St Vincent's Catholic Primary School

Whistleblowing Policy

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Whistleblowing Policy

1. **Aims:** This policy aims to:

- Encourage individuals affected to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated, and that their confidentiality will be respected.
- Let all staff in the school know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the school.
- Set clear procedures for how the school will respond to such concerns.
- Let all staff know the protection available to them if they raise a whistleblowing concern.
- Assure staff that they will not be victimised for raising a legitimate concern through the steps set out in the policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken (though vexatious or malicious concerns may be considered a disciplinary issue).

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time. The policy applies to all employees or other workers who provide services to the school in any capacity including self-employed consultants or contractors who provide services on a personal basis and agency workers.

2. Legislation

This policy has been written in line with:

- The government guidance on whistleblowing.
- The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA).
- The Employment Rights Act 1996, as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
- The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) (Amendment) Order 2025, which updates the prescribed bodies to whom whistleblowing concerns may be reported.
- Relevant safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), where concerns relate to safeguarding or the conduct of adults working with children.

3. Definition of Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is "in the public interest". Examples of whistleblowing include (but are not limited to):

- Criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption.
- Pupils' or staff health and safety being put in danger.
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement.
- Breaches of financial management procedures.
- Attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest.
- Damage to the environment.

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above. Not all concerns about the school count as whistleblowing. For example, personal staff grievances such as bullying or harassment do not usually count as whistleblowing. If something affects a staff member as an individual, or relates to an individual employment contract, this is likely a grievance.When staff have a concern they should consider whether it would be better to follow our staff grievance or complaints procedures.

4. Procedure for Staff to Raise a Whistleblowing Concern

4.1 When to Raise a Concern

Staff should consider the examples in section 3 when deciding whether their concern is of a whistleblowing nature. Consider whether the incident(s) were illegal, breached statutory or school procedures, put people in danger or were an attempt to cover any such activity up.

4.2 Who to Report To

Staff should report their concern to the headteacher. If the concern is about the headteacher, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the staff member should report their concern to the chair of governors.

Where a concern relates to safeguarding, staff should also follow the school's safeguarding and child protection policy and, where appropriate, report concerns directly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Children's Services or the Police.

4.3 How to Raise the Concern

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Staff are encouraged to put concerns in writing wherever possible, but a concern will not be disregarded because it has been raised verbally.

Where concerns are submitted in writing, they should include names of those committing wrongdoing, dates, places and as much evidence and context as possible. Staff raising a concern should also include details of any personal interest in the matter.

4.4 Anonymous Concerns

Concerns may be raised anonymously. Anonymous concerns will be considered at the discretion of the school, taking into account:

- The seriousness of the issue raised
- The credibility of the concern
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation through other sources

4.5 Initial Assessment of Concerns

If the concern is raised via a third party, the headteacher will collect evidence where necessary by speaking:

Directly to the person who raised the concern, unless it has been raised anonymously.

- To the individual involved and any witnesses.
- The headteacher will use the information collected to determine the nature of the concern and any further action required.
- If the concern relates to the headteacher, the chair of governors will be informed.
- Where concerns relate to safeguarding allegations against staff, volunteers or visitors, these will be managed in accordance with the school's safeguarding and child protection policy and relevant statutory guidance.

5. School Procedure for Responding to a Whistleblowing Concern

5.1 Investigating the Concern

When a concern is received by the headteacher, referred to from here as the "recipient", they will:

- Meet with the person raising the concern within a reasonable time. The person raising the concern may be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative.
- Get as much detail as possible about the concern at this meeting and record the information.
- If it becomes apparent the concern is not of a whistleblowing nature, the recipient should handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy or procedure.
- Reiterate that the individual is protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. If the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious, disciplinary action may be taken.
- Establish whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant further investigation.

Where further investigation is required:

- The recipient will arrange for the matter to be investigated, involving the headteacher if appropriate.
- In some cases, an external, independent body may be appointed to investigate.
- In other cases, the matter may be referred to the police or another relevant authority.
- The person who raised the concern will be informed of how the matter is being investigated and a reasonable timescale for receiving updates.

The school will seek to maintain confidentiality wherever possible. However, there may be circumstances where information must be disclosed to external agencies, regulatory bodies or law enforcement authorities to investigate the concern appropriately or fulfil legal obligations.

5.2 Outcome of the Investigation

Once the investigation is complete, the investigating person(s) will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether wrongdoing has occurred.

The report will include:

- Any recommendations.
- Details of how the matter can be rectified.
- Whether referral to an external body is required, such as the local authority, Diocese, Teaching Regulation Agency, Disclosure and Barring Service or police.

The person who raised the concern will be informed of the outcome, although certain details may need to remain confidential.Beyond the immediate actions, the headteacher, **school leaders, governors** and other staff, where necessary, will review relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences. Whilst the school cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, concerns will be dealt with fairly and appropriately.

6. Malicious or Vexatious Allegations

- Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there may be an issue.
- If an allegation is made in good faith, but the investigation finds no wrongdoing, there will be no disciplinary action against the member of staff who raised the concern.
- If, however, an allegation is shown to have been deliberately invented or made maliciously, the school will consider whether disciplinary action is appropriate.

7. Escalating Concerns Beyond the School

The school encourages staff to raise concerns internally in the first instance. However, the school recognises that there may be circumstances where individuals feel unable to do so or remain concerned after an internal investigation.

Staff may raise concerns with an appropriate external body.

8. Approval and Review

- This policy will be reviewed every two years.
- The policy will also be reviewed earlier where changes to legislation, statutory guidance or local procedures make this necessary.

9. Links with Other Policies

This policy links with:

- Staff grievance policy
- Complaints procedure
- Safeguarding and child protection policy
- Staff code of conduct
- Disciplinary policy
- Low-level concerns policy
- Allegations against staff policy (where applicable)