William Cobbett Primary School

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WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY STATUTORY

Autumn 2026
Review: Autumn 2028

1. Introduction & Purpose of Policy

Whistle blowing is the reporting, by those working for or on behalf of the School, of suspected wrongdoing on the part of employees, management or the governing body. Such wrongdoing might include fraud, malpractice, breach of health and safety law or some other illegal act.

William Cobbett Primary School is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of honesty, openness and accountability and relies on its employees to help maintain these standards. In pursuit of these aims, the School encourages all individuals to raise concerns which they may have about the conduct or practices of others. This policy sets out how such concerns will be dealt with. It applies to all employees, volunteers and governors. Other individuals performing work on behalf of the School, such as agency workers and contractors, are also encouraged to use it.

This policy aims to give members of staff and others working on behalf of the School the confidence to raise serious concerns using the routes provided, and to reassure staff of the protection they are afforded when they have made a disclosure in good faith. It will be fairly and consistently applied in accordance with the School's commitment to equal opportunities.

This procedure is for disclosures about matters other than a breach of the employee's own contract of employment. Such concerns should be raised under the grievance procedure.

2. Legislation

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (by way of amendment to the Employment Rights Act 1996) is designed to provide protection to workers who raise genuine concerns about specified matters. These are known as "qualifying disclosures". The specified matters are:

- Conduct which is a criminal offence;
- Breach of any other legal obligation;
- Disclosures related to miscarriages of justice;
- Health and safety risks, including risks to the public or pupils as well as other staff;
- Damage to the environment; or
- Deliberate concealment of any of the above.

A worker who makes a qualifying disclosure has the right not to be dismissed, subjected to any other detriment or victimised because he/she has made the disclosure. The School will take a zero-tolerance approach to any act of harassment or victimisation resulting from a member of staff raising a concern

in good faith. A member of staff making an allegation within the scope of this policy will be supported by the School when raising a concern, providing that he/she:

- Believes the concern to be true
- Is not acting maliciously or making false allegations
- Is not seeking any personal gain.

3. Raising a Concern

As a first step, a member of staff should normally raise concerns with his/her immediate line manager, the Headteacher or the School's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) where this is appropriate to the nature of the concern. If the allegations involve the Headteacher, the member of staff should raise the matter with the Chair of the governing body. Contact details are available in the staffroom.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing, but the earlier the concern is expressed the easier it is to take any required action. Where a concern is raised verbally, the person hearing it must ensure that a written statement of it is made to assist with any subsequent investigation. School management will take all concerns raised within the scope of this policy seriously and identify the appropriate level of investigation, taking external advice as necessary. The concerns raised will be treated in confidence, whilst recognising that the individual raising the concerns may need to come forward as a witness at a later date.

The whistle blower may invite a recognised trade union representative or a work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews held in connection with the concerns raised.

If a worker requests that their identity be protected, it will not be disclosed unless the School is required to do so in law. Whilst the School will not refuse to consider anonymous reports, those making them must be aware that it is considerably more difficult to investigate matters properly in such circumstances or to resolve the concern satisfactorily.

While the School encourages members of staff to raise their concerns internally, the School also recognises that some staff may feel unable to do this and that they may therefore wish to contact an independent, external organisation (see section 6).

4. Investigating Concerns

Preliminary enquiries will be made into the concerns raised to establish whether a formal investigation is required. Immediate action may be taken – prior to an investigation being conducted – if there are concerns for the safety or welfare of pupils or others.

If a formal investigation is not to be undertaken, the reasons why will be explained to the individual as soon as possible. If an investigation is undertaken, this will normally be conducted by an appropriate senior individual with no previous involvement with the concerns raised. In certain cases, this may involve governors and/or an external independent investigator. The investigation will be conducted, where appropriate, in accordance with the School's other relevant internal procedures which could involve the suspension of staff on full pay whilst the investigation is being carried out. Investigations involving child protection issues will not commence until external advice has been sought from the local authority designated officer.

Written records will be taken throughout the investigation and the employee will be kept informed of the likely timescale and progress of the investigation. The investigator will be responsible, where possible within 28 days, for reporting formally to the Headteacher and/or governing body on the outcome of the investigation. The Headteacher and/or Governing Body will be responsible for taking any necessary action, which may include reporting the matter to the local authority, appropriate

government department, regulatory agency or the police, and/or taking action under internal procedures (e.g. disciplinary or bullying and harassment). On conclusion of the investigation, the worker will be informed of the outcome and the proposed action to be taken, whilst respecting the confidentiality of individuals and any legal constraints.

5. Malicious or Vexatious Complaints

If a member of staff makes an allegation in good faith but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. If, however, an allegation is made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action is likely to be taken in accordance with the School's disciplinary procedure.

6. Contacting External Organisations

The School encourages all staff to make use of the internal procedure before considering referring concerns outside the School. If the member of staff feels that it is right to take the matter outside the School, contact can be made with a recognised trade union, local Citizens Advice Bureau, relevant voluntary or independent organisation or legal advisor. The Public Interest Disclosure Act also sets out a number of bodies to which protected disclosures can be made, including HM Revenue & Customs, the Health and Safety Executive and the Serious Fraud Office. Employees should be aware that going directly to the press may limit their protection under the Public Interest Disclosure Act and they could therefore be subject to disciplinary action as a result. An employee considering such a course of action is strongly advised to seek prior advice from their trade union or an independent organisation such as Public Concern at Work (www.pcaw.co.uk)

7. Monitoring & Reporting

The Headteacher is the Responsible Officer for the School and has overall responsibility for overseeing the operation of this policy and for ensuring that appropriate records are maintained of genuine concerns raised and the outcomes. The Chair will report as necessary to the governing body and to other outside agencies.