



Whistleblowing Policy

Policy Code:	HR7
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Policy Review Date:	November 2026

Statement of Intent

The Community Inclusive Trust (CIT) is committed to open and honest communication and ensuring the highest possible standards in integrity – we will always treat whistleblowing as a serious matter.

In line with the Trust's commitment to openness, probity and accountability, members of staff are encouraged to report concerns. This policy will work to ensure that, if an employee sees or suspects something is wrong, they will raise this with the Trust. This is known as "blowing the whistle" – a phrase that is used throughout this policy and should be viewed as a positive action of speaking up.

This policy seeks to ensure any member of staff who suspects malpractice knows how to raise concerns and what procedures are in place to deal with the concern.

Where this policy necessitates personal or special category data to be processed, it will be done so in accordance with the Trust's Data Protection Policy. This policy should not be confused with the procedure on dealing with harassment at work or the Trust's Grievance Policy and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

This policy covers all employees, consultants, contractors, volunteers including Trust Members, Trustees, Local School Board Governors, casual workers and agency workers.

This policy will:

- Give confidence to members of staff when raising concerns about conduct or practice that is potentially illegal, corrupt, improper, unsafe or unethical, or which amounts to malpractice or is inconsistent with Trust standards and policies.
- Provide members of staff with avenues to raise concerns.
- Ensure members of staff receive a response to the concerns they have raised and feedback on any action taken.
- Offer assurance that members of staff are protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistleblowing action undertaken in good faith and within the meaning of the PIDA.

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

1. Legal Framework

- 1.1. This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:
- Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA)
 - Employment Rights Act 1996
 - DfE 'Keeping children safe in education
 - GOV.UK (2012) 'Whistleblowing for employees'
 - Sir Robert Francis (2015) 'Freedom to speak up report'
 - DfE 'Academy trust handbook 2025'
 - DfE 'Whistleblowing: guidance for prescribed persons'
 - DfE 'Blowing the whistle to the Department for Education'
- 1.2. This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:
- Disciplinary Policy
 - Records Management Policy
 - Complaints Policy
 - Data Protection Policy
 - Grievance Policy

2. The Public Interest Disclosure Act

- 2.1. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) protects employees who “blow the whistle” where the employee reasonably believes the disclosure falls within the remit of the prescribed person or body and the information and any allegations are substantially true. Disclosures made under this procedure will be monitored for statistical purposes as required under the PIDA. The details of any disclosure will remain confidential.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. **Whistleblowing** is the term used to describe the disclosure of information by a worker which relates to suspected wrongdoing, malpractice or dangers at their place of work.
- 3.2. **Whistleblower:** a worker who reports certain types of wrongdoing in the public interest. Whistleblowers are protected by law.
- 3.3. **Qualifying disclosure:** to be covered by whistleblowing law, the disclosure must be a 'qualifying disclosure'. A qualifying disclosure is any disclosure of information which, in the reasonable belief of the worker making the disclosure, is made in the public interest and tends to show one or more of the following:
- That a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed.
 - That a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject.
 - That a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur.
 - That the health or safety of any individual has been, is being or is likely to be endangered.
 - That the environment has been, is being or is likely to be damaged.

- That information tending to show any matter falling within any one of the preceding paragraphs has been, is being or is likely to be deliberately concealed.
- 3.4. **Protected disclosure** – this means a qualifying disclosure as defined above.
- 3.5. For a **qualifying disclosure** to be **protected**, it must be made by a worker using one of the following permitted methods of disclosure:
- Disclosure to the employer or other person responsible for the failure .
 - Legal advisers
 - Government Ministers
 - A person prescribed by an order made by the Secretary of State
 - Other disclosures may be protected where in the particular circumstances they are either reasonable, or special provision is made for disclosures relating to exceptionally serious problems.
- 3.6. A worker who blows the whistle, by making a disclosure in accordance with the relevant criteria set out is making a protected disclosure and has the right not to be unfairly dismissed or suffer a detriment, e.g. being dismissed or being denied a promotion, as a result of having made that disclosure.
- 3.7. **Worker:** defined by section 230(3) of the Employment Rights Act 1996 as: 'an individual who has entered into or works under (or, where the employment has ceased, worked under):
- A contract of employment.
 - Any other contract, whether express or implied and (if it is express) whether oral or in writing, whereby the individual undertakes to do or perform personally any work or services for another party to the contract whose status is not by virtue of the contract that of a client or customer of any profession or business undertaking carried on by the individual.'
- 3.8. **Prescribed person** - If an individual decides to blow the whistle to a prescribed person rather than the school, they must make sure that they choose the correct person or body for their issue. The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014 sets out a list of over 60 organisations and individuals that a worker may approach outside their workplace to report suspected or known wrongdoing. The organisations and individuals on the list have usually been designated as prescribed persons because they have an authoritative or oversight relationship with their sector, often as a regulatory body. An up-to-date list for the education sector can be found [here](#); there is also a brief description about the matters that can be reported to each prescribed person.
- 3.9. **In the public interest** means that it must affect others, for example the general public/ people at large.
- 3.10. **Blacklisting** refers to an individual who is being refused work because they are viewed as a whistleblower.
- 3.11. **Grievances** involve someone filing a complaint because they personally have been mistreated in some way – the person making the complaint will have a direct interest in the outcome. It is important to understand the difference between raising a grievance and blowing the whistle.

4. Roles, Responsibilities and Implementation

4.1. The People Committee has overall responsibility for:

- Approving this policy.
- Ensuring the agreed whistleblowing procedure is published on the Trust's website.
- The effective operation of this policy.
- Ensuring compliance with the relevant statutory framework.
- Reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this policy.
- Delegating day-to-day responsibility for operating the policy and ensuring its maintenance and review to the Director of HR.

4.2. The Director of HR and Headteachers will be responsible for:

- Ensuring all members of staff have read and understood this policy.
- Receiving, investigating and responding to any concerns that have been raised by school staff.
- Being the first point of contact regarding whistleblowing.
- Ensuring that all concerns raised by whistleblowers are responded to properly and fairly.

4.3. Employees will be responsible for:

- Raising any concerns that meet the definitions in section 3 of this policy.
- Being truthful and reasonable with any concerns they have.
- Not raising malicious or unfounded concerns.

5. Harassment and Victimisation of Staff

5.1. The Trust recognises the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to take, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the malpractice or from the school or Trust as a whole; however, the Trust will not tolerate any such harassment or victimisation and will take appropriate action to protect staff who raise a concern in good faith.

5.2. Staff are protected in law by the PIDA, which gives employees protection from detriment and dismissal where they have made a protected disclosure, providing the legal requirements of the Act are satisfied, e.g. the disclosure was in the public interest.

5.3. Any member of staff who victimises or harasses a member of staff as a result of their having raised a concern in accordance with this policy will be dealt with under the Trust's Disciplinary Policy.

6. Good Practice Principles

6.1. The Trust will implement the core whistleblowing principles, as outlined in the 'Freedom to speak up report', to ensure whistleblowing procedures are fair, clear and consistent.

- 6.2. The Trust will implement a culture of change by ensuring the following principles are reflected in our ethos and values – there will be a culture:
- Of safety in the Trust.
 - Where people feel confident with raising concerns.
 - Free from bullying.
 - Of visible leadership.
 - Of valuing staff.
 - Of reflective practice.
- 6.3. By providing a clear procedure for mediating and resolving cases, as outlined in section 8, the Trust will ensure all cases are efficiently handled. This procedure includes:
- How to raise and report concerns.
 - How investigations will be conducted.
 - How the Trust will mediate and resolve disputes.
- 6.4. The Trust will implement measures to support good practice by ensuring adherence to the following principles:
- Offering relevant training to staff.
 - Providing the necessary support to staff.
 - Providing support to staff who are seeking alternative employment.
 - Being transparent.
 - Being accountable.
 - Conducting an external review of any concerns raised, where necessary.
 - Undertaking regulatory action as required.
 - Informing staff what protection is available to them if they report someone
 - Ensuring that alternative whistleblowing channels are in place for members of staff who feel unable to raise an issue with their employer
- 6.5. We will ensure there are particular support measures in place for vulnerable groups by adhering to the following principles:
- Ensuring non-permanent staff are taught, and receive training on, the same principles as permanent staff.
 - Ensuring trainees are subject to all the safeguarding and whistleblowing principles.
 - Ensuring staff from ethnic minorities are supported, as they may feel particularly vulnerable when raising concerns.
 - Ensuring staff are empowered and protected, enabling them to raise concerns freely.

7. Raising a Whistleblowing Concern

- 7.1. We hope that staff will be able to raise any concerns with their line manager. Staff can tell line managers in person or put the matter in writing if they prefer. Line managers may be able to agree a way of resolving the concern quickly and effectively.
- 7.2. However, where the matter is more serious, or staff feel their line manager has not addressed the concern, or staff prefer not to raise it with them for any

reason, or they are the subject of the complaint, then staff can raise the matter with:

- The Director of HR - This is the member of the Executive Leadership Team who is responsible for managing whistleblowing complaints.
- The CEO
- The Chair of the Trust Board

- 7.3. If an individual is raising concerns about the CEO they should contact to the Chair of the Trust Board.
- 7.4. Contact details for the Director of HR, CEO and the Clerk to the Trust Board can be found in section 14.
- 7.5. Members and Trustees should raise any whistleblowing concerns directly with the Chair of the Trust Board. Local School Board Governors should raise matters with the Chair of their LSB who will then contact the Chair of the Trust Board. Any concerns with raising the matter with the Chair of the Trust should be raised with the Vice Chair of the Trust.
- 7.6. When individuals raise their concern, they should include the following information as far as possible:
- The background and history of the concern.
 - Any relevant names, dates and places.
 - The reasons for the concern.
- 7.7. A meeting will be arranged as soon as possible to discuss the concern. Staff may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this policy. The companion must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.
- 7.8. A written summary of the concern will be made and staff will be provided with a copy after the meeting. The Trust will also aim to give an indication of how we propose to deal with the matter at this stage.

8. Confidentiality and data protection

- 8.1. The Trust hopes staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if staff want to raise a concern confidentially, every effort will be made to keep their identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know the identity of staff this will be discussed with them first.
- 8.2. The Trust do not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information. 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 to one of the other contact points listed in paragraph 8.3, and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If staff are in any doubt, they can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. The Protect

website can be accessed here (www.protect-advice.org.uk), or they can be contacted on 020 3117 2520.

- 8.3. Where anonymous complaints are received, they will be investigated as far as is reasonable taking into account:
- The seriousness of the issue raised.
 - The credibility of the concern; and
 - The likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources.
- 8.4. As part of the application of this policy, the Trust may collect, process and store personal data in accordance with our data protection policy. We will comply with the requirements of data protection legislation (being the UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018) and any implementing laws, regulations and secondary legislation, as amended or updated from time to time in the collecting, holding, and sharing of information in relation to our workforce. Records will be kept in accordance with our employee privacy notice, our retention and records policy and in line with the requirements of data protection legislation.

9. External disclosures

- 9.1. The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases, staff should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.
- 9.2. The law recognises that in some circumstances, it may be appropriate for staff to report concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage staff to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. Protect holds a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. The Protect website can be accessed here (www.protect-advice.org.uk), or they can be contacted on 020 3117 2520. Alternatively, the list is available from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.
- 9.3. Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of our staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a contractor, supplier, or service provider. In some circumstances, the law will protect staff if they raise a concern with the third party directly where they reasonably believe it relates mainly to their actions, or something that is legally their responsibility. However, we encourage staff to report such concerns internally first. Staff should contact their line manager or one of the other individuals set out in paragraph 4.2 for guidance.

10. Investigation and outcome

- 10.1. Once a concern has been raised, we will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. The individual who raised the concern will be informed of the outcome of our assessment. Staff may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.
- 10.2. In some cases, an investigator or team of investigators may be appointed, including staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. In some circumstances an external person or body may be

appointed to investigate the concern. The investigator(s) will collate findings on the matter, and may make recommendations for change to enable the Trust to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing. This will be sent to the CEO or Director of HR for actioning.

- 10.3. The Trust will aim to keep the individual who raised the concern informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving specific details of the investigation, an outcome, or any disciplinary action taken as a result. Staff should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.
- 10.4. If it is concluded that a whistleblower has made false allegations maliciously, the whistleblower will be subject to disciplinary action.

11. If you are not satisfied

- 11.1. While the Trust cannot always guarantee the outcome the whistleblower is seeking, we will try to deal with the concern fairly and in an appropriate way. By using this policy, staff can help us to achieve this.
- 11.2. If the whistle-blower is not happy with the way in which the concern has been handled, they can raise it with one of the other key contacts in paragraph 8.3. Alternatively, they may contact the chair of trustees. Contact details are set out at the end of this policy.

12. What the Trust asks of Whistleblowers

- 12.1. The purpose of this policy is to enable individuals to raise concerns in confidence, without any fear of reprisal; therefore, it is imperative that whistleblowers:
- Do not talk about the concern outside the Trust unless it is to report the concern through the proper external channels, e.g. the LA or Ofsted.
 - Declare any personal interest in the matter, as the policy is designed to be used in the interest of the public and not for individual matters.

13. Protection and support for whistleblowers

- 13.1. It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. The Trust aims to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- 13.2. Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a genuine concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform one of the contact people in paragraph 8.3 immediately. If the matter is not remedied, you should raise it formally using our grievance procedure.
- 13.3. Staff must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action. In some cases, the whistleblower could have a right to sue an individual personally for compensation in an employment tribunal.

14. Monitoring and Review

14.1. The People Committee will review this policy annually, ensuring all procedures are up to date.

14.2. Any changes made to this policy will be communicated to all members of staff.

15. Contacts

- Director of HR, Stephen Scott, stephen.scott@citacademies.co.uk
- Clerk to the Trust Board, Ana Hendrickson, ana.hendrickson@citacademies.co.uk
- Chief Executive Officer, Peter Bell, peter.bell@citacademies.co.uk

Appendix A – from Protect (<https://protect-advice.org.uk/what-is-whistleblowing/>)

What is the difference between whistleblowing and raising a grievance?

This can be a really tricky distinction. If you are unsure whether your concerns are best raised as whistleblowing concerns or as grievances, have a look at the differences between the two processes, outlined below:

Whistleblowing	Grievances
• Risk to others – whistleblowing is about raising concerns relating to wrongdoing risk or malpractice that you witness in the workplace.	• Risk to self – grievances typically relate to how you, specifically, are being treated rather than relating to the treatment of others.
• Public interest – whistleblowing concerns should be in the public interest, and unlike grievances, the concerns may not even affect you. They should, in any case, have wider implications for other workers or the public.	• Types of issues – grievances may be raised about various issues, including: things you are asked to do as part of your job; breaches by your employer of your employment rights / your contract of employment, or the way you are personally being treated at work.
• Process – there is no set process for investigating whistleblowing concerns. There is also no right to be accompanied to a meeting with your employer to discuss your concerns.	• Process – the independent public body, ACAS, has set out <u>Codes of Practice</u> in relation to discipline and grievance procedures. You can find more information about how to raise a grievance on the <u>ACAS website</u>.
• Confidentiality – your employer should respect your wish for confidentiality.	• Support – you have the right to be accompanied at a grievance hearing if the complaint is about your employer breaching a term of your employment contract.
• Feedback – you may never know the outcome of a whistleblowing concern. For example, if your employer investigates the behaviour of another individual and disciplines them as a result, that would	• Outcome – grievances result in a legal determination (decision) on the issue that you raise. The ACAS Codes provide for employees to be given the outcome of their grievance e.g. an apology, a

be confidential information between the employer and that other individual.	payment due or a change to the working practices.
• Appeal – there is no general right to appeal if you are unhappy with how your employer deals with your whistleblowing concerns. You may, however, consider escalating your concerns at this stage (it is worth checking your employer’s whistleblowing policy, if they have one, before doing so).	• Appeal – you should be given the opportunity to appeal should you feel unsatisfied with the outcome.

Appendix B – from Protect (<https://protect-advice.org.uk/what-is-whistleblowing/>)

When does bullying become a whistleblowing concern?

Bullying is a very difficult matter to tackle. If you are being bullied yourself, you should raise this as a grievance.

However, there can be instances when bullying may become a whistleblowing matter and there are some factors which may indicate this:

- How many people are affected? If the bullying affects the whole team (or a large number of employees), this might suggest a bullying culture and it may be more appropriate to use the whistleblowing process (check your employer's policy says on bullying).
- What is the impact of the bullying? Does the bullying culture have a wider impact on the work you deliver? As an example, a bullying culture within a hospital may impact the quality of care provided to patients if the bullying culture is affecting a substantial number of the team and is resulting in high numbers of work-related stress and sickness.
- Who is instigating the bullying? If it is a senior member of staff, then it is more likely that the concern should be raised as a whistleblowing concern.
- How serious is the bullying? Is the bullying a one-off isolated incident, or is it a series of events which may suggest a deliberate campaign of bullying? If the latter, then this suggests intentional wrongdoing.

However, from an employer's perspective, even when an individual says that there is a bullying culture in their team, if no one else comes forward and if there is no record of grievances that have previously been filed about the matter, then this can make it difficult for your employer to investigate and act. It is important that your colleagues who are also affected should be willing to participate in any subsequent investigation, otherwise it may be more effective to raise this as a collective grievance or by enforcing your own rights in the workplace by seeking the advice of a trade union or from ACAS.