

RAISING CONCERNS AT WORK ("WHISTLEBLOWING") CODE

Approval Date: December 2021

Review Date: December 2024

1. Introduction

1.1 Westfield Academy is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we wish to encourage employees, and others that we deal with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Academy's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

1.2 Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the Academy. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Academy. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

1.3 This Confidential Reporting Code is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise concerns within the Academy rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside. This Code makes it clear that you can do so without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. Westfield is committed to listening to concerns, taking them seriously and ensuring that they are dealt with promptly and fairly.

1.4 The Code applies to all employees and those contractors working for the Academy on our premises, for example agency staff, trainees on vocational/work experience, consultants, builders, drivers.

1.5 The Code is in addition to the Academy's Complaints Procedure and other statutory reporting procedures.

1.6 In addition to the Academy's commitment to protect employees who raise concerns, the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 provides a worker with potential protection from detriment and dismissal for making a 'qualifying disclosure'. The Act encourages workers to raise matters internally with employers and where an internal whistleblowing policy exists, it steers the worker to use this. (Please note: there are legal requirements for 'qualifying disclosures' to be protected under the Act). In addition, an employee who raises a concern under this Code in good faith will be protected from any claim of defamation by the Council's insurance policy.

2. Aims and Scope of The Code

2.1 This Code 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 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 (e.g., Grievance, Harassment and Bullying) which make provision for you to raise a concern relating to your own employment. This 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 the law;
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice;
- health and safety risks, including actions likely to cause physical danger to any person or to give rise to a risk of significant damage to property;
- damage to the environment;
- the unauthorised use of public funds;
- possible fraud and corruption;
- sexual or physical abuse;
- other unethical conduct.
- failure to take reasonable steps to report and rectify any situation which is likely to give rise to a significant, avoidable cost or loss of income to the Academy or would otherwise seriously prejudice the Academy;
- abuse of power or the use of Academy powers and authority for any unauthorised or ulterior purpose.

Please note that this is not a comprehensive list but is intended to illustrate the range of issues which might be raised under this Code.

2.3 Thus, serious concerns which you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of employees or governors of the Academy or others acting on behalf of the Academy can be reported under the Confidential Reporting Code. This may be something that:

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

2.4 The Academy provides guidance to employees on the standards it expects from its employees through the policies agreed by the Academy, for example:

- Staff Code of Conduct
- Health and Safety Policy
- Equalities and Diversity Policy
- Safeguarding Policies

and through procedures, agreed with the relevant recognised trade unions and professional associations, for addressing poor standards which include:

- Disciplinary Procedure
- Grievance Procedure
- Bullying and Harassment Policy

3. How to Raise A Concern

3.1 As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your immediate manager or their line manager. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if you believe that management (a member or members of the Academy leadership team) is involved, you should approach one of the following:

- The Headteacher
- The Chair of Governors

3.2 If these channels have been followed but you continue to have concerns or believe that those listed above are implicated then you should approach one of the following:

- The Director of Children's Services
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA)
- The Academy's Auditors

3.3 Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. You will need to include the background and history of the concern (giving relevant details, e.g., names, dates) and the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation. When raising a concern, you must declare any personal interest you have in the matter.

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

3.5 Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate that there are reasonable grounds for a concern. However, you must not attempt to investigate a concern or accuse individuals directly.

3.6 Advice and guidance on how to pursue matters of concern may be obtained from:

- Officers in the Personnel Team of the Local Education Authority (01823 356776)
- Officers within Internal Audit, Treasury (01823 355548); or
- Your trade union/professional association representative.

3.7 Advice may also be obtained from Public Concern at Work, an independent charity which provides confidential advice for employees. Their telephone number is 020 7404 6609.

3.8 You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague 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.

3.9 You may invite your trade union/professional association representative or work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised. Meetings can be arranged off-site if you wish.

4. How the Academy Will Respond

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

4.2 The action taken by the Academy will depend on the nature of the concern. Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by a senior member of staff
- be referred to the Police;
- be referred to an external auditor or the EFA;
- be dealt with under a more appropriate Academy procedure.

4.3 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 Academy will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for

example, child protection or discrimination issues or financial irregularities) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

4.4 Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation.

4.5 If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

4.6 Within ten working days, the person with whom you raised the concern will write to you:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how they 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.

4.7 The Academy will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For example, if you are required to give evidence the Academy will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure.

4.8 The Academy accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed and you will be informed of the final outcome of the investigation. In some circumstances, however, it may not be possible to reveal the full details where this relates to personal issues involving a third party or legal constraints.

4.9 If you make an allegation in good faith but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you.

5. How the Matter Can Be Taken Further

5.1 This Code is intended to help you raise concerns you may have within the Academy. Hopefully, you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not, there are other people you can contact and these are:

- the External Auditor;
- your trade union/professional association;
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations (for example Health and Safety Executive);
- the Police;
- your own solicitor.

5.2 If you do take the matter outside the Academy, you should ensure that you do not misuse confidential information. The person you contact should be able to advise you on this.

5.3 The Code, in line with the legislation, provides protection for employees who raise concerns internally. It is inconsistent with the satisfactory operation of the Code to pursue such concerns with the media (newspapers, TV, radio, etc) and employees who do so are unlikely to be protected by the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act, and may be subject to disciplinary action.

5.4 This Code encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. Concerns expressed anonymously or through a third party are much less powerful and may not be possible to investigate.

6. Harassment or Victimisation

6.1 Westfield recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. However, you have a responsibility to the Academy and to those for whom you are providing a service to raise serious concerns using the approach outlined in this Confidential Reporting Code.

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

6.3 Disciplinary action will be taken against an employee if they try to stop you from raising a concern or if an employee is responsible for any act of retribution against you for raising a concern.

6.4 Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect you.

7. Confidentiality

7.1 All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. It must be appreciated, however, that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information, and that a statement may be required as part of the evidence and/or you may need to come forward as a witness at the appropriate time.

8. False Allegations

8.1 If an allegation is knowingly made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken.

9. Review

9.1 The Headteacher has overall responsibility for monitoring the Code and should report annually to the Governing Body on the operation of the Code.

9.2 The Code will be reviewed every three years by the Business Committee of the Governing Body.