

WOODLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL, HEDGEHOGS NURSERY & SUNBEAMS CLUB



Whistleblowing Protocol

Updated: September 2025

Next Review Date: September 2026

Contents

1.	About this policy	3
2.	What is whistleblowing?.....	3
3.	Raising a whistleblowing concern	4
4.	Confidentiality	5
5.	Investigation and outcome	5
6.	If you are not satisfied	5
7.	External disclosures	6
8.	Protection and support for whistleblowers.....	6
9.	Key Contacts and additional information.....	7
10.	Personnel responsible for the policy	7

1. About this policy

At Woodlands Primary School, Hedgehogs Nursery and Sunbeams Club (the school), we are committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity, and it is expected that all Employees and Governors will maintain high standards. However, all schools 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 within School in order to prevent such situations occurring and to be able to address them effectively when they do occur.

The aims of this policy are:

- To 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 as far as possible.
- To provide staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns.
- To reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

This policy covers all Employees, Governors, Consultants, Contractors, Volunteers, Casual and Agency workers.

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

All contact details for individuals/ organisations named in this policy are available at the end of this document.

2. What is whistleblowing?

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

- criminal activity
- failure to comply with any legal, professional obligation and/ or regulatory requirements
- miscarriages of justice
- danger to health and safety
- damage to the environment;
- a breach of Anti-Fraud & Corruption and Anti-Bribery Policies
- fraud and/ or mismanagement/ unauthorised use of public funds
- failure to prevent fraud

- negligence including sexual, physical and/or financial
- breach of the school's internal policies and procedures, including our Code of Conduct
- conduct likely to damage the school's reputation
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential/ sensitive information
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

A whistle-blower 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 the school's activities then it should be reported under this policy.

This policy should not be used for complaints relating to an employee's personal circumstances, such as the treatment of individuals at work. In those cases, staff should use the School's Grievance Procedure and/ or Dignity at Work Policy.

If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy you should seek advice from the School's Whistleblowing Officer.

3. Raising a whistleblowing concern

Woodlands Primary School, Hedgehogs Nursery and Sunbeams Club (the school), hopes that in the majority of cases staff will feel able to raise any concerns with their line manager; this may be in person or in writing if you prefer. It might be that there is an agreed way of resolving your concern quickly and effectively. In some cases, the matter may need to be referred to another Officer/ Agency.

However, where the matter is more serious, or it is felt that your line manager has not addressed your concern, or you prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, you should contact one of the following:

- The Head teacher
- The Chair of Governors
- The Council's Whistleblowing Officer
The Council's Monitoring Officer (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)
(*Maintained schools only*)
- Chief Executive of the Academy Trust (*Academy Schools only*)

If appropriate a meeting will be arranged to discuss your concern and this will take place as soon as possible. You may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this policy, both you and any companion must respect the confidentiality of any disclosure and subsequent investigation.

A written summary of your concern may be taken, if so, a copy will be provided. An indication may be given of how the matter will be dealt with.

If Governors have concerns about potential wrongdoing within School, then these concerns may be raised with the Council's Whistleblowing Officer (*Maintained Schools*) or the Chief Executive (*Academy Schools*).

4. Confidentiality

Woodlands Primary School, Hedgehogs Nursery and Sunbeams Club (the school), hopes that anyone who wishes to raise a whistleblowing concern feels able to do so openly under this policy. However, if there is a desire to raise concerns confidentially, every effort will be made to keep their identity secret. If it is necessary for the appointed Investigating Officer to know the identity of the individual making the original disclosure then this will be discussed with that individual.

At Woodlands Primary School, Hedgehogs Nursery and Sunbeams Club (the school), we strongly encourage any disclosure not to be made anonymously as this may make effective investigation more difficult or impossible if such information cannot be obtained. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible.

Whistle-blowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should discuss their concerns with the Head teacher (or one of the other contact points) so that measures can be then be taken, if possible, to preserve confidentiality.

If there is any doubt then advice can be sought externally from the Council's Whistleblowing Officer or from Organisations such as Public Concern at Work, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline.

5. Investigation and outcome

Once a concern has been raised, an initial assessment will be carried out to determine the scope of any investigation and the individual making the disclosure will be informed of the outcome of the assessment. There may also be a need to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.

In some cases, an investigator or team of investigators will be appointed including staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to ensure that the risk of future wrongdoing is minimised.

The appointed investigator will aim to keep the whistle-blower informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent specific details of the investigation and/ or any disciplinary action being given. Any and all information about the investigation must be treated as confidential.

If it is concluded that a whistle-blower has made false allegations maliciously or with a view to personal gain, the whistle-blower may be subject to disciplinary action.

6. If you are not satisfied

Whilst Woodlands Primary School, Hedgehogs Nursery and Sunbeams Club (the school), cannot always guarantee the outcome, all concern/s will be dealt with fairly and in an appropriate way. The appropriate use of this policy will help us to achieve this.

If you are not happy with the way in which any concern has been handled, you can raise it with one of the other key contacts.

7. External disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing within School. In most cases it should not be 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. It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media. It is strongly recommended to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline and you may wish to contact them for advice. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

8. Protection and support for whistle-blowers

It is understandable that whistle-blowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. Woodland Primary School aims to encourage openness and will support anyone who raises genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Whistle-blowers 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 any individual believes that they have suffered any such treatment, then this should be raised with the Head teacher or Chair of Governors immediately. If the matter is not remedied then the matter can be raised formally using the School's Grievance Procedure.

Whistle-blowers must not be threatened or retaliated against in any way; involvement in such conduct may result in disciplinary action. In some cases, the whistle-blower could have a right to sue the individual personally for compensation in an employment tribunal.

9. Key Contacts and additional information

Tables can be amended accordingly

Schools Whistleblowing Officer	Victoria Carr, Headteacher head@woodlands.cheshire.sch.uk
Governor with responsibility for Whistleblowing	Hannah Mather, Chair of Governors. Chair@woodlands.cheshire.sch.uk
Council's Whistleblowing Officer	Helen Peters (Internal Audit) 01244 977 375 helen.peters@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk
Head of Governance (Monitoring Officer)	Vanessa Whiting 01244 977 802 vanessa.whiting@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk Karen McIlwaine (interim) 01244 977 802 Karen.mcilwaine@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk
Council's Whistleblowing hotline (Internal)	01244 973 223 whistleblowing@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk
Public Concern at Work (Independent Whistleblowing Charity)	Helpline: (020) 7404 6609 E-mail: helpline@pcaw.co.uk Website: www.pcaw.co.uk

10. Personnel responsible for the policy

The Head teacher as overall responsibility for this policy, and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this policy.

All Employees and Governors are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing.

Other relevant policies in addition to this Whistleblowing Policy, these include:

Code of Conduct (incorporating Gifts and Hospitality)

Governor Code of Conduct

Anti-Bribery Policy and Framework

Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy

Failure to Prevent Fraud guidance and protocols