Oxbridge Lane Primary

Confidential Reporting and Whistleblowing Policy

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Policy prepared by (name and designation)	Lauren Amerigo Headteacher
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Introduction

Oxbridge Lane Primary School is committed to ensuring that all employees and stakeholders behave with honesty and integrity and expect all staff to maintain high standards in accordance with their contractual obligations and the school's policies and procedures particularly operating within the school's Staff Behaviour Policy / Code of Conduct.

However, all schools may face things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. **A culture of openness, accountability and vigilance from all staff** is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring or to address them when they do occur.

The school is committed to fostering a culture of openness, transparency and accountability where all staff feel safe and confident to raise concerns. Concerns raised in good faith are welcomed and viewed as an opportunity to improve practice, strengthen safeguarding arrangements and maintain high standards across the school.

This policy is not a substitute for normal line management processes but an addition to them. Staff should always first consider using normal line management for raising concerns particularly around issues to do with curriculum or general day to day school life. The line manager should always inform the Headteacher of any actions taken. When the issue is regarding someone's conduct with children this MUST be shared directly with the Headteacher. This policy is only for the purpose of raising concerns about wrongdoing and is not a substitute or alternative for existing procedures such as the Grievance, Disciplinary Procedures for staff or the complaints procedure.

This policy should only be used where all other existing internal procedures are felt to be inappropriate or when a member of staff, for whatever reason, feels inhibited in going through the normal line management. As an example, therefore, if a member of staff has a personal grievance then it must be raised through the grievance procedure. The existence of this policy does not prevent staff from raising concerns through their trade union if they so wish. The policy is therefore not a route through which employees can raise concerns about mismanagement which may arise from weak management rather than malpractice.

Aims of Policy

- To encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected;

- To provide staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns;

- To reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns in good faith without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be a mistaken.

This Policy takes account of the Whistleblowing Arrangements Code of Practice issued by the British Standards Institute and Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work). This Policy does not form part of an employee's contract of employment and is notintended to have contractual effect. It is provided for guidance to all members of staff at the school and the school reserves the right to amend its content at any time.

This Policy reflects the school's current practices and applies to all individuals working at all levels of the organisation, including the Governors, Headteacher, members of the Senior Leadership Team, employees, consultants, contractors, trainees, part-time and fixed-term workers, casual and agency staff (collectively referred to as "staff" in this policy) and volunteers who are advised to familiarise themselves with its content.

Legislative Framework

This policy is underpinned by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA), incorporated within the Employment Rights Act 1996. The Act provides legal protection for workers who make qualifying disclosures in the public interest regarding wrongdoing, malpractice or risks within the workplac

What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

- criminal activity;

- child protection and/or safeguarding concerns; * See note at the end of this policy

- miscarriages of justice;

- danger to health and safety;

- damage to the environment;

- failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory

requirements;

- financial fraud or mismanagement;
- negligence;
- breach of the school's internal policies and procedures including its Code of Conduct;
- conduct likely to damage the school's reputation;
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information;
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

A 'whistleblower' is a person who raises a genuine concern in good faith relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of the school's activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this policy.

This policy should not be used for complaints relating to staff's own personal circumstances, such as the way you have been treated at work. In those cases, you should follow the Grievance Policy and Procedure.

If staff are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy they should seek advice from the Headteacher (Miss L Amerigo) and if the matter is in relation to an alleged wrongdoing by the Headteacher then staff should seek the advice of the Chair of Governors (Mr H Smith). The Headteacher's advice may be sought at any time and the line manager who may receive information first regarding another member of staff must always keep the Headteacher informed of any actions taken.

Raising a whistleblowing concern

Oxbridge Lane Primary School hopes that, in many cases, staff will be able to raise any concerns with their Line Manager, speaking to them in person or putting the matter in writing if they prefer. They may be able to agree a way of resolving a concern quickly and effectively. In some cases they may refer the matter to the Governing Body.
However, where the matter is more serious, or you feel that your Line Manager has not addressed your concern, or you prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, you should contact one of the following:

The Headteacher

The Chair of Governors/The Governor with responsibility for whistleblowing matters

The Headteacher will arrange a meeting with the 'whistleblower' as soon as practicable to discuss their concern. They will record sufficient details to enable the

matter to be thoroughly investigated. As a minimum, the Headteacher will record the name of the employee but also indicate whether the individual wishes his or her identity to remain confidential, if possible and the nature of the concern. In some cases, it will not be possible to maintain confidentiality and the Headteacher should explain this to the employee. In such instances the employee will have the choice of either withdrawing or agreeing to his/her identity becoming known to enable the concern to be effectively dealt with.

Staff may bring a colleague or trade union representative to any meetings under this policy who must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

The School will take notes and produce a written summary of the concern raised and provide the 'whistleblower' with a copy as soon as practicable after the meeting. The school will also aim to give the 'whistleblower' an indication of how it proposes to deal with the matter.

Confidentiality

Oxbridge Lane Primary School hopes that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if a member of staff wants to raise his or her concern confidentially, the school will endeavour to keep his or her identity secret in so far as it is possible to do so when following this policy and procedure. If it is necessary for anyone investigating that member of staff's concern to know the 'whistleblower's' identity, the school will discuss this with the member of staff first.

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. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible and have been made in good faith. 'Whistleblowers' who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to one of the contacts listed above and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality.

If an individual misuses the policy and procedure e.g. by making malicious or repeated unsubstantiated complaints against colleagues this could give rise to action under the school's Disciplinary Procedure. If the Headteacher knows or has a suspicion that an employee comes into this category then advice will be sought from the Chair of Governors who will help to determine what action should be taken.

If you are in any doubt, you can seek advice from Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work), the independent whistleblowing charity, which offers confidential advice and guidance to whistleblowers.

Protect – Speak Up Stop Harm (Independent Whistleblowing Charity)
Telephone: 020 3117 2520
Website: https://protect-advice.org.uk

Anonymous Disclosures

Anonymous concerns will be considered at the school's discretion. In determining whether to investigate an anonymous disclosure, consideration will be given to:

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

Concerns against Governors

If a concern against a Governor is received then this will be treated in the same way as any other concern. It will receive the same serious consideration. The concern will be raised by the Headteacher with the Chair of Governors who will decide how it should be dealt with.

If the concern is against the Chair of Governors then clearly this process cannot be followed. In such circumstances, the concern will be taken directly to the Headteacher who will decide in consultation with the Headteacher and the Governor with responsibility for Whistleblowing matters (if this is not the Chair of Governors), how it should be dealt with. In normal circumstances such a concern would be referred to the Department for Education for action.

External disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases staff should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for staff to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. All staff are encouraged to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline and holds a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of school staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a service provider. The law allows staff to raise a concern in good faith with a third party, where the member of staff reasonably believes it relates mainly to their actions or something that is legally their responsibility. However, staff are encouraged to report such concerns internally first. Staff should contact one of the other individuals set out above for guidance.

If the matter of whistleblowing is against the 'regime' in school and therefore cannot be managed by senior leaders, then whistleblowers are advised to contact their Local Authority in the first instance. OFSTED may also be contacted directly.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills

(the chief inspector) about matters relating to the regulation and inspection of establishments and agencies for children's social care services.

OFSTED
Picadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
0300 123 3155
Email: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

Investigation and outcome

Once a member of staff has raised a concern, the school will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. The school will inform the 'whistleblower' of the outcome of its assessment. The member of staff raising the concern may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.

In most cases a panel of three Governors will investigate any issue. In rare cases the school may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable the school to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

The school will aim to keep the member of staff informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent the school from giving specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. The member of staff is required to treat any information about the investigation as strictly confidential.

If the school concludes that a 'whistleblower' has made false allegations maliciously, in bad faith or with a view to personal gain, the 'whistleblower' will be subject to disciplinary action under the School's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Whilst the school cannot always guarantee the outcome a particular member of staff is seeking, the school will try to deal with the concern fairly and in an appropriate way. If a member of staff is not happy with the way in which his or her concern has been handled, he or she can raise it with one of the other key contacts outlined above.

There are no rights of appeal against any decisions taken under this procedure. However, an employee or the Headteacher will have the right to refer any particular case to the Chair of Governors for review.

Any member of staff raising a concern under the procedure will be kept informed of progress by the Headteacher, including, where appropriate, the final outcome. However, in certain circumstances, e.g. where disciplinary action under the School's

Disciplinary Procedure has resulted from the concern, it may not be appropriate to provide specific details due to the confidentiality and sensitivity of such matters.

External Reporting

Where appropriate, concerns may also be reported to:

- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council / Prince Regent Street Trust
- Ofsted
- NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line
- The Department for Education
- The Health and Safety Executive
- The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

Staff are encouraged to seek advice before making an external disclosure.

Protection and support for 'whistleblowers'

It is understandable that 'whistleblowers' are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. The school aims to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns in good faith under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern in good faith. Detrimental treatment would include dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If a member of staff believes that he or she has suffered any such treatment, he or she should inform the Headteacher immediately. If the matter is not remedied the member of staff should raise it formally using the School's Grievance Policy and Procedure.

Staff must not threaten or retaliate against 'whistleblowers' in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

All staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing. Staff are invited to comment on this policy and suggest ways in which it might be improved. Comments, suggestions and queries should be addressed to the Headteacher in the first instance.

Keeping Children Safe (Safeguarding)

All issues relating to the safety and welfare of children must be reported immediately in accordance with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and the current version of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE). If a member of staff suspects that there is a serious safeguarding issue that they feel

that the Headteacher is not taking seriously or thatthey believe there is a serious safeguarding issue involving the Headteacher they should in the first instance contact the Chair of Governors before seeking external support. Further information regarding keeping children safe can be found in the School's Child Protection Policy.

Staff may also contact the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line where they believe safeguarding concerns are not being appropriately addressed.
NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line
0800 028 0285
help@nspcc.org.uk

GDPR

Any sharing of personal information must follow each school or setting's agreed protocols in relation to the General Data Protection Regulations. Information that places a child at risk of significant harm must be shared immediately and recorded in line with the school or setting's recording protocols and information sharing protocols. Anything which steps outside of the policy or places private information in a public arena would be classified as a data breach and must be reported accordingly. See information sharing policy for further information.

This policy should be read and in line with the Local Authority's practice on whistleblowing.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the school's:

Child Protection Policy and Safeguarding Policy

Staff Behaviour Policy