

St. Mary's College



Whistleblowing Policy

College, Preparatory School
and
Early Years Department

All sites collectively referred to in this
document as the 'College'

2023/2024

This policy has been written in consultation with staff and governors of The College and Prep and with due regard to the school's mission statement:

Our Mission is to provide an independent Catholic education for boys and girls of all faiths aged 0-18; to provide individual challenge towards holistic and balanced development, service and achievement for life and beyond; and to try to show our Faith by the way we live, showing care and consideration for each other, those around us and the environment.

Introduction

The College are committed to conducting our business with honesty and integrity and we expect all staff to maintain high standards. Any suspected wrongdoing should be reported as soon as possible. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring or to address them when they do occur. This policy acts as a framework to allow concerns to be raised confidentially.

This policy covers all employees, officers, consultants, contractors, volunteers, interns, casual workers and agency workers.

The aims of this policy are:

- a) To encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected.
- b) To provide staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns.
- c) To reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisal, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

The College is committed to tackling malpractice and treats these issues seriously.

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

This policy pays due regard to the Safeguarding policy.

What is whistleblowing?

"Whistleblowing" is the reporting of suspected wrongdoing or dangers in relation to our activities. This includes bribery, fraud or other criminal activity, miscarriages of justice, health and safety risks, damage to the environment and any breach of legal or professional obligations.

A "whistleblower" is a person who raises a genuine concern. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities you should report it under this policy.

This policy should not be used for complaints relating to your own personal circumstances, such as the way you have been treated at work. In those cases you should use the Grievance Procedure.

If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy you should seek advice from your line manager or Principal.

When might the whistleblowing policy apply?

Individuals are encouraged to come forward with genuine concerns knowing they will be taken seriously.

If any individual raises false malicious unfounded concerns with a view to personal gain or attempts to make mischief, this will also be taken seriously and may constitute a disciplinary offence or require some other form of penalty appropriate to the circumstances.

Examples of whistleblowing may include (please note this is not an exhaustive list):

- manipulation of accounting records and finances
- inappropriate use of school assets or funds
- decision-making for personal gain
- any criminal activity
- miscarriages of justice
- danger to health and safety
- bribery
- failure to comply with any legal obligation or regulatory requirement
- damage to the environment of the school
- dangerous practices
- abuse of position
- fraud and deceit or corrupt practices
- serious breaches of school procedures which may advantage a particular party (for example tampering with tender documentation, failure to register a personal interest)
- sexual or physical abuse of pupils or others
- other unethical conduct
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

Raising a whistleblowing concern

The College hopes that in many cases you are able to raise your concerns at the first instance with your line manager (or the Principal if the line manager is the one under suspicion).

You may tell them in person or put the matter in writing if you prefer. They may be able to agree a way of resolving your concern quickly and effectively.

Alternatively if the whistleblower considers the matter too serious or sensitive to raise with their line manager, they may raise their concerns with the Principal. If the whistleblower considers the matter too serious or sensitive to raise within the internal environment of the College, or you feel that your line manager (or the Principal) has not addressed your concern, or your concern is about the Principal, you should raise the matter to the Chair of the Governors who may need to involve other governors.

How will the matter be progressed?

If the matter cannot be resolved informally then we will arrange a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern. You may bring a colleague or union representative to any meeting under this policy. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

We will take down a written summary of your concern and provide you with a copy after the meeting. We will also aim to give you an indication of how we propose to deal with the matter.

Once you have raised your concern, we will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. We will inform you of the outcome of our assessment. You may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.

In some cases we may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable us to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

The initial assessment may identify the need to involve third parties to provide further information, advice or assistance, for example involvement of other members of staff, the College's external auditors, legal or personnel advisors, the police or the Department for Education and Skills.

We will aim to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescales. 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.

Records will be kept of work undertaken and actions taken throughout the investigation. Those investigating your concern, possibly in conjunction with the Chair of Governors or nominee, will consider how best to report the findings and what corrective action needs to be considered. This may include some form of disciplinary action and/or third party referral such as the police.

Depending on the nature of the concern or allegation and whether or not we consider there to be a case to answer, the disciplinary procedure may be applied. In such cases any disciplinary action will be considered by the dismissal committee and if appropriate the dismissal appeals committee of the Governing Body. Where a case is proven on the balance of probability the matter will be reported to the full Governing Body, and where appropriate the DfES and GTC.

If you are not satisfied

While we cannot always guarantee the outcome you are seeking, we will try to deal with your concerns fairly and in an appropriate way. By using this policy you can help us to achieve this.

If you are dissatisfied with the conduct of the investigation or resolution of the matter or have genuine concerns that the matter has not been handled appropriately, the concerns may be raised with the Chair of Governors or, for financial impropriety, the school's Responsible Officer. If you are in any doubt you can seek advice from "Public Concern at Work" the independent whistleblowing charity who offer a confidential helpline on 0207 404 6609.

Respecting confidentiality

We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if you want to raise the concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your

identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating your concern to know your identity, we will discuss this with you first.

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 come forward and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality.

External disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases you should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of our staff but there may sometimes relate to actions of a third party, such as a supplier to the College or a service provider. The law allows you to raise a concern with a third party, where you reasonably believe it relates mainly to their actions or something that is legally their responsibility. However, we encourage you to report such concerns internally first.

Protection for whistleblowers

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We aim to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a genuine concern e.g. threats or unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform the Principal immediately.

Staff must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. The College will not tolerate any attempt to harass or victimise the whistleblower, or attempts to prevent concerns being raised. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

Conclusion

Existing good practice within the College in terms of its systems of internal control, both financial and non-financial, and the external regulatory environment in which the College operates, ensure that cases of suspected fraud or impropriety rarely occur. This whistleblowing policy is provided as a reference document to establish a framework within which issues can be raised confidentially internally and if necessary outside the management structure of the College. This document is a public commitment that concerns are taken seriously and will be actioned.

Reviewed 04/08/23 (MKE)