



WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Royal Grammar School and RGS Prep School (The School) has adopted this policy and the accompanying procedure on whistle blowing to enable members of staff to raise concerns internally and in a confidential fashion about safeguarding, fraud, malpractice, health and safety, criminal offences, miscarriages of justice, and failure to comply with legal obligations, inappropriate behaviour or unethical conduct. The policy also provides, if necessary, for such concerns to be raised outside the organisation.

About this Policy

The School is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity and expects all staff to maintain high standards in accordance with our Staff Code of Conduct. However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The School's policy on whistleblowing is intended to demonstrate that it:

- Will not tolerate malpractice;
- Encourages staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated, as appropriate;
- Respects the confidentiality of staff raising concerns and will provide procedures to maintain confidentiality so far as is consistent with progressing the issues effectively;
- Will provide the opportunity to raise concerns outside of the normal line management structure where this is appropriate;
- The policy seeks to reassure staff that they can raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisal, even if they turn out to be mistaken; and
- Will provide a clear and simple procedure for raising concerns, which is accessible to all members of staff.

Scope of this policy

This procedure is separate from the School's adopted procedures regarding grievances. Staff should not use the whistle blowing procedure to raise concerns relating to their own personal circumstances, such as the way they have been treated at work. In those cases, the School's Grievance or Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy should be used as appropriate. If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this procedure you should first seek advice from the Head or Bursar.

This procedure is to enable members of staff to express a legitimate concern regarding suspected malpractice within the School.

What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing, malpractice or dangers at work. Malpractice is not easily defined; however, it includes allegations of fraud, financial irregularities, corruption, bribery, dishonesty, acting contrary to the staff code of ethics, criminal activities, or failing to comply with a legal obligation, a miscarriage of justice, or creating or ignoring a serious risk to health, safety or the environment (negligence).

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to suspected malpractice within the School. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected malpractice affecting any of the School's activities (a whistleblowing concern), you should report it under this procedure.

If staff and volunteers feel unable to raise an issue with the School or feel that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, they may report their concerns to other whistleblowing channels, such as:

- Protect, an independent whistleblowing charity (helpline: 020 3117 2502, email: whistle@protect-advice.org.uk, website: <https://protect-advice.org.uk/>).
- The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline (tel: 0800 028 0285 or email: help@nspcc.org.uk).

Confidentiality

We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this procedure. Staff who wish to raise a concern under this procedure are entitled to have the matter treated confidentially and their name will not be disclosed to the alleged perpetrator of malpractice without their prior approval. It may be appropriate to preserve confidentiality that concerns are raised orally rather than in writing, although members of staff are encouraged to express their concern in writing wherever possible.

If there is evidence of criminal activity, then the Police will in all cases be informed.

Staff are encouraged not to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from them. 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 discuss this with the Head or Bursar and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If the employee is in any

doubt, they can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are set out above.

Raising a whistleblowing concern

It is hoped that in many cases staff will be able to raise concerns with their line manager. They may tell them in person or put the matter in writing if they prefer. The line manager may be able to agree a way of resolving the concern quickly and effectively. In some cases, they may refer the matter to the Head, Deputy Head or the Bursar.

However, where the matter is more serious, or the member of staff feels that their line manager has not addressed their concern, or they prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, they are at liberty to raise a whistleblowing concern to the Head, Deputy Head or Bursar directly. If the member of staff feels unable to approach any of these colleagues, then the Chair of Governors should be the first point of contact.

A meeting will be arranged with the member of staff as soon as possible to discuss their concern. The member of staff may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this procedure. Their companion must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation. The member of staff may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information as the concerns raised are investigated.

Any concern raised will be investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner, and appropriate corrective action will be pursued. The member of staff making the allegation will be kept informed of progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. Whenever possible and subject to third party rights, the member of staff will be informed of the resolution. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent sharing specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. Any information about the investigation should be treated as confidential.

A member of staff who is not satisfied that their concern is being properly dealt with will have a right to raise it in confidence with the Governors.

External Procedures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying and wrongdoing in school. In most cases it should not be necessary to alter anyone externally.

However, where all internal procedures have been exhausted, a member of staff shall have a right of access to an external person/body. This may include (depending on the subject matter of the disclosure) HMRC, the Audit Commission, the Health and Safety Executive, the Local Authority Designated Officer (where the disclosure relates to a staff safeguarding issue) and/or Surrey Children's Services (where the disclosure relates to a pupil safeguarding issue).

It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate for you to alert the media.

It should be noted that under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, there are circumstances where a member of staff may be entitled to raise a concern directly with an external body where the employee reasonably believes:

- That exceptionally serious circumstances justify it;
- That the School would conceal or destroy the relevant evidence;
- Where they believe they would be victimised by the School;
- Where the Secretary of State has ordered it.

It is strongly encouraged that advice is sought before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

Protection from Reprisal or Victimisation

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We aim to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

No member of staff will suffer a detriment or be disciplined for raising a genuine and legitimate concern, providing that they do so in good faith and following the whistle blower procedures. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment you should inform the Bursar immediately. If the matter is not remedied, you may raise it formally using the School's Grievance Procedure.

You must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. If you are involved in such conduct you may be subject to disciplinary action.

Abuse of the whistle-blowing procedure

In the unlikely event that the procedure is used to advance deliberately false or malicious accusations, the School reserves the right to bring misconduct proceedings against the person abusing the procedure.

Reviewed by: Bursar

Date of last review: 2 July 2024

Date of next review: Trinity 2025