St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon

Whistleblowing At Work Policy

'Achieving Excellence Together'

June 2025 – 2028

Definition

The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 provides legal protection to all employees against being dismissed or victimised by their employers should they reasonably and in good faith report matters of concern. It is expected that employees will faithfully serve their employer and not disclose confidential information about the employer's affairs. This policy applies where an individual discovers information which he or she believes shows malpractice or wrongdoing within an organisation. When this occurs, the information should be disclosed without fear of reprisal and may be made independent of line management.

The term 'whistleblowing' used in this policy refers to a disclosure by a member of the school community (including a governor), or by a former employee, of malpractice within St Patrick's Academy.

Rationale

St Patrick's Academy is committed to creating and maintaining a culture of openness within our school so that individuals feel encouraged and confident to raise any concerns relating to suspected malpractice at an early stage. We also recognise the negative effect which malpractice can have on the organisation, and therefore encourage you to raise genuine concerns, or any suspicions you may have with regard to potential misconduct.

This Policy has been created in order to provide a clear reporting mechanism for concerns regarding potential misconduct of a staff member and is intended to cover concerns that are made in the public interest. If the matter is of an individual or personal nature, it should be pursued through the 'Grievance Procedure'. Complaints relating to discrimination, victimisation or harassment should be dealt with through the normal grievance procedure.

This Policy applies to all full and part-time staff. This Policy is non-contractual and may be amended by us at any time.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- Facilitate a culture of openness and transparency within our school;
- Explain how to raise a genuine concern with regard to potential malpractice by a member of staff;
- Provide reassurance for the member of staff reporting their concern;
- Clarify what constitutes malpractice or suspected malpractice.

Protection

We appreciate that those reporting concerns may be apprehensive but, where possible, St Patrick's Academy would encourage the use of the internal procedures as set out below. We want to reassure you that you will suffer no detrimental treatment as a result of voicing your concerns. However, the school also recognises that, at times, members of our community would prefer to report their concerns to an external body.

We will not tolerate victimisation, harassment, bullying or any other detrimental treatment of any worker who has made a disclosure under this Policy. Complaints about such behaviour will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.

Should you feel you have been subjected to any detriment as a result of raising a concern under this Policy you should notify in writing one of the vice principals, the principal or chairperson of the Board of Governors, as appropriate.

Disclosures under this Policy

You can make a disclosure under this Policy if you have genuine concerns relating to any of the following areas of malpractice, or suspected malpractice:

- Criminal activity;
- Practices endangering health and safety;
- Practices damaging the environment;
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation;
- Bribery;
- Financial malpractice, impropriety or fraud;
- Serious failure to comply with any professional codes of practice;
- Attempts to conceal any of the above.

The malpractice can be past, present or prospective. It may have occurred inside or outside the United Kingdom.

You are encouraged to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible. No action will be taken against you if you raise genuine concerns even if the concern you raised is not confirmed by any subsequent investigation.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Any disclosure you make under this Policy will be treated, as far as reasonably practicable, in a confidential and sensitive manner. If confidentiality is not reasonably practicable, for instance, because of the nature of the information, this will be explained to you.

We hope you will feel comfortable to voice any concerns openly; however, you may make a disclosure anonymously. However, concerns expressed anonymously cannot be dealt with as effectively as open disclosures as they are often more difficult to investigate.

How to make a disclosure

In the first instance, you should bring the matter to the attention to one of the Vice Principals, who will inform the Principal. If the disclosure contains allegations about an employee at Vice Principal level, you may make the disclosure directly to the Principal.

If your disclosure contains allegations which you do not wish to make to the Principal, you can make the disclosure to the Chair of Governors.

If your disclosure concerns a very serious allegation, the Board of Governors will be notified.

Vice Principals: Mr M Fahy, Mr R Campbell and Mrs E Black can be contacted at 37 Killymeal Road, Dungannon, BT71 6DS. Tel 028 87 727400.

Principal: Mr C Holmes can be contacted at 37 Killymeal Road, Dungannon, BT71 6DS.
Tel 028 87 727400.

Procedure

Once a concern has been raised, the Principal (or Chair of Governors) will investigate this. If you have not made the complaint anonymously, you will be asked to attend a meeting as part of this investigation.

At this meeting, the Principal will make a written note of concern(s) raised and agree the content with the whistle-blower. Following this meeting, the Principal may decide to appoint an Investigating

Officer from SLT, or in more serious cases, an Investigating Panel comprising of Board of Governors and/or SLT to carry out an investigation in the strictest of confidence. In some circumstances, it may be necessary for the person under investigation to be placed on a precautionary suspension by the Principal, in consultation with the Chair of Governors.

Should a whistle-blower wish to make an allegation regarding the Principal, they should note their concern in writing and leave with Mrs Maria Martin marking the envelope *'Private and Confidential - For The Attention of The Chair of Governors'*.

We will keep you informed as to the progress of the investigation, as far as is possible and appropriate, bearing in mind, in particular, any confidentiality obligations that apply. Please note that you will not be given details of any disciplinary action taken unless we consider this appropriate.

Dissatisfaction with the outcome of the process

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation, you should raise this with the Principal or with the Chairperson of the Board of Governors, giving the reasons for your dissatisfaction. They will respond in writing notifying you of their acceptance or rejection of the need for further investigation and the reasons for this.

Recording and Monitoring

The Principal and Chair of Governors will maintain an accurate and up-to-date register of all concerns reported.

Availability

This Policy will be published in RM Staff.

Key staff will be fully briefed as to their role in supporting this Policy and the appropriate action to take in the event of any disclosure being made to them.

Breach of this Policy

We may invoke the Disciplinary Procedure if you are found to have subjected a whistle-blower to any form of detrimental treatment. It may also be invoked if you have intentionally misled us in respect of any matter, breached this Policy in any other way and/or if we believe that you have made a false allegation maliciously.

Review and Evaluation

This policy should be reviewed at least every three years or within six weeks of an allegation of malpractice against a member of staff.

Reviewed: June 2025

To be reviewed: June 2028