



MET Whistleblowing policy

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This policy covers all MET educational establishments.

Where this policy states 'school' this means any of our educational establishments and the wider Trust. Where this policy states 'Headteacher' this also includes 'Head of School' and 'Centre Manager'.

1. Introduction

Mowbray Education Trust is committed to the highest possible standards of honesty and integrity and to creating a transparent culture. We expect all staff to maintain these standards in accordance with the MET Code of Conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

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

2. Scope and purpose

This policy applies to all employees of the Mowbray Education Trust, as well as consultants, contractors, casual and agency staff, trainees and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

It also applies to Trust Members and Trustees (collectively referred to as governance volunteers in this policy).

The aims of this policy are:

- To encourage staff and governance volunteers to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected.
- To provide staff and governance volunteers with guidance on how to raise concerns; and if they are dissatisfied how to take the matter further, plus how the Trust will respond to such concerns.
- To reassure staff and governance volunteers that they should be able to raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

The requirement to have clear whistleblowing procedures in place is set out in the Academies Trust Handbook.

3. What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information that relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. The law provides protection for workers and governance volunteers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters or "qualifying disclosures". A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest by a worker or governance volunteer who has a reasonable belief of 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;
- other unethical behaviour
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above.

A whistle-blower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities, you should report it under this policy.

Not all concerns about the Trust count as whistleblowing. For example, personal staff grievances such as bullying or harassment do not usually count as whistle-blowing. If something affects a staff member as an individual, or relates to an individual employment contract, this is likely a grievance.

When staff have a concern, they should consider whether it would be better to follow our staff grievance or complaints procedures.

If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy, you should seek advice from the HR Team or a member of the Operations team. Contact details are set out in Appendix A.

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) has:

- Further guidance on the difference between a whistle-blowing concern and a grievance that staff may find useful if unsure (<https://protect-advice.org.uk/what-is-whistleblowing/>)
- A free and confidential advice line (<https://protect-advice.org.uk/contact-protect-advice-line/>)

4. Raising a whistleblowing concern

We hope that you will be able to raise any concerns with your Headteacher/line manager, or in matters relating to the Trust's governance, to the Company Secretary & Clerk to the Board. You may tell them in person or put the matter in writing if you prefer and they may be able to agree a way of resolving your concern quickly and effectively.

However, where the matter is more serious, or you feel that your Headteacher/line manager or the Company Secretary & Clerk to the Board has not addressed your concern, or you prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, or they are the subject of the complaint, then you can raise the matter with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). This person is responsible for managing Whistleblowing complaints. Contact details are set out in **Appendix A**.

The CEO or delegated staff member, will arrange a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss your concerns. You may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this policy. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

We will take down a written summary of your concern and provide you with a copy after the meeting. We will also aim to give you an indication of how we propose to deal with the matter.

5. Confidentiality

We hope that staff and governance volunteers 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 secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating your concern to know your identity, we will discuss this with you.

We do not encourage staff and governance volunteers to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from you. 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 Appendix A.

Appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If you are in any doubt, you can seek advice from Public Concern at Work, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are given in Appendix A.

Where we receive anonymous complaints, we will decide whether to investigate based on:

- the seriousness of the issue raised.
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources.

The Trust's HR team will keep a central record of disclosures made under the Whistleblowing Policy, please contact hr@mowbrayeducation.org. The number of disclosures will be reported via MET HR update report to Audit, Finance and Risk Committee where it will be monitored and escalated to Trust Board.

We will comply with data protection and retention requirements in terms of any records made and kept.

6. External disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating, and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace and the associated governance mechanism of the Trust. In most cases you should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. Public Concern at Work holds a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. Their contact details are given in **Appendix A**. The Protect advice line, linked to section 3 of this policy, can also help staff when deciding whether to raise the concern to an external party.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of our staff and governance volunteers, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a contractor, supplier or service provider. The law allows you to raise a concern with a third party, where you reasonably believe it relates mainly to their actions or something that is legally their responsibility. However, we encourage you to report such concerns internally first. You should contact your line manager or one of the other individuals set out in Appendix A for guidance.

7. Investigation and outcome

Once you have raised a concern, we will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. We will inform you of the outcome of our assessment. You may be required to attend additional meetings to provide further information.

In some cases, we may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) will collate findings on the matter and may make recommendations for change to enable us to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

We will aim to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation, its likely timescale and outcome. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.

8. If you are not satisfied

While we cannot always guarantee the outcome you are seeking, we will try to deal with your concern fairly and in an appropriate way. By using this policy, you can help us to achieve this.

If you are not happy with the way in which your concern has been handled, or the subject of your whistleblowing concern is the CEO of the Trust, you can raise it with the Chair of the Mowbray Education Trust. If the subject of your whistleblowing concern is the Chair of the Mowbray Education Trust, you can raise it with the Company Secretary & Clerk to Board. Contact details are set out in **Appendix A**.

If you do not feel able to raise your concern in the ways outlined above, you should consult the Public Interest Disclosure Act for information about other routes by which a disclosure may be made or contact Public Concern at Work.

If you do take the matter outside the Trust, you will need to ensure that you do not disclose confidential information or disclosures that would be privileged.

9. Protection and support for whistleblowers

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We aim to encourage openness and will support staff and governance volunteers who raise genuine concerns under this policy.

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 a Whistleblower is protected from detriment and unfair dismissal. The Trust will support and not discriminate against concerned employees and governance volunteers who apply the Whistleblowing procedure, provided any claim is made in good faith.

Staff and governance volunteers 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 the Chief Operating Officer.

If the matter is not remedied, you should raise it formally using our Grievance Procedure. Staff and governance volunteers must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

If you make a deliberately false or malicious accusation or an accusation is made for personal gain, this will be treated as a disciplinary offence and will be dealt with under the Trust's disciplinary procedure.

10. Review of policy

This policy is reviewed biennially by the Trust. The Trust will monitor the application and outcomes of this policy to ensure it is working effectively.

Appendix A - Contact details

Whistleblowing Officer / Chief Executive Officer of Mowbray Education Trust	Christine Stansfield 01664 565901 cstansfield@mowbrayeducation.org
Chair of the Mowbray Education Trust	Anne Frost afrost@mowbrayeducation.org
Executive Lead for Governance and Compliance	Susan Beasley sbeasley@mowbrayeducation.org
Chief Operating Officer	Paul Maddox pmaddox@mowbrayeducation.org
Protect	Helpline 020 3117 2520 https://protect-advice.org.uk/advice-line/

Log of changes to document

Version	Date	Page	Change	Approver:
v1.0	March 2016	Original document		Board
v1.0	December 2016	Throughout	Job titles updated. Paragraph numbering and format updated	COO
v1.0	July 2017	All pages	Format and contact details updated	Head of HR
v2.0	April 2019	All pages	Biennial review for Trust Board approval	MET Group Operations
v2.0	April 2019	All pages	Draft for approval	Trust Board
v2.0	Oct 2019	All pages	Trust Chair updated / addition of volunteers to 1 st para section 2 / addition of who will keep central record and how reported in section 5. Amended version for approval following Board Members feedback.	Trust Board
v2.0	31.10.19	All pages	Approved	Trust Board
V2.0	Sep-20	Page 7	Updated contact details	MET Operations

V2.0	Sept-21	Page 3 Page 4 Page 5 Page 6 Page 7	Sec 2. – added plus ‘how the Trust will respond to such concerns’, Academy Trust Handbook ref. & removal of Local Governing Body (LGB) Governors ref. Sec. 3 – updated wording around the difference between a whistleblowing concern and a grievance and updated Trust’s HR/Operations Director ref. Sec 5 – Updated where disclosure numbers reported to AFR and removed Risk Register Sec.6 – Added reference to protect advice helpline. Sec. 9 – Updated Trust’s HR/Operations Director ref. Appendix A – Company Secretary /HR/Ops Dir / Protect details updated	MET Operations - Biennially Review
V2.0	Nov 22	Whole Document	Refresh of personnel	Exec Team
V2.0	Mar 23	P2	Addition of Iveshead School	Exec Team
V 3/0	Oct 23	Whole Document	Change of logo Minor amendments to the policy Change of reporting requirements from Operations Team to HR Team Updated website address for Protect	HR Team