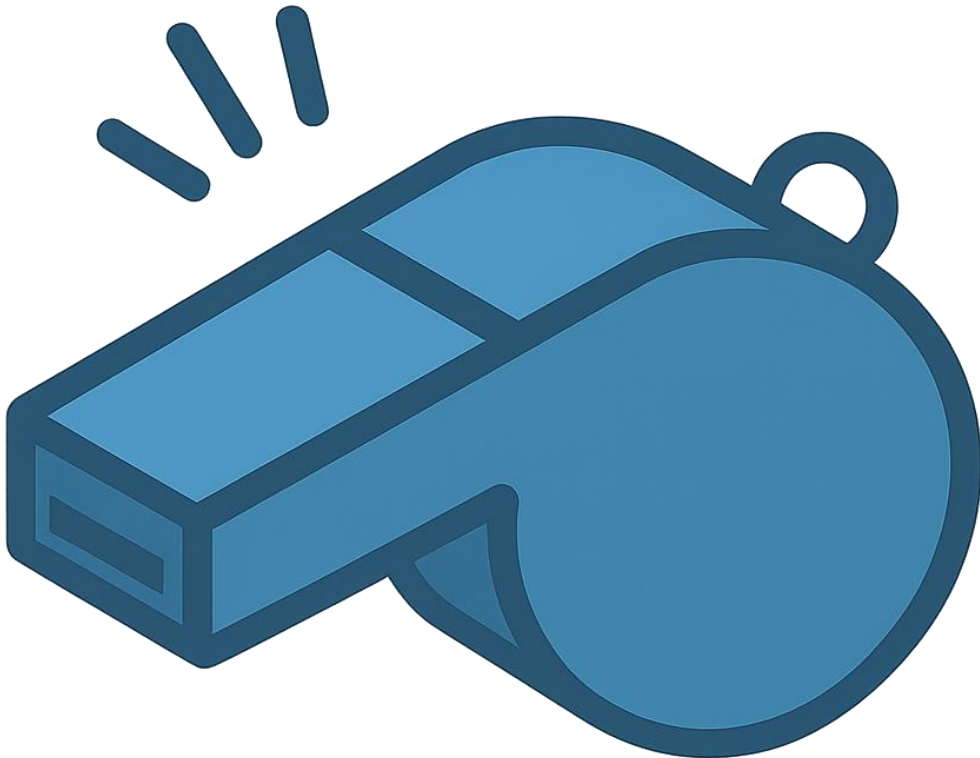




OAKTREE
EDUCATION SERVICES
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Whistleblowing Policy



Document History

Version	Comments/Amendments	Name	Date
1	First Version	Chris Kelly	22/04/2025

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1. Introduction

At Oaktree Education Services, we are committed to creating and sustaining a culture of openness, transparency and accountability. Staff and others working with the college are expected to report any concerns they have about malpractice or wrongdoing without fear of reprisal.

We understand that working with young people with SEMH needs requires a trauma-informed approach. All staff are trained in trauma-informed practices, which includes understanding the potential impact of whistleblowing procedures on both students and staff. This policy outlines how concerns can be raised safely and confidentially, in line with our commitment to safeguarding, well-being and legal obligations.

2. Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Encourage individuals to feel confident about raising concerns regarding the conduct of others or the functioning of the college
- Provide accessible and clear procedures for raising concerns
- Ensure all concerns are handled consistently, fairly and sensitively
- Protect whistleblowers from reprisals, harassment or victimisation
- Promote a trauma-informed and safeguarding-focused environment
- Comply with the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) and relevant Ofsted guidance

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All employees
- Volunteers, contractors and agency staff
- Partner organisations and third parties acting on behalf of the college

This policy is not intended for individual grievances, which are addressed under separate grievance procedures. Concerns covered by this policy may include:

- Criminal offences, including fraud or misuse of funds
- Breaches of legal obligations or statutory codes
- Danger to health and safety or the environment
- Safeguarding risks or potential harm to students
- Discrimination, harassment or bullying
- Serious professional misconduct
- Abuse of authority or position
- Deliberate concealment of information related to the above

4. Safeguards for Whistleblowers

We recognise it can be difficult to speak out. The college will take all reasonable steps to protect whistleblowers from harassment, victimisation or any disadvantage. Any such retaliation will be subject to disciplinary procedures.

If a concern is raised in good faith but not substantiated, no action will be taken against the whistleblower. Malicious or knowingly false allegations may result in disciplinary action.

5. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Wherever possible, confidentiality will be maintained. However, it may not always be possible to resolve a concern without disclosing the whistleblower's identity. In such cases, the matter will be discussed before disclosure.

Anonymous disclosures may be considered, depending on:

- The seriousness of the issue
- The credibility of the concern
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation through other means

6. How to Raise a Concern

Staff should, wherever possible, raise concerns internally in the first instance. This may be done verbally or in writing. Concerns can be raised with:

- The Head of Education or Principal
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead (if safeguarding related)
- The Director of Governance (if concern involves senior leadership)

If the concern involves the Head of Education or Principal, it may be escalated directly to the local authority, DfE, or Ofsted.

A concern should include as much detail as possible: what happened, when, who was involved, and any supporting evidence. Staff may be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative in any meetings.

7. Investigating Concerns

Upon receiving a concern, an initial review will be completed within ten working days. This may lead to:

- An internal investigation
- Referral to safeguarding or child protection procedures
- Referral to external bodies (e.g. the Police, Local Authority Designated Officer, Ofsted, Education and Skills Funding Agency)
- No further action, with reasons explained

The whistleblower will be informed of next steps, though some details may remain confidential.

8. Support During the Process

The college is committed to supporting whistleblowers. Where concerns arise in the context of trauma or distress, support and signposting will be provided. Staff are also encouraged to seek advice from their union or professional association.

Independent advice can be sought from:

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work)

Email: whistle@protect-advice.org.uk

Phone: 020 3117 2520

9. Taking Concerns Further

If a whistleblower is not satisfied with how a concern has been handled, or feels the issue is being covered up, they may escalate the concern externally to:

- Ofsted: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted
- Education and Skills Funding Agency
- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)
- Children's Commissioner
- The Police

Care must be taken to avoid unlawful disclosure of confidential or sensitive information.

10. Monitoring and Oversight

The Principal is responsible for the maintenance and oversight of this policy. A log of whistleblowing concerns, anonymised where necessary, will be maintained and reviewed by the Board of Governors. This includes reporting to the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee.

11. Policy Review

- This policy will be reviewed **bi-annually** (or sooner if required by legislative changes or significant developments in best practice).
- The review process will involve **teachers, support staff, senior leaders, and governors**, alongside student representatives (where appropriate).

Approval and Signature

- **Principle or Head of College:**
Chris Kelly, 22/04/2025
- **Chair of Governors/Trust Board:**
Name, Signature, Date