



HIGHGATE

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Whistle-blowing Procedure

April 2023

Introduction

Highgate Primary School has a commitment to achieving a high standard of integrity and accountability. The purpose of this procedure is to assist in this by assuring that complaints of fraud, malpractice and improper conduct may be raised without fear of harassment or detriment. The school will ensure that all complaints and reports are given proper and serious consideration.

The school gives the further commitment that this procedure will not undermine other existing procedures such as grievance procedures, disciplinary procedures or child protection procedures. All allegations raised under the whistle-blowing procedure will be referred at the appropriate stages for consideration under the appropriate separate procedures.

This procedure will not lessen in any way the school's commitment to a climate of openness and cooperation, where the opportunities should always exist for discussion of difficulties and problems of all kinds with management.

Who and what is covered by the procedure?

This procedure applies to all staff. It applies to non-employees, such as volunteers, agency teachers and contractors' staff.

This procedure applies to:

- disclosures which qualify under the Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) as criminal offences
- failure to comply with legal obligations
- miscarriages of justice
- health and safety dangers
- environmental risks
- concealing information about any of the foregoing

Additionally, it applies to disclosures that are related to:

- suspected financial or fraudulent malpractice such as embezzlement or bribery
- corruption, dishonesty, etc.
- unauthorised use of public funds
- breaches of agreed LA or governing body procedures
- breaches of established standards of good practice
- improper conduct of other kinds

This policy does *not* apply to allegations that staff or volunteers have harmed children. These should be referred directly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), and in her absence, one of the Deputy DSLs. If such allegations relate to the headteacher, they should be referred to the Chair of Governors, who will then refer to the Local Authority Designated Officer directly.

Protection for Individuals Making Complaints

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act, a worker has the right not to suffer detriment or be unfairly dismissed as a result of speaking out about malpractice.

Any worker who raises a complaint will have full protection against harassment or discrimination which may happen as a consequence. Any such harassment or discrimination, or attempts at deterrence from making complaints, will be regarded as a disciplinary matter.

Complainants will not be asked to demonstrate the validity of any allegation themselves. No action will be taken against the complainant if complaints are found to be invalid provided that the complainant has acted in good faith, believing the complaint to be justified.

The procedure is intended to provide a means for suspected fraud or malpractice to be raised, rather than to pursue individual grievances. The procedure should therefore not be used in place of the agreed grievance procedure.

It is completely unacceptable for the procedure to be used to further private disputes and make unfounded allegations for malicious or vexatious reasons.

Procedures for Making Complaints

If an individual has concerns, s/he should consider, in the first instance, raising them directly through school line management channels.

If the complainant has exhausted this line of complaint or if s/he believes, for whatever reason, that this will not prove to be an effective avenue of complaint, s/he can raise the matter directly with the school's Inclusion Manager who will appoint an investigating officer. The investigating officer will in most cases be the Headteacher.

An external channel of complaint, directly to the Local Authority, makes it possible for individuals to raise complaints outside the normal channels of line management. This channel may be used when the individual believes, in good faith, that action is unlikely to be taken if the usual channels are used, or when a complaint has previously been raised with management.

Allegations need not be made in writing, but an acknowledgement will be made in writing within ten days of receipt of written allegations.

The investigating officer will offer an appointment to meet the complainant in order to explore the allegations. This meeting should take place away from the normal workplace.

The investigating officer will then decide whether the matter will be referred for consideration under existing procedures and to consider in particular whether immediate action needs to be taken under child protection procedures. Other investigations should be subject to an initial investigation under the whistle-blowing procedure but, if they are found to be potentially valid, they will then be referred for consideration under the disciplinary procedure, to the police or to the district auditor. The investigating officer will then take the matter up with governors, school management, the audit department or other appropriate parties.

The investigating officer will maintain the confidentiality of the complainant, ensuring also that any individual who is the subject of the allegations is given details of the allegations in order to respond.

The investigating officer will produce a written report relating to the allegations, detailing the outcome of the investigation and further action, if any, to be taken. A copy of the report will be given to the complainant.

A standing committee of elected members of the schools governing body should be convened to hear the allegations from the complainant if s/he is dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigating officer's report.

The complainant is entitled to trades union representation at any meetings convened for the purpose of consideration of complaints heard under the whistle-blowing procedure.

Confidentiality

The investigating officer will guarantee confidentiality at the point of raising the complaint. Confidentiality should be maintained during the investigation and any hearings, except in circumstances where there is the need for disclosure of identity, for example due to cross examination of the complainant as a witness.

In order to further preserve confidentiality, a complainant may raise complaints via a trades union, rather than personally. In such circumstances trades union representatives will themselves have full protection from detriment and discrimination, provided that they act in accordance with the procedure with regard to information so disclosed.

Anonymous complaints may be considered, particularly when the matter of complaint is extremely serious.

Links to other policy documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Allegations of Abuse Against Staff
- Complaints Procedures
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

Staff responsible

Rebecca Lewis:	Deputy Headteacher
William Dean:	Headteacher

Policy Monitoring and Review

A copy of this policy is available to all staff and parents and is published on the school website. Parents will be made aware of this policy when their child is admitted to this school.

This policy is reviewed every two years by the Governors' Safeguarding Committee.