



**Lakelands**  
Academy

**SPEAKING UP ABOUT  
WRONGDOING POLICY  
(Whistleblowing)**

**NEXT REVIEW:  
Autumn 2027**

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## Introduction

Lakelands Academy is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, honesty, integrity and accountability. As part of this commitment, we encourage employees, members and others who have serious concerns to speak up in order that it can be dealt with promptly. This may need to be on a confidential basis and the Academy wishes to emphasise that if someone does ‘speak up’ they can do so without fear of reprisals. Such policies are termed “blowing the whistle” and this phrase is used throughout this statement but should be viewed as a positive action of speaking up. It is understandable that employees may not express concerns because they may feel that speaking up would be disloyal to colleagues or they fear harassment/victimisation. The Academy would encourage all employees to not ignore concerns and to report them positively and appropriately.

The Academy recognises the need to encourage anyone with concerns about any aspect of our work to come forward and voice those concerns. Usually, these are easily resolved. However, when these are about unlawful conduct, financial malpractice or dangers to the public, people or the environment, it can be difficult to know what to do. Specific examples could include:

- a criminal offence (e.g. fraud, theft, bribery, corruption etc.) may have or has been committed;
- a miscarriage of justice has been or is likely to occur;
- the health or safety of an individual has been or is likely to be endangered;
- public funds are being used in an unauthorised manner;
- the environment has been or is likely to be damaged;
- the council’s own rules have been or are being breached;
- abuse (e.g. physical or verbal) of someone receiving a council service, or council employee is taking place; and
- someone receiving a council service is being discriminated against (e.g. on the grounds of disability, race, gender).

We have introduced this ‘Speaking up about Wrongdoing Policy (Whistleblowing), specifically to protect and enable you to raise your concerns about suspected

malpractice at an early stage and in the right way. We would rather that you raised the matter when it is just a concern rather than wait for definite proof. This Whistleblowing Policy is intended to encourage and enable you to be able to communicate serious concerns rather than overlooking a problem.

If something is troubling you, which you think we should know about, or look into, please use this policy. Don't ignore the concern. If in doubt – raise it!

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this policy are to encourage you, as employees to:

- feel confident about raising serious concerns;
- feel reassured that, if you raise any concerns in good faith and reasonably believe them to be true (i.e. “Whistle blow”), your concerns will be taken seriously and you will not experience harassment or victimisation as a result;
- have a range of ways in which to raise concerns and to receive appropriate feedback on any action taken;
- ensure that you receive an appropriate response from the Academy to the concerns you have raised and, if not satisfied, show how you may take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with the response.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time. The policy applies to all employees or other workers who provide services to the trust in any capacity including self-employed consultants or contractors who provide services on a personal basis and agency workers.

## **2. Legislation**

The requirement to have clear whistle-blowing procedures in place is set out in the [Academy Trust Handbook](#).

This policy has been written in line with the above document, as well as [government guidance on whistle-blowing](#). We also take into account the [Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998](#).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

## **3. Definition of whistle-blowing**

Whistle-blowing means reporting serious concerns about wrongdoing that are “in the public interest”. Examples of whistle-blowing include (but aren't limited to) something that:

- is unlawful
- is against the Academy's Constitution, financial rules, contract rules or other policies
- does not meet established standards or working practices

- amounts to improper conduct

Theft, bribery and corruption, discrimination, the abuse of children, vulnerable adults or staff, and environmental misuse are all the types of things which would fall into these categories

A whistle-blower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above.

It is the duty of employees to speak up when they have serious concerns and it is the duty of the Academy to act on those concerns and protect and support employees when they do. A failure to report a serious concern could be construed as collusion. Difficult as it may be to speak up, employees should be aware of their special position and of their duty to make their concerns known.

This policy statement makes clear what employees should do and what will happen as a result. The policy has been discussed with all the relevant trades unions and professional organisations and has their support.

### **Clarification**

This policy statement is issued to employees to advise specifically on blowing the whistle on wrongdoing. It should not be confused with the **complaints procedure** (where you can complain about the Academy's services), the **grievance procedure** (where you can complain about your own treatment as an employee) or the **Child Protection protocols** (specifically relating to working around Children and Young People).

## **4. Procedure for staff to raise a whistle-blowing concern**

### **4.1 When to raise a concern**

Staff should consider the examples in section 3 when deciding whether their concern is of a whistle-blowing nature, or whether it would more appropriately be addressed through another procedure.

### **4.2 Who to report to**

Staff should report their concern to the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher. If the concern is about the Headteacher or it is believed they may be involved in the wrongdoing in some way, the staff member should report their concern to the chair of governors or link governor for safeguarding.

### **4.3 How to raise a concern**

The earlier concerns are expressed the better, and the easier it is likely be to take action. Concerns are better raised in writing. They should try to set out:

- the background and history to the concern;
- dates and places where possible;
- reasons for the serious concerns.

In order to ensure the confidentiality, concerns should be sent in writing in a sealed envelope addressed to the deputy headteacher, headteacher, chair of governors or safeguarding link governor and clearly marked 'Strictly Private and confidential – To be opened by the addressee only'

Although employees are not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, employees will need to demonstrate to those appointed to investigate the matter, that there are sufficient grounds to the concern.

It is a serious disciplinary offence for any person to seek to prevent a communication of concern reaching an appropriate contact or to impede any investigation

## **5. Procedure for responding to a whistle-blowing concern**

### **5.1 Investigating the concern**

The action taken will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters raised may:

- be investigated internally with the Academy but independently of those directly involved;
- be referred to the Police;
- be referred to the external Auditor;
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

In order to protect individuals and the Academy, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. These will be made confidentially and every attempt made to protect the employee. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (e.g. child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. The process

When a concern is received by the deputy Headteacher, Headteacher, chair of governors or safeguarding link governor - referred to from here as the 'recipient' - they will:

- Meet with the person raising the concern within 5 working days. The person raising the concern may be joined by a trade union or professional association representative
- Get as much detail as possible about the concern at this meeting, and record the information. If it becomes apparent the concern is not of a whistle-blowing nature, the recipient should handle the concern in line with the appropriate policy/procedure
- Reiterate, at this meeting, that they are protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. However, if the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious, disciplinary action may be taken (see section 6 of this policy)

Following this meeting, the recipient will establish whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant further investigation. If there is:

- The recipient should then arrange a further investigation into the matter, involving the Headteacher and/or Chair of governors, if appropriate. In some cases, they may need to bring in an external, independent body to investigate. In others cases, they may need to report the matter to the police

Within 10 working days of the initial concern being received, the person raising it should receive

- Formal acknowledgement that the concern has been received;
- an indication of how the academy proposes to deal with the matter;
- an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- an indication of whether any initial enquiries have already been made;
- if the decision has been taken that further investigations will not take place details explaining this decision

## **5.2 Outcome of the investigation**

Once the investigation is complete, the investigating person(s) will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether or not any wrongdoing has occurred. The report will include any recommendations and details on how the matter can be rectified and whether any immediate action needs to be taken. The report will state whether or not a referral was made to an external organisation, such as auditors, or the police.

The person who raised the concern will be advised of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality. Beyond the immediate actions, the headteacher, governors and other staff, if necessary, will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

## **6. Malicious or vexatious allegations**

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made in good faith, but the investigation finds no wrongdoing, there will be no disciplinary action against the member of staff who raised the concern.

If, however, an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the trust will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the person making the allegation.

## **Safeguards**

### **Harassment and Victimisation**

The Academy recognises that deciding to report a concern can be difficult, not least because of the fear of possible reprisals. The Academy will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect whistleblowers when they raise a concern in good faith.

This does not mean that if a member of staff is already the subject of disciplinary or redundancy procedures, that those procedures will be halted as a result of their whistleblowing.

### **Confidentiality**

The Academy will do its best to protect the identity of staff when a concern is raised by a staff member and they do not want their name to be disclosed. The Academy will do its best to protect your identity when you raise a concern and do not want your name to be disclosed (information relating to the investigation will be strictly controlled on a need to know basis). However, it is not easy for the Academy to act on complaints that are made anonymously. If you ask us for your identity to be kept confidential, we will not disclose it without your consent or unless we are required to do so by a Tribunal, Court of Law or an Act of Parliament. If the situation arises where we are not able to resolve the concern without revealing your identity (e.g. a statement by you may be required as part of the evidence), we will discuss with you whether and how we can move forward.

### **Concerns raised anonymously**

This policy strongly encourages you to put your name to your concern. Concerns expressed anonymously will be much more difficult for us to look into or to protect your position or to give you feedback. Concerns raised anonymously are much less powerful and less likely to be effective, but they will be considered at the discretion of the Academy.

In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised;
- the validity of the concern;
- the likelihood of confirming the allegations from other sources.

### **Support For staff raising concerns**

Throughout and after this difficult process staff who raise concerns will be given full support from the Senior Leadership Team, their concerns will be taken seriously and the Academy will do all it can to help them. If practically achievable, and if a member of staff wishes to do so, they may be transferred to another role to ensure that they are fully protected.

## **7. Escalating concerns beyond the academy trust**

The trust encourages staff to raise their concerns internally, in line with section 4 of this policy, but recognises that staff may feel the need to report concerns to an external body. The following are possible contact points:

- Shropshire Council Whistleblowing Hotline where confidential disclosures can be made. The contact number is 01743 252627.
- an email to [whistleblowing@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:whistleblowing@shropshire.gov.uk)
- a letter to the Head of Audit, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND or to [audit@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:audit@shropshire.gov.uk)
- an external auditor;
- relevant professional bodies who regulate organisations (including the Ombudsman);
- a solicitor;
- the police;
- Protect (Whistleblowing Charity) [www.protect-advice.org.uk](http://www.protect-advice.org.uk).

Shropshire Council's 'Speaking up about wrongdoing' policy states that "concerns are better raised in writing" and asks that "if you choose to do this you are invited to set out:

- the background and history of the concern,
- names, dates and places where possible, and
- the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation. If you do not feel able to put your concern in writing, you can telephone or meet the appropriate officer.

NB The disclosure of confidential information would normally constitute a serious disciplinary offence which could result in dismissal or other disciplinary action. Accordingly, if an employee does take the matter outside the Academy they must ensure that; either, no confidential information is disclosed, or, that there are wholly exceptional circumstances which the Academy would consider justified in the circumstances.

## **8. Approval**

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years.

These procedures have been agreed by the board of governors, who will approve them whenever reviewed.

## **9. Links with other policies**

This policy links with our policies on:

- Staff grievance policy
- Complaints procedure



- KCSiE Child protection policy
- KCSiE Staff Code of Conduct
- E-safety policy and Staff Acceptable Use Policy
- Acceptance of gifts and hospitality policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Anti-Fraud Policy
- Disciplinary Procedure