



# Kingston Educational Trust

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## Whistleblowing Policy

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**Approved by:** Trust Board, Kingston Educational Trust

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## Whistleblowing Policy

### 1. Aims

Kingston Educational Trust is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of honesty, openness and accountability.

This policy aims to:

- Encourage individuals affected to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated and that their confidentiality will be respected.
- Let all staff in the trust know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the trust.
- Set clear procedures for how the trust will respond to such concerns.
- Let all staff know the protection available to them if they raise a whistleblowing concern.
- Assure staff that they will not be victimised for raising a legitimate concern through the steps set out in the policy even if they turn out to be mistaken (though vexatious or malicious concerns may be considered a disciplinary issue).

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time. The policy applies to all employees or other workers who provide services to the trust in any capacity including self-employed consultants or contractors who provide services on a personal basis and agency workers.

### 2. Legislation

The requirement to have clear whistleblowing procedures in place is set out in the [Academies Financial Handbook](#).

This policy has been written in line with the above document, as well as [government guidance on whistleblowing](#). We also take into account the [Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998](#).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

### 3. Definition of whistleblowing

Whistleblowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is "in the public interest". Examples of whistleblowing include (but aren't limited to):

- Criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption
- Pupils' or staffs' health and safety being put in danger
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement
- Breaches of financial management procedures
- Attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest
- Damage to the environment

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above. Whistleblowers have legal protection from unfair treatment or dismissal.

Not all concerns about the trust count as whistleblowing. For example, personal staff grievances such as bullying or harassment do not usually count as whistleblowing. If something affects a staff member as an individual, or relates to an individual employment contract, this is likely a grievance.

When staff have a concern they should consider whether it would be better to follow our staff grievance procedures.

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) has:

- [Further guidance](#) on the difference between a whistleblowing concern and a grievance that staff may find useful if unsure
- A free and confidential [advice line](#)

## **4. Procedure for staff to raise a whistleblowing concern**

### **4.1 When to raise a concern**

Staff should consider the examples in section 3 when deciding whether their concern is of a whistleblowing nature.

### **4.2 Who to report to**

Staff should report their concern to the head teacher. If the concern is about the head teacher, or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the staff member should report their concern to the trust's Executive Director who will step in and take on the Head teacher's role as set out in these procedures. At The Kingston Academy, where the Head Teacher is also the Executive Director, or where the concern is about the Executive Director (or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way), concerns should be referred to the Chair of the Trust Board, who will step in and take on the Head teacher's role as set out in these procedures.

### **4.3 How to raise the concern**

Concerns should be made in writing wherever possible. They should include names of those committing wrongdoing, dates, places and as much evidence and context as possible. Staff raising a concern should also include details of any personal interest in the matter.

Where a concern is raised verbally, the recipient must ensure that a written statement of it is made to assist with any subsequent investigation.

The concerns raised will be treated in confidence, whilst recognising that the individual raising the concerns may need to come forward as a witness at a later date. If staff request that their identity be protected, it will not be disclosed unless the trust is required to do so in law. Whilst the trust will not refuse to consider anonymous reports, those making them must be aware that it is considerably more difficult to investigate matters properly in such circumstances or to resolve the concern satisfactorily and the trust may not be able to take the concerns forward if not all of the information needed has been provided.

## 5. Trust procedure for responding to a whistleblowing concern

### 5.1 Investigating the concern

When a concern is received by the head teacher or chair of the trust board - referred to from here as the 'recipient' - they will:

- Meet with the person raising the concern within a reasonable time. The person raising the concern may be joined by a trade union or professional association representative.
- Get as much detail as possible about the concern at this meeting, and record the information. If it becomes apparent the concern is not of a whistleblowing nature, the recipient should handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy/procedure.
- Reiterate, at this meeting, that they are protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. If the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious, disciplinary action may be taken (see section 6 of this policy).
- Establish whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant further investigation. If there is:
  - The recipient should then arrange a further investigation into the matter. In some cases, they may need to bring in an external, independent body to investigate. In other cases, they may need to report the matter to the police.
  - The person who raised the concern should be informed of how the matter is being investigated and an estimated timeframe for when they will be informed of the next steps.

### 5.2 Outcome of the investigation

Once the investigation – whether this was just the initial investigation of the concern, or whether further investigation was needed – is complete, the investigating person(s) will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether or not any wrongdoing has occurred. The report will include any recommendations and details on how the matter can be rectified and whether or not a referral is required to an external organisation, such as the local authority or police.

They will inform the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

Beyond the immediate actions, the headteacher, trustees and other staff if necessary will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

Whilst we cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, we will deal with concerns fairly and openly.

## 6. Malicious or vexatious allegations

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made in good faith, but the investigation finds no wrongdoing, there will be no disciplinary action against the member of staff who raised the concern.

If, however, an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the 'recipient' will consider whether any disciplinary action may be appropriate against the person making the allegation.

## **7. Escalating concerns beyond the trust**

### **7.1 External bodies**

The trust encourages staff to raise their concerns internally, in line with section 4 of this policy, but recognises that staff may feel the need to report concerns to an external body. The government maintains a list of prescribed bodies to whom staff can raise concerns with can be found [here](#).

The Protect advice line, linked to in section 3 of this policy, can also help staff when deciding whether to raise the concern to an external party.

### **7.2 Safeguarding concerns**

The NSPCC's 'what you can do to report abuse' dedicated helpline is available as an alternative route for staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally or have concerns about the way a concern is being handled by the school. Staff can call 0800 028 0285 (the line is available from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, Monday to Friday) and email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk).

### **7.3 Media**

Staff should be aware that if they report concerns to the media, in most cases they will lose their whistleblowing law rights and protections and they are strongly advised to seek prior advice from their trade union or an independent organisation such as Protect (contact details at section 3).

## **8. Approval**

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years.

These procedures have been agreed by the board of trustees, who will approve them whenever reviewed.

## **9. Links with other policies**

This policy links with our policies on:

- Staff grievance policy
- Safeguarding and Child protection policy

Copies of all policies can be found in the Policy folder in the school's Drive.

Next review is due: July 2026

Date approved: 17 July 2023

Kingston Educational Trust

Signed:

Graham Willett, Chair

[Signed copy held by the Head of Governance]