Emerson Park Academy

FINANCE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

(MAKING A DISCLOSURE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST)

Board of Directors:

Review Due October 2027

1. Introduction

Emerson Park Academy prides itself on having an open and honest culture and is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability.

An important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable staff and other members of the Academy to voice concerns in a responsible and effective manner. It is a fundamental term of every contract of employment that an employee will faithfully serve his or her employer and not disclose confidential information about the employer's affairs. Nevertheless, where an individual discovers information which they believe shows serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation then this information should be disclosed internally without fear of reprisal, and there should be arrangements to enable this to be done independently of line management (although in relatively minor instances the line manager would be the appropriate person to be told).

The Public Interest Disclosure Act, which came into effect in 1999, gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. The Academy has endorsed the provisions set out below so as to ensure that no members of staff should feel at a disadvantage in raising legitimate concerns.

It should be emphasised that this policy is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not designed to question financial or business decisions taken by the Academy nor should it be used to reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under harassment, complaint, disciplinary or other procedures. Once the "whistleblowing" procedures are in place, it is reasonable to expect staff to use them rather than air their complaints outside the Academy.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy is designed to enable employees of the Academy to raise concerns internally and at a high level and to disclose information which the individual believes shows malpractice or impropriety. This policy is intended to cover concerns which are in the public interest and may at least initially be investigated separately but might then lead to the invocation of other procedures e.g. disciplinary or criminal proceedings.

These concerns could include

- Financial malpractice or impropriety or fraud
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or Statutes
- Dangers to Health & Safety or the environment
- Criminal activity
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- Attempts to conceal any of these

3. Safeguards

3.1. Protection

This policy is designed to offer protection to those employees of the Academy who disclose such concerns provided the disclosure is made:

- in good faith
- in the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure that it tends to show malpractice or impropriety and if they make the disclosure to an appropriate person (see below).
- It is important to note that no protection from internal disciplinary procedures is offered to those who choose not to use the procedure. In an extreme case malicious or wild allegations could give rise to legal action on the part of the persons complained about.

3.2. Confidentiality

The Academy will treat all such disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner. The identity of the individual making the allegation may be kept confidential so long as it does not hinder or frustrate any investigation. However, the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and the individual making the disclosure may need to provide a statement as part of the evidence required.

3.3. Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages individuals to put their name to any disclosures they make. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less credible, but they will be considered at the discretion of the Academy.

In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised
- The credibility of the concern
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources

3.4. Untrue Allegations

If an individual makes an allegation in good faith, which is not confirmed by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual. In making a disclosure the individual should exercise due care to ensure the accuracy of the information.

If, however, an individual makes malicious or vexatious allegations, and particularly if he or she persists with making them, disciplinary action may be taken against that individual.

4. Procedures for Making a Disclosure

On receipt of a complaint of malpractice, the member of staff who receives and takes note of the complaint, must pass this information as soon as is reasonably possible, to the appropriate designated investigating officer as follows:

- Complaints of malpractice will be investigated by the Head Teacher unless the complaint is against the Head Teacher or is in any way related to the actions of the Head Teacher. In such cases, the complaint should be passed to the Chair of the Board of Directors.
- Complaints of malpractice by a member of the board will be investigated by the Chair of the Board of Directors. In cases where the complaint is about the Chair of Directors should be reported directly to the Department of Education (DfE).
- The Head Teacher will carry out the investigation in conjunction with other members of the Senior Leadership Team, Directors or alone.
- In the case of a complaint, which is any way connected with but not against the Head Teacher, the Chair of Directors may nominate a member of the Senior Leadership Team to act as the alternative investigating officer.
- The member of staff has the right to bypass the line management structure and take their complaint direct to the Head Teacher.
- The Head Teacher has the right to refer the complaint back to a line manager if he/she feels that the manager, without any conflict of interest, can more appropriately investigate the complaint.

If there is evidence of criminal activity then the investigating officer should inform the police. The Academy will ensure that any internal investigation does not hinder any formal police investigation.

5. Timescales

Due to the varied nature of these sorts of complaints, which may involve internal investigators and/or the police, it is not possible to lay down precise timescales for such investigations. The investigating officer should ensure that the investigations are undertaken as quickly as possible without affecting the quality and depth of those investigations.

The investigating officer, should as soon as practically possible, send a written acknowledgement of the concern to the complainant and thereafter report back to them in writing the outcome of the investigation and on the action that is proposed. If the investigation is a prolonged one, the investigating officer should keep the complainant informed, in writing, as to the progress of the investigation and as to when it is likely to be concluded.

All responses to the complainant should be in writing and sent to their home address.

6. Investigating Procedure

The investigating officer should follow these steps:

- Full details and clarifications of the complaint should be obtained.
- The investigating officer should inform the member of staff against whom the complaint is made as soon as is practically possible. The member of staff will be informed of their right to be accompanied by a trade union or other representative at any future interview or hearing held under the provision of these procedures.
- It may be appropriate for the investigating officer to consider the involvement of the Academy auditors and the Police at this stage and should consult with the Head Teacher (or Chair of Directors if the allegation is against or connected with the Head Teacher).
- The allegations should be fully investigated by the investigating officer with the assistance where appropriate, of other individuals or authorities.
- A judgement concerning the complaint and validity of the complaint will be made by the investigating officer. This judgement will be detailed in a written report containing the findings of the investigations and reasons for the judgement. The report will be passed to the Head Teacher (or Chair of Directors if the allegation is against or connected with the Head Teacher).
- The Head Teacher or Chair of Directors will decide what action to take. If the complaint is shown to be justified, then they will invoke the disciplinary or other appropriate Academy procedures.
- The complainant should be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and, if appropriate, of the final outcome subject to any legal constraints
- A copy of the outcomes will be passed to the Academy's Auditors to enable a review of the procedures.

If the complainant is not satisfied that their concern is being properly dealt with by the investigating officer, they have the right to raise it in confidence with the Chair of Directors.

It is intended that this policy will provide staff with an avenue to raise concerns within the Academy. However, should none of the above routes be suitable or acceptable the Academy recognises the lawful rights of employees and ex-employees to make disclosures to prescribed persons such as:

- Department for Education
- Audit Commission
- Health & Safety Executive
- Relevant Ombudsman
- Trade Union or professional organisation
- The Police
- Public Concern at Work: 020 7404 6609 www.pcaw.co.uk

Public Concern at Work (PCaW) is an independent authority on public interest whistleblowing. PCaW focuses on the responsibility of workers to raise concerns about malpractice and on the accountability of those in charge to investigate and remedy such issues. It offers free advice to people concerned about danger or malpractice in the workplace but who are unsure whether or how to raise the matter.