



# ABINGDON

## WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

This policy applies to Abingdon School, Abingdon Prep School and to Abingdon School Enterprises Limited (the School's trading subsidiary).

### 1. What is whistleblowing?

- 1.1. 'Whistleblowing' means the reporting by employees of suspected misconduct, illegal acts or failure to act within the School. 'Whistleblowing' is viewed by the School as a positive act that can make a valuable contribution to the School's efficiency and long-term success.

### 2. About this Policy

- 2.1. The aim of this policy is to enable members of staff (including self-employed staff), volunteers, governors and other school stakeholders to raise concerns internally and in a confidential fashion about fraud, malpractice, health and safety, criminal offences, miscarriages of justice, failure to comply with legal obligations, inappropriate behaviour or unethical conduct. The policy also provides, if necessary, for such concerns to be raised outside the organisation.
- 2.2. **These procedures are distinct from whistleblowing concerning safeguarding issues and these should be raised in line with the procedures detailed in [Section 12 of the School's Safeguarding Policy](#).**
- 2.3. The School is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity, and expects all staff to maintain appropriately high 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 and to address them when they do occur.
- 2.4. This policy on whistleblowing is intended to demonstrate that the School:-
  - Will not tolerate malpractice;
  - Respects the confidentiality of staff raising concerns and will provide procedures to maintain confidentiality so far as is consistent with progressing the issues effectively;
  - Will provide the opportunity to raise concerns outside of the normal line management structure where this is appropriate;
  - Will invoke the School's disciplinary procedure in the case of false, malicious, vexatious or frivolous allegations;

- Will provide a clear and simple procedure for raising concerns, which is accessible to all members of staff.

### **3. Policy Guidance**

- 3.1. This procedure is to enable members of staff to express a legitimate concern regarding suspected malpractice within the School and is separate from the School's adopted procedures regarding grievances, and individuals should not use the whistleblowing procedure to raise grievances about their personal employment situation. If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this procedure you should seek advice from the Headmaster or the Director of Finance and Operations.
- 3.2. Malpractice is not easily defined; however, it includes allegations of fraud, financial irregularities, corruption, bribery, dishonesty, acting contrary to the staff code of conduct, criminal activities, or failing to comply with a legal obligation, a miscarriage of justice, or creating or ignoring a serious risk to health, safety or the environment.
- 3.3. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected malpractice affecting any of the School's activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this procedure.
- 3.4. If staff and volunteers feel unable to raise an issue with the School or feel that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, they may use other whistleblowing channels, such as:
  - Public Concern at Work (an independent whistleblowing charity) (helpline: (020) 7404 6609, email: [whistle@pcaw.co.uk](mailto:whistle@pcaw.co.uk), website: [www.pcaw.co.uk](http://www.pcaw.co.uk)).
  - The Charities Commission whistleblowing email address (details here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/whistleblowing-guidance-for-charity-employees>)

### **4. Confidentiality and Anonymity**

- 4.1. The School hopes that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this procedure. However, if you wish to raise a concern confidentially, the School will make every effort to keep your identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know your identity, this will be discussed with you first.
- 4.2. If there is evidence of criminal activity then the police will be informed.
- 4.3. The School does not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if the School cannot obtain further information from you. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should discuss this with the Headmaster or Director of Finance and Operations and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If you are in any doubt you can seek advice from Public Concern at Work, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are set out above.

## **5. How to raise a whistleblowing concern**

- 5.1. A whistleblowing concern in line with this policy should be raised with the Headmaster or the Director of Finance and Operations as is most appropriate. This can be verbally, by email or by written letter.
- 5.2. A meeting will be arranged with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern. You may bring a colleague to any meetings under this procedure. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation. You may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information as the concerns raised are investigated.
- 5.3. Any concern raised will be investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner, and appropriate corrective action will be pursued. You will be kept informed of progress and, whenever possible and subject to third party rights, informed of the resolution. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.
- 5.4. If you are not satisfied that your concern is being properly dealt with you have a right to raise it in confidence with the Chairman of Governors.
- 5.5. If your concern is about the Headmaster you should go directly to the Chairman of Governors.

## **6. External Procedures**

- 6.1. Where all internal procedures have been exhausted, and a member of staff remains dissatisfied, an individual can raise a concern with an external person/body. This may include (depending on the subject matter of the disclosure) HMRC, the Audit Commission, the Independent Schools Inspectorate, the Health and Safety Executive and/or the Charities Commission.
- 6.2. It should be noted that under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, there are circumstances where an individual should raise a concern directly with an external body where the individual reasonably believes :-
  - That exceptionally serious circumstances justify it;
  - That the School would conceal or destroy the relevant evidence;
  - Where they believe they would be victimised by the School;
  - Where the Secretary of State has ordered it.
- 6.3. If welfare or safeguarding concerns are mistakenly raised under this policy rather than the School's safeguarding procedures, the individual will be referred to the appropriate procedure under the School's Safeguarding Policy. This can include direct contact with the Local Authority Safeguarding Board (contact details in the Safeguarding Policy).

## **7. Malicious Accusations and Protection from Reprisal or Victimisation**

- 7.1. False, malicious, vexatious or frivolous accusations will be dealt with under the School's Disciplinary Procedure.
- 7.2. No member of staff will suffer a detriment or be disciplined for raising a genuine and legitimate concern, providing that they do so in good faith and following the Whistleblowing procedures.

**Director of Finance and Operations**

Last Internal Review: April 2018

Last Governor Review: April 2018

Next Governor Review: April 2019