

drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust

Whistleblowing Policy

drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust Vision

The drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust has been established through a shared belief that lives can be transformed by what goes on in schools. We believe that the process of teaching and learning shapes futures.

Our vision:

All pupils achieve the highest standard of educational outcomes regardless of circumstance or background.

Rationale

The Whistleblowing Policy is to help employees in the drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust to raise concerns about possible malpractice(s) at an early stage and in the right way. The Trust would rather employees raised any matter when it is just a concern rather than wait for concrete proof.

If something troubles employees which they think the Trust should know about or look into, they are advised to use this Policy. The Whistleblowing Policy is not for use in relation to personal grievances. The Trust's Grievance Procedure is designed for that purpose. This Whistleblowing Policy is primarily for concerns where the interests of others, or of the organisation, itself are at risk.

Situations covered by the Whistleblowing Policy are likely to include circumstances where employees believe that one or more of the following may be possible:

- 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 Trust's governance arrangements have not or are not being observed or are being breached by pupils, staff employed in or those working with drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust
- Sexual or physical abuse of any employee or pupil is taking place (subject to the Child Protection Procedure in the case of pupils)
- Discrimination is occurring against any member of staff or pupil on grounds of sex, race or disability
- There is evidence of activities not in line with a democratic, multi-cultural, multi-faith inclusive Britain
- Any other form of improper action or conduct is taking place
- Information relating to any of the above is being deliberately concealed or attempts are being made to conceal the same.

The Policy aims to:

- encourage employees in or working with drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust, to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon their concerns;
- provide ways for employees in or working with drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust to raise those concerns and get feedback on any action taken as a result
- ensure that employees in or working with drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust 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 drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust 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 and policies procedures are available. For example:

- Grievances – (see Grievance Policy and Procedure)
- Harassment – (see Anti-Harassment Policy and Procedure)
- Complaints of misconduct against Trustees
- Safeguarding /Child protection (see Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection procedures)

The scope of the Trust's Whistleblowing Policy

All employees in or working with or assisting drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust should use this Policy. This includes permanent and temporary employees, and employees seconded from a third party. Any concerns relating to the third party, if relevant to the employee's secondment, can also be raised under this Policy.

Assurance of being taken seriously and protected

Employees raising a genuine concern through this Policy, will not be at risk of losing their employment or suffering any form of retribution as a result. Provided an employee is acting in good faith, it does not matter if they are mistaken. Of course, this assurance is not extended to someone who maliciously raises a matter that s/he knows to be untrue.

The Board of Trustees will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a genuine concern. However, it is recognised that employees may, nonetheless, want to raise a concern in confidence under this Policy.

Requests for confidentiality will be granted, and identity will not be disclosed without consent. If the situation arises where resolution of the concern is not possible without revealing identity, for example,

because evidence is needed in court, discussions with the employee raising the matter will be held collaboratively to decide on how to proceed.

Furthermore in line with GDPR requirements, all personal information will be processed to meet with the GDPR Article 5(39) (Principles relating to processing of personal data), and follow the EDPS Guidelines on processing personal information within a whistleblowing procedure 2016 and DfE Guidance on Whistleblowing Procedures for Schools (2014)

The legal context and background

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (referred to as 'the Whistleblower's 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 covers protected disclosures under six categories namely:

- Crime
- Illegality
- Miscarriage of justice
- Damage to health and safety
- Damage to the environment
- *Cover-ups* about these issues.

To obtain protection, employees must first disclose the information to their employer.

Therefore, this Policy has been adopted to provide an avenue within the Trust to raise concerns safely. If an employee chooses to take a matter outside the Trust, 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 vulnerable to disciplinary or other action if they disclose confidential information in circumstances not covered by the Act.

Employees unsure whether to use this Whistleblowing Policy for their particular concern or require advice at any stage, are advised to contact:

- The Trust's Director of Privacy and Data Protection
- If applicable, a relevant trade union
- The independent charity Public Concern at Work on 020 7404 6609 where lawyers can give confidential advice about how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.

How should a concern be raised?

As soon as an employee becomes reasonably concerned, any matter should firstly be raised with the employee's head teacher or line manager if the employee works for the Trust's central team unless s/he is the potential transgressor. In such a case the matter should be raised with the Trust's CEO, Director of Privacy and data Protection or Chair of the Trust Board. If s/he is the reason for the concern,

or suspected of being connected with it, contact should be made with the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) or Ofsted.

Concerns may be raised orally or in writing. Employees who wish to make a written report should submit the following information as clearly as possible:

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

The Trust response

Once the Trust has been informed it can assess what action should be taken. This may involve an internal inquiry or a more formal investigation. The employee will be told:

- who will be handling the matter
- how they can be contacted
- whether further assistance may be needed.

If the employee requests it, the Trust or head teacher of the school involved will write to the employee summarising the concern(s) and setting out how it will be handled. At this stage, it is essential that the employee declares any personal interest.

The employee may be asked for their view on how best the situation may be resolved. Should the concern fall within another policy of the Trust, for example the Grievance Policy, the employee will be informed at this point.

While the purpose of this Policy is to enable an investigation of possible malpractice and take appropriate steps to deal with it, the employee will be given as much feedback as is possible in the situation. Any response may be limited by other confidentiality.

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 immediate, urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

As appropriate, the matter raised may:

- be investigated by a member of the Trust's Executive Team, representatives of the Board of Trustees or through the Trust's formal Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.
- be referred to the police.
- be referred to the Trust's external auditor
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

Within two weeks of a concern being raised, the representative looking into the concern will contact the person raising the concern:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how the Trust proposes to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a full response
- stating whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supplying information about support available to them
- stating 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.

Steps to ensure effective safeguards for the person raising the concern

- The Trust is clear that it 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 in order to minimise any difficulties resulting from any referral. This may include advice on giving evidence if needed.
- Meetings can be arranged off-site and with representation if that is the wish of the employee.

Employee Satisfaction

Employees who are not satisfied with the action taken by the Trust and feel it right to question the matter further, may consider the following possible contact points:

- Chair of the Trust Board
- The Trust's independent auditors
- The employee's Trade Union
- The Citizens Advice Bureau
- 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

Corporate recording and monitoring

The Trust will ensure it has sufficient internal arrangements to address the requirements of this Policy, including appropriate support for the CEO, trustees and head teachers in implementing it.

The Trust will maintain a Whistleblowing Register containing all concerns that are brought to its attention.

The Trust will review the Whistleblowing Register and produce an annual report. The Report will not mention any employees, only the concerns raised, the number of such concerns, the fact that the concern relates to a school or other education service provided by the Trust, and the nature of the job held by the person over whom the concerns were raised, if not bound by confidentiality. The Report will also note any issues arising from the same with the intention of:

- preventing the occurrence of similar concerns in future
- consistency of treatment across schools and the Trust

For the avoidance of doubt, the Whistleblowing Register – along with the annual report referred to above – will be available for inspection by both internal and external audit, after removing any items which any employee has asked should remain confidential.

Monitoring and review	Trust Board
Links	Code of Conduct Policy Safeguarding Policy Child-Protection Policy
Staff responsible	CEO Trust Board
Date approved	November 2018
Reviewed	November 2019
Next review	November 2021
Sign off by Chair of Trust	 Date: November 2019

*Please note that should there be any changes/further national guidance issued relevant to this policy, it will be updated accordingly prior to the review date shown above and referred to the next Trust Board meeting.

Change Management

Issue No.:	Change date:	Change description:
1.0	Sept'17	Initial release
2.0	Nov'18	Rebranded, updated and signed off for release
3.0	Nov'19	Review