



Whistleblowing Policy

Reviewed by Admin Manager (Headteacher/DSL):

Date: May 2021

Approved by Board of Trustees on:

Review Date: May 2023

Page left blank intentionally

Bristol Steiner School Whistleblowing Policy

1. Rationale

Bristol Steiner School (BSS) is committed to ensuring a safe, legal, and fair workplace and to the highest standards of openness, integrity and accountability. An effective Whistleblowing policy is a key component of this commitment. The School encourages the raising of concerns and for individuals to speak out against wrongdoing. A culture where individuals feel confident in being able to raise concerns is one where the highest standards of performance can be achieved.

Our Whistleblowing policy is an essential part of our Safeguarding practice. BSS is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young people and vulnerable adults. We believe the welfare of the child is paramount and that no child should suffer harm of any form, either at home or at school. Everyone who works at or visits our school has the responsibility to make sure all our children are safe.

For the purposes of this policy, 'staff' also includes agency staff, volunteers, and students working in our Schools, and 'parents' includes carers and legal guardians – unless this is clarified further within the text.

2. Aims

The aim of this policy is to encourage individuals to raise concerns about any wrongdoing that they know about, or suspect is happening in the School. The policy sets out the way in which concerns can be raised and how these concerns will be dealt with. BSS aims to:

- provide support and advice to Whistleblowers, as raising a concern may be a daunting and difficult experience;
- maintain that an individual raising a concern in 'good faith' is acting responsibly and appropriately, even if the concern turns out to be a misunderstanding or otherwise groundless;
- treat in confidence in as far as this is possible all Whistleblowing concerns and make every effort to protect the anonymity of the person raising a concern, if requested (in circumstances where this may not be possible, the individual will be contacted to discuss the available options and offered support);
- ensure all concerns raised under the policy will be taken seriously and investigated;
- employ the School's Disciplinary Procedure if wrongdoing is discovered as a result of an investigation in addition to any appropriate external measures;
- ensure that victimisation of any individual raising a concern, or attempts to prevent such concerns from being raised, will not be tolerated and is in itself a disciplinary offence;
- take disciplinary against a staff member when statements are made maliciously.

3. Definitions

Whistleblowing is the term used when someone who works in or for an organisation wishes to raise concerns about malpractice, wrongdoing, illegality or risk in the organisation (for example, crimes, civil offences, miscarriages of justice, dangers to health and safety), and/or the cover up of any of these. A Whistleblowing concern goes beyond a personal grievance or complaint, because it involves concerns about the welfare of others. Wrongdoing includes misconduct on all levels, from minor to serious acts.

4. Implementation

This policy is the responsibility of everyone who works at, volunteers for or visits BSS. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will ensure that arrangements will be made to bring this policy to the notice of all staff (including new, temporary, and part-time employees), agency and other contract staff, volunteers, visitors and students during Induction and throughout their time at the School so that they fulfill their duties to co-operate with this policy. This policy and procedure will apply in all these contexts, including school activities taking place offsite. BSS delivers services at various venues, and this policy will apply in all these contexts. BSS expects services delivered by partner organisations to have safeguarding procedures in place. This policy should appear on the School website.

5. Other policies

This policy works in conjunction with the following School related policies and procedures:

1. *Anti-bullying*
2. *Behaviour*
3. *Code of conduct (staff)*
4. *Complaints/Concerns/Grievance*
5. *Equalities*
6. *eSafety*
7. *Finance*
8. *Health and Safety*
9. *Lettings*
10. *Recruitment and selection*
11. *Safeguarding and Child Protection*
12. *Staffing*
13. *SEN, disability, SEND, and Inclusion*
14. *Volunteers*

6. Monitoring and Review

BSS will seek to continually improve all its related safeguarding policies, procedures and guidelines. BSS will review this policy on a regular basis to confirm that content and approach is still appropriate. The review will take place whenever there are significant changes and not later than 12 months from the previous review date.

7. Law and Guidance

Currently the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, known as the Whistleblowing Act, protects people in the workplace who raise concerns about child safeguarding and welfare systems, financial malpractice, danger, illegality, or other wrongdoing.

8. Type of incident or behaviour covered

The following list covers the type of concerns that may be raised under the Whistleblowing Policy and is not intended to be exclusive or exhaustive list:

- misconduct involving a child;
- performance/conduct that puts at risk the safety of a child;
- performance/conduct which puts at risk the school's reputation as a provider of education;
- inappropriate/sexual relationships between a member of staff in a position of trust and a pupil;
- inappropriate conduct or unethical behaviour;
- performance or conduct that gives cause for concern;

Policies and procedures: Whistleblowing

- negligent conduct or performance;
- witnessing harassment or bullying of others;
- abuse or misuse of the school's property (including computer systems, computer software/hardware, email and the internet);
- a criminal offence;
- fraud/financial irregularity;
- danger to health and safety; or
- a deliberate attempt to cover up information of any of the above.

9. Independent Advice

Staff should always seek independent advice at the earliest opportunity. This may be to check who may be best placed to deal with their concern, or simply to talk the matter through in confidence first and discuss how to raise their concern. They can do this through their union or professional body or the independent Whistleblowing charity Public Concern at Work (telephone 020 7404 6609, or email at helpline@pcaw.co.uk). For further information on Public Concern at Work, please see www.pcaw.co.uk. If staff decide to seek advice from a legal adviser, then anything they say will be automatically protected.

10. Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence in as far as this is possible and the School will endeavour to protect the identity of the person raising a concern, if they do not want their name to be disclosed. Where this is not possible, the person raising the concern will be contacted to discuss the matter and offered full and continuing support.

11. Anonymity

There may be occasions where an individual only feels comfortable raising a concern anonymously and the School will always take such concerns seriously. However, anonymous concerns make investigation difficult. Also it can be difficult to assess the extent to which the matter has been raised in 'good faith'. Therefore, there may be instances where the School, having seriously considered the concern and taken all information available into account, may not be able to pursue an anonymous concern. This policy, therefore, encourages individuals to disclose their identity to those who need to know it; this ensures a thorough investigation and that the matter is dealt with appropriately. It also enables feedback to be provided.

12. Procedure

Normally, staff should first raise their concerns internally with the following:

- their line managers;
- the Head Teacher;
- a trustee of the School;
- a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT);
- the DSL or Deputy DSL or Designated Safeguarding Trustee if there is a Safeguarding concern;
- the Admin Manager if the concern relates to any financial issues;
- If none of the above are appropriate or a staff member feels unable to approach any of the above, then they should raise their concern with someone they trust within the organisation.

Policies and procedures: Whistleblowing

Staff do not have to provide evidence of the allegation but will be expected to demonstrate that there are reasonable grounds for raising the concern. Wherever possible, staff should raise concerns in writing, but if they don't feel able to do this, they may telephone, or arrange to meet them face to face. All concerns raised will be treated confidentially by those involved in the reporting process.

Action taken by the people above will be dependent on the nature of the concern raised. The concerns raised may:

- be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation;
- be investigated by an internal investigation;
- be the subject of an independent inquiry commissioned by the School; or
- be referred to the police.

Staff should receive an initial response to any concerns raised within seven working Days, informing them of the following:

- that the concern has been received;
- whether any initial enquiries have been made;
- how the matter will be investigated;
- an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- a point of contact for support and information on the sources of support and advice available.

13. Investigation Process

If the concern is judged to necessitate an investigation, an initial assessment will be made as to whether alternative working arrangements are required during the investigation. For instance it may be necessary to suspend a member of staff for their own protection. The investigators will then meet with the individual who has raised the concern to find out all the facts and clarify any details. An investigation will also involve meeting with the individual that the concern has been brought against (if applicable) and any witnesses. The right to be accompanied at meetings will apply to both parties. This may be a union representative or a colleague. Throughout the investigation both parties will be kept informed of progress, including any difficulties in completing the process within the timescale given. Once the investigation is complete, the mandated investigation team will meet separately with the person raising the concern and the person the concern has been brought against, to feedback the outcome and whether any further action will be taken. The team will check to ensure that any identified actions are taken and that there is no victimisation of any parties involved. Regular reports will be given to the Trustees detailing the process. It may be appropriate to give full details of the concern to the Trustees, or just to the Chair of Trustees depending on the nature of the concern raised. Individuals who feel that their concern has not been handled effectively should write to the Chair of Trustees, explaining why, within 10 working days of receiving the outcome.

14. Referral outside the School

If resolution is not found, staff are advised to take their concerns outside the School, and contact external organisations. Staff who have an unresolved safeguarding concern about the practices and procedures of other professionals/volunteers working with children at the School can report to Ofsted Whistleblowing hotline in three ways.

- Call on 0300 123 3155 (Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 6.00pm).
- Email at whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk
- Write: WBHL, Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

Staff can now also ring the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line which can be reached on 0800 028 0285. www.nspcc.org.uk/fighting-for-childhood/news-opinion/new-whistleblowing-advice-line-professionals/

For other matters, staff can also contact:

- Audit Commission (telephone 020 7828 1212);
- the Police (Avon and Somerset Constabulary - local rate telephone number is 0845 4567000);
- their trade union; or
- their solicitor.