



Prepared by:	Signature:	Date:
TONY LACEY	_____	
Chief Executive Officer		<u>DATE</u>
Approved by:	_____	
		<u>DATE</u>
Chair of Trustees	_____	<u>DATE</u>

1. Introduction

- 1.1. We are committed to running our Trust and its academies with honesty and integrity, and we expect all staff to maintain high standards. We encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible.
- 1.2. A person who raises a concern is protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, which is incorporated into the Employment Rights Act 1996, as long as they have a reasonable belief that the complaint is made in the public interest. This legislation protects workers from victimisation, discrimination or disadvantage when they voice legitimate concerns.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The purpose of this policy and procedure is to ensure that individuals know how to raise a concern, feel confident in raising concerns, and when concerns are raised, reassured that the concern will be dealt with in confidence and they will be protected from victimisation, discrimination or disadvantage.
- 2.2. This policy and procedure does not cover matters which are covered by other existing procedures, e.g. Grievance Procedures, Disciplinary Procedures, Complaints Policy, Fair Treatment at Work Policy and staff code of conduct. In those cases, you should use the Grievance Procedure or Fair Treatment at Work Policy as appropriate. If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy, you should seek advice from the Whistleblowing Officer, whose contact details are at the end of this policy.
- 2.3. This policy does not form part of your contract of employment, and we reserve the right to amend or withdraw.

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy applies to all individuals working at all levels of the Trust and its academies, including all teaching and non-teaching staff, officers, governors, trustees, consultants, contractors, trainees, part-time and fixed-term workers, casual and agency staff and volunteers (collectively referred to as “staff” in this policy).

4. What is whistleblowing?

- 4.1. Whistleblowing is the reporting of suspected wrongdoing or dangers in relation to the Trust's and academies' activities. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Bribery, fraud or corruption.
 - Conduct which has failed, or is likely to fail, to comply with a legal or professional obligation.
 - Disclosure related to miscarriages of justice.
 - Actions which endanger the health or safety of any individual, including risks to children or the public, as well as other workers.

- Sexual or physical abuse of children/staff.
- Neglect or emotional abuse of children
- Damage to the environment.
- Theft or misuse of Trust/school property or assets.
- The unauthorised use of public funds.
- Serious departure from professional standards.

Any safeguarding concern relating to a child or vulnerable person must be reported immediately in accordance with the Trust's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and to the Designated Safeguarding lead in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE). Whistleblowing procedures do not replace statutory safeguarding duties and may run alongside them where appropriate.

5. Procedure

- 5.1. We hope that in many cases you will be able to raise any concerns with your manager. However, where you prefer not to raise it with your manager for any reason, you should contact the Whistleblowing Officer (CEO of the Trust) or the Chair of the Trust Board if the concerns are about the Trust Executive Team. Contact details are at the end of this policy.
- 5.2. You can raise your concern orally or in writing. Individuals should provide as much information as possible, including:
 - Details of the suspected wrongdoing
 - The reason why they are particularly concerned about the situation
 - The names of any colleagues/employees who are considered to be either directly involved or who can help with further information
 - Any other background information, for example, lists of documents, etc.
 - What action (if any) are you seeking?
- 5.3. Concerns should, ideally, be raised in writing.
- 5.4. We will arrange a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern. You may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this policy. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

6. How concerns will be handled

- 6.1. Once a concern has been raised, the Whistleblowing Officer (or an appropriate senior officer of the Trust) will make an initial assessment to determine whether the concern falls within the scope of this policy and whether it can be investigated under these procedures. Where appropriate, the concern may be referred to another procedure (for example, safeguarding, disciplinary or complaints procedures).
- 6.2. Decision to Investigate

- 6.3. Following the initial assessment, the Trust will decide whether an investigation is required and, if so, what form it should take. Some concerns may be resolved without the need for a formal investigation, for example by providing clarification or addressing a minor issue. Other concerns may require a more detailed investigation.

7. Who will investigate

- 7.1. Investigations may be carried out by:
- a senior member of the Trust leadership
 - a nominated trustee or committee
 - an external investigator, auditor or professional adviser

The investigator will be independent of the matters being investigated wherever possible.

8. Conduct of the Investigation

- 8.1. The purpose of any investigation is to establish the facts and assess whether wrongdoing has occurred. Investigations will be conducted sensitively, fairly and as confidentially as possible. The whistleblower may be asked to provide further information or clarification during the process.
- 8.2. Timescales
The Trust aims to deal with concerns as promptly as possible. Indicative timescales will be provided to the whistleblower at the outset where appropriate, recognising that some investigations may be complex and take longer to conclude.

9. Feedback to the whistleblower

- 9.1. Where possible, and subject to legal and confidentiality constraints, the whistleblower will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and whether any action has been taken. The Trust may not be able to share specific details, particularly where this would breach confidentiality or data protection obligations.

10. Possible Outcomes

- 10.1. Following an investigation, outcomes may include (but are not limited to):
- no further action
 - changes to procedures or controls
 - additional training or guidance
 - referral to another internal procedure
 - referral to an external body or regulator

11. Confidentiality

- 11.1. We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. Completely anonymous disclosures will be considered, although the Trust may be limited in its ability to investigate them fully. If you want to raise your concern confidentially, we will

make every effort to keep your identity secret and only reveal it where necessary to those involved in investigating your concern. Confidentiality may not be possible where a concern leads, for example, to a full investigation.

12. External disclosures

- 12.1. The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing within the Trust and its academies. In most cases, staff should not find it necessary to raise concerns externally.
- 12.2. The law recognises that, in certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for an individual to report a concern to an external body, such as a prescribed regulator. This may include, for example, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Ofsted, the Department for Education, or a local authority in relation to safeguarding matters.
- 12.3. Staff are strongly encouraged to seek independent advice before making an external disclosure. **Protect** (formerly Public Concern at Work) operates a confidential helpline offering free, impartial advice to whistleblowers. Their contact details are provided at the end of this policy.

13. Protection and support for whistleblowers

- 13.1. We aim to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- 13.2. Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a genuine concern under this policy. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform the Whistleblowing Officer or the Chair of the Trust Board immediately. If the matter is not remedied.
- 13.3. You should raise it formally using the Trust's Grievance Procedure or Fair Treatment at Work Policy as appropriate.
- 13.4. Staff must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.
- 13.5. If we conclude that a whistleblower has knowingly made false allegations maliciously or with a view to personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken.

14. Contacts

Whistleblowing Officer	Tony Lacey 0151 203 0935 ceo@oaktreesmat.co.uk
Chair of Audit Committee	Murray Freeman 0151 203 0935 admin@oaktreesmat.co.uk
Chair of Trust Board of Governors	Jane Owens 0151 203 0935 chair@oaktreesmat.co.uk
Protect www.protect-advice.org.uk (Independent whistleblowing charity)	Helpline: (020) 7404 6609 E-mail: whistle@pcaw.co.uk Website: www.pcaw.co.uk