Policy Owner	**Bursar**
Approving Body	**Board of Governors**
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Whistleblowing Policy

St Aubyn's (Woodford Green) School Trust

Whistleblowing policy

1 **Honesty and integrity**: The School is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity, and we expect all staff to maintain high standards in accordance with the Code of Conduct. 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.

2 **Aims**: The aims of this policy are to:

2.1 encourage staff 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;

2.2 provide staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns; and

2.3 reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

3 **Staff**: This policy covers all employees, officers, governors, consultants, contractors, volunteers, work placement students, casual workers and agency workers.

4 **Legislation**: This policy has been written in line with government guidance on whistleblowing. We also take into account the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

Wrongdoing at work

5 **Whistleblowing**: Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

5.1 criminal activity;

5.2 safeguarding concerns (see paragraph 12 below);

5.3 failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements;

5.4 miscarriages of justice;

5.5 danger to health and safety;

5.6 damage to the environment;

5.7 bribery;

5.8 financial fraud or mismanagement;

5.9 sexual harassment;

5.10 other unlawful or unethical conduct in the workplace;

5.11 the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

6 **Whistleblower**: A whistleblower 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 (a **whistleblowing concern**) you should report it under this policy.

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

8 **Grievances**: This procedure should not be used where you have a complaint relating to your personal circumstances in the workplace. The grievance procedure contained in the Employment Manual should be used in such cases.

9 **Detriment**: Provided that this procedure is used appropriately and correctly, you will not suffer any detriment as a result of reporting a suspected wrongdoing. A failure to follow this procedure may however make the disclosure unreasonable and the protection given to you by this procedure may be lost.

10 **Advice**: Not all concerns about the trust count as whistle-blowing. 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. If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy you should seek advice from the Head, Bursar, Designated Safeguarding Lead, Public Concern at Work or the NSPCC whistleblowing helpline.

11

Safeguarding

12 **Safeguarding:** Nothing within this policy is intended to prevent staff from complying with their statutory obligations in accordance with *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (DfE, September 2023). In particular:

12.1 **Safeguarding / child protection policy:** You should raise any initial safeguarding concerns about a child with the Designated Safeguarding Lead in accordance with the School's child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures.

12.2 **Safeguarding - member of staff:** You should raise any concerns about another staff member with the Head, or if the concern is about the Head, with the Chair of Governors (without first notifying the Head) in accordance with the procedures in Appendix 4 of the School's child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures].

12.3 **Whistleblowing policy:** You should follow this procedure to raise concerns about poor or unsafe safeguarding practices at the School or potential failures by the School or staff to properly safeguard the welfare of pupils if you are concerned that the School's child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures are not being followed correctly.

12.4 **Referral:** If a child is in immediate danger or is at risk of harm a referral should be made to Children's Social Care and / or the Police immediately. Anyone can make a referral.

Confidentiality

13 **Confidentiality**: We hope that staff 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.

14 **Anonymous disclosures**: We do not encourage staff 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.

Stage one

15 **Procedure:** You should disclose the suspected wrongdoing first to your Head of Department / Line Manager. In the event that your Head of Department / Line Manager is involved in the suspected wrongdoing, you should proceed directly to Stage Two of this procedure.

16 **Response:** You can expect a response detailing to whom the disclosure has been notified or any action taken within seven days of your Head of Department / Line Manager becoming aware of the disclosure.

Stage two

17 **Procedure:** If no response is forthcoming after seven days from your Head of Department / Line Manager, if you are not satisfied with the way in which your concern has been handled or if your Head of Department / Line Manager is involved in the suspected wrongdoing you should notify the Head or Bursar, as appropriate.

18 **Response:** You can expect a response detailing any action taken within seven days of the Head or Bursar becoming aware of the disclosure.

Stage three

19 **Procedure:** If no such response is forthcoming after seven days from the Head or Bursar, if you are not satisfied with the way in which your concern has been handled or if the Head or Bursar is involved in the suspected wrongdoing you should inform the Chair of Governors of the disclosure.

Outcome of the investigation

20 Once the investigation – whether this was just the initial investigation of the concern, or whether further investigation was needed – 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 or not a referral is required to an external organisation, such as the local authority or police.

They will inform the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

Beyond the immediate actions, the Head, Governorss and other staff, if necessary, will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

Whilst we cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, we will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

21

Relevant external reporting

22 **Outside body**: The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. The law recognises, as does paragraph 1212 above, that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to a relevant outside body including:

22.1 the local authority's Designated Officer;

22.2 Children's Social Care;

22.3 the NSPCC;

22.4 the Health and Safety Executive;

22.5 the Environment Agency;

22.6 the Information Commissioner;

22.7 the Department for Education;

22.8 the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy;

22.9 the Police;

22.10 the Charity Commission;

22.11 the Independent Schools Inspectorate; or

22.12 the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (**Ofsted**) in respect of EYFS; or

22.13 the Channel Police Practitioner.

23 **Advice**: Staff are strongly encouraged to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. In most cases you should not find it necessary to alert anyone external but before you do, as well as considering the internal help and support available which is identified above, please seek external advice from:

23.1 **Public Concern at Work**: If you have any concerns about disclosing a suspected wrongdoing the independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline. Staff can call 020 7404 6609 for advice.

23.2 **NSPCC**: The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline is available for staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally. Staff can call 0800 028 0285 (8.00 am to 8.00 pm Monday to Friday) or email help@nspcc.org.uk.

24 **The media:** You should under no circumstances approach a commercial body or the media with details of the suspected wrongdoing. If you approach any such body and / or where your concern is disclosed in a malicious manner or for personal gain this may make the disclosure unreasonable and the protection given to you by this procedure may be lost. Additionally, the School may consider this to be gross misconduct and disciplinary action may be taken against you.

Links with other policies

This policy links with our policies on:

- Staff grievance policy
- Complaints procedure
- Child protection policy