



ST. THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

MISSION STATEMENT

I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full - John 10:10

As a Catholic school, God is at the heart of all we do. We believe that each person is made in His image, deserving to be treated with respect and dignity.

Showing respect, love and care for everyone and everything, we aim to develop harmony between pupils, parents, the school and Parish and grow as a Christian community.

We aim to embed the virtues in every child to believe in themselves to be the best that they can be and leave school as well-rounded individuals who care about themselves, others, and the world.

This policy must be read in conjunction with the
Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

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Date ratified by the Governors: February 2024

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1. Introduction

The Governors and Head Teacher are committed to delivering a high quality education service to pupils and expect high standards from their staff and contractors. In order to maintain these high standards a culture of openness and accountability is vitally important.

The aims of this policy are: -

- to encourage staff to raise concerns about malpractice within the School without fear of reprisal.
- to reassure staff that concerns will be taken seriously.
- to address low level concerns or allegations that do not meet the threshold of harm.
- to provide information about how to raise concerns and explain how the School/ Governors may respond.

2. Policy Scope

This policy applies to all School employees and volunteers, agency staff and staff contracted to work in school. Concerns from parents should fall under the school's complaints procedure or, if regarding an allegation of abuse or neglect against a member of staff, under the school's Safeguarding policy.

3. Definition of Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing occurs when a concern is raised regarding something dangerous or illegal that affects other people. The whistle-blower may not necessarily be directly affected by the danger or illegality and so may not have a personal interest. This is not the same as a complaint where the complainant is usually personally affected and so can seek reasonable redress.

As a school we promote an open and transparent culture in which all concerns are dealt with promptly and appropriately. This applies to both allegations that meet the harms threshold and allegations that do not meet the harms threshold (low level concerns). The term 'low-level' does not mean that the concern is insignificant. An example of a low-level concern is something which is inconsistent with the Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct out of work, or a concern that does not meet the allegations threshold and is not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer).

If staff have a safeguarding concern or an allegation about another member of staff (including supply staff, volunteers or contractors) that does not meet the harm

threshold, then this should be shared in accordance with the school Safeguarding Policy and reported to the Head Teacher.

This encourages an open and transparent culture and enables the school to identify concerning or inappropriate behaviour early and minimise the risk of abuse. It ensures that adults working in the school are clear about professional boundaries and act within them, in accordance with the ethos and values of the school.

4. Blowing the Whistle

Whistleblowing may be for a wide range of concerns. The types of activity that should be disclosed include but are not limited to the following: -

- the physical, emotional or sexual abuse of pupils or staff
- endangering of an individual's health and safety
- concerns about the professional practice or competence of colleagues, other members of staff or other workers
- lack of safe recruitment
- concerns about a lack of support or undermining of the Catholic ethos of the school
- unauthorised use of School funds and/or financial maladministration
- fraud and corruption
- failure to comply with legal obligations
- damage to the environment
- a criminal offence
- failure to follow financial and contract procedure rules
- showing undue favour to a contractor or a job applicant
- miscarriages of justice
- deliberate concealment of information relating to any of the above

Staff should raise their concerns with the Head Teacher. The earlier a concern is raised the easier it will be to take action. The whistleblower is a witness to events not the investigator. They do not need to wait for compelling evidence before raising concerns, but must have reasonable grounds for their suspicion.

When reporting a concern, they should provide as much information and detail as possible. In particular, they should provide the full names of the people involved or who know about what is happening, including the names of those involved, dates of events and any relevant documentation. This will help the investigator to focus on the main issues quickly.

There will be some cases where it is not appropriate for staff to raise concerns with the Head Teacher, for example where it is suspected that the Head Teacher already knows about the malpractice or where it is suspected that the Head Teacher may be involved. In those cases, concerns should be reported to the Chair of Governors, or in the case of

an allegation of abuse or neglect of a child by a member of staff, it should be raised directly with the LADO – telephone number: 01452 426 994. Initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. The person reporting will be advised whether an investigation takes place or not.

5. Advice and Support

The School recognises that staff may wish to seek advice and support from their professional association or trade union before blowing the whistle and they are strongly advised to do so, but a concern regarding the safety of a child should not be delayed.

Whistleblowers who consider that they have been victimised as a result of whistleblowing should make a formal complaint to their employer immediately giving details of the way in which they believe they have been subject to detriment and their reasons for thinking that the detriment might be connected with their disclosure. The person reporting may also choose to raise the matter with:

- Professional Association/Trade Union
- Councillor
- Member of Parliament
- Legal Adviser

It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that the person reporting is not victimised as a result of whistleblowing.

6. Confidentiality

The School understands that people may be reluctant to come forward with information about the wrongdoing of a colleague or manager or indeed at all. As such, the School recognises that whistleblowers may wish to raise concerns in confidence. If the person reporting (the whistleblower) makes a request for the matter to be kept confidential, then their identity will not be revealed without discussing the matter with them first.

7. Anonymous Allegations

It is recognised that the purpose of a Whistleblowing Policy is to allow people to make a protected disclosure with the protection being against any reprisals or victimisation for disclosures made honestly and in good faith. It is very difficult for some people to come forward and make a disclosure and the prospect of having to identify yourself can make the action of whistleblowing all the more difficult. People are encouraged to give their name when raising concerns. A concern expressed anonymously is much less powerful and is often more difficult to investigate and can lack credibility.

The decision whether to investigate an anonymous allegation will be made by the Head Teacher and/or the Chair of Governors. If it is an allegation of abuse or neglect, it will be passed to the LADO for advice. When making this decision they will take into account the seriousness of the issues raised, the credibility of what is being said and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources.

8. Protection for the Whistleblower

All concerns raised under this procedure will be treated seriously and a decision made about whether or not an investigation is appropriate. Depending upon the nature of the matter it may be referred to the external auditor, the LADO or the police. The person to whom a concern is reported will be responsible for keeping them informed about the progress of the investigation and the action, which has been taken, although they may not be told the outcome. In some cases, the investigation may result in criminal or disciplinary proceedings. If this happens the person who reported the concern may be invited to give a written statement or give evidence at a hearing. The Head Teacher and Governors will support them in this process and ensure that they are clear about what will happen.

9. Allegations not made in the public interest

Concerns that are raised maliciously, or where they are known to be untrue may result in disciplinary action or, in the case of agency staff, the termination of the agency contract. In the case of contractors, the matter will be reported to the Head Teacher and the manager of the contracted company so that a decision can be made about the appropriate action to take.

10. Blowing the Whistle outside the School

Sometimes it may be appropriate to raise concerns outside the School. This should only be done where there is a genuine concern in the public interest and where it is believed the information is true, i.e. more than just suspicion. Anybody raising a concern is advised to discuss their concerns with a legal advisor, professional association or trade union before reporting them outside the School.

They may also choose to raise the matter directly with the LADO, if the matter concerns a potential safeguarding/child abuse issue. It is important to remember that in cases of abuse or neglect of a child, if anybody fails to report a concern and it later comes to light that they were aware of information which could have protected a child, it is possible that disciplinary action could be taken against them under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002.

Examples of external regulators you may wish to contact:

- Ofsted (whistleblowing helpline): 0300 123 3155 or whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk
- LADO: 01452 426 994
- National Audit Office: 020 7798 7264
- Information Commissioner: 0303 123 1113
- Environment Agency: 0370 850 6506
- Health and Safety Executive: 0300 003 1747

11. How is this policy reviewed?

The Local Governing Committee have overall responsibility for the operation of this policy and it will be reviewed annually.