



Central Co-operative Learning Trust

Whistleblowing Policy

Responsible for Policy :	CEO/Headteachers	
Approved by:	Trust Board	Date: November 2019
Date last reviewed:	4/11/19	
Next review date:		

Introduction

The Central Co-operative Learning Trust expects the highest standards of conduct from all employees, governors and trustees and will treat seriously any concern raised about illegal or improper conduct.

This Policy is intended to help employees who are working in or with Central Co-operative Learning Trust who have major concerns over any wrongdoing within one of our schools or in our Trust relating to unlawful conduct, financial malpractice or dangers to the public or the environment. Specific examples could include:

- A criminal offence (e.g. fraud, corruption or theft) has been/is likely to be committed.
- A miscarriage of justice has been/is likely to occur
- The health or safety of any individual has been/is likely to be endangered
- The environment has been/is likely to be damaged
- Public funds are being used in an unauthorised manner
- The Governance arrangements have or are not being observed or are being breached by students, staff employed in or those working with or assisting our schools
- Sexual or physical abuse of any employee or service recipient is taking place (subject to the Child Protection Procedure in the case of children)
- Discrimination is occurring to any member of staff or service recipient on grounds of sex, race or disability
- Breach of the school's internal policies and procedures including its Code of Conduct
- Conduct likely to damage the Trust's reputation or any other form of improper action or conduct is taking place
- Unauthorised disclosure of confidential information
- Information relating to any of the above is being deliberately concealed or attempts are being made to conceal the same.

The Trust would rather that you raised the matter when it is just a concern rather than wait for concrete proof.

If something is troubling you, which you think we should know about or look into, please use this policy. If, however, you are aggrieved about your personal position, please use any appropriate Grievance Policy – which you can get from your Headteacher. This Whistle Blowing Policy is primarily for concerns where the interests of others or of the organisation itself are at risk.

Aims

The Policy aims to:

- Encourage employees in or working with or assisting our schools to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon their concerns
- Provide ways for employees in or working with or assisting our schools to raise those concerns and get feedback on any action taken as a result
- Ensure that employees in or working with or assisting our schools get a response to their concerns
- Ensure that employees in or working with or assisting our schools are aware how to pursue their concerns and the appropriate steps to take if they are not satisfied with any action
- Reassure employees in or working with or assisting our schools that if they raise any concerns in good faith and reasonably believe them to be true, they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation.

It is not intended to be used where other more appropriate procedures are available, for example:

- Grievances – (see Grievance Procedure)
- Child protection (see Safeguarding procedures)

Finance

Financial regulations require that any suspicion of fraud, corruption or other financial irregularity exceeding £5K or any unusual or systematic fraud, is reported to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for possible investigation. Normally an employee must first report any suspicion of such an irregularity to the Headteacher, CEO or Chair of the Board of Trustees, who will in turn report it to the ESFA.

Who is covered by this Policy?

All employees, Local Governing Board members, Trust members, Trustees in or working with or assisting our schools, may use this Policy. This includes permanent and temporary employees, and employees seconded to a third party.

What assurance do you get?

If you do raise a genuine concern under this Policy, you will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any form of retribution as a result. Provided you are acting in good faith, it does not matter if you are mistaken. Of course, this assurance is not extended to someone who maliciously raises a matter that s/he knows to be untrue.

The Trust Board will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a genuine concern. However, we recognise that you may nonetheless want to raise a concern in confidence under this Policy. If you ask us to protect your identity by keeping your confidence, we will not disclose it without your consent. If the situation arises where we are not able to resolve the concern without revealing your identity (for instance because your evidence is needed in court), we will discuss with you whether and how we can proceed.

What is the legal background?

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (hereinafter referred to as 'the Whistleblowers Act') protects employees against detrimental treatment or dismissal as a result of any disclosure of normally confidential information in the interests of the public. The Act only covers protected disclosures under six categories, namely; crime, illegality, miscarriage of justice, damage to health and safety, damage to the environment, and 'cover-ups' about these issues. To obtain protection, employees must first disclose the information to the employer.

Therefore this Policy has been adopted to provide an avenue within the Central Co-operative Learning Trust to raise concerns. If an employee takes the matter outside the MAT, s/he should ensure that no disclosure of confidential information takes place and should take advice, if unsure, as the Public Interest Disclosure Act does not provide blanket protection and could leave employees in or working with or assisting Central Co-operative Learning Trust vulnerable to disciplinary or other action, if they disclose confidential information in circumstances not covered by the Act.

If you are unsure whether to use the Whistle Blowing Policy or you want independent advice at any stage, you are advised to contact

- If applicable, your relevant trade union; or
- The independent charity Public Concern at Work on 020 7404 6609. Their lawyers can give you real confidential advice at any stage about how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.
- Further information is available here: www.gov.uk/whistleblowing

How should a concern be raised?

As soon as you become reasonably concerned you should firstly raise the issue with your Headteacher (unless s/he is the potential transgressor, in which case write to the CEO.) Concerns may be raised orally or in writing. Employees who wish to make a written report should use the following format:

- The background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates).
- The reason why they are particularly concerned about the situation.

How long will it take the Trust to respond?

Once you have raised your concern, the Trust will look into it to assess initially what action should be taken. This may involve an internal inquiry or a more formal investigation. You will be told who may be handling the matter, how you can contact him/her whether your further assistance may be needed. If you request it, the Headteacher or CEO will write to you summarising your concern(s) and setting out how it will be handled.

When you raise the concern you may be asked how you think the concern(s) might best be resolved. If you do have any personal interest in the matter, we do ask that you tell us at the outset. Should your concern fall within another policy of the Trust for example, the Grievance Policy, we will tell you.

While the purpose of this Policy is to enable us to investigate possible malpractice and take appropriate steps to deal with it, we will give you as much feedback as we properly can. If requested, we will confirm our response to you in writing. Please note, however, that we may not be able to tell you the precise action we take where this would infringe a duty of confidence owned by us to someone else.

Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example child protection) will normally be referred for consideration under that relevant procedure. 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.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- Be investigated by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process
- Be referred to the police
- Be referred to the external auditor
- Form the subject of an independent inquiry

Usually, within two weeks of a concern being raised, the person looking into the concern will write to the person raising the concern:

- Acknowledging that the concern has been received
- Indicating how the Trust propose to deal with the matter
- Giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a full response
- Saying whether any initial enquiries have been made
- Supplying information on support available to you
- Saying whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not (subject to any legal constraints)

The relevant employee will normally be informed of the final outcome of any investigation.

What safeguards are there for the person raising the concern?

- The Trust will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect employees who raise a concern in good faith.

- Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures already taking place concerning the employee.
- No action will be taken against anyone who makes an allegation in good faith, reasonably believing it to be true, even if the allegation is not subsequently confirmed by the investigation.
- Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality as far as this is reasonably practical.
- Help will be provided to you in order to minimise any difficulties, which you may experience. This may include advice on giving evidence if needed. Meetings may, if necessary be arranged off-site with you and for you being represented, if you so wish.

How can a concern be taken further?

Employees in or working with or assisting CCLT schools who are not satisfied with the action taken by the Trust and feels it right to question the matter further, may consider the following possible contact points:

- The employee's Trade Union
- The Citizens Advice Bureau and/or law centre/firm
- Relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- The Local Government Ombudsman
- The Information Commissioner
- A relevant voluntary organisation
- The Police and/or Health and Safety Executive
- The Education Funding Agency
- Ofsted

Corporate recording and monitoring

The Trust will ensure it has sufficient internal arrangements to address the requirements of the Policy, including appropriate support for the CEO / CFO and Headteachers in implementing the Policy.

Safeguarding

If a member of staff suspects there is a serious safeguarding issue that they feel the CEO/Headteacher is not taking seriously, or that they believe there is a serious safeguarding issue involving the CEO/Headteacher, they should in the first instance contact the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Contact details:

CEO Bernadette Hunter bhunter@centralclt.com
 COO Deb Bacon dbacon@centralclt.com
 Chair of Trust Board Phil Pusey ppusey@centralclt.com