St Laurence School Academy Trust

Policy and Procedures on Whistleblowing

Approved Feb 2023	FGB	SLT link T Farrer
Review Feb 2027	Strategy	

Policy Statement

1. The St Laurence Academy Trust is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability in an organisation where People are our Treasure. This whistleblowing policy and procedure supports this commitment.
2. Relevant trade unions and professional organisations have been consulted about this policy and procedure, and it has their support.

Scope

1. It gives employees with genuine concerns about malpractice or wrongdoing in the School a way to voice those concerns without fear of victimisation. The policy also gives governors of the school the same mechanism by which to raise concerns. In this document, any reference to employees will mean governors too.
2. Often it is those closest to an organisation who realise that there is something wrong.
3. Sometimes people are reluctant toact upon their concerns because they think that they are being disloyal, or because they are afraid that they might be victimised if they speak up.
4. There are existing procedures in place (e.g. Grievance and Dignity at Work policies and procedures) which make provision for School employees to lodge a concern relating to their own employment. This whistleblowing policy is intended to complement those procedures by covering concerns that appear to fall outside their scope. This concern may be about something that is:
    - Unlawful, including financial or fraudulent malpractice such as embezzlement,
    - Bribery, corruption, dishonesty, etc
    - Against establishment standards of practice
    - Improper conduct.
5. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures, e.g. child protection or examination misconduct will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. However, please refer directly to the guidance contained on Wiltshire Council's website for specific procedures relating to safeguarding to consider whether action needs to be taken in accordance with those processes.

Definitions

1. A 'nominated governor' is the governor identified by the Academy Trust as the first point of contact for whistleblowing queries. The nominated governor at St Laurence School is the Chair of Governors.

Aims

1. The purpose of this policy is to provide the employee with the help and support they need to speak up and be confident that they can do so safely. The School will take their concerns seriously and ensure that they are dealt with promptly and fairly.

How to raise a concern

1. Initial concerns should be raised with the nominated governor. If the employee believes that this governor is implicated then the employee should approach the Chair of Governors if they are not the nominated governor. If the Chair of Governors is the nominated governor then they should approach the Vice Chair of Governors.
2. Within 48 hours, the nominated governor will contact the employee to arrange to meet them to discuss their concerns. Before the meeting, it would be helpful if the employee wrote down what they considered the problem to be, giving names, dates and places where possible. If there were any other documents that they thought might be helpful, they should try to bring these with them. They are advised to take a friend, colleague or school union representative with them to the meeting with the governor.

3. The employee is encouraged to raise their concern in person, or through their professional association / union representative on their behalf, because concerns that are expressed anonymously are difficult to investigate. However, the School will exercise its discretion in deciding whether to investigate an anonymous allegation. The factors taken into account will include:
    i. the seriousness of the issues raised;
    ii. the credibility of the allegation; and
    iii. the likelihood of being able to confirm the allegation from attributable sources.

How we will respond

1. After the initial meeting, the nominated governor will arrange for discreet initial enquiries to be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and if so, what form it should take.
2. The nominated governor will write to the employee within 10 days of their initial meeting to:
    i. acknowledge that their concern has been received
    ii. outline the School's understanding of what the issues are; and
    iii. indicate how the School proposes to deal with the matter.
3. If the nominated governor decides that it is appropriate for an investigation to be carried out, this will either be done by them, or by a governor who is asked to investigate – the investigating officer. However, it may sometimes be necessary for a concern to be referred to the police, an external auditor, or for it to be the subject of an independent enquiry. In addition, where it is established that the complaint involves issues of bullying or unlawful discrimination, it may be necessary to involve the school's Human Resources provider.
4. If an investigation is carried out, the employee will be informed of the final outcome. It might not be possible to give them full details of the outcome if it contains personal details of a third party, because the School has a duty to protect personal information under relevant data protection legislation.

How will the School treat whistleblowers?

1. If an employee makes an allegation in good faith but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. If an employee knowingly makes malicious allegations, disciplinary action may be taken against them.
2. Disciplinary action will be taken against any member of staff who tries to stop another employee from raising a concern or who is responsible for any act of recrimination or victimisation against an employee who raises a concern.
3. Where an employee may have been party themselves to an act of possible gross misconduct on which they are now 'blowing the whistle', this could be considered in mitigation. They are not, however, exempt from disciplinary action.
4. Disciplinary action may be taken against employees if they contact the media with concerns about conduct at work without first following the steps set out in this policy.
5. The Governing Body will make every effort to protect an employee's identity when they raise a concern and do not want their name to be disclosed. It must be appreciated however, that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by the employee may be required as part of the evidence.
6. If an employee raises a concern, they will be given the opportunity to feed back any issues or problems they may have experienced as a result. The purpose of this is to ensure that employees who have raised concerns in good faith do not suffer as a result.

Queries

If you have any queries about this policy please contact the Headteacher or Chair of Governors.