



# Whistleblowing Policy

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<b>Written by</b>	<b>Lulu Stanier-Martin</b>
<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Joe Creswick</b>
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## Introduction

Ridgeway is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity and expects all staff to maintain high standards in accordance with their contractual obligations and our policies and procedures. 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 to prevent such situations occurring or to address them when they do occur.

This procedure is not a substitute for normal line management processes, but an addition to them. Staff should always first consider using normal line management for raising concerns. This procedure is only for the purpose of raising concerns about wrongdoing, not personal grievance, and is not a substitute or alternative for existing procedures such as the disciplinary procedures for staff or the complaints procedure. This procedure should only be used where all other existing internal procedures are felt to be inappropriate.

If after reading this policy, anyone is still in any doubt about what to do, advice can be sought from Protect – an independent whistleblowing charity. Their website is <https://protect-advice.org.uk> and they offer a confidential helpline: 020 3117 2520. The NSPCC also have a whistleblowing helpline: 0800 028 0285.

## The purpose of this policy

- To encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected;
- To provide staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns;
- To reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns in good faith without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be a mistake.

## What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

- criminal activity;
- child protection and/or safeguarding concerns; (see relevant section at the end of this policy)
- miscarriages of justice;
- danger to health and safety;
- damage to the environment;
- failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements;
- financial fraud or mismanagement;
- negligence;
- breach of Ridgeway's internal policies and procedures, including the Code of Conduct;
- conduct likely to damage Ridgeway's reputation;
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information;
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern in good faith relating to any of the above.

Reasons for whistle blowing:

- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.
- each individual has a responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour;



- to prevent the problem worsening or widening;
- to protect or reduce risks to others;
- to prevent becoming implicated yourself.

## Raising a whistleblowing concern

Ridgeway hopes that in many cases staff will be able to raise any concerns with their line manager, through speaking to them in person or putting the matter in writing. They may be able to agree on a way of resolving a concern quickly and effectively. In some cases, they may refer the matter to the Governing Body.

However, where the matter is more serious (in line with the examples above), staff feel that their line manager has not addressed the concern, or they would prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, staff should contact the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors can be contacted by emailing [b.crease@ridgeway.beds.sch.uk](mailto:b.crease@ridgeway.beds.sch.uk)

The Headteacher / Chair of Governors will arrange a meeting with the whistleblower as soon as practicable to discuss their concern. Staff may bring a colleague or trade union representative to any meetings under this policy, who must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

## Investigation & outcome

Once a member of staff has raised a concern, the Headteacher / Chair of Governors will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. They will assess the seriousness of the allegation and consider this in appointing an investigating officer. This is likely to be a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). In more serious cases, a panel of 2-3 Governors will investigate the issue.

All staff involved in the investigation are required to treat any information about the investigation as strictly confidential.

The person investigating the concern will:

- meet with the person raising the concern
- get as much detail as possible about the concern and make a record of this
- reiterate, at the meeting, key details in this policy
- establish whether there is sufficient cause for further investigation
- inform the person who raised the concern of how the matter is being investigated
- 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
- inform the person who raised the concern of the outcome of the investigation, though certain details may need to be restricted due to confidentiality.

If investigations conclude that a whistleblower has made false allegations maliciously, in bad faith or with a view to personal gain, the whistleblower will be subject to disciplinary action under the disciplinary policy.

Whilst Ridgeway cannot always guarantee the outcome a particular member of staff is seeking, the school will try to deal with the concern fairly and in an appropriate way. If a member of staff is not happy with the way in which their concern has been handled, they can raise it with one of the other key contacts (Headteacher / Chair of Governors). There are no rights of appeal against any decisions taken under this procedure. However, an employee or the Headteacher will have the right to refer any particular case to the Chair of Governors for review.



## Confidentiality

Ridgeway hopes that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if a member of staff wants to raise their concern confidentially, Ridgeway will endeavour to keep their identity secret in so far as it is possible to do so when following this policy and procedure. Staff should be aware that it may be necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know the identity of the whistleblower.

Ridgeway does not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if the person investigating cannot obtain further information. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible and have been made in good faith. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible issues if their identity is revealed should come forward to one of the contacts listed above and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality.

## External disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases, staff should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for staff to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage anyone to seek advice from one of the helplines above before reporting a concern to anyone external.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a service provider. The law allows staff to raise a concern in good faith with a third party, where the member of staff reasonably believes it relates mainly to their actions or something that is legally their responsibility. However, staff are encouraged to report such concerns internally first. Staff should contact the Headteacher or Chair of Governors for guidance.

## Concerns regarding governors

If a concern against a Governor is received, then this will be treated in the same way as any other concern, and it will receive the same serious consideration. The concern will be raised by the Headteacher with the Chair of Governors who will decide how it should be dealt with. If the concern is against the Chair of Governors, then clearly this process cannot be followed. In such circumstances, the concern will be taken directly to the Headteacher who will decide in consultation with the senior leadership team (SLT) how it should be dealt with. In normal circumstances, such a concern would be referred to the Department for Education for action.

## Protection & support for staff after whistleblowing

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. Ridgeway aims to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns in good faith under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken. Whistleblowers are encouraged to seek support for themselves, either through the helplines noted above, or through the Employee Assistant Programme (Care First).

However, if an individual misuses the policy and procedure e.g. by making malicious or repeated unsubstantiated complaints against colleagues, this could give rise to action under the disciplinary procedure.



Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern in good faith. Detrimental treatment would include dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If a member of staff believes that he or she has suffered any such treatment, he or she should inform the Headteacher immediately. Anyone involved in such conduct against whistleblowers will be subject to disciplinary action.

## Roles and responsibilities

All **staff** are responsible for using this policy to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing.

The **Headteacher** and **Chair of Governors** are responsible for ensuring that processes are followed according to this policy.

## Legal framework & statutory guidance

**Linked national guidance:** government guidance on whistleblowing; Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

**Linked policies:** Allegations against staff procedures; Code of Conduct; complaints procedure; confidentiality policy; safeguarding & child protection policy; staff capability policy.

## Equalities & inclusion

Ridgeway has zero tolerance towards abuse and actively recognises the protected characteristics. This policy supports our commitment to preventing abuse and harassment within Ridgeway, and to take remedial action immediately when incidents occur that do not meet our high expectations.

## Safeguarding implications

If a member of staff suspects that there is a serious safeguarding issue that they feel that the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Headteacher is not taking seriously, or that they believe there is a serious safeguarding issue involving the Headteacher, they should in the first instance contact the Chair of Governors. Ridgeway is committed to developing and maintaining a culture of safeguarding and staff must play an active role in supporting this, including using this policy to raise any relevant concerns.