



Salisbury Plain
Academies

Whistleblowing Policy

SALISBURY PLAIN ACADEMIES POLICIES

VERSION CONTROL SHEET

POLICY NAME: Whistleblowing

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The Salisbury Plain Academy Trust are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. This whistleblowing policy and procedure supports this commitment.

1 Scope

This policy gives employees and others with genuine concerns about malpractice or wrongdoing in one of the Academy's a way to voice those concerns without fear of victimisation.

Often it is those closest to an organisation who realise that there is something wrong. Sometimes people are reluctant to act upon their concerns because they think that they are being disloyal, or because they are afraid that they might be victimised if they speak up.

There are existing procedures in place (e.g. Grievance, harassment and bullying) which make provision for employees to lodge a concern relating to their own employment. This whistleblowing policy is intended to complement those procedures by covering concerns that appear to fall outside their scope. This concern may be about something that is:

- Unlawful, including financial or fraudulent malpractice such as embezzlement, bribery, corruption, dishonesty, etc;
- Against establishment standards of practice;
- Improper conduct.

Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures, e.g. child protection or financial irregularities will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

2 Definitions

A 'nominated Trust member' is identified as the first point of contact for whistleblowing queries. The nominated person could be a Trustee, or an AAB Member, but not a staff AAB Member. The nominated person is Philip Howie, Trustee and Chair of the Leadership, Management and HR committee.

3 Aims

The purpose of this policy is to provide you with the help and support you need to speak up and be confident that you can do so safely. We will take your concerns seriously and ensure that they are dealt with promptly and fairly.

4 How to raise a concern

Initial concerns should be raised with the nominated Trust member. If the employee believes that this trust member is implicated then the employee should approach the Chair of the Board or another member of the Trust Board.

Within 48 hours, the nominated Trustee/AAB Member will contact you to arrange to meet you to discuss your concerns. Before the meeting, it would be helpful if you write down what you consider the problem to be, giving names, dates and places where possible. If there are any other documents that you think might be helpful, please try to bring these with you. You are advised to take a friend, colleague or professional association / union representative with you to the meeting with the Trustee/AAB Member.

You are encouraged to raise your concern in person, or through your professional association / union representative on your behalf, because concerns that are expressed anonymously are difficult to investigate. However, the Academy will exercise its discretion in deciding whether to investigate an anonymous allegation. The factors taken into account will include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised;
- the credibility of the allegation; and
- the likelihood of being able to confirm the allegation from attributable sources.

5 Informing External Agencies

Within the Academy all staff have a duty of confidentiality. The duty of confidentiality is implied by the law in every contract of employment and prohibits employees from publicly disclosing employers' confidential information, unless it is in the public interest that the information is disclosed or unless the Academy fails to follow required procedures. Other legal restrictions on the disclosure of information, for example under data protection legislation, may also apply.

Whistleblowing to an external agency without first going through the internal procedure is a breach of the Academy's Code of Conduct. The external agencies which may be used if disclosure is permitted under paragraph 6.1 are:

- Department for Education (EFA). (In these circumstances, the DfE/EFA will assess whether all school processes have been applied and that the Assessor has done everything possible to resolve the issue. If this is not the case, the DfE/EFA will refer the matter back to the Assessor);
- Member of Parliament;
- National Audit Office;
- Health and Safety Executive;
- Police.

Whistleblowing to the media is not appropriate or permitted in any circumstances.

6 How we will respond

After the initial meeting, the nominated Trustee/AAB Member will arrange for discreet initial enquiries to be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and if so, what form it should take.

The nominated Trustee/AAB Member will write to you within 10 days of your initial meeting to:

- acknowledge that your concern has been received
- outline our understanding of what the issues are; and
- indicate how we propose to deal with the matter.

If the nominated Trustee/AAB Member decides that it is appropriate for an investigation to be carried out, this will either be done by them, or by another Trustee/AAB Member who is asked to investigate – the investigating officer. However, it may sometimes be necessary for a concern to be referred to the police, an external auditor, the Education Funding Agency, or for it to be the subject of an independent enquiry. In addition, where it is established that the complaint involves issues of bullying or unlawful discrimination, it will be necessary to involve Human Resources.

If an investigation is carried out, you will always be informed of the final outcome. It might not be possible to give you full details of the outcome if it contains personal details of a third party, because we have a duty to protect personal information under the Data Protection Act.

7 How will the Academy treat whistleblowers?

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

Disciplinary action will be taken against any member of staff who tries to stop another employee from raising a concern or who is responsible for any act of retribution or victimisation against an employee who raises a concern.

Where an employee may have been party themselves to an act of possible gross misconduct on which they are now 'blowing the whistle' this could be considered in mitigation. They are not, however, exempt from disciplinary action.

Disciplinary action may be taken against employees if they contact the media with concerns about conduct at work without first following the steps set out in this policy.

The Academy Trust will make every effort to protect an employee's identity when s/he raises a concern and does not want her/his name to be disclosed. It must be appreciated however, that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by the employee may be required as part of the evidence.

If you raise a concern, you will be given the opportunity to feed back any issues or problems you may have experienced as a result. The purpose of this is to ensure that employees who have raised concerns in good faith do not suffer as a result.

8 Queries

If you have any queries about this policy please contact the CEO, Principal, Trust Board, or your HR Advisor.