



PROTECTED DISCLOSURE POLICY (WHISTLE BLOWING)

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Date of next review:	December 2017	Owner:	DFO
Type of policy:	Trust	LGB or Board approval:	Board

Whistle blowing Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

1.1 Victoria Academies Trust is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of service and ethical standards.

1.2 Whistle blowing is the reporting by employees or ex-employees, of wrongdoing such as fraud, malpractice, mismanagement, breach of health and safety law or any other illegal or unethical act either on the part of management, the Board, Governing Body or by fellow employees.

1.3 This policy has been introduced in line with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (which you can consult at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/23/contents>) to enable employees to raise issues of concern in an appropriate manner.

2. Purpose

2.1 This policy aims to:

- Encourage employees to feel confident in raising serious concerns
- Establish a fair and impartial investigative procedure
- Provide avenues for employees to raise concerns and receive appropriate feedback
- Ensure that employees receive a response to concerns and are aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied
- Ensure that employees will be protected from any reprisals or victimisation by the academy, provided that there is reasonable belief that the matter disclosed tends to show wrongdoing and that the disclosure has been made in an appropriate manner and in good faith

3. Scope

3.1 This policy may be used by all employees at an academy to raise concerns where the wellbeing of others or the academy itself is at risk.

3.2 The term worker broadly includes employees, contractors, agency employees, trainees and a person who is or was subject to a contract to undertake work or services for the academy.

3.3 The Whistle blowing policy is designed to sit alongside the Victoria Academies Trust Grievance Policy and Procedure and Victoria Academies Trust Complaints Procedure. As a guideline, concerns, which should be raised through these routes, are as follows:

- Employment related issues should be raised through the Victoria Academies Trust' Grievance Policy and Procedure
- The Victoria Academies Trust Complaints Procedure can be used for complaints about Trustees or Governors.

4. Equal Opportunities

4.1 The whistle blowing procedure must always be applied fairly and in accordance with employment law and Victoria Academies Trust Equal Opportunities Policy.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 Victoria Academies Trust is responsible for maintaining fair, consistent and objective procedures for matters relating to whistle blowing.

5.2 The Headteacher has overall responsibility for the internal organisation, control and management of each academy.

6. Timing

6.1 The whistle blowing procedure should normally be conducted within the timescales laid down in this document. However, if there is a valid reason to do so, timescales can be varied. If this is initiated by management, the employee should be given an explanation if this occurs and informed when a response or meeting can be expected. Delays should not normally exceed 10 working days.

7. What to raise concerns about

7.1 The Public Interest Disclosure Act lists matters about which concerns can be raised, which are as follows:

- a) That a crime has been committed, is being committed, or is likely to be committed
- b) That a person has failed, is failing, or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject, for example a breach of contract.
- c) That a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur
- d) That the health and safety of an individual has been, is being, or is likely to be endangered
- e) That the environment has been, is being or likely to be damaged
- f) That information tending to show any of a) to e) above has been concealed or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

8. Victoria Academies Trust assurances to employees

8.1 To ensure employees have the right to disclose a concern

8.1.1 Employees have the right to disclose a concern/issue if the academy does not deal with the matter. However, the duty of fidelity is implied by the law in every contract of employment and prohibits employees from disclosing employers' confidential information, unless it is in the public interest that information is disclosed or unless the Academy fails to properly consider or deal with the issue.

8.2 To protect employees

8.2.1 If a worker makes a disclosure on one or more of the matters listed above and they have a reasonable belief that the concern is real and they are acting in good faith, the worker will not suffer any detriment, even if after investigation it transpires that the concern is

unfounded. Victoria Academies Trust will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of any worker raising a genuine concern.

8.2.2 If a worker requests that their identity is protected, the academy will not disclose it unless required to do so in law. If the situation arises where the academy is unable to resolve the concern without revealing the employee's identity (for instance because the employee's evidence is needed in court), the academy will discuss with the worker how the matter should proceed. However, it must also be stated that if a worker chooses not to disclose their identity it will be much more difficult for us to look into the matter or to protect your position or to give you feedback. Accordingly, while we will consider anonymous reports, it will not be possible to apply all aspects of this policy for concerns raised anonymously.

9. Internal procedure

9.1 Stage one - notification

9.1.1 The worker (the Representer) raising the concern should do so orally or in writing to their line manager or to the Headteacher. The Representer has the right to have the matter treated confidentially.

9.1.2 If the line manager or the Headteacher believes the concern to be genuine and that it is appropriate to use the Whistle Blowing procedure, the manager should contact SIPS Governance (the Assessor).

9.1.3 Should it be alleged that the Clerk to the Governing Body is involved in the alleged malpractice, a member of the Board should be asked to act as Assessor.

9.1.4 If the Representer feels unable to raise their concern with their line manager or the Headteacher in the first instance, they may contact the Assessor direct. If this occurs, the Representer will be asked to justify why they feel unable to raise the concern with their line manager or the Headteacher.

9.2 Stage two - the meeting

9.2.1 The Assessor will interview the Representer within ten working days, in confidence, or earlier if there is an immediate danger to loss of life or serious injury and will:
Obtain as much information as possible from the Representer about the grounds for the belief of malpractice;

Consult with the Representer about further steps which could be taken;

Inform the Representer of appropriate routes if the matter does not fall within the Victoria Academies Trust Whistle blowing Procedure;

Report all matters raised under this procedure to the Governing Body's Responsible Officer (a Victoria Academies Trust Board of Director's representative).

9.2.2 At the interview with the Assessor, the Representer may be accompanied by a recognised trade union representative or a work colleague. The Assessor may be accompanied by a note taker.

9.3 Stage three - the outcome

9.3.1 Within ten working days of the interview, the Assessor will recommend to the Headteacher one or more of the following:

- The matter be investigated internally by the school
- The matter be investigated by the external auditors appointed by the school
- The matter be reported to the Department for Children, Schools and Families
- The matter be reported to the Police

9.3.2 The grounds on which no further action is taken may include:

The Assessor is satisfied that, on the balance of probabilities, there is no evidence that malpractice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur;

The Assessor is satisfied that the Representer is not acting in good faith;

The matter is already (or has been) the subject of proceedings under one of the school's other procedures or policies;

The matter concerned is already the subject of legal proceedings, or has already been referred to the police, the external auditors, the Department for Education and Skills or other public authority.

9.3.3 Should it be alleged that the Headteacher is involved in the alleged malpractice, the Assessor's recommendation will be made to the Responsible Officer of the Governing Body.

9.3.4 The recipient of the recommendation (Headteacher or Responsible Officer) will ensure that it is implemented unless there is good reason for not doing so in whole or in part. Such a reason will be reported to the next meeting of the Governing Body.

9.3.5 The conclusion of any agreed investigation will be reported by the Assessor to the Representer in writing within twenty eight days.

9.3.6 If the Representer has not had a response within the above time limits, he or she may appeal to the school's external auditors, but will inform the Assessor before doing so.

9.3.7 The Representer may at any time disclose the matter on a confidential basis to a solicitor for the purpose of taking legal advice.

10. External contacts

10.1 Whistle blowing to an external body without first going through the internal procedure is inadvisable without compelling reasons. A reason may be that the Representer is not

content with the conclusion of the Assessor. In particular, this means being careful about what is said to the media. Compelling reasons could be the involvement of the senior managers, serious health and safety issues or possible discrimination. The external bodies which could be used are:

- The Department for Education
- Member of Parliament
- National Audit Office
- Health and Safety Executive
- Police

10.2 If you do not feel able to raise your concern in the ways outlined above, you should consult the Public Interest Disclosure Act for information about other routes by which a disclosure may be made.

11. Malicious Accusations

11.1 Deliberately false or malicious accusations made by a Representer will be dealt with under the Victoria Academies Trust disciplinary procedure.

11.2 The academy will ensure the Representer is protected from any form of victimisation or discrimination.

12. Review

12.1 This policy will be reviewed every two years in consultation with the recognised trade unions.