WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

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Document summary

Whistleblowing is the raising of a concern, either within the workplace or externally, about a danger, risk, malpractice or wrongdoing which affects the organisation or others.

This policy provides a clear framework which is intended to give people the confidence to raise workplace concerns without fear of reprisal or victimisation.

This policy is based upon current policies operating in our academies, as provided by East and West Sussex County Council, with reference to policies in various Diocesan Multi-Academy Trusts.

Whistleblowing policy – raising concerns

Key points

- The public have an expectation that the Hurst Education Trust will run its Multi Academy Trust with the highest standards of openness and integrity.
- This policy encourages, enables and reassures all employees to raise workplace concerns about risk, malpractice and wrongdoing. The principles of this policy apply equally to governors and trustees.
- Employees will not be penalised, victimised or harassed for raising workplace concerns and this policy sets out guidelines to provide assurance.
- All concerns will be treated in confidence. You are encouraged to put your name to allegations, as anonymous concerns are more difficult to investigate and provide feedback. However, anonymous concerns can still be raised.
- This policy is about raising a workplace concern where the risk is possibly to the organisation or others, as opposed to a grievance, The Safeguarding Policy in operation in academies should be read in connection with this policy in the event of concerns about the safety and welfare of children.

Introduction

1.1. Policy Procedures regarding concerns in the workplace are designed to ensure problems are resolved. However, when the concern feels serious because it involves possible health and safety, or a person's welfare, malpractice or a wrongdoing that might affect others or the organisation, it can be difficult to know what to do.

1.2. It is not uncommon to think that your observations are only a suspicion and that the concern may not be your business. Also, feelings of disloyalty towards colleagues, managers or to the organisation may result in inaction. You may decide to say something but find that you have spoken to the wrong person, you may have raised it before and nothing was done or you may have raised it in the wrong way and are not sure what to do next.

1.3. The public have an expectation that we will run the organisation with the highest standards of openness and integrity. Furthermore, the Hurst Education Trust Board and Senior Managers in the Trust are committed to running this organisation in the best way possible and to do so, your help is needed. This policy is designed to reassure you that it is safe and acceptable to speak up and raise any workplace concerns you may have and that you are showing loyalty and commitment to the organisation by raising concerns.

1.4. Rather than wait for proof, you should raise the matter as early as possible and when it is still a concern. Speaking out early could stop the issue from becoming more serious, dangerous or damaging.

1.5. The Whistleblowing Policy is primarily for concerns where the interests of the organisation or others are at risk. Therefore, if something is troubling you that you think we should know about and look into, please use this policy.

Who does this policy apply to?

1.6. This policy applies to all Hurst Education Trust employees whether full-time or part-time, including in schools or within the central Multi Academy Trust team.

1.7. All employees have the right to raise concerns, which could be about the actions of other employees, private contractors, governors, volunteers or the Local Authority.

Our assurances to you

1.8. The Hurst Education Trust is committed to this policy. If you raise a genuine concern under this policy, you will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering from any form of retribution as a result. Provided you are acting honestly and in good faith, it does not matter if you are mistaken. Of course, this assurance is not extended to someone who maliciously raises a matter they know not to be true.

1.9. With these assurances, you can raise your concerns openly. However, we do recognise that there may be circumstances when you would prefer to speak to someone in confidence first. If this is the case, please say so at the outset. If you ask us not to disclose your identity, we will not do so without your consent unless required to do so by law. Please note that there may be times when we are unable to resolve a concern without revealing your identity and in such cases how best to proceed will be discussed.

1.10. Please note that if you report concerns anonymously it will be much more difficult for us to look into the matter. We will also not be able to protect your position or provide feedback.

1.11. If you are unsure about raising a concern, you can get independent advice from the independent whistleblowing charity Public Concern at Work (see contact details under External Contacts).

What kind of concerns would I disclose under this policy?

1.12. This policy covers any serious concerns about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of employees or Trustees of the Trust or others acting on behalf of the Trust. This could be something against Trust policy; that falls below established standards of practice; or which relates to improper conduct or criminal activity (including fraud).

1.13. Concerns that fall within this policy could include, but are not limited to:

- practice that puts people or the Trust at risk;
- sexual harassment;
- a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed;
- health and safety risks, including risks to the public;
- damage to the environment;
- something that is against the Trust's policies;
- miscarriages of justice;
- failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements;
- bribery;
- financial fraud or mismanagement;
- negligence;
- breach of internal policies and procedures;
- conduct likely to damage the Trust's reputation;
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information;

- examination fraud;
- information relating to any of these concerns that is being or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

1.14. This list is not exhaustive and if your concern does not fall into any of the categories above, you are still encouraged to raise it.

1.15. Please note that the Hurst Education Trust Grievance Policy exists to enable you to lodge a grievance relating to any matter concerning your own employment that you are unhappy about. It is very important that the Whistleblowing Policy is not used to raise individual grievances, and nor is it to be a mechanism for challenging decisions, practices and policies with which you disagree.

How do I raise a concern internally?

1.16. Please note that you do not have to have firm evidence before raising a concern. You only need to have a reasonable belief that wrongdoing is taking place. Any evidence you can provide will be useful in helping the Trust investigate your concern, although it could be that you are not able to provide any evidence. We do ask that you explain as fully as you can the information or circumstances that gave rise to your concern.

1.17. Please raise your concern(s) either orally or in writing, to your immediate line manager, a more senior manager or The Chief Executive of the Hurst Education Trust. In the case of schools, contact the Head teacher or Chair of Governors. It is your choice as to how you raise a concern. You may wish to communicate via email, over the phone, or arrange a meeting away from the workplace.

1.18. Should you not wish to report your concerns using the normal management structure or if your concerns are about management, you can use any of the contacts listed below:-

- Chair The Diocese of Chichester Education Trust (DCAT) – 01273 833636
- Chair of the Audit and Resources Committee 01273 833636
- Chief Executive - 01273 836588
- Chief Financial Officer – 01273 836915
- Diocesan Director of Education – 01273 425687

1.19. If you wish to raise your concerns in writing to any of the above, please address your letter to:

(Marked 'confidential')

Hurst Education Trust
Hurstpierpoint College
College Lane
Hurstpierpoint
West Sussex
BN6 9JS

School based employees whose concerns relate to the head teacher / principal may wish to approach the Chair of Governors, the Hurst Education Trust Chief Executive or any of the individuals listed above.

1.20. Remember to allow us to investigate and assess the situation it would be helpful to provide as much information as possible. We encourage you to put your name to allegations, as anonymous concerns are more difficult to investigate, and we want to be able to take any appropriate action to protect you and provide you with feedback

How will the Trust respond?

1.21. Your concern will be assessed and what appropriate action will be considered. This may involve a formal review, an internal enquiry or a more formal investigation. You will be told who your point of contact is to be, what further assistance we may need from you, and agree a timetable for feedback. If you ask, we will write to you summarising your concern and setting out how we propose to handle it. If we have misunderstood the concern or if there is any information missing, please let us know.

1.22. When you raise the concern please comment on how you think the matter might be resolved. Please tell us at the outset if you have any personal interest in the matter. If we think your concern falls within the Grievance policy or another relevant policy, you will be informed.

1.23. Regardless of what action may be appropriate in resolving your concern, we will not tolerate victimisation or harassment, and will take all necessary steps to protect you from any detriment.

1.24. Wherever possible, we will give you feedback on the outcome of any investigation. Please note, however, that we might not be able to tell you about the precise actions we take where this would infringe the duty of confidence we owe to other persons.

1.25. Whilst we cannot guarantee that we will respond to all matters in the way that you might wish, we will strive to handle the matter fairly and properly. By using this policy, you will help us to achieve this.

External contacts

1.26. The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigation and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases the employee should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally. The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for the employee to report his/her concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. Employees are strongly encouraged to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. If an employee is not satisfied with the Local Governing Body's response, the manager should ensure that s/he is made aware with whom s/he may raise the matter externally. For concerns about the safety and welfare of children in our academies, the Safeguarding Policy provides details of who to contact: the Executive Principal or Head Teacher, the chair of the governing body or the Local Authority Designated Officer. Should staff not feel able to raise concerns they can call the NSPCC whistleblowing helpline on 0800 028 0285.

1.27. External contacts are identified with contact details at the end of this policy but could include:-

- **Protect** a registered charity that employees can contact for advice to assist them in raising concerns about poor practice at work. The charity also provides advice to employers as to the possible ways to address these concerns.

  Whistleblowing or grievance? | Protect - Speak up stop harm

  A free and confidential Advice Line

- recognised trade union
- an officer of HET
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations

1.28. The employee should be aware that if s/he chooses to take a concern outside the organisation, it is the employee's responsibility to ensure that confidential information is not disclosed, i.e.,

confidential information, in whatever format, is not handed over to a third party.

Monitoring and Review

The Trust will review the policy on a regular basis.

External Contacts

Regulator/Organisation	Contact details
Health and Safety Executive Contact the Health and Safety Executive Protect people against the risk to health or safety arising out of work activities.	HSE Concerns Team Tel: 0300 0031647 in office hours, (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 8.30am – 5pm; Wednesday 10am-5pm) Online form: Tell us about a health and safety issue - Contact HSE
Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	Tel: 0300 303 3344 Email: whistleblowing@ofqual.gov.uk Online form: Complaints procedure - Ofqual - GOV.UK
Ofsted http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/contact-us/whistleblower-hotline Inspect and regulate services which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages.	Tel : 0300 123 3155 (Monday to Friday from 9.00am -5.00pm). Email: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk Address: WBHL, Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD
Department for Education Contact the Department for Education (DfE) - GOV.UK	Tel: 0370 000 2288 Address: Ministerial and Public Communications Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD
External Audit Carpenter Box Chartered Accountants Worthing Accountants | Carpenter Box	Tel: 01903 234094 Email: info@carpenterbox.com Address: Carpenter Box/Sumer Audit Amelia House, Crescent Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1RL

Protect Contact our Advice Line - Protect - Speak up stop harm An independent charity who run a confidential whistleblowing helpline.	Tel: 020 3117 2520 Webform: Contact Our Advisors Write: The Green House 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road London E2 9DA
Employment **Fair Work Agency**	**Fair Work Agency - GOV.UK**

Document History:

Whistleblowing Policy	
Policy Type:	Statutory – Trust Policy
Policy Source:	ESCC and WSCC Policies
Model Policy Approval:	HET Trust Board
Review period:	3 Years

Date Reviewed	Amendments Made	Date Model Approved by Trust Board	Next Review Due
Jun 2022	New Trust Policy	17/6/2022	Jun 2025
May 2025	Updated contacts	15/5/2025	May 2028
April 2026	Updated to take account of Employment Rights Act 2025; updated contacts		April 2029