



Rochdale Islamic Academy
inspire - believe - achieve
G I R L S ' S C H O O L

WHISTLE-BLOWING POLICY (STAFF)

Reviewed: September 2023

Next Review: August 2024

Responsible: Mr Mohammad Zarafat

Approved by Board of Trustees September 2023

Rochdale Islamic Academy is a:

- A safe, supportive stimulating learning environment.
- A team of respectful, tolerant, open-minded citizens.
- A community where everyone aspires to be the very best, they can be.
- A community of resilient lifelong learners.
- A centre of excellence where all achieve success.

PURPOSE

To set out the school's policy and procedure for dealing with concerns raised by employees which relate to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. Allegations of child abuse against teachers and other staff and volunteers is be dealt with in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory guidance (2023) for schools.

1. Backgroundpage 3
2. Aims of policypage 3
3. Safeguardspage 4
4. How to raise a concernpage 5
5. The Role of Senior Leaderspage 5
6. External Disclosurespage 7
7. Monitoring and Reviewpage 8

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 As employees are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the school, it is important that they feel able to express their concerns without fear of harassment or victimisation. Otherwise, they may find it easier to ignore the concern rather than report it. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 recognises this fact and is designed to protect employees who make certain disclosures of information in 'the public interest', from detriment and/or dismissal. This policy builds on the provisions of the Act.
- 1.2 The school is committed to the highest possible standard of operation, probity, and accountability. In line with that commitment, employees, officers, consultants, contractors, volunteers, casual workers, and agency workers with serious concerns are encouraged to come forward and voice those concerns. This policy document makes it clear that employees can do so without fear of reprisals.
- 1.3 It is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the school rather than overlooking a problem or alerting anyone external to the school.

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

2. AIMS OF THE POLICY

2.1 This policy aims to:

- Provide avenues for employees to raise concerns internally as a matter of course and receive feedback on any action taken.
- Provide for matters to be dealt with quickly and appropriately; and ensure that concerns are taken seriously and treated consistently and fairly; reassure employees that they will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistleblowing where they have a genuine concern; allow employees to take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with the Board of Trustees response.

2.2 A **whistle-blower** is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the matters below. If employees have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities (a whistleblowing concern) s/he should report it under this policy. **Whistleblowing** is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

- Criminal activity.
- Miscarriages of justice.
- Danger to health and safety.
- Damage to the environment.
- Failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements.
- Bribery.
- Financial fraud or mismanagement.
- Negligence.
- Breach of our internal policies and procedures.
- Conduct likely to damage our reputation.
- Unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.
- Public examination fraud.
- The deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

2.3 Before initiating the procedure, employees should consider the following:

- The responsibility for expressing concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour rests with all employees.

- Employees should use line manager or team meetings and other opportunities to raise questions and seek clarification on issues which are of day-to-day concern.
- Whilst it can be difficult to raise concerns about the practice or behaviour of a colleague, employees must act to prevent an escalation of the problem and to prevent themselves being potentially implicated.

2.4 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 a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

If your concern is in relation to safeguarding and the welfare of students, you should consider whether the matter is better raised under the Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with the arrangements for reporting such concerns, i.e., via the Designated Safeguarding Lead, although the principles set out in the is policy may still apply.

3. SAFEGUARDS

3.1 Harassment or Victimisation

The school recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the malpractice. The Trustees will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect employees when they have a genuine concern.

This does not mean that if an employee is already the subject of internal procedures such as disciplinary or redundancy, that those procedures will be halted as a result of that employee raising a concern under the whistleblowing policy.

3.2 Confidentiality and Data Protection

We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if you want to raise your concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity confidential. If it is necessary for anyone investigating your concern to know your identity, we will discuss this with you.

As indicated above, identity will be protected as far as possible, but should the investigation into the concern require the employee to be named as the source of the information, that this will be discussed with the employee before their name is disclosed.

As part of the application of this policy, the school may collect, process and store personal data in accordance with our data protection policy. We will comply with the requirements of Data Protection Legislation in the collecting, holding, and sharing of information in relation to our workforce. Records will be kept in accordance with our Staff Privacy Notice, our Retention Policy and in line with the requirements of Data Protection Legislation.

3.3 Anonymous Allegations

Employees are encouraged to put their name to an allegation. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information and it is also more difficult to establish whether allegations are credible. Anonymous allegations will be considered at the discretion of the Trustees. In exercising the discretion, the factors to be considered would include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised.
- The credibility of the concern; and
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

3.4 Untrue Allegations

If an employee makes an allegation where s/he has a genuine concern, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against that employee. If, however, we conclude that an employee has made malicious or vexatious allegations, or with a view to personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against that employee.

3.5 Unfounded Allegations

Following investigation, allegations may be confirmed as unfounded. This outcome will be notified to the employee who raised the concern, who will be informed that the Trustees deem the matter to be concluded and that it should not be raised again unless new evidence becomes available.

3.6 Support to Employees

It is recognised that raising concerns can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support will be made available, as appropriate to both the employee(s) raising the concerns and any employee(s) subject to investigation.

4. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

4.1 As a first step, an employee should normally raise concerns with their immediate manager or their manager's superior. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues and who is involved. For example, if an employee believes that their immediate manager or their manager's superior is involved, s/he should approach the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees. An employee (including the Headteacher and members of the leadership team) can by-pass the direct management line and the Trustees if s/he feels the overall management and the Board of Trustees of a school is engaged in an improper course of action. In this case, please refer to section 6 below.

4.2 Concerns are better raised in writing. The employee should set out the background and history of the concerns, giving names, dates, and places where possible, and the reasons why s/he is particularly concerned about the situation. If an employee does not feel able to put the concern in writing, s/he should telephone or meet the appropriate person. It is important that, however the concern is raised, the employee makes it clear that s/he is raising the issue via the whistle-blowing procedure.

4.3 The earlier an employee expresses the concern, the easier it is to take action.

4.4 Although an employee is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, s/he will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for the concern.

4.5 In some instances, it may be appropriate for an employee to ask the trade union to raise a matter on the employee's behalf. At each meeting under this policy the employee may bring a colleague or trade union representative. The companion must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

5. THE ROLE OF LEADERS

5.1 A Senior Leader may be informed by an employee about concern(s) and that s/he is "blowing the whistle" within the procedure in person, or in writing or over the phone.

5.2 The Senior Leader should respond immediately by arranging to meet with the employee to discuss the concern(s) as soon as possible.

5.3 Stage One:

At the initial meeting the Senior Manager should establish that:

- There is genuine cause and sufficient grounds for the concern;
- The concern has been appropriately raised via the Whistleblowing Policy.

The Senior Leader should ask the employee to put their concern(s) in writing, if s/he has not already done so. If the employee is unable to do this the senior manager will take down a written summary of his/her concern/s and provide him/her with a copy after the meeting. The Senior Leader should make notes of the discussions with the employee. The employee's letter and/or senior leader's notes should make it clear that the employee is raising the issue via the whistle-blowing procedure and provide:

- The background and history of the concerns;
- Names, dates and places (where possible);
- The reasons why the employee is particularly concerned about the situation.

The employee should be asked to date and sign their letter and/or the notes of any discussion. The Senior Leader should positively encourage the employee to do this, as a concern expressed anonymously is much less powerful and much more difficult to address, especially if the letter/notes become evidence in other proceedings, e.g. an internal disciplinary hearing.

The Senior Leader should follow the policy as set out above and explain to the employee:

- Who he/she will need to speak to in order to determine the next steps (e.g. Headteacher).
- What steps s/he intends to take to address the concern.
- How s/he will communicate with the employee during and at the end of the process. It should be noted that the need for confidentiality may prevent the school giving the employee specific details of any necessary investigation or any necessary disciplinary action taken as a result.
- The employee will receive a written response within ten working days.
- Their identity will be protected as far as possible but should the investigation into the concern require the employee to be named as the source of the information, that this will be discussed with the employee before their name is disclosed.
- The Board of Trustees will do all that it can to protect the employee from discrimination and/or victimisation.
- The matter will be taken seriously and investigated immediately.
- If the employee's concern, though raised as a genuine concern, is not confirmed by the investigation, no punitive action will be taken against them.
- If clear evidence is uncovered during the investigation that s/he has made a malicious or vexatious allegation, disciplinary action may be taken against them; and
- The investigation may confirm their allegations to be unfounded in which case the Board of Trustees will deem the matter to be concluded unless new evidence becomes available.

5.4 Stage Two:

Following the initial meeting with the employee, the Senior Leader should consult with the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees to determine whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. A record should be made of the decisions and/or agreed actions.

It may be necessary, with anonymous allegations, to consider whether it is possible to take any further action. When making this decision, Senior Leaders should take the following factors into account:

- The seriousness of the issue(s) raised.
- The credibility of the concern(s); and

- The likelihood of confirming the allegation(s) from attributable sources.

In some cases, it may be possible to resolve the concern(s) simply, by agreed action or an explanation regarding the concern(s), without the need for further investigation. However, depending on the nature of the concern(s) it may be necessary for the concern(s) to:

- Be investigated internally.
- Be referred to the police.
- Be referred to the external auditor.
- Form the subject of an independent inquiry.

Senior Leaders should have a working knowledge and understanding of all school policies and procedures, e.g., grievance, disciplinary, child protection & safeguarding procedures, to ensure that concerns raised by employees are addressed via the appropriate procedure/process.

5.5 Stage Three:

Within ten working days of a concern being received, the manager receiving the concern (at paragraph 5.1 above) must write to the employee:

- Acknowledging that the concern has been received.
- Indicating how they propose to deal with the matter.
- Giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response.

and/or

- Telling the employee whether any initial enquiries have been made.

and

- Telling the employee whether further investigations will take place, and if not why.

and/or

- Letting the employee know when s/he will receive further details if the situation is not yet resolved.

6. EXTERNAL DISCLOSURES

6.1 The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigation and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases the employee should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally. The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for the employee to report his/her concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. Employees are strongly encouraged to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. If an employee is not satisfied with the Board of Trustees response, the manager should ensure that s/he is made aware with whom s/he may raise the matter externally:

6.2 The manager should stress to the employee that if s/he chooses to take a concern outside the School, it is the employee's responsibility to ensure that confidential information is not disclosed, i.e., confidential information, in whatever format, is not handed over to a third party.

6.3 Public Concern at Work is a registered charity that employees can contact for advice to assist them in raising concerns about poor practice at work. The charity also provides advice to employers as to the possible ways to address these concerns.

Concerns about safeguarding practices can be raised externally using the NSPCC whistleblowing helpline.

Employees can call 0800 028 0285 or email help@nspcc.org.uk

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2>

7. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Headteacher will be responsible for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of this policy/procedure. The policy/procedure will be reviewed every two years.