

Vine Tree Primary School

Whistleblowing Policy

Adopted by the Governing Body
School/Academy:
Date:

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Scope

This policy applies to all employees of Vine Tree Primary School. Other individuals, including members of the Governing Body, contractors and suppliers are also encouraged to follow the policy set out in this document.

This policy does not cover members of the public. Any concerns reported by the public should be dealt with in accordance with the school/academy's complaints procedure.

It does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time, following consultation with the recognised trade unions.

About this policy

Vine Tree Primary School is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity and expects all employees to maintain high standards in accordance with the school/academy's policies and procedures, including the Code of Conduct. 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 to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The purpose of this policy is to outline how whistleblowing concerns can be raised and how they may be dealt with, including the protection and support that is available to those raising the concern.

This policy is also intended to encourage individuals to raise concerns internally as soon as possible rather than overlooking a problem or blowing the whistle outside where wrongdoing is suspected.

If an employee raises a whistleblowing concern in accordance with this policy, the school/academy will seek to ensure that they are treated with respect and provided with adequate support and protection, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected where possible (see section confidentiality and anonymity).

If a concern relates to a personal grievance that is not in the public interest (for example, an employee's own employment, contractual position or an allegation of bullying or harassment), it should be raised through the school/academy's Grievance Policy and Procedure or the Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure. If a complaint relates to an employee's own personal circumstances but they also have wider concerns (for example, a breach of the school/academy's internal policies), they should discuss with the headteacher/manager which route is the most appropriate.

If any individual is unsure about how their concerns are best dealt with, they should contact their headteacher/manager for further advice.

This policy has been developed in line with best practice and the Public Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA), and aims to:

- Encourage individuals to feel confident and supported in raising concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice.
- Provide avenues for employees to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken, where appropriate.
- Encourage openness in disclosing concerns to facilitate the gathering of information and a clearer understanding of the issues.
- Provide reassurance that employees will be protected from possible detriment if they have a reasonable belief that any disclosure employees have made are true (see section on the law).

What is whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is the act of reporting suspected wrongdoing or risk of wrongdoing relating to:

- a criminal offence;
- a failure to comply with a legal obligation;
- a risk to the health and safety of an individual, including risks to pupils and the public as well as other employees;
- sexual harassment (in relation to concerns raised on or after 6 April 2026) - irrespective of when the incident or incidents being reported are alleged to have occurred;
- damage to the environment;
- the unauthorised use of public funds;
- possible fraud and corruption;
- other unethical conduct; or
- an attempt to cover up of any of the above.

It is not necessary for employees to prove the wrongdoing. However, to be protected by whistleblowing laws against detrimental treatment or dismissal, they must reasonably believe that the wrongdoing (related to one of the categories listed above) is being, has been, or is likely to be committed and that their disclosure is in the public interest.

Concerns around child protection can be dealt with under the whistleblowing policy. However, if the headteacher/manager deems it appropriate, they should be referred through the school/academy's safeguarding procedure.

Raising a whistleblowing concern

If an employee has a genuine concern relating to any type of wrongdoing that is covered under this policy, they should normally raise the concern with their immediate manager or headteacher.

However, depending on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice, this may not always be appropriate. Where this is the case, they should report their concern directly to the Chair of Governors.

Employees can raise their concern verbally, or in writing. However, it is preferable for concerns to be raised in writing, and where this is the case, it is important that they set out clearly:

- their name and contact details;
- the details of the suspected wrongdoing;
- the names of any individuals involved;
- whether they wish their name to remain confidential; and
- what action (if any) they are seeking.

Responding to a whistleblowing concern

The school/academy will arrange a meeting with the employee as soon as possible to discuss their concern. The employee may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this policy. The companion must respect the confidentiality of their disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

The headteacher/manager to whom the employee raised their concern with (or the Governing Body if appropriate) will decide if an investigation is required and, if it is, they will decide the most appropriate person to conduct it. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to appoint an individual who is external to the school/academy to carry out the investigation. The headteacher/manager will write to the employee confirming that an investigation will be conducted.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may be:

- investigated internally;
- referred to the police;
- referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer;

- referred to Cheshire East Borough Council Internal Audit

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

The level of investigation and time this will take will vary depending on the nature of the suspected wrongdoing. Where possible, an estimate of the length of any investigation will be provided and, subject to legal constraints as referred to below, employees will be updated during the process.

Following the investigation, the relevant manager will inform the employee in writing, as quickly as possible after completion of the investigation, of the outcome and any next steps or action that will be taken. While the school/academy aims to provide feedback, in some cases this may not be possible, for example where data protection rules apply or there are sensitive issues that need to remain confidential. Sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent the school/academy giving the employee specific details of the investigation, an outcome or any disciplinary action taken as a result. The employee should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.

Confidentiality and anonymity

The school/academy wants employees to feel comfortable about raising a whistleblowing concern openly and actively encourages them to do so. Employees have the right not to be subjected to any detrimental treatment (including being unfairly penalised, disciplined or dismissed) because they have raised a whistleblowing concern.

Where an employee raises a whistleblowing concern openly, the school/academy will maintain the confidentiality of the employee as far as possible, specifically, their identity will only be disclosed to those individuals who are directly involved in handling and investigating the concern. Confidentiality, however, cannot be guaranteed as there are certain circumstances where the name of the whistleblower may be made known. For example:

- the report is found to be knowingly false;
- disclosure is ordered by the courts; or
- a formal statement is required as part of a police investigation.

If the school/academy needs to disclose an employee's identity to anyone outside of the investigation, the employee will be notified beforehand.

The school/academy hopes that employees will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, employees may raise

a whistleblowing concern anonymously. Whilst the school/academy does not encourage anonymous reporting, the school/academy will make every effort to investigate any concern that is reported anonymously as best they can. An anonymous report is likely to be more difficult to investigate or impossible if the school/academy cannot obtain further information from the employee. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible, and the school/academy will not be in a position to provide the whistleblower with any feedback.

Employees who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to the headteacher, manager or Chair of Governors and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality as far as possible.

Unfounded allegations

If an employee makes an allegation that they believe to be true, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. If, however, it is found that they have knowingly raised false allegations, then action may be taken against them under the school/academy's disciplinary procedures.

Raising whistleblowing concerns externally

This policy is intended to provide employees with an avenue to raise concerns within the school/academy. In most cases employees should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally. However, the law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for employees to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. The school/academy strongly encourages employees to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external.

The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. Their contact details are below. There is also a list on the GOV.UK website (see Whistleblowing: list of prescribed people and bodies).

Employees should take advice before reporting an issue to a body other than those specified in this policy to ensure that they are making a protected disclosure.

Employees should also ensure that they do not disclose confidential information (unless required as part of the protected disclosure) if they take the matter outside of the school/academy.

Protection and support for whistleblowers

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. The school/academy aims to encourage openness and will support employees who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Whistleblowers must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If an employee believes that they have suffered any such treatment, they should inform the headteacher, manager or Chair of Governors immediately. If the matter is not remedied, the employee should raise it formally using the school/academy's Grievance Policy and Procedure.

Employees must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. If an employee is involved in such conduct, they may be subject to disciplinary action.

Employees may wish to consider discussing their concern with a work colleague or their trade union representative first before raising the issue as a whistleblowing concern. Further advice may also be sought from the following organisations:

Protect - Speak up stop harm - Whistleblowing Homepage (protect-advice.org.uk)

Telephone 020 3117 2520

Acas | Making working life better for everyone in Britain

Telephone 0300 123 1100

Education Support, supporting teachers and education staff

Telephone 0800 562 561

Citizens Advice

Telephone 0800 144 8848

The law

This policy has been written to take into account the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA). This law makes it unlawful to subject a worker to negative treatment or to dismiss them because they have raised a whistleblowing concern. Raising a whistleblowing concern is also known as a making a 'protected disclosure' in law. PIDA is part of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA), which already protects employees who take action over, or raise concerns about, health and safety at work.

Equality

The school/academy will ensure that, when implementing this policy, no employee will be disadvantaged on the basis of their gender or transgender, marital status or civil partnership, racial group, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, disability, pregnancy, or maternity, social or economic status or caring responsibility. This means that the policy may need to be adjusted to cater for the specific needs of an individual including the provision of information in alternative formats where necessary.

Monitoring and review

The school/academy will monitor this policy to ensure that it is operating fairly, consistently, and effectively. The policy will also be reviewed in the light of operating experience and/or changes in legislation.

Prepared by:	Education HR Consultancy
Date:	January 2015
Reviewed:	December 2024
Last updated:	April 2026
Latest revision:	The model policy has been updated to reflect the Employment Rights Act 2025. From 6 April 2026, sexual harassment is expressly listed as a 'qualifying disclosure' under whistleblowing law.