



## Copnor Primary School

### Whistleblowing Policy

Governing Body approval gained in March 2024

Next review March 2025

Policy proposed for adoption by Matt Johnson, Headteacher

Headteacher's signature:

Chair of Committee signature:

#### **Rationale**

We are committed to openness at Copnor Primary School. This policy has been designed to help raise concerns about malpractice such as fraud, a danger to health, safety, safeguarding of children, the environment or a crime, in the right way and without fear.

The Whistleblowing Policy should be read in conjunction with our Safeguarding Policy. The Safeguarding Policy is paramount to the school and it specifically details who to contact in cases of safeguarding concerns. We follow the policies and procedures laid out in Portsmouth Education Authority's "Manual of Personnel Practice." This has been agreed by union organisations and is in line with employment legislation.

The Whistleblowing Policy was also written to cover the guidance in "Keeping Children Safe in Education" and "The Prevent Strategy" and it would be updated earlier than stated in the review date were there a need to. This would be based upon relevant changes to either of these key documents.

Governing bodies of maintained schools are responsible for agreeing and establishing the school's whistleblowing procedure. These whistleblowing procedures are based upon Portsmouth City Council's procedure (the school's local authority). The school has appointed one member of staff (the Designated Safeguarding Lead [DSL]) and one governor (the staff governor) who other members of staff can contact if they wish to report concerns.

#### **Introduction**

The school is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability in all of its practices. Staff who believe that there is a serious problem within the school may feel reluctant to express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues, school, or to the local authority. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. This policy document makes it clear that they have a duty and a right to disclose concerns, in confidence, without fear of subsequent victimisation, discrimination or disadvantage. The school would prefer that any concerns about malpractice were raised when it is just a concern, rather than wait for proof. This policy has been introduced to help raise any concerns in the correct way. It explains the routes open to staff, including employees, temporary workers, agency staff and people working for contractors.

Staff may wish to consult their trade union or professional association before taking any other action.

The Grievance Policy should be used when a member of staff wishes to raise a grievance relating to their own employment. The Dignity at Work policy outlines how to deal with cases of discrimination, harassment, victimisation or bullying in the workplace.

This policy is also separate from the external complaints procedures for use by pupils/parents and members of the public. Anyone who has a complaint and who are not staff, should be referred to

the Complaints Policy unless they are a volunteer within the school, in which case this policy is relevant.

### **Aims and Scope**

This policy aims to:

- Provide information about what the whistleblowing process means for openness, confidentiality and anonymity.
- Encourage staff to question and act upon concerns about malpractice and to feel confident in raising serious concerns.
- Provide avenues for staff to raise those concerns.
- Ensure that staff raising concerns receive feedback on any action taken, if possible.
- Provide guidance to staff on how to take matters further if they are not satisfied.
- Reassure staff that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have made the disclosure in good faith.

### **Possible issues include:**

- Conduct which is an offence or a breach of law.
- Child protection issues, including radicalisation.
- Health and safety risks (to pupils and members of the public as well as to staff).
- Damage to education property.
- Unauthorised use of public funds and resources.
- Fraud and corruption.
- Abuse of clients.
- Abuse or intimidation of staff.
- Other unethical conduct.

This list is not exhaustive, however, this policy is intended to cover major concerns that staff might have.

### **The Safety of the Whistleblower**

It is recognised that it may be difficult to raise a concern. The law gives certain safeguards if a concern is raised as a whistleblower and the local authority and school will not tolerate the victimisation or harassment of anyone who has raised a concern in good faith. If it is felt that this has happened, it must be reported and the conduct will be treated seriously. The local authority and school will encourage its contractors to do the same.

It is a disciplinary matter both to victimise a genuine whistleblower or to maliciously make a false allegation. Disclosers will be protected if they meet the legal requirements, which generally require the worker to be acting in good faith. If an employee raises a genuine concern under this policy, they will not be at risk of losing their job or suffering any reprisal as a result. Provided that they raise the matter honestly, it does not matter if they are mistaken. This assurance cannot be extended to someone who maliciously raises a concern they know is untrue. Any such conduct may be liable to disciplinary action or other appropriate action.

If disciplinary action or redundancy procedures have already been started, raising a concern will not, in itself, halt them.

### **Confidence in the Whistleblowing Process**

With these assurances, the school hope that staff will raise concerns openly in the normal way. However, it is recognised that there may be some circumstances when it would be preferable to speak to someone in confidence. If so, please state this when the concern is raised. Keeping a confidence means that if a member of staff asks not to disclose their identity, this will not be done without consent, unless it is legally required to do so.

## **Anonymity**

If a member of staff raises a concern anonymously, it is much more difficult to look into the concern. It is more difficult to protect a member of staff's position (or staffs' positions) or to inform them of the outcome. Therefore, the same support and assurances can not be guaranteed if a concern is reported anonymously.

## **Support**

The school (with the support of the local authority where necessary) will take steps to minimise any difficulties which a member of staff may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if they are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, Portsmouth City Council will arrange for advice and support to be provided. The school (following advice from the local authority) will also consider practical issues such as travel costs and the implications of spending time away from the workplace.

Support is available at all stages of the process from the confidential counselling and support service. Contact details are provided below.

## **How concerns can be Raised, Including for Temporary Staff and Contractors**

Firm evidence of malpractice is not required before raising a concern. However, the concern will need to be explained as fully as possible with the information or circumstances that gave rise to the concern. The earlier the concern is raised, the easier it may be to resolve.

Most concerns should be resolved simply and effectively at the lowest possible level within a member of staff's normal line management structure. This will normally entail staff raising concerns with their immediate manager, the Assistant Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, Headteacher or union or professional association representative. Temporary staff will be made aware at induction of the Whistleblowing Policy. Contractors will also be made aware of this policy and that they too are able to whistleblow where they deem fit.

However, this will depend on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of malpractice. It should be noted that all concerns relating to financial malpractice should be raised with the Director of Children Services & Education.

***If the concerns involve issues of child protection it is the Headteacher that should be immediately informed. If the issues concern the Headteacher, then it is the Chair of Governors that should be immediately informed.***

A concern may be raised orally, or in writing. There is no definite time limit for raising concerns; whether an issue will be dealt with viably after a long period of time will depend on the circumstances. Staff may wish to discuss their concerns with a colleague first and may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) people who have had the same experience or concerns. However, staff should also be prepared to give their own individual account during the investigation process.

At any stage of the procedure, the employee may be accompanied by a representative from their trade union, professional association or a friend or colleague.

If a member of staff feels unable to raise the matter with a line manager or the Headteacher, for whatever reason, or they feel that the concern has not been properly addressed, then they are advised to contact one of the following:

- The Chair of Governors;
- The Director of Children's Services and Education
- A Union or Professional Association;
- PCC's Whistleblowing line on 023 9284 1373 email:

[Whistleblowing@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:Whistleblowing@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

Or via post (marked Private & Confidential) to:

Audit & Counter Fraud  
Portsmouth City Council  
Civic Offices  
Guildhall Square  
Portsmouth  
PO1 2AR

If it is a child protection/safeguarding concern, then the member of staff (or volunteer) should contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (the LADO) at [LADO@secure.portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:LADO@secure.portsmouthcc.gov.uk) - Telephone 02392882500.

### **How the school will respond**

The school will always respond to concerns raised by staff and there will be an investigation by management. Further courses of action will vary, depending on the issue, but could include:

- Using the school's disciplinary process;
- Investigation by an internal audit, again resulting in use of the disciplinary process if appropriate;
- Referral to Portsmouth City Council's Audit and Counter Fraud department;
- Referral to the police.

When deciding on which course of action is appropriate, the school (in consultation with the local authority as appropriate) will consider public interest as an over-riding principle.

Within ten working days of the concern being raised, and if it is not anonymous, the Headteacher/line manager receiving the disclosure will write to the member of staff to:

- Acknowledge that the concern has been received.
- Summarise the concern and ask to be contacted if the concern has been misunderstood or any information is missing.
- Indicate how it is proposed that the matter will be dealt with (i.e. whether further investigations will take place, and what form these will take);
- Indicate whether any initial enquiries have been made;
- Give an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- Supply information on staff support mechanisms.

The amount of contact between the Headteacher/line manager considering the issue and the member of staff who has raised the issue will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought from the person making the disclosure, ensuring that confidentiality is maintained.

It is accepted that a member of staff may want to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed and whenever possible, feedback will be provided on the outcome of any investigation. Please note, however, information about disciplinary or other action will not be provided when it infringes a duty of confidence that is owed to third parties.

If the member of staff has a personal interest in the matter, it is asked that this is highlighted properly at the outset.

If the concern falls more properly within the Grievance Procedure or Dignity at Work Procedure, the member of staff will be informed of this and referred to the appropriate information.

### **How the matter can be taken further**

If a member of staff raising a concern is dissatisfied with the action taken, or wishes to take the matter outside the local authority, the following are examples of appropriate contact points:

- An Elected Member of the Council;
- A Trade Union or Professional Association;
- The Citizen Advice Bureau;
- Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) a national charity that gives advice on whistleblowing;
- The police.

While the school governors hope that this policy gives the staff member the reassurance needed to raise a concern internally, they recognise that there may be circumstances where a staff member properly report matters to outside bodies, including in very serious situations, to the police.

Protect, or if applicable the staff member's union, will be able to advise on such an option and on the circumstances in which the staff member will be able to contact an outside body safely.

If the matter is taken outside of the school/ PCC, the member of staff should ensure that confidential or privileged information is not disclosed, such as personal details about colleagues, or restricted financial information.

Staff raising a concern externally should consider carefully whether this is the most appropriate course of action for resolving the issue and whether all reasonable, internal steps have been taken.