



# Burdett-Coutts

& Townshend Foundation Primary School

## WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY



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We would like to acknowledge the work of other colleagues in the drafting of this policy. We have drawn on a range of sources including policies from other schools, good practice guides, published schemes, LDBS, LA and any statutory guidelines where appropriate.



## Our Vision

At Burdett-Coutts & Townshend Foundation CE Primary School, we encourage our learners to be ambitious for themselves and for others. We challenge and support them in questioning the world and in finding solutions. Our Christian values of friendship, compassion and service underpin our ethos: *"I can do all things through Him who gives me strength"*.

We want our learners to be ready to learn, to be respectful of each other and to feel safe.

## Introduction

Burdett-Coutts and Townshend Foundation CE Primary School (collectively referred to as "the School" in this policy) is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity and expects all individuals working at all levels of the organisation (collectively referred to as "Staff" in this policy) to maintain high standards in accordance with their contractual obligations and the School's policies and procedures.

However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring or to address them when they do occur.

This procedure is not a substitute for normal line management processes but an addition to them. Staff should always first consider using normal line management for raising concerns. This procedure is only for the purpose of raising concerns about wrongdoing and is not a substitute or alternative for existing procedures such as the Grievance, Disciplinary Procedures for Staff or the Complaints procedure.

This procedure should only be used where all other existing internal procedures are felt to be inappropriate or when a member of Staff, for whatever reason, feels inhibited in going through the normal line management.

As an example, therefore, if a member of Staff has a personal grievance then it must be raised through the grievance procedure; it would not be appropriate for it to be raised through this procedure.

The existence of this procedure does not prevent Staff from raising concerns through their trade union if they so wish. The procedure is therefore not a route through which Staff can raise concerns about mismanagement which may arise from weak management rather than malpractice.



## The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

This Act became Law on 2nd July 1999. Its purpose is to protect Staff from victimisation as a result of raising a concern in good faith. It does this by affording protection to Staff who raise concerns in accordance with certain criteria. Similarly, the Act also describes where protection will not be available when a disclosure is made in certain ways.

### Aims of Policy

- To encourage Staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected;
- To provide Staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns;
- To reassure Staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns in good faith without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

This policy takes account of the Whistleblowing Arrangements Code of Practice issued by the British Standards Institute and Public Concern at Work.

This policy does not form part of a Staff's contract of employment and is not intended to have contractual effect. It is provided for guidance to all members of Staff at the School and the School reserves the right to amend its content at any time.

This Policy reflects the School's current practices and applies to all individuals working at all levels of the organisation, including the Governors, Head Teacher, members of the Senior Leadership Team, school staff, consultants, contractors, trainees, part-time and fixed-term workers, casual and agency staff.

All are advised to familiarise themselves with its content.

### What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:



- criminal activity;
- child protection and/or safeguarding concerns; \* See note at the end of this policy
- miscarriages of justice;
- danger to health and safety;
- damage to the environment;
- failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements;
- financial fraud or mismanagement;
- negligence;
- breach of the school's internal policies and procedures including its Code of Conduct;
- conduct likely to damage the School's reputation;
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information;
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

A 'whistleblower' is a person who raises a genuine concern in good faith relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of the School's activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this policy.

This policy should not be used for complaints relating to Staff's own personal circumstances, such as the way you have been treated at work. In those cases, you should follow the Grievance Policy and Procedure.

If Staff are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy, they should seek advice from the Head Teacher and if the matter is in relation to an alleged wrongdoing by the Head Teacher then Staff should seek the advice of the Chair of Governors.

## Raising a whistleblowing concern

The School hopes that in many cases Staff will be able to raise any concerns with their Line Manager, speaking to them in person or putting the matter in writing if they prefer. They may be able to agree a way of resolving a concern quickly and effectively. In some cases, they may refer the matter to the Governing Body.

However, where the matter is more serious, or you feel that your Line Manager has not addressed your concern, or you prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, you should contact one of the following:

- The Head Teacher
- The Chair of Governors



The Head Teacher will arrange a meeting with the 'whistleblower' as soon as practicable to discuss their concern. They will record sufficient details to enable the matter to be thoroughly investigated. As a minimum the Head Teacher will record the name of the Staff but also indicate whether the individual wishes his or her identity to remain confidential, if possible and the nature of the concern.

In some cases, it will not be possible to maintain confidentiality and the Head Teacher should explain this to the Staff. In such instances the Staff will have the choice of either withdrawing or agreeing to his/her identity becoming known to enable the concern to be effectively dealt with.

Staff may bring a colleague or trade union representative to any meetings under this policy who must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

The School will take notes and produce a written summary of the concern raised and provide the 'whistleblower' with a copy as soon as practicable after the meeting. The School will also aim to give the "whistleblower" an indication of how it proposes to deal with the matter.

## Confidentiality

The School hopes that Staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if a member of Staff wants to raise his or her concern confidentially, the School will endeavour to keep his or her identity secret in so far as it is possible to do so when following this policy and procedure.

If it is necessary for anyone investigating that member of Staff's concern to know the whistleblower's identity, the School will discuss this with the member of Staff first.

The School does not encourage Staff to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if the School cannot obtain further information. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible and have been made in good faith.

Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to one of the contacts listed above and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality.

If an individual misuses the policy and procedure e.g. by making malicious or repeated unsubstantiated complaints against colleagues, this could give rise to action under the School's Disciplinary Procedure. If the Head Teacher knows or has a suspicion that a member of Staff comes into this category, then s/he will take advice from the Designated Governor who will help to determine what action should be taken.



If you are in any doubt you can seek advice from Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are:

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work - independent whistle blowing charity)

Helpline: 020 3117 2520

E-mail: [whistle@protect-advice.org.uk](mailto:whistle@protect-advice.org.uk)

Website: [www.pcaw.co.uk](http://www.pcaw.co.uk)

## Concerns against Governors

If a concern against a Governor is received, then this will be treated in the same way as any other concern. It will receive the same serious consideration. The concern will be raised by the Head Teacher who will decide how it should be dealt with.

If the concern is against the Chair of Governors, then clearly this process cannot be followed. In such circumstances, the concern will be taken directly to the Headteacher who will decide in consultation with the Head Teacher and the Governor with responsibility for Whistleblowing matters how it should be dealt with.

In normal circumstances such a concern would be referred to the Department for Education for action.

## External Disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases Staff should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for Staff to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media.

We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of school staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a service provider. The law allows Staff to raise a concern in good faith with a third party, where the member of staff reasonably believes it relates mainly to their actions or something that is legally their responsibility.





However, Staff are encouraged to report such concerns internally first. Staff should contact one of the other individuals set out above for guidance.

## How the Governors will respond

The action taken by the Head Teacher / Governing Body will depend on the nature of the concern. In order to protect individuals and the governing body, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

Concerns or allegations that fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection, disciplinary or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

The matters raised will be investigated internally to establish basic facts. At that stage a decision will be made on whether:

- to complete the investigation internally;
- to refer the matter to the External Auditor;
- to refer the matter directly to the Police;
- to organise an independent inquiry;
- to take no action.

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

## Feedback to Staff raising a concern

The Head Teacher / Governing Body will inform the Staff who raised the concern where possible, practical and appropriate within ten working days of a concern being received, either in writing or by other means as appropriate:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how it proposes to deal with the matter;
- stating whether any initial enquiries have been made;
- stating if further investigations will take place, and if not, giving reasons.

The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and the Staff(s) who raised the concern will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved, and the clarity of the information provided.



Initial contact with the Staff(s) may be outside of the workplace to protect their identity and, if necessary and mutually acceptable, subsequent meetings may be held away from work and / or outside normal working hours.

When any meeting is arranged, the Staff(s) who raised the concern may be accompanied by a Trade Union or professional association representative, colleague or other representative of their choice as long as that person is not involved in the concern being discussed.

The Head Teacher / Governing Body accepts Staff who raise a concern may need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, they will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.

## Investigation and outcome

Once a member of Staff has raised a concern, the School will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. The School will inform the 'whistleblower' of the outcome of its assessment. The member of Staff raising the concern may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.

In most cases a panel of three Governors will investigate any issue. In rare cases the School may appoint an investigator or team of investigators, including Staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable the School to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

The School will aim to keep the member of Staff informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent the School from giving specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. The member of Staff is required to treat any information about the investigation as strictly confidential.

If the School concludes that a 'whistleblower' has made false allegations maliciously, in bad faith or with a view to personal gain, the 'whistleblower' will be subject to disciplinary action under the School's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Whilst the School cannot always guarantee the outcome a particular member of Staff is seeking, the School will try to deal with the concern fairly and in an appropriate way. If a member of Staff is not happy with the way in which his or her concern has been handled, he or she can raise it with one of the other key contacts outlined above.

There are no rights of appeal against any decisions taken under this procedure. However, the Staff or the Head Teacher will have the right to refer any particular case to the Designated Governor for review.



Any member of Staff raising a concern under the procedure will be kept informed of progress by the Head Teacher, including, where appropriate, the final outcome. However, in certain circumstances, e.g. where disciplinary action under the School's Disciplinary Procedure has resulted from the concern, it may not be appropriate to provide specific details due to the confidentiality and sensitivity of such matters.

## Protection and support for 'whistleblowers'

It is understandable that 'whistleblowers' are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. The School aims to encourage openness and will support Staff who raise genuine concerns in good faith under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern in good faith. Detrimental treatment would include dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern.

If a member of Staff believes that he or she has suffered any such treatment, he or she should inform the Head Teacher immediately. If the matter is not remedied, the member of Staff should raise it formally using the School's Grievance Policy and Procedure.

Staff must not threaten or retaliate against 'whistleblowers' in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

All Staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing. Staff are invited to comment on this policy and suggest ways in which it might be improved. Comments, suggestions and queries should be addressed to the Head Teacher in the first instance.

## Safeguarding

If a member of Staff suspects that there is a serious safeguarding issue that they feel that the Head Teacher is not taking seriously or that they believe there is a serious safeguarding issue involving the Head Teacher, they should in the first instance contact the Chair of Governors.



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## Harassment or Victimisation

The Head Teacher / Governing Body recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal.

The Head Teacher / Governing Body will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take the appropriate action to attempt to protect Staff who raise a concern in good faith. However, this does not mean that if the Staff raising a concern is already the subject of other employment procedures e.g. disciplinary or redundancy, that those procedures will be halted or suspended.

The Head Teacher / Governing Body will take steps to minimise any difficulties that the Staff(s) may experience as a result of raising a concern. The Staff might, as a last resort, be required to give evidence in Court or in disciplinary hearings. The Head Teacher / Governing Body will advise and support the Staff about this, if necessary, to reduce any anxiety they may have.

## Confidentiality

The Head Teacher / Governing Body will do its best to protect the identity of the Staff who raises a concern and does not want his or her name to be disclosed to colleagues and / or the person(s) under investigation.

Where an investigation takes place, the investigating officers will not disclose your identity unless they are required to do so by law. This might happen if a formal, written statement is needed as evidence, for example, or where the matter is referred to a third party such as the Police for investigation.

In no circumstances will the Staff's identity be revealed before he or she is consulted.

## Untrue or Malicious Allegations

The School's intention in having a Whistleblowing Policy is to encourage Staff to raise legitimate concerns. Consequently, if a Staff makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them.

Where, however, a Staff is shown to have made malicious or vexatious allegations, or indeed undertaken their own investigations, surveillance or interviewed or visited witnesses, disciplinary action may be taken.



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## Monitoring and review

The Governing Body will monitor and review this policy annually and update, modify or amend it as it considers necessary to ensure the welfare of Staff, pupils and those visiting the school.



## Appendix 1

DON'T think: "what if I'm wrong?" THINK: "what if I'm right?"

### Reasons for whistleblowing:

- 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.

### 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 easier and sooner action can be taken.
- Try to pinpoint exactly what practice is concerning you and why.
- Approach your immediate manager, Head Teacher, or the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- If your concern is about your immediate manager/Head Teacher, or you feel you need to take it to someone outside the school, contact The Local Authority.
- 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.

### What happens next?

You should be given information on the nature and progress of any enquiries. Your employer has a responsibility to protect you from harassment or victimisation.



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No action will be taken against you if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith.

Allegations made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain will be seen in a different light and disciplinary action may be taken.

## Self reporting

There may be occasions where a member of Staff has a personal difficulty, or perhaps a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging on their professional competence.

Staff have a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their line manager so professional and personal support can be offered to the member of Staff concerned.

Whilst such reporting will remain confidential in most situations, this cannot be guaranteed where personal difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children.

## Further advice and support

It is recognised that whistle blowing can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support is available from your line manager, HR department and/or your professional trade union.