KEYSTONE
ACADEMY TRUST

Whistleblowing Policy

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Contents

1. Statement of Intent 3
2. Legal Framework 4
3. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 4
4. Definitions 5
5. Roles and Responsibilities 6
6. Harassment and Victimisation of Staff 7
7. Non-employees 7
8. Good Practice Principles 8
9. Procedure 9
10. Interview and Investigation 10
11. What the trust asks of whistleblowers 12
12. Appeals Process 12
13. Unfair Treatment 12
14. Monitoring and Review 12

1. Statement of Intent

Keystone Academy Trust is committed to open and honest communication and ensuring the highest possible standards in integrity – the trust will always treat whistleblowing as a serious matter.

In line with the trust's commitment to openness, probity and accountability, members of staff are encouraged to report concerns. This policy will work to ensure that, if an employee sees or suspects that something is wrong, they will raise this with the trust. This is known as "blowing the whistle" – a phrase that is used throughout this policy and should be viewed as a positive action of speaking up.

This policy seeks to ensure that any member of staff who suspects malpractice knows how to raise concerns and what procedures are in place to deal with the concern.

Where this policy necessitates personal or special category data to be processed, it will be done so in accordance with the trust's Data Protection Policy.

This policy is intended for concerns about wrongdoing that a worker reasonably believes are in the public interest. It is separate from the trust's procedures for addressing individual employment complaints, harassment and employee misconduct, including the Grievance Policy and Disciplinary Procedure Policy. The appropriate procedure will depend on the nature of the concern. In some circumstances, a concern about harassment, including sexual harassment, may also amount to a protected disclosure and will be considered under this policy where the statutory requirements are met.

This policy will:

- Give confidence to members of staff when raising concerns about conduct or practice that is potentially illegal, corrupt, improper, unsafe or unethical, or which amounts to malpractice or is inconsistent with trust standards and policies.
- Provide members of staff with avenues to raise concerns.
- Ensure that members of staff receive a response to the concerns they have raised and feedback on any action taken.
- Offer assurance that workers who make a protected disclosure are protected from detriment and, where applicable, dismissal under the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Under this policy, any of the following can raise a concern:

- Workers, including employees of the trust.
- Agency workers and others within the extended statutory definition of worker.
- Trainees covered by the statutory definition, and volunteers under the trust's wider arrangements.

2. Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA)
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Employment Rights Act 2025, including the addition of sexual harassment as a qualifying disclosure from 6 April 2026
- DfE (2025) 'Academy Trust Handbook 2025' and DfE (2026) 'Academy Trust Handbook 2026' (effective 1 October 2026)
- DfE (2026) 'Keeping children safe in education 2026'
- GOV.UK 'Whistleblowing for employees' and Department for Business and Trade (2026) 'Whistleblowing guidance for employers'
- DfE (2026) 'Keeping children safe in education 2026'
- Sir Robert Francis (2015) 'Freedom to speak up report'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Disciplinary Procedure Policy
- Records Management Policy
- Concerns and Complaints Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Grievance Policy

3. The Public Interest Disclosure Act

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 amended the Employment Rights Act 1996 to protect workers who make a protected disclosure. A worker must reasonably believe that the disclosure tends to show a relevant type of wrongdoing and that making it is in the public interest. A disclosure to a prescribed person is protected only where the worker reasonably believes that the matter falls within that person's remit and that the information and any allegation are substantially true. "Prescribed person" means a person or body formally designated by legislation to receive external whistleblowing disclosures about specified matters. A worker making a disclosure to a prescribed person must reasonably believe that the matter falls within that person's remit and that the information disclosed, and any allegation contained in it, are substantially true. Workers should consult the current government list of prescribed people and bodies before making an external disclosure:

Whistleblowing: list of prescribed people and bodies - GOV.UK

The trust will take reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality and will share information only where necessary to assess, investigate or act on the concern, or where disclosure is required by law.

The Headteacher is the first point of contact for whistleblowing queries. If the allegation is related to the Headteacher, the concern will be raised with the CEO

If the allegation is related to the CEO, the concern will be raised with the Chair of Trustees.

4. Definitions

"Whistleblowing" is when a worker reports information which they reasonably believe tends to show specified wrongdoing and that the disclosure is in the public interest.

As outlined by the Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA), **"qualifying disclosures"** pertain to when any of the following takes place:

- A criminal offence has been committed, is likely to be committed or is being committed.
- A person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject.
- A miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur.
- The health or safety of any individual has been, is being or is likely to be endangered.
- The environment has been, is being or is likely to be damaged.
- Sexual harassment has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur.
- Information tending to show any matter falling within any of the preceding points has been, is being or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

"In the public interest" means that an individual acted outside of their own personal interest – they acted for more than personal gain. It is not necessary for the disclosure to be of interest to the entire public. The following considerations are often used as a test to establish whether something is within the scope of public interest:

- The number of people in the group whose interests the disclosure served.
- The nature of the interests and the extent by which individuals are affected by the wrongdoing disclosed.
- The nature of the wrongdoing disclosed.
- The identity of the alleged wrongdoer.

"Non-employees" The 'Non-employees' section explains the trust's arrangements for those outside the statutory definition. Workers covered by the statutory whistleblowing provisions may raise concerns under this policy. The trust will also consider public-interest concerns

raised by volunteers, trustees, contractors, former workers and other individuals who have credible or relevant knowledge of suspected wrongdoing, even where statutory whistleblowing protection may not apply to them. Concerns raised by parents, pupils or members of the public that do not meet the definition of whistleblowing will normally be dealt with under the trust's Concerns and Complaints Policy, safeguarding procedures or another appropriate procedure.

"Blacklisting" refers to an individual who is being refused work because they are viewed as a whistleblower.

"Grievances" involve someone filing a complaint because they personally have been mistreated in some way – the person making the complaint will have a direct interest in the outcome. It is important to understand the difference between raising a grievance and blowing the whistle.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Trustees will be responsible for:

- Establishing and agreeing the whistleblowing procedure.
- Ensuring the agreed whistleblowing procedure is published on the trust's website.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and undertaking any necessary reviews, e.g. in relation to good practice recommendations or changes in legislation.
- Ensuring all members of the trust community have access to this policy.
- Investigating, in liaison with the CEO/Headteacher, any concerns that are raised.
- Ensuring this policy provides an open and transparent framework where employees of the trust can raise their concerns.
- Taking the necessary action against members of staff following an investigation into any alleged malpractice.
- Reviewing the trust's whistleblowing arrangements annually and ensuring that staff are aware of both the internal and external routes available for reporting concerns.
- Appointing one trustee and one member of staff to act as points of contact for staff members following the reporting of a concern.
- Ensuring that all concerns raised by whistleblowers are responded to properly and fairly.
- Ensuring that whistleblowing forms part of the Staff Code of Conduct as part of a wider approach to having in place appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures.

The Headteacher will be responsible for:

- Ensuring all members of staff have read and understood this policy.

- Receiving, investigating and responding to any concerns that have been raised by school staff.
- Being the first point of contact regarding whistleblowing.

The CEO will be responsible for receiving any concerns raised about the Headteacher.

All members of staff will be responsible for:

- Raising any concerns that meet the definitions in the 'Definitions' section of this policy.
- Being truthful and reasonable with any concerns that they have.
- Not raising malicious or unfounded concerns.

6. Harassment and Victimisation of Staff

Keystone Academy Trust recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to take, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the malpractice or from the trust as a whole; however, the trust will not tolerate any such harassment or victimisation and will take appropriate action to protect staff who raise a concern in good faith.

Staff are protected in law by the PIDA, which gives employees protection from detriment and dismissal where they have made a protected disclosure, providing the legal requirements of the Act are satisfied, e.g. the disclosure was in the public interest.

Any member of staff who victimises or harasses a member of staff as a result of their having raised a concern in accordance with this policy will be dealt with under the trust's Disciplinary Procedure Policy.

7. Non-employees

People who do not fall within the statutory definition of worker, such as most volunteers and trustees acting solely in that capacity, may not receive statutory whistleblowing protection. Irrespective of this, the trust will take concerns raised by non-workers seriously and will not tolerate victimisation, harassment or exclusion because they raised a concern honestly and reasonably.

Where an individual feels that they have been unfairly treated following blowing the whistle, they should make a complaint under the trust's Concerns and Complaints Policy.

Trustees acting solely in their capacity as trustees are not normally workers for whistleblowing purposes. They remain responsible for ensuring that effective whistleblowing arrangements are in place and may raise concerns through this policy or directly with the DfE.

8. Good Practice Principles

The trust will implement the core whistleblowing principles, as outlined in the 'Freedom to speak up report', to ensure that whistleblowing procedures are fair, clear and consistent.

The trust will implement a **culture of change** by ensuring the following principles are reflected in our ethos and values – there will be a culture:

- Of safety in each school.
- Where people feel confident with raising concerns.
- Free from bullying.
- Of visible leadership.
- Of valuing staff.
- Of reflective practice.

By providing a clear procedure for mediating and resolving cases, as outlined in the 'Procedure' section of this policy, the trust will ensure that all cases are efficiently handled. This procedure includes:

- How to raise and report concerns.
- How investigations will be conducted.
- How the trust will mediate and resolve disputes.

The trust will implement **measures to support good practice** by ensuring adherence to the following principles:

- Seek HR guidance where necessary.
- Offering relevant training to staff.
- Providing the necessary support to staff.
- Providing support to staff who are seeking alternative employment.
- Being transparent.
- Being accountable.
- Conducting an external review of any concerns raised, where necessary.
- Undertaking regulatory action as required.
- Informing staff what protection is available to them if they report someone.
- Ensuring that alternative whistleblowing channels are in place for members of staff who feel unable to raise an issue with their employer.

The trust will ensure there are **particular support measures in place for vulnerable groups** by adhering to the following principles:

- Ensuring non-permanent staff are taught, and receive training on, the same principles as permanent staff.

- Ensuring trainees are subject to all the safeguarding and whistleblowing principles.
- Ensuring staff from ethnic minorities are supported, as they may feel particularly vulnerable when raising concerns.
- Ensuring staff are empowered and protected, enabling them to raise concerns freely.

9. Procedure

Individuals may raise a concern orally or in writing with the Headteacher. A worker is not required to prove the allegation or provide evidence before a concern is considered. If the concern relates to the Headteacher, it should be raised with the CEO. If it relates to the CEO, it should be raised with the Chair of Trustees. If it relates to the Chair of Trustees, it should be raised with the Vice-Chair or another nominated trustee. The recipient will arrange for an impartial person, with no conflict of interest, to assess and where appropriate investigate the concern.

When individuals raise their concern, they will include the following information as far as possible:

- The background and history of the concern
- Any relevant names, dates and places
- The reasons for the concern

The trust encourages individuals to provide their name because this can assist an investigation and enable feedback. Anonymous concerns will nevertheless be considered, taking account of the seriousness and credibility of the concern and the prospects of confirming it from other sources. The trust will not seek to identify an anonymous whistleblower unless this is necessary and lawful.

Individuals who would like to seek professional and confidential advice should contact Protect, a registered charity that advises on whistleblowing queries. The Protect website can be accessed here (www.protect-advice.org.uk), or they can be contacted on 020 31172520.

Once an individual has raised a concern, the trust will be responsible for investigating it and will acknowledge receipt as soon as possible. An initial meeting will be held within two working days.

In certain instances, it may be appropriate for the individual to raise the concern with an outside agency, e.g. the police, depending on the severity of the concern. Equally, it may be appropriate for the individual to request that their trade union raises the matter.

A worker may make a disclosure about an academy to the Department for Education through its customer help portal, including anonymously using the guest option. Workers may also disclose to another prescribed person where that body has responsibility for the subject

matter. The current GOV.UK list of prescribed people and bodies should be checked before making an external disclosure.

Appropriate whistleblowing procedures will be put in place for concerns about poor or unsafe practice and potential failures in the trust's safeguarding system to be raised with the SLT.

If a member of staff feels like they are unable to raise a safeguarding-related concern with the school, or feels that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, they are able to contact the NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline on 0800 028 0285 or the LADO: 01522 554674 or email: LSCP_LADO@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Safeguarding concerns about a child must be acted on immediately in accordance with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education. A whistleblowing concern about unsafe safeguarding practice, systemic failure, concealment or the handling of a safeguarding matter may be raised under this policy as well. The recipient must ensure that use of this policy does not delay any referral or protective action required for a child.

The trust will keep the whistleblower appropriately informed about how the concern is being handled and the outcome, subject to legal, confidentiality and data protection restrictions. Contact with the whistleblower will be managed so that it does not compromise the fairness or integrity of any investigation.

10. Interview and Investigation

The initial stage will be an interview with the whistleblower, and then an assessment of further action will be discussed. During this initial stage, the Headteacher will establish if:

- The information disclosed could fall within this policy and the worker reasonably believes it to be in the public interest.
- The concern was raised in accordance with this policy.

The Headteacher will explain the following to anybody raising a concern:

- How they will communicate with the whistleblower throughout the process. It should be noted that the need for confidentiality may prevent the trust giving the whistleblower specific details of any necessary investigation or any necessary disciplinary action taken as a result of the concern.
- That reasonable steps will be taken to protect the whistleblower's identity, but absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where disclosure is necessary for a fair investigation, to comply with a legal duty, or in legal proceedings.
- That the Board of Trustees will do everything in its power to protect the whistleblower from discrimination.

- That no disciplinary action will be taken merely because a concern is not upheld, provided the worker had a reasonable belief in the information disclosed.

Disciplinary action may be considered only where there is clear evidence that an individual knowingly made a false allegation or acted dishonestly. A concern that is mistaken or not upheld will not by itself justify disciplinary action.

If an investigation is carried out, the whistleblower will be informed of the final outcome.

A record will be kept of the seriousness of the issues raised and the credibility of the concern. All records will be kept confidential and will be stored in line with the trust's Records Management Policy.

It may be possible for the concern to be resolved by simply agreeing the necessary action or explaining procedures to the alleged wrongdoer; however, depending on the severity and nature of the concern, it may:

- Be investigated by management, an internal audit or through the disciplinary process.
- Be referred to the police or an external auditor.
- Form the subject of an independent inquiry.

If the investigating officer needs to talk to the whistleblower, they are permitted to be accompanied by a trade union representative, a professional association representative, a friend or a fellow member of staff not involved in the area of work that the concern relates to. This person will provide support only and will not be allowed to become involved in the proceedings.

A record will be made of the nature and outcome of the concern. The purpose of this is to ensure that a central record is kept which can be cross-referenced with other complaints to monitor any patterns of concern across the trust and to assist in monitoring the procedure. This will be logged on CPOMS StaffSafe.

The whistleblower will be informed of the results of the investigation. Where action is not taken, the individual will be given an explanation.

Outcome information will be sufficiently clear to explain whether the concern was upheld in whole or in part and what general action has been taken or is planned, while protecting the privacy and legal rights of others. The trust may withhold details where disclosure would breach confidentiality, data protection obligations, legal privilege or the fairness of another process.

11. What the trust asks of whistleblowers

The purpose of this policy is to enable individuals to raise concerns in confidence, without any fear of reprisal. It is important that whistleblowers:

- Use the internal route where appropriate, or seek confidential advice from a legal adviser, trade union, ACAS or Protect. Nothing in this policy prevents a worker from making a protected disclosure to a prescribed person or another person where the statutory conditions are met, reporting a crime to the police, or co-operating with a regulator.
- Declare any personal interest in the matter, as the policy is designed to be used in the interest of the public and not for individual matters.

12. Appeals Process

If no action is to be taken, or the whistleblower believes the concern has not been handled fairly or in accordance with this policy, they may request a review by the Chair of Trustees or another trustee or independent person who has not previously been involved. The review will consider the handling of the concern, the reasons for the decision, any relevant new information and whether further action is required. This internal review does not prevent a worker from seeking independent advice or making a disclosure to an appropriate prescribed person where the statutory conditions are met. A non-worker may also use the trust's Concerns and Complaints Policy where applicable.

13. Unfair Treatment

An individual can take a case to an employment tribunal if they feel that they have been treated unfairly as a result of whistleblowing. Further information can be sought from the Citizen's Advice Bureau, the whistleblowing charity Protect, or from an individual's trade union.

Employment tribunal time limits are strict. A claim relating to whistleblowing detriment or unfair dismissal will normally need to be presented within three months less one day of the act complained of or the effective date of termination, subject to any extension arising from ACAS Early Conciliation. Individuals should obtain prompt independent advice.

14. Monitoring and Review

The Trust Board will receive anonymised, proportionate management information on concerns raised, themes, timeliness, outcomes, referrals and allegations of detriment. Reporting will protect confidentiality and will be used to test whether reporting routes are trusted, investigations are independent and lessons are implemented. The policy will also be

reviewed following relevant legislative or regulatory change, a significant case, or evidence that the arrangements are not operating effectively.

The Trust Board will review this policy annually, ensuring that all procedures are up to date. Any changes made to this policy will be communicated to all members of staff.