

The Heath Academy



Growing Excellent Learners

Whistleblowing Policy

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Definitions

Note: these terms are standard throughout all policy documents and are designed to provide clarity

Section 1: The MAT

“the Academy Trust” and “Trust”	mean the Heath Academy Trust Company.
“the Board”	means the Board of Directors of the Heath Academy Trust Company.
“the Directors”	refers to the group of (up to 12) Directors who make up the Board, and who are also the Heath Academy Trust’s “Trustees” under charity law.
“Finance Committee”	refers to the Finance and Audit Committee formed by the Board to manage the financial affairs of the Trust.
“Accounting Officer”	is a role held by the Chief Executive Officer (“CEO”) of the Trust, and one which includes a personal responsibility for the financial resources under the Trust’s control. He is accountable for the Trust’s financial affairs.
“Chief Finance Officer” (CFO)	is the Trust’s finance director, and also the Trust Business Manager, to whom the Accounting Officer delegates responsibility for delivery of the Trust’s financial processes and reports , and for the oversight and consolidation of the Academies’ financial data.
“Trust Business Manager” (“TBM”)	Fulfills the CFO role within the Trust, including compliance and statutory returns as described in the Academies’ Financial Handbook.
“Leadership Team”	is a team representing the Academies, consisting of the Headteachers and the CEO, and the TBM.

A full description of the positions listed and their responsibilities will be found in the current Academies’ Financial Handbook

Section 2: The Schools

“Academy”	One of the six schools making up the Heath Academy Trust.
“Academies”	All of the six Academies.
“School”	means an Academy within the Trust.
“Finance Officer”	The person responsible for the day to day management of an Academy’s financial operations.
“Governor”	means a formally elected and appointed member of a School’s Governing Body (generally referred to as the LGB).
“Headteacher”	means the senior person at an Academy who may also be and Executive Headteacher and/ or elected as a Director of the Board.
“School’s Leadership Team”	A group within each School consisting of the Headteacher, senior staff and the local Governing Body.

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Existing good practice within the School in terms of its systems of internal control, both financial and non-financial and the external regulatory environment in which the School operates will ensure that cases of malpractice rarely occur. This whistleblowing policy is provided as a reference document to establish a framework within which issues can be raised confidentially internally, and if necessary outside the management structure of the School.

This document is a public commitment by the Trust that concerns are taken seriously and will be actioned.

1. Directors' Statement

- 1.1 The Board is committed to tackling all forms of malpractice, fraud etc and treat these issues seriously. The Board recognises that some concerns may be extremely sensitive and has therefore developed a system which allows for the confidential raising of concerns within the School environment but also has recourse to an external party outside the management structure of the School.
- 1.2 The Board is committed to creating a climate of trust and openness so that a person who has a genuine concern or suspicion can raise the matter with full confidence that the matter will be appropriately considered and resolved. The provisions of the policy apply to matters of suspected malpractice and fraud and not matters of more general grievance which would be dealt with under the School's grievance procedures.

2. Background and Context

2.1 This policy on 'whistleblowing' has the following background and context:

- a) Any version of the code adopted by the Board will form part of the Conditions of Employment. The code currently states:

"School employees are expected to give the highest possible standard of service to the public through the performance of their duties. Employees will be expected through agreed procedures and without fear of recrimination, to bring to the attention of their line manager any deficiency in the provision of service."

Employees must report to the appropriate manager any impropriety or breach of procedure.

- b) The legal background relating to “whistleblowing” is covered by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1988 which affords protection against dismissal penalty where an employee discloses in good faith, with reasonable grounds for belief in the disclosure, certain information relating to the following examples:-

Malpractice

- Failure to comply with legal obligations
- Child protection issues
- Miscarriages of justice
- Criminal offences
- Danger to Health & Safety
- Damage to the environment
- Concealment of evidence relating to the above

Fraud

- Manipulation of accounting records and finances
- Inappropriate use of school assets or funds
- Decision making for personal gain
- Abuse of position to influence decisions
- Fraud and deceit

- c) This policy sets out the agreed procedures that should be followed where employees have concerns about what they regard as such impropriety or neglect of duty. Such breaches of acceptable standards may be in relation to ethical or professional standards, as well as the school’s expectations on money, gifts, hospitality, health and safety and welfare, equal opportunities, relationships and outside interests. The Code of Conduct gives greater details.
- d) This procedure should be used where concern is about the consequences for other employees or the public. If the concern is about the individual being disadvantaged, by the action or failure to take action, then that should be pursued through the School’s Grievance Procedure.

3. What Should an Individual do if “Whistleblowing”?

- a) Judgement will need to be exercised here if the inaction or lapse of standards seems to be minor, then it may well be sufficient just to bring the matter to the attention of the employee who appears to be at fault.
- b) If the matter is more significant, particularly if it involves breaches of the School’s Code of Conduct or where a previous informal response has been apparently disregarded, then the matter should be raised formally with the line manager and as a matter of urgency if it appears serious.

If given verbally, confirmation of the complaint should be made in writing as soon as possible.

- c) Where the complaint concerns the line manager, or having made the report it is believed that appropriate action has not been taken then the complaint should be brought to the attention of a more senior manager.
- d) If it is believed that fraud, theft or other potential gross misconduct is involved; the matter should be raised quickly as mentioned above.

It must not be mentioned to the subject of the complaint or other colleagues as this could prejudice subsequent investigation.

Suspected fraud should be reported in accordance with the Anti-Fraud and Corruption policy.

Contact details for the Chair of the Trust Board are:

Office@heathacademytrust.co.uk

- e) Where there are genuine and justified suspicions of wrong doing, even though at the time of “whistleblowing” there is no concrete evidence of serious wrong doing, this should not deter anyone from going ahead and reporting the matter, particularly where it may involve potential risk to vulnerable people.
- f) The Board encourages the “whistleblower” to raise the matter internally in the first instance to allow those School staff and Governors in positions of responsibility and authority the opportunity to right the wrong and give an explanation for the behaviour or activity.

The LGB should have designated a number of individuals to specifically deal with whistleblowing and if the “whistleblower” feels that appropriate action has not been undertaken after following the actions in paragraphs (b) and (c) above then the matter should be referred to one of the individuals shown below:-

Headteacher

Chairperson of LGB

Trust Board Member

- g) The “whistleblower” may prefer to raise the matter in person, by telephone or in written form marked “private and confidential” and addressed to one of the above named individuals. All matters will be treated in strict confidence and anonymity will be respected wherever possible.

Alternatively if the “whistleblower” considers the matter too serious or sensitive to raise within the internal environment of the School, the matter should be directed in the first instance to the Chairman of the Board. The Academy Trust has its own procedures for dealing with such matters and will ensure every effort to respect the confidentiality of the “whistleblower”. The Chairman will ensure that relevant Board Members and other bodies such as the Department for Education, County Council and Police are informed as appropriate.

In addition, information and advice can be obtained from the charity – ‘Public Concern at Work’. This charity offers free legal advice in certain circumstances about serious malpractice

at work. Their literature states that matters are handled in strict confidence and without obligation. Contact details for the charity are as follows:

Public Concern at Work

Suite 306

16 Baldwin Gardens

LONDON

EC1N 7RJ

Telephone number – 0207 404 6609

4. What Should a Line Manager Do When a Complaint is Received?

- a) It is essential that problems raised are tackled effectively and quickly and with the aim of righting wrongs, this may well be best achieved in many less serious cases by discussion with the “offending” employee and securing a commitment as to future standards and corrective action. In other more serious cases, the matter may well have to be referred to a senior manager.

It may be necessary to instigate disciplinary proceedings.

- b) Complaints received from outside of the School environment must be dealt with by following the procedures as outlined in the School’s own Code of Conduct / Customer Care Code of Practice.
- c) Any written complaint / allegation should be given a written acknowledgement and confirmation that the matter will be looked into. Unless clearly made in a very low key way about minor matters, verbal complaints / allegations should receive a written acknowledgement in the same way.
- d) In the event of the allegation being of a serious nature e.g. relating to a fraud or other gross misconduct offence, there may well be a need to involve other colleagues immediately – see paragraph no. 3(f). This should normally be agreed initially by the Chair of the LGB and / or the Headteacher who, in turn, should keep the Trust Business Manager informed or in the case of fraud, otherwise the Board Chairman.
- e) When any complaint or allegation has been looked into and resolved or dealt with, the person who raised the matter in the first instance should be notified – normally in writing unless common-sense indicates that it can be done more appropriately verbally. How much detail to provide in such cases is a matter of judgement.

5. Protecting “Whistleblowers” and Complainants

- a) “Whistleblowers” have an expectation that their identity can be kept concealed. In the majority of cases this may be possible, but in more serious cases where disciplinary action may have to be taken against an individual, it may well be judged that they have a right to know the source as well as the nature of such complaints. In any case the LGB is committed to

doing as much as possible to ensure that the wellbeing of the “whistleblower” at work does not suffer as a result of the tensions that may result from the making of or investigation of complaints.

- b) Individuals are encouraged to bring to the attention of their managers any harassment or victimisation they may suffer as a result of whistleblowing. All necessary action will be taken to ensure that such harassment or victimisation is stopped.
- c) It may be that “whistleblowers” will find the process of reporting wrong-doing and making statements etc stressful, particularly where there may be feelings of divided loyalties. In such cases the opportunity should be given for the “whistleblower” to talk through these anxieties and feelings, either with their manager or possibly, someone from an external counselling service. The LGB encourages this action.

6. Individuals Receiving A Complaint About Themselves

- 6.1 If the complaint or allegation is at all significant or made in a formal way, particularly by a member of the public or other external users, then the line manager, or Chairperson of the LGB in the case of a Headteacher, should be informed even if it is believed that the complaint is groundless or unjustified.

Where a complaint or “grumble” clearly does not justify the issue being pursued in this way, then a brief file note or diary entry will often be appropriate and in the best interests of the individual.

7. A Sense of Perspective

- 7.1 As stated in the Code of Conduct, all staff have an obligation under the code to raise concerns where it is seen that proper standards have clearly been breached or ignored.

Nevertheless it is important that where deficiencies in service provision standards are involved rather than in areas of malpractice, staff should satisfy themselves that the failing is serious and that the potential disadvantage to the school or public is significant. Any unnecessary over-zealous reporting might be inappropriate and counter-productive.

However, Governors re-iterate that individual staff members are encouraged to raise genuine concerns with the knowledge that they will be taken seriously.

8. Malicious Accusations

- 8.1 If on investigation, it is considered that an individual has made malicious allegations without any real substance, then these too will be taken seriously and may constitute a disciplinary offence or require some other form of penalty appropriate to the circumstances.

Editor’s Note:

This Policy was previously within the Trust’s approved Financial Regulations Policy, and was extracted in September 2016.

Changes made during the extraction include:

1. *Heading and paragraph numbering*
2. *Contact details in 3 f)*
3. *The paragraph cross-reference in 4 d)*

These changes do not impact the approved content of the Policy, and so the 'approved' date remains unchanged.