Olive Academies Independent School

OA-North View

Whistleblowing Policy

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Application of this Policy This policy applies to Olive Academies Independent School, OA-North View and should be implemented consistently throughout the school. Proposed amendments should be referred to the Head of School/Executive Headteacher and OAISB for consideration.	

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1. Introduction

All employees, workers, and volunteers are entitled to a transparent, safe, and accountable workplace. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 was enacted to ensure a climate of greater frankness between employers and workers so that irregularities can be identified and addressed quickly, and to strengthen employment rights by protecting responsible workers who raise concerns about wrongdoing or failures in the workplace. While this policy complies centrally with Olive Academies funding agreements, corporate governance structures, and trust-wide financial guidelines, it specifically operates to secure compliance with Part 8 regarding the quality of leadership and management and Part 3 regarding the welfare, health, and safety of pupils under the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. This policy applies equally to all personnel, whether based within the central team or working directly within our independent special school provision at OA-North View. It applies to casual hours staff, temporary workers, fixed-term employees, agency personnel, authorised volunteers, work experience placements, and independent contractors providing services on a personal basis. It does not apply to individuals engaged through a third-party commercial organisation or to members of the general public, including parents, who must instead utilise the separate school complaints procedure published on our website.

2. What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing encourages and enables employees to raise serious concerns within the organisation. rather than overlooking a problem or 'raising concerns externally through appropriate prescribed channels'.

Employees are often the first to realise that something seriously wrong may be happening within a school environment. However, they may not express their concerns either because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues, or because they fear harassment and victimisation. In these circumstances, it may be easier to ignore a concern than to report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

The school is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity, and accountability, and this framework explicitly encourages individuals with serious concerns about any aspect of our operations to come forward and voice them safely. It recognises that certain cases must proceed on a confidential basis, ensuring that staff can do so without fear of reprisals or detriment.

3. Aims and scope of this policy

This policy aims to provide clear avenues for you to raise concerns, establish a transparent structure for you to receive feedback on any subsequent actions taken, and allow you to take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with the school's response. It exists to reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you hold a reasonable belief that the information disclosed tends to show wrongdoing and that your disclosure is made in the public interest. This policy covers specific, high-level operational concerns that fall outside the scope of daily management procedures. It is not intended as a recourse against standard financial or business decisions made by

leadership, nor is it an alternative to the well-established staff grievance, complaints, or disciplinary procedures. It operates alongside the school staff code of conduct, the dignity at work policy, and our multi-agency safeguarding protocols to maintain professional boundaries across the organisation.

4. Types of concern

Concerns raised under this policy are governed strictly by the criteria set out in the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. Before making a whistleblowing statement, you must have a reasonable belief that your concern falls within specific categories of wrongdoing that impact the public interest. These categories include situations where a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed, or is likely to be committed, or where a person has failed, is failing, or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation placed upon them. It encompasses miscarriages of justice, situations where the health and safety of any individual has been, is being, or is likely to be endangered, and instances where the local environment has been, is being, or is likely to be damaged.

In an independent special school context, this also explicitly covers the mistreatment, neglect, or abuse of any pupil or service user for whom the school holds a regulatory responsibility, the unauthorised use or misappropriation of school funds, and any serious, deliberate breaches of professional conduct requirements, ethical standards, or proprietor policies. Whistleblowing must always involve a matter of public interest; personal grievances, contract disputes, and individual complaints regarding working conditions are not covered by this policy and must be processed through the separate staff grievance policy.

5. Safeguards against Harassment and Victimisation

The school recognises that the decision to report a serious concern can be deeply challenging, primarily due to the fear of reprisal from those involved in the alleged malpractice. If the information you disclose is handled with a reasonable belief that it tends to show wrongdoing, you have nothing to fear because you are performing your professional duty to your employer, your colleagues, and the vulnerable young people in your care. The school and the proprietor board will take immediate, decisive action to protect any worker who makes a public interest disclosure. The organisation will not tolerate any resulting harassment, victimisation, or exclusionary pressure, whether informal or indirect, and will treat any such retaliatory behaviour as a major disciplinary offense to be managed under formal misconduct procedures. Crucially, any ongoing investigation into an allegation of malpractice will be kept completely separate from, and will not influence or be influenced by, any parallel disciplinary, capability, or redundancy procedures that may already affect you.

6. Confidentiality Anonymous Allegations

All concerns will be handled in strict confidence, and the school will deploy all reasonable endeavours to protect your identity if you request that your name remain undisclosed. If the thorough investigation of a concern uncovers a situation that warrants formal disciplinary action or direct police involvement, your evidence may become essential to secure a resolution. In such circumstances, your name will not be released as a potential witness until the legal reasons for disclosure have been fully discussed with you.

While this policy encourages individuals to put their name to an allegation to facilitate a comprehensive investigation, anonymous disclosures will still be reviewed at the complete discretion of the leadership team. When deciding whether to investigate an anonymous report, the school will evaluate the overall seriousness of the issues raised, the likelihood of confirming the

malpractice from alternative attributable sources, and the school's statutory duty to protect its pupils and assets. Staff should note that raising concerns anonymously makes it significantly harder to map evidence or provide direct feedback, which is why submitting such concerns through a trade union representative remains a supported alternative.

7. Untrue allegations Malicious Allegations

If you make an allegation with a reasonable belief that the information tends to show wrongdoing and is in the public interest, but the facts are not subsequently confirmed by the investigation, no action of any kind will be taken against you. The school protects honest whistleblowers absolutely. However, if a comprehensive investigation uncovers clear evidence that an allegation was made maliciously, vexatiously, or without any factual substance for the purpose of personal gain or disruption, this will be treated as a severe breach of the staff code of conduct. Such behaviour will trigger an immediate investigation under the trust disciplinary policy and may result in summary dismissal. Where independent contractors or external partners are proven to have submitted a malicious allegation through the complaints system, the school will investigate thoroughly and reserves the right to terminate all associated contracts and placement agreements immediately.

8. Good Practice Principles

The school implements core whistleblowing principles aligned with national safe-governance frameworks to ensure that all disclosures are handled efficiently, fairly, and consistently. We are committed to fostering an organisational culture of absolute safety, where personnel feel empowered and confident to raise concerns, entirely free from the threat of bullying or professional detriment. This culture relies on visible leadership, valuing staff feedback, and embedding reflective practice into our daily routines. To secure these standards, the school ensures that alternative, external whistleblowing channels are clearly communicated to all staff who may feel unable to raise an issue directly with their local leadership.

Furthermore, support measures are explicitly extended to vulnerable or non-permanent groups, ensuring that casual workers, trainees, supply cover, and individuals from minority groups receive the identical protections, training, and institutional advocacy as permanent contract holders, enabling everyone to speak out safely whenever a risk is identified.

9. How to Raise a Concern

Should a member of staff identify a serious concern, they are encouraged to raise the matter in the first instance with their direct line manager or an appropriate member of the school senior leadership team. However, if this internal route is deemed inappropriate or ineffective due to the nature of the allegation, the concern must be escalated directly to the Deputy Chief Executive Officer. If the concern directly involves the conduct of the Chief Executive Officer, the whistleblower should contact the Chair of the Olive Academies Independent Schools Board via the central governance channels. Concerns can be shared orally during a confidential meeting, but it represents best practice for the details to be recorded in writing at an early stage to ensure the facts are fully understood. A written disclosure should clearly outline the background and timeline of the situation, providing relevant names, dates, and locations where possible, alongside the precise reasons why the situation raises a public interest concern. If a manager records an oral conversation on your behalf, a true copy of that transcript will be sent to your home address to ensure both parties agree on the factual record. Staff seeking independent, professional, and entirely confidential guidance before making a disclosure are

encouraged to contact the national whistleblowing charity Protect via their official helpline or digital platform.

10. How the School Will Respond

The specific action taken by the school will depend entirely on the nature and severity of the concern raised. Following initial enquiries to evaluate the substance of the report, the matter may be assigned to an independent investigation officer who has no prior connection to the situation. If a disclosure involves time-critical dangers or an acute child protection risk, emergency protective action will be taken immediately before a full investigation is launched. Within ten working days of receiving your concern, the school will write directly to your home address to formally acknowledge the report, indicate how the trust proposes to manage the matter, provide an estimated timescale for the final response, and clarify whether any initial enquiries have already occurred.

The school will also name an independent support officer, completely separate from the local school team, to assist you throughout the process. This officer will maintain regular contact, protect your confidentiality, and support you within the workplace or during any subsequent disciplinary or judicial proceedings where you are required to give evidence. Subject to legal constraints and data privacy laws, you will be informed of the final outcome and any institutional lessons learned once the investigation is concluded.

11. Safeguarding and External Escalation

The school explicitly recognises that data protection regulations and confidentiality contracts never prevent or limit the sharing of vital information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Appropriate whistleblowing channels are permanently embedded on site to ensure that any poor, unsafe, or non-compliant practice within the school safeguarding system can be reported directly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or the Head of School without delay. If a staff member feels entirely unable to raise a child protection concern internally, or firmly believes that a genuine safeguarding risk has been ignored by leadership, they hold a statutory right to bypass internal frameworks and report the matter directly to the Local Authority Designated Officer or the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children whistleblowing helpline.

Where a public interest disclosure involves allegations against the Designated Safeguarding Lead or senior school leaders, the report must be escalated directly to external multi-agency safeguarding partners. The investigating authority will formally acknowledge the whistleblower's disclosure, and subsequent communication will be securely maintained through the designated support officer to ensure the employee is kept protected, updated, and validated throughout the evidence-gathering process.

12. Monitoring and Links with Other Policies

The Data Protection Officer and the local leadership team will meet regularly to review whistleblowing data and trend lines to ensure that our operating procedures prevent future administrative or safety failures. The ultimate legal accountability for the governance, publication, and annual review of this framework rests with the Olive Academies Independent Schools Board, ensuring that the minutes of the board formally record our local whistleblowing compliance checks.

This policy links directly with our staff grievance policy, the school behaviour policy, the child protection and safeguarding policy, the data protection framework, and the central school complaints procedure.