



HOPEBRIGHT

SCHOOL

WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY

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Whistleblowing Policy

Hopebright School

Ground Floor Rear of 155 Deane Road, Bolton, BL3 5AH

Website: www.hopebright.co.uk

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Policy Owner: Headteacher

Applies to: All staff, agency staff, supply staff, volunteers, students on placement, contractors, consultants, directors, proprietor representatives and any adults working with or on behalf of Hopebright School

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1. Introduction

Hopebright School is committed to the highest standards of openness, integrity, transparency, accountability and safeguarding practice. Staff and adults working with or on behalf of the school must feel confident and safe to raise concerns about poor, unsafe, unlawful, unethical or unacceptable practice.

Hopebright School is a specialist day school for pupils aged 7 to 17 with a range of complex needs, including autism spectrum condition, social, emotional and mental health needs, communication needs and associated learning or developmental needs. Many pupils may be vulnerable because of their age, SEND, communication differences, previous educational disruption, anxiety, trauma, social care involvement, health needs or difficulty expressing concerns. This makes a strong whistleblowing culture essential.

The school expects all staff to act in the best interests of pupils at all times. All adults working in or with the school have a responsibility to challenge practice that may place pupils, staff, visitors or the wider school community at risk. Silence, inaction or failure to escalate concerns can allow unsafe practice to continue.

This policy explains how staff and other adults can raise concerns about wrongdoing, malpractice, unsafe practice or failures in safeguarding. It applies to concerns about the activities, behaviour or decisions of:

- Staff.
- Senior leaders.
- Volunteers.
- Agency or supply staff.
- Contractors.
- Consultants.
- Directors or proprietor representatives.
- External organisations or professionals in their dealings with Hopebright School.
- Any person working with or around pupils on behalf of the school.

An individual who raises a concern under this whistleblowing policy must reasonably believe that they are making a disclosure in the public interest. Whistleblowing is not normally used for personal employment grievances, such as disputes about terms and conditions, interpersonal conflict, working arrangements, pay or individual management decisions. Such matters should usually be raised through the school's grievance procedure or other relevant employment procedures.

However, where a personal employment issue also raises wider concerns about safeguarding, health and safety, unlawful conduct, discrimination, regulatory breaches or risk to pupils, it may be appropriate to raise the matter under this policy.

A whistleblowing disclosure may relate to past, present or likely future wrongdoing in one or more of the following categories:

- Criminal offences, including fraud, theft, corruption, abuse, assault, exploitation or financial impropriety.



- Failure to comply with a legal obligation.
- A miscarriage of justice.
- Conduct that endangers the health, safety or welfare of pupils, staff, visitors or members of the public.
- Safeguarding failures or child protection failures.
- Failure to follow statutory guidance or regulatory requirements.
- Breach of the Independent School Standards.
- Breach of Hopebright School policies, procedures or guidance.
- Behaviour that falls below established standards of good practice.
- Abuse of position, authority or trust.
- Discriminatory, harassing or victimising conduct.
- Serious professional misconduct.
- Unsafe staffing, supervision, care, behaviour management or physical intervention practice.
- Misuse of school funds, property, information or resources.
- Deliberate concealment, falsification or destruction of records.
- Conduct that endangers or damages the environment.
- Any attempt to cover up wrongdoing in any of the above categories.

All disclosures will be dealt with appropriately, consistently, fairly, sensitively and professionally. The school will take all reasonable steps to protect those who raise genuine concerns and to ensure that matters are investigated or addressed properly.

This policy and associated procedures apply to all staff and should be read in conjunction with other safeguarding, conduct, employment and operational policies, including but not limited to:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Staff Code of Conduct / Safe Working Practice Policy.
- Low-Level Concerns Policy.
- Allegations Against Staff Policy.
- Complaints Policy.
- Grievance Procedure.
- Disciplinary Policy.
- Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Behaviour Policy.
- Physical Intervention Policy.
- Health and Safety Policy.
- Educational Visits Policy.
- Online Safety Policy.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.



- Data Protection and Privacy Policies.
- Recruitment and Selection Policy.
- Managing Allegations and LADO procedures.
- Missing from Education Policy.
- Medication Policy.
- Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy.
- Staff ICT, Social Media and Acceptable Use policies.

Failure to comply with relevant policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action, which may include summary dismissal and referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service, Teaching Regulation Agency, Local Authority Designated Officer, police, Ofsted, local authority or other relevant professional or regulatory body where appropriate.

2. Safeguards

a. Harassment or Victimisation

Hopebright School recognises that deciding to report a concern can be difficult. Staff may fear reprisals, damaged working relationships, isolation, criticism, disciplinary consequences or career impact. The school will not tolerate harassment, victimisation, bullying, intimidation, detrimental treatment or retaliation against anyone who raises a concern in good faith or who assists with an investigation.

The school will take all reasonable steps to protect staff who raise concerns. This includes considering:

- Confidential handling of the concern.
- Alternative reporting routes.
- Support from a senior leader, HR, safeguarding lead or external adviser.
- Temporary adjustments to working arrangements where appropriate.
- Support for wellbeing.
- Protection from retaliation or disadvantage.
- Clear communication about the process, where possible.

Harassing or victimising a whistleblower, or instructing, causing, encouraging or inducing others to do so, will be regarded as a serious disciplinary matter and may amount to gross misconduct. Employees found to have engaged in this behaviour may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

b. Confidentiality

Hopebright School will, as far as possible, protect the identity of staff who raise concerns and do not want their name to be disclosed. Information will be shared only with those who need to know in order to assess, investigate, manage or respond to the concern.

However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in all circumstances. It may not be possible to investigate the concern fully without revealing the source of the information. A statement from the person raising the concern may be required as part of evidence. Information may also need to be shared with safeguarding partners, the Local Authority Designated Officer, the police, Ofsted, the local authority, the Disclosure and Barring Service, the Teaching Regulation Agency or other bodies where required.

Where a person's identity needs to be disclosed, the school will discuss this with the person wherever possible and will take steps to support and protect them.

c. Anonymous Concerns

Hopebright School encourages staff to put their name to concerns whenever possible. Named concerns are usually easier to investigate, clarify and resolve. However, the school recognises that some staff may feel unable to identify themselves.

Anonymous concerns will be considered and will not be ignored. In deciding how to respond, the school will take into account:

- The seriousness of the issue raised.



- The credibility of the concern.
- Whether the concern relates to safeguarding or pupil welfare.
- The level of detail provided.
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources.
- Whether immediate action is needed to protect pupils or others.
- The possibility of false, malicious or vexatious allegations.

Because anonymous concerns do not identify the person raising the concern, it may not be possible to seek further information or provide feedback.

d. Good Faith and Malicious Allegations

If a concern is raised in good faith but is not confirmed by investigation, no action will be taken against the person who raised it.

If an allegation is found, following investigation, to be deliberately false, malicious, vexatious, knowingly misleading or made for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken. This does not apply to concerns that are raised honestly but cannot be substantiated.

e. Safeguarding Comes First

Where a concern relates to the safety or welfare of a child, staff must not delay reporting it. Safeguarding concerns must be raised immediately with the designated safeguarding lead or another appropriate safeguarding lead in accordance with the safeguarding and child protection policy. Whistleblowing may be used where staff believe that safeguarding concerns are not being handled properly, are being ignored, are being covered up, or relate to the conduct of staff or leaders.

If a child is in immediate danger, staff must take urgent action, including contacting the police on 999 where necessary.

3. How to Raise a Concern

All staff have a duty to report concerns about the safeguarding and welfare of children. Staff must not wait for a supervision session, appraisal, meeting or annual review if they are concerned that a child may be at risk or that unsafe practice is occurring.

For concerns that do not relate directly to the safety or welfare of children, staff should still raise the matter as early as possible. Early reporting makes it easier for the school to take action, prevent harm, preserve evidence and address practice before concerns escalate.

Step 1: Raise the Concern Internally

As a first step, an employee should normally raise concerns with their line manager or supervisor. This may be appropriate where the concern relates to practice, procedure, conduct, health and safety, management action or another issue that can be addressed locally.

However, the appropriate reporting route will depend on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issue and who is thought to be involved.

Where a concern relates to safeguarding, child protection or pupil welfare, staff should report it immediately to the designated safeguarding lead or a deputy designated safeguarding lead in accordance with the safeguarding policy.

Step 2: Raise the Concern with the Headteacher

Staff who are unwilling or unable to approach their line manager, or who believe their concern has not been addressed, should raise the matter with the headteacher.

The Headteacher of Hopebright School is:

Arshad Ashraf

Hopebright School

Ground Floor Rear of 155 Deane Road, Bolton, BL3 5AH

Website: www.hopebright.co.uk

Step 3: Raise the Concern Beyond the Headteacher

Staff must raise the concern with the proprietor, directors, chair of governance or nominated safeguarding/whistleblowing lead where:

- They are unwilling or unable to approach the headteacher.
- The concern is about the headteacher.
- The concern involves senior leaders.
- They believe the concern has not been dealt with properly.
- They are unhappy with the response received.
- They believe there is a conflict of interest.
- They believe there is a risk of evidence being destroyed or concerns being covered up.

Where the school is part of a wider organisation or has a proprietor body, staff may contact the proprietor or nominated organisational safeguarding lead through the contact arrangements provided to staff. The school will ensure that current contact details are made available in staff induction materials, the staff handbook and safeguarding information.

Step 4: External Reporting Where Necessary

Staff may contact external bodies where:

- They believe a child is at risk and the school has not acted appropriately.
- They believe internal reporting routes are unsafe, inappropriate or ineffective.
- The concern involves senior leaders or the proprietor.
- The matter is urgent.
- They believe evidence may be concealed or destroyed.
- They are not satisfied with the school's response.
- They need independent advice.

External reporting routes are listed in section 5 of this policy.

How Concerns Should Be Raised

Concerns should normally be raised in writing where possible. A written concern should include:

- The background and history of the concern.
- What happened or is believed to be happening.
- Names of those involved, where known.
- Dates and times, where known.
- Places or locations, where relevant.
- Any witnesses.
- Any evidence available.
- Why the person is concerned.
- Whether the concern has already been raised and with whom.
- Whether there is any immediate risk to a child, adult or the school.

A staff member who does not feel able to put concerns in writing can raise them verbally by telephone, in person or through a meeting with the appropriate person.

Staff may invite a representative of their trade union or professional association to raise the matter with them or support them through the process.

Staff do not need to prove wrongdoing. They must have a reasonable belief that the information tends to show wrongdoing or risk.

4. How Hopebright School Will Respond

The action taken by Hopebright School will depend on the nature of the concern, the seriousness of the issue, the evidence available, the risk to pupils or others, and any legal or safeguarding requirements.

The matter may be:

- Resolved by immediate management action.
- Investigated internally.
- Referred to the designated safeguarding lead.
- Referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer.
- Referred to children's social care.
- Referred to the police.
- Referred to Ofsted.
- Referred to the local authority.
- Referred to the Disclosure and Barring Service.
- Referred to the Teaching Regulation Agency.
- Referred to a professional body.
- Referred to health and safety, data protection or other regulators.
- Managed under another school policy, such as the disciplinary, grievance, safeguarding, low-level concerns, complaints or allegations policy.

Initial enquiries will be made to determine whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. The school will consider how to protect pupils, staff and evidence during this period.

Some low-level concerns may be resolved by agreed action if this is appropriate, proportionate and safe. However, concerns relating to safeguarding, abuse, criminal conduct, serious misconduct, cover-up or risk to children will not be treated as informal matters.

Within 10 working days of receiving a whistleblowing concern, the headteacher or other appropriate person will normally write to the person who raised the issue, where their identity is known, to:

- Acknowledge that the concern has been raised.
- Confirm who is handling the matter.
- Indicate how the school proposes to deal with the matter.
- Explain whether further information is needed.
- Explain what further enquiries or investigations may take place, if this can be shared.
- Explain if no further action will be taken and why, where appropriate.
- Give an estimated timescale for providing a final response, where possible.
- Provide information about support and confidentiality.

Hopebright School accepts that staff need to be assured that matters have been properly addressed. Subject to legal, safeguarding, confidentiality, data protection and employment constraints, the person who raised the concern will be told the outcome of any investigation or the reason why full information cannot be shared.

Where a concern is anonymous, the school will not normally be able to provide feedback.

Where the concern relates to safeguarding or allegations against staff, the school will follow the statutory guidance and local safeguarding partnership procedures. This may include consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer before taking action that could compromise an investigation.

Records will be kept of:

- The concern raised.
- Who received it.
- The date received.
- Actions taken.
- Decisions made.
- Referrals to external agencies.
- Communication with the person raising the concern, where possible.
- Outcomes and lessons learned.

Records will be stored securely and handled in accordance with data protection, safeguarding and employment requirements.

5. Taking the Issue Further

This policy is intended to provide staff with a clear route to raise relevant concerns within Hopebright School. The school hopes that staff will feel able to raise concerns internally and will be satisfied that appropriate action is taken.

However, the school recognises that in some circumstances staff may not feel able to raise concerns internally, may believe the matter has not been handled properly, or may need independent advice.

Ofsted

Staff may contact Ofsted where the concern relates to a school, safeguarding, education provision or the welfare of children.

Ofsted Whistleblowing Hotline

Telephone: 0300 123 3155

Email: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

Address: WBHL, Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

If a child is in immediate danger, staff should call 999. If a child may be at risk, staff should contact the local authority children's social care service or police as appropriate.

NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line

The NSPCC whistleblowing advice line is available for professionals who are worried about how child protection issues are being handled in their own or another organisation.

Telephone: 0800 028 0285

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Protect, formerly Public Concern at Work

Protect is an independent whistleblowing charity that provides free, confidential advice to workers who are unsure how to raise a whistleblowing concern or need advice about their rights.

Telephone: 0203 117 2520

Website: www.protect-advice.org.uk

Local Authority Designated Officer

Where a concern relates to an allegation that a person who works with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child.
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child.
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

The matter should be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer in accordance with local procedures. Hopebright School is located in Bolton, and staff should use the current Bolton safeguarding partnership or local authority LADO contact arrangements available through the school safeguarding information, local authority website or safeguarding board procedures.

Health and Safety Executive

Concerns about serious workplace health and safety risks may be raised with the Health and Safety Executive.

Information Commissioner's Office

Concerns about serious data protection breaches may be raised with the Information Commissioner's Office.

Police

Where a criminal offence may have been committed, or where there is immediate risk of harm, the police may be contacted. In an emergency, call 999. For non-emergencies, call 101.

Trade Unions and Professional Associations

Staff may seek support and advice from a recognised trade union or professional association.

Prescribed Persons

Staff may also contact a prescribed person or body. Prescribed persons are mainly regulators and professional bodies but may include other persons such as Members of Parliament. The appropriate prescribed person depends on the subject matter of the disclosure.

A current list of prescribed people and bodies is available on GOV.UK.

Independent Whistleblowing Reporting Service

Where Hopebright School or its proprietor has arranged access to an independent whistleblowing reporting service, such as Safecall or an equivalent provider, staff may use that route to report wrongdoing confidentially or anonymously. Current access details must be provided to staff through induction, staff handbook information and safeguarding training materials.

Where Safecall is used, reports may be made by telephone or online. Staff should use the current contact details provided by the school or proprietor.



6. Staff Training

Hopebright School is committed to training all staff on key aspects of whistleblowing, safeguarding and professional conduct.

Whistleblowing information will be included in:

- Staff induction.
- Safeguarding training.
- Annual policy updates.
- Staff code of conduct training.
- Low-level concerns training.
- Allegations management training for leaders.
- Safer working practice training.
- Governance and proprietor oversight where relevant.

Training will ensure staff understand:

- What whistleblowing is.
- The difference between whistleblowing, grievances, complaints, low-level concerns and safeguarding disclosures.
- How to raise concerns internally.
- How to raise concerns externally.
- The duty to report safeguarding concerns immediately.
- Protection against victimisation.
- Confidentiality and anonymity.
- How whistleblowing supports a safer culture.
- The importance of professional curiosity and challenge.
- How to respond if another staff member raises a concern.

For further information and advice on whistleblowing, staff may refer to:

- GOV.UK whistleblowing guidance for employees.
- ACAS guidance on whistleblowing at work.
- Protect whistleblowing advice.
- NSPCC whistleblowing advice line.
- Current Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance.

7. Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The designated senior member of staff with overall responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this Whistleblowing Policy is the headteacher.

The headteacher is responsible for ensuring that staff, volunteers, agency staff, contractors and relevant adults are aware of this policy and understand how to raise concerns. The headteacher is also responsible for ensuring that parents, carers and placing local authorities can access the policy where appropriate.

An electronic copy of this policy will be posted on the school website: www.hopebright.co.uk. A copy will also be available for inspection on the premises during office hours.

This policy will be reviewed and publicised in writing at least annually and more frequently if required in response to:

- Changes in legislation.
- Changes in statutory guidance.
- Changes in local safeguarding procedures.
- Significant incidents.
- Lessons learned from whistleblowing concerns.
- Inspection findings.
- Organisational changes.
- Updates to Ofsted or Independent School Standards expectations.

The proprietor and directors have oversight of the school's safeguarding culture, including whether staff feel confident to raise concerns and whether concerns are acted on appropriately. They will ensure that safeguarding duties are discharged in accordance with current legislation, regulations, statutory guidance, local authority procedures and inspection expectations.

The proprietor and directors will hold senior leaders to account for:

- Maintaining a culture of openness and professional challenge.
- Ensuring staff understand whistleblowing routes.
- Responding promptly to concerns.
- Protecting staff who raise concerns in good faith.
- Referring safeguarding concerns appropriately.
- Learning lessons from concerns raised.
- Monitoring patterns or themes in whistleblowing, low-level concerns, complaints, safeguarding and allegations.

Where appropriate, whistleblowing themes may be reported to the proprietor or governance body in anonymised form so that leaders can identify learning, strengthen systems and improve safeguarding culture.

If staff have comments, questions, concerns or suggestions about the content of this policy, they should speak to the headteacher. If the concern relates to the headteacher or the response received, staff should use the escalation routes set out in this policy.



Quick Reference: Raising a Concern

Type of concern	First route	Alternative or escalation route
Immediate risk to a child	DSL / deputy DSL immediately	Police 999 if immediate danger; local authority children's social care
Concern about staff conduct towards a child	Headteacher / DSL	LADO, proprietor, Ofsted or police depending on risk
Concern about headteacher	Proprietor / directors / nominated safeguarding lead	LADO, Ofsted, NSPCC, police if urgent
Concern about unsafe practice	Line manager	Headteacher, proprietor, relevant regulator
Concern not dealt with internally	Headteacher or proprietor	Ofsted, NSPCC, Protect, prescribed person
Need independent advice	Trade union / professional association	Protect or NSPCC whistleblowing advice line

Policy Confirmation

This policy supports Hopebright School's commitment to safeguarding, openness, professional accountability and continuous improvement. Staff are expected to raise concerns promptly and leaders are expected to respond with seriousness, fairness and integrity.