Summit Education Trust

Whistleblowing Policy

Date of last review: September 2026

Date of next review: September 2028

Version: 5

Monitoring and Evaluation: Has it been used and raised a concern. Have the concerns been raised according to the policy?

CEO to produce an anonymised annual report for the Trust Boards Staff, Pay & Conditions Committee detailing the number of disclosures received, outcomes reached and lessons learned. The committee will then make any recommendations to the Trust Board.

Summit Education Trust is committed to the safeguarding and welfare of its students and young people

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Status: Statutory

The information contained within this policy and the appendix are of equal importance. For relevant information please ensure you review the policy in its entirety.

1. Purpose

1.1 This policy aims to:

- Encourage individuals affected to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated, and that their confidentiality will be respected
- Let all staff in the trust know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the trust
- Set clear procedures for how the trust will respond to such concerns, ensuring that staff know that concerns raised by whistle-blowers will be responded to properly and fairly
- Let all staff know the protection available to them if they raise a whistle-blowing concern
- Assure staff that they will not be victimised for raising a legitimate concern through the steps set out in the policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken (though vexatious or malicious concerns may be considered a disciplinary issue – see section 8 below)
- Ensure staff know that they are protected by law and that a non-disclosure agreement, confidentiality clause or 'gagging clause' in a settlement agreement or employment contract cannot stop them from making a protected disclosure in the public interest

1.2 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

1.3 This policy applies to all employees, officers and trustees. Other workers, including consultants, contractors, agency staff and those on work placements, are also encouraged to use it.

2. Legislation

2.1 The requirement to have clear whistle-blowing procedures in place is set out in the Academy Trust Handbook.

2.2 This policy has been written in line with the above document, as well as government guidance on whistle-blowing. We have also taken into account the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

2.3 This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

2.4 This policy links with our policies on:

Staff grievance policy, Complaints procedure, Child protection policy, Disciplinary policy

3. Definition of whistle-blowing

3.1 Whistle-blowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is "in the public interest". Examples of whistle-blowing include (but are not limited to):

- Criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption
- Pupils' or staff health and safety being put in danger
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement
- Breaches of financial management procedures
- Sexual harassment (in effect from 6 April 2026)
- Attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest
- Damage to the environment

3.2 A whistle-blower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above. These concerns should be reported under this policy.

3.3 Not all concerns about the trust, or individual schools in the trust, count as whistle-blowing. For example, personal staff grievances such as bullying or harassment do not usually count as whistle-blowing. If something affects a staff member as an individual, or relates to an individual employment contract, this is likely a grievance.

3.4 If a complaint involves personal circumstances alongside wider concerns (e.g. pupil health and safety), the staff member must consult with the CEO/Headteacher of TDS for The Downs School, and Director of Primaries for the primary schools to decide the most appropriate reporting procedure.

3.5 When staff have a concern, they should consider whether it would be better to follow our staff grievance or complaints procedures.

3.6 Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) has:

- Further guidance on the difference between a whistle-blowing concern and a grievance that staff may find useful if unsure
- A free and confidential advice line

4. Responsibilities

4.1 The overall responsibility and operation of this policy and procedure rests with the Chair of the Trust Board

4.2 The Chair of Trustees will keep a record of concerns raised and outcomes (in a form that does not endanger confidentiality).

4.3 Heads of School receiving concerns are responsible for reporting the concern and their outcome to the CEO or Director of Primaries so that it can be recorded. The CEO is responsible for reporting concerns to the Chair of Trustees.

4.4 Heads of School, the Director of Primaries and the CEO are directly responsible for making their staff aware of this policy and procedure and for the adherence of their staff.

4.5 Employees have an individual responsibility to adhere to this policy and procedure and to the wider Trust Code of Conduct.

5. Guidance

5.1 It is not necessary for the employee to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be committed - a reasonable belief is sufficient.

5.2 **In the public interests** means that an individual acted outside of their own personal interest – they acted for more than personal gain. It is not necessary for the disclosure to be of interest to the entire public. The following considerations are often used as a test to establish whether something is within the scope of public interest:

- The number of people in the group whose interests the disclosure served
- The nature of the interests and the extent by which individuals are affected by the wrongdoing disclosed
- The nature of the wrongdoing disclosed
- The identity of the alleged wrongdoer

5.3 The employee has no responsibility for investigating the matter; it is the Trust's responsibility to ensure that an investigation takes place.

5.4 Where the concerns are about **safeguarding children or young people**, the Trust's Designated Safeguarding Lead should be notified.

5.5 An instruction to cover up wrongdoing is in itself a disciplinary offence. If a worker is told not to raise or pursue any concern, even by a person in authority, employees should not agree to remain silent and should disclose this instruction.

5.6 Where a disclosure is merely an expression of opinion that fails to show that a legal obligation has been or is likely to be breached, it will not amount to a protected or qualifying disclosure for the purposes of the whistleblowing legislation.

5.7 An employee who is not sure whether the conduct he/she is concerned about does constitute illegal or improper conduct or is unsure about how to proceed may contact their Professional Association/Trade Union. Employees can also seek professional and confidential advice from Protect, a registered charity that advises on whistleblowing queries (see section 5 below for more details).

5.8 Financial regulations require that any suspicion of fraud, corruption or other financial irregularity is reported to Internal Audit for possible investigation. Normally an employee must first report any suspicion of such an irregularity to a Head of School, Director of Primaries, the CEO or Chair of Trustees who will in turn report it to Department for Education.

5.9 Where allegations are raised anonymously they will be considered at the discretion of the CEO, in consultation with the Chair of Trustees. Where anonymity is requested, efforts will be made to meet the request where appropriate but that might not always be possible. The earlier and more open the expression of concern, the easier it will be to take appropriate action.

6. Procedure for staff to raise a whistle-blowing concern

6.1 When to raise a concern

6.1.1 Staff should consider the examples in section 5 when deciding whether their concern is of a whistle-blowing nature. Consider whether the incident(s) was illegal, breached statutory or trust procedures, put people in danger or was an attempt to cover any such activity up.

6.2 Who to report to

6.2.1 School-based staff should report their concern to the CEO/Headteacher of TDS for The Downs School and the Director of Primaries for the Primary schools within the Trust.

6.2.2 If the concern is about the Director of Primaries, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the staff member should report their concern to the CEO.

6.2.3 If the concern is about the CEO/Headteacher of TDS, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the staff member should report their concern to the Chair of Trustees.

6.2.4 Central team staff should report their concern to the CEO. If the concern is about the CEO, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the central team staff should report the concern to the Chair of Trustees.

6.3 How to raise the concern

6.3.1 Concerns should be made in writing wherever possible (see Appendix 2 for the Disclosure form). They should include the names of those committing wrongdoing, dates, places and as much evidence and context as possible. Staff raising a concern should also include details of any personal interest in the matter.

6.3.2 Staff are encouraged to give their name when reporting an allegation, to help the trust take the investigation further. However, a complainant's right to anonymity will be respected.

6.3.3 A proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if further information cannot be obtained from the staff member. This will also make it more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible.

7. Trust procedure for responding to a whistle-blowing concern

7.1 Investigating the concern

7.1.1 When a concern is received by the CEO/Headteacher of TDS, the Director of Primaries or Chair of Trustees – referred to from here as the 'recipient' – they will:

- Meet with the person raising the concern within a reasonable time. The person raising the concern may be joined by a trade union or professional association representative
- Get as much detail as possible about the concern at this meeting and record the information. If it becomes apparent that the concern is not of a whistle-blowing nature, the recipient should handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy/procedure
- Reiterate, at this meeting, that they are protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. If the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious, disciplinary action may be taken (see section 8 of this policy)
- Establish whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant further investigation. If there is:

- The recipient should then arrange a further investigation into the matter and appoint an Investigating Officer. In some cases, they may need to bring in an external, independent body to investigate. In others, they may need to report the matter to the Police
- The person who raised the concern should be informed of how the matter is being investigated and an estimated timeframe for when they will be informed of the next steps

7.1.2 Throughout any investigation, the trust will provide well-being check-ins for both the complainant and the subject(s) of a concern. Where appropriate, support and signposting to manage expectations, protect emotional wellbeing and maintain professional confidence will be offered.

7.2 Outcome of the investigation

7.2.1 Once the investigation – whether this was just the initial investigation of the concern, or whether further investigation was needed – is complete, the Investigating Officer will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether or not any wrongdoing has occurred. The report will include any recommendations and details on how the matter can be rectified and whether or not a referral is required to an external organisation, such as the Local Authority (LA) or Police.

7.2.2 They will inform the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

7.2.3 Beyond the immediate actions, the CEO, trustees and other staff, if necessary, will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

7.2.4 While we cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, we will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

7.2.5 If a staff member is not satisfied with the way in which their concern has been handled, they can raise their concerns with 1 of the contact points listed in section 6.2.

8. Malicious or vexatious allegations

8.1 Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made with the reasonable belief that the disclosure is in the public interest and meets the definition of whistleblowing as listed in section 5, but the investigation finds no wrongdoing, there will be no disciplinary action against the member of staff who raised the concern.

8.2 If, however, an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the trust will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the person making the allegation

9. Escalating concerns beyond the trust

9.1 The trust encourages staff to raise their concerns internally, in line with section 6 of this policy, but recognises that staff may feel the need to report concerns to an external body. A list of prescribed bodies to whom staff can raise concerns with is included here.

9.2 It is advised that staff seek advice before reporting a concern to an external body. The Protect advice line, linked to in section 5 of this policy, can help staff when deciding whether to raise the concern to an external party.

10. Safeguarding children and young people

10.1 All employees have a duty to report concerns about the safety and welfare of students.

10.2 Whistleblowing concerns about any of the following should be reported to the CEO/Headteacher of TDS for The Downs School and Director of Primaries for the Primary Schools within the Trust:.

- physical abuse of a pupil/student
- sexual abuse of a pupil/student
- emotional abuse of a pupil/student
- neglect of a pupil/student
- an intimate or improper relationship between an adult and a pupil/student

Please refer to the school's safeguarding policy.

10.3 The reason for the concern may be the actions of a colleague (including a more senior colleague), a Governor, another student or someone outside the school. Whatever the reason, concerns must be reported. Failure to report a Child Protection related allegation will be, in itself, a disciplinary matter.

11. What the school asks of whistleblowers

11.1 The purpose of this policy is to enable individuals to raise concerns in confidence, without any fear of reprisal; therefore, it is imperative that whistleblowers:

- Do not talk about the concern outside the school unless it is to report the concern through the proper external channels, e.g. the LA..
- Declare any personal interest in the matter, as the policy is designed to be used in the interest of the public and not for individual matters.

12. Approval

12.1 This policy will be reviewed annually.

12.2 These procedures have been agreed by the board of trustees, who will approve them whenever reviewed.

Appendix 1 – Quick Reference Guide

A) What type of concerns are covered by this policy and procedure?

i) As a worker you may be the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the school or trust. It may be tempting to do nothing as you may feel that voicing your concerns would appear disloyal to colleagues or the school/trust. You may also be afraid that it may lead to repercussions against yourself. However, it is important that you raise your concerns promptly so that the school can take action to rectify them.

ii) The trust is committed to ensuring that any wrongdoing is rectified as soon as possible and that workers are supported in raising any serious concerns. This whistleblowing policy and procedure explains how you should raise your concerns, and the protection you are entitled to.

iii) You should report any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of the school or trust, provision of education and extra-curricular activities or the conduct of employees, governors, volunteers or others acting on behalf of the school or trust.

iv) Concerns covered by the Public Interest Disclosure Act are listed in 3.1 in the policy above and may be something that makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of something that:

- Is against the law
- Puts someone at risk
- Breaches the school's standards, policies or procedures
- Is against the school's instruments and articles of government, Financial Regulations or policies and procedures
- Falls below established standards of practice
- Amounts to sexual harassment
- Amounts to improper conduct

B) How are you protected when raising a concern?

i) Staff are protected in law by the Public Interests Disclosure Act, which gives employees protection from detriment and dismissal where they have made a protected disclosure, providing the legal requirements of the Act are satisfied, e.g. the disclosure was in the public interest.

ii) You are not expected to investigate the concern yourself, just to be able to explain the reasons for your concern.

iii) Any investigation into concerns of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affects you.

C) What to do if you have a concern

i) You should raise your concern as specified in the procedure. If you are not sure if you should raise something it may help to talk things through with your line manager, or to seek advice from your trade union or the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Appendix 2: Whistleblowing Disclosure Form

This form is intended for use by any individual working for the school (including governors, contractors, agency workers and volunteers) who wishes to raise an issue about serious wrongdoing. You must have a reasonable belief in any allegations that you make, and they must be made in the public interest.

This form should be used to report wrongdoing within the school or trust (for example, financial irregularities, sexual harassment or health and safety concerns), rather than to raise a personal grievance. (If you want to make an allegation of bullying or harassment or are complaining that your contract of employment has been breached, separate procedures exist for these types of concerns.)

If you are unsure about whether your complaint is best dealt with under the trust's whistleblowing policy or the grievance procedure, please read the whistleblowing policy, which provides examples of the issues that should be reported using this form. If, having read the whistleblowing policy, you remain unsure about which procedure to use, please consult your Head of School, Director of Primaries, CEO or the Chair of Trustees (or Head of Education Services where the Chair of Trustees are the subjects of your allegations) for further advice.

Once you have submitted this form, the school's whistleblowing procedure will be invoked. This will result in an investigation. In certain circumstances, you can request that your complaint be kept anonymous. Where possible, the school will respect a request for anonymity, but cannot guarantee that it will be able to do so.

This form should be completed and delivered to the CEO/Headteacher of TDS for The Downs School, The Director of Primaries for the Primary Schools, or the Chair of Trustees (see sections 6 and 7 of the whistleblowing procedure) in an envelope marked "confidential" or sent as an email attachment with "confidential" in the subject line.

Formal public interest disclosure (whistleblowing)	
Worker's name	
Worker's job title	
School	
Date	
Does your public interest disclosure relate to your line manager?	Yes/No
Summary of disclosure	
Please set out the details of the issue that you wish to raise, providing examples where possible, particularly dates, times, locations and the identities of those involved. You may attach additional sheets if required.	

Individuals involved		
Please provide the names and contact details of any people involved in your complaint, including witnesses.		
Outcome requested		
Please set out how you would like to see the issue dealt with, and why and how you believe that this will resolve the issue.		
Declaration		
I confirm that the above statements are true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief. I understand that, if I knowingly make false allegations, this may result in the school taking disciplinary action against me.		
Form completed by		
Signature		
For completion by the school		
Date form received by the school		
Name of recipient and job role		
Signature		