

Whistleblowing

What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is when someone raises a concern about a dangerous or illegal activity or any wrongdoing within their organisation, which is in the public interest. Raising a concern is known as "blowing the whistle" and is a vital process for identifying risks to people's safety.

Wrong-doing covered by this ‘public interest disclosure’ includes:

- someone’s health and safety is in danger;
- damage to the environment;
- a criminal offence;
- not obeying the law;
- covering up wrongdoing;
- misusing public funds; (and in schools)
- actions that negatively affect the welfare of children

What the law says about whistleblowing

If you disclose information about wrongdoing, the law protects you from being treated unfairly or losing your job. A disclosure qualifies for protection if you are a worker and you disclose something about an organisation. A disclosure must be about something that affects the general public.

Every maintained school* should have a school whistleblowing policy that protects staff members who report colleagues they believe are doing something wrong or illegal, or who are neglecting their duties. The school whistleblowing policy has a key role to play in safeguarding children. This may be part of your Child Protection Policy (and will probably also be mentioned within your Financial Regulations when it refers to the reporting of financial mismanagement or irregularity).

Governing bodies of maintained schools are responsible for agreeing the school’s whistleblowing policy. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) Chapter 2, paragraph 4 says that organisations should have in place clear arrangements that reflect the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

**Since Working Together (2018) applies to all schools, this means all schools must have a whistleblowing policy. The principles of the Francis’ Report are outlined in the next section.*

Complaints that don’t count as whistleblowing

- Personal grievances (eg bullying, harassment, discrimination) aren’t covered by whistleblowing law, unless your particular case is in the public interest.

What should staff do if they have concerns?

Sharing information or talking through a concern can be the first step to helping an organisation identify problems and improve their practices.

Where staff have a concern they should aim to report it internally first before using an external ‘prescribed person or body’. Making a report to an external person should only be undertaken where the staff member thinks the school will cover it up, would treat them unfairly if they complained or have raised the matter before, but the concern hasn’t been dealt with. Schools should identify a member of staff and a governor to receive concerns of this kind; they should also identify the local authority contact person.

How to raise a concern:

- You should voice your concerns, suspicions or uneasiness as soon as you feel you can. The earlier a concern is expressed the sooner action can be taken.
- Try to pinpoint exactly what practice is concerning you and why.
- Approach your immediate manager, Headteacher, or the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- If your concern is about your immediate manager/Headteacher, or you feel you need to take it to someone outside the school contact the designated Governor or the Local Authority representative.
- Make sure you get a satisfactory response –don’t let matters rest.
- You should then put your concerns in writing, outlining the background and history, giving names, dates and places where you can.
- A member of staff is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation but will need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the concern.

Staff members with concerns should follow these steps and speak to:

- Their Line Manager
- A specified person (or governor) in school
- The Local Authority representative
- Their Union or Professional Association
- A prescribed Person or Body (eg. Ofsted, Education Funding Agency, Children’s Commissioner or NSPCC)
- alternatively contact the whistleblowing charity, ‘Public Concern At Work’
www.pcaw.org.uk

In our school the specified person who should be contacted about a whistleblowing concern is

If your concern is about this person, you should contact.....

The Local Authority Safeguarding Adviser is Jo Barclay, who can be contacted by telephone: 03330 131078 mobile: 07775 030021 email: jo.barclay@essex.gov.uk

Don't think “what if I'm wrong” – think “what if I'm right”

Reasons for whistle blowing:

- Each individual has a responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour
- To prevent the problem worsening or widening
- To protect or reduce risks to others
- To prevent becoming implicated yourself

What stops people from whistle blowing:

- Starting a chain of events which spirals
- Disrupting the work or project
- Fear of getting it wrong
- Fear of repercussions or damaging careers
- Fear of not being believed

NSPCC Whistleblowing advice line

When to call

If you have any concerns about a child in your workplace you should raise this with your employer or organisational safeguarding lead in the first instance.

You should call the Whistleblowing Advice Line if:

- your organisation doesn't have clear safeguarding procedures to follow
- you think your concern won't be dealt with properly or may be covered-up
- you've raised a concern but it hasn't been acted upon
- you're worried about being treated unfairly.

You can call about an incident that happened in the past, is happening now or you believe may happen in the future.

What to expect when you call

One of the call handlers will connect you with a trained practitioner.

They will discuss your concerns with you and:

- talk you through the whistleblowing process
- take details of your concern
- explain the protection available to you if you need it
- get relevant agencies and authorities to take action on your concern.

You don't have to tell us who you are if you don't want to - you can remain anonymous. If you do give us your name and contact details you can ask us not to share these with other agencies.

The NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line

[Whistleblowing Advice Line | NSPCC](#)

Call [0800 028 0285](tel:08000280285)

Email help@nspcc.org.uk

Additional guidance and further reading

- **The school’s Whistleblowing Policy**
- **DfE webpage**
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/whistleblowing-procedure-for-maintained-schools>
- **Keeping children safe in education –statutory guidance for schools and colleges**
(September 2023)
- **What to Do If You’re Worried a Child Is Being Abused** (2015)
- **Working Together to Safeguard Children** (2018)
www.tso.co.uk
- **National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children**
www.nspcc.org.uk
- The NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line
[Whistleblowing Advice Line | NSPCC](#)
Call [0800 028 0285](tel:08000280285)
Email help@nspcc.org.uk