressed the concern, or the individual prefers not to raise it with them for any reason, they should contact the Whistleblowing Lead at EPT. Contact details are set out at in Table 1 of this policy.

7.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

- 7.1 The trust hopes that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if staff want to raise a concern confidentially, every effort will be made to keep their identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know the member of staff's identity, this will be discussed with the individual.
- 7.2 The trust does not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if further information cannot not be gained from the member of staff raising the concern. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Providing feedback to the whistleblower will also not be possible which will leave them without confirmation that their allegations have been investigated and may leave them with uncertainty as to whether action has been taken. It should be noted that investigations are not always able to be undertaken with open knowledge. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to the Whistleblowing Lead and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If in any doubt, a member of staff can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are provided in Table 1 of this policy.

8.0 MALICIOUS/VEXATIOUS ALLEGATIONS

- 8.1 If you make an allegation, which is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you unless it is considered that you have made malicious or vexatious allegations. In these circumstances, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

9.0 EXTERNAL DISCLOSURES

- 9.1 The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating, and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases, staff should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.
- 9.2 The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for an individual to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media. The trust strongly encourage staff to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. Their contact details are provided in Table 1 of this policy.
- 9.3 Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a supplier or service provider. In some circumstances the law will protect an individual if they raise the matter with the third party directly. However, the trust encourages staff to report such concerns internally first. Staff should contact their line manager or one of the other individuals set out in the 'Raising a whistleblowing concern' section for guidance.

10.0 INVESTIGATION AND OUTCOME

- 10.1 Once a concern has been raised, the Line Manager, Headteacher or Trust Whistleblowing Lead will arrange a meeting with the member of staff as soon as possible to discuss the concern. The member of staff may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this policy. The companion must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.
- 10.2 A written summary of the concern will be taken and a copy provided to the member of staff after the meeting.
- 10.3 The trust will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. The member of staff who raised the concern will be informed of the outcome of the assessment and may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.
- 10.4 The trust will also aim to provide an indication of how it proposes to deal with the matter.
- 10.5 In some cases, an investigator or team of investigators including staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter may be appointed. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.
- 10.6 The trust will aim to keep the member of staff who raised the concern informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent sharing of specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. Any information about the investigation should be treated as confidential.

10.7 If it is concluded that a whistleblower has made false allegations maliciously or with a view to personal gain, the whistleblower may be subject to disciplinary action.

11.0 TAKING THE MATTER FURTHER

11.1 While the trust cannot always guarantee the outcome the member of staff seeks, the trust will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

11.2 If a member of staff is not happy with the way in which their concern has been handled, they can raise it with the trust Chief Executive or the Board of Trustees.

12.0 PROTECTION AND SUPPORT FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS

12.1 It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. The trust aims to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns in good faith under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

12.2 Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern in good faith. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats, or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If a member of staff believes that they have suffered any such treatment, they should inform the Whistleblowing Lead immediately. If the matter is not remedied, they should raise it formally using the trust’s Grievance Policy.

12.3 Staff must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

13.0 CONTACTS

13.1 Key contacts are provided below:

Table 1: Whistleblowing contacts

Whistleblowing Lead	Caroline Howarth chowarth@ept-uk.com 01254 790027
Protect Independent whistleblowing charity	Email: info@protect-advice.org.uk Website: www.protect-advice.org.uk