



ABINGDON

HOUSE SCHOOL

Whistleblowing Policy

<p>Responsible Person: Bursar Last Review Date: August 2023 Next Review Date: August 2024</p>
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In all AHS Policies, unless the specific context requires otherwise, the word “parent” imports the meaning parent, guardian, carer or any other person in whom is vested the legal duties and responsibilities of a child’s primary caregiver.

If you require a copy of this document in large print, braille or audio format, please contact the AHS School Office.

AHS employs the services of the following consulting companies to ensure compliance is met and best practice is implemented:

Peninsula HR Online
Peninsula Business Safe (Health and Safety)
Care Check (DBS)
Educare (online CPD)

Introduction

Abingdon House School and College is owned and operated by Cavendish Education; the Proprietary Body also known as the Governing Body. Any reference to Governors means any Director of Cavendish Education.

This Policy document is one of a series of AHS Policies that, taken together, are designed to form a comprehensive, formal Statement of AHS's aspiration to provide an outstanding education for each and every one of its students and of the mechanisms and procedures being put into place to achieve this. Accordingly, this Policy needs to be read alongside all of these Policies in order to get the full picture and should be read in conjunction with the **Equality Policy**, the **Health and Safety Policy**, the **Promoting British Values Policy** and the **Safeguarding Children & Child Protection Policy** in particular. All of these Policies have been written, not simply to meet statutory and other requirements, but to evidence the work that the whole School is undertaking to ensure the implementation of its Core Principles:

Self-belief/confidence

Respect

Perseverance

Kindness/empathy

Independence

Resilience

The Cavendish Group, including Abingdon House School ("the School"), is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. The schools make clear their whistleblowing procedures which are suitably referenced in staff training and codes of conduct.

1 Guidance for Employees - introduction

This guidance should be read in conjunction with:

- [the relevant local Safeguarding Children Partnership Board Procedures Keeping Children Safe in Education \(Sept 2022\)](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(July 2018\)](#)
- the school's [Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy](#) (including Prevent) where it is cross-referenced
- the school's staff behaviour / code of conduct policy where it is cross-referenced

This Policy seeks to reflect the principles in Sir Robert Francis' [Freedom to Speak Up Review](#), and is suitably referenced in the School's staff training.

2 Aims

This policy aims to:

- encourage staff members to feel confident and safe in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provide an avenue for staff members to raise these concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure that staff members receive a response to their concerns and that they are aware of how to pursue them if not satisfied
- reassure staff members that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have a reasonable belief that they have made any disclosure in good faith

3 Scope

This policy applies to all staff members, volunteers and contractors, paid and unpaid, working in the school including governance colleagues who wish to raise issues about individual colleagues and / or about the school and Cavendish Education as organisations.

It does not apply to staff members raising issues about a parent or a student, or about something or someone beyond your colleagues, the school and Cavendish Education, nor does it apply to parents or students raising issues (the former are invited to use the procedure set out in the School's Parental Complaints Policy, the latter to Complaints Other Than Parents).

4 What is "whistleblowing"?

Whistleblowing is when a worker reports suspected wrongdoing at work.

Wrong-doing covered by the disclosure of information in a school may include:

- someone's health and safety is in danger
- damage to the environment
- a criminal offence
- not obeying the law
- covering up wrongdoing
- misusing public funds
- actions that negatively affect the welfare of children

Concerns or allegations that raise issues routinely covered by other school policies / procedures will normally be addressed under those procedures, e.g. disciplinary, health and safety, grievance, child protection procedures etc.

5 General remarks

The school is committed to delivering services of the highest possible standard, having a culture of safety and of raising concerns where staff are valued and reflective practice is promoted.

Therefore, staff members are welcomed and encouraged to come forward and voice any concerns that they have about any aspect of the school's work, including about poor or unsafe practice and potential failures in the school's safeguarding regime, so that they can be dealt with effectively.

The school wants staff members to feel able to raise concerns following this procedure without fear of reprisals rather than overlooking a problem. Provision for mediation and conflict resolution are provided where necessary. The school seeks to promote a culture of transparency and accountability in relation to how concerns are raised and handled.

Staff members are expected to acknowledge their individual responsibilities to bring matters of concern to the attention of the Senior Leadership Team and / or relevant agencies; although this can be difficult, this is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

A staff member may be the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the school. However, they may not feel able to express their concerns because they feel that speaking up could be disloyal to their colleagues or to the school. They may also fear the possibility of harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances, they may feel it could be easier for them to ignore the concern rather than report it. These feelings, however natural, should not result in a child or young person continuing to be unnecessarily at risk. Staff members should not think "what if I'm wrong?" - rather, "what if I'm right?"

6 Approaching whistleblowing

The school identifies the following as possible reasons for whistleblowing:

- each individual has a responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour
- to prevent a problem worsening or widening
- to protect or reduce risks to others
- to prevent becoming implicated yourself

and the following as what can stop people from whistleblowing:

- starting a chain of events that spirals
- fear of being disloyal to your colleagues
- disrupting the work or project
- fear of getting it wrong
- fear of repercussions or damaging careers
- fear of harassment or victimisation
- fear of not being believed

7 What concerns should staff members raise?

As identified in Section 4 above, concerns that fall within the scope of the Whistleblowing Policy may be about something that:

- has an adverse impact on the welfare and safety of the pupils

- is potentially or actually unlawful and / or involves a significant miscarriage of justice
- might cause significant environmental damage
- is against the school's policies
- might endanger someone's health and safety
- falls below established standard or practice
- amounts to improper conduct
- inappropriately conceals such actions

In the context of this Policy, staff members should be actively alert to the requirements of the guidance [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022](#) including the section on low-level concerns (paragraph 429): *It is crucial that all low-level concerns are shared responsibly with the right person and recorded and dealt with appropriately.*

At AHS any concerns should be logged using MyConcern or by directly contacting the Headteacher.

Staff members have the right to raise concerns about the actions of other employees or private contractors. Under the school's Health & Safety Policy, they are expected to raise concerns about actual or potential health and safety risks.

If staff members are concerned about something to do with their own terms and conditions of employment, they should raise this under the school's Grievance Procedure.

8 Self-reporting

Any staff member must report immediately to the Headteacher or Bursar any criminal conviction (including e.g. a suspended sentence, restorative arrangement, formal warning etc) they receive.

There may be occasions when a staff member has a personal difficulty, eg a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging (or potentially impinging) on their professional competence. They have a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their line manager without delay, so that professional and personal support can be offered to the member of staff concerned. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where personal difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children.

9 Whistleblowing

Before whistleblowing, staff members should consider the following:

- the responsibility for expressing concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour rests with all staff members
- the use of appropriate internal opportunities in school to raise questions and seek clarification on issues that concern them
- whilst it can be difficult to raise concerns about the practice or behaviour of a colleague, they must act to prevent the problem getting worse, to reduce potential risks to the health and safety of others, and to prevent themselves potentially being implicated

When whistleblowing, staff members must:

- act in good faith
- not commit a criminal offence, or interfere with any judicial or pre-judicial process in doing so
- not disclose any confidential information to any person outside the school
- not bring the school into disrepute
- not expect or accept any personal gain from doing so

10 How should you raise a whistleblowing concern?

The earlier a whistleblowing concern is expressed, the easier and sooner it is possible to take action.

As a first step, staff members should normally raise concerns with their immediate line manager who may seek advice from the Designated Safeguarding Lead / Senior Leadership Team depending on what it is.

For more serious concerns, staff members should approach the Designated Safeguarding Lead / Senior Leadership Team.

If they believe that any of those colleagues are implicated in their concerns, they should contact the Directors of Cavendish Education on info@cavendisheducation.com who will ensure an appropriate person takes alternative appropriate action.

Staff members should put their concerns in writing, ideally using the MyConcern portal stating clearly:

- that they are raising concerns via the whistleblowing policy
- the background and history of the concerns
- names, dates and places where possible
- the reasons why they are particularly concerned about the situation
- their name and post title

Staff members are strongly encouraged to share their identity when they make their disclosure and are assured of appropriate support and protection in doing so. Disclosures made anonymously are less likely to allow leaders and managers to gain a full understanding of the concern. Anonymous whistleblowing concerns will be considered at the discretion of the school and / or Cavendish Education.

If they do not feel able to put their concern in writing, they can telephone or meet the appropriate person.

Although they will not be expected to prove the truth of any allegation, they will need to demonstrate to the person whom they contact that there are sufficient grounds for their concern.

Staff members should note that where a concern relates to a safeguarding matter, they must ensure that they have followed guidance from the school's safeguarding and child protection

policies, including where appropriate, referring the matter in line with these policies within the required timescales.

The safeguarding and child protection policies have advice to be followed regarding reporting safeguarding concerns where the person due to be reported to could be implicated. [Stephen Aiano](#) is the nominated group Safeguarding Lead for Cavendish Education and can be contacted if a staff member is unsure in this regard.

11 What happens next?

Once staff members have raised a concern, a nominated investigating manager will be appointed who will:

- where appropriate, give them outline information on the nature and progress of any enquiries
- if necessary, take action with the aim of protecting them from harassment or victimisation
- provide mediation and dispute resolution if appropriate
- do its best to protect their identity if they do not want their name disclosed (although this might not be possible in all cases, especially if a signed statement is needed from them in order to address the concern via another procedure, e.g. the disciplinary procedure)
- take no action against them if they raise a concern in good faith that is later confirmed to be unfounded

The nominated investigating manager will make initial enquiries (usually involving a meeting with them), to decide whether an investigation is required and what form it should take.

For example, the matter raised may:

- be resolved simply without the need for further investigation;
- be investigated internally by an appropriate manager eg the Bursar
- be referred to a relevant external agency or equivalent for advice
- be referred to the Police
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

Within ten working school days of their concern being received as Whistleblowing under this Policy, the nominated investigating manager will send them a written response:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how they propose to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response; and/or
- indicating whether any initial enquiries have been made, and whether further investigations will take place
or
- explaining the reasons for not investigating further if that is the decision
and/or
- indicating when they can expect to receive further details, if the situation is not yet resolved

If their whistleblowing concern, once investigated, is confirmed as unfounded, the school / Cavendish Education will deem the matter to be concluded and will not reconsider the matter via this or other procedure unless new evidence becomes available. If the whistleblower feels that there have been errors of fact or procedure, they may re-approach the same investigating manager to raise these errors which will be reviewed.

Whilst genuine Whistleblowing is acknowledged and welcomed as helpful and contributes towards high levels of quality, staff members should note that, if there is clear evidence that they have deliberately made a malicious or false statement, disciplinary action may be taken against them.

12 Whistleblowing support and context

The School recognises that Whistleblowing can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support for stress is available from the school's Senior Leadership Team or the employee assistance helpline provided by HealthAssured either

- by phone on 0800 0474096 or
- online at <https://healthassured.eap.co.uk/> using User Name *Peninsula* and Password *EAP*.

If they are not happy with the response that they receive from the school, they may wish to raise the matter externally to the school or Cavendish Education:

- 'Public Concern at Work' on 0207 4046609 or email whistle@pcaw.co.uk or helpline@pcaw.org.uk
- the NSPCC whistleblowing helpline is available for staff members who do not feel their concerns regarding child protection failures have been actioned appropriately
- general guidance on whistleblowing can be found via: Advice on Whistleblowing - the NSPCC's [what you can do to report abuse dedicated helpline](#) is available as an alternative route for staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally, or have concerns about the way a concern is being handled by their school or by Cavendish Education. Staff can call 0800 028 0285 – the line is available from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, Monday to Friday and email: help@nspcc.org.uk. Staff members can call 0800 028 0285 from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday; alternatively, email help@nspcc.org.uk
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations, eg the Health & Safety Executive

A staff member may contact their inspecting body via: [the ISI Concerns form](#).

If a staff member raises a concern externally, it is their responsibility to ensure that confidential information is not disclosed - that is, they must not hand over confidential information, in whatever format, to a third party.

Contextually, this Policy seeks to be in line with the guidance [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#), in particular:

74. All staff and volunteers should feel able to raise concerns about poor or unsafe practice and potential failures in the school's or college's safeguarding regime and know that such concerns will be taken seriously by the senior leadership team.

75. Appropriate whistleblowing procedures should be put in place for such concerns to be raised with the school's or college's senior leadership team.

76. Where a staff member feels unable to raise an issue with their employer, or feels that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, other whistleblowing channels are open to them:

- general guidance on whistleblowing can be found via: [Advice on Whistleblowing](#)
- the [NSPCC's what you can do to report abuse dedicated helpline](#) is available as an alternative route for staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally, or have concerns about the way a concern is being handled by their school or college. Staff can call 0800 028 0285 – line is available from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, Monday to Friday and email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Annex A 22. Appropriate whistleblowing procedures should be in place for concerns to be raised with the school or college's senior leadership team. 23. Where staff feel unable to raise an issue with their employer or feel that their genuine safeguarding concerns are not being addressed, the NSPCC whistleblowing advice line is available. Staff can call 0800028 0285 – 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, Monday to Friday and email: help@nspcc.org.uk. Alternatively, staff can write to: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH.

* [Public Concern at Work / Protect](#) is a registered charity that you can contact for advice on how to raise a concern at work about poor practice. The charity may also provide the School with advice as to the best possible ways to address your concern(s).

13 Training

Training is provided on Whistleblowing as part of the safeguarding and child protection training regularly provided by the school and as part of the induction of new staff members. At least annual reminders of good practice are given to staff as well as updates when any changes occur. This may be digitally or as part of a staff meeting or training session.

14 Review of implementation

The implementation of this Policy is reviewed annually by the school's Senior Leadership Team in consultation with staff and a report is made to the Governance Body.

The school may submit to Cavendish Education proposals for amendments to this Policy.