



Whistle-blowing policy

Approved by:	Paula Tucker	Date: 1/9/26
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1. Aims

1.1 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 at ReFocus 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 whistle-blowing concern
- Assure staff that they will not be subjected to detriment or dismissed for making a protected disclosure, even if their reasonable concern proves to be mistaken. An unsubstantiated concern is not, by itself, malicious

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time. The school permits employees, agency workers, contractors, consultants, volunteers and others working for or on behalf of ReFocus to use this procedure. Access to this procedure does not mean that every person falls within the statutory definition of a 'worker' or has statutory whistle-blowing protection; that will depend on their legal status and the circumstances of the disclosure.

2. Legislation and guidance

2.1 Whistle-blowing protection is principally contained in Part IVA and related provisions of the Employment Rights Act 1996, as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

This policy also has regard to the government's Whistleblowing guidance for employers and current list of prescribed people and bodies, and to Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, which applies from 1 September 2026.

3. Definition of whistle-blowing

3.1 Whistle-blowing is when a worker discloses information about wrongdoing which they reasonably believe is in the public interest. The worker must reasonably believe that the information tends to show that one or more of the following has happened, is happening or is likely to happen:

- A criminal offence, such as fraud or corruption
- A failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement
- A miscarriage of justice

- Someone's health or safety being endangered, including the health or safety of pupils or staff
- Damage to the environment
- Sexual harassment, or deliberate concealment of information tending to show any of the wrongdoing above

3.2 A whistle-blower is a person who raises a concern which they reasonably believe meets the test above. A person does not need proof and should not investigate the matter personally before raising it.

3.3 Not all concerns about the school are whistle-blowing. A matter affecting a staff member only as an individual, or concerning their individual employment contract, is likely to be a grievance. However, a concern may still be whistle-blowing where the worker reasonably believes disclosure is in the public interest, including where sexual harassment affects others or indicates a wider risk. Staff who are unsure may seek advice from Protect or their trade union.

3.4 Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) provides:

- [Further guidance](#) on the difference between a whistle-blowing concern and a grievance that staff may find useful if unsure and a free and confidential [advice line](#)

4. Procedure for staff to raise a whistle-blowing concern

4.1 When to raise a concern

Staff should raise a concern as soon as possible where they reasonably believe that past, present or likely future wrongdoing falls within section 3. They should not delay reporting in order to obtain proof or investigate the matter themselves.

4.2 Who to report to

- Staff should normally report a concern to the ReFocus Whistleblowing Officer, Hayley Perry, at hayley@refocus.school.
- A concern may instead be reported to the Whistleblowing Governor, Richard Boddy, at Richard@refocus.school, particularly where the concern involves the Whistleblowing Officer, a senior leader, or the worker reasonably believes that the usual route is inappropriate.
- If the concern is about the headteacher, or the headteacher may be involved or there is another conflict of interest, it should be reported to the Chair of Governors, James Alcock, at governor@refocus.school.
- A safeguarding allegation about an adult which meets or may meet the harm threshold must be managed immediately under the safeguarding allegations procedure, including referral to the LADO where required. A concern below the harm threshold must be reported under the low-level concerns procedure.
- Whistle-blowing is the appropriate route for poor or unsafe safeguarding practice or potential failures in the school's safeguarding arrangements. Classification under this policy must never delay action needed to protect a child. Where the headteacher is also the sole proprietor, or reporting to the headteacher creates a conflict of interest, a safeguarding allegation about the headteacher must be reported directly to the LADO.

4.3 How to raise the concern

A concern may be raised orally or in writing. It is helpful to give dates, places, names and available context, and to declare any personal interest, but the worker is not required to prove the concern. The recipient will make a written record of an oral disclosure and offer the worker an opportunity to check its accuracy. A worker may

ask for their identity to be kept confidential or may report anonymously; the limits of confidentiality and anonymous reporting are explained in section 5.

5. School procedure for responding to a whistle-blowing concern

5.1 Investigating the concern

When a concern is received by Hayley Perry, or by an alternative recipient identified in section 4, that person ('the recipient') will:

- Acknowledge the concern promptly and, normally within 10 working days, meet or speak with the person raising it. Urgent safeguarding, health and safety or criminal concerns will be acted on immediately. The worker may be accompanied by a colleague, trade union or professional association representative, or another appropriate support person
- Obtain and record as much relevant detail as is reasonably available. The worker will not be expected to prove the concern or investigate it. If the matter is not whistle-blowing, the recipient will explain this and route it under the appropriate policy without avoidable delay
- Confirm that a worker who makes a protected disclosure must not be dismissed or subjected to detriment, including harassment, threats, loss of hours, denied opportunities or other disadvantage. An unsubstantiated or mistaken disclosure is not, by itself, malicious
- Make an initial assessment, record the decision and reasons, identify any immediate protective or referral action, and decide whether further investigation is required

5.2 Where further investigation is required, the recipient will appoint an appropriate impartial investigator and define the scope. The headteacher may be involved where appropriate and there is no conflict of interest. An external independent investigator may be appointed. Matters will be referred promptly to the police, LADO, local authority, regulator or other authority where required, and the school will avoid action that could compromise an external investigation.

5.3 The person who raised the concern will be told, so far as confidentiality and legal restrictions allow, how the matter will be handled and the anticipated timescale. They will receive reasonable progress updates and be informed of the conclusion, although the school may be unable to disclose personal, disciplinary, safeguarding or legally privileged information.

5.4 Confidentiality and anonymous disclosures

The school will take reasonable steps to protect the identity of a person raising a concern and will share information only with those who need it to assess, investigate or act. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, for example where disclosure is required by law or a fair investigation requires the person's identity to be known. The school will discuss this with the worker where practicable. Anonymous concerns will be considered, but anonymity may make investigation and feedback more difficult.

5.5 Record keeping

The recipient will maintain a secure record of the concern, meetings, evidence considered, decisions, reasons, referrals, updates and outcome. Access will be restricted to those who need to know. Records will be retained and disposed of in line with data-protection law and the school's retention arrangements. Safeguarding records will be managed under the safeguarding policy.

5.6 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 action, the headteacher, governing body and relevant staff will review applicable policies, procedures, training and organisational learning to reduce the risk of recurrence.
- Whilst we cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, we will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

6. Deliberately false or malicious allegations

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns which they reasonably believe are in the public interest. No disciplinary action will be taken merely because a concern is mistaken, unsubstantiated or cannot be proved. If, after appropriate investigation, a concern is shown to have been deliberately fabricated or raised maliciously, the school may consider action under its disciplinary procedure. Any safeguarding allegation will also be handled in accordance with KCSIE and the school's safeguarding procedures.

7. Escalating concerns beyond the school

The school encourages internal reporting where appropriate, but a worker is not prevented from seeking legal advice or making a disclosure through another legally protected route. A disclosure to a prescribed person may be protected where the worker reasonably believes the matter falls within that body's remit and reasonably believes that the information and any allegations are substantially true. The current government list of prescribed people and bodies should be checked before reporting.

Relevant routes may include:

- the Secretary of State for Education/Department for Education for matters concerning independent schools in England;
- the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line for child welfare and protection: 0800 028 0285 (8am to 8pm Monday to Friday, including bank holidays; 9am to 6pm at weekends), help@nspcc.org.uk;
- the Health and Safety Executive or the relevant local authority for matters within their health and safety remit;
- the Information Commissioner for data-protection concerns, or another prescribed person whose remit covers the matter.
- The LADO is not a general prescribed person under whistle-blowing legislation, but is the required safeguarding route for relevant allegations about adults working with children. Ofsted's prescribed-person education remit is limited to welfare concerns involving accommodation at boarding schools, colleges and residential special schools and is not the general education route for ReFocus.
- Protect, a trade union or a legal adviser can provide independent advice on disclosure routes. A disclosure to the media or on social media is protected only in limited circumstances, and workers are strongly advised to obtain independent advice first. Nothing in this policy or in a confidentiality agreement prevents a worker from making a protected disclosure.

8. Approval

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where legislation, statutory guidance, the school's governance arrangements or identified learning require it. The named contacts and reporting routes will be checked whenever the policy is reviewed and communicated to all staff, temporary staff, agency workers, volunteers and contractors.

9. Links with other policies

This policy links with our policies on:

- Staff grievance and disciplinary procedures
- Complaints procedure and staff code of conduct
- Safeguarding and child protection policy, including allegations against staff and low-level concerns procedures
- Data protection, records retention and health and safety policies