



The Villages' Multi-Academy Trust

Whistleblowing (Confidential Reporting) Policy

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Introduction

The Villages' Multi-Academy Trust and each of the schools within the Trust recognise that people working within organisations are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong in the place in which they work. They may be wary of expressing concerns because they feel that to do so would be disloyal to their colleagues or to their school. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances it may feel easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

This Trust and its schools are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity, and accountability. In line with that commitment, we expect employees and others working at or for the school who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Schools' or Trust's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

Aims of the Policy

This Policy is designed to encourage and enable you to be able to raise concerns you might have about the way the School or Trust conducts its business. It does this by providing you with an opportunity to raise concerns which you reasonably believe point to serious malpractice either in your School or within the Trust in a confidential way, without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination, or disadvantage. Your concerns may relate to the improper, unethical, or illegal conduct of employees, Governors, Directors, or others acting on behalf of the Trust. Some examples of serious malpractice include:

- conduct which is an offence or a failure to comply with a legal obligation.
- disclosures on miscarriages of justice.
- endangering the health and safety of pupils, members of the public as well as other employees.
- damage to the environment.
- the unauthorised use of public funds.
- possible fraud and corruption.
- sexual or physical abuse or harassment of pupils or other workers.
- any concern over the welfare of pupils or other workers.
- deliberate concealment of malpractice; and
- other unethical conduct.

This list is not exhaustive.

Victimisation or harassment of anyone using this policy or if anyone tries to discourage others from coming forward will be deemed to be a disciplinary matter.

This Policy complements complaints and statutory reporting procedures already in place for service users and non-employees and reflects the legal protection afforded by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. It is not designed to be a substitute for the school's grievance, disciplinary or harassment policies. If you have a personal concern unrelated to malpractice, please use the School's Grievance Procedure or Harassment Policy as appropriate, copies of which are available from your Head teacher or from our commissioned Human Resources provider, Liberata.

If, having read this policy, you are uncertain about whether it is the appropriate policy or how to proceed, please feel free to seek informal advice from Human Resources, Liberata.

Who is covered by the Policy?

Anyone working for or on behalf of the school or Trust may raise a concern about malpractice, including employees, governors, contractors, supply staff, agency and trainee teachers, directors, or other office holders.

Who is responsible for the Policy?

The Local Governing Body of each school is responsible for ensuring the operation of this policy. The Local Governing Body will work in partnership with the Trust in dealing with concerns about malpractice and will immediately contact the Trust on receiving such information.

The Trust Chief Executive Officer, (or Chair of the Trust, if the concern relates to the CEO) and the HR Director, have overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy throughout the Trust. Their role is to ensure that matters are investigated properly and to maintain a record of concerns raised together with outcomes and they will report as necessary to the Trust without jeopardising confidentiality.

How to Raise a Concern

Step 1 - Within the School

If you have a concern about malpractice, the Local Governing Body hopes that you will be able to raise the matter with your Head Teacher. If your concern is connected to a child protection issue, you must follow the school's Child Protection Policy and report your concern to the school's DSL or one of the Deputy DSLs.

However, if you feel unable to raise the concern with your Head Teacher due to the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved, or if you believe that he/she may be involved, you should speak to the Chair of

Governors or the Safeguarding Governor. Alternatively, you may wish to contact a Director of the Trust - Vickie Lee (HR) or Marcus Rea (Chair). Alternatively, you can speak to HR officers at Liberata.

Concerns may be raised verbally and/or in writing. If you wish to make a written report, you are advised to include in your letter the background and history (giving relevant dates) and give the reason you are particularly concerned about the matter. You may also wish to seek advice from your trade union at this stage.

If you are personally involved in the matter you raise, please tell us at the outset. You may invite your trade union, a member of staff from Human Resources or a work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews (which may be arranged away from your normal workplace if you so wish) in connection with the concerns you have raised.

Step 2- Within the Trust

Where appropriate, the Head Teacher, governor, HR officer or Trust director will refer the matter to another officer or director. For example, if you have a concern about any financial loss or irregularity, this would be raised with the Auditors; if your concern relates to the conduct of a director or to the working relationship between a director and an employee of the school, this may be raised with the Chair of the Board or CEO.

If you have followed the channels described in Step 1 and you still have concerns or feel that you are unable to discuss the matter with any of the individuals listed in Step 1, you may wish to raise the matter with another Director. If the concern is related to child protection, you may wish to raise it with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

What will happen?

The School or Trust will respond promptly to your concerns by assessing what action ought to be taken. This may involve an internal investigation or a more formal inquiry. You will be told who is handling the matter (the Responsible Officer), how you can contact them and whether any more assistance from you will be required. In normal circumstances within seven working days of a concern being raised, the Responsible Officer will write to you acknowledging that your concern has been received. The letter will also inform you of any relevant staff support mechanisms and agree arrangements for keeping you informed.

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

Thereafter, the Responsible Officer will keep you informed of progress and the outcome of any investigations or decisions on the matter including the content of any reports written.

The School or Trust will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the school and/or Trust will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure. You are protected against victimisation as a result of raising a concern and, should victimisation be proven to have taken place, it will be dealt with under disciplinary procedures. In exceptional circumstances, it may also be necessary to consider future working arrangements.

Step 3 - Raising a Concern Externally

While we hope that this policy gives you the confidence to raise your concern with your school management team, governing body, Trust directors or HR officers, we would prefer that you raised your concern with the proper external regulator rather than not at all.

If you act in good faith and genuinely and you reasonably believe that both the malpractice falls within the remit of a regulator and that the information disclosed is substantially true, you may also contact the following prescribed regulators:

- the Health and Safety Executive for health and safety dangers.
- the Environment Agency for environmental dangers.
- the Audit Commission or External Auditor for concerns associated with conduct of business, value for money, fraud, and corruption; or
- the Data Protection Registrar.

Finally, in circumstances where you genuinely believe that the matter cannot or will not be dealt with internally because either your complaints have been ignored, you believe that information will be concealed or destroyed or you will be subjected to victimisation and have evidence to back up your belief, you may consider it appropriate to contact a non-regulatory external body for example the police, OFSTED or the Department of Education. You are strongly advised to seek independent advice before you raise any issue outside the Trust. A list of contacts is given in the sections below entitled Further Advice and the Role of Trade Unions.

Confidentiality

The Trust undertakes to protect your identity and we will not disclose it without your consent. If the situation arises where it is not possible to pursue your concern without revealing your identity (e.g., the need to give evidence in court or at a disciplinary hearing), we will discuss with you how and if we can proceed.

Untrue Allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith, but the evidence produced during the investigation does not substantiate it, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you are an employee or statutory office holder and you make an allegation maliciously or for personal gain, this may result in disciplinary action taken against you.

The Role of the Trade Unions

The trade unions recognised by the Trust are committed to the effective use of this policy. If you are considering raising concerns using this procedure you may wish to seek advice from your trade union representative before doing so, particularly if you believe that the only course of action open to you is to raise your concern with an external body.

Further Advice

You may of course seek advice from any from Education Human Resources (Liberata) at County Hall On 01905 763763.

However, if you want independent advice at any time, you may contact your trade union or the independent charity, Public Concern at Work on 0207 404 6609 or email them on whistle@pcaw.demon.co.uk. Their lawyers will give you free confidential advice at any time on how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.

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