



ST. MARY'S
ACADEMY TRUST

St Mary's Academy Trust

Whistleblowing Policy

Date agreed by Board: ...12/06/2018.....

Date to be reviewed: ...11/06/2020.....

Introduction

St Mary's Academy Trust (The Trust) is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with the commitment, employees and others with concerns about any aspect of the Trust's work have a duty to come forward and voice those concerns.

Employees and others who work with/support the Trust are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the organisation. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or The Trust. Indeed it may also be the case that someone with a concern is not aware how best to raise their concerns. It is important to stress that any concern raised through this Policy will be treated confidentially.

This Policy also makes it clear that legitimate concerns can be raised without fear of reprisals. It is human nature to be apprehensive about raising a concern as often there is also fear of harassment or victimisation. Many, therefore, may feel it is easier to ignore the concern rather than report their suspicion of wrongdoing.

This Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within The Trust irrespective of seniority, rank or status, rather than overlooking a problem or reporting the matter externally. It does not override workers' legal rights to make a protected disclosure to certain third parties under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA), as incorporated into the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Who does the Policy apply to?

This Policy applies to all employees of The Trust, together with contractors employed by The Trust and partner organisations.

What should be reported?

There are existing procedures in place to enable individuals to lodge a grievance relating to their own employment, including issues relating to bullying. This Policy is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. These include serious concerns about:

- A criminal offence (actual or potential)
- A failure to comply with a legal obligation
- A miscarriage of justice
- A misuse or theft of public money and/or physical assets
- Abuse of working arrangements, time recording or other policies e.g. recruitment procedures
- A misuse or abuse of The Trust's computer, its systems, data or information
- An act that breaches The Trust's financial regulations or policies
- Actions which endanger the health and safety of staff, pupils or the public
- An abuse of power or position
- Actions which cause damage to the environment
- Suspicions of bribery
- Improper conduct by a member of staff

Whistleblowing contacts

The initial points of contact to report concerns are:

Melanie Priestley, Chief Executive Officer, telephone 01226 282721, email m.priestley@smat.org.uk

Sharon Cook, Chair of Trust, telephone 01226 282721, email s.cook@smat.org.uk

How to raise of concern

Employees are encouraged to raise concerns as early as possible to make it easier to take effective action.

When reporting a concern, employees are urged to consider who, given the nature of the concern, they should report it to.

When raising a concern it is helpful to set out the background and history of the concern, providing names, dates, places and amounts where possible and giving reason for their concern. Absolute proof is not required; however you will need to demonstrate reasonable grounds for the allegation.

The concern can be raised as follows:

- Contacting one of the above named officer by telephone
- Contacting one of the above named officer by email
- Clicking [here](#) or if you have a QR Scanner by scanning the image at the end of the policy
- Writing to the above officers at

St Mary's Academy Trust
BBIC
Innovation Way
Wilthorpe
Barnsley
S75 1JL

Employees are encouraged to provide their name when raising a concern, as concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful than those that are attributed to a named individual. However, anonymous allegations will be considered and investigated at The Trust's discretion.

In exercising the discretion, the factors taken into account would include:

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

How The Trust will respond

The action taken by The Trust will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters raised may:

- Be investigated solely by the recipient, either the Chief Executive Officer or the Chair of Trust in the first instance
- The recipient may be required to further investigate the concern in conjunction with other Trust employees or with representatives of the Board where applicable
- Be investigated internally by an appropriately skilled and experienced individual, knowledgeable in the area concerned
- Be referred to an External Auditor or Ombudsman
- Form the subject of an independent enquiry

In order to protect individuals, The Trust's 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 or discrimination) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

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

Within ten working days of concern being received (excluding anonymous concerns) the individual with whom the employee raised the matter will write to the employee:

- Acknowledging the concern has been raised
- Indicating how it is proposed to deal with the matter
- Giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- Telling the employee whether initial enquiries have been made, and
- Telling the employee whether further investigations will take place, and if not, the reason why.

The amount of contact between the individual(s) considering the issues and the employee who raised the concern will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided, If necessary, further information will be sought from the employee in a discreet manner.

When any meeting is arranged, the staff member has the right to be accompanied by a union or workplace representative. The meeting can be 'off site', if requested.

The Trust will take steps to minimise any difficulties which the staff member may experience as a result of raising a concern and provide any appropriate support. For instance, if the employee is required to give evidence in disciplinary or criminal proceeding, The Trust will advise/provide support as required.

The Trust accepts that the employee needs to be assured that the matter had been addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, he/she will be informed as to what action has been taken to correct working practices where they have been found to be at fault by the investigation.

Safeguards

Harassment or Victimisation

The Trust will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take the appropriate action to attempt to protect employees who raise a concern in good faith. However, this doesn't mean that if an employee raising a concern is already the subject of other employment procedures e.g. disciplinary or redundancy, that those procedures will be halted or suspended.

Confidentiality

The Trust will respect confidentiality and all steps will be taken to ensure that confidentiality is maintained throughout the process, however, an employee's identity may have to be disclosed if legal proceedings are undertaken. In no circumstances will an employee's identity be revealed before he or she is consulted.

Data

In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 at all stages of this procedure data obtained will be used only for the purpose for which it is intended and will be stored securely with restricted access to those involved in the process. Data will be destroyed securely and in accordance with the Trust's retention policy.

Allegations

If an employee makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against that employee.

If, however, an employee makes malicious or vexatious allegations, disciplinary action may be taken against them.

In determining whether an employee has acted maliciously and/or vexatiously the investigator will consider whether the employee was motivated to make the allegation(s) simply out of a desire to pursue a personal vendetta or grudge.

How the matter can be taken further

This Policy is intended to provide staff with an avenue to raise concerns within The Trust. We hope anyone invoking this procedure will be satisfied with the response given. If not, the employee should indicate this to the Chair of The Trust. If the staff member feels it is right to take the matter outside the organisation, the following are possible contact points:

- Relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- The relevant ombudsman
- The employee's solicitor
- The Police.

The Audit Committee

In accordance with its Terms of Reference for the oversight of the internal control and governance framework of The Trust, the Audit Committee will review this Policy and consider its effectiveness through a process of annual review.

Note: St Mary's Academy Trust comprises: St Mary's CE Primary, All Saints Academy, Queens Road Academy, West Meadows Primary, Darton Primary, The Mill Academy and Royston St John Baptist CE Primary.

