

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

1 Introduction

The 22 schools and central team which form the St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi Academy Trust were founded by and form part of the Catholic Church. In addition to the Church's funds which established the schools, it is sustained in its mission by receipt of public funds through the Education Funding Agency. Accordingly, it is accountable to the Catholic community of which it is a part, and which provided the school and the central team, and to the public whose funds it expends.

Whistleblowing has been defined as:

'The disclosure by an employee or professional of confidential information which relates to some danger, fraud or other illegal or unethical conduct connected with the workplace, be it of the employee or his/her fellow employees'

The Public Interest Disclosure Act (1998) is designed to protect whistleblowers from detrimental treatment and unfair dismissal.

The Academy Trust is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability, and will treat whistleblowing as a serious matter. In line with that commitment, we expect employees and others with whom we deal, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Trust's work to come forward and voice those concerns. In response, concerns will be taken seriously, investigated and appropriate action taken. It is recognised that some cases may have to proceed on a confidential basis.

This policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the school or central office in the first instance so that it is not necessary to resort to outside agencies. This policy makes it clear that you can do so without fear of victimisation, discrimination or disadvantage.

2 Aims and Scope of this Policy

There are existing procedures in place to enable you to lodge a grievance relating to your own employment. This policy is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. These include:

- conduct which is an offence, a breach of the law or contrary to Church teaching;
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice;
- health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees;
- damage to the environment;
- the unauthorised use of public or Church funds;
- bribery, fraud or financial mismanagement;
- sexual, physical or emotional abuse of staff or students;
- other unethical or immoral conduct; and
- deliberately concealing information about any of the above.

Thus, any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of employees, volunteers, governors or directors of the Academy Trust in any of the schools, central office or others acting on behalf of the Trust, its central office or any of its schools can be reported under this policy. This may be something that makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your

experience or the values, beliefs and standards to which the school subscribes; is against the Academy Trust instrument of government or policies; falls below established standards of practice; or amounts to improper conduct.

3 Safeguards

The Academy Trust will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.

Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence you or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that might affect you.

4 Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. However, investigation into the concern could reveal the source of the information; and statements could be required from you as part of the evidence, which would be seen by all parties involved. At the appropriate time, you may need to come forward as a witness. You also have a duty to observe this confidentiality.

5 Anonymous Allegations

You are encouraged to put your name to your allegation wherever possible. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will be considered at the discretion of the Academy Trust, especially concerns relating to the welfare of children. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include:

- the seriousness of the issue raised;
- the credibility of the concern and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

6 Untrue and Malicious/Vexatious Allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously, or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

7 How to Raise a Concern

If you reasonably believe that you have discovered serious malpractice within the Academy Trust, its central office or any of its schools, you should ideally raise these concerns with your line manager. However, if, for whatever reason this is not possible or appropriate, you should contact the CEO if you are in the central team or the Head Teacher if you are in a school.

You will be given the opportunity to discuss your suspicions and an appropriate person will be designated as investigating officer, who will arrange for an investigation to take place.

If you suspect that the Head Teacher may be involved in the malpractice, then you should contact the CEO. If your concern is about the CEO, then you should raise this with the Chair of the Trust. If you also suspect involvement by the Chair of the Trust, then you should contact the Diocesan Director of Education. If you have concerns about how child protection issues are being handled in your own or another organisation, you should contact the NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline.

Within ten working days of your initial meeting, the investigating officer will write to confirm the details of your concern and that an investigation will take place. Throughout the investigation, you will be kept informed of progress and you will normally be advised of the eventual outcome, subject to third party rights. All correspondence will be addressed to your home. If a meeting is needed, it may be arranged off site if you wish, and a union representative or a friend may accompany you. Although records will need to be kept as the enquiries progress, these will be of an anonymous nature.

There can be no prescribed time limits for completion of the investigative process, but it will obviously be in the interests of all concerned if the issue is resolved without delay.

If you have any complaint about the way in which the investigation is being handled, then you should raise this with the designated investigating officer in the first instance. If the complaint remains unresolved then you may contact the Diocesan Director of Education with your concerns.

When the investigation is complete a report will be presented to the board of directors which will decide upon the appropriate course of action. Subject to any relevant legal constraints, you will be informed of the action to be taken. If you do not agree with the outcome then you will have seven days in which to make your concerns known to the board of directors, via the Chair of the Trust or the Diocesan Director of Education. If you remain dissatisfied with the response from the board of directors or the governing body, then you may consider contacting the Secretary of State for Education, who has the power to intervene if the board of directors appears to be acting unreasonably. You should be aware, however, that this course of action could have serious implications for the Academy trust and/or schools.

At no stage should you contact the media without the written permission of the Chair of the Board of Directors. Such action would be a breach of confidentiality and could result in disciplinary proceedings against you.

8 List of Contacts

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Director of Education: Peter Giorgio

Diocesan Education Service

Diocesan Centre

Mornington Crescent

Derby DE22 4BD

Email: Julie.Sweeney@nottingham-des.org (PA)

Secretary of State for Education

Department for Education

2 St Paul's Place

125 Norfolk Street

Sheffield

S1 2FJ

NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline
0808 028 0285
help@nspcc.org.uk
or fill in online form

Date of Policy: 12 April 2021

Date for Review: September 2023

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Noon', written in a cursive style.

S Noon
Chair, St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi-Academy Trust Board