

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Staff are expected to acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring any matters of concern about the behaviour of a member of the teaching staff, a member of the support staff, a governor, a person working for externally managed services within the school or a volunteer to the attention of one of the Designated Safeguarding Leads, or the Headmistress or Head of Lower School. Although this can be difficult, it is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

A member of staff may be the first to recognise that something is wrong but may not feel able to express their concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to a colleague or they may fear harassment or victimisation. These feelings, however natural, must never result in a child or young person continuing to be unnecessarily at risk. It is often the most vulnerable children or young people who are targeted. These children need someone to safeguard their welfare.

A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The School's policy on whistleblowing is intended to demonstrate that it:-

- will not tolerate malpractice;
- respects the confidentiality of staff raising concerns and will provide procedures to maintain confidentiality so far as is consistent with progressing the issues effectively;
- will provide the opportunity to raise concerns outside of the normal line management structure where this is appropriate;
- will invoke the School's disciplinary procedure in the case of false, malicious, vexatious or frivolous allegations; and
- will provide a clear and simple procedure for raising concerns, which is accessible to all members of staff.

Reasons for whistle-blowing:

Each individual has a responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour towards a pupil or a member of staff:

- to prevent the problem worsening or widening
- to protect or reduce risks to others
- to prevent being implicated yourself

How to raise a concern:

This procedure is separate from the School's adopted procedures regarding grievances.

- Staff should voice their concerns, suspicions or uneasiness to one of the Designated Safeguarding Leads, or the Headmistress or the Head of Lower School, as soon as possible.

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- If the concern is about a member of staff, in the first instance the member of staff should contact the Headmistress who would then determine whether it is appropriate for the matter to be addressed by another member of the Senior Leadership team.
- If the concern is about the Headmistress, the member of staff should contact the Chair of Governors by letter to Chair of Governors, The Queen's School or through email governors@thequeensschool.co.uk
- The member of staff reporting his/her concerns will be asked to put them in writing, outlining the background and history, giving names, dates and places wherever they can. A member of staff is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation but will need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the concern.
- Any concern raised will be investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner, and appropriate corrective action will be pursued. You will be kept informed of progress and, whenever possible and subject to third party rights, informed of the resolution. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.

If you are not satisfied that your concern is being properly dealt with you will have a right to raise it in confidence with the Governing Body.

What happens next:

- The SLT and the governing body have a responsibility to protect the member of staff who has voiced a concern from harassment or victimisation.
- Where there are allegations of criminal activity, the LADO will always be informed, and advice taken, before the school undertakes any investigation.
- The member of staff reporting their concerns will be given appropriate feedback.
- No action will be taken against the member of staff reporting their concerns if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith.
- Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 the member of staff may be entitled to raise a concern directly with an external body where the circumstances justify it.
- In respect of incidences involving a member of staff falling into the category of 'low level concerns laid out in the School's safeguarding policy, appropriate records will be kept by the Headmistress.
- Malicious allegations may be considered as a disciplinary offence.

If a member of staff is concerned about any other aspect of staff professional conduct, such as fraud or theft, they should follow the same procedure for reporting.

Confidentiality

We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this procedure.

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However, if you wish to raise a concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know your identity, this will be discussed with you.

If there is evidence of criminal activity then the Police will in all cases be informed.

We do not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from you. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should discuss this with the Head or Bursar and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If you are in any doubt you can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are set out below.

External Procedures

Where all internal procedures have been exhausted, a member of staff shall have a right of access to an external person/body. This may include (depending on the subject matter of the disclosure) HMRC, the Audit Commission, the Health and Safety Executive and/or the Local Authority Designated Officer (where the disclosure relates to a child protection issue).

It should be noted that under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, there are circumstances where a member of staff may be entitled to raise a concern directly with an external body where the individual reasonably believes :-

- that exceptionally serious circumstances justify it;
- that the School would conceal or destroy the relevant evidence;
- where they believe they would be victimised by the School; or
- where the Secretary of State has ordered it.

If staff and volunteers feel unable to raise an issue with the School or feel that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, they may report their concerns to other whistleblowing channels, such as:

- Protect, an independent whistleblowing charity, previously known as Public Concern at Work (helpline: 020 3117 2502, email: whistle@protect-advice.org.uk, website: <https://protect-advice.org.uk/homepage/>).
- The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline (tel: 0800 028 0285 or email: help@nspcc.org.uk).