

SVS Whistleblowing Policy



Approval and review dates

Policy	Date of last review	Date of next review
SVS Whistleblowing Policy	September 2024	September 2025

1. Policy Statement

Sandwell valley School (SVS) Board of Governors is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and public accountability. It seeks to conduct its affairs in a responsible manner taking into account the requirements of the Department for Education.

Therefore, the Board is committed to the prevention and detection of fraud, corruption and malpractice and has adopted this policy with the purpose of encouraging staff to raise any concerns that they may have in such matters. Concerns must usually be brought to the attention of SVS management in the first instance. Nevertheless, the policy also sets out how staff may raise their concerns with the Board or, as a last resort; outside the organisation should they feel that this is warranted after the matter has been dealt with internally by SVS. By these means, potentially damaging, dangerous and embarrassing matters can be dealt with and resolved internally.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain concerns. Employees are subject to an implied contractual term of confidence and trust which seeks to prevent them from disclosing their employer's confidential information. There may also be within the Contract of employment a specific confidentiality clause. However, where an individual discovers information which they believe shows malpractice or impropriety within the organisation, this information should be disclosed without fear of reprisal and, if appropriate, such a disclosure may be made independently of line management.

It should be emphasised that this policy and procedure is intended to assist individuals who believe that they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not designed to question financial or business decisions taken by SVS and it is not a mechanism for employees to raise private grievances or grievances about their employment situation.

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Sandwell Valley School will undertake to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation with regard to the provision of first aid for students, staff and visitors and will make sure that procedures are in place to meet that responsibility.

2. Aims

This policy aims to:

- Encourage individuals affected to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated and that their confidentiality will be respected
- Let all staff in the trust know how to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing in or by the trust
- Set clear procedures for how the trust will respond to such concerns
- Let all staff know the protection available to them if they raise a whistle-blowing concern
- Assure staff that they will not be victimised for raising a legitimate concern through the steps set out in the policy even if they turn out to be mistaken (though vexatious or malicious concerns may be considered a disciplinary issue)

This Policy is intended to cover the disclosure by an employee of confidential information which relates to some danger, fraud or other illegal or unethical conduct connected with the workplace, be it of the employer or of his or her fellow employees. The policy and procedure may also be used by agency staff and contractors working at SVS.

3. Legislation and guidance

This policy has been written in line with the above document, as well as [government guidance on whistle-blowing](#). We also take into account the [Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998](#).

4. Links with other policies

This policy links with our policies on:

- Staff grievance policy
- Complaints procedure
- Child protection and Safeguarding policy

5. Definition of whistle-blowing

Whistle-blowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is “in the public interest”. Examples of whistle-blowing include (but aren’t limited to):

- Criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption

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- Pupils' or staffs' health and safety being put in danger
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement
- Breaches of financial management procedures
- Attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest
- Damage to the environment

A whistle-blower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above.

Not all concerns about the trust count as whistle-blowing. For example, personal staff grievances such as bullying or harassment do not usually count as whistle-blowing. If something affects a staff member as an individual, or relates to an individual employment contract, this is likely a grievance.

When staff have a concern they should consider whether it would be better to follow our staff grievance or complaints procedures.

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) has:

- [Further guidance](#) on the difference between a whistle-blowing concern and a grievance that staff may find useful if unsure
- A free and confidential [advice line](#)

6. Protection of Staff raising concerns

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) gives legal protection to employees who raise concerns provided that they:

- are acting in good faith
- have reasonable grounds for believing that the information disclosed indicates the existence of one or more of the following:
 - that a criminal offence has been committed, or is likely to be committed
 - that a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which s/he is subject
 - that a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur
- that the health and safety of any individual has been, is being or is likely to be damaged. It must indicate a greater danger than is associated with the normal use of the process/product, or a danger that is not usually associated with it.
- that information tending to show any matter falling within any one of the preceding paragraphs has been, is being or is likely to be deliberately concealed
- SVS will treat as a serious disciplinary matter any example of a manager or member of staff seeking to deter an employee from raising a legitimate concern.
- Staff who bring legitimate concerns to the attention of SVS management will have the right to have the matter treated confidentially and not to have their name disclosed to the alleged perpetrator of malpractice without their prior approval. A person raising a concern will not be required to put the matter in writing although the manager with
- whom they discuss the issue will take notes which do not identify the complainant.
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- If an employee, in good faith, makes an allegation in accordance with this policy and procedure which is not confirmed by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual.

7. Accountability of staff raising concerns

- 7.1. SVS has a responsibility to ensure that that staffs against which concerns are raised are treated fairly and it is important that staff should realise that an allegation made under this Policy is a serious matter. Concerns should be raised only if disclosure is in the interests of SVS, the staff, the students or the public (i.e. for the protection of one of these groups).
- 7.2. It is an abuse of the Policy to bring a false, malicious accusation. Therefore, it must be understood that falsely or maliciously raising unfounded allegations will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence and, in the case of making such an allegation externally, could involve the offence of bringing the SVS into disrepute.

8. Anonymous Allegations

- 8.1. Anonymous allegations will not normally be considered under this procedure. However, if the allegations are of a serious nature and there is sufficient supporting evidence to enable SVS to undertake an investigation, they may be considered.
- 8.2. A free, confidential employee helpline service (tel: 0207 404 6609) is provided by the independent charity "Public Concern at Work" which offers independent advice to anyone worried about malpractice in the workplace. Further information is available online at www.pcaw.org.uk.
- 8.3. For staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally staff are now able to report their concerns via the NSPCC whistleblowing helpline on 08000280285 or by email: help@nspcc.org.uk

9. Procedure

How to raise a concern

- 9.1. Staff wishing to raise a concern should do so in accordance with the procedure set out below. It is acknowledged that anyone wishing to raise a concern may wish to seek advice and support from their trade union at any stage of the procedure.

Stage 1

- 9.2. Where a member of staff wishes to raise a concern, s/he should ordinarily discuss this with their line manager. However, in circumstances where these concerns relate to their line manager, or where the member of staff so chooses, the matter may be raised with any member of the Senior Management Team. The employee may contact the Clerk to the Governors if the concerns
 - relate to a member of the Senior Management Team, or
 - relate to an individual governor or to the Board of Governors, or

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- where there are exceptional circumstances, for example where an employee feels that the raising of the concern within SVS could lead to the destruction of evidence of criminal activity

- 9.3. The Clerk will deal with the matter under Stage 2 below.
- 9.4. A member of staff raising a concern should first make an appointment with the manager with whom they wish to discuss the matter and, at the same time, advise him/her that the matter is one to be dealt with under this policy and procedure. If s(he) wishes, the member of staff may be accompanied by a friend or representative.
- 9.5. The matter will be handled in the strictest confidence. The person raising the concern will not be required to put their concern in writing although they may do so if they wish. The manager with whom the matter is being raised will meet the member of staff and will take notes that do not identify the individual raising the concern.
- 9.6. The manager with whom the concern has been raised will inform the Principal who will cause the matter to be investigated, or will inform the Police should criminal activity be suspected.
- 9.7. The member of staff shall be kept informed of the progress of the investigation, particularly if this is protracted, and they shall be advised, in writing to their home address, of the outcome of the investigation of their concern and any action taken to resolve the issue. The employee shall have the right to raise the matter under stage 2 of this procedure if s/he is not satisfied that the matter is being dealt with properly.
- 9.8. A member of staff against whom an allegation has been made will be informed at the time most appropriate to the nature of the allegation and the consequent investigation.

Stage 2

- 9.9. Should the employee regard the matter as unresolved and wish to raise the issue with the Board, (s)he should contact the Clerk to the Governors (contactable through the Principal's admin) who will arrange to interview the member of staff and will gather all of the evidence available. The Clerk will then arrange for the matter to be brought to the attention of the Chair of the Governing Body. If the disclosure has been made direct to the Clerk and is of a criminal nature s/he may also notify the Police.
- 9.10. The Chair of the Governing Body will review the action taken by management in relation to the concern raised and decide whether further investigation or action is required. In doing so, the Chair may interview the member of staff and any persons previously involved in dealing with the matter. If s(he) wishes, the member of staff may be accompanied at such an interview by a friend or representative. The Chair may commission such further investigation as he/she considers is warranted.
- 9.11. If the concern reported to the Clerk is one which affects the whole Board of Governors, the Clerk may seek advice from the Learning & Skills Council as to the steps to be taken to deal with the matter. In this eventuality, the Clerk must inform the Chair of the Board and the Principal that this has been done.
- 9.12. The Clerk will advise the member of staff, in writing to their home address, of the outcome of the Chair's review and any further action taken to resolve the issue.

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Stage 3

9.13. If, having fully exhausted the procedure for raising the matter internally, the employee is still dissatisfied with the way in which SVS has addressed the issue, s(he) may then raise the concern with one of the following external bodies

- SVS's internal or external auditors
- the Department for Education and Employment
- the Health & Safety Executive
- the National Audit Office
- a Member of Parliament

9.14. The Clerk to the Governors will advise the employee how to progress the matter and will provide all of the collected evidence for the external body.

10. Outcome of the investigation

10.1. Once the investigation – whether this was just the initial investigation of the concern, or whether further investigation was needed – is complete, the investigating person(s) will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether or not any wrongdoing has occurred. The report will include any recommendations and details on how the matter can be rectified and whether or not a referral is required to an external organisation, such as the local authority or police.

10.2. They will inform the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

10.3. Beyond the immediate actions, the headteacher, trustees and other staff if necessary will review the relevant policies and procedures to prevent future occurrences of the same wrongdoing.

10.4. Whilst we cannot always guarantee the outcome sought, we will try to deal with concerns fairly and in an appropriate way.

11. Malicious or vexatious allegations

11.1. Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made in good faith, but the investigation finds no wrongdoing, there will be no disciplinary action against the member of staff who raised the concern.

11.2. If, however, an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the trust will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the person making the allegation.

12. Escalating concerns beyond the trust

The trust encourages staff to raise their concerns internally, in line with section 4 of this policy, but recognises that staff may feel the need to report concerns to an external body. A list of prescribed bodies to whom staff can raise concerns with is included here.

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The Protect advice line, linked to in section 3 of this policy, can also help staff when deciding whether to raise the concern to an external party.

13. Familiarisation and Training

This policy and procedure forms part of the induction package for new employees.

Staff development will include education and training as to the circumstances in which it would be appropriate to use the procedure. Designated managers and governors who might hear disclosures will receive training in reacting to and dealing with, concerns raised under the procedure.

14. Dissemination of the Policy

This policy is available on the SVS website, on request to parents and carers, the LA and Ofsted through the Principal.