



St Mark's West Essex Catholic School

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Date Reviewed: December 2020

Next Review Date: December 2022

Committee: Finance and HR

14.1 Introduction

The staff and governors of St Mark's West Essex Catholic School seek to run all aspects of school business and activity with full regard for high standards of conduct and integrity. In the event that members of school staff, parents, governors or the school community at large become aware of activities which give cause for concern, the following whistleblowing policy, or code of practice, has been established which acts as a framework to allow concerns to be raised confidentially and provides for a thorough and appropriate investigation of the matter to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion.

St Mark's West Essex Catholic School offers protection to any employee who honestly and reasonably believes that underhand or illegal practices are taking place. St Mark's undertakes to comply with all applicable laws relating to the prohibition of retaliation against good-faith whistle blowers; see the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, which gives to workers who whistle blow protection against victimisation or dismissal.

Throughout this policy, the term *whistleblower* denotes the person raising the concern or making the complaint. It is not meant in a pejorative sense and is entirely consistent with the terminology used by Lord Nolan as recommended in the *Second Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life: Local Spending Bodies* published in May 1996.

The Governors of St Mark's West Essex Catholic School are committed to tackling fraud and other forms of malpractice and treat these issues seriously. The Governors recognise that some concerns may be extremely sensitive and have 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.

The Governors are 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 this policy apply to matters of suspected fraud and impropriety and not matters of more general grievance which would be dealt with under the grievance procedures.

14.2 When might the whistleblowing policy apply?

The type of activity or behaviour which the Governors consider should be dealt with under this policy includes:

- manipulation of accounting records and finances
- inappropriate use of school assets or funds
- decision-making for personal gain
- any criminal activity
- abuse of position
- fraud and deceit
- serious breaches of school procedures which may advantage a particular party (for example tampering with tender documentation, failure to register a personal interest)

14.3 What action should the *whistleblower* take?

The School Governing Body 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. This can be through the normal line management process or anyone the whistleblower trusts to ensure the matter is dealt with.

The Governing Body have designated a number of individuals to specifically deal with such matters and the whistleblower is invited to decide which of those individuals would be the most appropriate person to deal with the matter. These are shown below:-

NAME AND POSITION

Headteacher: **Miss E Heaphy**

Chair of Personnel and Finance Committee: **Mrs J Delves**

Chair of Governors: **Mr S Gleeson**

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, advice could be sought from their professional association or union alternatively the matter could be directed in the first instance to the Chief Auditor, Corporate Services, Essex County Council.

The LA has its own procedures for dealing with such matters and will ensure every effort to respect the confidentiality of the *whistleblower*. The LA will ensure relevant officers of the Department of Education and Employment are informed as appropriate.

In addition, information and advice can be obtained from the charity 'Protect'. This charity offers free legal advice in certain circumstances to people concerned 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:

Protect
The Green House
244-254 Cambridge Heath Road
London
E2 9DA

Telephone Number: 020 3117 2520

Website: www.protect-advice.org.uk

14.4 **How will the matter be progressed?**

The individual(s) in receipt of the information or allegation (the investigating officer(s)) will carry out a preliminary investigation. This will seek to establish the facts of the matter and assess whether the concern has foundation and can be resolved internally. The initial assessment may identify the need to involve third parties to provide further information, advice or assistance, for example involvement of other members of school staff, legal or personnel advisors, the police, the Department for Education and Employment, the LEA.

14.5 **Respecting Confidentiality**

Wherever possible, the Governors will respect the confidentiality and anonymity of the *whistleblower* and will as far as possible protect him/her from reprisals. The Governors will not tolerate any attempt to victimize the *whistleblower* or attempts to prevent concerns being raised and will consider any necessary disciplinary or corrective action appropriate to the circumstances.

14.6 **Raising unfounded malicious concerns**

Individuals are encouraged to come forward in good faith with genuine concerns with the knowledge they will be taken seriously. If individuals raise malicious unfounded concerns or attempt to make mischief, this will also be taken seriously and may constitute a disciplinary offence or require some other form of penalty appropriate to the circumstances.

14.7 **Conclusion**

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 suspected fraud or impropriety 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 Governors that concerns are taken seriously and will be actioned.