



Confidential Reporting
(Whistleblowing) Policy

Date Published	1 June 2016
Version	2
Last Approved Date	February 2024
Review Cycle	Triennial
Review Date	February 2027

“Learning together, to be the best we can be”

1. Introduction

1.1. Whistleblowing has been defined as:

'the disclosure by an employee or professional of confidential information which relates to some danger, fraud or other illegal or unethical conduct connected with the work place, be it of the employee or his/her fellow employees'

(Public Concern at Work Guidelines 1997).

1.2. Statutory protection for employees who whistle-blow is provided by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 ("PIDA"). The PIDA protects employees against victimisation if they make a protected disclosure within the meaning of the PIDA and speak out about concerns about conduct or practice within the school which is potentially illegal, corrupt, improper, unsafe or unethical or which amounts to malpractice.

1.3. This policy applies to all Trust staff including full and part time, casual, temporary, substitute staff and to individuals undertaking work experience.

2. Aims and Scope of Policy

2.1. Nexus Multi Academy Trust is committed to high standards in all aspects of the Trust and will 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 which will be taken seriously, investigated and appropriate action taken in response.

2.2. This policy aims to:

- give confidence to members of staff about raising concerns about conduct or practice which is potentially illegal, corrupt, improper, unsafe or unethical or which amounts to malpractice or is inconsistent with school standards and policies so that s/he is encouraged to act on those concerns;
- 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 members of staff are protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistleblowing action undertaken in good faith and within the meaning of the PIDA.

2.3. This policy covers whistleblowing relating to alleged:

- unlawful conduct;
- miscarriages of justice in the conduct of statutory or other processes;
- failure to comply with a statutory or legal obligation;
- potential maladministration, misconduct or malpractice;
- health and safety issues including risks to the public as well as risks to pupils and members of staff;
- action that has caused or is likely to cause danger to the environment;
- abuse of authority;
- unauthorised use of public or other funds;
- fraud or corruption;
- breaches of financial regulations or policies;
- mistreatment of any person;
- action that has caused or is likely to cause physical danger to any person or risk serious damage to Trust property;
- sexual, physical or emotional abuse of members of staff or pupils;
- unfair discrimination or favouritism;
- racist incidents or acts, or racial harassment; and
- any attempt to prevent disclosure of any of the issues listed.

2.4. The PIDA sets out the full statutory rights and obligations of members of staff wishing to whistle-blow.

3. Safeguard Against Reprisal, Harassment and victimisation

3.1. The Trust Board does not tolerate harassment or victimisation of members of staff when matters are raised in accordance with the PIDA provisions. Any member of staff who victimises or harasses a member of staff as a result of their having raised a concern in accordance with the whistleblowing policy will be dealt with under the Trust disciplinary procedures.

4. Confidentiality

4.1. The Trust recognises that members of staff may want to raise concerns in confidence and will do its utmost to protect the identity of members of staff

who raise a concern and do not want their name disclosed. Appendix A includes a protocol for reporting concerns where there is or may be a suspected conflict of interest with an individual who is connected to a senior leader.

- 4.2. However, investigation into the concern could reveal the source of the information; and statements may be required from the member of staff as part of the evidence, which would be seen by all parties involved. If the investigation leads to prosecution and the whistle-blower is likely to be called in to give evidence in court.

5. Anonymous Allegations

- 5.1. Staff should put their name to allegations whenever possible – anonymous concerns are much less powerful. Nonetheless anonymous allegations may be considered under this whistleblowing procedure, especially concerns raised relating to the welfare of children. In relation to determining whether an anonymous allegation will be taken forward the trust will take the following factors into account:

- the seriousness of the issue raised;
- the credibility of the concern;
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources, and obtaining information provided.

6. Untrue and Malicious/Vexatious Allegations

- 6.1. If a member of staff makes an allegation in good faith but it is not confirmed by further inquiry the matter will be closed and no further action taken. If, however, the inquiry shows that untrue allegations were malicious and/or vexatious or made for personal gain then the Trust will consider taking disciplinary action against the member of staff.

7. Allegations Concerning Child Protection Issues

- 7.1. If a member of staff raises a concern related to a child protection issue, the Headteacher should urgently consult the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to lead on child protection in the school's local area.
- 7.2. However, in relation to child protection issues, it is open to the member of staff to make a direct referral to the social services designated manager either before raising their concern with the Trust or where the Trust fails to do so after receiving the concern and the member of staff remains concerned about the situation.

8. Procedure for Making a Whistleblowing Allegation

- 8.1. Concerns within an individual Trust academy should be expressed in writing to the Headteacher. If the concerns involve the Headteacher then the Chief Executive Officer should be the first point of contact. It should not be expected that the person receiving the allegation will become the investigating officer. It is at the discretion of this person to delegate the investigation to another person if they feel this is appropriate.
- 8.2. If you feel you cannot express your concerns within the academy and/or with the Chief Executive Officer, it is open to you to raise your concern with someone outside the school setting from the list of organisations in the section of this policy 'Taking the Matter Further'. However, it would usually be expected that the Trust Chief Executive Officer would be the person to whom you express your concerns outside of the school.
- 8.3. The named officer to contact where you have concerns is:
 - 8.3.1. The Chief Executive Officer, Email: ceo@nexusmat.org
 - 8.3.2. The named Director to contact where you have concerns is the chair of Nexus MAT Board of Directors, Email: Chair@Nexusmat.org.

- 8.4. Your concern should be in writing for the avoidance of doubt. You should set out the background and history of the concern; giving names, dates and places where possible, and explaining the reason for your concerns. If you feel unable to put the matter in writing you can still raise your concern verbally and should telephone or arrange to meet the appropriate person.
- 8.5. You can also ask your trade union or professional association to raise the matter on your behalf or to support you in raising the concern.
- 8.6. Where the concern relates to a financial matter including suspicions of fraud, bribery or corruption, you should raise this with the Trust's Chief Finance Officer. If you do not want to raise this through the Chief Finance Officer, you can write directly to the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

9. Response to Whistleblowing

9.1. The matter raised may:

- need inquiry internally by the Trust, under this policy or in line with another (e.g. grievance, dignity at work, disciplinary etc);
- need to be passed to the Police if it relates to alleged criminal activity;
- need to be passed to the Chief Executive Officer who is responsible for the financial management or financial propriety of academies and services within the Trust;
- need to be referred to the LA Designated Officer (LADO) to lead on child protection if there is a concern relating to child protection, or if that person is not available the local authority's designated social services manager for child protection.

9.2. At this stage concerns/allegations are neither accepted or rejected.

10. Timescale for Response

10.1. You will normally receive a written response within 5 working days (except in the case of anonymous allegations):

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how it is proposed to deal with the matter;
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- advising whether any enquiries have been made;
- advising whether further enquiries will take place informing you of support available whilst matters are looked into; and
- maintaining confidentiality wherever possible, but also explaining that it not be possible that you can remain anonymous.

11. The Inquiry Process

11.1. The Trust has a policy on how it undertakes workplace investigations and this will guide the response. An investigating officer will:

- look into the allegation - seeking evidence and interviewing witnesses as necessary;
- maintain confidentiality wherever possible but will be mindful that there is no guarantee that the whistle-blower can remain anonymous;
- if appropriate, bring the matter to the attention of the Chief Executive Officer or the Education & Skills Funding Agency when dealing with complaints about financial management of academies.

11.2. Where external statutory agencies are involved, the whistleblowing process may be halted until the statutory authorities have completed their investigations and confirmed that it is appropriate to continue with the whistleblowing process.

11.3. If the investigating officer needs to talk to you, you are permitted to be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative or a fellow member of staff not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates.

- 11.4. The target is to complete the inquiry within 20 working days from the date of the initial written response, although the enquiry may extend beyond this timescale.

12. The Inquiry Report

- 12.1. Following completion of the inquiry process the investigating officer will make a written report and if necessary action will be taken. This may result in a trigger for the grievance and/or disciplinary procedure to be implemented against the person reported. The whistle-blower will also be notified of the outcome. The report will not contain the whistle-blower's name unless you have expressly stated that you wish to be named.
- 12.2. If the investigation was carried out by a person other than the Headteacher or Chief Executive Officer, then the written report must be submitted to the Chief Executive Officer to determine what further action (if any) is required. When considering further actions, Chief Executive Officer must act on any recommendations made in the report. If the Headteacher and Chief Executive Officer cannot agree on further actions, a panel of three Directors will be convened to consider the report and agree further actions.
- 12.3. Following completion of the investigation, and any actions arising from the investigation, a copy of the report (anonymised) will be made available to all Directors.

13. Taking the matter further

- 13.1. If no action is to be taken and/or you are not satisfied with the way the matter has been dealt with, you can make a complaint under the Trust complaints procedure or raise your concerns with other organisations as listed below:
- the Trust Chief Executive Officer;
 - the Education & Skills Funding Agency;
 - The Office of the Regional Director within the Department for Education;
 - a relevant professional body or regulatory organisation;
 - the Children's Commissioner for England;
 - the Public Services Ombudsman for England;

- Ofsted;
- a solicitor;
- the Police - for concerns of criminal behaviour;
- a trade union or professional association;
- Public Concern at Work (an independent charity that provides free advice for persons who wish to express concern about fraud and other serious malpractice. Telephone 0207 404 6609 or www.pcaaw.co.uk).

Appendix A

Protocol for reporting concerns where this is an actual or perceived conflict of interest

Within any employment setting, it is not uncommon for friends and family members to work together, and/or for new relationships to develop and end through the course of one's working life.

In line with the staff Code of Conduct, all employees and volunteers are required to act with professionalism at all times, with clear professional boundaries adhered to in the workplace to ensure that there is no degradation of professional standards due to familiar relationships. Where there is an absence of professional standards and therefore a breach of the Code of Conduct, this will typically be addressed through HR policies, such as:

- Dignity at work;
- Capability;
- Disciplinary.

In a small number of cases, there may be a relationship between a senior leader and a member of the wider workforce, which may create the impression that a conflict of interest exists which does not allow for an open and transparent response to concerns being raised.

All executive leaders and Headteachers employed by Nexus MAT are required to adhere to the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#), also known as the Nolan Principles. These principles put a binding duty on leaders to act at all times with:

- Selflessness;
- Integrity;
- Objectivity;
- Accountability;
- Openness;
- Honesty; and
- Leadership.

Leaders are performance managed on their adherence to these principles, and any breach is taken very seriously.

However, it is possible that staff may feel anxious about, or unable to, raise concerns to a Headteacher or other Executive leader for fear that a perceived or actual conflict of interest may result, at best, in their concern not being taken seriously and acted upon or, at worst, used against them.

The potential discomfort of raising a concern where there is a relational connection that extends beyond the professional could also be a barrier to employees or volunteers raising issues.

Appendix A

Protocol for reporting concerns where this is an actual or perceived conflict of interest

This protocol is therefore intended to ensure employees and volunteers know that there are routes available to escalate concerns, which will be dealt with sensitively and supportively in line with the protections afforded all whistle-blowers in law.

The following steps can therefore be taken to ensure a culture of openness is maintained at all times:

- a) Where an issue arises and there is a perceived or actual conflict of interest which does **not** include the Headteacher (or equivalent senior manager), then employees should report this to the Headteacher (or equivalent senior manager), citing this policy;
- b) Where an issue arises and there is a perceived or actual conflict of interest which does include the Headteacher (or equivalent senior manager), then employees should report this to the Chief Executive Officer at CEO@Nexusmat.org, citing this policy. Responsive action may be delegated to another Trust leader and/or Human Resources.
- c) Where an issue arises and there is a perceived or actual conflict of interest which includes the Chief Executive Officer, then employees should report this to the Chair of the Trust Board at Chair@Nexusmat.org, citing this policy. Responsive action may be delegated to another Trust leader and/or Human Resources.

Where submitting an email which includes details of concerns, employees and volunteers are encouraged to copy their correspondence to hr-enquiries@nexusmat.org to ensure that an offer of support can be coordinated, if needed. This inbox is monitored for the majority of the year by the HR team, whereas the above steps involve reporting to an individual who may naturally be delayed in responding, depending on their work and/or leave commitments.

Where there is a concern of financial abuse or mismanagement, any email should be copied to the Trust Chief Finance Officer at CFO@Nexusmat.org, unless that individual is the subject of the concern. In that case, steps b or c (above) should be followed.