

OAKHURST COMMUNITY FIRST SCHOOL

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN: WHISTLE BLOWING - A POLICY FOR SCHOOLS

This guidance is written for staff working with children and young people in education settings and should be read alongside Dorset County Council 'Employee Whistle blowing policy – Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998'.

Staff must acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of concern to the attention of senior management and/or relevant agencies. Although this can be difficult this is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk. Reference should be made at all times to the schools Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Procedures.

You may be the first to recognise that something is wrong but may not feel able to express your concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues or you may fear harassment or victimisation. These feelings, however natural, must never result in a child or young person continuing to be unnecessarily at risk. Remember it is often the most vulnerable children or young person who are targeted. These children need someone like you to safeguard their welfare.

Don't think what if I'm wrong – think what if I'm right

What is 'whistle blowing'?

The dictionary definition of whistle blowing is; 'To report or inform on a superior's or organization's ethical or legal misconduct'.

Most people will have heard of 'whistle blowing' but what is it? Put at its simplest, whistle blowing occurs when an employee or worker provides certain types of information, usually to the employer, which has come to their attention through work. The whistleblower is usually not directly, personally affected by the danger or illegality. Whistle blowing occurs when a worker raises a concern about danger or illegality that affects others, for example other staff or children at school.

Specific examples could include:-

- issues regarding child protection matters or concerns about the safeguarding of pupils
- a criminal offence (e.g. fraud, corruption or theft) has been/is likely to be committed
- the health or safety of any individual has been/is likely to be endangered
- public funds are being used in an unauthorised manner
- sexual or physical abuse of any member of staff is taking place
- discrimination is occurring to any member of staff on grounds of sex, race or disability
- any other form of improper action or conduct is taking place
- information relating to any of the above is being deliberately concealed or attempts are being made to conceal the same.

Reasons for whistle blowing

- Each individual has a responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour
- Protection of children is paramount and all staff and volunteers have a duty to report concerns
- To prevent the problem worsening or widening
- To protect or reduce risks to others
- To prevent becoming implicated yourself

¹ Staff includes any adult, paid or voluntary, who works in a school or educational establishment within the LA

² Local Education Officers (LEOs): (contact details)

What stops people from whistle blowing

- Starting a chain of events which spirals
- Disrupting the work or project
- Fear of getting it wrong
- Fear of repercussions or damaging careers
- Fear of not being believed

How to raise a concern

- You should voice your concerns, suspicions or uneasiness as soon as you feel you can. The earlier a concern is expressed the easier and sooner action can be taken
- Try to pinpoint exactly what practice is concerning you and why
- Approach the Headteacher to voice your concerns
- If the concern is regarding child protection or safeguarding issues you must raise your concerns immediately
- If your concern is about the Headteacher, or you feel you need to take it to someone outside the school, contact the Chair of Governors, Mr John Baker (077678504650)
- Make sure you get a satisfactory response – don't let matters rest
- Ideally, you should put your concerns in writing, outlining the background and history, giving names, dates and places where you can
- A member of staff is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation but will need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the concern

What happens next

- You should be given information on the nature and progress of any enquiries
- Your employer has a responsibility to protect you from harassment or victimisation
- No action will be taken against you if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith
- Malicious allegations may be considered as a disciplinary offence

Self reporting

There may be occasions where a member of staff has a personal difficulty, perhaps a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging on their professional competence. Staff have a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their line manager so professional and personal support can be offered to the member of staff concerned. Whilst such reporting will remain confidential in most instances, this cannot be guaranteed where personal difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children.

Further advice and support

It is recognised that whistle blowing can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support is available from your line manager, HR department (Jo Hickson & Clair Adams– teachers and office staff; Alison Elrick – teaching assistants & midday supervisors 01202 224375) and/or your professional or trade union.

Please read this policy in line with DCC advice.

“Absolutely without fail – challenge poor practice or performance. If you ignore or collude with poor practice it makes it harder to sound the alarm when things go wrong” (reproduced with acknowledgement to “Sounding the Alarm” – Barnardos)

Policy adopted by governors on: Thursday 4th October 2007
Policy to be reviewed annually: Reviewed - October 2009.