



MARK
Education
Trust

MARK Education Trust

Whistleblowing Policy

Policy document provenance

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Summary of key changes made since last review:	Formatting updates to bring in line with the trust's policy template. Full revision of policy and process.
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Unless there are legislative or regulatory changes in the interim, this policy will be reviewed every three years.

Related policies:	MARK Education Trust Staff Code of Conduct MARK Education Trust Complaints Policy MARK Education Trust Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy MARK Education Trust Staff Disciplinary Policy MARK Education Trust Staff Grievance Policy
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1. The trust's guiding principles

MARK Education Trust's aim is to provide the best possible education for our students, preparing them for life in the 21st century, so they can stand equally alongside their peers, locally, nationally and globally. The trust's commitment to providing the very best education to all the students in all its schools includes welcoming any feedback about the education the trust provides as this enables the trust to improve. This includes concerns which cannot be dealt with through the normal channels and so amount to whistleblowing.

This policy is written in line with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA), which amends the Employment Rights Act 1996, which enables individuals to raise issues of concern in an appropriate manner and without fear of reprisal.

2. The purpose of this policy

This policy:

- Encourages individuals affected to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated, and that their confidentiality will be respected
- Lets all employees in the trust know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the trust
- Sets clear procedures for how the trust will respond to such concerns
- Let all employees know the protection available to them if they raise a whistle-blowing concern
- Assures employees that they will not be victimised for raising a legitimate concern through the steps set out in the policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken (though vexatious or malicious concerns may be considered a disciplinary issue)

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

3. Who the policy applies to

This policy applies to all employees including trainees, casual workers and agency staff, as well as to those working for the trust under contract such as consultants. The policy also applies to suppliers and those providing services under contract with the trust or any academy on their own premises, or in any other premises where services are delivered. Volunteers, whilst not staff or contractors, are also covered by this policy.

4. Equal opportunities

Any individual who makes a disclosure will be fully supported and protected by the trust and all disclosures will be treated in a consistent and fair way. The trust will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect individuals who raise a concern in good faith.

Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures already taking place concerning the individual.

No action will be taken against anyone who makes an allegation in good faith, reasonably believing it to be true, even if the allegation is not subsequently confirmed by the investigation.

Support will be provided to an individual raising a concern in order to minimise any difficulties which they may experience. This may include advice on giving evidence if needed. Meetings may, if necessary, be arranged off-site and the individual will be given the opportunity of being represented if they so wish.

5. What constitutes whistleblowing

Whistleblowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is “in the public interest”. Examples of whistleblowing include (but are not limited to):

- Criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption
- Pupils’ or staff health and safety being put in danger
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement
- Breaches of financial management procedures
- Attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest
- Damage to the environment

Not all concerns about the trust, or individual schools in the trust, count as whistleblowing. For example, personal staff grievances such as bullying or harassment do not usually count as whistleblowing. If something affects a staff member as an individual, or relates to an individual employment contract, this is likely to fall under the grievance policy.

When staff have a concern, they should always consider whether it would be appropriate to follow the staff grievance or complaints procedures.

6. Confidentiality

As far as possible, all concerns will be treated in the strictest of confidence and every effort will be made to protect, and not reveal, the whistleblower’s identity.

If a concern leads to investigation or further action then the individual may, at some point in the future, need to act as a witness and/or provide evidence in which case every effort will be made to limit the number of people within the trust with access to the whistleblower’s identity. If the individual does not consent to their identity being revealed this will be respected but may hinder the scope or outcome of the investigation.

7. Anonymous reporting

Employees are encouraged not to make disclosures anonymously, although every effort to investigate anonymous disclosures will be made. Employees should be aware that proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if further information cannot be obtained. 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 contact the CEO or chair of trustees and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If an employee is in any doubt, they can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, which offers a confidential helpline. Contact details are at the end of this policy.

8. Malicious or vexatious allegations

The trust encourages individuals to speak out if they have reasonable belief that their suspicions are justified, and they are reporting the concerns in good faith and in the interest of others. If an allegation turns out to be untrue, or it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against the individual who raised the concern.

If, however, an individual raises a concern that they know to be false or that is made maliciously, is vexatious, frivolous or for personal gain then disciplinary action may be taken against them.

9. Raising a concern

In many cases an employee will be able to raise any concerns with the headteacher. They can do so in person or by putting the matter in writing. They may be able to agree a way of resolving their concern quickly and effectively.

However, where the matter is more serious, or an employee feels that concerns have not been addressed, the individual should contact the CEO outlining the concerns, the actions taken to date and the reasons for their dissatisfaction.

If the concern is regarding the CEO, the employee should raise the concern with the chair of trustees.

Contact details are set out at the end of this policy.

10. Investigating the concern

When a concern is received by the headteacher/CEO/chair of trustees – referred to from here as the ‘recipient’ – they will:

- Meet with the individual raising the concern within a reasonable time. The individual 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 the individual is protected from any unfair treatment or risk of dismissal as a result of raising the concern. The exception is if the concern is found to be malicious or vexatious as described in section 8 of this policy, disciplinary action may be taken.
- Establish whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant further investigation in which case an investigator or team of investigators may be appointed. This may include employees with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator (or investigators) may make recommendations to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing. If necessary they may need to report the matter to the police. The individual who raised the concern should be kept informed of how the matter is being investigated and an estimated timeframe for when they will be made aware of next steps.

11. Outcome of investigation

Once the investigation is complete – either the initial investigation of the concern, or where further investigation was needed –, the investigator (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 about 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.
- Inform the individual who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.
- The CEO, trustees and other staff will, if necessary review relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.
- The trust will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

12. External disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases an individual should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate to report concerns to an external body such as a regulator. Individuals are encouraged to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline. It also has a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. Contact details are at the end of this policy.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of employees, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a parent, supplier or service provider. In some circumstances the law will protect an employee if they raise the matter with the third party directly. However, employees are encouraged to report such concerns internally first, in line with this policy. Employees should contact their headteacher or the CEO in the first instance.

13. Protection and support for whistleblowers

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. The trust aims to encourage openness and will support an employee who raises genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Whistleblowers must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If an employee believes that they have suffered any such treatment, they should inform their line manager or the CEO immediately. If the matter is not remedied, they should raise it formally using the trust's Grievance Policy.

Whistleblowers must not be threatened or retaliated against in any way. If a fellow employee is involved in such conduct, they may be subject to disciplinary action. In some cases, the whistleblower could have a right to sue the fellow employee personally for compensation in an employment tribunal.

14. Contacts

Internal contact emails

Chair of trustees	Clare Collins	Email: ccollins@markeducationtrust.org
Executive headteacher & CEO	Anna Robinson	Email: arobinson@markeducationtrust.org

Should an individual have a whistleblowing concern relating to the CEO or the trustees, they should address their concern to the Head of Governance

Head of Governance	Cheryl Adams	Email: cadams@markeducationtrust.org
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External Contacts

In the event that the matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved within the trust, concerns may be escalated to:

- A member of the board of trustees
- Relevant trade union or professional association

- Protect – Helpline 020 3117 2520, Independent whistleblowing charity, Website: <https://protect-advice.org.uk>

15. Support for employees

- The Education Support Partnership - <https://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk/>
- Citizen’s Advice Bureau - <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>
- Trade Union or professional association where the employee is a member

16. Legal Frameworks

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- DfE (2025) ‘Academy Trust handbook 2025’
- DfE (2025) ‘Keeping children safe in education 2025’
- GOV.UK (2012) ‘Whistleblowing for employees’
- Sir Robert Francis (2015) ‘Freedom to speak up report’