

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

For adoption by all CDAT schools and the CDAT Central Office

This policy is informed by the Christian values which are the basis for all of CDAT's work and any actions taken under this policy will reflect this.

'Blessed are those who act justly, who always do what is right'

Psalm 106:3

Approved by	Date	Review Schedule	Date of next review
Trust Board	March 2025	Every two years	March 2027

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Please note that this document includes links to external documents and guidance, which can be accessed by clicking on the underlined references.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to make clear that employees can and should voice concerns without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. It is intended that this policy will encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the school and the Chester Diocesan Academies Trust (CDAT) rather than overlooking a problem or 'whistleblowing' outside the organisation.

2. Applicability

This policy applies to all employees within CDAT whether on a permanent or on a fixed term contract. It also applies to contractors working for the school or CDAT on school premises, for example agency workers, supply teachers and builders.

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 trust in any capacity, including self-employed consultants or contractors who provide services on a personal basis and agency workers.

3. Legislation

The requirement to have clear whistle-blowing procedures in place is set out in the Academy Trust Handbook. This policy has been written in line with the above document, as well as government guidance on whistle-blowing. We also take into account the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The CDAT Trust Board and its executive team along with the Local Governance Committee and management of the school has overall responsibility for ensuring that the Whistleblowing Policy is managed appropriately in accordance with this agreed procedure.

In accordance with the Department for Education's academy trust governance guidelines, CDAT has appointed at least one representative of the Trust Board and one member of staff who other staff can report concerns to. These are:

Trust Board:
Staff:

The Headteacher along with line managers are responsible for making employees aware of the existence of this policy. The Headteacher is responsible for maintaining a record of concerns raised and outcomes (but in a form which does not endanger confidentiality) and will report to the Local Governance Committee and CDAT Chief Executive Officer (CEO) routinely, including those found not to require any further action.

Employees are responsible for making themselves familiar with and complying with this policy.

5. Policy

Employees could be the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within an individual school or the wider trust. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the school. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances the employee may feel it is easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

CDAT is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees, and others that we deal with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of CDAT's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.

This policy aims to encourage employees to feel confident about raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice and to provide avenues for employees to raise those concerns and receive feedback

on any action taken. The policy also aims to reassure employees that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have a reasonable belief and have made any disclosure in good faith.

A Grievance Procedure exists to enable an employee to lodge a grievance relating to her/his own employment. The Whistleblowing Policy is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. This includes:

- Conduct which is an offence or breach of the law
- Disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- Serious health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
- Serious damage to the environment
- The unauthorised use of public funds
- Sexual or physical abuse of pupils
- Unethical conduct

Any serious concerns that an employee may have about any aspect of conduct by employees of the school or others acting on behalf of the school may be reported under this policy. This policy does not replace the school's complaints procedure.

6. Safeguards Against Harassment or Victimisation

CDAT recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what the employee is saying is true, or they have a reasonable belief that it is true, the employee will have nothing to fear because they will be doing their duty to the school and pupils of the school.

CDAT will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressure) and will take appropriate action to protect employees when concerns are raised in good faith.

Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence, or be influenced by, any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect an employee.

7. Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal the identity of an employee who raises allegations under this policy. At the appropriate time, however, the employee may need to come forward as a witness.

Employees are encouraged to put their name to allegations wherever possible. This is because concerns expressed anonymously are much more difficult to investigate. Therefore, anonymous allegations will be considered at the discretion of the Headteacher in consultation with the Chair of the Local Governance Committee.

8. Untrue Allegations

If an employee makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against the employee. If, however, the employee makes an allegation frivolously, maliciously, vexatiously, or for personal gain, disciplinary action will be taken against the employee.

9. How to Raise a Concern

In most circumstances the employee should raise concerns with their immediate line manager. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of malpractice. For example, if the employee believes that senior management is involved, the employee should approach as appropriate:
their Headteacher
Chair of their Local Governance Committee
the CEO – Neil Dixon
a member of the executive team – Chris Williams
the Chair of CDAT Trust Board – John Mason
CDAT Member – Michael Gilbertson

Central team staff should report their concern to the CEO (Neil Dixon). If the concern is about the CEO or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the central team staff should report the concern to the Chair of the Trust Board (John Mason).

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. It is helpful for the following information to be provided: the background and history of the concern (giving relevant names and dates) and the reason why the employee is particularly concerned about the situation.

The earlier the employee expresses the concerns, the easier it will be to take action.

Although the employee is not expected to prove beyond reasonable doubt the truth of an allegation, the employee should demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for the concern.

The employee may wish to consider discussing the concern with a colleague or trade union representative first and may find it easier to raise the matter if there are other colleagues who have the same experience or concerns.

10. Procedure for Responding to a Whistleblowing Concern

10.1 Investigating the concern

When a concern is received by the headteacher/CEO/Chair of Trust Board/other appropriate person - referred to from here as the 'recipient' – they will:

- Meet with the person raising the concern within a reasonable time period. The person raising the concern may be joined 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 whistle-blowing nature, the recipient should handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy/procedure.
- Reiterate, at this meeting, that they are 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. If there is:
    - The recipient should then arrange a further investigation into the matter, involving the CEO (unless the matter refers to the CEO, where it should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board or a representative appointed by the same). In some cases, they may need to bring in an external, independent body to investigate. In others, they may need to report the matter to the police
    - The person who raised the concern should be informed of how the matter is being investigated and an estimated timeframe for when they will be informed of the next steps

10.2 Outcome of the investigation

Once the investigation – whether this was just the initial investigation of the concern, or whether further investigation was needed – is complete, the investigating person(s) will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether or not any wrongdoing has occurred. The report will include any recommendations and details on how the matter can be rectified, and whether or not a referral is required to an external organisation, such as the local authority or police.

They will inform the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

Beyond the immediate actions, the CEO, Trust Board and other staff, if necessary, will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

While we cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, we will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

11. Escalating Concerns

The aim of this policy is that employees should be able to raise concerns internally and it is hoped that the employee will be satisfied with any action taken. If this is not the case, then they may raise their concerns to CDAT's Board of Directors. If the employee wishes to take the matter outside of the organisation, a list of prescribed bodies to whom staff can raise concerns with is included here.

If the employee chooses to take the matter outside of the school and CDAT then the employee should ensure that they do not disclose confidential information. An employee should not take concerns directly to the media.