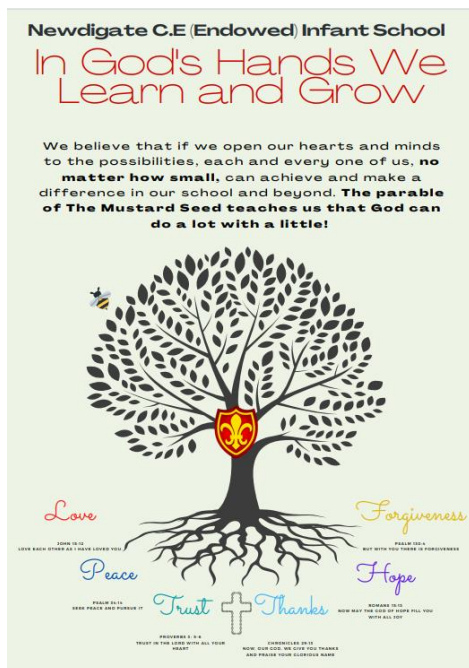




Mole Valley Gateway Federation C of E Infant School's (Newdigate Infant School and St Michael's Infant School)

Whistleblowing Policy



Author	Nicola Cleather (Federation Head teacher)
Created	December 2024
Source	Surrey County Council
Review cycle	3 years (September 2027) Finance and Resources Committee

Introduction & Purpose of Policy

St Michael's C.E Infant and Newdigate C.E Infant School is committed to the highest possible standards of honesty, openness, probity and accountability. It seeks to conduct its affairs in a responsible manner, to ensure that all its activities are openly and effectively managed, and that the School's integrity and the principles of public interest disclosure are sustained.

In line with that commitment, all members of staff and those working on behalf of the School who have serious concerns about any aspect of the School's work are encouraged to come forward and voice those concerns as follows:

- a) with their immediate manager and/or more senior managers. Where any member of staff decides to report a serious incident, whether anonymous or not, this will be treated as a 'protected, internal disclosure' i.e. there will be no adverse repercussions for the member of staff.
- b) through an external, independent and confidential service provided via the **Navex Global** helpline. Freephone: 0800 069 8180.

The Governing Body is mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and this policy will be applied fairly and consistently to all staff employed at the school as well as those carrying out work for the School, for example, governors, volunteers, agency workers, contractors or consultants. The term 'member(s) of staff' is used in this document for simplicity but is intended to include this broader range of individuals covered by this policy. Copies of this policy, which incorporates the key aspects of Surrey County Council's whistle blowing policy, are available to all members of staff in their school safeguarding folder.

Purpose of the Policy

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the School. However, staff may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the School. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. Each person working for the school, needs to realise that they not only have the right, but also a duty to report any improper actions or omissions. The school also recognises and appreciates that staff who raise concerns regarding malpractice or wrongdoing are an asset to the school, and not a threat. This policy makes it clear that they can raise concerns without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. The whistleblowing policy is intended to encourage and enable staff to raise serious concerns within the Council.

This policy aims to:

- encourage staff to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provide avenues to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure that staff receive a response to their concerns and that they are aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied
- reassure staff that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have made any disclosure in good faith.

Who is covered by the Policy?

The policy applies to all school employees whether full-time or part time, permanent or temporary; members of the school and those carrying out work on the school premises, for example, agency workers, contractors, consultants. It also covers providers of works, services and supplies, including the schools external contractors. However, to facilitate the reading of this policy, the terms 'staff' or 'members of staff' have been used, with the intention to cover all individuals mentioned above.

Scope of the Policy

The whistleblowing policy is intended to cover serious concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures, in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. These include:

- Conduct which is an offence or a breach of law
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation
- Disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- Health and safety risks, including risks to the public or pupils as well as other staff
- Damage to the environment
- Information relating to the above issues that has been, or is likely to be, deliberately concealed.

Examples of the above categories are likely to include:

- The unauthorised use or misuse of public funds
- Possible fraud and corruption
- Sexual, physical or psychological abuse of pupils at the school
- Harassment & bullying of staff
- Breaches of codes of conduct
- Malpractice in examinations and assessments.

Therefore, any serious concerns that a member of staff has about any aspect of the School's service provision or the conduct of staff or others connected with the School can be reported under this whistleblowing policy where that member of staff has a reasonable belief in the validity of those concerns and they relate to one of the specified areas set out above.

A member of staff who makes such a protected disclosure has the right not to be dismissed, subjected to any other detriment, or victimised, because he/she has made a disclosure.

Safeguarding Against Harassment or Victimisation

The school is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees. It is recognised that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If a member of staff has a reasonable belief that what they are saying is true, they have nothing to fear because they will be doing their duty to their employer and/or those for whom they are providing a service. The school will take appropriate action to protect staff when they raise a concern, by supporting the member of staff and consider action under the appropriate procedure against the person or persons responsible for the reported acts, provided the member of staff:

- Discloses the information in good faith
 - Believes the concern to be true
 - Does not act maliciously or make false allegations
 - Does not seek any personal gain
- and provided the allegations relate to one of the categories covered by the scope of the policy.

There are national guidelines to help you as a whistleblower. See the government guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing>

There is also a whistleblowing charity Protect that has a helpline on 020 3117 2520. This helpline offers independent and confidential advice to those who are unsure whether, or how, to raise a concern.

Unsubstantiated Allegations

If a member of staff makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. If, however, an allegation is made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action is likely to be taken.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence but, at the appropriate time, the whistle blower may be asked to come forward as a witness and this will be discussed with them.

Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages staff to put their name to their allegation wherever possible.

This policy encourages staff to put their name to their allegation whenever possible. Where a concern is raised via the external confidential Navex Global Service, the whistleblower can choose to provide Navex Global with their name and contact details, which will not be passed to the Council without express permission from the individual. This enables Navex Global to ask for further information on the concern, if required.

The Council will take all concerns raised seriously. When carrying out an initial review of a concern, the council will take into account the following factors:

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

The School will take all concerns raised seriously. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will still be given consideration at the discretion of the Governing Body. In exercising this discretion, the Governing Body would consider the seriousness of the issues raised, the credibility of the concern and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from sources which can be attributed.

How to Raise Concerns

There are two ways to raise a concern:

1. As a first step, a member of staff should normally raise concerns with his/her immediate line manager, the Headteacher or the School's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL) where this is appropriate to the nature of the concern. If the concerns relate to allegations that a member of staff or volunteer may have harmed a child or behaved in a way that indicates he/she poses a risk of harm to children, the allegation should be raised with the Headteacher in the first instance, in accordance with the school's child protection and safeguarding policy. Where the allegations involve the Headteacher, the member of staff should raise the matter with the Chair of the Governing Body or, should the whistle blower feel the need to involve a person external to the school, his/her trade union/professional association or the Area Schools Officer, who will refer allegations to other officers of the Council as relevant to the nature of the concerns.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing, but the earlier the concern is expressed the easier it is to take any required action. Members of staff who wish to make a written report are encouraged to include the following information:

- The background and history of the concern, giving relevant dates and providing as much supporting evidence as possible;
- The reason(s) why they are particularly concerned about the situation.

The earlier the concern is expressed, the easier it is to take action. In order to assist with the investigation, staff should provide as much detail and supporting evidence as possible. Staff are not expected to prove that an allegation is true, only to have sufficient grounds for concern. The whistleblower may invite a recognised Trade Union representative or a work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns raised.

2. While concerns will usually be raised internally, the Council recognises that staff may feel unable to do this, and that they may wish to contact an independent, external organisation, such as Navex Global, in order to report something. Navex Global is an external and independent organisation which specialises in providing a confidential hotline service for whistleblowing and

can be contacted any time, night or day, in complete confidence with any relevant concerns. The call will not be traced or monitored. Freephone: 0800 069 8180. How the council will respon

How the School Will Respond

The school will investigate and respond to all concerns raised by staff or service users through any channels including Navex Global and the Contact Centre. While it is not essential that the concerns be provided in writing, the person receiving the concern will, ensure that a written account of it is made. This will help with the subsequent investigation by facilitating clear record-keeping. When a concern is raised directly with a Headteacher/staff member, they should undertake the following actions:

- Take the concern seriously
- Consider the concerns fully and objectively
- Recognise that raising a concern can be a difficult experience for employees
- Ensure confidentiality
- Refer to a member of staff with appropriate seniority, to agree the level at which the concern will be investigated and identify who will take responsibility for co-ordinating the enquiry.

Staff members who are under investigation will not be involved in the investigation process. In schools, this will include Governing Body members.

Initial Enquiry

In order to protect the individuals involved 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 and who should be appointed to conduct it. The overriding principle is that of the public interest. If urgent action is required, for example if the welfare of pupils may be at risk, this action will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

The purpose of the initial inquiry is to ascertain if the conduct or behaviour involves a senior member of staff, so that further enquiries and investigation can be progressed accordingly.

Preliminary Review

A preliminary review establishes the need to carry out an investigation. Further to the results of the initial enquiry and preliminary review, and at the discretion of senior management, the following steps will then need to be considered:

- Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures, e.g. child protection, bullying or harassment or disciplinary, will normally be referred for investigation and consideration under those procedures.
- Where there are any concerns about financial impropriety or criminal activity, the concern will be referred to Surrey County Council's Internal Audit Team before taking any other action, which may include reporting to the police.
- Concerns indicating unlawful activity should be reported to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services at Surrey County Council, who is the Council's Monitoring Officer.
- Suspected incidents of malpractice relating to examinations will be reported to the appropriate awarding body at the earliest opportunity.

Investigation

Depending on the nature of concerns, investigation may be carried out under the Disciplinary Policy or the Strategy against Fraud & Corruption.

Investigation Timescales Within 14 days of a Navex Global report being received, the person who is dealing with the concern that has been raised will respond in writing:

- Acknowledging that the concern has been received
- Supplying information on staff support mechanisms, and
- Advising whether further investigations or action is required and, if not, why not.

A further update will also be provided 28 days after the report was received, advising of additional progress made and the estimated date a final response will be available. If the whistleblower has chosen to remain anonymous and non-contactable, they will need to contact Navex Global or their original reporting route in order to receive updates.

Investigation process

The impartial investigating manager appointed to undertake the investigation will establish the facts of the matter and assess whether the concern has foundation and can be resolved internally. Other people may need to be interviewed to provide further information and/or clarification concerning the issue(s) raised.

It is essential that written records of all interviews be kept throughout the investigation, together with written details of any action taken. The investigation will result in a written report and recommendations for corrective action which will be passed to the manager responsible for deciding whether formal action shall be taken.

Where any meeting is arranged involving an individual member of staff, which can be offsite, a recognised Trade Union representative or a work colleague may also attend. The Governing Body will take steps to minimise any difficulties which may be experienced as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if a member of staff is required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Governing Body will arrange for them to receive appropriate procedural and/or legal advice.

A member of staff raising directly with a senior officer a concern will be, subject to legal constraints, advised in writing of the outcome of the investigation and, where appropriate, what action is being taken.

Monitoring arrangements

The Governing body has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy and will maintain a record of concerns raised and the outcomes (but in a form which does not compromise confidentiality) and will report as necessary to officers at Surrey County Council. Whistle blowing procedures are defined, documented, widely circulated and reviewed at appropriate intervals, and in respect to the LA whistleblowing procedures. The practical aspects of monitoring are to assess whether:

- The policy is being used appropriately
- Concerns are being handled and investigated properly
- There are any discernible patterns of concern across the Council
- The policy has been effective in identifying and deterring malpractice, and
- More needs to be done to raise awareness of the policy.

Links with other policies:

- Complaints Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Health & Safety Policy

Additional Contact Details:

Designated Safeguarding Lead

The School's DSL is: Nicola Cleather

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead

Vickie Leney (St Michael's)

Rachel Moon (Newdigate)

Area Schools Officer

Telephone:; (SE) 01737 737960]

Surrey County Council's Internal Audit Team

Telephone: 020 8541 9299

Email: internal.audit@surreycc.gov.uk