

Whistleblowing Policy

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1. Introduction

Mill Hill Education Group (the 'Group') is the trading name of The Mill Hill School Foundation and is a group of independent mainstream Schools which together educate girls and boys aged 3 to 19 years. It currently comprises the following Schools:

Senior Schools (day and boarding)

Mill Hill School
Mill Hill International
Cobham Hall

Pre-Preparatory/Preparatory Schools (day)

Grimsdell Pre-Preparatory School*
Lyonsdown School*
Keble Prep School*
St Joseph's in the Park*
Belmont Preparatory School
Kingshott*

*These Schools have Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) pupils.

This Policy applies to all Schools in the Group, including EYFS settings.

The term 'School' in this Policy shall refer to each of these schools, as appropriate.

The Group has adopted this policy and the accompanying procedure on whistleblowing to enable members of staff to raise concerns internally and in a confidential fashion about fraud, malpractice, health and safety, criminal offences, miscarriages of justice, a failure to comply with legal obligations, inappropriate behaviour or unethical conduct. The policy also provides, if necessary, for such concerns to be raised outside the organisation.

2. About this Policy

The Group is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity, and expects all staff to maintain high standards. However, all organisations 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 in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The Group's policy on whistleblowing is intended to demonstrate that it:

- will not tolerate malpractice.
- respects the confidentiality of staff raising concerns and will provide procedures to maintain confidentiality so far as is consistent with progressing the issues effectively.

- will provide the opportunity to raise concerns outside of the normal line management structure where this is appropriate.
- will invoke the Group's disciplinary procedure in the case of false, malicious, vexatious or frivolous allegations; and
- will provide a clear and simple procedure for raising concerns, which is accessible to all members of staff.

3. Procedure

This procedure is separate from the Group's adopted procedures regarding grievances. Individuals should not use the whistleblowing procedure to raise grievances about their personal employment situation. If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this procedure you should seek advice from the Head or the Director of Finance and Resources (DFR).

This procedure is to enable members of staff to express a legitimate concern regarding suspected malpractice within the Group.

Malpractice is not easily defined; however, it includes allegations of fraud, financial irregularities, corruption, bribery, dishonesty, acting contrary to the staff code of ethics (including the deliberate concealment of any material facts from Governors), any serious neglect of duties which might give rise to a serious complaint against the Group by any pupil, parent, employee, supplier contractor or visitor, conduct likely to damage the Group's reputation or financial wellbeing, criminal activities, or failing to comply with a legal obligation, a miscarriage of justice, or creating or ignoring a serious risk to health, safety or the environment.

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to suspected malpractice, wrongdoing or dangers at work within the Group. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected malpractice affecting any of the Group's activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this procedure.

If staff and volunteers feel unable to raise an issue with the Group or feel that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, they may report their concerns to other whistleblowing channels, such as:

- Protect, an independent whistleblowing charity, previously known as Public Concern at Work (helpline: 020 3117 2502, email: whistle@protect-advice.org.uk, website: <https://protect-advice.org.uk/>)
- The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline (telephone: 0800 028 0285 or email: help@nspcc.org.uk).

4. Confidentiality

We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this procedure. However, if you wish to raise a concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know your identity, this will be discussed with you.

If there is evidence of criminal activity then the Police will in all cases be informed.

We do not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from you. 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 discuss this with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Director of Finance and Resources (DFR), and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If you are in any doubt you can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are set out above.

5. Raising a Whistleblowing Concern

5.1 Safeguarding Concerns

If your concern relates to Safeguarding, the safeguarding whistleblowing procedure is covered in the Safeguarding and Protecting the Welfare of Pupils Policy.

In summary all staff and volunteers must report to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) any concerns or allegations about Group/School practices which are likely to put pupils at risk of abuse or other serious harm. In addition, they should report low level concerns as referenced in the current version of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) that an adult working in or on behalf of the school or college may have acted in a way that is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct.

Any concern with the behaviour of colleagues or allegation made against a member of staff or volunteer, or the DSL, should immediately be reported as follows:

- Staff attached to a Group School should inform the Head of the School or, if the Head is absent, the CEO
- Support staff working for the Group in any location should inform the DFR or their local Head. If either the DFR or the relevant Head is absent, they must inform the CEO
- If the allegation is against the Head or DFR, the member of staff must inform the CEO
- If the allegation is against the CEO, the member of staff must inform the Chair of the Court of Governors

If staff (including governors, agency staff and volunteers) believe that a child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, they should make an immediate referral to children's social care and/or the Police.

5.2 Other Concerns

We hope that in many cases you will be able to raise any concerns with your line manager. You may tell them in person or put the matter in writing. They may be able to agree a way of resolving your concern quickly and effectively. In some cases, they may refer the matter to the Head or DFR.

For significant concerns that are outside of regular line management, you are at liberty to raise a whistleblowing concern to the CEO, Head of the School, DFR, Director of Operations (DO) or Head of HR. If the person expressing the concern feels unable to approach the CEO, Head of the School, DFR, DO or Head of HR directly, then the Chair of the Court of Governors should be the first point of contact.

A meeting will be arranged with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern. You may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this procedure. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation. You may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information as the concerns raised are investigated.

Any concern raised will be investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner, and appropriate corrective action will be pursued. You will be kept informed of progress and, whenever possible and subject to third party rights, informed of the resolution. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.

If you are not satisfied that your concern is being properly dealt with you will have a right to raise it in confidence with the Governing Body.

6. External Procedures

Where all internal procedures have been exhausted, a member of staff shall have a right of access to an external person/body. This may include (depending on the subject matter of the disclosure) HMRC, the Audit Commission, the Health and Safety Executive and/or the Local Authority Designated Officer (where the disclosure relates to a child protection issue).

It should be noted that under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, there are circumstances where a member of staff may be entitled to raise a concern directly with an external body where the individual reasonably believes:-

- that exceptionally serious circumstances justify it
- that the Group would conceal or destroy the relevant evidence
- where they believe they would be victimised by the Group; or
- where the Secretary of State has ordered it

7. The Media

Even where extreme circumstances are thought to exist, you should under no circumstances approach a commercial body or the media with details of the suspected wrongdoing. If you approach any such body and/or where your concern is disclosed for personal gain you will lose your whistleblowing rights.

The Group will consider this to be serious misconduct and immediate disciplinary action may be taken against you.

8. Malicious Accusations

False, malicious, vexatious or frivolous accusations will be dealt with under the Group's Disciplinary Procedure.

9. Protection from Reprisal or Victimisation

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

No member of staff will suffer a detriment or be disciplined for raising a genuine and legitimate concern, providing that they do so in good faith and following the Whistleblowing procedures. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform the Head, CEO, DFR, DO or Head of HR immediately. If the matter is not remedied, you may raise it formally using the Group's Grievance Procedure.

You must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. If you are involved in such conduct you may be subject to disciplinary action.

10. Review

This Review: February 2024

Next review: Spring 2027

This Policy was approved by the Governance Committee of the Court of Governors on 22nd February 2024