



Denefield School Whistleblowing Policy

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Whistleblowing Policy

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. Any employee at Denefield could be the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the school. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the school. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.
- 1.2. Denefield is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees, and others that we deal with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the school's work to come forward and voice those concerns in line with this policy. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.
- 1.3. This policy document makes it clear that employees can voice concerns without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. The Whistleblowing Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the school rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.

2. Applicability

- 2.1. This policy applies to all employees and others who could potentially be victimised by blowing the whistle whilst working at the school. For the purposes of this policy, the term employees will be used to include all those who might reasonably rely on this whistleblowing policy.
- 2.2. This procedure is in addition to the school's complaints procedure.

3. Roles & Responsibilities

- 3.1. The Trust Board, along with the Headteacher, has overall responsibility for ensuring that the Whistleblowing Policy is managed and reviewed appropriately, in accordance with this agreed procedure.

4. Policy

- 4.1. This policy aims to:
 - encourage employees to feel confident about raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
 - provide avenues for employees to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken

- ensure that employees receive a response to their concerns and that employees are aware of how to pursue the concerns if not satisfied
- reassure employees that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have a reasonable belief that they have made any disclosures in good faith
- provide a timely conclusion for both reporter and the employee being investigated

4.2. There are existing procedures in place to enable an employee to lodge a grievance relating to their own employment. The Whistleblowing Policy is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. The items covered include:

- conduct which is an offence or breach of the law
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- serious health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
- serious damage to the environment
- the unauthorised use of public funds
- sexual or physical abuse of pupils
- unethical conduct

4.3. Any serious concerns that an employee may have about any aspect of conduct by employees of the school or others acting on behalf of the school can be reported in line with the Whistleblowing procedures. This may be something that:

- makes an employee feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, the employee's experience or the standards the employee believes the School subscribes to
- is against the schools standing orders, financial regulations or policies
- falls below established standards of practice
- amounts to improper conduct.

4.4. This policy does not replace the school's complaints procedure.

5. Safeguards against harassment or victimisation

- 5.1. Denefield is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees.
- 5.2. Denefield recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what the employee is saying is true, or they have a reasonable belief that it is true, the employee will have nothing to fear because they will be doing their duty to the school and students at the school.
- 5.3. Denefield will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressure) and will take appropriate action to protect employees when concerns are raised in good faith.
- 5.4. Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence, or be influenced by, any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect an employee.

6. Confidentiality

- 6.1. All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal the identity of an employee who raises allegations. At the appropriate time, however, the employee may need to come forward as a witness.

7. Anonymous allegations

- 7.1. This policy encourages employees to put their name to allegations wherever possible. This is because concerns expressed anonymously are much more difficult to investigate.
- 7.2. However, all anonymous allegations should be investigated by the Headteacher in consultation with the Chair of Trustees, in which they should take into account:
 - the seriousness of the issue raised
 - the credibility of the concern
 - the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

8. Untrue allegations

- 8.1. If an employee makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against the employee.
- 8.2. If, however, the employee makes an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action will be taken against the employee.

9. How to raise a concern

- 9.1. Where the employee has a concern relating to a member of staff they should raise this with the Headteacher. Where the concern relates to the Headteacher the employee should approach the Chair of Trustees.
- 9.2. Where an employee raises a concern with their line manager, the line manager must share the concern with the Headteacher or, if the concern relates to the Headteacher, with the Chair of Trustees who will determine the best course of action.
- 9.3. Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Staff who wish to make a written report are invited to use the following format:
- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant names and dates)
 - the reason why the employee is particularly concerned about the situation.
- 9.4. The earlier the employee expresses the concerns, the easier it will be to take action.
- 9.5. Although the employee is not expected to prove beyond reasonable doubt the truth of an allegation, the employee should demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for the concern.
- 9.6. The employee may wish to obtain advice/guidance on how to pursue matters of concern from one of the following:

Public Concern at Work	020 7404 6609	helpline@pcaw.co.uk
Ofsted Whistleblower hotline	0300123 3155	whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

- 9.7. The employee may wish to consider discussing the concern with a colleague or trade union representative first and may find it easier to raise the matter if there are other colleagues who have the same experience or concerns.
- 9.8. The employee may invite a trade union or professional association representative or friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns raised.

10. How Denefield will respond

- 10.1. Denefield will respond to the employee's concerns by carrying out some initial enquiries. Where appropriate, the matters raised may:
- Be investigated by management, or through the disciplinary process

- Be referred to the police
- Be referred to the internal auditor
- Form the subject of an independent inquiry.

10.2. In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Concerns over allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedure (for example, child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration by the appropriate senior leader, under the procedures for dealing with these issues.

10.3. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

10.4. Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees will write to the employee:

- Acknowledging that the concern has been raised
- Indicating how it is proposed to deal with the matter
- Giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- Telling the employee whether any initial enquiries have been made
- Supplying the employee with information on staff support mechanisms (if appropriate).
- Telling the employee whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

10.5. The amount of contact between the individual considering the issue and the employee who raised the issue will depend on the nature of the matters raised; the potential difficulties involved; and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the school will seek further information from the employee.

10.6. Where any meeting is arranged (off-site if requested) the employee can be accompanied by a trade union representative or a work colleague.

10.7. The school will take steps to minimise any difficulties the employee may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if the employee is required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings the school will arrange for the employee to receive additional advice.

10.8. The school accepts that the employee will need to be assured that the matter has

been properly addressed. Thus, the school will inform the employee of the steps that have been taken to resolve the matter as appropriate.

11. How the matter can be taken further

11.1. This policy is intended to provide employees with an avenue within the school to raise concerns. The school hopes the employee will be satisfied with any action taken. If this is not the case, or where the concerns cannot be raised with the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees because the allegations relate to them, the employee can raise their concerns directly with one of the following contact points:

Public Concern at Work	020 7404 6609 / helpline@pcaw.co.uk
Audit Commission	01628 796122
Citizens' Advice West Berks	08444 779980
Citizens' Advice Reading	0118 969006
Thames Valley Police	101

11.2. If the employee chooses to take the matter outside the school, the employee should ensure that they do not disclose confidential information. An employee should not take concerns directly to the media without first complying with this policy.

Linked Documents:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Fairness & Dignity at Work Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Complaints Procedure