

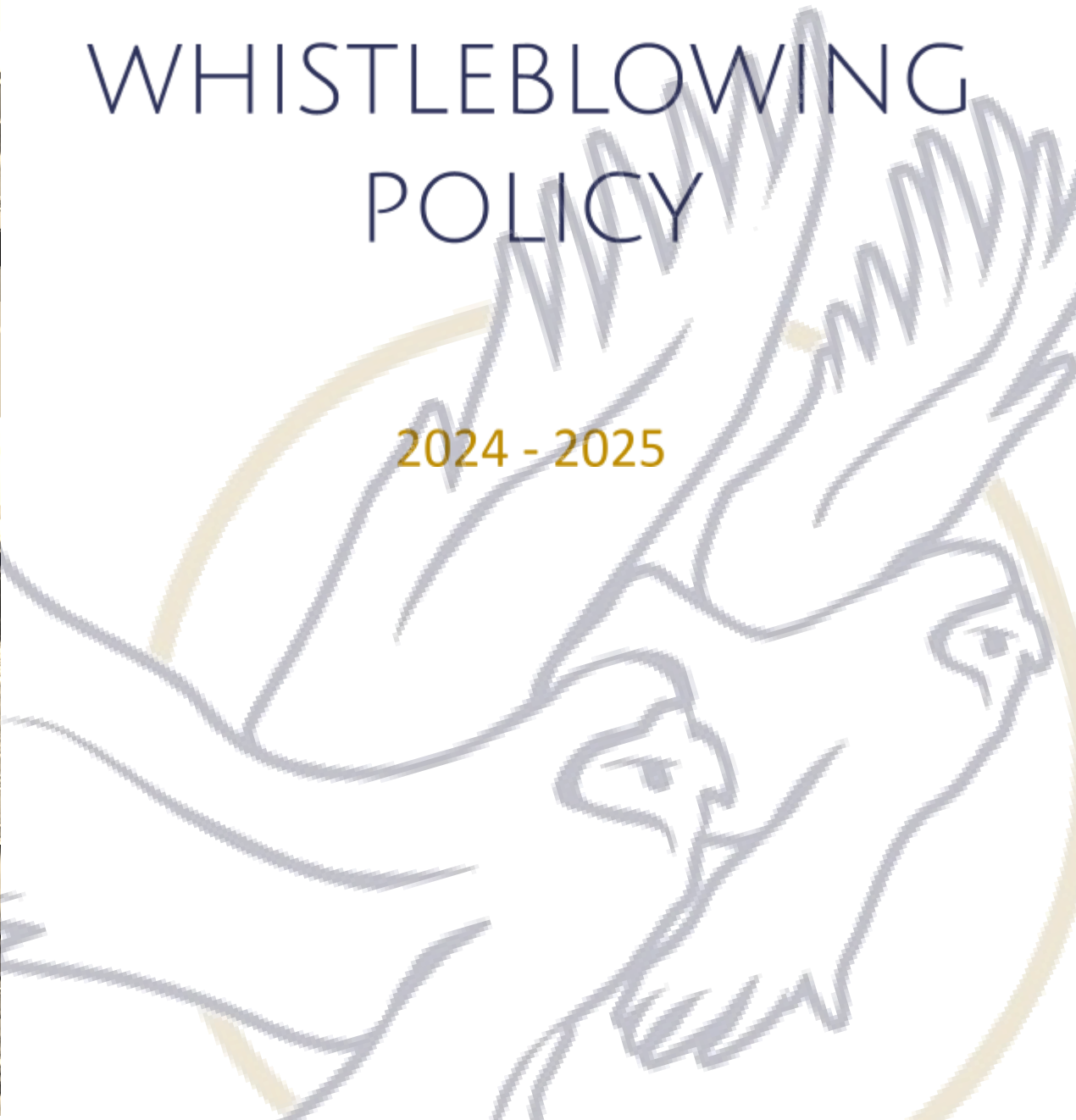


Bengeworth
Multi Academy Trust

Brilliant People • Better Schools • Bright Futures

CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING AND WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

2024 - 2025



This policy reflects the consensus of opinion of the teaching staff and has the full agreement of the Governing Body. The reviewed policy was agreed at the September 2024 meeting of the Governing Body and reviewed annually.

Christine Spriggs Chair of Governors

Review date: September 2025



INTRODUCTION

People working within organisations are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong in the place in which they work. They may be wary of expressing concerns because they feel that to do so would be disloyal to their colleagues or to their school. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances it may feel easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

The schools within the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, we expect employees and others working at or for the MAT who have serious concerns about any aspect of the MAT's or Council's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

AIMS OF THE POLICY

This policy is designed to encourage and enable you to be able to raise concerns you might have about the way the schools within the MAT or County Council conducts its business. It does this by providing you with an opportunity to raise concerns which you reasonably believe point to serious malpractice either in your school or within the County Council in a confidential way, without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. Your concerns may relate to the improper, unethical or illegal conduct of employees, Governors, County Councillors or others acting on behalf of the Council. Some examples of serious malpractice include:

- conduct which is an offence or a failure to comply with a legal obligation;
- disclosures on miscarriages of justice;
- endangering the health and safety of pupils, members of the public as well as other employees;
- damage to the environment;
- the unauthorised use of public funds;
- possible fraud and corruption;
- sexual or physical abuse or harassment of pupils or other workers;
- any concern over the welfare of pupils or other workers;
- deliberate concealment of malpractice; and
- other unethical conduct;

This list is not exhaustive.

Victimisation or harassment of anyone using this policy or if anyone tries to discourage others from coming forward will be deemed to be a disciplinary matter.

This policy complements complaints and statutory reporting procedures already in place for service users and non-employees and reflects the legal protection afforded by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. It is not designed to be a substitute for the school's grievance, disciplinary or harassment policies. If you have a personal concern unrelated to malpractice, please use the MAT's Grievance Procedure or Harassment Policy as appropriate, copies of which are available from your Head of School or from Education Human Resources.

If, having read this policy, you are uncertain about whether it is the appropriate policy or how to proceed, please feel free to seek informal advice from Education Human Resources.

Who is covered by the policy?

Anyone working for or on behalf of the schools within the MAT or Council may raise a concern about malpractice, including employees, governors, contractors, supply staff, agency and trainee teachers, councillors or statutory office holders.

Who is responsible for the policy?

The MAT directors are responsible for ensuring the operation of this policy with regard to matters relating to all schools within the MAT. Local governing bodies will work in partnership with the Local Authority Designated Officers (LADOs) in dealing with concerns about malpractice and will immediately contact the LADOs on receiving such information. The MAT Trustees have oversight of this policy and expect local governing bodies to expect compliance. It is the Headteacher/Head of School's role to ensure that matters are investigated properly and to maintain a record of concerns raised together with outcomes and they will report as necessary to the LADO without jeopardising confidentiality.

HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

Step 1 – Within the School

If you have a concern about malpractice, the Trustees of the Multi Academy Trust hope that you will be able to raise the matter with your Headteacher/Head of School. If your concern is connected to a child protection issue, you must follow the school's Child Protection Policy. However, if you feel unable to raise the concern with your Headteacher/Head of School due to the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved, or if you believe that he/she may be involved, you should speak to the Chair of Governors.

Alternatively, you may wish to contact one of the Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO): – 01905 846221 or lado@worcestershire.gcsx

Concerns may be raised verbally and/or in writing. If you wish to make a written report, you are advised to include in your letter the background and history (giving relevant dates) and give the reason why you are particularly concerned about the matter. You may also wish to seek advice from your trade union at this stage. If you are personally involved in the matter you raise, please tell us at the outset. You may invite your trade union, a member of staff from Human Resources or a work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews (which may be arranged away from your normal workplace if you so wish) in connection with the concerns you have raised.

Step 2- Within the Trust

Where appropriate, a school leader, governor, director or trustee will refer the matter to another MAT official, for example if you have a concern about any financial loss or irregularity, this would be raised with the School Business Manager; if your concern relates to the conduct of a MAT leader or to the working relationship between a leader and an employee of an academy or LGB, this may be raised with the MAT Trustees. If you still have concerns or you feel that you are unable to discuss the matter with any of the individuals listed in Step 1, you may wish to raise the matter with the ESFA, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for Safeguarding, or if none of these options seem viable, an Ofsted representative.

What will happen?

The school or LADO will respond promptly to your concerns by assessing what action ought to be taken. This may involve an internal investigation or a more formal inquiry. You will be told who is handling the matter (the Responsible Officer), how you can contact them and whether any more assistance from you will be required. In normal circumstances within 7 working days of a concern being raised, the Responsible Officer will write to you acknowledging that your concern has been received. The letter will also inform you of any relevant staff support mechanisms and agree arrangements for keeping you informed.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for an investigation. If urgent action is required this may be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Thereafter, the Responsible Officer will keep you informed of progress and the outcome of any investigations or decisions on the matter including the content of any reports written.

The School or LADO will take steps to 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 or LADO will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure. You are protected against victimisation as a result of raising a concern and, should victimisation be proven to have taken place, it will be dealt with under disciplinary procedures. In exceptional circumstances, it may also be necessary to consider future working arrangements.

Step 3 - Raising a Concern Externally

While we hope that this policy gives you the confidence to raise your concern with your school management team, governing body or LADOs, we would prefer that you raise your concern with the proper external regulator rather than not at all.

If you act in good faith and genuinely and you reasonably believe that both the malpractice falls within the remit of a regulator and that the information disclosed is substantially true, you may also contact the following prescribed regulators:

- the Health and Safety Executive for health and safety dangers;
- the Environment Agency for environmental dangers;
- the Audit Commission or External Auditor for concerns associated with
- conduct of business, value for money, fraud and corruption; or
- the Data Protection Registrar.

Finally, in circumstances where you genuinely believe that the matter cannot or will not be dealt with internally because either your complaints have been ignored, you believe that information will be concealed or destroyed or you will be subjected to victimisation and have evidence to back up your belief, you may consider it appropriate to contact a non-regulatory external body for example the police, OFSTED or the Department of Education and Employment. You are strongly advised to seek independent advice before you raise any issue outside the Local Authority. A list of contacts is given in the sections below entitled Further Advice and the Role of Trade Unions.

Confidentiality

The MAT and LADOs undertake to protect your identity and we will not disclose it without your consent. If the situation arises where it is not possible to pursue your concern without revealing your identity (e.g. the need to give evidence in court or at a disciplinary hearing), we will discuss with you how and if we can proceed.

Untrue Allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith, but the evidence produced during the investigation does not substantiate it, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you are an employee or statutory office holder and you make an allegation maliciously or for personal gain, this may result in disciplinary action taken against you.

The Role of the Trade Unions

The trade unions recognised by the MAT are committed to the effective use of this policy. If you are considering raising concerns using this procedure you may wish to seek advice from your trade union representative before doing so, particularly if you believe that the only course of action open to you is to raise your concern with an external body.

Further Advice

You may of course seek advice from any designated HR official and, in particular, from the MAT Business Manager or Education Human Resources at Liberata on 01905 763763. However, if you want independent advice at any time you may contact your trade union or the independent charity, Public Concern at Work on 0207 404 6609 or email them at whistle@pcaw.demon.co.uk. Their lawyers will give you free confidential advice at any time on how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.

Bengeworth

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