



White Woods
Primary Academy Trust

Confidential Reporting Policy

Reviewed by: HR

Date: September 2020

Reviewed by: Trust Board

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Next review Due:

Date: September 2022

1 Introduction

1.1 White Woods Primary Academy Trust ((hereafter referred to as the PAT) is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees, and others that we deal with, who have concerns about any aspect of the PAT's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.

1.2 Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the PAT and have a duty to report such matters. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the PAT. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. However, employees should not simply ignore their concerns.

1.3 This policy document makes it clear that employees can come forward and express their concerns without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. This Confidential Reporting Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the PAT. Employees will be commended for raising concerns within the PAT rather than overlooking a problem or "blowing the whistle" outside.

1.4 Line Managers should take in to account the translation and interpretation needs of the individual. This Code can be made available in other languages and formats on request.

1.5 The policy applies to all employees and those contractors working for the PAT, for example, agency staff, builders, drivers. It also covers suppliers and those providing services under a contract with the PAT.

1.6 These procedures are in addition to the PAT's complaints procedures and other statutory reporting procedures.

1.7 This policy has been discussed with the relevant trade unions and has their support.

2.1 Aims and Scope of This Policy

This policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied

- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in good faith.

2.2 There are existing procedures in place to enable you to lodge a grievance relating to your own employment including any breach of the PAT's Equal Opportunities Policies or bullying and harassment. The Confidential Reporting Code is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. These include:

- conduct which is an offence or a breach of law
- disclosures relating to miscarriages of justice
- health and safety risks, including risks to 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 of clients, or other unethical conduct.

2.3 Thus, any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of officers or members of the PAT or others acting on behalf of the PAT can be reported under the Confidential Reporting Policy. This may be about something that:

- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the PAT subscribes to; or
- is against the PAT financial policies; or
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

Anonymous Allegations

3.1 This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible.

3.2 Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful and more difficult to investigate, however, these will still be considered but will be assessed on the:

- seriousness of the issues raised
- credibility of the concern; and
- likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

Confidentiality

4.1 All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may need to come forward as a witness.

Safeguards

5.1 Harassment or Victimisation

5.2 The PAT is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees.

5.3 The PAT recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what you are saying is in good faith, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.

5.4 The PAT will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.

5.5 Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any other employment procedures that already affect you.

5.6 The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 gives legal protection to employees who disclose information, in good faith, about alleged wrongdoing.

Untrue Allegations

6.1 If you make an allegation in good faith and with reasonable belief, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

How to Raise a Concern

7.1 You should raise concerns with the Chair of Governors. Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Employees who wish to make a written report are invited to use the following format:

- please mark envelope "to be opened by addressee only"
- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates);
- the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.

7.2 The earlier you express the concern the easier it is to take action.

7.3 Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there

are reasonable grounds for your concern.

7.4 Obtain advice/guidance on how to pursue matters of concern from the School Business Manager.

7.5 You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague or your trade union first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns.

7.6 You may invite your trade union, professional association representative, work colleague or a friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

How the Academy Trust Will Respond

8.1 The PAT will respond to your concerns. Do not forget that testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

8.2 Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by management or through the disciplinary process
- be referred to the police
- be referred to the external auditor
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

8.3 In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. The overriding principle which the PAT will have in mind is the public interest.

Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

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

8.5 Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the person to whom it is expressed will write to you:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how we propose to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms, and

- telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

8.6 The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the PAT will seek further information from you.

8.7 Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a union, professional association representative, work colleague or a friend.

8.8 The PAT 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 PAT will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure.

8.9 The PAT accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, we will keep you informed of developments every twenty-eight days and the outcome of any investigation.

How the Matter Can Be Taken Further?

9.1 This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within the PAT to raise concerns. The PAT hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If, having exhausted all internal processes, you feel it is necessary to take the matter outside the PAT, the following are possible contact points:

- your trade union
- your local Citizens Advice Bureau
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- a relevant voluntary organisation
- the police

9.2 You are advised that disclosure to the press is not encouraged and will not normally be legally protected.